



Boston Poet Laureate Sam Cornish's '*dead beats*'

The magic of joining words

(Ibbetson Street Press - <http://lulu.com/ibbetson-press>):

Review by Michael T. Steffen

Words set together, that's all poetry needs. Sam Cornish finds just two words, the title, 'dead beats', to magnetize and entertain our attention, evoking foremost, for readers of poetry, the Beat poets of the 1950s and 60s, notably Ginsberg and

Kerouac (and Marlon Brando and Thomas Wolfe!) whom Cornish visits in poems throughout the book.

But look back at that first word, 'dead'. For poetry that loves paradox, reversals, contrariness, surprises, over- and understatements and everything turned around and on its head, the word 'dead' hints at something terribly vital. For poetry it does. Ever since David Ferry — hold on a second! — ever since Gilgamesh, Odysseus and Aeneas, long before Dante and Hamlet and Ezra Pound and Robert Pinsky, poetry has been sourcing from talks with and about the dead. Maybe the way all life does. Only poetry comes right out and says so.

Put the two words together, presto of the true ring of a commonplace term, and the next time you're called a "dead beat" (poets and readers of poetry often disguise themselves as such to the perception of this agitated worldly world) have Sam Cornish's book in your pocket and share the secret compliment with your smile. ("Beat," also, is the word partner of "heart," with which Cornish's writing is always in rhythm.)

I wanted to walk readers to the front door of this book, not through the house. Yet here's a peek at the poem, in astonishing phrases, 'Getting a Life' dedicated to Robert Creely:

the truth

on the floor
like scenes cut

from a movie
you miss them

there is nothing
to hold the

poem together
but his breath...

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/3

So Cornish's magical 'dead beats' published by Ibbetson Street Press, those two words, the title wagging the dog (would poetry have it any other way?) held the book together and resonated from poem to poem as I read with relish.