

Book Review

Title: *Moon on the Meadow: Collected Poems*

Author: Pia Taavila.

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Cost: \$24.95

Reviewer: Aimée Gramblin

When I was an elementary-aged child, my Dad and I took an American Sign Language class. Learning the alphabet was all it took for me to become captivated and mesmerized by the language. When *Moon on the Meadow: Collected Poems* came to my attention and I saw the author, Pia Taavila, was an English professor at Gallaudet University, I was immediately interested. My curiosity was satisfied by a collection that offers a window into disability culture as perceived by a hearing Child of Deaf Adults (CODA). *Moon on the Meadow* winds around many universal themes, including childhood, having children, familial roots, romantic involvements and dissipations, experiences of learning and teaching, and communion with nature. We are given glimpses into the deaf community on a personal and general level. Although these poems do not dominate the collection, Taavila's highly imagistic poetry is informed by her experience as a CODA.

In her astute and beautifully written introduction, Taavila cites Ezra Pound as one imagist poet from whom she draws inspiration. Amy Lowell is another imagist poet who comes to mind when reading Taavila's poems. On the predominance of images in her poetry, Taavila states:

“It is a seeing and seeing again, that shapes my work. It is the direct result of being raised by deaf parents, whose entire method of communicating with me was primarily through our hands and eyes, through a touch on the shoulder. Concrete. Tactile. Animated. Expressive” (p. xxv).

Earlier in the introduction, we are provided with helpful insights into Taavila's dance between the hearing and deaf community: “my overall feeling is one of gratitude for and celebration of being a quasi-member of two cultures, even as that identity was often one of confusing and overlapping allegiances” (p. xxii). This sentiment resonates in Taavila's poem “The Deaf Club Sails to Bob-Lo Island”:

“When Daddy spun and dipped her low,
she came up laughing.
How did they know
to move their feet, which steps to take?
How did they feel the drum line's beat?
I saw them dance to private music” (p. 19).

The poet's reverence for her parents' private language is obvious here; we feel a longing from Taavila to be an exclusive part of her parents' deaf culture, while she is instead faced with the ongoing struggle of being "other" in both the hearing and deaf communities, thus providing an important poetic tension which holds together the entire collection.

The writing in *Moon on the Meadow* is self-assured and varied, serious and playful. As Taavila works within traditional poetic forms, such as Haiku, she also stretches their limits. *Moon on the Meadow* consists of many previously published poems and lends itself to being read in snippets as each piece stands on its own. All the poems are presented in a continuous stream, which feels a bit overwhelming at times. For such a dense collection, guideposts such as section divisions would have proven useful. But this is only a minor annoyance. Taavila's collection, observant and vivid, promises to have a far reach into several audiences, including those interested in disability culture, poets and poetry enthusiasts.

Aimée Gramblin, English M.A., University of Central Oklahoma, has had Arts columns appear in *Urban Tulsa Weekly* and poems published in journals including *The Mid-America Poetry Review* and *The Rectangle*. She was the 2006 University of Central Oklahoma Creative Studies Program Geoffrey Bocca Scholar. She may be contacted at dna_gramblin@yahoo.com
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About this time, Roethke developed a simple free-verse style that we see in poems like "An Elegy for Jane" and "The Meadow Mouse." These have surprising power because, at least to me, they register the confidence and sincerity of the great artist. Then come the poems that seem to echo Yeats in style, but, contrary to much adverse criticism, could never be mistaken for Yeats.
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