

Almost invisible

New Poetry to Discover



JAMES TATE
THE ETERNAL ONES OF THE DREAM
SELECTED POEMS 1990-2010

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Because it's National Poetry Month, I've been checking out new collections for a few weeks. Here are a couple more titles that I particularly enjoyed.

The Eternal Ones of the Dream: Selected Poems 1990-2010

Forget the sappy title--James Tate's poems are accessible yet deep, eccentric, and sometimes bizarre. His gifts include a fluid poetic style and the ability to continuously surprise. Here's how "It Happens like This" begins:

"I was outside St. Cecilia's Rectory / smoking a cigarette when a goat appeared beside me...." The poem's speaker admires the goat, wonders if there's a leash law for them, and then when he walks away the goat follows him. "People / smiled at me and admired the goat. "It's not my goat," / I explained. "It's the town's goat. I'm just taking / my turn caring for it." "I didn't know we had a goat," / one of them said, "I wonder when my turn is..." Whether you're a goat-lover or not, you will enjoy the odd realism here, the tongue-in-cheek humor.

In fact humor is another one of Tate's paramount qualities. Check out some of his other poetic titles in *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*: "Uneasy about the Sounds of Some Night-Wandering Animal," "Doink," "The Flying Petunias,"

"Chirpy, the Ruffian," and "Shut Up and Eat Your Toad." For poetry that's fun and full of the foibles of being human, try Tate's charming work.

Almost Invisible by Mark Strand

Prose poetry--poems written without the lines--is a difficult form to do well and Mark Strand is certainly one of our American masters of it. *Almost Invisible* has forty-seven mostly one-paragraph gems that are at times funny, often profound, sometimes dense, but always rewarding. Strand has won gads of prizes including the Pulitzer for *Blizzard of One*. As Tate does, Strand often veers the poem in odd and surprising directions. He also shares with Tate a love for the bizarre, unusual, and eccentric. Here are samples from two poems. The first is titled "The Gallows in the Garden."

"In the garden of the great house, they are building an immense gallows. The head of the great house, who wears a dark suit, which he believes shows him to great advantage, defends the gallows' size by saying that the executed will thus appear small in death..."

And here's is how "Harmony in the Boudoir" begins:

"After years of marriage, he stands at the foot of the bed and tells his wife that she will never know him, that for everything he says, there is more that he does not say, that behind each word he utters there is another word, and hundreds more behind that one. All those unsaid words, he says, contain his true self..."

Sound familiar? Sound believable? Strand shares his wisdom about life in poems that will not be forgotten soon.

Posted by Dory L. on April 24, 2012

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Reviews Titles:

[Almost invisible](#)

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