

Review by Lo Galluccio

BREAK TIME

The Carpenter Poets of Jamaica Plain

Edited By Joseph Bergin @ 2007

www.carpenterpoets.org

“Dedicated to the men and women everywhere who practice the trade and craft of carpentry.”

This handsomely bound edition of poems by a collective of JP Carpenters contains many gems. From the sublime to the crude, the rugged to the rude, and on a level both seemingly pedestrian, but profound, it captures many facets of the thinking minds and labors of carpenter-poets. In fact what it does, is break the stereotype that there must be a division between the angelic thinkers and the industrious hands. The industrious have their muses and angels too, once they set about evoking them. For they emerge from after-hours jokes, nails and 2 x 4's and the wily and noble task of measuring and fitting beams. Whatever the carpenter is building, his/her service is also a service to mankind and to the Earth's maker. Certainly these poets can really sass out some poems.

In the Introduction they write:

“There's much to be said about the parallels between writing and carpentry. There's the act of creating something out of common supplies, fitting board to board, word to word, the beauty of the product and the pride in the craft. The house we live in, that poem that lives in us.”

In his poem, “Federalist Style” Jerry Abelow writes:

“A place for Puritans to hide.
soapstone sink, big and wide....”

“Growers of all kind.
sitting in the kitchen.
speaking their mind.
choke cherry trees
in the front yard.”

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For me these lines evoke William Carlos Williams – “so much depends upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens” and New England’s wintry pride. The images here are crisp and the scene is vivid.

In “Life is Grand” Cyrus Beer writes:

“It’s hard to explain at dawn on a frigid winter morn
with boogers that are black, and fingers worn
But life is grand.”

As Joe Bergin, the chief of this project, a number of whose poems are featured, writes:

“Brave men all who face danger each day
for to create their brand of artisinal perfection
the little wisdoms on the job.
learned from repetition and countless errors elevate you.”

In addition, Joe turns in some finely attuned rhyme schemes and lyric verse on his trade. In “Carpenter Etiquette” he writes:

“Don’t block the driveway
Or leave tire marks on a wet lawn
Or arrive early Saturday morning
And start machinery at dawn
Burn offerings to the goddess of safety
And make your rig strong
Go ahead! Do it!
Climb up that 4-story staging
Just like King Kong!”

This is a worthwhile collection to read for anyone who believes in the concrete value of a real world, a natural world, put into lyrical forms.

Perhaps my favorite line of all is: “Sing the praise of the forest loudly.”