

## The Wind is a Tall Man Striding

Jim Slominski

watershedBooks

Reviewed by Rob Thomas

"This letter is just to say, / We have some sad news. / Of course, you've known / for some time that our boy / was terminally ill, / the muscles in his body / wasting away, too weak / to pull breath through the lungs. / He died last week.", Jim Slominski writes in his poem 'Some Day I Might Write'. It comes from his debut collection *The Wind is a Tall Man Striding*. His son Jake, who suffers from muscular dystrophy, is the subject of the poem. The voice of the poem is direct, yet sincere, and the verse strikes a careful balance between personal emotion and literary device. It is a voice that is characteristically Slominski's.

The book is divided into four thematically consistent sections. The first, titled 'Jake', consists of charged, meditative poems about his son. 'Orchestra of Leaves', the second section, collects short literary experiments that explore striking poetic ideas or tropes. Section three, 'The Other Side of the Year', presents a range of nature poems, in an imagistic vein, while the final section, 'Where We have Loved', sees Slominski return to meditative reflection. But here the scope widens to encompass domestic settings generally, rather than focusing on Jake exclusively; Slominski's wife Mary and daughter Maya, among others, wander onto the scene.

As a collection it functions flawlessly. The four sections, though extremely consistent, are different

enough from each other to provide a genuine sense of variety and development. It's clear that Slominski has put a great deal of effort into perfecting the craft of poetry, and the fruits of this effort are clearly visible.

The seeds of the collection's poetic force can be found among the 'Jake' poems. It is here, taking care with the barbs of a difficult subject, that Slominski really proves himself as a poet. He takes something extremely personal and opens it up for the reader to look at, as though it were a universal lesson as much as a source of personal pain. Or this seems to be the case. In the poem 'School Bus', for example, something as ordinary as show-and-tell becomes the germ of serious reflection: "You've already brought / your magic bone and harmonica / and books and seashells / an ever evolving circle / of gathering things which become personality..." 'School Bus' also indicates an important tendency in Slominski's poetics: objects become metaphors for the many moods that make up a personality, such as the insomniac in 'Nocturne' who reflects that "The fridge whirrs, the wind chime / clangs out incidental music / over an orchestra of leaves: / no such thing as silence." or the activities that provide insights into emotions such as the two kite poems about his children. In the

first of these, 'Master of the Kite', Slominski describes Jake carrying his kite home—"and the whole sky swims under his arm"—while in the second, his daughter Maya becomes a kind of kite when she is lifted into the air and lifted from a sulky mood. This second poem also gives the collection its name: "The wind is a tall man / striding."

Jim Slominski is another tall man striding—and I don't mean to suggest that he is full of wind. This collection demonstrates the force and confidence of a poet writing at the height of his abilities. Whether as a spur to personal reflection—such as the instance when a

photographer "...needs to capture / what we all change from."—or as an insight into certain kinds of loss, *The Wind is a Tall Man Striding* rewards the reader. It is worth reminding ourselves that human suffering and human joy are universal and that the craft of poetry can be an effective tool for communicating that fact.