

Wilderness House Literary Review 4/4

For the Sake of the Light: New and Selected Poems.
by Tom Sexton.
(University of Alaska Press PO BOX 756240) \$23.

Review by Doug Holder

I reviewed a previous collection from Tom Sexton (*Clock With No Hands*), a poetry collection that dealt with his childhood in Lowell, Mass. Well Sexton is not only a topnotch urban poet, but he is an accomplished nature poet as well. And if you look at a dramatic sky, and see it as only that, well fine. But Sexton is a poet who transcends, and sees in nature a portal to another world or dimension. And since many of these poems take place in the hinterlands of Maine and Alaska, how better to view the grandeur? In "That Other World" we have case in point:

Out of the heavy cloud cover, a shaft
of light falling on the only leaf
of a devil's club plant that has turned

bright yellow a month before it should.
Could this, and not the arching sky,
be the portal to that other world,

the place where the gods, disheveled
and slightly sulfurous, enter ours
trailing bright red berries for a cape?

And in "Burial Ground" Sexton shed light on a cemetery, and its spectral denizens:

Past the man who was kind to his wife and children,
past the woman of biblical age,
past the Grand Army of the Republic markers,
past the child who knew only one winter,
past the peddler who sold needles and thread,
someone has knelt in the snow to fasten
a Christmas wreath, with a spray of holly
and a red velvet bow, to a defaced slate—
now a door for the dead to pass through
if only to see earth wearing the moon for a crown.

Sexton's poetry will make you a much closer look at that tree, that sunset, that flick of movement in the corner of your eye, that deep orange in an autumnal leaf....Highly recommended.

