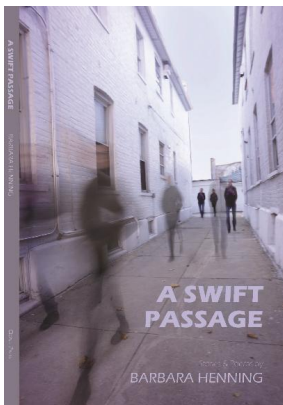


## Weaving Introspection: A Review of Barbara Henning's 'A Swift Passage'

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(<http://www.spdbooks.org/Product/9781935835103/a-swift-passage.aspx?rf=1>) **The concepts of discipline and experimentation are not always the most cordial when told they'll be sharing the same room;** one will no doubt insist on the top bunk while the other wishes to try them both to see which fits the mood. But, in *A Swift Passage* (<http://www.spdbooks.org/Product/9781935835103/a-swift-passage.aspx>), the most recent collection of poetry and fiction by Barbara Henning, it is well illustrated what can manifest when the two are brought together in symphony.

Through five sections, in a book coming in at just under 150 pages, the reader bears witness to investigations of memory, introspection, need for space, love, environmental degradation, and what may be parables hidden between the lines. All of which, be it in prose or poetic form, were built under certain restraints designed by Henning.

**In the hands of another writer this could very well result in a disjointed mess; one where experimentation over-rules readability. But there is nothing discordant in this collection.**

Instead, Henning is masterful in pulling together loose threads of text and weaving them lyrically into poetry and stories which keep you turning the pages. This is a collection which any reader will happily curl up with.

Take 'Third Street, Tuscon', a piece early in the collection, as an example. Here the reader is taken on a ride—only comparable to a wave—which begins with a first person descriptions of a beautiful scene, then curls and crests between description and historical fact, only to break-apart two-thirds through into a mélange of related words which then pull-together in the undertow to reflect back a personal narrative.

Or the short story 'A Dinner', where not only is the story told from multiple perspectives but where with-in lays other stories. Other writers would leave you confused in this attempt, but this is truly where Henning's strength on the page lies. In telling the tale from all angles Henning brings you in to the story; like the compound eyes of a housefly you see everything which is occurring. You're left feeling as if you were in every room, just outside of view.

In one section, 14 x 14 x 14, Henning sets her constraints to sonnet form; gathering lines through-out the day on note cards. The result, many of which appear to speak of love—an affect questionable if it was inspired by the form or by the writer's own recordings—are unavoidably engaging. Not to mention sometimes sly. As when she writes that "young people write about their relationships and their pain", in a piece that closes with a phone call asking if she'd like to come over.

If there's any detour in the experimentation's effectiveness it lies in the more environmental pieces. While the topics are creatively and seamlessly blended the threads feel past their prime, dated.

Perhaps this is simply a by-product of a society that moves from one disaster to another too quickly and with little remembrance.

Perhaps that previous comment was just what Henning was seeking to spur. How else are we to remember, if we're not reminded?

There are lessons in this collection; at least seemingly so. And they're woven so well that it does leave the reader wondering if they're there on purpose or if they just *happen*. Just when you're convinced a work is about what we see every day, you may find yourself surprised to find that the same piece is speaking to what we don't see.

**This collection represents Henning's skill, born of years of literary practice, of bringing together words, phases, ideas, lessons, and stories that may on the surface seem unrelated, and making of them a book which feels oddly whole.**

[A copy of *A Swift Passage* was provided courtesy of the author. If you'd enjoy a copy of your own—which I highly recommend—pick it up here (<http://www.spdbooks.org/Product/e/9781935835103/a-swift-passage.aspx>) or ask your local bookseller.]

**Barbara Henning was also kind enough to offer a short interview; one with insights that any writer and/or reader won't want to miss. Click here for the interview (<http://wp.me/p3Hcko-qS>).**

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**"Trust dreams. Trust your heart, and trust your story." - Neil Gaiman**

(<http://i2.wp.com/beyoumediagroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Shane-in-forest-ele-journal.jpg>)Shane is a manifestation of past actions. In this revolution he's: traveled the world; dropped-out of law school, seminary, and an MFA; focusing instead on art, writing, and somatics.