

Spring 1990

## Tongues We Speaks

Lorrane Ferra

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Ferra, Lorrane (1990) "Tongues We Speaks," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 33 , Article 31.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss33/31>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

# CutBank Reviews

## *The Tongues We Speak, New and Selected Poems*

by Patricia Goedicke

Milkweed Editions, 1989

Patricia Goedicke's *The Tongues We Speak, New and Selected Poems*, presents the major work of a poet who continues to find a profound generosity and resilience within the temporal, oftentimes elusive, nature of the world. "No bigger than a moth's shadow/With soft shaky wings," she tells us, "Something in us/Persists:..." ("Crossing the Same River"). In all her varieties of probing the mystery of lived experience, Goedicke moves constantly toward a sense of continuity in change, one of her principles of faith. Sometimes she finds jubilation, as in the image at the end of the same poem: "The sweet, steadfast cells of love/Forever replacing each other/and ringing."

This faith in the world walks side by side with loss, always managing to transform it in images extensive in both range and complexity of vision:

In the shadowless country of loss  
Wafers of silence whirr,  
Knives like hummingbirds flicker.  
("That Was the Fruit of My Orchard")

I see him standing like an orchard  
Over all the dry days of her dying  
("My Mother's/My/Death/Birthday")

Without being didactic, Goedicke's images gradually develop into a body of knowledge as important to us as it is to her. We learn from her poems universal truths grown from a sense of selfhood that has effaced self-centeredness. The poems embrace a wide landscape of compassion fashioned out of vulnerability, pain, loss, and loneliness; and the result of these encounters is uncompromising honesty:

Suddenly you remember:  
The beloved does not come  
From nowhere: out of himself, alone

Often he comes slowly, carefully  
After a long taxi ride  
Past many beautiful men and women

And many dead bodies,  
Mysterious and important companions.  
("The Arrival")

The beloved is not only the other, but also the self, as suggested in the "Mysterious and important companions." The word "important" carries a ring of necessity: one does not arrive at truth only through consideration of the other's experience, but through shared experience.

Rarely in Goedicke's poems do we feel merely spoken to: so many of the poems convey a sense of reader as speaker, as in "The Arrival." "Daily the Ocean Between Us" comes to a similar closure:

Each of us embraces the other  
With fists or kisses, no matter;

Whenever you shift, I shift  
From one stroke to the other,

Daily the ocean between us  
Grows deeper but not wider.

Goedicke is foremost among our contemporaries in closing the distance between speaker and reader. While maintaining integrity, "the tongues we speak" are more common than they are particular; and, for me, her strongest poems are those that create this bond. No matter the circumstance or concern, I never feel myself a stranger walking through the given landscapes of these poems. The distinctions between male/female, human/nonhuman, child/adult, dissolve in the mystery underlying everything:

Whatever life we cultivate  
Out of the animal moans of childhood

It is all wheat fields, all grass  
Growing and being grown.

("The Tongues We Speak")

This connectedness within the world and expansive vision inhabit the six new poems of the collection in which Goedicke's language is full and fluid, turning immediately into music whenever the imagination passes through the interplay of light and shadow. She demonstrates in these poems what distinguishes her earlier work, often giving over what she knows and feels like a pianist lingering over the last notes of a measure before finally moving into the next. Or like a fine jazz or blues singer coming in just before or after the anticipated note:

I will be looking for it always

Wherever it is, next to me  
In the darkness

Of rumpled white sheets,  
Pale siftings, clouds

Sudden scarves of ourselves gusting  
Loose, sandpaper as snow lifting

In what chill citadel of ice crystals  
Will I find you?

("The Hills in Half Light")

Remarkable language flares up over and over again, her lines spilling into wonderful turns of phrasing and patterns of sound, testifying to the unity of form and content that identifies Goedicke as one of our finest poets working today:

Though the windows still keep watch, crisscrossed  
By crows passing, the abrupt hunch of a hawk

In sparse grass small rodents scatter  
From desert to schoolyard to space center

Wherever we are, in city traffic speeding,  
Huddled behind blind skyscrapers,

Grandchildren of Detroit's red ore,  
Of Chicago's nuclear reactors