Poems with an eye on love and hurt, bold and delicate, broken like the cracked screen of an iPhone, buzzing with notifications all through the night, charged and still recharging. Poems that split apart, then get back together at the cliff edge of romantic experience; that follow the cruelty of love through the phases of the moon, on to the moors in the summer rain. Poetry was made for obsession like this, and the rhythmic bursts of this poetry are perfectly obsessive. It hooks you, hexes you, leaves you wide eyed and bleeding like the rising sun you thought you’d never see.

- STEPHEN NELSON, author of Lunar Poems For New Religions

TEACHING GUIDE

WILD HEATHER

by Siân S. Rathore

978-1937865849 / 162 pages / $15.95

Recommended Classes:
- Creative Writing
- Poetry / Confessional Poetry
- Contemporary British Poetry
- Contemporary / 21st Century British Literature
- Gnostic Studies / Occult Studies
- Creative Nonfiction / Memoir
- Psychology
- Feminist Literature
- Narrative Studies

Keywords:
- Poetry / British Poetry / Memoir / Autobiography /
- Grief / Suicide / Trauma / Obsession / Mental Illness /
- Witchcraft / Occult / Loss / Death / Mythology /
- Infatuation

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the narrator explain the timeline of the sequence of events this book describes? Is it linear/chronological? Is there a clear beginning, middle and end? Why does this matter?

2. How do the narrator’s shifts in perception and reality alter with the use of language, tone and imagery? Does she become more or less reliable at various points of the book? Are there poems that are markedly more or less reliable than others?

3. How is pathetic fallacy used and subverted within the text of this book? What is the relationship between weather and distinctions between night and day, with the overall narrative?
4. What is the relationship between magic and madness in this book?

5. *Wild Heather* speaks of grief, infatuation, psychiatry and loss. In what sense does the book subvert these topics as points of discussion? How is the author both embracing and rejecting these as subject matters?

6. *Wild Heather* uses tones that personally address the reader (colloquialisms, pet-names, specific references to a bygone and intimate era). How does this affect you as a reader?

7. How do the changes in tone and language signify or evoke a sense of psychological dissonance or disharmony to the reader? Are there times where this shift feels more palpable than others?

8. How does the narrator convey a sense of urgency within nostalgia, and how do the poems discuss a fear of leaving the past to itself? Why is this tension important to discuss in the 21st century, and how does the author explore the tensions between the old and the new within the language of the poems, and the references that are alluded to within them?

9. *Wild Heather* is a book of poetry, although it features heavily autobiographical, lived experiences. Does that knowledge alter your interpretation or understanding of the book?

10. How does *Wild Heather* discuss worship? Can worship exist outside of religion? What are the parameters of faith that *Wild Heather* explores through the use of geography, romanticism and psychology?

11. How are different types of violence treated within *Wild Heather*? What are some examples of violent experiences, imagined or real, within the poems? How does a theme of violence emerge within the narrative arc of *Wild Heather*?

12. *Wild Heather*’s narrative centers around a suicide, but more so, the grief that came after. In what sense does the text explore the idea that a grief is a trauma unto itself, and can be separate to the event? How do the poems exploit this dissonance?

Possible Assignments:
- The narrative of *Wild Heather* has been likened to the experience of “[receiving a] selfie from beyond the grave… a tear in fabric between this world and the next.” In *Wild Heather*, the author employs dichotomy as a story-telling device and expression of emotion; juxtaposing an old world with a new one, tradition with modernity, death for rebirth, ancient love for unknowable futures. Write a poem with a central theme of dichotomy and conflict, and how a past cannot exist without a future, and vice versa. How do opposites meet in the middle? Can
written experiences live in the past, present, future, all at the same time? Does this place the narrative in the middle, with both, or in a new place where neither exist?

- *Wild Heather* was primarily inspired by the author’s physical change of landscape when she moved out of the city, and into the countryside. How is a literal change of scenery at times pertinent? Are there times when it matters more or less than others? Write your own poem inspired by a significant change in surroundings - this can be in literal terms of location, climate, population, or more abstract terms such as interpersonal relationships, a change of outlook, an event that transformed everything around you and made it seem irrevocably different, etc. Be aware of the change, and how it affected the situation; for the better, worst, or not at all.

- The narrator of *Wild Heather* makes a habit of revisiting traumatic events of her past and physically returning to locations that hold painful memories and mementos of her loss and grief, something she doesn’t feel she is able to control, and instead “force[d] to reminisce,” as she describes “pilgrimages” and exhibits returning behaviors to the scene of her trauma. Imagine a time you have endured a feeling that you didn’t want to have, and didn’t know how to change. Write a poem about how you would address that feeling and what you would say to it, how you may have reasoned with it to make it go away. How does this process of bargaining add color to the feeling you had? If you are able to let a feeling go, does it make the feeling feel less real? Did you have the power to let go of it all along?

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