



Forms of Devotion: Stories and Pictures

Diane Schoemperlen

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Diane Schoemperlen's acclaimed *In the Language of Love* expanded our expectations of the contemporary novel, using everyday words to deconstruct a young woman's life and loves. In her new short story collection, *Forms of Devotion*, she again tests the bounds of her craft, creating an arresting and wonderfully readable work that is also a treat for the eye.

Forms of Devotion contains eleven stories, each one a brilliant interplay of words and images. The illustrations, selected by Schoemperlen and depicting almost every subject imaginable, are wood engravings and line drawings from the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In some cases, she was inspired to write the story after studying the illustrations; in other cases, she wrote the story first, then chose or constructed the pictures to accompany it. The result is a playful, sometimes surreal and often mysterious juxtaposition of a historical fascination with anatomy and classical themes with the author's contemporary exploration of everyday people, places and things.

Each story is a creative delight, perfectly formed and rich in mischievous wit, irony and multi-layered meaning. The title story, "Forms of Devotion," is a wonderful literary cataloguing of the traits and qualities of the faithful, those who "sail off to work, perfectly confident that they will indeed get there: on time, intact. It does not occur to them that they could just as well be broadsided by a Coca-Cola delivery truck running the red light at the corner of Johnson and Main." "Five Small Rooms" is an intriguing, spectral journey into the narrator's imagination, with the reader left wondering, "Is it madness or a murder mystery?" In "How Deep is the River," the author offers an innovative, completely compelling take on the ubiquitous high school math problem that begins "Train A and Train B are traveling toward the same bridge from opposite directions..."

Quite different in form, yet alike in their ability to entertain and provoke, the stories in *Forms of Devotion* show once again that Diane Schoemperlen's voice is as intriguing, fresh and electric as ever.

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