

Doors of Perception

Letting Myself In

by Anne McCrady

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Reviewed by
Jim LaVilla-Havelin

In these poems, you can map the places, smell the flowers and dust in the air, hear the voices with their easy drawl. I'd say you could hear the screen doors groaning closed—except that Anne McCrady's luminous book of poems, *Letting Myself In*, is about opening doors. With a jeweler's eye and a string band picker's ear, McCrady inhabits a universe of sensory responses tuned to song and color. McCrady's Texas of "Cold oatmeal morning" and "honeysuckled night," of "late lavish rain" and "spring-starved sky" is captured crisp and clear, and then—because these are poems of seeking, changing, learning, and accepting—she lets them go.

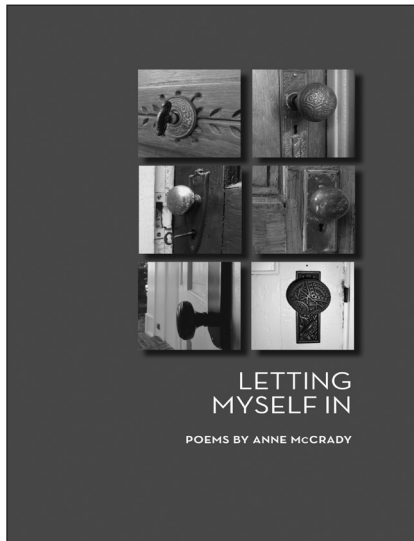
Anne McCrady's work has appeared in *The Texas Review*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Borderlands*, and *Concho River Review*. Among her many honors and prizes, McCrady has won the Edwin M. Eakin Memorial Book Publication Award for *Along Greathouse Road* and the Pudding House Chapbook Prize for *Under a Blameless Moon*. Committed to social justice, McCrady is a frequent lecturer, storyteller, reader, inspirational speaker, and workshop presenter. She is also a life-long naturalist who received a degree in Chemistry with a minor in Biology from Stephen F. Austin State University.

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Dos Gatos Press's publication of *Letting Myself In* is a handsome vol-

ume featuring stunning images of doorknobs and keys on the cover. The Austin based press also publishes the *Texas Poetry Calendar*, which has frequently included work by McCrady, and *Wingbeats: Exercises and Practice in Poetry*, which includes McCrady's essay, "Speaking the Unspoken."

McCrady's work calls to mind Annie Dillard. These poems are not ornate so much as they are full, her aesthetic encompassing all of the unexpected turns of Texas weather. The poem "Dusk," is thick with detail, moving inexorably from the stunning opening line, "Evening deepens to deceive us," across time and changes in scent and light, closing with a powerful recognition of twilight: "At this hour, no one knows / the final form of things."



Similarly, the collection moves from certainty to the transformative. Early poems like "A Stubborn Stillness," "Before You Marry," and "For a New Mother" address and instruct. But the later poems seek and confer grace. "Into Evening" concludes: "and we name again / the things that make us burn." "Porcelain" closes: "everything / yes everything / that is precious / breaks and is remade."

McCrady regards her world with clear senses, with memory, with a grounded knowledge, and a wisdom and wistfulness. There is acceptance

and complaint, understanding and questioning, and finally a surrender to the unknowable, to solitude, connection, and community. The huddled warmth of "Hunting Party" contrasts

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with the grimmer, more solitary "Forecast" and "Rancher, South Texas." Sometimes Donald Hall's deeply-rooted, hard-won realities are echoed in McCrady's homeland landscape. And if she posits "Thoreau in Texas"—giving him space to "breathe wide / open spaces into meter"—then Emerson is here too, in the self-reliance of the poems.

The richness of McCrady's metaphors startles and makes the familiar new. Near the end of the book, after McCrady has attuned us to the various tongues of the world, the poem "Rhetoric," asks, "Who among us can argue / the earthy rationale / of grass seeds on a willowy stalk / awaiting the cricket whose clicking / lifted above the night sounds / signals its sadly single state?" Finally, the poem lets us know: "Nature speaks for itself. / Nothing is more persuasive / than the last word." For our ears and eyes, McCrady transcribes nature's speech and we are richer for it. ✨

Jim LaVilla-Havelin is a poet, educator, consultant, and critic, who lives in Lytle, Texas. He is the author of four books, the most recent being *Counting* (Pecan Grove Press, 2010). LaVilla-Havelin is the Poetry Editor for the San Antonio *Express-News*, and the San Antonio coordinator for National Poetry Month events.