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Lee Evans

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Lee Evans, *The Fisherman's Widow*,
Frontier Award Committee, Garden City
Printing, 1989

Reviewed by Cindy Linse

It's easy to see why the chapbook of Lee Evans, *The Fisherman's Widow* won the Miriam Frontier Award; it contains not only the depth but also the rollicking fun of being. The title is taken from a piece in a poem sequence of varied narrative points-of-view, entitled "The Peasant Paintings from Zhejiang." The sequence is a form Evans is fond of using and works with well, perhaps because one of her most powerful tools is her ability to spread out like grassroots from a central subject or central subjectivity and work in all directions making connections.

Like the fisherman's widow captured in the crystallized colors of her grief, many of Evans' poems deal with mourning a lost father that is both real and figural, that was lost both before and after death's arrival. In a favorite of mine along this vein, "Wearing Your Sweater," Evans writes both of loss and of the need to make connections:

...So hard, slipping into the pale wave of your thoughts.
No different in death, you were always far away.

Her predilection for covering a subject from a variety of viewpoints is also indicative of another sentiment strong in Evans' poetry: that longing for the closeness of seeing it all through another's eyes, longing for closeness at the bone-level, as in the "Disappearing Lady" who zips herself "into your skin/to be close to your demons." Evans covers the terrible price of closeness as well, and the "disappearing lady's" "legs pop out of their babydoll sockets/then walk away in disgust." Several of the poems touch the impossibility of this closeness, too, as does "In This Room," where father sits in a wicker chair:

I grasp the barbed arm of his chair
and lean away from him,
the little sticks hurting my hands,
my hands already learning his silence.

But not all the poems plumb such depths and Evans isn't above playing in the garden. In another poem sequence, "The Secret Lives of White Moon Flowers and Other Miracles in the Garden," one sees the Reagan/Bush era in the person of "Emperor Broccoli," who has "nearly convinced them/that one of his spongy heads actually functions/that the Red Acre Cabbage is plotting against

him." Evans daringly flaunts that Victorian convention which prohibits the discussion of politics at the dinner table; so readers should be aware, after reading a poem such as this one, political discussion is likely to arise at the next dinner party where broccoli is served. Or beets, like the "Ruby Queen Beet," who we are urged to call a Bolshevik, who will "keep a nation/in soup with the sweet flesh of her roots." I'm sure nobody has had more fun with those silly names they put on seed packets than Lee Evans. And I'm glad I've had the opportunity to share in the fun, the grief and the impossible longing, to make connections with the Snap Dragon, who "returns you to a world you never left/to the satin soil, which ripples ever so gently/beneath you."