

★ **Made Holy**

Emily Arnason Casey

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Emily Arnason Casey's expansive and elegiac essay collection *Made Holy* is full of unsparing personal revelations and fierce, unflinching insights.

The opening essay, "The Cabin," establishes the collection's tone. Ruminating on Casey's childhood summers at her family's cabin in Minnesota, it grieves those disappeared times without yearning for innocence or youth. Instead, it expresses hunger for a return to the past. "Made Holy" puts it this way: "so as to believe time can stop, that somewhere we are all again safely alive in the before of our living."

Within the book, childhood and diving "back into the maze of memory" are used to structure pieces. The past is compared with the present, capturing lives as they crumbled, were reassembled, or were lost and damaged. Casey's treatment of her family's history of cancer and addiction in "Ancestry of Illness" is straightforward and tender. In "That Kind of Blue," "Prayer for the Scavenger World," and "Made Holy," she laments her fractured relationship with her heroin-addicted cousin and craves her presence. "Alchemy of Shadow" is one of two essays about Casey's miscarriages that are aching in their honesty.

The book's other entries ponder topics including motherhood, longing, grief, alcoholism, and imagination. Each is an intricate, layered masterwork of observations and reflections, baring intimate aspects of Casey's being and braiding events, emotions, scenes, and concepts together with lustrous and controlled prose. Personal existence yokes to nature and the outdoors, including the woodlands of Minnesota and of Burlington, Vermont, and the collection brims with gorgeous descriptions of flora and settings. The effect is mesmerizing.

Contemplative and lyrical, *Made Holy* is a powerful personal essay collection.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (September / October 2019)

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