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OFF RADAR: ‘With Little Light and Sometimes None at All: poems’

Richard Foerster’s collection of his highly personal poems is a book of moments, in keeping with much of his previous work.

BY DANA WILDE

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POETRY SERIES

**“With Little Light and
Sometimes None at All:
poems”** by Richard Foerster;
Littoral Books, Portland, Maine,
2023; 90 pages, paperback, \$20.

Richard Foerster’s “With Little Light and Sometimes None at All” is another collection of his highly personal poems, but not a memoir. Instead, it’s a book of moments, in keeping with much of his previous work.

Foerster meticulously scrutinizes seemingly small incidents and scenes, past and present, teases up their feelings and connections, and takes pleasure in shaping them in words.

A poem that kind of encapsulates the approach is “Bijoux Box.” In the first of its four sections, the speaker remembers the “icy stare” of a piece of sea glass the first time he picked it up in a stroll with an apparently long lost lover. In the second, “Biglietto,” an old train ticket reminds him of the discomforts of a youthful trip to Italy. In “Noble White” he contemplates a dried blossom from the Bavarian Alps that his cousin gave him in an effort to evoke his connections to the Fatherland. And finally he



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In the first part of the book arise memorable moments from boy- and young man-hood.

“Unfinished Litany” blends recurrent nature subject matter with long-ago memory when a news report on endangered species prompts recollections of “the giddy blur of the boy I was / at twelve ... (with his) killing jars and pins.” Then the characteristic question about what all this means, both personally and generally:

So many hungers fed those childhood hours.

Satyr, wood-nymph, tawny emperor ... How



does a man admit greed and disregard,

or pinpoint the day he learned to give excuse,

give it wings and call it Aspiration



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In the combing back through youth for moral clarification, the spirit of Wordsworth seems to be rolling through these poems. And the language itself, while skillfully, remarkably true to the [high poetic diction of our time](#), also has the feel of a sort of restrained antique declaiming. For example, “X-Ray” begins: “Not pentimento, exactly, how the surface / is scraped away, but the flesh, delved / as if dissolved and ghosted, letting the invisible // loom through depths the skin embodies ...” High-flown words and syntax to introduce a look at an x-ray of a finger crushed by a snowblower. The play on Romantic tone produces gently ironic humor.

I came away from this book feeling grateful its main themes are art, language and the ways personal meaning might be generalizable in the world. A break from the repetitive moralizing on sociopolitical frictions that you could easily be hoodwinked into believing make up the only acceptable subject matter for poetry. Foerster offers us highly skilled old-school personal poetry whose subject is anything that makes an impression.

Richard Foerster lives in Eliot. “With Little Light and Sometimes None at All” his ninth [collection](#) of



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Maine connections the first Friday of each month.

Contact Dana Wilde at dwilde.offradar@gmail.com.

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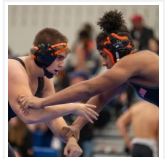
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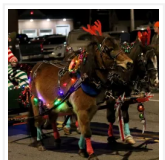
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