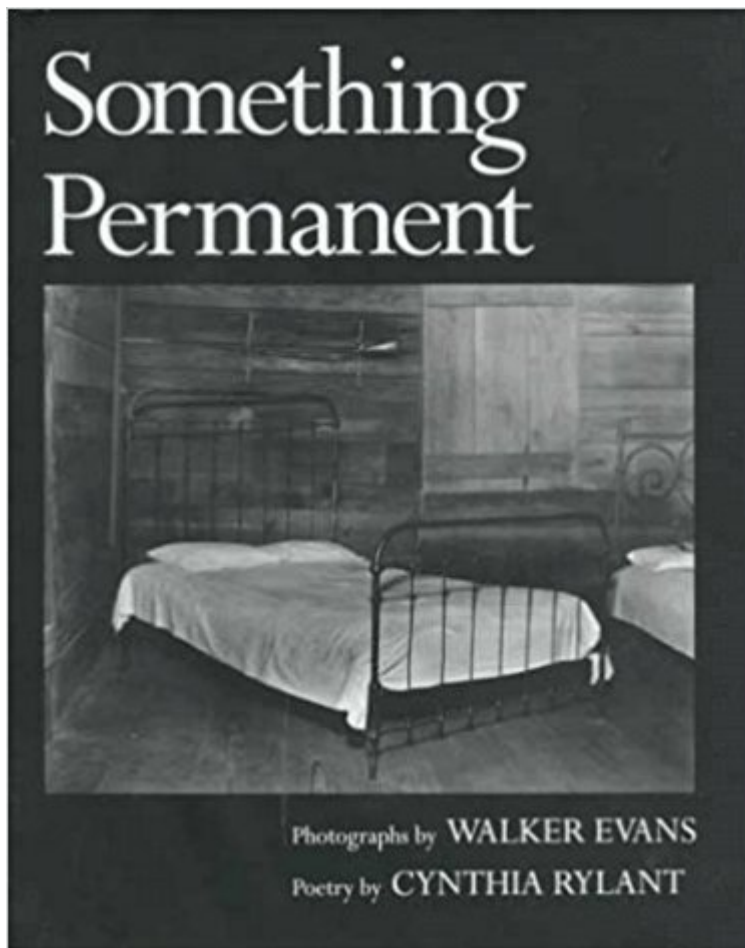


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Something Permanent



Synopsis

The photographs of Walker Evans tell stories of ordinary people living in America in the extraordinary time of the Great Depression. Cynthia Rylant's poetry about the photographs offers a new voice in the telling, celebrating the beauty of life lived in extreme circumstances.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As in Rylant's *Soda Jerk*, the subjects of this extraordinary and elegantly designed volume are ordinary moments in the lives of ordinary people. Rylant, responding to Evans's famous photographs of America during the Great Depression, pens spare, gem-like poems that tell stories--of a couple hitching a ride to the city, of a barber proud of his shop. Almost devoid of obviously figurative language, the poems are an expressive complement to the poignant images in Evans's (*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*) stark photographs. Even when the camera focuses on an inanimate object, the poems hone in on the human heart. A photograph of a crooked mantel inspires a description of a woman who "knew about beauty and understood it." A picture of two empty iron beds speak to Rylant of a couple who "would turn toward each other, and, / nestled in the warm breathing / of their other babies, / ease their weary minds / with the sex / they knew would likely make them / poorer / and / richer / all the same time." For the most part, the text deals with experiences and attitudes beyond the understanding of those at the younger end of the target audience, but older readers will respond to the book's eloquent and haunting images of loss, hope and love. Ages 10-up. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Grade 8 Up-Nearly 60 years ago, Walker Evans and James Agee documented the lives of poor

Southern sharecroppers. Their efforts resulted in a devastating, legendary account of the Depression, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Here, Rylant pairs Evans's photographs with 29 short, lyrical poems. Almost of necessity, her subject matter concerns survival. "House," "Bed," "Rocker," "Utensils," and "Grave" evoke an existence stripped of all but the essential. The poet shows how seemingly inconsequential things—a window box filled with plants, a few prized possessions displayed on a mantel—can spell the difference between hope and despair. Sly humor surfaces as well. Rylant's spare, conversational style matches the spirit of the pictures; her respect for the people whose way of life Evans has captured shines through. Powerful as the words are, the photographs steal the show. They pull viewers back again and again, deepening current notions of pride and endurance. Beautifully designed, the volume is printed on high-quality glossy paper. Each black-and-white, full-page photo is faced by a strategically positioned poem on the opposite page; silver endpapers add a luxuriant touch. Not a comfortable book, *Something Permanent* will delight and disturb readers. Ellen D. Warwick, Winchester Public Library, MA Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Cynthia Rylant has done the un-doable. She's written simple, beautiful, stark little amazing poems describing simple, beautiful, stark black and white photographs taken during the great Depression. Whoever said a picture is worth a thousand words, didn't know Ms. Rylant. For instance, next to a photograph of a very tall tree limb stuck in the ground with several gourd bird houses hanging haphazardly from it is this poem: Birdhouses
People said they were a good excuse for looking up.
That's the shortest poem in the book, but it's perfect for the photo. As soon as I read the last poem, I wanted to order copies of this book for every poetry-loving friend I have and scream, "STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING AND READ THIS RIGHT NOW!" Life is too, too short NOT to read poetry. It's life affirming, inspiring and uplifting. If only for a moment, it takes us outside of our selves and gives us a glimpse of pure Spirit. I've always believed that God can be found in the blank spaces between the words and this book of photos and poems only proves my theory. In the beginning was the word and the word was God. He's there in the words and the spaces. Buy this book and read it over and over and definitely give it to your friends and family. Even if you don't care for poetry, the photographs will speak to your heart and feed your spirit.

A true union of the arts—poetry and photography by two acclaimed masters of their respective mediums. For anyone who loves poignant poetry and photography this is the book for him/her. I cannot praise this small volume enough. It is priceless. M. Daniels, Ph.D.

This is the kind of book you keep. Reading it is truly an emotional experience. Rylant's fresh words are in harmony with the well known photographs. Well done Cynthia Rylant. Well done Walker Evans.

Just a quiet, beautiful read, lovely photography by a master and words that will bring a tear to your eye.

Walker Evans' photos speak volumes without any poetry alongside them but Cynthia Rylant did a superb job of complementing the photos with her gritty observations. I bought this book several years ago and have read it numerous times since. Just looking at his brutally honest snapshots of the hard times (supposedly) gone by was worth the book's price but just as you think you've absorbed all the beauty his photographs hold, you look over to read her accompanying poem and your heart aches a little more! This book is beautiful and moving - there are really no other words to describe it! It truly makes one relate to and hurt for the suffering/troubles of the people in the photos. And, one should always keep in mind, just because the photos were taken so long ago doesn't mean there aren't still people in the grip of poverty (& classism, suffering, depression, etc.) just as badly as the people whose images were captured in Evans' photos so many years ago. I've not really done that great a job explaining just how moving this book is but I guarantee you'll find it both gripping and touching and you'll laugh, cry, and get angry. Definitely a classic worth adding to your library!

Beautiful book with very compelling photographs and insightful, moving, and sometimes funny poetic descriptions of them.

A must own and repeatedly perused book for any photographers library. Simple, poignant and powerful. I've passed it on to many others. Russ

Though they are simple and black and white, I found the photographs by Walker Evans to be fascinating. Cynthia Rylant's poetry adds depth to the photographs in this interesting look at the Depression era. I recommend this book.

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