

Once : poems

Recent New Poetry



Over New Year's I found a few interesting new poetry collections. What better way to start the new year than by sampling and diving deep into new poems? I'll introduce two of these now and more later as I slowly read through them.

Things to Say to a Dead Man: Poems at the End of a Marriage and After

I had no idea that Jane Yolen, who is primarily a juvenile fiction and young adult author, wrote poetry. And what a wonderful collection this is. Because of the topic, it's a sad collection; in it she records her experiences taking care of her sick husband and then the months of her new widowhood. To round out the book, she added several memorial poems about her husband who was an expert on avian song. Birds also figure in some of these poems.

Despite the main topic the poems are uplifting. All are good; some are absolutely stellar. Here's a few lines from "Sorry for Your Loss."

*I did not leave him behind,
but let him go ahead--
the pathfinder, map reader,
who knew the compass points.*

Yolen describes next where his navigating took them. It always led them to new discoveries "like the last manned Scottish lighthouse / on the very last manned day."

Another lovely poem is "The Garden in April" where Yolen writes about how in nature everything returns. The poem ends this way, "April has returned to me everything, / everything but what means the most, / for I can dig deep in the garden, / down below the root system / and still not find you."



The second collection Once by Meghan O'Rourke is more modern, more sophisticated and will most likely appeal to a younger audience. She also writes about illness and death but from the perspective of a young daughter not a spouse. The first section has many poems about her mother suffering from cancer in their New Jersey farm house. Later sections broaden into other topics: relationships, war, divorce, and even the character of Ophelia from "Hamlet."

O'Rourke

is not afraid to push limits and to incorporate fantasy elements. The poem "Appeal to Self" begins:

*Have the dowagers of delusion visited you again
in their fat pink shoes,
creeping softly over the Persian rugs
of your creaking, boarded mind?"*

And in a kind of love poem, "Sex Again" O'Rourke writes:

*Two bodies in a corner
try to rewind the distance between us.
Finger, tongue, mirage, a sailboat,
the unexamined sun.*

Both these books will transport you to other worlds blessed with the gift of language.

Posted by Dory L. on January 7, 2012

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