

The Yellow Shoe Poets: Selected Poems, 1964-1999

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Who doesn't love an attic overflowing with objects old and new, illuminated by a bare light bulb or shaft of sun slipped in from the world outside? An anthology encompassing thirty-five years of university press publishing and over ninety poets is just such a place where one might go exploring as well.

This book's tendency toward narrative poems with an inward-looking, often meditative examination of the quotidian is exemplified in Brendan Galvin's title poem, "The Yellow Shoe Poet": "Right on time, a window open / the pine table-top begins to release / memories like radium, glowing / to outgild anything that ever sang / in its branches awhile." Likewise, the best poems in any collection will surface and glow.

In T.R. Hummer's intricate and vivid urban poem: "The abuela behind the 7-11 counter shuffles / and lays out the cards. Her abuela taught her this. / Five of clubs, three of diamonds: Every low card / whispers its password and its alibi."

There also is Conrad Hilberry, writing from Mexico in December of how distance from the familiar brings about a sharper attention to what is present: "in the garden / the orchids lay their small mouths on the neck / of the evening, as grackles scream into the pruned / trees, as lemon tea steeps in the pot ..." The precision of detail here and elsewhere in the anthology suggests an urgency, as if the authors wish the reader to look more closely and with more reverence at the things that inhabit their world.

To represent each poet ever published on the LSU list seems at first to be an overly tidy, if not contrived, way to conceive a collection, but the editors have managed to bring forward worthy evidence of their discoveries over the years, placing the well-knowns and lesser-knowns side by side in this humble offering. Meanwhile, to open any collection of this size expecting to appreciate each entry with enthusiasm would be to invite disappointment. Instead, finding just a few poets worth pursuing further certainly justifies the rooting around this kind of reading requires. Among those represented Margaret Gibson, Alison Hawthorn Deming and Jimmy Santiago Baca are treasures worth uncovering; others still hide in dark corners, though no less gilded.

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