FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Aristotle's Garden
Patricia Hooper
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This book harkens back to Gerard Manley Hopkins with its paeans to nature and consequent religiosity. Like so many before her, the poet finds resurrection and renewal in flora and fauna, quietly naming that which gives both peace and a kind of knowledge.

Author of two previous collections and winner of the Norma Farber First Book Award, Hooper begins her book with a narrative poem in which a mother buys encyclopedias for her daughter. The daughter fixates on the “S” volume, noting with delight all the things she has that might fit into its pages. The poems language, while accessible, still glories in the sibilant sound of s and all the possibilities one might find there. Characteristic of Hoopers subject matter, the child imagines entries like “stove / and saucers and spoons…Sumatra…Saginaw,” equally fascinated by the near and the far.

Hooper splits the book (which has been selected by National Book Critics award-winning poet B. H. Fairchild for the 2003 Bluestem Poetry Award sponsored by Emporia State Universitys BlueStem Press) into three sections. In the first, “This World,” she examines her garden, recovery from illness, and memory. Perhaps the most pedestrian of the book, these poems do little to surprise the reader. Some of the imagined epiphanies feel stale, while the garden continues despite the gardeners preoccupation that she too might have been skeptical had she met Christ, as the gardener realizes in another poem.

The second section offers more interesting fare—notes left behind spurring memories, a tableau of people just before their lives collapse, a claustrophobic visit to the Sistine Chapel. In the final segment, “Near the Intersection,” the poet plays with the persona poem to great effect in “Leda,” who is transformed after her encounter with Zeus: “So I became / a vessel of attention: pure desire. / And now what I dread most / is that he might return in some / more common form and seek me out / and find me, and in his coming / take away all I have.” Like Leda, part of each speaker in Hoopers book is defined by longing—for spring, for longer life, more love, less memory.

Hooper approaches poetry through the diurnal, providing a kind of calendar of mood

where the speaker oscillates between terror at being human and peace at being part of a greater cycle. Though not hugely inventive, these poems provide readers with a host of fragile, connected moments and a coherent way to connect them.

Camille-Yvette Welsch