



The Devil's Workshop: Poems (Camino del Sol)

Demetria Martinez

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"I can no more describe love," writes Demetria Martínez, "than mystics can light." Don't believe it for a minute. In this collection of fifty-three poems, the author of the award-winning novel *Mother Tongue* explores the themes that have long characterized her writing: the creative and destructive powers of romantic love, the failure of political systems, the spiritual life, and the need to forgive oneself in order to move on with the work of transformation, both social and personal. Through poems that confront mortality even as they demand social justice, Martínez writes of surviving in a culture where traditional values often get lost in the complexities of everyday life. Of nurturing relationships with nieces, nephews, and parents while pondering questions of life and death, love and loss. Of caring for one's own body when "each cough is an underground nuclear explosion, / Unraveling your body's hard-won peace accord." Martínez cauterizes old wounds inflicted by various agents: death, political repression, betrayal, and of course failed romance: "Don't bother, I did it / First. Broke my own / Damn heart." Here are "kernels of loneliness too stubborn to grind / Down to blue meal," and the struggle for a renewed sense of self as middle age approaches:

At this age you touch what little sanctity you can muster.

The yearning burns to do more, to do more by hand.

To thread your very life through a needle's eye. Martínez serves up a heady blend of political and sensual imagery. Her keen observations and compassionate voice lead the reader on a journey of self-exploration, of coping with life's mundanities as well as its heartaches: "I could use a loving word, / A loaf of bread, a rose, / Help with the laundry." Through her unquenchable passion for life, Demetria Martínez leaves the devil's workshop and brings us closer to an understanding of what is real.

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