

The House with Round Windows

Richard Snodgrass

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“Thomas Wolfe was wrong, of course. The melancholy truth is you can go home again,” writes Richard Snodgrass in his memoir *The House with Round Windows*. Brother of the confessional poet W. D. Snodgrass, Snodgrass portrays his own, differing experiences of their family via photographs and essays that mete out their dysfunction in a chiaroscuro of poignancy and compassion.

Snodgrass was the youngest of the family, born when his parents were almost forty, successful, and buying their first home—a grand, orange-brick edifice in Pennsylvania originally destined to be a lawyer's clubhouse. He grew up in the shadow of his brother's poems. And as his older siblings left for the wider world, died, and married, the house filled with clutter, debris, and his parents' smothering affection, wherein dependency and weakness were proof of love.

While, in Snodgrass's formative years, he struggled to find his own direction, his latter years became a wrestling match with recurrent “feelings of being a thirty-five-year-old child,” and the “old sorniness and guilt of wanting a life of my own making.” His book doesn't shy away from the household's craziness, but—rather than drawing conclusions—it does rely on imagery to speak for itself. Hovering between sketches of emotional confusion and love as a type of stigmata is an awareness that each of his parents was trying to say, “I hurt. Please love me ... And the further realization that there was nothing [he] could do to help them.”

Once, Snodgrass “hoped to reveal something of [his] brother's torment and intent” by photographing the house, but his documentary process revealed the most about himself. Succinct and poignant, *The House with Round Windows* is a memoir that packs an emotional and visual punch as it peeps into “the Brothers Snodgrass's” family world.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2022)

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