

Local News from Someplace Else. By Marjorie Maddox. Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2013. xii + 92 pages. \$14.00 (paper).

It is now a commonplace that modern poets tend to embrace, well, the commonplace. They don't compose epics about journeys to the underworld; they don't rhyme about major historical battles; they avoid supernatural tales. They instead write insightful poems about simple things or everyday objects. Spiral notebooks. Ferns. Wheelbarrows. These are a few of their favorite things.

The virtue of this interest in the everyday is that it helps us recognize the value and significance of things we otherwise take for granted. From a religious perspective, this technique reminds us of God's place in the quotidian. But sometimes such poems can make the reader yearn for a bigger subject, one with a broader significance and stronger emotional impact.

Marjorie Maddox's fourth book of poetry, *Local News from Someplace Else*, gives us poems about the commonplace that also satisfy this desire for something more. On the one hand, she writes about events that most of us have never been through: terrorist attacks, deadly storms, armed robberies, plane crashes, school shootings, kidnappings, unsolved deaths, murdered children, hunting accidents, cancer. But these are events that we hear about all-too-often, if not every day, and Maddox explores how we try to understand pain in distant places.

Maddox, a Professor of English at Lock Haven University, recognizes that her subjects carry an inherent emotional weight and so avoids melodrama and hyperbole. She uses subtlety and restraint when imagining the thoughts of those directly involved with tragedy. "The Good Mother Hides from Photographers" (p. 14) uses metaphors of photography to depict a mother's grief and shame when her daughter commits a crime; "Pennsylvania September: The Witnesses," (p. 17) uses the distinct voices of three different people to recall the crash of United flight 93.

Other poems take a more personal (but never solipsistic) approach by meditating on the effects that terrible events have on distant observers. In "Reoccurring Storms," (p. 59) Maddox recounts several weather-related tragedies, including a deadly tornado in Oklahoma from which

a family hid in a bathtub. Two boys were killed; the father, daughter, and pregnant mother survived. Maddox's moving final stanzas lead us into the mind of the daughter before casting us back into "the ordinary":

And in Oklahoma, five-year-old Cathleen,
who, amidst the hurricane's howl,
recognized hope in the heartbeat
of her unborn sibling:
that faint hum in the ear;
or that sudden surge toward possibility

into what one day even you and I—
after a particularly hard day of the ordinary—
might discuss as casually
as weather, as someone else's life (p. 60).

This passage, like many poems in this collection, reveals the gulf between participants and observers, but also hints at the possibility to bridge that gap with imagination and sympathy.

Although this collection is not as explicitly religious as some of Maddox's earlier work, many of her poems reveal a connection between tragedy and faith. In a poem about the murder of Amish students in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, she expresses admiration for how members of the community use religion to reconstruct their lives:

Can what is lost be leveled?
You hold each others' hands,

huddle in an unending circle,
"...as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Even out of this,
you build forgiveness (p. 24).

For all of her interest in public events and tragedy, many of Maddox's strongest poems focus on the more basic pleasures and dramas of personal and domestic lives. There are poems about house hunting and home buying, courtship and marriage, birth and birthdays, road trips and frequent fliers, hotels and diners, sperm donors and C-sections, breast-feeding and bike-riding, childhood and parenthood. In "First Layout," (p. 75) Maddox wryly captures the

imagination that ultrasound images inspire: “Oh, little one, / how patiently you pose / with wonder at your prenatal parents, / waiting for us to create / our perfect captions (p. 75).” Elsewhere, an old house “daydreams of us / who are watching inside, / forever waiting to see / what she will tell of our lives still / moving and moving (p. 88).” A poem set by the sea advises, “Listen. The tide’s wet breath / wants only you. Let be (p. 42).” The everydayness of these poems contrasts the dramatic intensity of the others but also evokes the joys from which tragedy tears us. When Maddox emerges from the darkness of terrible tragedy, she sees—and urges us to see—simple joys in an original light.

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