

Curios: Poems

Judith Taylor

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Do not presume to anticipate the course of these deft poems. Rather, know that each one acts as ballast against lyric predictability, nailing the dimwitted reader and the expert alike with a sure blow between the eyes. These are succinct, willful and at times naughty epistles about the multitudinous voices a poet speaks. Taylor's style is immediate, intimate and often given to quick twists and turns. She writes in medias res, without halting to tip her hat to academic syntax or high art.

Not that she maneuvers without artifice: the first line of the first poem in the book declares "I try to outdo reality, which tends to dress modestly." This is an appropriate entree into a collection where imagination is given full reign to exercise its talent for transforming the ordinary events of life into slivers of inspired vision. What results is an opportunity for self-examination and a sense of humor about the absurdity of this very conscious act. Compelled by a sense of theater and the spectacular, Taylor aims to discover and illuminate the uncommon in all situations.

To this end, Taylor's lovely, mad-hatter acts include implicating herself as a southern belle fending off a Confederate lecher, quoting Oscar Wilde in a bustle and corset and "Wearing nothing but one silver watch between us. / Exiled to another boondock of desire, the Newark Hilton. / We could see two different skylines when we looked out the window." And so, with her head askance and a privileged view to more than the usual dimension, another poem describes "Lusting after the same man, a friend and I bought identical red suede pumps." After all, curios, as well as certain kinds of poems can be both rare and bizarre.

Despite Taylor's knack for re-envisioning and re-construing reality, she still poses the question, and perhaps ultimately believes that "What is fiction, but another kind of mirror." Her poems tell truths in more than one guise, unpredictably and refreshingly.

HOLLY WREN SPAULDING (March / April 2000)

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