



# Delmarva Review

evocative prose and poetry

Volume 11

*Review by Sue Ellen Thompson*

## **IN THE MARGINS**

**By Christine Higgins, Ann LoLordo, Madeleine Mysko,  
and Kathleen O'Toole**

2017, Cherry Grove Collections, ISBN 9781625492203;  
56 pages

Imagine this: Four poets with deep roots in Baltimore and the Delmarva region who have worked together on poems for more than twenty years decide to put their egos and individual publication goals aside in favor of compiling a full-length collection to which all four have contributed equally. And—imagine this!—they decide to confine their identities within this collection to two small letters, the initials of the poet, at the bottom of each poem.

What struck me first about this volume, aptly titled *In the Margins*, was how seamlessly it was stitched together. One would think that seven short sections with only four poems in each might lead to a certain...jumpiness. On the contrary, this collection flows as smoothly and steadily as a river. I was so caught up in the current of the poems themselves that I quickly stopped caring about whose boat I was on. It was where they took me that mattered.

As might be expected from a group of poets who have been sharing their work for so many years, themes pass easily from one to the next: loss, faith, memory, and aging mothers predominate. But then a passage—“I have built up a fortress / against the injustices / and finally / she comes knocking” from

## BOOK REVIEWS

Christine Higgins' "Desire"—or a whole poem, such as Kathleen O'Toole's "The House, the Night of Lilacs," would stop me in my tracks, and I would suddenly be reminded that these poems come from four very different women's lives. When I tried reading the book again, this time skipping ahead to the next poem by the same poet, I had to admit that something was lost.

That "something" is what makes *In the Margins* so compelling. The late Thomas Lux, in his poem "An Horatian Notion," writes "You make the thing because you love the thing / and you love the thing because someone else loved it / enough to make you love it." These four women have clearly loved each other's work—to the point where one poem appears to be responding to another, to the point where the borders between poems and poets begin to dissolve. Madeleine Mysko pulls a forgotten handkerchief out of her purse at a funeral and recognizes it as one her mother bought at a consignment shop. In the very next poem (the aforementioned "Desire" by Christine Higgins), a once-judgmental and unforgiving mother picks up the phone to call her daughter, "Her mind emptying itself like a pocketbook." If I had to choose an epigraph for this collection, it would come from Ann LoLordo's "Report from Miss Johnson, Feng Shui Consultant": "Nothing happens without consequence to something else."

