

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/1

**Said Not Said by Fred Marchant
(GRAYWOLF PRESS 2017) — Release
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Review by Doug Holder

Fred Marchant, the author of the poetry collections, "The Looking House" and "Full Moon Boat" among other titles, has released a new collection "Said Not Said" from the Graywolf Press. As the title asserts "Said Not Said" — much is said in this life, but there is even more unsaid — so much subtext, so much nuance, so much subtlety, but Marchant does his part to the fill the void with his new book of evocative verse.

Since I have worked at McLean Hospital for over 34 years, and struggled with the "black dogs" of depression myself-- I was drawn to the poems of Marchant's late sister — a woman who suffered from mental illness. In his poem "The Unacceptable," Marchant focuses on her strange cough, and how something as banal as this spurt of air, can signal the turmoil within. Marchant captures this beautifully. I have noticed the abnormalities, the tics, the repetitive body movements, that infest the psychiatric ward. This rings so true:

*"How?
How do you write about a cough?
How to hint at the sound of it?
A cough that was odd, not from a cold, or something else you catch.
I think now it was the sound of what was eating away my sister's mind.
I first heard it at our grandfather's funeral Mass.
I was seven and thought she should just quit it, stop bothering me, and
everyone."*

"Body Body" is a brutally honest poem about facing our aging bodies, and ourselves. I am sure every man or woman over age 60 can look at themselves and wonder about all the baggage, both physically and mentally they have acquired over the years. I could imagine a modern day Falstaff, in a more sober moment, perhaps waking at 3AM in a cold sweat-- during his dark night of the soul — speak similar words. Marchant speaks to his carcass:

*"old trading buddy, fat winter sleeping bag I carry with me
into my dreams, you my ne'er do well pardner on a mule*



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*crossing the desert, old guy who keeps asking for a swig,
who soaks the sheets with worry, turns on me regularly,*

*remains hard to fathom, easy to ignore, impossible to trust,
years since we met, when first I cut in, and asked for a kiss."*

And one must not forget that Marchant is a translator as well, and in this translation "The Peach" — well nothing is lost in translation. Marchant, who co-translated this Vietnamese poem, renders a peach, half-eaten by a bat, as a wonderful metaphor of the close habitation of sorrow and happiness. A peach is never just a peach in Marchant's and the poet Vo Que's closely observed world.

This just a mere sample of Marchant's work in this collection. He also writes wonderfully about Vietnam, the Middle East, olive trees, and the sufferings in the lives of people. David Ferry, noted translator and poet said of Marchant's work "... the noble generosity of feeling that has characterized his work, (is) here more impressively than before."

Amen. Highly Recommended.