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I Wish I'd Written? ?Overheard on a Saltmarsh?

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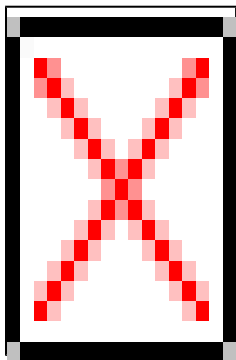
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I Wish I'd Written

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Hilary McKay chooses Harold Monro's ?Overheard on a Saltmarsh?.

Hilary McKay on a poem that is a glimpse of passion and denial?



I liked ?Overheard on a Saltmarsh? when I didn't like poetry. When I was very young, and poetry was nothing but a fancy variation on boredom, invented and declaimed by adults with no reference to the desires of their audiences.

There was nothing fancy about this poem. It was all plain words, as austere as a saltmarsh itself. The only poetry was in the silver stringing of those words together.

Then magic was created. A landscape of moonlight and wind, deep mud and dark water. There was a goblin and a nymph and a circle of green glass beads on a silver ring, stolen from the moon, held by the nymph, desired by the goblin. ?Give them me,? demands the dark love of the goblin and the nymph replies, ?No.?

That is all there is. A fragment of conversation overheard. A glimpse of passion and denial. But for me an enchantment that began early, in the familiar world of the saltmarshes on my doorstep, where I hunted for cockles and King John's treasure, and gathered samphire and sea lavender, and howled in the mud like the goblin, and fell in love with a string of perfect words. I didn't even know it was a poem.

But it was.

?Overheard on a Saltmarsh? by Harold Monro can be found in numerous anthologies. It is also Carol Ann Duffy's featured poem in the ?Poets? Favourite Poem? series published by Young Picador (978 0 330 51712 6, £5.99 pbk).

Hilary McKay's latest book is **Wishing for Tomorrow**, the sequel to **A Little Princess**, published by Hodder, 978 0 340 95653 3, £10.99 hbk (see review in **BfK** No. 178).



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