FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

North Northeast: New England Scenes
Rennie McQuilkin
Sarah McQuilkin, illustrator
Antrim House
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Rennie McQuilkin does what many writers must wish for: he takes one of his early books and re-imagines it. An accomplished poet, McQuilkin is the author of nine collections, including *An Astonishment and an Hissing* and *We All Fall Down.* His work has appeared in *The Atlantic, The Yale Review*, and *The American Scholar*, and he has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

In this renewed edition of his 1985 book, *North Northeast*, McQuilkin not only updates the collection by the addition of new poems, but he also includes additional illustrations by his wife of thirty-seven years, Sarah. The pen-and-ink drawings include frogs in bogs and cows in a pasture, and the interaction between image and text results in a multidimensional depiction of rural New England.

As the title of the collection suggests, place is an integral theme in many of the poems, and his wife's images add a rich cultural context. New England, both the space and its inhabitants, is explored through music, through words, and through image.

The poems are often meditative. McQuilkin focuses on the images, many of them quiet, of his beloved rural landscape. Ordinary events are lifted to prayer. In the poem "Swamp Song," he writes:

…rain begins to rattle
and raises more
stridently the ruckus of frogs.
Tomorrow the sword-beaked
Blue will hunt them
down. Their death will be
mute

as the stalk of the heron.
But now in the rain-
washed warp of the bog, this
wefting of song.

Here, the swamp comes to life; the rain literally falls from line to line. McQuilkin's poems invite the reader to experience each image, each word, as a complete "wefting of song." The enjambed stanzas heighten the layering of experience. McQuilkin's lines, while short, are packed full of sound and meaning: nothing is extraneous; everything is always complete and perfect in its own way.

The music of McQuilkin's landscape contains rich layers of sound and a slow drawl of a pace that seems specific to this region, particularly the rural portions. In fact, it's the careful consideration of image that pushes this collection past its subject matter. These poems are accessible to any reader, even if they have not visited the author's beloved New England landscape.

Lisa Bower