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## Ordinary Hours by Karen Enns and Lake of Two Mountains by Arleen Paré

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## **The Pull of the Past; The Lure of the Land**

***Ordinary Hours* by KAREN ENNS**

Brick Books, 2014 \$20.00

***Lake of Two Mountains* by ARLEEN PARÉ**

Brick Books, 2014 \$20.00

Reviewed by **LISA MAY GILES**

Glimpses into the poet's rural childhood fill the quiet poems of Karen Enns' *Ordinary Hours*. They welcome a reader to a meditative stillness that slows the pulse in a welcome, deliberate way.

Divided into three sections, the book offers a loose grouping of impressions rather than a focused, thematic study. Harvest, barn, and family are rendered with a light but reverent touch. A young girl in "Cicadas" walks on the road with her brother, who is "a second me or more of me" (line 13), popping tar bubbles under her shoes. Cherries "too hot to touch" (5) and the labour of picking them make the "light-haired girl listening" (26) want to dance in a poem titled "Restraint." If the greatest achievement of the lyric poem is to elevate the ordinary, "Suite for Tools" makes a decent bid. The hoe, the plow, the harness, the shovel: each earns aesthetic value by fitting perfectly to its job.

While some poems are stronger than others, Enns' faith is of the eye and heart; her careful diction invites us to pause and taste the words for themselves and for the sake of individual lines. The ante-world of the farm imbues even descriptions of the present with a kind of holiness: "At midnight we walked with the music / still burning our fingers" (1–2). But as much as she celebrates the sensual and risks sentimentality, Enns registers accumulated losses that leave us gasping for air. Elegies

punctuate the book. Painterly touches reveal a shadow here, a reverberating silence there, setting light and sound against absence.

Trained as a classical pianist and playing professionally for years, Enns becomes a philosopher in the strongest of these poems. If all else is stripped away, the breathing voice or the changing light can be both subject matter and composition tool: "There is mourning. Sleep. The small of the back. / Held breath. / Breath" (15–16). She also writes honestly about poetic inspiration. Just because a poet works with the materials of prophecy, she does not expect to master them. A gull almost landing on the shore rapidly becomes a metaphor of humility: "as the holding becomes opening, / as the moment of arrival on dry ground, small and blazing with intent, / becomes departure" (14–17).

The promise of prescience attracts poets. But desire and possession are two different things. Enns knows the difference.

In *Lake of Two Mountains*, Arleen Paré's portrait of a lake in central Canada is as rippled and sensitive as the shoreline itself—now probing into inlets, now tracing spray in front of a storm. The result is an accumulation of glances, or a series of shifting views that lets us know the lake is always more than topography, always (more than) enough. An early poem that plays on the image of reflected trees and submerged roots, "More," might serve as an epigraph to the book. The deceptively simple surface of this small, double quatrain makes a mirror of itself. It reaches a "surfeit of calm" (7) that the forthcoming poems will both unsettle and seek to quiet again.

Most of the poems are investigations of place: big history filters down through musings on glacial

beginnings, ethical concerns underlie descriptions of reservation land. Numbered prose poems imagining the monastic life in a Trappist community across the lake appear amidst the free verse poems that constitute the book's main mode. "Lake 1" and "Lake 2," also prose poems, anchor the book even more securely to specific coordinates. This pair explores the passivity of the lake, which asks for nothing and never complains. The punctuated, complete sentences of "Lake 1" become floating, impressionistic phrases in "Lake 2." Even as the poet seeks the right form for the essence of her subject, she does not impose a voice on the lake. This restraint lets readers appreciate experiments in verb creation that lend momentum and originality to the phrasing. "Let the bowl corrugate" (8), she writes, in a poem about the lake's becoming; "Bullfrogs horn the first part of night" in "Under Influence," another poem about origins (15).

I am reminded of Barrett Browning's sonnet, "How do I love thee?" as the speaker draws a map, conjures portraits of family members, and ghosts through the

empty rooms of a summer cottage in the diminished, winter-edged opposite of the summer's "billowing" fullness. Paré gets this exactly right: the enigmatic air of a seasonal cottage is ripe with questions of ownership, tenancy, and time, and although the young girl can begin to own the lake's muddy edges and metal-scent and ribbon grass, the house is an enigmatic cipher of the future. She may shelter under the roofline if caught in a storm, but further entrance becomes trespass.

The cardinal directions are mapped onto the body of this lake and then stretched, backwards in time and forward in feeling. "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach," says the speaker in Barrett Browning's poem. Freely, purely, passionately, adds Paré.

#### **LISA MAY GILES**

Lisa received an MFA from Arizona State and a PhD from Brandeis University. Currently, she teaches writing and environmental literature at the University of Maine and the University of New England.