



F&W Publications, Inc.
1507 Dana Drive
Cincinnati, Ohio 45207
Phone 513 531-2690
FAX 513 531-1843

9th Annual Writer's Digest National Book Award for Poetry
Winner Recipient – Independent Publishing
Riding the Absolute by Roger Ladd Memmott

Magazines
Books
Book Clubs
Home Study Schools

Citation – Poetry

Riding the Absolute

This is a deeply philosophical collection of poems, assaying the ultimate questions, but doing so with élan and music. The title poem points the way into this book, and into the central problems of meaning-making in our time. “Riding the Absolute” opens with the speaker chanting how we are not the words we use, nor are we even the images that register on the retina and brain of the one who observes us. We are all memories of each other within each other’s head, says the poet, and like castaways we “ride the absolute” into the emptiness and absence of existence. This is not a comforting thought, but it has a bracing shock of recognition and considerable truth.

That emptiness, that abyss of being, is palpable throughout this book. And hovering at the edges of it is something else: our capacity to sing in praise, to lament in our sorrows. As serious and existentially bleak as the philosophical core of this book is, there is also an emotional allegiance to the fragments and tendons of meaning we can preserve and nourish. This book celebrates our capacity to “solve the riddles of love & pain” or at least to attempt such. We live our lives “in ashes,” says this poet, and are “firebirds rising anew/holding fast to the syntax of faith.”

To put the matter another way, this is a book that dramatizes the dialectic of meaning and non-meaning, faith and despair, wholeness and fragmentary nothingness. This is without doubt the inescapable conundrum of our own time, and the poems in this book attempt to chart a path between, or among, these various dualities. Thus there are love poems that lean or tilt one way or another, but always they seem to find some kind of meaning in the face of what would take it away. One example that comes to mind is an elegy for the poet’s dog, “Sissel in Heaven.” One would think this might be more or less a spoof, but it is not. It is beautiful and tender, even as it is realistic and honest about the dog just being a dog. Love can tilt toward romance or lust, but these poems are intent on finding the path or line of the authentic in our innermost affairs of the heart. Probably one of the finest poems in the collection is “Keeping Diaries in Code”—a poem possessed by a desire for naming the existentially authentic in love.

In short, these are poems that are uncompromising in the desire to find or create at least one solid thing that human beings can count on in a universe of potential nothingness. That solid thing is the individual human capacity to sing, to connect with others, to understand the actual conditions of existence, and not only to understand it, but to name it as “riding the absolute.”

Melanie Rigney, Editor
Writer's Digest

This book was chosen by a panel of judges as one of five winners in its genre in a field of over 1900 entries in the 9th Annual Writer's Digest National Book Awards for independently published books. Such work from these truly impressive winners confirms our belief that independent publishing is both a vital and increasingly appropriate option for today's writers. It is also one that is fully capable of rivaling the best productions of the commercial publishing establishment! —The Editors of Writer's Digest