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The Selected Poems of Yvor Winters

R.L. Barth
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In his essays, American poet Yvor Winters (1900-1968) has described the poetic discipline as “the richest and most perfect technique of contemplation.” Perhaps better known and remembered as a critic than a poet, he nevertheless has left us a sizeable quantity of fine poetry; edited by Barth in a more or less chronological arrangement of Winters? life-long works. The Selected Poems of Yvor Winters provides the reader with in-depth background on the poet and his style, noting the influence of contemporary imagist experimental poetry, as well as that of Japanese and Native American poetry on Winters? art.

The use of poetic forms as a “means to discovery” interested Winters, as indicated by the last critical work he wrote. In his work, the reader is led to discover his or her own personal depths and is enticed to explore them. Readers will be impressed by occasions of intense, almost stark imagery, as in the following, taken from “Moonrise”:

…the dog / at / moments is / possessed and
screams.

The rising moon draws / up his blood and

hair.

and the sparse, crystalline moment, captured here deeper than photography ever could:

Vacant Lot

Tough hair like dead / grass over new and /
hooves quick and /

Impatient the he-goat / looks around him /
over frozen mud // but /

Finds no mate // hardeyed // and savage he /
turns back and nips /

The bitter grass.

Of his later works, “Time and the Garden,” “In Praise of California Wines” and “Summer” all have vivid imagery.

For those who seek scholarly analysis, the introduction by Helen Pinkerton Trimpi is worth their study. Lovers of poetry will take pleasure in the works presented in this well-designed volume.
KRISTINE MORRIS (March / April 1999)

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