

Deep
Landscape
Turning



Poems by
Ann Hutt Browning

DEEP LANDSCAPE TURNING

by Ann Hutt Browning,
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Review by Barbara Bialick

Ann Hutt Browning, with her poetic last name and lyrical poetry, is known by many for the writer's retreat center she runs with her husband of 50 years—Wellspring House, in Ashfield, Massachusetts. All those she helped inspire—and others—should certainly buy this book by the English-born, southern California-raised Radcliffe girl. With master's degrees in both psychology and architecture, she has the bedrock foundations of nature interplay with human relationships.

The cover of this attractive book is a sepia photograph of huge, smooth rocks, "Maine Seacoast, 1976" by Jim Weigang. It brings the reader right into the book's natural imagery. The first poem, EACH MORNING I HOLD YOU, is a villanelle on the daily connection between love and light.

Then, in A DAY IN THE DORDOGNE, FRANCE, she shows our relationship to rock: "All day we tramp weary over old stones/...as we crunch the surface stone we are pulled,/Drawn across abandoned fields.../follow ancient paths to the river..." where they drink "rough red wine" and tear bread.

She continues in her travels to a "WAYSIDE TABLEAU" where "three ancient women" sit in black clothes of mourning with "sorrowful" purple lilac... "...But "the one white spray of lilac...whispers...snatches of singing/from their young marriage nights."

In all of these poems, her long lines are built on the blank page like edifices she would build on land. In BLINDED BY LIGHT, she writes: "I want to be with you on wild white bedrock,surfaced.../where Doric columns, rooted in the foundation are rooted also in that rocky mount..."

Her poems range from travel and nature ("SESTINA FOR A HUMMINGBIRD") to her childhood relationships. In CUSTODY, she hears in a courtroom about the divorce of her parents and custody by her mother, and also starts her period. She learns by LETTER FROM MY ENGLISH AUNT that her father has died ("Cremated. No service"). As a 14-year-old she's among adults with loud voices discussing McCarthy, among other topics, and has to "put my hand on (the white stone) Ulysses' curls/and was calmed."

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But one of her best poems is MY YOUNGER BROTHER: "He and our mother strolled in the garden,/...he filled her skirt with ripe tomatoes,/ laughing as he dropped each one/into the billowing cloth,/his opened fist a fat starfish/...her loaded skirt swaying./back to the house...stained with red juice/her eyes like stars."

She also adds some political poems, such as AN ORDINARY LIFE: "She threw back her all-cotton sheet,/cotton woven in a far-off country/by a dark-skinned girl chained to her her large loom..."(and so on!)

Ann Hutt Browning is a poet more people should know about.