

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

The World Doesn't Know You

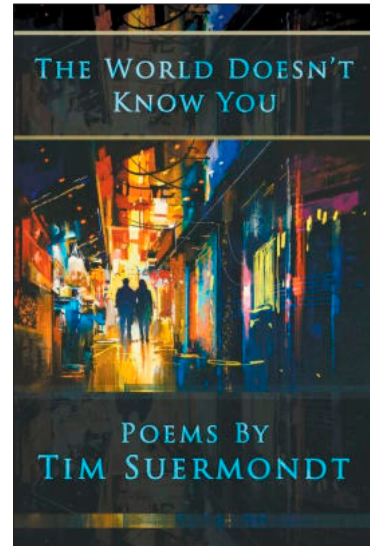
Poems by Tim Suermond

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Review by Zvi A. Sesling

Take Billy Collins, mix in a touch of Charles Simic and you get Tim Suermond. He is an entertaining, thoughtful and serious poet whose newest book is *The World Doesn't Know You*. The poems reinforce his reputation as a poet whose work presents him as one who is romantic, without sentimentality, and intellectually profound.

In "EATING A SAUSAGE DOG WITH MY WIFE ON HER BIRTHDAY," he can turn a cold winter day into a warm romantic event --thanks to a sausage:

*The first snow of the season
lies flecked like birdseed
over the landscape of the city—
the atmosphere so crisp I'm sure
I heard the universe crunch.
"This is what you call
feeding your face," she says,
trying to laugh as she
struggles and chomps away
at the big sausage and bun,
a mustard stained napkin
dropping from her hands, fluttering
in the wind—how silly
we'll look in the photos, and how happy.*

He also digs into sports – baseball – in this case to capture the frustration of a losing streak while enjoying the company of his friend:

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LEAVING THE STADIUM AFTER THE HOME TEAM LOSES

*Being good citizens my friend and I
deposit our hot dog wrappers and beer bottles
in one of the designated trash bins.
Were we able to we'd deposit the entire team
now nursing a nine game losing streak.
Someone yells for the manager to be fired —
or worse, and everyone within earshot yells their assent.
We climb the ramp leading to the subway,
the stadium rather prison-like in its dimming lights
made worse by the fog of a relentless drizzle.
My friend and I who believe sports is a type of magic
watch the reflections from the train window —
apartment houses, bodegas, and miles of cemeteries
where in this lost season no Lazarus will rise.*

Within each of these poems his humor rises like cream; so does his serious side. The first poem about his relationship with his wife, both starts and ends on serious notes, albeit the latter in a gentle, sweet conclusion, while everything in between is a light-hearted look at the couple eating.

The second poem presents three aspects of Suermond's poetry. First, he is a sports fan who does not like his team's losing streak. Second, he has a good friend with whom he shares the disappointment of loss. And third, unlike many rabid sports fans who believe their team will prevail, Suermond realizes his team will not overcome its poor efforts.

In all poems in this volume of poetry Suermond reveals his optimism and his knowledge of different subjects whether it is baseball, a cold winter day, or watching a playground basketball game in which he thinks "I should butt in, show them/moves they've never before ..." Basketball is a recurring theme and makes one hope his team is doing well or Suermond is out on the court and he has made some clean hoops from the three-point line.

Suermond also travels and in HAN-SHAN he is off in China:

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*I lean against the palace's golden balustrade
twined with apricot blossoms
and look down on the streets of Beijing
like the emperor himself may have done
when his subjects stirred in him a longing
to join them in the chaotic world, no less
beautiful for all its hubbub.*

*There's the woman I bought a sweet potato
from before I climbed up and there's
the young couple decked out in designer duds,
the LAKERS yellow shirt on the man
shining like the sun and there's the old man
who said he's the last communist and offered
me a tiny porcelain bust of Mao which I bought
and buried deep in the bottom of my bag.*

Here he presents a more serious side in his poetry including hiding the most famous symbol of communist China "in the bottom of my bag." He anticipates problems in China or some other country(including the United States) should it be discovered.

Suermond's poetry is delightful. He has an easy, low key approach, with occasional surprise endings and always a keen understanding of what is accessible and entertaining to the reader. I highly recommend this book to all fans of fine poetry.