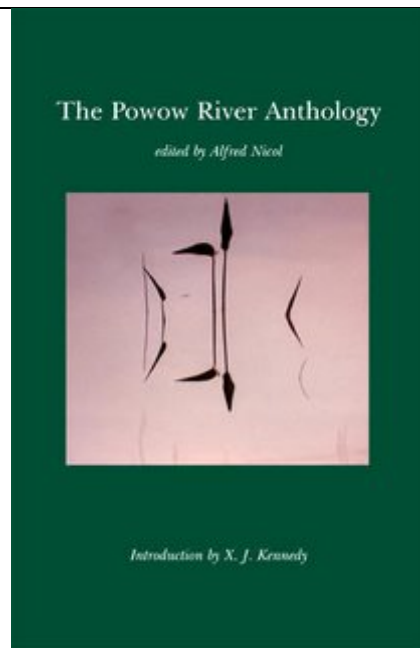


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The Powow River Anthology
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The product of over a decade's worth of meeting, collaboration, and creativity centered in Newburyport, The Powow River Anthology accomplishes one of the great feats of any anthology of

poetry – while each poem remains a strong entity of singular import, the pieces all fit together to form a cohesive whole, joined not only by thematic similarities but by their painstaking attention to language and structure, with no one poem eclipsing another. And the best part about that whole is that it's a book you can live with, think about, and share. Perhaps the most notable experience I had with the book while carrying it around was when I passed Rhina Espaillat's "Weighing In" to a co-worker, who had been complaining about recent weight gain, in what was admittedly an overly dramatized effort to comfort her. Espaillat writes:

"What the scale tells you is how much the earth
has missed you, body, how it wants you back
again after you leave it and go forth
into the light."

In a final stanza that is both warm and dark, the speaker concludes:

"But look at you now, body, soft old shoe
that love wears when it's stirring, look down, look
how earth wants what you weigh,
needs what you know."

It's no surprise that the poems in this anthology deal with the themes of love, death, and spirituality, but the ways in which the poems explore these familiar subjects are inventive. Brian T. O'Brien's Pantry Mouse takes a seemingly mundane encounter between a man and a mouse in his kitchen and applies the dynamic of the encounter to the loss of love:

"You slid with whatever dignity
you could muster down a vertical
partition, and I threatened and swore
like a man—though without conviction.
It was very much like when love departs.
There will be no traps or poisoned bait.

I put a brick in front of your hole,
as I did another time with my heart."

A. M. Juster's Cancer Prayer is a modern sonnet that beautifully captures small wishes to make a terminal situation more bearable. The speaker prays:

"Please smite that intern in oncology who craves approval from department heads.

Please ease her urge to vomit; let there be kind but flirtatious men in nearby beds.

...Surround her with forgiving family and nurses not too numb to cry."

Len Krisak's What of the Night? recalls a scene of love often overlooked – a father's nighttime ritual of locking the house to keep his family safe, and wonders of the father, "When he's townsman of the stillest town,/ Who will I be to set his burden down?" Noah's Wife by Nancy Bailey Miller tells the Genesis story from the wife's perspective and shows how, in the midst of all the other animals boarding the ark two by two, she boards alone. And James Najarian evokes loss and the passage of time through reminiscences of life on a goat farm, in his at times whimsical Goat Song.

Countless poems in the anthology are replete with striking, sensual imagery and language. Of particular note are Bill Coyle's Anima, Alfred Nichol's Sunday, Robert Crawford's The Whole of It, Michele Leavitt's Ladies Night, Karen Nelson's Flamenco Dancer, and Deborah Warren's Elizabeth's Dress, which cleverly describes through claims of not describing.

With a blend of appropriate gravity and wit, the poems of The Powow River Anthology have tremendous resonance with the reader, long after the anthology has been put down.

Reviewed By: Amy Brais /Ibbetson Update/ April 2006/Somerville, Mass.