

Pilgrim

Holly Wren Spaulding

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Spare yet never lacking, these breathless poems capture the beauty of the simple and the sacred.

Holly Wren Spaulding's *Pilgrim* is as nourishing as breath. The importance of each line, each word, is equal to that of the spaces in between them: how the sky comes through the branch of a tree without leaves.

The fifteen poems collected within the volume are beautifully crafted. There is no excess. The inclusion of blank pages and Spaulding's use of white space throughout the poems reflect the opposite of restraint; one does not feel like anything was ever held back, that there could be or should be more. Each instance of openness is as necessary and rich as lines like "nightfall like a long blue dress" and "our atoms spilled / and mixed with something like water / like rust."

The speaker's depictions of the natural world are both universal and intensely personal. Pieces like "Pilgrim" and "Late and Soon" share experiences with time and season alongside images of everyday love—making soup, stacks of quilts, desire. The result is a deep sense of care for each thing that turns the journey of the collection into a pilgrimage itself: the "brittle / tannic smoke" is sacred; the trees "draped bride-like" are sacred.

Moments full of descriptive detail abound. Color and verdure come together with the promise of winter, a thread that pulls the collection together while at the same time creating stark contrasts: the "green / and orange" of moss is even more "electric" when the air hardens in a later poem; "June skies and June air" are thicker when "October is to fall / all things die back."

The epigraph by Japanese poet Basho places Spaulding's pieces within a context that is both open and quiet: breath comes in and breath comes out; words capture beauty, experience, time; and then there must be openness that allows these to be—to question "from where, / which tree?" and to see the sky as well.

MARGARET FEDDER (Spring 2015)

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