

The Road To Emmaus
by Spencer Reece
Farrar, Strauss and Giroux
New York, New York
Hardbound, \$24 (tentative), 124 page



review by Zvi A. Sesling

There are some poets a reader discovers and is determined to read the rest of that poet's work. This happened with *The Road to Emmaus*, Spencer Reece's second offering to the poetic world. The first book, *A Clerk's Tale*, of which the title poem was given a full page review in *The New Yorker* proved to be an enthralling poem, in fact the whole book proved more than interesting. However, the current volume, due out in April 2014 from Farrar, Strauss and Giroux is one to be recommended without hesitation.

As interesting as his poems are, Reece himself is a fascinating character. He was a salesman for Brooks Brothers, clothing men in high priced apparel. A gay man, he later became an Episcopalian priest. He teaches in Central America now. His poems are reality based often depicting what he sees or experiences. Let's look at "ICU"

*Those mornings I traveled north on I-91,
passing below the basalt cliff of East Rock
where elms discussed their genealogies,
I was a chaplain at Hartford Hospital,
took the Myers-Briggs with Sister Margaret,
learned I was an I drawn to Es.
In small group I said, "I do not like it,
the way young black men die in the ER,
shot, unrecognized, their gurneys stripped,
their belongings catalogued and unclaimed."
In the neonatal ICU, newborns, breathed,
blue, spider-delicate in nests of tubes.
A Sunday of themselves, their tissue purpled,
their eyelids the film on old water in a well,
their faces resigned in plastic attics,
their skin mottled mildewed wallpaper.
It is correct to love even at the wrong time.
On rounds, the newborns eyed me, each one
like Orpheus in his dark hallway, saying:
I knew I would find, I knew I would lose you.*

Perhaps his teaching experiences in central America resulted in the poem "Among Schoolchildren" in which the following appears:

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*I had come to work in the orphanage of Villa Florencia.
Inside the ten-foot wall with barbed wire, behind the mental
gate,
guards fingered
their pistols like Bibles,
and seventy orphaned girls politely greeted strident Christians.
One girl had been found on a coconut truck.
She had lived on coconut juice since birth,
had trouble speaking, preferred not to be held.
Two sisters had been left a street corner on a sheet of
cardboard;
their mother told them to wait, then never came back.*

Reece's descriptions leave little to the imagination. No surrealist, he realistic verbiage brings it all to the immediate, the real. Yes, his sexual orientation crops up. More importantly is his religious orientation which buttresses his faith and his ability to see and deal with the difficulties of the lives of others.

In his final poem, "Hymn," the last three lines may best sum up Reece's poetry:

*We each went our separate ways
following where we were being led.
Marie said: "Writ it down, just as it happened."*

Reece has done that in definitive fashion much to our good fortune.