



bonjour poetry reviews



Anaïs Nin is perhaps the intended audience for Diana Raab's work, but her poetry can easily be slipped on to any reader like a much beloved cashmere sweater. In the beginning of *Dear Anaïs: My Life in Poems for You*, the author writes a letter to the famous diarist. She explains her admirations this way, "for years, whenever I have been stuck or my pen negotiated its flow, I've turned to your diaries for inspiration." The letter ends with heartfelt appreciation: "You've taught me the intrinsic value of the written word, how to dig deeper into my emotional truth, and the importance of having love in my life. And for all these gifts, I thank you." As emotionally clear as this letter is, it is Raab's poems which are the real tribute.

The first chapter of *Dear Anaïs*, "Each Winter Sunday" contains the poems of childhood. Fond yet raw memories in works such "Rockefeller," and "Figure Skating," show us the poet's years as a young girl learning how to skate on ice. This subject reappears several times in the book, a wonderful parallel to the thought of navigating the realities of life.

Between the poems "Love Chains" and "Those Times" there is a dramatic change of tone from childhood to young adult. Dreamy thoughts of youth and talking about crushes on boys and gum wrappers are replaced with drugs and the avoidance of pain. Both of the poems are tied together with the mention of silver ID bracelets, a reminder that childhood is never really far behind the arrogance of adolescence.

"Those Times" ends with a reminder of the present in the line "acne stricken face, like my daughter's now." The poem smiles upon the recklessness of the past but manages to ground itself into the adult world with simply that sentence, and with it, the reader is carefully directed to the next chapter.

The poem "To Dettner" (My Grandmother) talks of suicide, "I wonder why you left in such a way, as the depression gnawed at your gentle heart, which cared for me." But while the poem could take on the darkest of tones, it instead embraces the goodness of life. It ends with the sentiment of metaphorically living forever through poetry, and writing, and perhaps through the memory of someone who loved you so deeply.

Such is the case with "My Navigator," which the author dedicates to her Aunt Lilly. In six stanzas a complete characterization is told. We get a sense of the smells from a busy kitchen, the spark of spirit despite life's tragedies and hardship, and the willingness to move on without dwelling on whatever might have happened in the past.

The author shows her affection and admiration combined when she says, "I knew I wanted to grow old like you, proud shoulders pulled back, despite years in concentration camp and the loss of two adoring husbands."

The Chapter "Those Fine Strings" speaks from the experience of a first crush to the disappointment of a failed romance. From the buildup of expected sensual moments and the bust in not following through to the end. Rather than dive too deeply into introspection, the poet pulls herself out to a moment when she is shaken from the unchanged world of a steady relationship to the outward sexuality of a stranger who reminds her she is a sexual person, and alive.

The poem "A Dictionary of Secret Lovers" is a lovely take on a relationship. Clever, from start to finish.

In "A Woman's Life" the poet uses a simple string of terms to describe women from baby to older adult to death. The list is not a smattering of random words, however, but rather a free form expression that picks up speed gradually, until before you know it, it is over. The perfect representation of how quickly our lives move and change.

One of the things I enjoyed about *Dear Anaïs: My Life in Poems for You* was that it was not overly sentimental, but shared life's beauty in the simplest of moments. Even the poems about family members are not filled with grand gestures, but the unique and odd characteristics that make us feel affection toward our loved ones.

Reading Raab's work is like walking past a happy home on a summer evening. You can hear the sounds of life and see glimpses of a family that is like any other, and yet at the same time is delightfully unique.