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FLOATERS

Poems

by MARTÍN ESPADA

Winner of the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize

“The visionary latest from Espada combines a sharp political awareness with a storyteller’s knack for finding beauty and irony in the current moment.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

FLOATERS [W. W. Norton & Company, Inc; January 19, 2021; \$26.95 hardcover]

by Martín Espada offers masterfully crafted narratives from one of the essential voices in American poetry, exuberant odes and defiant elegies, songs of protest and songs of love.

FLOATERS takes its title from a term used by certain Border Patrol agents to describe migrants who drown trying to cross the Río Grande. The title poem addresses the viral photograph of Óscar and Valeria, a Salvadoran father and daughter drowned in the Río Grande in 2019, and charges posted in a Border Patrol Facebook group that the photo was faked. Espada bears eloquent witness to confrontations with anti-immigrant bigotry as a tenant lawyer years ago, and sings the praises of Central American adolescents kicking soccer balls over a barbed wire fence in a migrant internment camp founded on that same bigotry.

Espada knows that times of hate call for poems of love. In “Aubade with Concussion,” the poet’s wife slips on ice, smacks her head, wakes up and drives herself to school, where a student awaits—sleepless since her boyfriend’s murder. There are also “love songs” in the voices of a cantankerous kraken and a Galápagos tortoise. The collection ranges from such flights of the imagination to personal lyrics of adolescence, the baseball that drops from the sky in the outfield and smacks Espada in the eye as he contemplates a girl’s gently racist question.

Espada's elegies for the people and places that nurtured him combine tenderness and ferocity in equal measure. "Morir Soñando" (To Die Dreaming) is a tribute to the brilliant activist Luis Garden Acosta and his community center in Brooklyn. "Letter to My Father" grieves the devastation of Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane María—particularly in the mountain town of Utuado, where the poet's once-invincible father was born: "I promised myself I would stop talking to you, white box of grey grit. / You were deaf even before you died. Hear my promise now: I will take you / to the mountains, where houses lost like ships at sea rise blue and yellow / from the mud. I will open my hands. I will scatter your ashes in Utuado." (61)

Martín Espada is a poet who "stirs in us an undeniable social consciousness," says Richard Blanco. Whether celebrating visionaries—the fallen dreamers, rebels and poets—or condemning the outrageous governmental neglect of his father's Puerto Rico after the hurricane, Espada invokes fierce, incandescent spirits.

ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR FLOATERS:

"Vintage Espada—essential, topical, political, irrepressible; in his poems, mercy acquires muscle and close attention confers value—reminding us that protest and praise rise from the same source. Such eloquence in comradeship, elegy and homage to those who lit the path, and, oh, a fresh bounty of love poems, written 'not in lust but in astonishment.'"—**Eleanor Wilner**

"In his dynamic new book, Martín Espada is a fierce activist in verse, decrying, with accuracy and urgency, the depravity of inhumane detention and acute bigotry. One of America's most indelible voices, as always, Espada's poetry is lionhearted."—**Cyrus Cassells**

"Along with his trademark blend of gravitas, humor and raucous imagination, we get an Espada more vulnerable, a voice more intimate, than any we've heard from him before. Martín Espada has long established himself as one of our most prolific and important poets, his body of work a canon unto itself. *Floaters* is another cannon in that canon."—**John Murillo**

"If Martín Espada's name weren't on the book, I would still recognize the poems as his... This book disturbs in the best way, and still it sings."—**Wayne Karlin**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Martín Espada has published more than twenty books as a poet, editor, essayist, and translator, including *Vivas to Those Who Have Failed*, *The Trouble Ball*, *Alabanza* and Pulitzer finalist *The Republic of Poetry*. His many honors include the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Shelley Memorial Award, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Born in Brooklyn, he now teaches at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

TITLE: FLOATERS
AUTHOR: Martín Espada
PUBLICATION DATE: January 19, 2021
ISBN: 978-0-393-54103-8
PRICE: \$26.95 hardcover
PAGE COUNT: 96