

Poets write from life experiences

Two Washington writers find their voice in retirement

In the lush archipelago that occupies the mid-section of the Salish Sea, two poets are producing vibrant work in what we used to call the golden years of retirement.

In a new poetry collection, “The Lesson of Plums,” Whidbey Island, Washington, poet Lois Parker Edstrom deftly mines that gold — which may be wisdom burnished by experience.

In a poem called “Kintsugi,” she considers the Japanese method of repairing cracks in broken ceramics with seams of gold, a practice that highlights the “flaws to add beauty / and, in so doing, the repaired vessel becomes / stronger.”

Similarly, the title poem, a dreamy meditation on illness, includes the detail of an over-ripe plum that bursts “its perfect purple skin, / and sweetness, an amber rivulet, / crusts along the gash.”

In “The Geometry of Faith,” Edstrom invokes “rich tapestries shot / with golden thread” and dreams of “galvanic charm / that glides out of sleep into the sunrise / of consciousness...”

Edstrom’s poems ponder the passage of time in seasonal delights, beginnings and endings. The moments are precious, and the inevitable bittersweet is profound and sometimes generational.

Along with acknowledgments of transience, this collection also has odes to stubborn endurance, as in “The Over Sixty Softball League.”

In pieces like the delightful “Deep Thinker,” Edstrom extols the value of nurturing a rich inner life. In “The Weight of Words,” Edstrom focuses on the power of language.

Not too many miles away on the neighboring Fidalgo Island, Michael Daley also dedicates himself to poetry. As one of the co-founders of the seminal Empty Bowl Press back in the 1970s, Daley has promoted and published other poets for years. He worked in a Poet-in-the-Schools program before becoming a teacher and spending more than 20 years teaching high school in Skagit County.

Now retired from teaching, Daley continues to write his own poems. His fifth poetry collection, “Born With,” is a compendium of the liveliest dirges you might

Lois Parker Edstrom



THE LESSON OF PLUMS

‘The Lesson of Plums’ is by Lois Parker Edstrom.

This Week’s Books

‘Born With’ by Michael Daley

Dos Madres Press — 106 pp — \$19

‘The Lesson of Plums’ by Lois Parker Edstrom

MoonPath Press — 114 pp — \$16

ever read, along with other pieces — sometimes raging, sometimes keening with regret, but always bristling with detail.

With references to mold-breakers such as photographer Alice Austen, rocker Jim Morrison and scientist Rachel Carson, Daley writes poems about his own norm-shattering acts and those of his friends. It begins with the very first poem, “Among School Children,” and carries on through poems including “One for the Road.”

He also tackles other harsh realities.

“Tim Among the Mechanicals” ponders the death of a student.

The brief poem “Song 49” begins with wolves but ends with what is too often the human condition and the haunting line: “no



Born With

MICHAEL DALEY

‘Born With’ is by Michael Daley.

one starving is ever free.”

“A White Confession” is a self-critical reflection that presents a stinging scenario involving door-to-door salesmen, wasps and racism.

Both “The Lesson of Plums” and “Born With” are worthwhile collections

— each offers different lessons from lived experience.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com