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The Day Seamus Heaney Kissed My Cheek in Dublin: Poems 1986-1999

Bob Jacob
The Spirit That Moves Us Press (Sep 15, 2000)
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The debate over just how “accessible” poetry should be—as though it were a public building with users in wheelchairs outside every entrance—shows no sign of ending. With this book Jacob takes his place with those who insist poems should speak directly and clearly; the short-line, free verse narratives in his first book never risk confusing readers about their subjects or intentions. This neatly produced chapbook offers many simple pleasures to those more interested in human beings and human relations than in subtleties of language and form.

The subjects are usually family, friends, relationships, glimpsed in anecdotes and gestures. Jacob is little interested in the kind of meditation that less adventurous college students call “too in-depth.” Nor does he concern himself with intricately crafted, formal lines or stanzas. Instead he sketches his subjects, especially relatives and famous poets like Donald Hall and Seamus Heaney, in quick, sometimes proselike, generous lines. Here Hall speaks of his wife Jane Kenyon’s by-now-famous death: “While the tv gasps in the background / he begins a monologue of grief so deep / my insides cry when he / has trouble speaking of his wishes…”

Although Jacob has long been a supporter of poetry, few will accuse him of over-controlling or intellectualizing too much; he is no “poet’s poet.” At times his lines and effects can seem a bit too easy, as in the short poem “The Baker,” which ends with the throw-away line “When the baker calls all will rise.” The book, however, creates a strong sense of the poet’s good humor, modesty, and genuine feeling; the work is affectionate, unpretentious, and engaging.
JEFF GUNDY (August 16, 2000)

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