

Mt. Angel Poet Journeys through Pain

By Christopher Wicks

Patricia Ann Love, a poet and artist who lives in Mt. Angel, has been devoting herself for many years to teaching, especially classes on writing memoir. Educated at Syracuse University in New York, Love came to Oregon to teach at the liberal arts college at Mt. Angel, now defunct but by reputation once very lively. Since her time working there, she has taught older adults in a variety of community settings.

However, Love is a considerable literary talent in her own right. This is evident from her comprehensive collection *Feeding after Dark: Poems and Drawings, 1965-1998*. This book, as the subtitle tells us, gathers work from decades of life experience. The memoir poems here tend to focus on themes of loss. As Love reminds us in her preface, “No one escapes loss.” There are also poems of political engagement, which only occasionally take on a didactic or condescending tone. The book’s chronological sections are marked off with Love’s own carefully executed black-and-white drawings of features of the natural world.

In form, the poems vary widely. There are many examples of free verse with disjunct lines and artful use of the clipped monosyllables and harsh consonants of our Saxon tongue. “The Scent of Balsam,” one long, tumbling sentence draped over 28 lines, feels almost like a prose poem. “After Memorial Day” is so unrelentingly bleak in its description of rotting flowers on graves after the holiday that we are startled to realize it is a strict Shakespearean sonnet.

A few rondels and rondeaux emerge—“Year of the Unseasonable,” “When the Wild Geese Fly,” “Soul Dance.” With their interlacing rhymes and refrains, these are overtly, gracefully “formal” but not pretentiously so.

Among these more patterned pieces is the title poem, “Feeding after Dark.” Given Love’s preoccupation with grief and pain, we might take the title to indicate a desperate or even sordid situation, but it does not. Instead, seabirds feeding under floodlights at the shoreline remind the poet of her continuity with the natural world: “Sanderlings in chorus line as though/ We have rehearsed the choreography/ Flow around me...”

The writing of turn-of-the-century novelist Edith Wharton has been described as an exercise in “the artistic working-through of pain.” Likewise, Patricia Ann Love has used poetry as the vehicle for what she calls in her preface a “journey *toward...*”—as she explains, not exactly “toward healing or toward meaning, but I prefer just to say *toward...*”