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## Review of *Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps* By Ted Kooser

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buildings, wild roses, animals, people. And he listens. For example, the book is sprinkled with aphorisms from the Bohemians who settled in this area. But mostly he listens *through* watching. The land and its structures tell him their stories. An old lilac bush near an abandoned farmhouse, for instance, “set[s] about to chronicle the history of this farmstead. In its withered arms, it has gathered the memorabilia of many years.” The “items the bush has decided to keep” include “three spark plugs, a broken water glass . . . two broken robin eggs . . . bits of cellophane . . . pieces of wallpaper printed with pine cones.” What most would find an unsightly collection of garbage intrigues Kooser who “sit[s] in the shade of the lilac, sorting through the curios of this lilac museum.”

For Kooser, there is no such thing as an inanimate object. Old hand tools glisten with the dreams of those who have yielded them. A caravan of elephants marching across the top of a bookcase bears memories of Uncle Tubby. And old cookie tins hold the “good ghosts of cookies.” “I hold on to nearly everything that comes my way,” Kooser admits. He means the objects themselves, and he also refers to the memories such objects contain and project. His mother’s cutting board holds “chapters on flaky pie dough, thick egg noodles, and round steak hammered to a pulp” even after it has broken in two. Saving and repairing such objects reveals that “there is so much I want to hold together.” So much is held together here—self and family, individual and community, now and yesterday—and all through words. Kooser further deepens our wonder at the power and mystery of words by frequently reminding us of their histories. Explaining his preference for staying put, for instance, he reminds us that “travel” and “travail” share the same root. Reading this book one marvels at the ability of a mere word—that “ayery nothing”—to hold together the entire world.

The prose within the seasonal sections of *Local Wonders* is divided into pieces of half a page to a couple of pages. These combine the metaphorical richness of poems with the easy

*Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps.* By Ted Kooser. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 168 pp. \$22.00 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

It’s no wonder that the title of Ted Kooser’s first book of nonfiction prose should share the word “local” with his first volume of poems, *A Local Habitation and a Name* (1974), for place is always central in Kooser’s writing. The locale of *Local Wonders: Seasons in the Bohemian Alps* is Kooser’s land north of the village of Garland, Nebraska, where he lives with his wife, two dogs, and an indeterminate number of chickens.

Kooser claims this land as his place in several ways. First, he does a lot of looking: at old

intimacy of a postcard. Kooser's stay-at-home postcards do what all really good travel literature does: they remind us to look around, to see what's right in front of us, and to treasure our memories.

Through his love of the word, his reverence for place, his tender observations, and his wry wit, Kooser reanimates our world, convincing us that there is no true separation between the material and the spiritual, that, in fact, it may be our connection to the things of this world that holds us—like the glue bonding the broken halves of his mother's cutting board—to the divine.

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