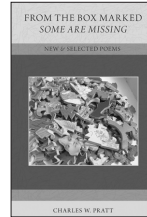


## New Hampshire Does it Again

By Robert Stewart

Book Review:

*From the Box Marked Some are Missing,  
New & Selected Poems*, by Charles W. Pratt.  
Hobblebush Books, 2010.



With this review, I get in line to speak up for the poetry of Charles Pratt. I follow Maxine Kumin and X. J. Kennedy, who lead me here. Although Mr. Pratt published his first book, *In the Orchard*, in 1986, I had not heard of him until this, his *New & Selected*, came out in 2010. Once again, I am reminded that remarkable and important poets, even in this day, can be tucked away within regions of the country and not much known to us in other regions. I find this occurrence almost any time I travel, and I find it joyfully.

Pratt and his wife, Joan, run an apple orchard in New Hampshire.

How refreshing to regard a poet who confronts the guts of life and yet shows not a glimmer of limitation or cynicism. If we want to trace Pratt's images, we can find them held in the stubby, black fingers of a small-engine repairman—carburetors, chainsaws, plugs, and gaskets. Those make up for Pratt a kind of prayer. So do the many allusions and figures that, as he says, "adjust the gap of our passions." Once, leaving his wife and children to their station on a beach in Ireland, the speaker goes, he says, "To clamber a rocky headland in search of curlews / Yeats had reproved in a poem."

Pratt's passions always seem grounded—in a bowl-shaped apple tree, a stained-glass window by Gabriel Loire, a dog that sleeps under a car—but poems, for him, need something more. Art. I suggest that Pratt's attention to the art and craft of poetry is a function of his lack of cynicism, or, to put it positively, his faith. He shapes poems as he trims his trees, reaching from ground up:

I on the ground,  
 circle my tree slowly,  
 reaching my long pole-clippers up.  
 (from "Learning to Prune")

All of the virtues that come with the orchard relate to these poems—trimming off the suckers, shaping to let light into the center, acceptance of loss, and joy of harvest. These poems come in many varieties. Some celebrate repetition, some rhyme, some openness. In one poem, "Veranda," we hear the off rhymes of "marry" and "hurry," of "divan" and "sun"; "woven" precedes "of love." Such care with sound gives us hope, also, that the themes of this book—marital love, the vitality of the family, physical work, and art—indeed do interact and matter.

Perhaps I am celebrating tradition, and perhaps that's good. Pratt has his own voice, quirky in its style and subject; but part of the joy of this book comes in hearing, or thinking I am hearing, the echo of fellow New England poets. Surely, Frost's "Oven Bird" lurks behind Pratt's "Tourist in the Country," which says,

Motionless I stood  
 Until at last I'd found  
 The source of all that sound

Perched where twigs grew thick.

Might I also hear the expansive rhythms of fellow New Hampshire Donald Hall in Pratt's "Oh, Say Can You See"? "Tonight the whole neighborhood gathered for the first night game," he writes, "In the history of Thomas T. Tree Stadium. . . ." I don't want to project too far; but New Hampshire has its great poetic history, having sent off four of its own to become U.S. poets laureate, just for starters. Mr. Pratt has had his own distinctive career as poet, and now we have this volume to hold alongside the best there is.