

A Poet of Intensity and Vision...

Mary MacRae began writing poetry when she retired from teaching. She took her apprenticeship very seriously and in less than six years had become a remarkable poet. Her first collection, *As Birds Do*, was published in 2007 and the second (posthumously) in 2010, both by Second Light Publications.

Mary observed, thought and felt intensely and for me the outstanding feature of her work is its reflection of this intensity and the way it is controlled by brilliant use of form. At first glance she might appear to be a nature poet because she frequently writes about birds, plants and landscape with knowledgeable and telling detail but she brings the same close observation to the interiors of buildings, paintings, pottery and performances of music. Her two collections reveal that central to her poetry are the people in her life. She writes, often through small incident, about her deep love for her husband and daughter, the lives of her parents, and empathizes with friends. Also key is the way the investigation of her feelings underpins her poems whether she is writing about motherhood, loss or a simple memory which comes to her as she is walking by the sea. The emotional weight of a poem is mainly carried by descriptive detail. She wonders:

...how I could live without colour

feathering the air, afraid
of blue and brightness, of losing

sight of the material world
as I stare into the garden and follow

small birds along invisible tracks
inside the bay tree

until they conjure themselves
out of the leaves,

their eyes excited
by wavelengths of green light. (*Blue Tits, As Birds Do*)

Her later work, as she struggled against illness, became increasingly visionary. It is very potent and still firmly rooted in descriptive detail as in this poem:

BACK TO THE LIGHT

They say it's better if a bruise comes out,
blooms like a flat blue rose. But some sink in
to be covered with layer on layer of skin,

tree-bark hiding the tell-tale rings of history.
That's why the dead fade slowly:
they peel inwards, are stripped to a faint

smudged core, always just out of range,
hints in mirrors, purplish shadows pressed
behind the eye, half-felt, half-guessed.

Melting to dream: a bright corridor;
without thinking I push through double doors
letting the heavy glass swing back on a girl –

and it's my girl, my daughter – to hit her full
on the forehead. Above her eye a deep ink-stain
gathers and spreads like a blot. I can't return,

can't reach her; can't heal the hurt;
back to the light, I feel myself dissolve
in an acid-bath of gold. (*Inside the Brightness of Red*)

Mary's poetry ranks with the finest being written today and deserves to survive.

Myra Schneider