

Jay Rogoff: on "Disposal"

Snodgrass's particularly American confessionality--his lack of reticence in appropriating his own life and family for poetry--also distinguishes his early work from Larkin's. Not for Specialists includes six poems from his 1970 chapbook *Remains*, a bitter expose of unhappy family life centering on the early death of a hopelessly mousy wallflower sister, a sequence apparently so personal that he first issued it under the anagrammatic pseudonym S. S. Gardons:

The unworn long gown, meant for dances
She would have scarcely dared attend,
Is fobbed off on a friend--
Who can't help wondering if it's spoiled
But thinks, well, she can take her
chances.

This poem, "Disposal" also describes how "One lace/Nightthing lies in the chest, unsoiled/By wear, untouched by human hands," and notes "those cancelled patterns/And mark-downs that she actually wore,/Yet who do we know so poor/ They'd take them?" That "actually" serves a vital role, not just filling out the meter, but expressing quiet amazement at her impoverished taste and acceptance of her shriveled emotional circumstances. As in Donne's elegy "Going to Bed" clothing becomes a synecdoche for the woman who wears it, but here creating a scenario of isolation and misery rather than erotic play.

[Snodgrass's poetry's] formal elegance domesticated the worst shocks of our emotional lives, intensifying them by ironically pretending they participated in an orderly universe we could endure.

Rogoff, Jay. "Shocking, surprising snodgrass." *The Southern Review* 42.4 (2006): 885+. Academic OneFile. Web. 9 Feb. 2014.

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