



An Individual History: Poems

Michael Collier

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“Profound, emotional, sparing, loving, and sometimes very funny. . . . [Collier is] always the consummate craftsman.”—*Poet Lore*

An Individual History describes the fears, anger, and guilt—personal, familial, societal, political, and historical—that comprise a life. The figure of the speaker’s maternal grandmother who was institutionalized for five decades serves as an overriding metaphor for this haunting, bold new work by an essential American poet.

from “*An Individual History*”

This was before the time of lithium and Zoloft

before mood stabilizers and anxiolytics

and almost all the psychotropic drugs, but not before

thorazine,

which the suicide O’Laughlin called “handcuffs for the

mind.”

It was before, during, and after the time of atomic

fallout,

Auschwitz, the Nakba, DDT, and you could take water

cures,

find solace in quarantines, participate in shunnings,

or stand at Lourdes among the canes and crutches.

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