



Transfer

Naomi Shihab Nye

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"In the current literary scene, one of the most heartening influences is the work of Naomi Shihab Nye. Her poems combine transcendent liveliness and sparkle along with warmth and human insight. She is a champion of the literature of encouragement and heart. Reading her work enhances life."— William Stafford

Dusk

where is the name no one answered to
gone off to live by itself
beneath the pine trees separating the houses
without a friend or a bed
without a father to tell it stories
how hard was the path it walked on
all those years belonging to none
of our struggles drifting under
the calendar page elusive as
residue when someone said
how have you been it was
strangely that name that tried
to answer

Naomi Shihab Nye has spent thirty-five years traveling the world to lead writing workshops and inspire students of all ages. In her newest collection *Transfer* she draws on her Palestinian American heritage, the cultural diversity of her home in Texas, and her extensive travel experiences to create a poetry collection that attests to our shared humanity.

Among her awards, **Naomi Shihab Nye** has been a Lannan Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a Witter Bynner Fellow. She has received a Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Isabella Gardner Poetry Award, the Paterson Poetry Prize, and four Pushcart prizes. In January 2010, she was elected to the board of chancellors of the Academy of American Poets.

Transfer Details

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Patti K says

I enjoyed her latest collection of poems. It begins with a series of poems about her father. He had recently died. She connects with the past and the old country of Palestine. The poems are very moving and intimate, almost as if the reader were reading the poet's diaries. She is masterful and never disappoints.

Mike says

A powerful collection of poems by the Arab-American poet about her relationship with her father and with the Middle East in an age where America has involved itself in two wars in the region for nearly a decade. I would recommend Nye's book to anyone who enjoys contemporary poetry—not only are her topics timely and pithy, her poetics are overall top-notch and there's a lot to love about her style of writing. She not only finds the perfect balance between personal narrative and universal experience, but she also conveys a sense of chaotic vastness, a feeling of looking out across tarmac, across sand, airplanes leaving for other cities, people you may never meet again.

Vincent Scarpa says

Naomi is, quite simply, a master. These poems are so rich, so important, so lovely. I admire most especially the way in which the poems orbit the tragic loss of her ill father while simultaneously interrogating and excavating the politics of Israel and Palestine (and the US, for that matter) in so doing. An important book of poems that I will revisit time and time again, with so many lines that touched me deeply. Lines like, "Everyone in a body is chosen/for trouble and bliss." Or, my favorite, "There's a way not to be broken/that takes brokenness to find it." It's my great honor to be studying with Naomi this semester at the Michener Center. She is a living legend in my book, and in the books of many others.

Elizabeth A says

I've read several poems by the author that I've loved, but for some reason my library system didn't have the collection I wanted to read, so I tried this one instead.

This collection is a homage to her father and her grief at his death. There is much here that is universal, and I especially liked the ones that dealt with the immigrant/exiled man her father became after leaving Palestine.

I copied some of the lines into my journal, and there were times I stopped reading because I was stunned by the imagery evoked, but overall this is not a collection I loved. I say that knowing full well that poetry is not my usual fare, so the fault might be all mine, and there I'll leave it.

Isla McKetta says

There's a rawness to this book and to the grief that is very honest, but I almost wanted it all to be one step farther removed. The language is beautiful and I enjoyed learning from the way she wrote.

Miranda Hency says

These poems hit me really hard and I felt wildly emotional reading this book. Considering there isn't really a day that I don't think about my own parents' mortality, this collection felt especially personal to me. Along with poems pertaining to her father's death, poems surrounding the conflicts between Israel and Palestine were also poignant and heartbreaking.

Pete says

This collection is touching without being sentimental, instructive without being didactic, illuminating and at the same time humble. The list of poems in that I enjoyed, and sometimes found myself not only enjoying but thinking about long after a first encounter, is long, including

"Scared, Scarred, Sacred"

"Many Asked Me Not to Forget Them"

"Fifty Years Since I Prayed or Thought in Arabic"

"Knowing"

"Thirsty"

"Where Are You Now?"

"Footstool"

"WAR is RAW Backwards and Forwards"

I could probably take issue with the redundancy of some of the themes and scene-types. But this book's reflections on her father, losing him, his emigration and resulting longing, and their connection (of blood and of culture) are vivid, resonant, and alternate between tough and sweet without being sentimental. More than that, though, Nye's capacity through their specific relationship to make real the power of memory, gratitude and exclusion -- of/for a person and a culture -- linger, fulminate, connect, pain and beautify.

Marwa Aldaraweish? Aldaraweish? says

The strength of Transfer relies in Naomi Shihab Nye's attempt to speak for herself, father, mother, family and entire world to memorialize her father's death for eternity or as long as people can read. In reading Transfer and analyzing some of Nye's poems, it is almost impossible to read any outside the context of her father's death. It is also difficult to distinguish between the speaker or poem's persona and the poet; this notion has marked her poetry with sense of originality, honesty, and individuality, which her readers can recognize and relate to easily. The poet's honesty in expressing her grief allows the readers to go through her journey of pain. It formed a balanced understanding of death in refugee and the significant of a homeland, which is accessible for immigrants through food, memory, and storytelling.

Furthermore, this book also highlights the need for closure, especially in chapter three where Nye tries to reply to some of her father's notebook lines, which existed when he was gone. The poet's dual Arab-American identity attracts a wider range of readers to a personal narrative in which she addresses grief as a universal theme. The poet also is exposed since childhood "to art and culture" through her father "Aziz Shihab" who "was an immigrant from Palestine, a refugee" (Nye PBS). Thus, I recommend this book for those who are interested in contemporary poetry, and want to know more about the Middle East culture and political views. This book praises the power of words and poetry; it has kept a father alive in words and given his daughter a chance to mourn him in poetry. The poet's tone goes through confusion, denial, and reaches acceptance by generational communication through notebooks, by poetry, and ultimately that produces a published book to reach another and wider generation; it is a circle of life and poetry.

Scott Wiggerman says

Naomi Nye can do no wrong, and this moving tribute to her father (and the dead) is no exception. Some of the poems even use titles provided from her father's notebooks--and are spoken in her father's voice. The bond between daughter and father is strong, loving, and--at times--exasperating, but it's the love that most shines through. As always, the poems intermix the personal and the political with the wisdom Nye seems to write so readily in lines like "There's a way not to be broken / that takes brokenness to find it."

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This book of poems is in memory of Nye's father, who passed away shortly before she wrote them. Some of them are actually composed based on pages he had written, with an entire section she attempted in his voice. He was a Palestinian who came to America after losing his home to Israeli occupation, so those themes are prevalent.

My favorites:

When One is So Far from Home, Life is a Mix of Fact and Fiction

(you can see a YouTube version combining imagery from Howl's Moving Castle to the poem read aloud)

For Mutanabbi Street

"A single sentence which mesmerized one mind
for hours will not be seen again, in that edition,
will not be found tucked into a bookshelf
of the friend we will not meet
on the street we will not know.

What blows to pieces goes fast.
They'll give it names,
successful mission,
progress in security.

What lingers long - quiet hours reading,
in which people were the best they hadn't been yet,

something was coming,
something exquisitely new,
something anyone might do,
and the paper flicker of turning."

Hannah Fenster says

This collection is the best kind of elegy-- it memorializes, refreshes, exposes. With deceptively clear language and phrasing, Transfer captures the deeply personal memory of Naomi Shihab Nye's Palestinian father.

But Transfer also explores the ways in which her father's life reflects the experience of being Arab and Muslim in Palestine and America in recent years. Shihab Nye's words are as direct as they are gentle. Certain poems, like "A Kansas Preacher Called Me Muscleman," keep unfolding for me each time I return to them. "Endure," in memory of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, takes my breath away. In a literary world still struggling to illuminate Palestinian loss of homeland and American islamophobia, it is thrilling to read poems where the grief is mentioned so softly, so strongly, and always with the possibility of "a planet so wide open for doing."

jmjester says

I am never disappointed in her poetry.

Holly Socolow says

This is a book of poetry by an American living treasure, by Naomi Shihab Nye (otherwise known as NSN). I had the great fortune to hear her speak at a local college nearly a year ago and bought three of her books without knowing anything about them other than meeting the author herself who was so full of humanity it spilled over onto everyone she touched.

This is a collection of love poems in tribute to NSN's father, a Palestinian-born American, who was unceremoniously ousted from his homeland in the 1948 war. It is not political in the sense that we hear on the news, but on the personal level. Of a man who has lost his homeland and has done the best he can in a new world, with an American wife and family and job and community, and forever missing his birthplace, his homeless home.

The fabric of everydayness is what NSN specializes in. A grocery list written in her father's hand, with the curl of "o" and "I" intrinsic to Middle Eastern writing. A passing conversation. A humorous memory, his illness and health. These fragments that represent a thread to another time and a man who was her entire world. Some poems I found very moving and some did not resonate at all. Some left me feeling tired of her grief and for a long time the book sat on my night table unfinished.

There were only two pages to go and it took me nine months to read them. In those two pages, more narrative, helped to contextualize what came before and fall away any filters I had unknowingly had on while reading. It is above all about love, inclusivity, the yearning for peace when it is senseless to fight. The picture on the back cover of the author at 8-years old with a look of purest delight as she and her father look right into the camera and at us, the reader. It warms my heart as much as the magic of the words.

Bill DeGenaro says

A beautiful and moving cycle of poems by Nye, many about her recently deceased father. Readers meet Aziz Shihab in such intimate ways: some poems use lines from Aziz's journals as titles, some are written in his voice, some are about his final days, and many more capture his lifelong love and longing for Palestine and his gentle ability to talk to his colleagues and friends about the Mideast.

Nathan says

Naomi Shihab Nye is a true Texas Troubador, and plays guitar enough to prove it. But I'm talking about the poems now. She is one of our national treasures. And "Transfer" is a beautiful, slightly haunting, collection about the loss of her father. Something that has not happened to me yet, and yet looms for me, sadly.

There were one-liners that took my head off. She deals head-on with xenophobia, and what it means to have a homeland, while living in exile.

This is a book for quiet nights... when we know we're going to have to get up again the next day and head back out into the world, going about the work... once again... of trying to save it... one simple gesture at a time...
