



Speculative Music: Poems

Jeff Dolven

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Jeff Dolven's poems take the guise of fables, parables, allegories, jokes, riddles, and other familiar forms. So, there is an initial comfort: I remember this, the reader thinks, from the stories of childhood But wait, something is off. In each poem, an uncanny conceit surprises the form, a highway paved with highwaymen, a school for shame, a family of chairs. Dolven makes these strange wagers with the grace and edgy precision of a metaphysical poet, and there are moments when we might imagine ourselves to be somewhere in the company of Donne or Spenser. Then we encounter "The Invention: A Libretto for Speculative Music," which is, well—surreal, and features a decisively modern, entirely notional score, sung by an inventor and his invention, which (who?) turns out to be a 40s-type piano-perched chanteuse who (which?) somehow knows all the words to the song you never knew you had in you. The daring of this collection is not in replaying the fractured polyphony of our moment. *Speculative Music* gives us accessible lyrics that still manage to listen in on our echoing interiors. These are poems that promise Frost's "momentary stay against confusion" and, at the same time, provoke a deep, head-shaking wonder.

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