

Traveling light : poems

New Poetry Books



It's April and National Poetry Month is in full swing. It's easy to see why a large group of poets, librarians, and publishers chose April to promote this wonderful art, for as e.e.cummings said, "in Just-/ spring when the world is mud-lucious... and puddle-wonderful." Here are several contemporary books that I found compelling.

--Beautiful in the Mouth: Poems by Keetje Kuipers

Kuipers' first collection rocks. With an assured voice, she tackles difficult subjects with honesty, freshness, and inviting detail. She writes about love gone bad, sleeping with her first boyfriend (an injured war vet), and loneliness. And she writes about sex in a way that makes it both believable and extraordinary. Kuipers has lived in many places. From these poems you can tell that she attaches deeply to her current home whether it's a Montana cabin, a Paris room, or a New York apartment. She brings an out-of-the-way reservoir to life with the playful shouts of swimming children. It's hard to believe that this amazingly accomplished book is her first. Check it out.

--Traveling Light by Linda Pastan

This poet is known for meditative domestic poems and ones about family. In this wonderful collection, she continues writing about those subjects but also includes poems about the deaths of loved ones and even imagines her own. However, these are not dark poems at all. Pastan has a wonderful sense of humor and slyly incorporates it to provide additional movement in her writing. One poem celebrates a long discarded Christmas tree that has become a nest for wrens; another one celebrates a flower salad, and a third, a Thanksgiving Day feast where a young child's eyes recall those of a dead great grandparent, "there, three generations down,/ her pale blue eyes// watching/ from the child's/ oblivious face."

--The Arrival by Daniel Simko

I read all the poems first and was incredibly moved by them. Later, I perused Carolyn Forché's introduction to be shocked by these lines, "This, Svetozar Daniel Simko's first book of poetry in America, is also his last..." Unfortunately, this poet and former translator of Georg Trakl's work, died in his forties. Simko was born in Bratislava, so Eastern Europe with its pogroms, violence, and politics is a motif in some of these poems. Simko brings to life the echo of his family, and many other Europeans who have suffered and are now lost with lines such as, "I am writing your names down for the last time./ I am writing your names in secrecy./ Be silent...Be silent." Anyone who admires the work of Trakl, Celan, or Mandelstam will find these poems eloquent and haunting.

--Every Riven Thing by Christian Wiman

A sense of mortality hangs over Wiman's third collection; some of these poems speak of illness and loss. Ultimately, this is an optimistic book that asks and then answers some of the great questions: why are we here? What is life about? How can we live wisely and praise this extraordinary earth that gives us a home? Poems such as "One Time" and "Gone for the Day,

"She Is the Day" explore the nature of love, especially after a serious diagnosis. Wiman, who is also the editor of the revitalized Poetry Magazine from Chicago, writes more formally than many modern poets, often incorporating rhyme. Despite the seriousness of his poems, humor is often included and indeed necessary, given the subject matter: "tumbleweeds maddening/ past in the cage of themselves." A collection that sings with the beauty of life and at the same time acknowledges its fragility, "To believe is to believe you have been torn/ from the abyss, yet stand waveringly on its rim."

If you love poetry, these books are not to be missed.

Posted by Dory L. on April 11, 2011

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[The arrival](#)

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