



# The Solace of Islands

*Ansie Baird*

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## **The Solace of Islands** Ansie Baird

These are thoughtful, warmly felt poems. In the haunting, powerful, unforgettable elegy, “Like Hector,” the gardener William Gratwick orders his funeral: hitch his body to a carriage and drag it around the sixty acres of his gardens through the pasture and by the hedge and past the pond and oaks and sycamores -- to mark his turf and to be marked by it, and “then toss my stained bones / out beside the shed and // let the gray fox gnaw me when I’m dead.”

—Irving Feldman

I recently read *The Solace of Islands*, by Ansie Baird, student of John Logan in the 1970s and active Buffalo poet for nearly 40 years. I found her imagery striking. The wave of the hand in her poem “En Route to Algeciras” has hold in my mind. It will not exit. These days, after many years of reading, this is what I hope to find in poetry. *The Solace of Islands* is focused and deals thematically with various forms of loss, aging and inevitable death, death and abandonment. Aroused, these intense and relentless feelings in the poems are full and deep and focused on the human condition at these peak moments, moments we all inevitably confront. The poet is master of her craft and poetic magic manifests in each poem. The magic is all the music of the poetry. The weaving of the words is beautiful.

—Michael Basinski

Although the title poem of this collection presents her overlooking the Aegean Sea, and the last poem leaves her hiking a murky trail at daybreak, Ansie Baird’s poems tend to congregate around her house and garden in the heart of Buffalo, like hawks and starlings on the roof, chrysanthemums in the garden, house ghosts stealing out the front door, light slanting into the attic cranny or basement nook. Whether she is listening to her father’s wordplay or her mother’s laughter, chiding her contrary sister or her distant husband, sending billets doux to a lover or elegies to departed friends, she finds herself at home: the house of poetry provides permanence in flux, sheltering, delimiting, concealing. But the windows are open and the back yard is full of trees: so she also finds herself at home in the world.

—Emily Grosholz

“Scanning the dark” is often what Ansie Baird is doing in this rich new collection of poems that open into emotional terrain in which her only compass is a mix of intelligence, clear-sightedness, and the power of exact articulation. Happily for her readers, the dark is lightened by her own highly developed, often acerbic, sense of irony, her quickness of wit. These new poems chart a lifetime’s emotional journey—open to pathos, humor, and above all compassionate understanding. Whether she’s delicately limning a complicated love affair; recalling complicated family relationships (father “an old rogue, his laugh explosive;” unhappy mother but “thank god she could make her children laugh”); detecting the emotional vibrations of ordinary actions (“the broken/ screen door slamming in the dawn”); or simply, in unsentimental elegies, celebrating the lives of beloved friends (“How real people evaporate into thin air”), what strikes me again and again is the inimitable authenticity of her voice, and the resilience of a spirit finding the right words--so truly personal feelings are neither self-indulgent nor self-regarding. “Holding On” is the title of one of her poems,

but the phrase grounds a great many of them, and the emotional temper they embody--the radical honesty they enact in sections that take a close view and a loving but undeceived hold on Love, Family, Marriage, Divorce, Death, even Soul and Spirit, even Art itself. In all of them, she walks her elected territory with sure formal steps, and--oddly enough--with her own brand of undeceived optimism: traversing the dark, singing her own song. "This radiant world is good enough to keep," she says in her title poem. And we know she means it.

—Eamon Grennan

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