

## Digressions on God

By Emily Vogel

Main Street Rag, 2012

43 pages

Reviewed by Lisa A. Flowers

“Inebriate of air am I, and debauchee of dew!/Emily, your light and memorial soul/absolve me of this despair,” writes Emily Vogel to Emily Dickinson, adding: “Kierkegaard, for instance, would say the despairing are only happy once they have died.” Indeed, if one wanted to turn the Nietzschean idea that humankind is subconsciously working towards self destruction to a theological conundrum, one could say that our memory of heaven is unremembered; that we subconsciously wish to be dead because we wish to return to paradise. *Digressions on God* is largely concerned with this idea. In a world where atheist intellectualism is the new black (and the new presumption), it's a welcome throwback to the sensibility of visionaries like John Donne, Anne Bradstreet, and the sublimely agnostic John Berryman of *Eleven Addresses to the Lord...* a return to a world where morning sun still flooded the valleys and reverence for the higher meaning of existence wasn't merely a brilliantly imaginative but ultimately futile escapist indulgence in magical realism.

*Digressions* is also very much a celebration of the sacred erotic. “My love is a body with a mind, and it is a mind/I cannot see,” Vogel writes. It's so, of course; since we can never enter the unseen mind of another, the beloved (like everyone else on earth) remains a kind of ghost, regardless of the physical harmony and communion of love. Yet, lines like “It is rapturous—my eyesight/thanking God for the oblivion of blindness” seem to advocate for the superiority of ignorance-as-bliss. Vogel's book is preoccupied with navigating the relationship between burgeoning knowledge (and free will) and childlike faith, a division that's articulated beautifully in poems like *Verge*:

You are safe  
inside your own disappearance...

The children are already transitioning away  
from their own origins, like the shape-shifting moon.

And they fill the emerging day like spring.

To be of service, and to have purpose, is key. “We must consider the distress of objects that lack utility” writes Vogel, adding:

When I woke, you had an imaginary tuba

propped next to your leg,  
and the tuba was not making any sound,  
trying its best not to be dead.  
Even the air is dead matter, without God

In Vogel's vision, music is clearly a direct translation of God. But what of the non-universal language of words? "I cannot write them and I cannot die with them./They drift in the brain, lift as if mist/into God's territory/and linger, elegant as dross," Vogel says. Yet this fine book is also a celebration of "a good universe: a destruction, a restoration/and the darkness between them/nothing disappearing/except on the verge of its disappearance."