

Lifelines: Poems for Winslow Homer and Edward Hopper

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Readers of the *JAC* are accustomed to reviews of books that present the latest scholarship on a particular topic, with the books usually referencing the work of the author's predecessors. Original creative writing of any sort is generally not reviewed, as such work is considered the purview of literary magazines. Yet, as this volume is a series of poems about the specific paintings by two extremely well-known and highly regarded artists, it seems appropriate to examine Stanton's poems about the paintings as carefully as we would regard a group of essays deconstructing either the individual works or the entire body of the artist's production.

The Greek word *ekphrastic* has long been used to define a poetic or other literary description or analysis of a work of art. However, this written form has taken a back seat to documented scholarship in the last several generations of authorship. Stanton's volume is not his first in this genre, and he has garnered substantial recognition for his poetry.

What differentiates this body of work from others is that the poet neither utilizes the poem to celebrate the subject of the painting nor to completely treat each one as a stand-alone production. What he has done here is to chronologically follow both artists' careers through the poems, giving poetic rhythm to what others have always seen in their art, but also providing personal observations about the meaning and feelings behind what is there for us.

The vast majority of the paintings selected are well known to all who study American art, though, regrettably, more than half of the paintings are not reproduced. The author helpfully provides valuable information in a few succinct pages that identify each painting, the medium, its date, its dimensions, and its location, enabling the reader to easily find useful information and reproductions of each of the paintings. These pages are followed by acknowledgments that identify sources the poet has consulted.

One of Stanton's important contributions to our study and knowledge of these two often-paired artists is the way each poem is a reinforcement of established scholarship about their lives, opinions, feelings, and interests, with the poet teasing out more and presenting his findings. While not disregarding the long-established traditional tropes about the painter's views of rural or urban America, Stanton's poems go deeper and give his personal view of what is behind each of the artist's paintings. Whether identifying Irony as part of "Home Sweet Home," or suggesting that the woman in *Automat* is introspective rather than lonely, we are forced to look at these iconic works in recognition of the possibility that there is more to the painting than what scholarship has defined. That is also true in the way Stanton gets into the painter's thoughts and feelings about people, mortality, and the place and time in which they lived and worked.

As Stanton is an art historian as well as a poet, his poetically presented readings are even more convincing. His unusual blend of scholarship and poetry helps him dig into the paintings with the acute vision he lays out for us to consider. This work rooted in the ancient ekphrastic tradition is refreshingly contemporary, illuminating, and imaginative. We can read the poems, garner new ideas and thoughts about them, and really enjoy our experience while doing so.