

The East Deck Motel and Selected Poetry

Theodore M. Wandzilak

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This lovely, softer revival of beat poetry looks back on the hedonism of summers in the Hamptons.

With vivid settings and an audacious voice, Theodore M. Wandzilak's collection *The East Deck Motel and Selected Poetry* offers a nostalgic, but complex, take on youth, death, and aging.

This appealing collection of wistful poems looks back on the hedonism of a young man's summers in East Hampton and Montauk in the 1970s and how those moments altered him. The beaches of New England serve as the focal point in this examination of memory. Whether looking through not-so-rosy glasses at summer flings in movie theaters or recounting awe over a Moscow ballet, this collection is cheeky and insightful.

"Never Spoke" is the powerful opening poem, and includes poignant and repulsive images of everyday tragedies, including aging, unresolved regrets, and the inevitability of turning into one's parents. The rhymed verse is entrancing, as are lines like "As she watched white walls turn to tar-stained yoke, / she never spoke." Slant rhymes, like "I died her death of endless neglect," make the piece a rhythmic standout with images that endure.

The collection draws inspiration from visceral beat poetry, as is evident in its unconventional yet rhythmic diction and its somewhat sexual and grotesque elements. "In Reverence of Lawrence Ferlinghetti" gestures to the revered, bearded beat poet with its lines about rejecting conventionality and not shaving. Though it seems rather tame for a homage to the man made famous by defending banned and "obscene" poetry, it is a charmingly rebellious poem and a reminder of the absurdity of convention.

"A Partial Autobiography" is one of the most powerful poems and is the poem most directly influenced by the beat poets. It features choppy construction and gory metaphors that beautifully show the humorous hopelessness of life, as its narrator looks back with awe and appreciation over wild times of indulgence and despair: "I was born with a remnant third nipple / I did not know what that meant for me."

Other poems also feature this straightforward diction, with lines like "Lion Head Rock Road / My girlfriend liked the name" ably portraying the candor of youth. Uncomplicated metaphors like "my mother came back as an endless ringing telephone" are similarly memorable. There are also occasional moments of flowery syntax and sentimentality, though, as with "the plumeria fragrance pranced along the shore," that fit unevenly within the rest of the collection.

The East Deck Motel is a lovely, softer revival of brazen beat poetry, appealing for its reminiscences.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (July 29, 2016)

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