

A Poet Who Maps the Human Heart in Verse

By Fred Volkmer

Daniel Thomas Moran's *From HiLo to Willow Pond: New & Selected Poems* is the fifth collection of poems that he has published in a dozen years. And this is while he has been working full-time practicing dentistry on Shelter Island.

He is also literary correspondent to WLIU, Southampton College's radio station, and vice president of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association. He

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has not been idle. Half of the title's significance escapes me. I have no idea where or what "HiLo" is, but Willow Pond is clearly a pond near his home on Shelter Island.

The voice in the poems is cultivated, intelligent, thoughtful, whimsical, sometimes very funny, searching, musical, urban, nature loving, light, profound, generalizing, and deeply personal by turns. Each poem reveals a new side of Dr. Moran, until by the end of the book we have a three-dimensional picture of him. The best conceivable review would be to simply quote at length.

Dr. Moran has a verbal dexterity that calls for the reader to read aloud. Yet some poems are humorous by virtue of their arrangement on the page, as in "Waiting for Louie the Clip," in which placement of words and phrases mimes the movement of a barber's comb and scissors, or "These Hummingbirds," in which the layout remarkably suggests the ecstatic flight

BOOK REVIEW

of a feeding hummingbird ("two tiny wings in harmonic perfection") drinking from a feeder.

In what is surely the only poem written to celebrate bagels, he hymns "Ess-A-Bagel," New York's wondrous bagel emporium, where you can buy "not just any bagels but / thoroughbred bagels, / crown jewel bagels, / the bagels Abraham / prophesied for the / Chosen People of Stuytown." These same bagels then are "to be schmear'd with / delicacies beyond poetry. / Taste and texture and / Kosher perfumes painting / the dense air with life." And speaking of firsts, Dr. Moran has also written an ode to his septic tank.

And even the lowly ant has found in Dr. Moran his Maeterlinck, with "Concerning Ants." "Never say can't / To any ant." And like Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian dramatist who wrote *The Life of the Bee*, Dr. Moran contemplates the bee, also, "like me / out early, / in search of nectar, / hoping / to add a little / sweetness / to this world."

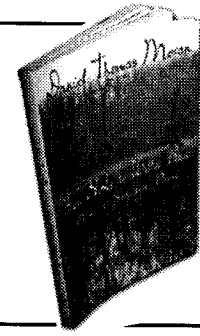
This resident of Shelter Island still has his links to the city, and a poem captures the subway journey "Uptown," and another, "41 West 86th Street," that tells all the city's noise-makers ("all you noise peddlers, / you jack-hammer riders, / and you roaring buses / whose tired brakes groan / and squeal at my corner. / All you refuse / compressor-compactors, / all you scurrying / taxicab trumpeters, and / every single hammer in / this sheet-metal, I-beam city") to pipe down, and consider those of us who lie "half-doing in / a perfect naked reverie, / dreaming of violin concertos / and the plaintive cooing of / distant mourning doves. / ... alone or / holding one another for comfort." And besides, he'd love to sleep another hour.

And yet he is a nature lover, also, who ponders the deer tentatively stepping out of the wood: "They emerge / from the vanishing green, / carrying the enigma / of the summer forest." In "The Cage," he whimsically addresses the bird who has hit his picture window. "I only wished / to console, to say / how sorry I was / for the nature of glass / and this cruel cage / I choose to inhabit, / without flight or feather. / But tiny bird, / I only wish to ask / with all humility, / Where did you / think you were going / anyway? / If I had / invited you in, / would you have / stayed a little longer?"

Some poems are Eliotesque in their diction, like "From the Porch In Summer," with its faint rhythmic echoes of Eliot's "Burnt Norton." "That peace we seek, is / that peace we find. // The peace we make. // ...In the journeys which lead nowhere, / and the ones which find us home. // ...In the silence beyond speaking and / our surrender to mystery."

In a witty introduction, Graham Everett slyly raises the suggestion that Dr. Moran might be a namedropper, because he confronts God and Betty Friedan in separate poems. In "Never Cross a Woman" Dr. Moran witnesses a collision between Ms. Friedan and a "nice lady's" Beamer in Sag Harbor on a summer day, and thirty years of consciousness-raising evaporate in a second with the crunch of metal against metal. The confrontation leads the woman to say "Save the speech, Betty. Who's / going to pay for the god- / damned crease in my door? When / my husband sees this, he's going to kill / me."

And he does consider God somewhat ironically, half in awe and half in accusation, whose "finger tips / swirl galaxies / ... He is love and / love is blind. / He loves a good fight. / He enjoys His fame. / He had me fail geometry and / made trees which became / the masts of ships and / the bunks in the death camps. / ...He



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makes / plaster madonnas weep and / causes deserts and cancer and / snowflakes and stillbirths and / fireflies and widows and / shadows and the apocalypse."

In "Lying With Marianne On St. Mark's Place" he describes the experience of being shelved on a bookshelf next to Marianne Moore. "She loves her men / silent and I love / my ladies profound. / There we lie, poised / in our communal in- / spirations, naked / musings and alliteration. / Often in the padlocked / midnight, I wait for / her to turn and embrace / me, but still, / she acts as though she / never even knew me."

Dr. Moran is a husband and lover and his love poems find us laughing and being touched by turns. As in "An Ode to the Feet of the Woman I Love."

In "Creed" he sums it all up. "The way / puddles dry / after / a night of rain. // The way / I reach up / and balance / the moon / on the tip / of my finger. // The way / a clock / proceeds / in pointless / circles. // The way / your ribs, / without thought, / mimic the tides / while you sleep. // Perhaps, / this is all // I know about / eternity."

These poems explore the human comedy, commemorate the seasons, rejoice in the quotidian, and seek, in their modest way, to read the map of the human heart. They are a delight to read.