

Review of *It Happens As We Speak: A Feminist Poetics* by Pat Falk

Review by Pramila Venkateswaran

I read the book in one sitting, I was so moved by it. Pat Falk has managed to show the interweaving of her life as a mother, wife, daughter, writer, teacher--each role bringing her closer to an understanding of poetry. Images of Falk's life recur in different circumstances and find their way on the page. There are parallel discoveries happening—on one hand her personal life and the growing knowledge of what it means to be a woman in the family and the world, and on the other, the world of academia and poetry where she goes through the process of realizing she's been left out—and finding her way back.

The book reveals years of introspection that result in such simple and profound writing. I love all the little stories about her conversations with Rich and Levertov (the link of those names to her sisters' names, not mere coincidence), establishing herself in a feminist literary tradition. Using poetry to connect and disconnect with the world, poetry as protection, all the little inventions as a child, the poetry that became possible, several snippets about her family, her doctor, Roe v. Wade, revelations about poets past and present and their commentaries—all these details appear in layers like an onion. Peel one layer of skin, and the next emerges shiny and inviting.

It was a great idea to include poems she has written since childhood as personal and historical markers; they become the places where all the emotion welling up in pages of prose could be gathered. (The emotion is really the reader's, not the writer's; she is not sentimental in the least.)

Most important, this book is about the process of discovery. It's about questioning and working toward change. Poetry becomes the path: looking inward at herself and at language (since language shapes the self). Her personal transformations become her best teacher about poetry, especially showing what it means to write as a woman. The center of her book seamlessly weaves all of these strands through images, stories, history and recollection to create a dream-like flow.

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