



Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life

John H. Timmerman

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It is a testament to the enduring power and beauty of Jane Kenyon's poetry that many people even those not particularly interested in poetry know her work. What forces and influences shaped Kenyon's work? And what shaped her as a person and a poet? These are the questions John Timmerman seeks to answer in "Jane Kenyon: A Literary Life."

In the opening chapters Timmerman gives a vivid portrait of Kenyon, one made possible by the use of previously unpublished journals, personal papers, and the recollections of her husband, the poet Donald Hall. Timmerman enriches this dramatic portrait by exploring, volume by volume, the form and substance of Kenyon's work.

By frequently examining the multiple drafts that Kenyon wrote in the process of reaching a finished poem, Timmerman reveals how she refined ideas, images, and language until a poem was honed to its essence. She was especially interested in the "luminous particular," the arresting image that would focus a poem. She also took care to use simple, grounded language and natural objects and events often drawing on and reflecting on the life she lived at Eagle Pond Farm in rural New Hampshire.

Throughout her life Kenyon struggled with depression, but she never let it define her or her work. She also struggled with her faith almost constantly, but she was able to write poems of great beauty and spiritual consolation. Yet Kenyon was cut down in the prime of her writing life by leukemia, and Timmerman ends the volume by exploring Hall's mourning of her death in "Without," a powerful collection of poems. This full-orbed, often moving study of Kenyon's life shows why her literary voice continues to touch readers with its beauty, grace, and power.

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