



The Diener: Poems (Barataria Poetry Series)

Martha Serpas

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The Diener investigates loss and healing, change and permanence, in a hospital trauma center and the eroding landscape of southern Louisiana. The diener himself, the morgue attendant who assists the dead in the interstice between the living world and the world beyond, is the person with whom Martha Serpas most identifies in this collection. As a part-time hospital chaplain, Serpas possesses keen insight into the despair and resolve of patients and their families and friends.

Yet the themes in *The Diener* go well beyond grief and loss, as Serpas finds deeper meaning in faith, humanity, and the celebration of life. The diener is preeminent in a cast of characters—a sailor, a clerk, roustabouts, mothers, nurses, and chaplains—that represents the paradoxes of body and soul. Loss is never just absence, and presence is not necessarily wholeness. Attending to the pastoral both as ecological advocacy and spiritual care, *The Diener* looks to the metaphysical world and the Gulf landscape as vehicles of change and stasis.

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