

All Fire All Water

Judith Roche

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Judith Roche's fourth collection of poems, *All Fire All Water*, consists of four parts. "Rivers Have Memories," the first part, explores nature and our relationship to it. Poems include fish and birds, bees and wolves, storms and the changing of the seasons. Drawing from the Salish Sea, where Roche lives, the Pacific Ocean, and the northern Great Lakes, these poems are steeped in water. But there's plenty of the fire of passion in this collection as well. In "A Bird Caught in the Throat," Roche turns to "The Face of War" and the horrors of unnecessary suffering; e.g., the "blood for oil" the 20th and 21st century have brought us. She writes of a usually well-intentioned friend from her liberal church who says she would torture those who are cruel to animals. In "Hoffa" she invokes a childhood memory of the unthinking pain adults can inflict on children, in this case, James Hoffa (the son, not his famous father) in the 11th grade.

In "The Husbands Sweet," a play on *suite*, she looks back from a great distance to a marriage both painful and beloved. These poems are in turn ironic, playful, rueful, and humorous, but still keep all of the sorrow intact. There are poems of other assignations after the bitter breakup of the marriage.

The final section is "We Are Stardust," the title taken from the Joni Mitchell song. These poems pose existential questions and explorations of identity and the possibilities of honest communication with others. Roche has a nonverbal, handicapped son and these poems are informed by some of the frustration of communication with him, other than that infused by profound love. She wonders if we can understand the nonverbal language of other creatures, especially crows, and the possibility of bridging the gaps between us and other sentient beings, including ancient beings. In "Linear B" and "Linear A" she tries to understand ancient Greece, the culture and the people, through what we know of their language. In "Metaphors of Dust," she explores where we come from: "As it turns out, we actually are stardust./ I thought it was a metaphor/ of life and space and time./ Apparently, our materials are 13 million years old./ We are star stuff pondering the story/ told in the life of the stars."

Throughout this collection, the poems are infused with the music of the language in careful interplay of assonance and consonance.

(Judith Roche)



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