



Footprints

James Ten Eyck

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In James Ten Eyck's memorable poetry collection *Footprints*, the pleasures of rhyme and meter are enhanced by variation and subtlety.

Supplemented by occasional prose notes, these poems combine pitch-perfect musicality with empathetic considerations of human nature, emotions, and aspirations. They include lyrical musings on interpersonal relationships, paeans to historic individuals, and intellectual considerations of international events. The collection is united by its formal skill and generous voice.

With an aesthetic directed by interplays between repetition and variation, the book makes use of traditional meters and forms built on soothing, repeating patterns. Measured disruptions of familiar elements like iambic pentameter also appear, as do strategic departures from sentence patterns that become familiar over the course of individual poems. In "Autumn in Heiberg Forest," a narrative poem centered on an outing with a newborn child, iambic pentameter patterns are settled into just as the speaker settles into accepting time's passing: "the newborn bends / our light like gravity." Meanwhile, the sentences expand in length as the poem continues, in time containing multiple clauses. But these habits are abandoned in an abrupt manner with the brief line "The day declines," introducing thoughts of mortality. Elsewhere, though, the structures of individual lines help to propel entries toward their conclusions, as where enjambment is used to focus attention on what comes next, or where end-stopped lines close poems concerned with emotional upheaval.

Linguistic variations make familiar imagery feel fresh too. In "To Carol," the image of castles built on sand is changed to "castles built / with sand" and is married to that of "salty tidal tongues" that lick away and dissolve said castles. But the metaphor is echoed a few lines later when Carol's "tongue-tied suitors" are described. Indeed, habits of repetition link images and metaphors throughout: in "Bridges," bridges become synapses, and synapses become metaphorical bridges between present experiences and past echoes of cultural icons.

Notes devoted to sharing context or additional information accompany some of the poems to varying degrees of success. A poem honoring the humanitarian baseball player Roberto Clemente is paired with poignant details from Clemente's short, impactful life; elsewhere, "Let Freedom Ring" is followed by a lengthy note about twenty-first-century struggles between democracy and authoritarianism, including in the war between Russia and Ukraine, which draws attention away from the poetic lines rather than complementing them.

In the thoughtful poetry collection *Footprints*, attention to detail refreshes common themes.

MICHELE SHARPE (June 4, 2024)

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