



Vivas to Those Who Have Failed: Poems

By Martín Espada

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Vivas to Those Who Have Failed: Poems By Martín Espada

Award-winning poet Martín Espada gives voice to the spirit of endurance in the face of loss.

In this powerful new collection of poems, Martín Espada articulates the transcendent vision of another, possible world. He invokes the words of Whitman in “Vivas to Those Who Have Failed,” a cycle of sonnets about the Paterson Silk Strike and the immigrant laborers who envisioned an eight-hour workday. At the heart of this volume is a series of ten poems about the death of the poet’s father. “El Moriviví” uses the metaphor of a plant that grows in Puerto Rico to celebrate the many lives of Frank Espada, community organizer, civil rights activist, and documentary photographer, from a jailhouse in Mississippi to the streets of Brooklyn. The son lyrically imagines his father’s return to a bay in Puerto Rico: “May the water glow blue as a hyacinth in your hands.” Other poems confront collective grief in the wake of the killings at the Sandy Hook Elementary School and police violence against people of color: “Heal the Cracks in the Bell of the World” urges us to “melt the bullets into bells.” Yet the poet also revels in the absurd, recalling his dubious career as a Shakespearean “actor,” finding madness and tenderness in the crowd at Fenway Park. In exquisitely wrought images, Espada’s poems show us the faces of Whitman’s “numberless unknown heroes.”

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Editorial Review

Review

“In a passionate collection that is socially conscious and personal, ecstatic and elegiac all at once, Martin Espada’s collection of poems *Vivas to Those Who Have Failed* should be read again and again, silently and aloud, in sadness and celebration of those who have fought throughout history and refuse to be forgotten.” (Massachusetts Review)

“This poet’s work breathes life into those who failed?the downtrodden, the forgotten, and the dead?so that their voices may speak to us now....Espada’s poems act as a salve for today’s violence, just as Whitman’s poems dress the wounds of the Civil War.” (The Rumpus)

“Espada at his brilliant best, the poet laureate of our New America, with a voice that breaks heart, gives courage and burns all illusions.” (Junot Díaz)

“In the battle against forgetfulness, in the ongoing war against dumb distraction and voluntary blindness, Martín Espada is our Subcomandante. With an ear sweetened by long listening to voices most often unheard, he writes poems that resonate like bells forged of bronze and blood.” (Tim Seibles)

“Martín Espada is one of the few poets in our time who really matters, because his words matter, and the people and the world he writes about matter. One thinks of Neruda, of Whitman, of Philip Levine as one finds oneself caught up by the magic of Espada’s voice.” (Paul Mariani)

“Memorable, vital, heart-stopping poems. Eloquent in his celebration of those whose names and faces are ‘rubbed off / by oblivion’s thumb like a Roman coin,’ laureate of ballparks and boxing rings, mad love and workers’ strikes, moving elegist... Martín Espada is an essentially American poet and true son of Walt Whitman.” (Alicia Ostriker)

“In his tenderly elegiac, yet fierce collection...Espada’s poems continue to define the role of the poet as an emotional historian. Like Whitman, Espada stirs in us an undeniable social consciousness and connectedness.” (Richard Blanco)

About the Author

Martín Espada has received the Shelley Memorial Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches at the University of Massachusetts–Amherst.

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