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Tom Crawford, *I Want To Say Listen*

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the end of that street. We hear Loney out because we share his questions as to the meaning of certain words; abandon, father, human. We hear him out because of the enormous pleasure in a story told with little pretension and much honesty.

I cannot let this review slip by without showing my gratitude and admiration for the characters of Rhea Davis and Kate Loney. In a culture still afflicted with the worst of Hemingway, Welch neither romanticizes alcohol nor indulges in the taxonomy of women as a separate species. The trend that began in his first novel continues in the second; women are people with jobs and problems and diverse personalities. They make up about half the population. They think much like everyone else. They are interested in the opposite sex and are interesting in return. Etc. Welch can enter the mind of a female character because he does not regard it as alien territory. His obsessions are personal and humane and seek relationship, not separation; extension, rather than narcissism.

Sharman Apt

I Want To Say Listen

Tom Crawford
Ironwood Press
Tucson, Arizona
\$2.50, paper

I Want To Say Listen is a collection of poems that affects the reader subtly. There is a calmness in the work that is settling, even when the content isn't. These twenty poems show Crawford's love of nature and the set of images he derives from it is used across the board in his

work.

Many of the poems contain birds, fish, trees, wood, water, sky. They occupy a similar place in the work that nature does in Chinese and Japanese poetry. Crawford imbues the poems with a calmness and love of the things he writes about that is reminiscent of the strong, spiritual poems of Kenji Miyazawa. Like Miyazawa, Crawford has no choice but to go to nature for imagery, and he finds his metaphors there as well.

This involvement with nature is balanced with several other things in the work. One is Crawford's stoicism and resignation to (or belief in) the continuity and inevitability of events. Nature is more constant than man. Another thing is his tendency to construct another world, that of darkness, dream, and allusion to personal myth. He takes everything from the real world he needs, but leaves behind all the things he feels caused him to escape. The opening poem is called "Enormous Sleep," and establishes immediately the anesthetic qualities of darkness, sleep, and dreams . . .

My growing up
is trying to put old senses to sleep

And the last lines confirm the comfort of this place . . .

I want to stay in my bed
and wait for night
coming down the hall
like an old nurse with the needle

If this night world is numbing, it is also a place where the mind can genuinely get rest. "Night Fishing" talks of "it so very dark/ I had to feel my way out to the river/ and send out line on memory." Then, after the fish has struck . . .

I had to follow the line
with both hands
to find the flapping trout
cold and slippery in my grip
For awhile I'd forgotten my father left again

For Crawford, this groping is the writing of the poem as well as the unsureness of the life many people lead. We see, in "Night Fishing," how remembering is sometimes forgetting, the poem an exorcism and

healing thing.

In “Bird Lore” Crawford advises the artist that his job is not always safe from criticism by non-sympaticos, and the narrator responds to his detractors by magically drawing birds out as witnesses that art and nature are parallel—therefore, “get off my back because I’ve got important friends.”

There is a strong appreciation of life in the poems in the sense that no matter how painful things get, at least they *continue*, and the sense of humor that reinforces the work strengthens this notion. When Crawford talks of the joys of working with wood we find he loves it more than we expect . . .

From “Prettier Than Ever”

I tell you about the work on the boat
the new depth finder
how it’s going in right over the wheel
as soon as I find the right screws

or from “Things I learned about carpentry and couldn’t wait to tell”

It’s not the shellacking that gets me
though there’s something heavenly there
but the opening of the wood now
that I won’t even let my wife see
and the thing coming together again
keeps the fingers so busy there’s no time to think
about the cold garage
only the smell of it
and the brass screws going in under me
butting up the joints
where I stall
at every turn now,
Jesus!
He would have understood this and the joys
Of counter-sinking
and the putting in of plugs

Finally, there is, in the affirmation of the natural cycle and the sense of life moving on basically unstoppable, a kind of weariness that surfaces that has to do with growing old and tired of the patience life demands. Perhaps this is the other reason for the nurse with the needle and the peaceful dark world where poetry is made and things

are constructed calmly and clearly. In the last poem, "Everything Must Go," Crawford repeatedly says he "understands everything must go," and it is not necessarily with no fuss . . .

and I understand that everything must go
when the trees begin to drop their branches
like tired arms
and fall to the ground
before they are even struck,

. . .

and when the windows explode
against the flying weight of splintered bone
and bodiless wings
that wound me through the covers,

. . .

and when the house begins to move
then stumbles
like a dying bear

. . .

I don't mind
because now even the moon is falling
and I understand that everything must go

Quinton Duval