

Book Review

Title: *BlindSight: Come and See*

Author: Jane L. Toleno

Publisher: Ely, MN: Singing River, 2006

Paper, ISBN: 0-9774831-4-2, 141 pages

Cost: 14.95

Reviewer: Steven E. Brown

BlindSight is a fascinating book, both for its content and its presentation. The author, who, along with her twin, lost most of her sight after a premature birth in the late 1940s when physicians had not yet learned about the dangers of too much oxygen, has spent a great deal of time in reflection about her life and situation. In the first of seven chapters, all of which invite us to come along with the author's journeys, she relays her internal thoughts to a phone friend's queries: "Must I have this conversation again? Don't I ever get to take time out from blindness? Why are its fingerprints found throughout my whole person, life and culture?" (p. 2). Eventually Toleno, who has clearly thought a great deal about light, dark, seeing, and not seeing, decides, "There are layers upon layers to sift and sort, name and blend here. But I think we have to talk about blindness before we can talk about light and dark" (p.4).

The author takes us along a journey exploring blindness, seasons, language, disability, and wholeness. Interspersed in her thoughts, which are by turns reflective, imploring, stern, gracious, patient, and always passionate, she includes poems essaying some of her ideas. In Toleno's essay on seasons, a poem, "After the Thaws" concludes:

"We got just enough snow
To get a mile off meaning a world of work!
It was just enough snow
To force on boots, track up floors,
And blot out pointers to spring.
And there is such a hush all over the world.
It is clean and good and deep and right.
It is so quiet. Can it be trusted?
Sometimes, after love-making, it is like this, too" (p. 61).

This kind of unexpected juxtaposition is a hallmark of this book. Toleno plays with words and shares concepts of DarkLight, LightDark, see-ers and other ways of turning what many of us often conveniently think of as unassailable truths about perceiving the world into limitations we have been acculturated to accept. The author's manner of taking common "truths" and portraying their falseness is the most compelling aspect of her story and makes *BlindSight* a valuable addition to any disability studies or autobiographical collection.

