



Intervale: New and Selected Poems

Betty Adcock

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With the publication of Adcock's latest book of poems, Texas cowboys will have to make room for another recognizable state figure: the poet.

Intervale brings together more than two decades of Adcock's poetry, work that pays homage to both her native East Texas and the broad world beyond. A winner of numerous awards and honors including a Pushcart Prize and NEA Fellowships, Adcock has published four previous books of poetry.

From her first book, *Walking Out*, published in 1975, to the newest poems in this collection, Adcock crafts elegant—often elegiac—verses from the familiar material of the tangible world, as in "Southbound": "A green glass vase from a grave in a field / comes flowerless to your hand, holds a smell / of struck matches, of summer on rust, of running / water, of rabbits, of home." Adcock focuses a careful eye on the minutiae of the world and finds not only beautiful details, but a mirror to the self and humankind.

While many of the poems excavate the poet's personal history, as in the title poem "Intervale," a long elegy to her mother, and in earlier works, "To Sylvia, Grown Daughter" and "Remembering Brushing My Grandmother's Hair," Adcock's project seems as much about attending to the intervals that exist between unrelated beings or geographies, as to those that divide or join generations of kin. The speaker in "Blind Singer" imagines the world through the perspective of a sightless woman, and in "Time After Time," Adcock eloquently mourns the loss of scratches in restored vintage records, an action metaphorically and thematically linked to a diminished respect for past eras.

Though at times the work might rely too much on the personal with no clear or even subtle view beyond the self, the poet presents a genuine curiosity about the greater world as in "The Clouded Leopards of Cambodia and Viet Nam" when she writes that "To come close to what they know / would feel like thunder and its silent afterword." Regardless of her poems' subjects, readers can expect to find pleasure in this poet's genuine affection for and careful observation of the world as it exists in both her own and others' backyard.

JESSICA BELLE SMITH (May / June 2001)

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