

Marjorie Maddox. *Local News from Someplace Else*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013.

As a title, *Local News from Someplace Else* is an artful recognition of the urge we have when the horrific occurs close to home. A variation on the cliché *we never thought it would happen in a place like this*. The title of the collection leads with the nightly news' suggestion that darkness always lurks elsewhere, or crouches within, as "We disguise ourselves with smiles and wave." The balance of public ease and private struggle, and often vice versa, forms the spine of this book.

Local News from Someplace Else is Maddox's fourth full-length collection, and she is also the author of five chapbooks. Her work since the first book, *Perpendicular as I*, has explored personal negotiations between worlds—whether the porous line between body and landscape in that first collection, the relationship between body and spirit in *Transplant*, *Transport*, *Transubstantiation*, or the many links and stretches between the earthly, earthy, and divine in *Weeknights at the Cathedral*.

This collection draws a new contrast, one that works as the governing question of the collection: does public and spectacular cultural upheaval (think 9/11, Columbine, publicized kidnappings and murders and the like) remind us, via contrast, to appreciate how the quotidian can resonate with even more power?

The book's first section works through one memorable tragedy after another, with speakers who appear unmoored when considering their own location in relation to the events of the spectacle. The titular poem concerns the postmodern unease at seeing a realistic world in a television that insists on the danger of the "real" world just beyond the windows. The effect is that our own location can seem less real, and the set and its anchor—or the reports across whatever medium—tell us nothing that we know. "We try to look outside // to our own doings, but all fingers / are frozen. No matter / what channel we pay, // there is still no news from home."

Similarly startling is the line, "At fourteen, my daughter / can't recall Harris and Klebold," names current parents know as well as *their* parents knew Squeaky Fromme. The poem shows that we share many national memories that few people *actually* remember personally, but of which everyone remembers first learning, and the now-familiar media-driven search for "meaning" after such events. Maddox critiques the urge to seek answers, particularly those so popular among the saccharine responses of local news personalities. The appeal for heavenly

rationale, she notes, has “nothing there suggesting God’s / premeditation.” She highlights the comfort of routine: “The unknown *why* / is expected, something / we’ve been through before.”

The proximity of cataclysm is a constant in the work. In “Minersville Diner,” one of the book’s strongest and most deftly controlled poems, Maddox works metaphorical resonance to a fine pitch:

...its painted gold starts winking knowingly
as we pass into the life we pretend is safe
from explosion, from unexpected
and total collapse.

“Ithaca Winter” typifies thematic concerns of the book’s second section. The speaker evokes a shifting psyche in the details of a snowy and nihilistic winter scene. The poem opens with the speaker making a choice: “To undo who I was, I opened / my chapped lips and swallowed / the weather whole.” As the logic and setting of the poem unfold in a very particular locale, the change solidifies in the final stanza: “When I stopped shivering, / behind my teeth were words.” The events changing the speaker here are vague and stylized. What matters is the change the speaker undergoes, amplified in poems that deal with reported tragedies.

“Montoursville, PA” concerns the accidental explosion and crash of TWA Flight 800 that claimed nearly 300 lives in 1996. The raw and sudden catastrophe challenges the town and the speaker to conceive of it: “...this, natural detached / from disaster too explosively to listen / to anything but the hiss of absence.” In another poem, “Jazz Memorial,” Maddox captures the twin urges of mourning the dead and (sometimes guilty) celebration of being alive that accompany public cataclysm: “your syncopated Orleans / raising up the dead / this city’s misery out on the streets / unable to miss a parade.”

Technically, Maddox achieves a level of unease throughout the book by employing nameless, elliptical references in the poems, images and gestures that imply specific subjects that are not often fully revealed. The technique underscores the notion of *someplace else*, creating specifics that are recognizable, familiar, but not intimate. The usual pronouns are at work in these cases—you, I, we, they—but also the “neighbor’s uprooted trunk,” the “life still coming,” the “city.” Emotion is contrasted using verbal metonymy; speakers are often “temporarily wedged between faith and scream.” Enjambment unsettles word

relations in nearly every poem, very often to unsettling effect, or to cause disruption (as opposed to, say, play or duality of meaning). The collective effect of such maneuvers is plain in the closing lines of the book's second section, in the poem "Twice," which concerns a man's being struck by lightning in the speaker's neighborhood:

even on clear, bright days,
will we continue, with hope
or fear, to look up straight
into whatever warms us?

If the collection has a weakness—and this is a faint-hearted complaint—it is that the poems navigating public suffering and private reaction and distancing are so engaging that some of the quieter and more personal poems feel reduced in comparison. When they work well, they highlight by contrast the book's thematic thrust. When the placement does not—as happens once or twice in the final section—the poem functions like one of those speed bumps with a huge plateau in the middle: you slow, are lifted out for a moment, then proceed with caution into what is next.

The final section of the book contains *mostly* personal poems about bringing life into the world, pregnancy, raising children, and family; many of these reveal speakers ambivalent about the world in which they have created life. As a group, they are a strong ending to the book, as they collectively repeat, in a changed context, many of the concerns of the earlier sections. In one, a baby hiccup reminds a speaker of a deceased father. In another, a man donating at a sperm bank later watches children in the snow while meditating on all the children he will never know, which is an invigorating twist on the earlier theme of local news that is potentially *everywhere* else. In another, parents rediscover bicycles as they teach their children to ride, literally getting moving again in a poem capturing both fear and delight. Many of these ending poems contain the familiar and perhaps quintessential parental moment, waiting for the moment your child's eyes have "the sad joy that lets her see / all that the world is."

—Gabriel Welsch