

Donna Spector is a triple threat talent - successful playwright, poet published in many top journals, and novelist. Her work here is rich with meaning and metaphor, delightfully honest, human, nostalgic, poignant and humorous in turn. Through her words, Spector shares herself generously with readers. We meet long dead relatives captured in faded photographs and experience precious or sorrowful moments frozen in time. She tells her stories in three parts: *The Same Shadows*; *Lovers and Other Dreams*; and *Lessons in the Mirror*. The reading experience is exhilarating and sometimes harrowing.

In "My Father's Breakfast," for example, the poet watches her father eat his breakfast, concerned about his failing health after a heart attack. Her fear is revealed simply, beautifully:

It's just an egg, I said, just in case  
the egg wouldn't keep him here,  
but he smiled such sorrow at me, his only  
child, that I began to understand  
the fragile mystery of skin like a shell  
holding, hiding  
blood, thoughts, laughter and a thousand  
terrors, unborn children.

Break us and love pours out,  
or tiny prayers with their fingers crossed,  
or hunger when our only father  
has finally disappeared.

"Family Photos" is a long, luxurious poem, intimate revelations in sepia tones or black and white, starring players from Spector's past. This brief excerpt is the heart of the poet's musings:

How little life leaves us!  
No definite lines, no  
outlines. Nothing  
that stays  
bright, unstained  
and here.

Spector's poetry is often lyrical, musical. Readers can see and feel the moment. One such poem is "A Current Invitation." I chose this excerpt as an example but you need to read this fine poem in its entirety:

Walk with me on this winter road  
just as far as the turning where black  
ice begins. Lilac buds sleep  
in crystal blankets and the stiff swamp grass  
rustles a brown lament.

I can't do justice to this exceptional work with a few random samples. This is a reading experience to be savored, as the rich broth of life should be. Highly recommended.

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Review by Laurel Johnson for Midwest Book Review