



Where Shall I Wander

John Ashbery

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A masterful collection from “the grand old man of American poetry” (New York Times)

You meant more than life to me. I lived through

you not knowing, not knowing I was living.

I learned that you called for me. I came to where

you were living, up a stair. There was no one there.

No one to appreciate me. The legality of it

upset a chair. Many times to celebrate

we were called together and where

we had been there was nothing there,

nothing that is anywhere. We passed obliquely,

leaving no stare. When the sun was done muttering,

in an optimistic way, it was time to leave that there.

--from “The New Higher”

Where Shall I Wander Details

Date : Published March 1st 2005 by Ecco (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9780060765293

Author : John Ashbery

Format : Hardcover 96 pages

Genre : Poetry, Literature, American

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From Reader Review Where Shall I Wander for online ebook

Ron Henry says

This time Ashbery left me a little flat. Didn't like it as much as I did Chinese Whispers (the last of his books that I read).

vi macdonald says

4.5

Meg says

Wasn't exactly what I dreamed it would be, but, you know, it's Ashbery.

Chris Lilly says

"Difficult" is a different thing from "incomprehensible, I know that, and Ashbery has a reputation that makes me reluctant to say bad things about this collection, but... I don't get it. Seems like word-salad, some nice effects, some pleasing music, but really, really inconsequential. My first Ashbery collection, I've read isolated poems in anthologies previously, and so many people say he's wonderful and important that I won't judge him on one book, but I'm not enthused. And I really like Geoffrey Hill, so I'm not easily daunted. I need guidance.

Debs says

2.5 stars. To be honest, nothing in this collection pulled me in. I couldn't connect with any of the poems and my star rating stems on my own unwillingness to dig deeper and spend more time with them.

Phil says

Asbery is an American treasure that will stand as a giant in 20th and 21st century poetry

Irena says

i can't believe it took me this long to find him. each poem reads like a familiar preoccupation.

Sarah says

A strong Ashbery book, even if it is not among my favorites. As always, the sharp resonance that comes from crystal clear and startling imagery is on display, and his lines are a pleasure to read aloud.

T. says

The New Higher is very dear to my heart. I would've bought this book even for just this poem alone.

Written April 12, 2008:

It is three in the afternoon. I take a photo of a window and the curtain parting the sunlight.

The New Higher

John Ashbery

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leaving no stare. When the sun was done muttering,
in an optimistic way, it was time to leave that there.

Blithely passing in and out of where, blushing shyly
at the tag on the overcoat near the window where
the outside crept away, I put aside the there and now.
Now it was time to stumble anew,
blacking out when time came in the window.
There was not much of it left.
I laughed and put my hands shyly
across your eyes. Can you see now?
Yes I can see I am only in the where
where the blossoming stream takes off, under your window.
Go presently you said. Go from my window.
I am in love with your window I cannot undermine
it, I said.

Richard Smith says

Ashbery's *Where Shall I Wander* exhibits a contrast between poetry and prose similar to his book *A Wave*. The book is filled with diverse poems, both in form and in content, but the Ashbery voice is apparent in all of them. Some poems have short lines, some have long lines, some are written in prose. Some are incredibly short with one seven line stanza, and others go on for four or five pages. This diversity helps to keep the book interesting and engaging, and also shows Ashbery's skill in driving his own voice and style into many forms of poetry and prose.

The prose in this book is unique in that it truly carries the same style as the poetry. There are more prose pieces in this book than in *A Wave*, but they also feel less story-like. They are often a continuation of Ashbery's poetry, only in paragraph form and often adhering to a slightly more obvious theme for the reader to follow.

The content of Ashbery's poetry was consistent and incredible. He kept up the fantastic imagery that riddle his other books and continued to use much anthropomorphism to give animate actions to inanimate and natural objects. He also uses the enjambment very tastefully to connect stanzas throughout his poems. The writing is riddled with references to time: to years past, to years ahead, and to seasons. For example, his first prose piece in the book, "Coma Berenices," follows a years worth of time, from winter to winter, and focuses on different groups of people for the different times of the year. Ashbery also continues to hold on to themes, images, and words throughout a poem, bringing them back tastefully so the reader is reminded and satisfied with the image. The example in "Coma Berenices" is an anthropomorphism of snow that Ashbery uses at the beginning and end of the piece.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, and I found it to be an accurate representation of Ashbery's style and form. The content and diversity of form in the book made it an engaging and worthwhile read.

Amy Christine Lesher says

Ashberry is always difficult to read. I feel as though the meaning is hidden deep in the poem. As I try to understand the poem I feel as though I get lost in the text.

Carolyn Hembree says

You know what, yeah. Included in the collection, "Retro" is one of my go-to contemporary poems, one discussed in Longenbach's *The Art of the Line*. It's in lines and prose, elliptical and fragmented. "The midnight forest drags you along, thousands of peach hectares." Also, love the title poem of this collection.

Cari Caldwell says

There is really not much you could say about John Ashbery except he has to be read to be believed. Where? indeed.....

Taylor says

I'm not sure that I'm much of a poetry reader. Sure, I was an English major in college and, sure, I went through the regular rigamarole of basic poetry study. Heck, I even wrote a couple of poems myself in a creative writing course. But I don't think any of that helped me when trying to tackle this Ashbery collection. I should note that it didn't help to read things like: "No figure looms so large in American poetry over the past 50 years as John Ashbery." Langdom Hammer said that and I don't know who he is except that he teaches English at Yale, so I suppose he must be brilliant.

Anyways, I thought that I approached this project admirably: I read through the collection in one sitting, then went back through it and marked the poems that I wanted to reread. One week later, I went back through and read the poems I had marked, plus a bunch of others. I was somewhat surprised when, rereading those marked poems, that I couldn't recall what I had liked about them in the first place. I had the vague recollection of certain lines and phrases jumping out at me, but on review, the poems seemed oblique and confusing, sliding just past my ability at comprehension. Maybe I need to try again in a week. Maybe I need to read more poetry.

A note: I'm hedging on 3/5 stars, because I didn't like *or* really dislike this book. I at least liked *some* of it one of the times that I went through it. So 3 stars it is - perhaps a perusal in the future will change my mind?

Stephen says

This was a swim in muddy waters for the first 1/3, then it opened up. Some really nice ones in the back half. Yet not fully my style. Choppy in rhythm. Short on music. A bit too remote. Self-consciously intellectual and lacking in warmth. But somehow still worthwhile.

Liam says

Most poems from John trouble me so that I can't make out what they're about. Some make good sense, but those that don't I gloss over twice and read closely, then realize this one or that one wasn't meant for my understanding.
