

Nostos

V. Penelope Pelizzon

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In a literary world often inundated with the banal, readers will cherish these poems for their fine sophistication. Pellizon, who won the prestigious Hollis Summers Poetry Prize for this collection, writes with a striking sense of dignity about everything from the rotten fruit in her father's market to the weather and worship of Florence.

What unites this diverse collection is the integrity that infuses the subjects of her poems. Hers is an elegant fabric of sound and sense, woven into the construction of the complex sentence. For example, in "The Alembic" she describes two old women, lost to desire, who have at last come to calm. "Then sorrow's distillate: /years of loneliness / which also burned / until it chilled / and in them turned / to that keen tincture / where peace begins." Her diction is refined, her treatment cultured in the best sense and her formal choices-though careful-never seem forced or contrived. In addition, the poems in the series "The Body of Speech and Silence" sometimes take on a mystical tone, reminiscent of some of the deep image work done by W.S. Merwin years earlier. A scarf becomes symbolic of the psyche and "bears new seams each time / he rends it-then weakening, stitches the tear." The ancient procedure of mummyfying the body becomes a means of measuring the heart's worth. Keats' heart survives the body's burning. The poems in this brilliant section will remind readers that one great purpose in living is to speak for that human heart.

Finally, in the last section of the book, a series of lovely sonnets "To Vertumnus," god of the changing seasons, trace Italian weather from October to March, reflecting in the sun and storms the emotional weather as it is tied to place. These are beautifully artistic pieces, filled with "wings clattering like water on stone."

ANNE-MARIE OOMEN (January / February 2000)

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