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Book Review of *A Stone to Carry Home* by Andrea Potos

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A Stone to Carry Home by Andrea Potos
(Salmon Poetry, 2018)

Creating under Alvaro de Campos, one of his many heteronyms, the Portuguese poet, translator, and critic Fernando Pessoa once wrote, “A place is what it is because of its location. Where we are is who we are.” This quote passed over my mind often while reading *A Stone to Carry Home*, the new poetry collection by Andrea Potos. Potos’ skilled use of place in these poems tells the reader that there is often a deep lore to place—where we are born, how that place shapes our outlook—strong connections abound to places we find significant, whatever the reason. It is fitting that this book is published by Salmon, a unique and storied Irish publisher, considering that the Irish use the term *Dinnseanchas* for this kind of adoration of place. Salmon also publishes authors from around the globe, many who engage in deep wanderlust. In this collection, Potos uses her carefully crafted words to recount the origins and significance of place, the traditions of family, and links to the past. Through these poems she often concerns herself with earthy beauty and reflects on events and characters associated with herself, her travels, artists, and

especially her family, her mother, and grandfather. There is a softness and beauty to these poems, a reflection through journeys in life and journeys of the mind.

Part One – Widening Spaces begins the tenor of the collection. It touches on the personal and familial, the ways in which we pass memories down through generations. The book is also conceived as a journal to travel and new spaces. Many poems are also formed from a very personal standpoint. The author sees travel and the page as a cathartic space to ponder. Some the most telling poems reflect in an immediate way including: “Midlife, Late,” “Morning of My 56th Birthday,” “Trying to Talk to my Daughter,” “On the Anniversary of My Grandmother’s Death,” and “In the Café Where I Write.” There are also conversations with writers, John Keats and the Brontës, clearly two of Potos’ favorite inspirations. There is love and adoration in these poems, a sense of connection that helps the poet reflect on the past and the future, the mythical in words. Here are some lines from “I Ask My Mother to Show Me the Old Greek Church of Her Childhood.”

*It was there, she said, where
she, at 14, first saw my father.
I told myself, I’m going to marry that boy.
I imagine her, waiting at the bottom of that small hill.
He moved toward her, his white shirt
shuddering in the breeze off the water, his face
so clear from afar, olive skin and dark hair
blazing in air, like a young god,
the planet spinning
from her axis onto his.*

Here Potos explores connections to the past and reminiscences of where she was born and how she was formed. There is Wisconsin (the author’s home state) deeply in this work and the significance of how a spot so close can be remembered and cherished. These poems are signposts leading to a larger, more impactful story, a tale steeped in tradition and past.

Just as Potos takes from her mother and her grandmother for history and connection, she also passes ideas down to her daughter pondering conversations and upbringing, a way to include history and influence, moments in life that claim the strong bonds of family. The author is learning to talk about her history and sending those news items to the next generation in poems like: “Daughter at 16,” “Daughter Pearl,” “Mother/Daughter,” “Visiting Your Child’s Chosen College,” and “At 18.” The sentiment in many of these poems is not so far

removed from later Linda Pastan and Anne Sexton poems about the mother and daughter bond. The words contain connections that are seldom done with such insight.

When we reach *Part 2 – The Spell of the Journey* the reader enters the conversation of far off places, and Potos shares the impact they can have on a writer. We see Keats again appearing in poems about art and writing. He becomes a kind of spiritual guide. The reader also experiences the parts of Greece the author calls her ancestral home. The link Potos makes to the land of her grandfather conjures up images of the closeness of her family. Being from far off places in space and time can often show us how we are all very closely related. We see the lineage of family in poems like “My Grandfather’s Home” where the author reflects.

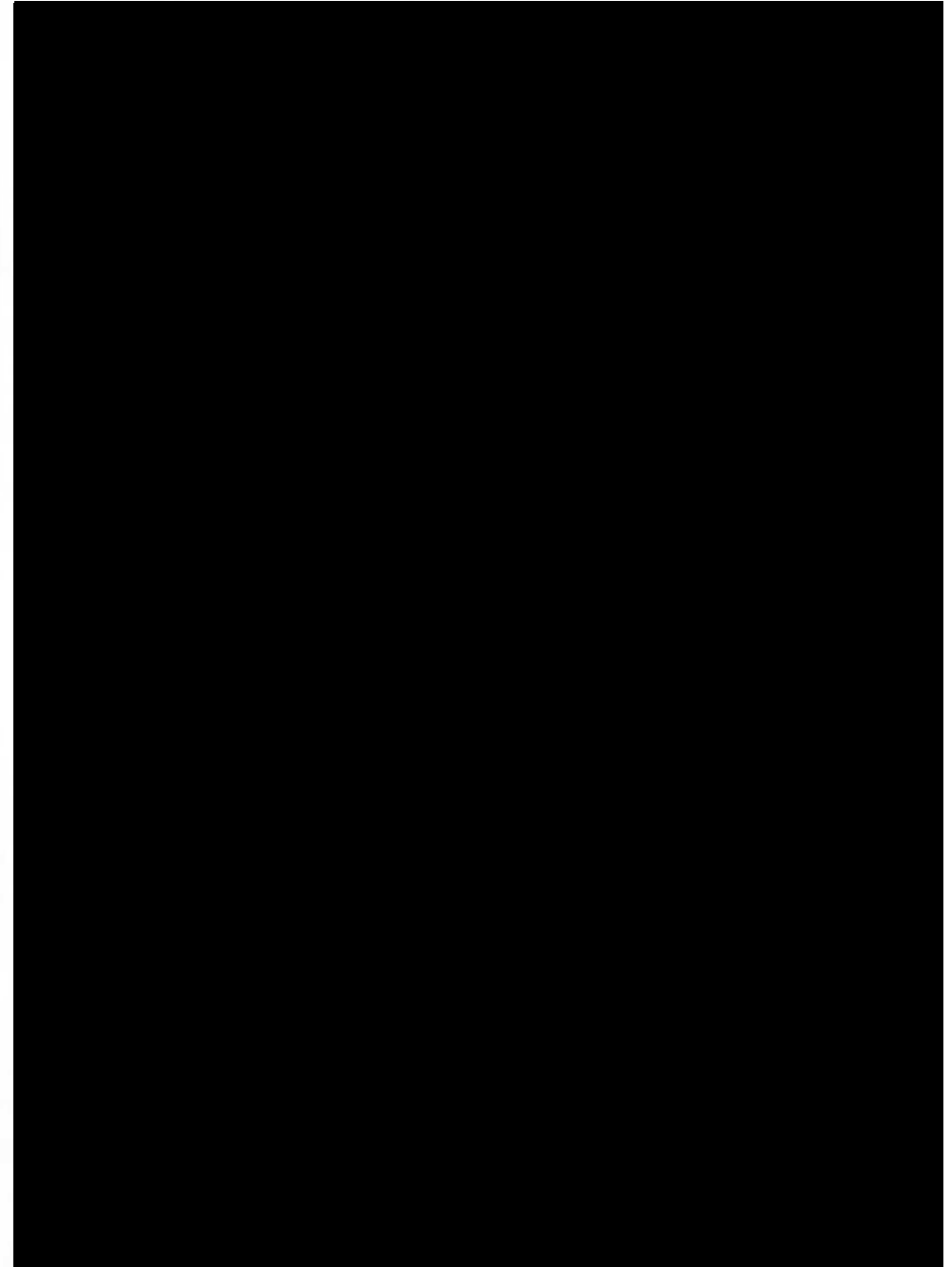
My daughter and I bend, peer under
a muddy tarp that cloaks
a rubble of fallen stones,
as if saved for the day the granddaughter
and the great-granddaughter could cross
the Atlantic, drive the dizzying
mountain roads to kneel
on the April grass
and reach their arms inside, pick one stone
to carry home.

We see the mementos that Potos wants to keep, but also ones to share in her deliberately chosen words.

The collection’s final poems are the strongest featuring conversations with Van Gogh or Proust and contemplations in the Musée de l’Orangerie. Art and writers can truly inspire and allow the author to look at the deeper aspects of life, a journey we have with ourselves, a travel log about the voyage of life. In Potos’ work we see the connection to our journeys, our family, our significant places—who we are—and the experience all wanderers see through words and deeds, a journey we long to hear and write.

Born in Illinois in 1973, **Tyler Farrell** received his undergraduate degree at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska where he studied with Eamonn Wall. In 2002 he received his doctorate from UW-Milwaukee where he studied with James Liddy. He has published three books with Salmon Poetry: *Tethered to the Earth* (2008), *The Land of Give and Take* (2012), and *Stichomythia* (2018); and has contributed a biographical essay on James Liddy for Liddy’s *Selected Poems*

(Arlen House, 2011). Farrell is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Marquette University where he teaches poetry, drama, writing, and literature. Farrell also leads two study abroad programs; one to Ireland, the other to London. Also, his Morrissey imitations are said to be legendary.



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