



Bonfire of the Verities

Michael Lieberman

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Res ipsa loquitur--the thing speaks for itself--as the lawyers say. But does it? Not in Michael Lieberman's new book of poems, *Bonfire of the Verities*. What speaks here is doubt and the commitment to cast aside the apparent truths we all accumulate. Those verities are what are tossed onto Lieberman's bonfire:

It is here I heap
the platitudes
I cannot keep.

He grounds his struggle precisely:

The coordinates of the country of doubt
are 29°, 45' N / 95°, 21' W,

which are those of Houston, his adopted city. It is an unusual poet who is willing to pare away belief and accept that truths--received or earned--must be discarded as we face the unknowable mystery. In the end what Lieberman wrests from the void is the recognition that there is no ultimate choice but dissolution:

This fire burns in me--
it cannot set me free
it leaves me ash, not tree.

And yet ash is both residue and tree, offering the possibility that dissolution is a kind of redemption.

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