FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

A Hundred White Daffodils: Essays Interviews

Jane Kenyon
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"A single green sprouting thing would restore me …", writes Kenyon in winter, asserting that her life owes much to a rootedness in, and appreciation of, the natural world. A Hundred White Daffodils, edited by her husband, Donald Hall, handles this theme and others in previously uncollected prose, three interviews and a scattering of old and new poems. Of particular interest are Kenyon's translations of twenty poems by Anna Akhmatova, one of the most respected Russian poets of this century. Regarded as her main muse, and a consistent influence throughout Kenyon's career, these short lyrics are a celebration of the sensual life, "intense, musical cries of the spirit" telling "the human truth about the complexity of life and death." In her essay "The Moment of Peonies" Kenyon's quirky imagination spills forth: "These are not Protestant work-ethic flowers. They loll about in gorgeousness; they live for art; they believe in excess. They are not quite decent, to tell the truth. Neighbors and strangers slow their cars to gawk." In humble newspaper columns about gardening, community and the life of the writer, her sharp observations, political opinions and simple aesthetics are further enunciated.

Throughout the book, Kenyon's characteristic use of everyday objects as symbols for larger themes results in an engaging directness. For example, a hoe abandoned in long grass at dusk and a ripe peach for breakfast are assigned a significance that animates the landscape and does not favor sentient, over non-sentient, beings. Also included is a new long poem, "Woman, Why Are You Weeping," investigating Kenyon's sudden ambivalence about Christianity during a visit to India. Conversely, she tells an interviewer about her religious faith, so often invoked in the poems dealing with the cancer that eventually killed her in 1995: "Let the fox go back to its sandy den./ Let the wind die down. Let the shed/ Go black inside. Let evening come." Here, and elsewhere, Kenyon's awareness of her own mortality brings her to an appreciation of the quotidian events in her life. Within this cosmological framework, Kenyon offers literature that matters, with a spareness that is accessible to a wide readership.

Holly Wren Spaulding