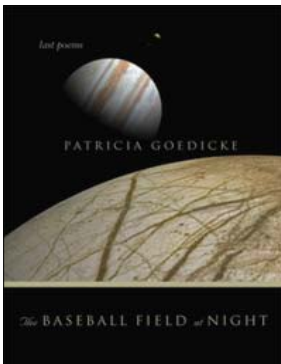


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Review: *The Baseball Field at Night: last poems* by Patricia Goedicke

The last poems of Patricia Goedicke, completed before her death in 2006, will only further her reputation as a poet full of life, emotion and energy. *The Baseball Field at Night*, her thirteenth collection published by Lost Horse Press (2009), demonstrates her devotion to craft and the emotional quick-wittedness that define her work.



Many of the poems in *The Baseball Field at Night* can be considered self-portraits; indeed, readers can be sure that the "speaker in the poem" is not a voice in space, but Goedicke herself, and we come to understand both the certainty of her voice as she guides us through her poems, and also what set these poems in motion. She speaks of her late husband Leonard Robinson often and with intense love: her remembrance of their life together seems never to be in memoriam, but as if he is still very much present, and waiting just off the page. In "Moon Song" she concludes "I've no idea what's coming or how or / when / only that if it has two sides at least / one of them must be you." Intriguingly, Goedicke also creates places for us to imagine where the dead reside, as in "Unicycles of the Dead:"

whether we notice them or not, they keep tapping:
behind the eyes whispering, each night and not just in the movies
a series of serious men and grave women in top hats
on skinny unicycles wobbles across the sky and disappears

over and over, for the world's windows are transparent

Goedicke finishes the poem with these lines:

even after they move on they remain

in pieces all over the house. In bureau drawers,
in desks. On the back stairs, especially in the glassy
whirlpool depths of mirrors
continually changing places, out there
on the dark grid of the lawn.

But if the poems in this collection can be thought of as revealing and personal, so too can they be thought of as reaching outside the realm of the poet's mind, a testament to Goedicke's dexterity

of thought. She surveys the world with a keen eye, never wearily. In her poem "Cloud Chamber and Circumference," she writes,

at the slightest movement
from the picture window noticing each leaf, taking in
each student on the sidewalk jostling by,

in the wide cloud chamber of your mind scanning for every least
skeletal spirit-shape of feeling

electric in the air around you as lightening,
as dazzled corposant patches, short circuiting

but still flashing

Most poems are rich with movement. Some poems gain momentum as they cascade, fall, project or jet down the page. Goedicke examines and explores her subjects with the perspective that they are active, working, alive. In "Cloud Chamber and Circumference" the start of new day isn't simply a subject for comment, it's in motion. She writes,

Each morning now the sky opens
silent, neutral
without you

yawns. Stretches its mouth wide
as a gray cat.

In "Moon Song" the moon "was sneaking around / playing tricks / all over the house." Even about sleep, she writes "the body wakes to itself/ as to an ocean, the soft wash of it" in the poem, "The Question on the Floor." The end results of all these images that pound, tremble, balloon, scatter, crackle, heave, scissor and spider (to use Goedicke's words) is surprising and never anticipated. At times readers may feel they are being led into a confusing clutter of activity (or shot into space, as in "The Blow"), yet Goedicke always skillfully grounds the poem in the concrete heart of her ideas, pulling us back to the people, places and objects that fascinate her.

The Baseball Field at Night leaves readers feeling fully engaged. Not often enough are we given a collection of poems that feel as if they were written for us to take part in, whether it's the way our eyes dash down the page or the way we are invited into her world. As Sam Hamill writes, "She is a poet without pretension or outward ambition, able to engage rhythms and harmonies that illuminated and bound together the practices of a lifetime of generosity of spirit. Her poetry remains a sustaining gift to us all." To know Patricia Goedicke's work is to know it's possible to speak to (not about, not at) the reader, and for this, her last poems are truly rewarding.