The Art Of Drowning (Pitt Poetry Series) by Billy Collins

Always Enchanting And Very Thrilling

This collection of poems has a subject matter ranging from the gustatory pleasures of osso buco to an analysis of the handwriting of Keats; from the art form of the calendar pinup to blues music.

"In a while, one of us will go up to bed and the other one will follow. Then we will slip below the surface of the night into miles of water, drifting down and down to the dark, soundless bottom until the weight of dreams pulls us lower still, below the shale and layered rock"
~Osso Buco

Firstly, I want to say that I love the Pittsburgh Poetry Series. Each book is about 100 pages and you can read one book right before going to bed. Poetry seems to calm my mind and encourages more vivid dreams.

"The Art of Drowning" is an interesting collection. It is not as "cartoon" focused as "Questions about Angels." Although, there is some silliness to be had in "Nightclub" where we are amused by songs no one would sing. It was funnier when my husband read it to me. I’m not sure why. He and I were reading in bed and I asked him to read me some poems. He liked "The Biography of a Cloud," especially the lines: "but early one morning over Arizona it held the distinction of being the only one in the sky." He loves going to Arizona, so he could easily imagine the lonely cloud drifting across an open sky.

You hardly imagine that reading poetry in bed would be anything less than romantic, yet with many of Billy Collins' poems, this is exactly what happens. Apparently I'm not the only one who was highly amused by "Nightclub." My husband was just calmly reading and I was lost in laughter as if there were some private joke only I was acknowledging.
Many of the poems seem quite intimate, like cozy conversations with the reader. There is an inner vision and motion. At times Billy Collins peers into frankness as it looks back starkly and at other times his matter-of-fact observations show irony. Then, suddenly we are drowned in nostalgia, awakened by dread or simply wondering at the sheer imagination it takes to write the last few lines of "Tuesday."

You have to love the "book recommendations" in "Canada," or the story of trees reciting poems in "Fiftieth Birthday Eve." Collins turns poetry into magic. These are not just words dancing before your eyes, they are living creatures jumping off the page into our imagination. His choice of words is like the choice of colors for a painting, yet the painting is occurring in minds. The better your imagination, the better the poem. You must submit the canvas for the artwork. You can remain closed, only seeing the words, or let the words into your mind and allow them to paint vivid images, recollection, connect with past memories or propel you into thinking about the future.

The title of this book refers to a poem called: The Art of Drowning and it deals with the concept of your life flashing before your eyes. Here, Billy Collins takes a rather irreverent look at what happens when you die and why your life might not necessarily "flash" but might take other forms.

Billy Collins' poems amaze me, not only because he can adjust his focus in a variety of amusing and out-of-the-box ways. He amazes due to his ability to make each poem an emotion or a moment in time, representative of his present condition. There are moments of longing, the dreams of travel and other places he'd rather be. There is also a comfort in the present and common life or solitude when observing nature.

Many poems (in general) make me feel that I am on the outside looking in. Billy Collins' poems make me feel that I am on the inside, looking out as Billy Collins observes his world.

He does at times seem to be an observer as words break on the page. There are undercurrents of emotions surging inside him and occasionally they break on the page as sarcasm, irony or a sheer appreciation for being. In "Conversion" he takes us into the past while in "Death Beds" he takes us into the future. Here we think about where we will be when we die. Not something I think about daily, but an interesting concept.

"I would hope for a window, 
the usual frame of reference, 
a clear sky, or think high clouds, 
an abundance of sun, a cool pillow."

"Medium" is stunning because it explains how Collins would love to write on more surfaces than paper and I'm sure he realized that each time he
writes a poem, he is writing on our hearts or across our minds and many of his poems are unforgettable and seep into your soul. Some of the poems will even drown you in laughter.

~The Rebecca Review

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