

# IndieReader Review

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## UNDER VESUVIUS: A REFLECTIVE TRAVELOGUE IN VERSE AND PROSE

By Richard Haffey

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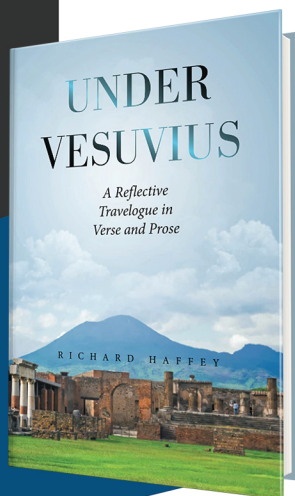
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An artistic and varied outsider's take on Italy, UNDER VESUVIUS: A Reflective Travelogue in Verse and Prose, paints a picture of the place and also of the author. It's sometimes a little obvious, but always entertaining, sharp, and engagingly personal.

book review by James Hendicott

★ **IndieReader**





*Frustrated with life at home, Richard Haffey travels to Italy, where his engagements with the local culture comes mostly in the form of oblique, sharp poems that explore the history, the sites, the every day and his own emotions.*

— **James Hendicott**  
*IndieReader Review*

# UNDER VESUVIUS:

## A REFLECTIVE TRAVELOGUE IN VERSE AND PROSE

*By Richard Haffey*

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Author Richard Haffey was working in a niche area, teaching people to protect themselves from lead poisoning, when bureaucracy which required him to teach out-of-date information or not teach at all combined with his morals to force him out of the door. Unwilling to teach proven falsehoods, Haffey fled in frustration to Italy. UNDER VESUVIUS: A Reflective Travelogue in Verse and Prose seems to serve a dual purpose: to poetically describe Haffey's experience as he explores some ancient corners of Italy, and to document his mental recovery and his growing sense of Italy as a personal balm along the way. The book's text is broken down into small and mid-sized poems that progress from the work departure to the travel agents, and then off into the world and the smart interlinking elements stand out. Haffey's take on the places are something akin to cleverly transcribed inner monologues, and he links their status and their past back to his own life.

Early on, for example, as readers explore the volcanically destructed titular village of Vesuvius, Haffey muses in his poem about the bands that now play there, and the darker side of the site, but also on how Vesuvius is often thought of as “advanced” because of its lead pipes, nodding back to his own work in removing them. There’s a sense of place and of impact, but like any good travelogue, there’s also a sense of the personal. The broader question, perhaps, is does the reader really relate to – or particularly care for – Haffey’s take on these largely well-trodden corners of Europe. The answer, for this reviewer at least, was ‘to a degree’. All travel, after all, can sooth the soul, and it’s clear that is part of its purpose here, and when you can draw on that sense, perhaps the specifics don’t matter all that much.

And so we find ourselves, poetically, exploring the suffocating deaths on the foothill of Vesuvius, or ancient family farms, or Italy’s relationship with religion, or ruminating on the strength of travel companions able to spend time together, or alone. And in amongst it all are: the stuttering journey to a class at an engaging cooking school, and the most spiritual of farmers, and, towards the conclusion, a kind of storytelling play that steps away from the broader format of the text altogether. The whole of UNDER VESUVIUS is more than its parts, and the finest moments of the text lie in its colorful snapshots, or its intelligent and quirky asides. Reader’s might not leave dying for more of Haffey’s take on his travels, but will understand that to him they were profound, and timely, even if some of the moments are the poetic take on the somewhat mundane. It is in the more colorful moments when that shines across, in whip-sharp lines and gentle sidelines, that the work sparks to life.

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