

2-15-2013

The Yellow Room

L. Eric Greinke
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus>

Recommended Citation

Greinke, L. Eric (1972) "The Yellow Room," *Amaranthus*: Vol. 1972: Iss. 3, Article 30.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1972/iss3/30>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Amaranthus by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

BOOK REVIEW

THE YELLOW ROOM. By Donald Hall. Harper & Row. Hardback. 74 pages. \$2.45 (paperback)

Reading Donald Hall's most recent work, **THE YELLOW ROOM**, (subtitled *Love Poems*), I am aware that he is now a mature poet who has found his strength with a new voice. There is a calmness in this book that could only be conveyed by a poet with Hall's maturity. His new poems have none of the unnecessary tension-for-its-own-sake with which we have all become so weary. Rather, the tone is conversational:

You have called me
a baked potato.
Very well, then.
I would like to be eaten
by someone as pretty
as a wooden
propeller, like you
(page 5)

undramatic & personal. In one respect, these poems represent a departure for Hall from his previous control. While his earlier poetry displays a superb craftsmanship & technical orientation, often they lacked the humor, anger & compassion which is now most apparent. This problem was due largely to an over-emphasis on formality & unity. The problem no longer exists. In **THE YELLOW ROOM** Hall's wit & sensitivity are allowed, even encouraged, to shine through. There is a casual freedom that never really came through so well before.

The freedom is exhilarating & fresh. The poems give the impression of having been written as they happened, perhaps in a diary. If you read the book from cover to cover, there is a narrative movement that is not un-

like the plot-line of a novel. You follow the love-affair from its beginning in the yellow room to its inevitable ending, with the speaker alone. Much of the tonal color is accomplished through the poet's capable usage of gold & yellow images:

The grass moves,
it grows taller, summer lengthens
gold days.
(page 3)

Pale gold of the walls, gold
of the centers of daisies, yellow roses
pressing from a clear bowl, All day
we lay on the bed,
(from GOLD, page 14)

& so on. The color follows the lovers through the book, appearing when they are together, being replaced by stones when they separate. After a breakup & makeup:

Three months,
So we are lovers again.
Yet we will do everything again.
The grass moves,
it grows taller, summer lengthens
gold days.
(page 51 - in full)

Note the restated theme: an almost musical kind of repetition. The image of the stone appears & re-appears too. The stones seem to represent the speaker's solitude & love. They are there when he is alone:

The lake enormous and calm;
a stone falls;
for an hour the surface
moves, holding to itself the frail
shudders of its skin. Stones
on the dark bottom
make the lake calm,
the life worth living.
(from WATERS, page 28)

The symbols all appear & re-appear like the gold. One poem, named THE RECURRENT DREAM, is the image of death without love. This theme is restated a great deal during the

last section of the book. (After the final breakup of the two lovers.)

The image of the stone becomes the central image at the end. The book finishes with a poem called THE STONES (quoted in full):

Now it is gone, all of it.
No, it is there,
a rock island twelve miles offshore
in the Atlantic. Straight cliffs,
salt grass on top,
rabbits, snipe.

At lowest tide,
a scrap of sand; maybe once a year
the sea is so calm
that an island man breaches his coracle,
wedges the anchor in stone,
and rock-climbs to the top.

He traps small game,
listening to the wind, fearful
of skull island.

Monks in the middle ages
lived in a stone house here
whole lives.

(THE STONES, page 74)

It is an excellent & powerful collection; one that is subtle & graceful without lacking power. It is the work of a mature & sensitive man; perhaps Michigan's best older poet. It is a book of love. I recommend it, because that is what we need most.

L. Eric Greinke