



## Surrounded by Friends

**Matthew Rohrer**

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*Rohrer strives to convey spirit through poetic structure in this collection and succeeds through his display of imagery.*

Matthew Rohrer illuminates 21st-century subjects, and partners with past poets, in his poetry collection *Surrounded by Friends*. Rohrer has published several books of poetry, including *A Green Light*, which was shortlisted for the 2005 Griffin Poetry Prize. The poems in *Surrounded by Friends* boast a similarly accomplished pedigree, having been previously published in *Harper's*, *Poetry*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Barrelhouse*, the *American Poetry Review*, and other prestigious journals and magazines.

One of the four subdivisions of *Surrounded by Friends* contains poems written in an experimental style, in which Rohrer takes lines from a famous haiku stylist (Buson, Issa, or Basho) and alternates these with his own lines. The result is surprisingly similar to Rohrer's sole-authored poems, which illustrates the sense of simplicity and grace that infuses all his work.

In *Surrounded by Friends*, Rohrer uses the poetics of the mundane, seizing everyday sights, sounds, and experiences to capture fragments of deeper meaning. There are poems that portray park scenes, crazy people on the subway, and ants run amok. But even when a poem ends seemingly unspectacularly, its cumulative effect demands rereading, until a blurry blend of images coalesces into beauty. "The Ants," for instance, affectingly anthropomorphizes an ant destined for death: "Everything he thought he was here / on Earth to do has been left undone."

In "There is Absolutely Nothing Lonelier," Rohrer uses simple words and imagery to forge a poem that begs to be memorized: "There is absolutely nothing lonelier / than the little Mars rover / never shutting down, digging up / rocks, so far away from Bond Street."

Though Rohrer makes extensive use of enjambment, his poetic techniques are often subtle, and he is anything but a slave to form. The poems in *Surrounded by Friends* will not be considered traditional by some readers, but in their elegance, Rohrer makes a strong case for adding them to the poetic canon.

PETER DABBENE (Summer 2015)

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