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Reviews

Fishing Secrets of the Dead by Meredith Davies Hadaway

Word Press, 2005, 80 pages, \$17.00

As a poet, Hadaway possesses a voice inseparable from the teeming, fog filled world of Maryland's eastern shore; its river inlets, salt marshes, yellow perch and kingfishers all form the canvas on which she paints her first collection, *Fishing Secrets of the Dead*. Dedicated to her husband, the man who first brought her to the shore and its secrets, the poems use the landscape to grapple with the absence created by his early death. Through their lyrical descriptions of nature the eastern shore mirrors the poet's sense of loss and grief. In this way, Hadaway's spare, precise lines are always doing two things at once—for example, in her poem "Rupture", a divide between two shores suddenly becomes an eerie premonition of her husband's coming death.

Hadaway's short poems (only the opening piece runs over a page) draw on a restrained descriptive flair that echoes Elizabeth Bishop. Like her, she's a writer that knows how to craft a clean sentence and pack big implications into a little package. However, unlike Bishop, Hadaway openly blends memories from her life into the fabric of the book. Yet these moments never feel self-indulgent; as the reader identifies with Hadaway's conflict, her fishlike movement through her past becomes the reader's as well.

Even the structure of the book takes its cue from the tidal flow of Maryland's rivers. Broken into three sections, each begun with an illustration by her husband, the collection moves through surges of grief and consolation. Given her attention to structure, the poems are at their best when read in context of one another, allowing a semi-narrative to emerge. By the end of the first section reconciling the pain of her grief with an instinctual need to confront it becomes the book's tenuous keynote. As she says, "The dead become the secret we cannot tell." However, Hadaway must tell that secret in order to survive her grief—it's this struggle that gives birth to her poetry.

—Cam Terwilliger