FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Poetry

The Snowbound House
Shane Seely
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As its title suggests, the poems in The Snowbound House contain images of dichotomies: cozy, frightening, warm, freezing. Relaxing in the comfort of home competes with thrilling danger. With the house as setting and metaphor, the poet leaves and comes back. When he returns, even though this house had once been home, the son is still strangely separated.

Throughout the book, Seely explores estrangement between the younger man and his forebears: a natural separation between generations according to differences in the spirit of the time. In earlier years, a boatman enjoyed the water and the open sky, and was proud of the pike he caught. Today, the water enthusiast questions a spray of gasoline on the water and wonders what God thinks about it. The poet throws back the fish, saddened that he has bloodied it for sport.

The older man had grown up in a world of hunting; he cuts the antlers off a deer and shows the dead brain to his son. The youngster wonders if the deer had final thoughts, "Â…if anything remained; the detailed sketches / of each rise and crevice of the hills; the language / of scent and gesture; the image of my father; as he raised his gun and firedÂ…" He understands that deer had once been food for his ancestors and had later been trophies for others, but to him the dainty creatures are worthy simply by virtue of their existence.

In other transpositions the poet goes deeper into the psychological. He reacts to death both literal and metaphorical: couples fighting with word-bullets and boys playing with real bullets. He mourns the deaths in senseless war, and examines the perpetual ravages of disease and old age. Death lurks everywhere and yet it brings rebirth.

Just as the farm takes on different shapes in different seasons, so do people transform- they live, die, and are buried. Not only do the spirits remain, the bodies are still there. They fertilize the tomatoes of summer or become the fresh smell of dirt when the gravedigger spades out a hole for another. The energy of the generations lives on.

Shane Seely is the winner of the 2008 Philip Levine Prize for Poetry. His first collection is well written and incisive, with powerful themes. He reveals a thoughtful tenderness for God's creation and an acceptance of transition and change. His work is a hinge which gives voice to the young, who contemplate what preceded them and what's in store for those who follow. (December) Mary Popham

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