

SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW



#25



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FROM THE

SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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LIGHT, AN EMPIRE

*to René Magritte's mother, Régina Bertinchamp,
after Empire of Light*

He's changed the locks again.

Again, you've waited
a long time for everything—

waited days to see
the darker water. Your wrist
against the cold glass pane,

the way a window asks to be opened.

Tonight, the Sambre riverbed is
smooth as silt, and the window
asks to be opened.

If only the tide, the only pulse.

It's a kindness
to warn people, and you tried

every time you tried
to break into night.

The window asks to be opened.

Through the glass, every sky
has a boundary.

But the river—
if only you could reach it—

empties into something larger.

THE HUMAN CONDITION

to René Magritte

We are only allowed to see what we are
allowed to see—

an easel, not a landscape,
a ceiling, not the sky.

If only you could have drawn back
the veil and bloat,

watched her breathe in the river.

There's only so much to be found
on a headstone anyway.

There's always something to give up—
the idea of art as the toy,

wind-up bird with its wings
flapping and no flight, the one gift.

About that—let me give more detail.

A child—you—asks, “What’s memory?” Later,
“Tell me the difference between a spirit and a soul.”

I wish I could, but I can't
remember my first nightmare. First bite

into smoke, inhale of apple.

THE FAIR CAPTIVE

*to Léopold Magritte, after René Magritte's 'The Fair Captive,'
1947 and 1965*

She was the stone you wouldn't let roll
into water.

Your child pushed a stone
off of the table, and no one watched.

The viewer will not ask why
the stone was there in the first place.

The viewer will ask about each faraway look.

When the child tells you his dream,
you do not try to interpret

the egg in a cage,
the young girl eating a bird—

not the veiled faces and always the sea.

Léopold, we've all forgotten
to lock the door at one point or another.

The key to the fields is a broken window—
sometimes things are just that easy.

INTERRUPTUS

I rescinded
God, latched
shut the red
door, again.
Dried wreath
of eucalyptus
shook; I took
my last wits
squirreled in
my hand like
a fine chain.
I considered
death: lunar
side of crisp
silver knife—
vast wishes
sliced aloft—
like a fleet
of tiny birds,
honing air's
great breath,
while below
dogs barked
at my rising,
and the pond's
eye glittered
blue as snow.

HOMAGE TO WEEDS

I took a pit-stop and warm beer from the seat.
Keys clinked flat against the ignition
long after the stutter of dirt-bumps I sped across
chuckling to dumbass radio shows about weight loss

and love loss and orphaned banjos and a widower betwixt
mauve-shadowed girls, and the plumber who fixed
more than pipes and wore a copper handcuff.
Exhaust dispersed like gnats

as I rolled out of the car under the graze of bees
into the shade of someone's well-loved well-bred flower bed,
face in the dirt on the side I leaned to the screen
in confession, lanky weed next to my nose,

leaves serrated like a knife I pulled in a bar—
its totem of buds hard as cloves,
sturdy as a drunk man who could stagger through court
or wave of sunlight across a field of corn.

The weed was paltry—stripped bare of some
previous glamour—still graced with glove-white flowers,
the petals' unfurling fringe soft as the hem
on the check-out girl in fishnets

who mouthed *kill me* at the start of every prayer.
Strike it up to tattered luck,
or the flint-haired minister scolding me from the pulpit
that heaven be damned I chased her

toward the interstate through the gallop of lights—
or clear-eyed boy greasy as a chassis
who bragged he punctured his English teacher's
tires, who reeked cologne and forgot to pump the tank full

which is why I ended up out of gas at a bend in the road
I mistook for my escape
where congregated thistle, chicory, and Queen Anne's lace—
prickly and intricate and full of trickery.

HOLY

Before light, a ruin,
a cellar, a voice
in a photograph
silenced by a crease,

then an unfolding,
a stillness, rain,
a house at dawn,
a couple standing

beneath a blue
window, a memory,
a river beginning
again and again

—an orchard
before harvest.

*

Then, harvest.
Then, what's left:
a quilt, a lover,
another story lost

in a field—a crow,
a cloud ending
with a ghost breeze
freeing the last

of the daffodils—
a few pine cones
shaking loose,
cracked open

on the ground,
a *whenever*, a door.

FIELD

Knotted cedar posts strung with barbed wire,
red barn sitting like Vishnu
at the center of a mandala
shaped like a temple. Inside,
a cow slurps water. Four stomachs
churn grass into milk,
then the heart's electric pump
vibrates the whole to set the field
in a perfect motion of stillness.

The farmer walks between strokes
of a celestial paintbrush,
is a dollop of rose-white paint
drifting toward the western gate,
corn bucket swinging
from her right hand. The gate opens
onto a gravel road. The road
leads to a small town with a Phillips 66,
where high school kids park cars
and resolve the beginnings of their lives.

Here is the heaven of *Paradisio*.
Here, the churning of grass
into milk and milk into butter.
Here is the water pulled from the well,
the wrinkle in the wallpaper,
and the farmer's belly sigh
when she sees the fence
downed by either rot or intent,
which means the long walk back
to the pickup to grab steel post and driver,
a pair of pliers and a bit of wire.
Then it's the work of driving the post,
stringing the fence. It's the making
of a universe and its undoing.

MILK SNAKE

Who was the first one claimed
there was milk gone missing?

The barn with its carpet of leaves, its cat piss
smell of hay. Sometimes there's a rattle

from a dark corner. Sometimes you can catch
a glimpse of the pale

undulant belly bright against the filth.
And whose idea was it

that the snake not bite but suck
so gently as to almost go unnoticed?

Sometimes a snake does not mean
what a snake means. Milk snake cloaked

in the skin of a viper, pretend-venomous. We still
want to know what wrong you've done.

FROM HERE ON OUT

Nothing will be spilled milk.
I won't raise my glass
or voice in vain. Won't stalk
my grief all the way
to the roots arching like bad
news from far ahead.
Won't enter the monogamy
of landscape pounding with rain
and reimagine a world
in curlicues. I won't kiss
and tell. The future will be backed
up, the past won't be backed
into any barbed wire fence
and kissed, full on the mouth.
Up everything ever held goes
with palsy. It won't anymore.
I won't make up niches
to blot out the worse.
Won't conjure up a minefield
for wounds to remember.
I will myself, I will
myself, I will.

LIFE IS A HAIKU WRITTEN ON WATER

to say
moons: how
time

betray(s)
your heart
on your
sleeves

the moon
lit
moon
light

MOVING THROUGH

New word, arcane: known by few. A little flower stuck behind my ear. When I first began with love I wanted sentiment, a misunderstanding. I wanted to feel re-explained by the light all the time like the kind that pours through the great gash of window extending now from the piano to a canvas I'd worked on with my son's father, who these days is very kind to me badly. We'd worked on them a great deal before I'd left. The tips of his fingers square and flush with the board. I sat on a bucket and prayed. The sun went up and then down. The trees stayed close then went very far away. A small noise made itself a room between my bones, by a clearing in the woods where we let the paint dry and watched our toes lag clean behind our bodies. I was really *in love*, then. Today, new things matter more. Even love. Even sweetness committed badly is terrible to have surround you. Arcane like the fire that took a friend's life, and less like the affair of my own, which I perform naked daily in the locker room at school, where someday soon a student will find me without skin, and blushing. I'm blushing even now—or have only wept, or have only swam where nothing feels alarming to me, and just getting to the ground is trouble yet.

MIDNIGHT

I just realized you never break
a line unless you're ready
to listen to it mourn everything
you kept it from becoming.

I learned this about poetry
while holding you in sleep.
Unbroken, somehow,
I still tend to think.

GRATITUDE LIST #3

Forgive me when I praise my wealth
of misadventure:

how the knife pressed against me scarred my thumb
& fingers,
never took my throat;

how the knife that pierced my lower back
spared an artery by an inch of fat;

how the knife I wielded like a child's plastic sword
found an arm & thigh but nothing
to haunt me past this writing-down;

how the knife I threw stuck only in a door;

how the pistol cocked behind me somewhere in shadow
never discharged
while cash & goods were exchanged;

how the larger knife held at my neck
turned out to be a test
by a desperate man who wanted my desperation;

how the officer's boot grinding my skull
into a blood-soaked pharmacy floor
raised up before a bone could fracture;

how the fists of other prisoners found my face
just enough to land a message;

how I survived the way I lived;

how knowing I survived
somehow doesn't make me a survivor;

how the knife tonight cut meat—
so dull, I thought, so simple & pleasingly dull.

E.S.P.

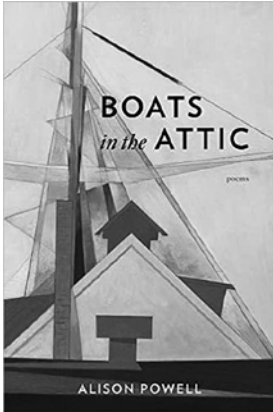
with a line from Gerard Manley Hopkins

It was a mistake to believe
objects had no thought.
Of course they did.
Rocks. Expensive looking
white lilies. Everything is
Charged with the grandeur of god,
which is another way
of saying we can't
hear the crickets
telling us who we are
anymore so we have
to believe in some
Paradise Maker.
If I told you how long
I spent practicing
telepathy with someone
who had a metal plate
in his head to block
my radiation. Years. Decades.
If you knew, you'd say
"Move on!"
Like my brain
is prodable, a dogie
on a drive toward
its own demise.
But the truth is,
sometimes I still do it—
conjure those bullet eyes
when I can't sleep,
or picture his yellowy nails
clenching my thigh,
his hollow chest
bent over me.
God, I can feel so crisp,
and sticky, so like a piece
of rock candy

the world wants to
pop in its mouth.
You have to believe
in a god, sometimes, or else
who would love you?
God, like I said, and the angels
and my Siamese cat.
Now I want to get
to the bottom of it,
the reasons why
I tried to squeeze
a white dress
out of a sow's ear.
It embarrasses me.
But the cat was real—
the blue-point who
touched my cheek
like a question.

BOATS IN THE ATTIC
BY ALISON POWELL
(Fordham University Press, 2022)

REVIEW BY YONI HAMMER-KOSSOY



Poetry for the End Times: *Boats in the Attic*

After more than two exhausting years of pandemic atop a daily procession of environmental catastrophe, social and economic turmoil, war, terrorism, and political upheaval (and those are just the morning headlines), it's no surprise to find the word "apocalyptic" bandied about almost reflexively to describe our current state of affairs. And while this isn't exactly breaking news—people have been living through terrible times since time began—somehow these days manage to feel even worse than usual. In this context, there's something incredibly refreshing about Alison Powell's second collection, *Boats in the Attic*, published by Fordham

University Press in fall 2022. Winner of the 2021 Poetic Justice Institute Editor's Prize, the book not only inhabits our fraught contemporary space without getting bogged down in artistic doom-scrolling, but, more importantly, points a way forward for living when it feels like the End Times have arrived.

Boats in the Attic is divided into three sections, with a distinct pleasure in the balanced and confident way they unfold from one to the next. Thematically, much of the first section circles around the importance of naming and knowing as a means of connecting to the world. From Adam and Eve to middle-school journalism class, Powell evokes a primal and formative sense of exploration. In "Etymology: Heaven" the process of naming (and therefore knowing, or even possession) takes center stage: "Adam has a word for all— // even the beasts are given titles — / naming being the first form." She returns to Adam and naming again in "Missing File #3: Panthera Leo Leo, Or, A Civics Lesson" with a more personal perspective:

Sometimes I think of naming as a paternal act: Adam sits, petting the animals as they come to him, making of them the first little zoo. Other times, I think naming is about disbelief, our lack of faith—that if we don't have a word for something, it won't let us hold it anymore.

The second section turns this process of naming and knowing inward and includes poems exploring parenthood, such as “The Book of Revelation,” “After the Birth of the First Child” and “Upon Turning Forty.” The litany “If We Speak of the Hurricane” bursts at the seams with lyric energy, and the incantation of “if”—with its dual sense of doubt and possibility—provides a touchingly grown-up echo to a child’s incessant “why”:

*if he is just a boy
asking about justice at the mall;
if his father and I cannot help but love
his locomotive of curiosity, its erratic perpetuity,
shark, shots, Mars, if we wonder how it will end;
if zoo doctor, if astronomer, if madman*

The third section brings the internal and external worlds of experience together, making it clear that there isn’t really a binary between the two to begin with. In particular, the sprawling “Missing File #7: Nomen Nudum” tells about the discovery of a skeleton called “The Red Lady” by geologist, distinguished eater, and Oxford professor Rev. William Buckland in 1823. Along the way, the poem passes through summer camp memories, the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* definition of the word consume, a description of how Powell’s son “makes sense of death,” as well as what lab analysis in the 1950s actually discovered about the skeleton.

Boats in the Attic illuminates repeatedly how today’s default understanding of the word apocalypse—referring to disaster or fiery destruction—must be reconsidered. As Powell writes in “The First Word” near the start of the book: “The First Word // of the Book of Revelation / is *apokalypsis* // meaning *unveiling*.” More than a friendly linguistic clarification, this reads as a statement of intent, applicable to the entire collection. Poetry, to the extent that it’s meant to “do something,” is an act of unveiling and discovery that we as readers are invited to join.

One delightful part of this unveiling is a series of prose poems appearing over the course of the book. These “Missing File” pieces illuminate topics as diverse as Paleolithic art, honeybees, Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, middle school, Larry King, Transhumanism, cryonics, ortolans and birdsong, 19th century archeology, and much, much more. Taken together, the poems reflect a vision of the world that is deeply curious and intellectually expansive. An ample notes section references the factual bona fides behind the poems, but the poems themselves never come off as feeling strictly documentary. Furthermore, the prose poem form is an effective choice for these pieces, as it enables a clear presentation of ideas while showcasing Powell’s ironic wit and associative range. What we get is a personal voice, even as the

poems foreground the weird and wondrous:

When I was a child, I licked manuka honey off the spoon when sick. I yanked handfuls of honeysuckle from the neighbor's vine... Together the girl and I would collect horse apples in the front yard and examine them carefully for caterpillars. We'd return at dusk to her house, with its one room just for the birds, carpeted in newspaper, branches anchored to the windows and extending all around. (from "Missing File #2: A Few Facts About Bees")

... the poems
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At the heart of *Boats in the Attic* is the poem "The Book of Revelation," an extended meditation on parenthood and the early years of the poet's children. As with the "Missing File" poems, keen observation combined with approachable language helps convey a deeper sense of lived experience. Watching Powell observe her children opening up to the world around them, I found myself nodding in recognition of the many moments she describes, such as her son's love of dinosaurs or when he ponders the mysteries of stars and planets from the backseat of a car.

But beyond the small wonders of domestic life, what I find most engaging about "The Book of Revelation" is its embodiment that parenthood isn't the end of the world but only a beginning. We are left with a defusing and reframing of apocalypse, from destruction to discovery:

*He that has an ear
let him hear it*

*I would fasten their small hearts
to my heart with reins*

For now let me watch

*as their bones
slowly inch forth*

entrepreneurial

*as a farmer
or a new religion*

The title poem “Boats in the Attic,” which appears in the third section, highlights the possibilities of this new understanding of apocalypse. It begins in familiarly grim territory: “It had been so dry. Wildfires / blooming into a continent of ash.” But the poem shifts to a resounding note of optimism and revelation:

*In the end, daughter, it was
the thing that was called for*

*years holy. You and me,
sitting criss-cross applesauce,
pretending to row
all the way to shore.*

Here in a few short lines are all the reasons why we should keep coming back to *Boats in the Attic*: clear-eyed poetic vision, love, and the power of imagination enabling us to reach shore when the waters are stormy.

APROPOS OF NOTHING

The leak is worse.

And I'm out back staring at a fly.

My father has stage four Parkinson's and can't talk or hear
or take care of himself.

They doubled our insurance premiums because of fires
in Carmel Valley Canyon

though we never had one, never made a claim.

The fly's on a rock that's bluish in the full, high sun.

It hasn't moved. It's not dead—I saw it swoop-land.

Probably it closed its eyes and is taking a big inhale

and a slow, long exhale and is thinking, God

this sun feels like heaven and this blue rock, so warm under my feet.

I should at least call a plumber.

Dad would have known how to fix it.

CONVERSATIONS WITH ANOMIE

It's been weeks since
my [everything's too hard]
put its pants on.
I plead with
my [I just can't]
to try again.
Most of all You!
My [all people suck]
screams.
[No one understands
me,] and [I'm all alone in this world]
think I don't get either of them.
Look on the bright side, I kid
my [I'm wearing sun glasses in the house
even at night.]
We smoke, cry, bite, curse, drink, lie, try
to change the topic;
at least my [soon this will pass]
is struggling to keep things in perspective. But
my [just let me be] plugs its ears, chants,
We like feeling like this! We need to feel like this!
Go ahead then, I tell
my [don't try talking me out of it.]
I'll help, I pile on.
I get the finger or spit, am double dared.
They think my offer is a sick joke.
Could be. Sometimes
my [please help me] can't say anything.

FROM *THE BREAKUP*

I visited drawings of withered flowers at a museum

here at a

lower

site the muse
visited

I sit with

her

raw red

wings

would he rather be mistaken than be together
would i
rather be mist than ether
rather get
the stake than
be a
rat he
would rather take her

unfinished dinners begin to soften in the fridge
gin to soften the ridge
to
be of the rid
inner
fin he often
is i
shed

this migraine: a dense orchard full of iridescent parrots
a hard ride
or a descent
this den
is full of
his dense scent
of rot

TAKE NINETEEN

You allot five for every four
Because it makes a better song.
Ask Dave Brubeck.
It's the extra that gives you time to breathe
Or eat before you fall.
But hey, it's easy to scoop a handful of sky
While you wear the light of erasure like a shrug.
Strap adverbs to the soles of your smooth shoes
That dig into the earth past the salt and ice
Beams of light from your feet, through
The core and so far down the day begins again.
Streets pretend not to hear but listen.
A huff from house to house, wan suburban smile.
You can see the slash of clouds where you clawed
through.

THIS OR YOUR BREATH UP TO THE LIGHT

or your body echoed on a cluttered wall, your limbs
pretending to be picture frame, swallowed
by its surroundings. Here, I become a crumbling sound

in your ear, a bird in the palm of your hand, so small
you can't help but wonder how much it would take to keep
quiet. Cup your hands, keep still, hear the song slipping through

your fingers. *Let's hold this close, you say, let's learn erosion
and ignore it. Let's watch the sky shut off her stars, let's get comfortable
in the dark.* If you hold me, I'll hold—

ALZHEIMER'S DIDN'T

trumpet itself.
I didn't detect
its high frequency sounds,
didn't spot
its webbed wings, sharp teeth.

It descended,
a soft-pawed cloud.
Settled
in your lap. Circled its tail
around the two of us.
Took time.

THE AWFUL MOOT

Zeus paws our bedclothes.

Digging

a nest?

A grave to lay to rest the dead
mole of my dozing fist?

The answer's

moot.

Wait.

Can answers or just
questions be moot?

Anglo-Saxon

Ealdormen only disputed moot *points*.

God, my head. . .

Sometimes I'd like
to cut it off and look it in the face and not
take its pop quiz.

The day will come
when every *raison d'être* I've lived through
turns up in the lockbox of my death,
alongside my scrips.

And my Last
Judgment—aka *The Awful Moot*—
will have its say.

Hell, I'm not talking
faith here.

But in the private creak
my step makes in our old floorboards,
unlatching the closet door, some spook
of belief now and then rises to harrow
life's nastier hijinks.

*Whatever we did
forever remains what we did*, a wise woman
wrote in a Polish I've Englished poorly.
The gist of it is a good reason to give
time, at its most glancing, a kiss.

Here

you lie too, our dog christened for a god
panting between us, warm as a sand bluff
at noon.

Let's take a long minute to raise
our eyes to the F-15s fanning out from Otis,
Mashpee, MA, 1986.

That whole fucking
summer their wings dipped to wave
approval for our sizzled, nude, sun-
stupid bodies,
didn't they?

One more
moot question and, in my book,
pointless.

Wings alone provide
more than enough excuse to look up.

SIX ANECDOTES

1

Knowing their way
to the wharves,

wave after wave,
buoyed by high tide,

swell and spill into
the narrow channel,

each surge wishing
eternity would end.

2

Often we'd stop at a roadside café,
the kind so out of the way

you wonder what keeps it open
if it's open. Plenty of free tables;

silence its usual customer;
our talk, fragments; sunlight

on a hand or hands,
a glass, a forehead—then

gone, like the gods
no longer believed in.

3

The fallen envoy retires to his farm.
Mornings: thrushes snared in birdlime

made by his own hands; afternoons:
his aviary, where the breeding songs

vie with Petrarch's scattered rhymes;
evenings: the inn, duels over a florin;

then, at midnight, his chancery robes,
to work on the little book for princes.

4

Mirrors can't help gazing at you,
you wheel-hub of the Milky Way.

When you walk past storefronts,
mannequins marvel at your taste

in hair, in smiles. The soul? Well . . .
The self, though, is a romance novel

to reread every day new fans wake up
convinced they've woken in your bed.

5

Mask-to-mask,
we sometimes see

our eyes remember
mutual crimes.

6

Saurian, cold as the drain's stare—
is that a feeling, then? The trickle

of something, is it water?
Scrubbed hands grime the basin,

windows locked, shutters drawn,
a dress thrown over a chair back.

Her pupils, even under lamplight,
grow wider the longer they look.

COMING INTO GRACE HARBOR

Stay off the shoals of Cumberland Point,
keep Rock of Ages well to the north,
the harbor deep and clear of obstructions
perfectly named after a long crossing.
Waves roll through the sun and shade
over moss-colored rocks near shore
where trees keep giving way to the water,
leaning farther until they
must know they have to let go,
after a while just trunks
moving up and down in the waves,
hollow roots not wanting to let go
still of the soil though water
is taken into them,
a moss-colored skull
skeletal as light on the water
nodding yes or maybe
held there by yet another death,
a tree that fell parallel to shore
a fulcrum like an old man
moving back and forth
between going on and getting ready to turn back,
an almost yellow of lichenized rocks
close to shore to blue-green shallows
turning greener before dark blue moves in,
these wild harbors
you're always glad to be able to distinguish
in the almost unbroken tree line
like a moon nearly full
holding back what is possible
for a satellite orbiting a dying earth.

NO SMALL COMFORT

BY BRIAN SIMONEAU

(Black Lawrence, 2021)

REVIEW BY TODD ROBINSON



Brian Simoneau is a poet who paints in sound and sense, each image in his welter of a *weltanschauung* a shining thing-in-itself and an infected existential wound salved only by patient intellection. A native son of Massachusetts with as large a transparent eyeball as Emerson himself, he owes as much to puckish Thoreau, who punctured Ralph Waldo's pretensions to grandeur and died first, as if to advance a theorem on loss. We're all tap-dancing on trap doors, but hear the syncopation of our shoes on lacquer, Simoneau avers. Note the fine craftsmanship of the hinge:

*Like the sound you imagine a bone
makes as it breaks if you never broke
a bone, atonal snap that's nothing
like rifle crack or thunder clap
or knot in a crackling log. Like
a twig crunching underfoot only
if you're standing only on twigs
over a deep hole you didn't know
was waiting but are not certain is
studded with sharpened stakes, your breath
gripped.*

In this promising opening poem (“A Lake Opens Up Beneath Your Feet”), Simoneau shows his hand and takes the trick. The poem—like its brethren all through this collection—begs to be read aloud to catch the gush of sound that nearly lulls one into reverie with its chiming rhymes that in fact mask a trap: for while the braided indentations and assonance suggest sweetness, Simoneau's poems inevitably return to his abiding obsession, one shared by honest folk of all persuasions: the imminence of infinity, the awful mystery of eternity, those fathomless scales of space and time which render our little dramas nigh unto nothing at all. Even the cosmic marbles in their long grooves succumb to endings which may or may not be known, Simoneau explains, telescoping from “the moon and stars, nebulae giving / birth, galaxies

trailing to endless black / at their edges” down, down to an authorial iota: “I too become / part of a sun, even my darkness / only part of a star burning up.” From infinity to the infinitesimally small self, “we’re doomed, not because we never learn / but just because we are.”

And so, not five poems into this bracing, beautiful collection, the big issues seem to be settled: nothing’s inescapable...we’re just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round. There’s something terrifying and sublime in Simoneau’s transcendental-adjacent “Semblance, similitude, synchronicity;” but one cannot dine on the sublime alone when “what’s happening escapes / what language we have.” Dead stars and astral voids intrigue and confound our poet, but he is equally perplexed and seduced by the teeming ground we daily pound, from city grids pocked by potholes and tow trucks to “hilltops weather-undressed” and a dozen still-wilder vistas of shore and forest, where for all the leaf-rot and “death in all / its disgraceful forms” eternal recurrence brings a peace which passeth understanding but nonetheless inspires:

Whatever tracks

*you followed out will lead you back. Year by year a river’s
zealous rise and fall will raze and restore your only holy ground.*

A child appears late in these pages, and with her new care, a heightened awareness of tenderness heaving through the speaker’s blood, that learned astronomer laying aside his cold and telling instruments for “pockets filled, digging in grass / for granite and quartz, rock after rock / on the puddingstone poking from hilltops left behind.” The daughter is characterized, like her father, by “a singular searching, unshakable.” They stack rocks like “temple stones” just as Simoneau stacks his indented lines and half-rhymes, building spires or pyres to our burning selves and galaxies’ “infinite / expansion made to obey the laws / of coloring books”; ever and anon we face our days with wonder: “another / place to excavate, another stretch / of empty sky to fill up with our shapes.”

He is a seeker and
a seer, a craftsman
of taut poems that
waste no words.

This book of wonders swaps the all-but-exhausted “I” of our self-revering age for the sage of Concord’s “eye” aimed squarely at the world(s), in fear and in wonder. The tone of alienated indifference that characterizes so many of my own poems is never once evinced in this journeyman’s collection. Simoneau is a scholar of earth and sky, of “flowers bursting / from mud at a river’s edge” who never reduces

the biome to a trope of some human need or gilded truth. He is a seeker and a seer, a craftsman of taut poems that waste no words. Would I like to see more variation in his use of the page? I confess I would, for these latticed indentations he everywhere relies on do not promise aesthetic revelations commensurate with his poems' profundities. And that is perhaps no small comfort in itself, for he is a poet steeped in tradition, building sturdy machines of language that sing and quake in diction and syntax, every sentence and caesura a well-made thing. These are not the dashed-off epiphanies of a drugstore shaman. Simoneau is a student of poets gone before (he acknowledges borrowings from Wilbur, Stevens, Dickinson, Emerson, and Williams), and they would surely recognize a kindred artificer committed to gleaning his teeming meanings with a nimble pen that still cannot quite strike through the mask Ahab sought to sunder, but which can with the grace of its sting commence a mighty ringing:

*there's no way of digging deep enough
to extract what it is that fastens
me, to say what chains any of us
to a place we forever circle*

*like a drain, a hole where once a star
shone, once turned like a god looking back
to drag us along the path we have
no hope of retracing in the dark.*

DECEMBER

12.19.19

We go back, each of us to our own town
eyes papery with sleep

throats slicked with grief.
Some hold to the old stories

while others skin the skies for evidence
of a great shift. None can deny

that our magnetic north is moving
at approximately thirty-four miles per year.

It is hard thinking
that all we've made will be gone.

The moon lost a third of its light
as did the sun, the someday-to-be

red star, at the center of
the one maypole dance

slipping from its rivets
at the middle ground of deep noise.

None can deny that fish sing.
That a steady hum comes from ocean depths.

That even what should be silent
has its own music.

* * *

My son wakes me to say
that bananas, when placed under

a blacklight, glow. And did you know
that birds too produce iridescence

with heft, see enough of a spectrum
of invisible-to-us color that

they shift and holler
when my red hair enters

their proximity. That one afternoon
years ago at the pet store

with the giant macaw
who may or may not now be dead,

parrots living as long as humans,
and myself a girl coming toward it,

the bird screaming indignation
at my advance.

Here there is something to say
about the limits of a human eye,

but what I remember is
the bird's enormous gray claws,

its dinosaur skin,
and the chain keeping it on its perch.

Also the feeling of sun
through plate-glass storefront.

It is not for me to ask
why I was there

or here for that matter.
Was I *born for this*, or

is this *my time*, the clock's one hard needle
pointing dead center

at the sky. The white of solstice.
The longest night edging out

its competition. When I say
some hold to the old ways

do I mean candles, a fire lit
in the cookstove, another outside,

last year's trees burning, my son
on the shoulders of his father.

His head a badger's
against the flames, sparks fountaining

like Van Gogh's burning soul
and its dark column:

the poster I memorized
at the front of the fifth-grade art room.

* * *

12.20.19

If we did not appreciate leisure
when it came knocking

who can blame us? We had not
set shoulders to the plow

for decades, hitched up the team
for a journey numbered in days.

Yes, there were train tickets
and trains, and the washing

machine beating the floor
like a distant helicopter—

but they had little to do
with us in our multitudes.

And if the wallpaper called out
from within the walls

we did not hear it, intent
as we were on moving our fingers

across the keys to form words.
Forgive us, for we did not know

we would crave the quiet
of the kitchen on a morning

when boiling water and its heaves
were the only sound, the blue light

of the kettle spilling softly
through the waves.

* * *

What did I do, I often wondered,
before the small bodies

of humans and their demands
came to live among us.

Even then, trees were strangers,
merely backdrop to the cacophony

of traffic that choked the streets.
We had our groceries handed to us.

If some headed through the floodwaters,
we did not stop them.

I closed the door to my heart
and made a sign over it.

* * *

And if we managed to disbelieve
what was before our eyes

it is because we could not accept it.
Truth be told, we'd wondered

what could come of unmet
demands. What seemed salvific

was the light, always the light.
What does Columbine mean

my son asked. A blue flower
I said. Plenty of time for the rest.

For those whose lives became divided
we could offer only a form

of staying with, of moving through.
Grief with its clenched jaw.

Not letting loose even when dislodged.
Changing the locks never enough.

In another version of this life
animals do not stand stanchioned

lowing, silver pumps withdrawing
their due, while in another room

babies rock to their feet, noses
quivering, tongues reaching.

We'll _____ till the cows come home
the saying goes, or the _____ to roost.

* * *

At one point my parents believed
that to harbor birds, one's property

had to be free of cats. Last summer
my father in the haymow

found himself faced with an indignant
juvenile vulture, wings raised

and hissing. The same place
that the first cat made itself known,

a tuxedo female whose generations
lived for decades among the mixed songbirds.

What kind of forfeiture must we make
to head off this new extinction.

Let's call it what it is. Very little news
reached us at the crossroads. What there was

often took on distortion as in
a game of "telephone."

What is that, you might have asked.
To which I'd responded ears and

whispers and what messages
we care to save.

What kind of day is it
that requires a fourth cup of coffee

at 3 p.m.? Afternoon bristling
with sunlight, its fine mesh

through curtains on the far wall.
Tendrils of hope persist

in soil that finds itself frozen,
then thawed. The intent of all this shining

can scarcely be felt, and what voice
beckons us from our slumber in

the cold weeds. To listen to the voice
is not obedience but juncture.

Unforthcoming, it moves
across the water. Sound carries

meaning, though only to the matched ears.
I've never understood how the moon

drapes its train on the waves.
A path we could follow, do follow

to the forest on the far shore.
Habit a bit of folded paper

12.22.19

that we carry. The memory
most present with me tonight

is being told to wait
at the baggage claim in a red coat

a week before the war started.
I was worried the plane would not land—

the wrong fear, as it turned out.
Habitat or habitus a mere invention.

* * *

The dream took me somewhere
I'd forgotten. Or never been.

As in the movie of a second earth
approaching this one, its fictions

unwritten, different from our own.
Before the accident caused by your client

she was a healthy 38-year-old woman.
A healthy four-year-old. Fifteen.

We're close to meeting on their terms.

* * *

I never made a good go-between.

Always one to absorb the conversation
at hand. The marriage, now aged sixteen,

ready to hit the road. Do we still look
like ourselves? The year we married

the world fell into one war and
almost another. Tensions like ligaments

without give, one knuckle twisted
sideways, keeping the other in lock step.

The muscles, or was it the muskets,
at home. Did we tense before

the exchange of rings? Did we trade words
or barbs? As on a fishhook. As on

a fence. Was there time to mend
fences? Fishhook in the arm, the soft

flesh below the elbow, all attempts to remove it
rebuffed by the forgiving tissue.

From across the room, I tried to see
a way through this juncture. Furniture

formed for a taller generation—
men with winged collars, bones

sturdy with calcium and good breeding.
Meanwhile, shutters banged in the wind.

Storm restive at the crest of hills.
I held my son close as it approached.

Sand swirling up from the roadway, us
at a waystation with its single, wooden table.

Fires, when large enough, create
their own weather. Hard to think

of a time when we did not know this.
Here, we have all the rain we need and then some.

River flowing to river, tributaries swelling
to inundate carefully tended fields.

* * *

12.24.19 The year my older son was born
I kept a list of what I wanted:

can opener, for instance. *Flower pot*.
I will listen to the muse if it wishes to visit.

Camaraderie not part of the equation.
Where the school bus has turned

into the game preserve entrance: all that
metal fence. And behind it? What

cruelties. I could find my way back
in a bind. And can you blame my father

12.25.19 for making me direct the truck home?
Last night I dreamed the trees

had emerged from dormancy. Don't tell
the dream before breakfast, my mother

always said, or it will come true.
So I held it secret

until after the toast and
a bowl of cut fruit in winter.

* * *

The trees have secondary buds
if the first ones are decimated by cold

but I worry nonetheless. Survival
of the fittest become a question

of survival. I checked the morning news.
All quiet, at least for now. Radar

tracking the developments, all flights south.
Meanwhile in the ocean, the plastic island

continued to whorl. The stuff of nightmares
like the glitter from the “peace”

wrapping paper scattered like evidence
on the table, in the folds of my hands.

The fields have thawed into mud.
Meanwhile an insect crosses the road.

I place the feathers behind the spruce
where one tree supports its fallen neighbor.

* * *

12.29.19

For a child to be born it must succumb
to the force of the mother. Those who resist

come out fighting, the way breath
wreathes the head like a halo.

It is comfort to believe that words matter.
That the world, always and already,

has not been falling apart. If humans
had not come onto the scene, all would not

hang in the balance, as it does.
The newswriters assure us that

apocalypse has not yet arrived.
A birth it is wise to leave unassisted.

For years I kept a photograph
of the four horsemen on my bedroom wall.

Their names unknown, unknown,
unknown and unknown. The sprit within

startles like a reflex, the heart's muscle
pausing before settling back into stride.

* * *

They say that we choose this life
before coming into it, that we were made

for *this* time and not another. That we are *in*
time but not of it: timebound, accelerating

always in one direction. Say time is a river
that you step into, a la Heraclitus.

Whose feet muddle the shallows, whose
fingers sift the leaves from the surface?

We haven't yet learned how to
unbuckle our seatbelts and keep going.

Rapids, whose rapidity astounds.
Rocks tunneled through, smoothed clean

by water. The chair a ladder
you climb to surface, unmarked.

* * *

12.31.19

My headache has left for parts unknown
meaning that it's no longer lodged

in my forebrain. When the wind subsides,
we'll rehang the wreaths, right the trees.

If you shield your ears from the drumbeats
the music will still find you. Listen with the ears

of your heart St. Benedict says.
Receive the stranger before you too

are out of luck. Whatever it takes
to preclude want. A no trespassing sign

stretched from pole to pole under the pines,
the child staining his shirt with cherries.

He could not get enough. Indoors, the years
had sunk their teeth into the walls

and the paneling, swollen from humidity,
and we could not see spending an hour

on a slow tour of ruin, though its true
that I wanted to save it. The sisters

who spun wool in an outbuilding long dead.
The family gone to who-knows-where.

* * *

Don't lament the passing of this decade.
Consider yourself lucky to have lived—

to be alive, that is, at the end of
what. You who are alive at this juncture,

that is accomplishment enough. Time travel,
my son tells me, is possible, but only

in one direction. With each decade we grow
further rootlets, the sky collapses its bands

of sinew. Forty years is a long time
my father remarked. The sightlines

of my childhood altered, yet still the bones
beneath the soil on the backslope.

We, who are alive, can still sing
or be told by our children to stay quiet.

ROSH HASHANA

Summer's gone bronze at the edges.
And here we are, gathering
button roses and comedy blooms
at a picnic table, taking up apple slices
to dip in the honey bowl, my ex
and our son saying the blessing before
tasting. "Here's to a good, sweet year."
Mellow September evening. God,
the year tore through so fast. Did I hurt
anyone, blaze uncontrolled? I think
I learned to drive a little slower, lie to those I love
less often. Hey, if you leave on time, make
things right, as they say, it all evens out.
Brian and Nancy aren't with us tonight,
no Ben either. Yeah, they bought
a house. Drove their twin Hondas into
a suburban sunset—a fresh spread
for their lunacy. But I miss them,
think back to my son and Ben as boys,
sometimes getting along, mostly not,
I thought they would always be little,
making a ruckus on the High Holy Days.
Here I am, chilled, aged, looking
across the table, this year's apples dunked
in last year's honey, my teenage son
going on about how he doesn't believe
in Milgram's experiment, "I wouldn't hurt
someone over and over just because
a dude in a white coat told me to." I open
my mouth, close it. Some things
he'll have to find out for himself—

ANGEL'S VIEW

When I want to learn, I throw
an algorithm against the Titanic
passenger manifest. I've seen who
lives and dies a million times.
If I don't cheat, I can predict
up to 90%. I see patterns
even if they don't exist.
A month ago Night Watch
found my son on a boulder
and named him Future. I wait
for them, and Snow White and
Lavender, in towns too small
for stoplights on the continent's
backbone. They warn me of Rebel,
the outlier, always a day ahead
or behind, peeing in water sources.
I have time to think about the man
who topped El Capitan to find
waist-high snow—his buddy ate
his food and he collapsed before
the medevac arrived—or the young man
who jumped to the edge of Angel's Landing
for attention, search and rescue took
nine hours to recover his body.
The day my son was caught
in hail and lightning, he sprinted
down shale, knew exactly eight trees
surrounded the tent where he waited,
cheek to mountain floor, the soil
electric. Future is always worried
about the future, there's a pattern
even if it doesn't exist. At the divide,
you can roll either way to either
ocean. Down on the dock
along the longshoremen, Bellows
painted a towboat in four brushstrokes,
poppies disguised as cleats,
he waited for the Titanic to arrive.

HALF LIFE

Something that is yours forever is never precious.

—Chaim Potok

I'm OK with the Other Side as a psychedelic mirror, sharp edges pulled into taffy: reds and purples, the dark another shade of light. Each generation bears, until that last moment, unknowable children. Kandinsky, as good as any angel, warns art is dead when split from life. Keep the chipped teacup once hidden from grandmother, inside it a love poem never delivered; the old Nokia that never died, the conversation you were too afraid to finish. Or don't. Anything can be as comforting as anything. Between us the next moment passes, our currency abundant as dreams. I don't mourn tight shoes. Death is confidence going nowhere.

CREMA

The foam atop this shot's a continent.
Its coastline jags, an archipelago flecks the dark sea
at its southern edge. A large lake, an island
afloat within a littler lake, a thin strip of lea

in between. Perhaps a girl of three walks
there, with her grandfather, who tells her the same two stories,
about the goatherd, or of the tree made of rock.
My coffee goes cold. To tilt the cup would bring calamity

upon this country. Their path is skinny and bent
and sharp with pebbles. The view from that ridgeline,
the two lakes, the dark sea, is something she'll never forget,
not when she's an old woman, in a different country,

Grandfather long dead, sons grown and gone, she'll
know none of it was real—the bare cliffs,
the gauzy meadows that lay thinly over rock,
even the warmth of her grandfather's palm

around her small wrist, her conjured self,
her dissolving history.

SQUATTER'S RIGHTS

Though I knew full well the house was not mine
still I returned, walked the grounds
marbled in light sand and dark soil, the lined
sea visible in snatches, between gate rails,

the rose beds, studded with
brass ornaments, sculptures of fish
arched as if swimming through an intimate
sea of bobbing roses. I wished

to remember those fish, always. I tried
to memorize their metalwork scale, fin,
I didn't stop myself imagining lying
in the chaise under the flowering mandarin.

Yes, I swam through your personal sea.
The sensation, the flush on your skin? That was me.

WELCOME HOME

It's not what we promised you on the
banner at the entrance, the one screaming
"Welcome Home" in red, white, and blue.

Welcome, meaning you are wanted.
Home, meaning here.
But what a world that might have been.

THE DEVIL DOESN'T COME TO THE FLATLANDS

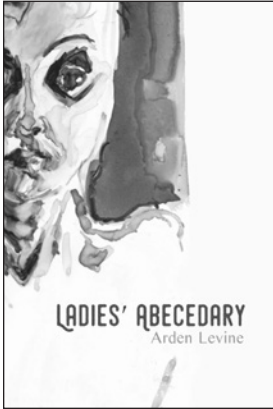
Tornadoes are a Midwest delicacy. As a child, I used to think the devil sent them here to taunt us. To whisper in our ears that he can find us in the flatlands too. Hurricanes are not his only trick. But we tried so hard to believe we were safe here. We land-locked ourselves and took a rolling pin to all the dangerous lumps in the earth, until the world was bare and vacant for miles. There is a kind of safety in making ourselves desolate. My mother told me all girls must remember this. Iron out all of your prominence—men won't hurt you if you give them nothing to want. After all, she'd say, the devil doesn't come to the flatlands. There is nothing to steal from an empty house.

WHY I DON'T OWN THE WORLD

Never the photo, the planet, the pancetta in the pan, the polka-dotted photon, defrocked Pluto, restocked pantsuit I bought for \$30 and returned and returned every time it went on sale, whittled that price down to a mere \$15. It was blue as royalty, black as dark matter, had shoulder pads, and I was in debt, indebted to my Nordstrom's card, my feathered hair and navy dyed rat tail, beaded and braided, like the day I competed in floor-ex, caught my tail between big toe and the one next to it. What you didn't see were the beads bouncing across the gymnasium floor, sticky with Pepsi and whatever else gets tracked in on trainers, and did you hear about all those PreachersNsneakers, dressed in Yeezy, Ricci and Gucci, Louboutin, Stella McCartney? Preachers trying to brightshine for Jesus, even the choir's lead singer's all Harley Davidson these days. In the dream I wondered at all the skinned creatures—the boar, the crocs, the sea deep ones not yet discovered—and I knew I should have written it down. Meanwhile, the whitegloved, the moneyloved, their love of money, Brother Jed and Sister Susie, evangelizing *this is what I got from God*, glittery fingers, wrists dripping Rolex time, you'd think Liberace, but God, what a racket! 1984, enticed into a tiny room down beneath the University District sidewalk the recruiter shoved me a copy of L. Ron Hubbard's book, the alarm bells clanging in my head, I ran back up into daylight, queasy, because he'd sniffed my scent, like that dog who first growled before he drew blood from my thigh, because I was so damned nice to him, because I didn't, right from the get-go, in that low-throated enough-is-enough go-home do-it-now voice I didn't know I had until my too-young-to-hear-it youngest was small—NO.

LADIES' ABECEDARY
BY ARDEN LEVINE
(Harbor Editions, 2021)

REVIEW BY JENNIFER KEITH



Ladies' Abecedary opens with two epigrams. The first is by Thomas Wentworth Higginson from his 1859 op-ed in *The Atlantic*. Higginson, alluding to an earlier “daring, keen, sarcastic” work by Sylvain Marchal, wonders if women learning the alphabet would grease the skids toward some unspeakable chaos. The second is a blood-tinged spit of lyric from Bikini Kill, a feminist punk band, about lives that can’t be spelled out in any traditional way. *Ladies' Abecedary* draws from both energies.

The polite title belies the deep dive of these poems into the real lives of girls and women. It’s rich territory for Levine, whose poems are like snapshots that suddenly extend into a third dimension when you hold them in your hand. “Abecedary” speaks to the structure of the book: each poem represents a piece in a sequence, with Levine titling poems with letters of the alphabet and arranging them in an order.

But there’s more to those solitary glyphs announcing each poem. The letters are initials, substitutions for women’s names like you’d see in police reports, case studies. The poems are introductions to deeper narratives where the reader can fill in the details. From the excruciating-but-healing “tourniquets” applied by “A” to the metamorphosis of “Z”’s brokenness, the subject of each poem is a very particular female identity who lives, breathes, and takes up residence in the consciousness.

Two of the poems pair letters, so there are 24 poems altogether in *Ladies' Abecedary*, a perfect circle of hours. The book is slim, modest in format, but many of the poems go surprisingly deep, and, taken together, put bright pins in a large map, hinting at the breadth of women’s experience. There’s a child who plays God and is answered by a parent bearing the brunt of being at her mercy. Two teen friends stride into their future with a new sense of physical power and purpose, while a pie baker’s failure and redemption hints at a private loss and acceptance.

Some of the poems’ subjects seem recognizable. “M” could be Marie Curie, who suffered public shame and xenophobia when, as a widow, she fell in love with a married

man. “L” might well stand for Lilith, a personification of untamable sensuality and dangerous seduction. “U” is a homophone, directed at the reader, a terse warning of assuming

*there's no way of digging deep enough
1) that you can find the missing
either with maps or with technology.*

2) that words will keep you safe.

There is an “I” poem with these lines:

*... She got
Levi's blue jeans, too, and wise
to how fast a girl can go
when the fabric wraps around both legs.*

But the “I” of first-person is absent in the book. Whereas other women poets fall to the temptation of trying to define large swaths of women’s realities through their own thoughts and episodes, Levine creates a mosaic of the stories of other women and girls, some fanciful, some terrifying, some difficult, some triumphant—and all believable. Levine doesn’t have just one story about women; she has two dozen, and doesn’t attempt to shoe-horn them into fitting together in a tidy set. The ease with which Levine holds contrasting and conflicting truths reflects both depth and empathy. The poems are free in both content and form to grow and expand as individuals.

The poems dealing with physical vulnerability in *Ladies’ Abecedary* leave a particular mark. “R” takes on maternal mortality as erasing a fully formed human as well as the mother of a newborn. “E” moves in a circle from subservient calm to the horrors of medical invasion involving blood and the extraction of “a condition,” after which the poem itself, like E’s fingertips, forms a circuit and returns to baseline, emptied and still. What’s happened to E is horrific, but Levine’s control of the poem keeps the reader present and unblinking.

Immediately afterward, “F” the poem about the pie baker, also touches on blood-like destruction that hints at pregnancy loss. But the poem ends with its subject embracing the cycles that define women’s physical lives and their attendant agonies and hopes:

*What did you do then? everyone asks.
Roll dough. She places that reply so casually down*

*as if she had described knocking over a cup of water in her sleep
and waking to find the floor already near dry; this, and not a story*

of toil in making, toil in cleaning, toil in remaking, mourning loss.

“F” and the other heroines in Levine’s alphabet don’t dazzle with CGI superpowers. Instead, they endure with quiet dignity. “H” is a portrait of a lonely docent embracing (and embodying) the passage of time. In another way, the solitary exile in “N” abides and even nurtures another, finite form of life:

Levine has used
her alphabet and
skill to create a
haunting index
of women’s
anonymous, yet
recognizable, lives.

*Here, they brought her
the last zinnia and some water
to hold it for a day or two.
After that, she will
hang it by its heels
so blood rushes to its head.*

“K” is a longer poem that reads like a fairy tale. A phalanx of sisters moving as one unit, in height order, carry stones through the carnivorous snow of “a cold land” to test the firmness of the earth beneath their feet.

Levine’s figures include women suffering and stricted by obsessions of mind and body. The fascinating “P”:

*can’t have any part of her
body touching any other
part of her body. It’s hard*

for more reasons that you’d expect.

“S”’s pretty dress is also a “silken tourniquet,” and the echoing of words and phrases (“drumbeat,” “tongue,” “wings”) creates music while also speaking to the obsessive inner dialog and ritual of her disorder.

Several short entries in *Ladies’ Abecedary* introduce women who are not just at the mercy of nature but engaging with it, letting it inform them with a deeper awareness of how the world works. “O” is a chilling six-line metaphor on the occasional mis-

steps of evolution, and the subject of “V” unwittingly conducts an experiment that shakes up both the cycle of time and the natural order that depends on it.

Women’s sexuality appears in the darkly seductive “L,” the bawdy, bouncing “Q,” and the easy, watery bath of “W and X.” But the one that induces shivers is “T.” Levine uses white space to create two entities in the poem, bucket seats where “T” and her lover-or-abductor are riding together, their past in the rearview. The tension of the poem captures a breathless, burgeoning female sexuality, where danger and adventure are riding in the same car:

*There is some place he took her from, or some place
she left with him, perhaps
they were tossed out
of the sky, lost their lease on God. So, El Camino
the drive, the unruly asphalt gardens,
the tailpipe fumes
like a long exhale, the tapering
of their history.*

Higginson’s *The Atlantic* essay, quoted in the book’s first epigram, ends with a suggestion: “First give woman, if you dare, the alphabet, then summon her to her career.” In *Ladies’ Abecedary*, Levine has used her alphabet and skill to create a haunting index of women’s anonymous, yet recognizable, lives.

VELVET

Because I've doused my wrists in *Exit the King* & bring them supplicationwise to my face loopingly as if I could *closer*. Because sheepsy wolvesy Beethoven's playing on Pandora. Because I'm performing an exorcism on the closet & what was within lays bare over bed & chaise stitched with dog hair. Coleworts twice sodden. Cockleshells all in a row. Art is very instinctive (declares Rosten-Edwards). In the '90s I wore you feline suited. Neon-wigged in *cognito*, didn't I think myself queenly pussyfooting into those guillotine nights? Inspiration drawn from Peg Bundy & Hades. It's not just the dust bunnies among the skeletons I'm after. Damn it I cried last night watching Queer Eye. Because *Stocking Lady* & damn it *wacky fashion sense* & damn it *overdressed & underclothed*. Because in a fantasy I'm as reflective as an idea eeling behind the eyes especially *crushed*—coruscated & Zorcoian as March rain. Navigating dusk I turn on mid-lights. Soft get-you-bys. I was intent you'd be skirt split to saddlebag, tube-top over-floweth. A text or two later—your Shane's second piss catheter. Him constipated from Chemo meds. You can't go back & it's a blessing as much as a curse. Scarf cloaking shoulder like the folded-upon-folded-upon-selves cabbage (cut in-half) now are: labyrinthine. I am adorned. I wear you. But you—you wear me out

WHY I AM LEARNING NORWEGIAN

I cannot bear the way
people say
the word *use*
or worse—*useful*
brown button words
bottom-lined like flypaper
or gasoline on wasp's nests
better to burn out the far-seedling
wolf through Samaritan scripture in a wasteful night
I cannot bear the sound of covenant colors in evangelical English
red and *rieve*—stink of spores
that sprout in the stomach
I have waited for New Year's brunch to come out
crusted brie and artisanal peasant bread
smearred butter soothing a chorus of sweating sliced ham
across the table they tell stories of Chautauqua residencies
shared piano four hands and calls home to lockdown Texas
the singer asks me what I am working on
a series in praise of cruelty
by which I mean a list of useful verbs
I tell the singer that I am naming
what must count as evidence
by which I mean my long walk to visit sinking gravestones
in view of the sick-cough bay
one stone belongs to my father
so shares my name—to the last letter
I tell the singer that I walked home again
without an umbrella
mouthing wet December
a cyclist passed me on the slicked asphalt
and waved

NOTES FOR A SPONSOR-ME TAPE

Start slow. Just cruise around
for a bit, remembering a pebble
could be fatal. Try not to pull

a muscle. Stretch first, knowing
the glory of handrails was never
in your stars, that the possibility

of children, however diminishing,
is preferable to the probability
of sacking. Don't bail. You're more

likely to really get hurt. Just
grind the curb, roll away without
looking back, into the chain-

link horizon. Try not to think
about it as quitting. Just make
sure not to slip out at the end,

when you powerslide out of frame,
both arms flailing, for style
as much as for balance. Don't die.

FEAR OF HANDRAILS

what a wall-
flower i was

always too
terrified

to ask
any hand-

rail may
i have

this dance
i dreamed

the sparks
my trucks

would make
if ever

they kissed
a round

kinked one
the grind

both rough
& smooth

one note
i might've

sustained
if even

for only
so long

no thought
of the risk

of being
destroyed

EL BOXEADOR

I've been a boxer since I was five years old. I grew up on the southeast side of town. No one really wants to live here, except us Mexicans. My father always wanted to be a professional fighter, but he mostly just watched it on the weekends, with a beer. He worked as an industrial mechanic for 35 years. That's how he paid for my boxing training. When he saw I didn't care much for tools, he taught me the right hook. He said, "we are Mexican fighters. We rarely use the jab. We are undersized but our hearts are made of iron. We get in on the inside, like Canelo fighting those tall light heavyweights. We come from an Aztec warrior class. Boxing isn't a sport, mijo," he'd say, "it's a religion. The boxing Gods don't forgive."

MEETING CAL RIPKEN JR. FOR COFFEE ONE MORNING

I was having my morning cup of coffee; the sun was getting ready to attack the southern California area. It was mid-summer. Then, someone knocked on my front door. It was Cal Ripken Jr. I almost started crying I was so surprised. I asked Cal to autograph my coffee mug of the Los Angeles Dodgers. He laughed and signed it. I thanked him for breaking the consecutive games record against the Angels and told him it inspired me as a child. I asked why he was here? "Because you're my favorite author," he said. "But I haven't published anything but obscure prose poetry," I told him. "That's what I'm into," he said. "What a small world," I said. I signed a couple priceless (literally priceless) literary journals for Cal, and he was on his way, happy as an Oriole.

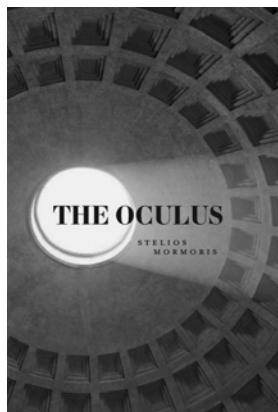
THE FORTUNE-TELLER OF MY YOUTH

after Mary Ruefle

When I was young, a fortune-teller told me I'd slay many dragons with nothing but a silver rose. The fortune-teller told me I'd bring great pride to my impoverished family, building a baroque castle for all of us to reside in. The fortune-teller, whom I met in a peaceful dream, said I'd fly amongst giants but retain the heart of a lamb. Sometimes, I think of this fortune-teller, at the dawn of autumn, when the leaves begin to turn brown, and the midnight fog obscures the moon.

THE OCULUS
BY STELIOS MORMORIS
(Tupelo Press, 2022)

REVIEW BY ROBERT DUNSDON



Sometimes, more often when we are young, a revelation might be offered to us: a signifier of something other, if only we would use our eyes. Ignore it and nothing changes, acknowledge it for what it is and your outlook, indeed your very character, is transformed. A drift of nettles swinging rhythmically in the shadow of a low stone wall was enough for me; that, and the apparent sanctity of the light denied them. It taught me to look out and beyond, that a breath away from the limitations we impose on ourselves are the intricacies and subtleties of everyday life so often unnoticed in the contemporary fog of urgency. Whether the author intended the title of this fine collection to convey something of the above, I can't say, but it seems that such a feeling hovers around

these poems in the imagery and almost peripheral intimations employed.

Stelios Mormoris holds dual Greek and US citizenship, but has spent much of his life in Paris, whose cultural heritage, you suspect, has played no small part in the development of his work. His is a delicate touch confidently applied, and his understanding of form and technique, allied to an appreciation of aesthetic values, lends his poetry an extra dimension; elevates it. Moments of enlightenment or recognition are enhanced by classical allusion, magnified in imagination, or detailed with a refreshing originality. His descriptive powers are considerable: throwaway lines, like his account of tourists “grazing on the excess grandeur of gargoyled boulevards” combine with the quietly moving, as when likening poinsettia leaves “fluttering in slips of breeze off Biscayne Bay” to the quivering of his mother’s lips on reading a devastating telegram.

The compensations and intrusions of memory feature strongly here, which is hardly surprising given the importance of a faculty which, as we get older, is our shadow and our guide. Among these, two poems in particular stand out, not only for their discretely emotional pull, but also in the structure of their telling. In one, Mormoris revisits a rented cabin in which his mother and four fatherless children once spent a hot, dry summer. The act of walking over the decayed and peeling linoleum feels

indecent, “as if pressing the dead inside its board.” The other is a poem detailing a domestic scene which is brought wonderfully alive with old photographs, oregano and lavender, fresh mint on a wet green melon, and a blue porcelain bowl from which his mother lifts a spoonful of soup to:

*a child's lips and
she says agape mou
and her bracelet
is decidedly cold
and thrilling as
loneliness can be.*

I've referred to the author's understanding of the bits and pieces of his craft: the learned skills of syntax, pace, half-rhyme, assonance, and all the rest, without which a poem can become loose and woolly, or worse still, mere prose cut into sections. He knows that construction and content are, or rather should be, indivisible in the making of art. He also knows these devices should be applied sparingly and be barely discernible; a principle seen at its best in a charming piece about one of his dogs, Zeus. Comprising a string of twenty-three couplets, it's a lovely depiction of a man and his dog growing old together, walking and playing. It's a snapshot almost: a picture of companionship, love and momentary contentment produced with seemingly little effort, although the whole effect is only made possible by a disciplined sensibility.

That particular quality is used to good effect in a poem hinting at something you cannot immediately grasp, as a driver encounters fog and fears he is, or might become, lost. “You have passed this field / through pleats of time,” we are told, and the fog becomes a memory of fog. Nicely descriptive of the landscape, with spruce trees, “whose branches swung out / like the hems of ballerinas as they curtsied / in tension, quivering.” It's an intriguing piece that probably needs, and certainly deserves, a second reading to fully appreciate its almost ethereal atmosphere.

There's a mingling of sentiment, colorful experience, and acquired wisdom in this expansive collection, and leafing through it feels as if you are encroaching on a private odyssey. You might be blinking at a spirited sea or brushing up against bougainvillea; encountering disappointment and regret or picking up fragments of remembrance from the movement of air. You might savour:

*Tournedos of barley
crammed into thick honey
laced with thyme, stubborn

in the roof of your mouth*

*and how it grows on you,
after penitent flows of salad
of cucumber and olive oil.*

or feel:

*the sea foam
like torn lingerie
wrapping your shins*

*as you wade towards the shore
to the intermittent clicks
of worry beads*

and staccato cicadas.

... just the right
word in just the
right place. It's an
art not easily won.

These gently persuasive lines are just a taste of the poet's expressive abilities; quite literally in the first example, when recalling a sermon for the dead where he cups the kernels of barley which had dropped to his plate "nimble as beads snapped from a necklace" and raises this "palmful of religion" to his mouth. "Kaiki Beach," from which the breezy scene above is taken, begins "how necessary it is / to lose yourself / in tangles" and recounts how a priest with a "pouring laugh" held court in a taverna, kissed a pregnant woman cradling her belly with one hand, and lifting a glass of sparkling quinine with the other, then cut into his filet of white fish "anointed with drops of lemon." He is conveying in deceptively simple terms the feel of a moment whose impact will grow in later years, and doing so without fuss or exaggeration, with just the right word in just the right place. It's an art not easily won.

As I finished reading this first-rate collection, a poem by Louis MacNeice came to mind. He wrote of a baywindow "spawning snow and pink roses against it / Soundlessly collateral and incompatible" at which the room becomes suddenly rich. Something of that sense, of that impression of quiet illumination comes across in these poems which are beautifully composed and never less than thoroughly absorbing.

THE PART OF SWAN LAKE THAT'S STUCK
IN MY HEAD BUT I CAN'T FIND

is the one that sounds like you've opened at least three doors
in the castle looking for that immaculate sapphire
Siegfried saying a password at each for good luck
luck like *bridal enchantment* or *powderpuff* as you take
each lion-maned brass in your hands which are still red
from trying on all your rings over and over
before deciding on just an onyx slip for your pinky
with a man's face and plumed helmet embossed you murmur
maybe Siggi will be his nickname pleased as punch
but only catch a glimpse of yourself in glass mid-thought
the weird down of your surprise like flicked antlers
coming clear-green out of the trees behind your childhood
home *what kept me from straight up disappearing*
into those trees anyway? over the tinshiny pinestraw slippy
as the thatched roof of an underworld and *where is he? ugh*
you start to suspect his weak heartbeat you've sussed out
is fizzling sigh yes it all reeks like a last act orchard
as you dab another fingertip of tuberose and slip
a cocktail shrimp behind your lustrous teeth in the Great
Room and *how the fuck does he even have so many*
friends? walking over their sandals on the Turkish rug
the heat of their underclothes and cosmetic chalk like
the world's most nervous parfumerie it makes your waist
feel like mercury in a bad way... just hold on... but
croak! on the terrazza all the frogs are sunk
deep into their boggy orchestra pit bucktoothing
the dark yard the hot pumpkin moon flicking starry salt
like *oh mimolette my fave! croak!* a fiber-optic surge of bonfire
embers and everyone giggling like night jasmine and one
voice says *that's really where the heat comes from, not the flame*
but the gems of citrine and pigeon grey extinguishing
mild as the powerlines outside your bedroom window which
tomorrow will be so quiet only the fabric of this
persistent music the bedsheets of it but right now
time is still chipping its tooth and you have a mission
so *get a life* you think *get a little tissue* and maybe
you slip behind one last door to look for a bathrobe

to steal and find a stranger there, just as lost
and you meet the renovation grey of her eyes
the cygnet grey her centrifuge and just then when she
walks on the balls of her feet out the door
is the moment when you hear the music change.

SO YOU WANT TO MAKE THE FLORIDA OPERA

but you're all out of libretto paper... and
the violins packed up and went home... so
start by listening hard to the metronome
chafing of banana leaf on oak, a fine slate
on which to stud your other notes. Like *peach*: best
articulated by your fully felted mouth and
its rivulets langouring into your sleeve—
almost sentient as a finger, sluicing
the planet of you so deep, you can nearly
hear the yawning of the Pleistocene.
A blue fossil coiled in repose. Maybe
you can exhume an aria or at least
attune your ear to the neck of a sea turtle
inclining toward the latenight shore—the rubberclad
kids flicking their flashlights, mimicking
a meteor. And *yes* to answer your question
she is in fact dragging herself to her death, and
no we may not sing something more cheerful—
consider the redgoldgreen of mangoes that shines
like the burn scar across your cousins's shoulder,
consider the pretty orange house that you will only
catch in passing, consider the fact that
there are only so many days in one's life
that you may see someone for the first time
soaking wet with rain on the putt-putt-course, swinging
their silver club with one hand and with the other
reaching up past the windmill and the nimbus
to grab a golf pencil from the desk of Zeus
just for you! See, the memory is already spiraling
weird like a hole in one, leaving you in the sand-
pale spotlight—a crater of white monstera,
the nerverlicking touch of a plasma lamp—so
it's up to you now, toucan, can you
say the word that baits the rest of music?

SI, BIRRIA

Inked on skin at 55, a heart/beat. This is how I feed on noise. Like an American/flag piercing the moon, how familiar scars become. Remind me of the black-haired teen who threads needles through her lips. I miss that rage. Today, she no longer opens her windows. Medical progress gives hope that one day disease can be eradicated. But a brain like mine knows only of its enemies. Don't let my breath linger on your tongue. According to my kids, I am the flavor that permeates. I once followed a boy to a small storefront on the west side of the free road, Popotla. The tall white counter allowed me to watch fat and nerve dissolving into red. The chef stuffed birria, onion, cilantro, into hot/corn/tortillas. You can't go wrong with any of the cheesy meat. The taco is crisp, not toasted and can be bitten easily. In Mexico, even the food offers forgiveness. Some come to get rid of what they don't want. Some come to collect what others discard. I haven't been honest. It is lambing season. My job is to wait for the noise, the smell of meat coming to life in our hands.

BETWEEN 50 AND 51

The walls mimic grasscloth, an imagined savannah of cream and palest green echoed in subtle stalks on carpet. The beveled mirror on back wall, the panel usual, buttons one to sixty, but then that's all what my mind reconstructs alone in the dark, in the panic and jangling heartrate when the lights go out and the box rattles and bangs against the shaking sides of shaft, dangling on cords, on threads, dry metallic taste dumbing my tongue. The distance matters, between you and me. Between me and the ground, between terrifying plunges. The weight of the car crashes, cracks. The cacophony of shocked concrete heaves in my ears, screeches in my bones. My hands flail, grapple for anything. I should be on 51, walking to my beige office. The drumming deafens now, no doors in the dead darkness and my brain is frozen between the useless emergency call button and the kind of prayer that is of the whole body, of clamor and catastrophe, of take me and make me, of chaos and clarity. My feet try to root into the pretend grasses, but I lurch and sway with the casket or chrysalis.

TODAY'S PATTERN

Take today's pattern of chairs & their occupants
Today's array of chairbacks & heads
& what the heads say today in the hall turning each of us
Into a toy camera filming but not wanting to
The water-damaged ceiling or the flag commemorating
Torture & deliverance & take today's only way I can
Force power upon the story my decisions have stitched together
To suppurate at this hour which is to tell myself I
Don't belong in this chair & that I could be one microscopic
Lens in the compound eye of a mating damselfly
Midflight over the contents of the buildings I occupy
Where I can see through rooftops over my son sleeping
By his radiator dreaming dreams in racecar pajamas
Over my apartment smelling like a grassy gerbil cage
The carpet under lamplight a field of flowering weeds pressed
Into my building's sleeplessness through thin walls
A late-night televised explosion over a faraway atoll in the 1950s
Over my neighbor's three-thousand-dollar guard dog's
Arthritic body tendons quivering as it eats hamburger
Around a pill then over today's steepled building
Where my friend spine straight face red & glistening beneath
A black leather baseball cap is speaking at length of living
Forever & how we can attain paradise right now in this room
& no one stops him we thank him tell him come back
Tell him it works after yelling our amen I must read what is stenciled
On the back of his chair the ancient rabbi's words
Only when we are crushed do we yield

TO CLIMB THE WINTER LADDER

slowly, to do nothing more
than wrap my hands around a junco I think
I see under rotted eaves

&, dazzled by aluminum
tinctured by my good neighbor's motion
detector before dawn, save the little bird,

to rise into branches of worry over the mama
tabby living in the caved-in chicken coop,
to listen for a polite invitation to

disrobe on a padded table, puddled
fable smelling of ginger & bleach,
to feel flecks of white paint fall

into my face like halogen from
a shattered glass rod, to look inside
a window of my house, my Edith

Piaf records, my son's
stuffed platypus he's outgrown,
to look into my blackened tongue,

my moldy rooms, my bent teeth
of distant summer window
AC units of abandoned nests, to put

one slipper forward, rung after
rung, up into my last ear's ecclesiastic plea
to listen to any sacred list

that goes on without me, to
last year's ecstasies, the studded tires
of my masseuse sex worker

neighbor's truck shattering ice
on their way to an early morning
house call, to keep climbing as if to see

us from space, our gray & white
microprocessor-tidy rooftops
in rock-candied satellite light,

to reach the inevitable moment to stop
reaching for you in cold
bedding & I'm thinking

about the defibrillator behind
the bar at the Village Vanguard &
what it takes to stop caring

for the voles beneath stiff weeds
sleeping with slow heartbeats
that are numbered, to reach

the angelic disorders far above
the cataract lens of ice
that was once milk I left her on the porch,

the stories no one would believe
if the objects of our lives, the lives
the objects touched, could speak.

SOBERING

Sometimes I cannot sleep till I turn
myself around, feet where my head belongs. I only know
how to breathe this in. Aloe Vera and spiders

are similar as silhouettes so don't yell
at me for the dirt on the floor. Tell me you feel
culpable on the car ride home. I pretend to be sorry

for not speaking sooner, sober. I leave your eyes for the trees
that collapse into each other, don't pay attention
to the shape they make on the horizon, don't

pay attention to the light that filters itself through
every gap in the bark. Just let every word be followed by fragile
influx, I can keep everyone tucked into my lungs. I've been the spine

to your frailty for long enough to know you'll never have
the words for this. I'll get you home, sweep up the soil, promise
your swamped eyes I am okay, I won't notice my own dizzy till I lie

backwards in bed to see the sky from the other
side.

HOUSESITTING FOR A STRANGER IN SPRING

a week spent sleeping in the little white house

because it was spring
you came

because it had been weeks
since we'd broken up

came and slipped
my dress
up over the kitchen counter

into me and my
what was mine
shaking into tile

you were angry

once
I bought myself flowers
as we grocery shopped

my love
my friend
taught me to buy flowers like that

wilting clearance over blossomed

rescues
she called them

I bought myself tulips

yellow opening
in the white house

I told you to leave
and called you back

ESSAY ON TALENT

Being almost immediately identified as a smallmouth prodigy from birth, I have always been close to my mother. This is true despite my having hurt her feelings early on when I was unable to accept her regular sized nipple, compelling her to advertise for and quickly hire an exceptionally small nipples wet nurse who proved difficult to find and expensive to transport. Moreover, my mother recognized my mouthtalent and tailored our lives around its preservation. I was raised for many years on a diet of almost exclusively small round candies which my mother bit in half and moistened for me alongside lemon juice so that my mouth was perpetually pulled into a puckering position which my mother explained would continuously train my mouth muscles to shrink and stiffen while I was still growing and these little muscles remained particularly plastic. I was of course homeschooled only in the loosest sense of the word—my mother fearing my unusual diet would make me a natural target for ridicule by other large sandwich eating mouthed children. Much in the way my unusual education brought us closer together, we avoided all trips to the dentist and this further developed our sense of being co-conspirators bucking middle-class convention. When I was still a very small child, I could not even be sure that I had teeth as they were too small to see and so crammed together and my mouth parted so very slightly when I ate and as I was strictly instructed by her to never part it wider lest I start to stretch it out. However, when I was a slightly larger small child, I had a mouth ache so tremendous I cried day and night until my angel mother who was forced to make an appointment with a nearby dentist and allow him to examine my smallmouth. My mother spent these hours at Dr. Carmicle's by my mouthside, breathing heavily and scolding him whenever he reflexively attempted to use his tool or finger to widen my mouth wider than she believed to be absolutely necessary in order for him to pull each snowcapped nerve end out that they may never trouble us again. But before we could finish taking off my paper baby bib and make our escape, I saw that the dentist had called his wife and children and secretary and hygienists over to see my prodigy mouth and I had to stand for several minutes and blush and nod and shake in answer to their questions but dared not open my mouth one bit as it was so sore and full of blood and as I could not stomach the thought of a single drop's escape.

CHAMISA

Do I want to be good

*swallow flies every night
trouble the same earth
pass current between metal plates*

It's true; I am *a small person*
too busy picking pith from my teeth

*(I'm sorry to have missed the meeting
to discuss the other, unsuccessful meeting)*
how the sea stirs itself
your half-pound of salt
in each human body

What could we have done to each other?
*Ten years ago?
fifteen?
It's all the same blight*

Rabbitbrush is a mark of poor soil
it smells like death
but, oh, that yellow

a few days a year

If I were to ever ...

We will never
layer white, leaded light

It would be the end of me

(Is it dark enough

to talk about this)

the sharp flare of your cheek

You know what the song says

It's wrong;

I don't get what I need

THE JAILS

The jails, they're full of prisoners. Why are they full of prisoners? Because everyone's doing drugs or selling them. Why is everyone doing drugs or selling them? Because they're bored and desperate. Why are they bored and desperate? Because they have no work. Why don't they have work? Because the jobs went away. Why did the jobs go away? Because the bosses put in robots. Why did the bosses put in robots? Because robots don't ask questions. Why don't robots ask questions? Because they don't have minds. Why don't they have minds? Because the scientists haven't gotten that far. Why haven't the scientists gotten that far? Because the government won't fund them. Why won't the government fund them? Because they're funding the army. Why are they funding the army? So we can fight. Why should we fight? Because we have enemies. Why do we have enemies? Because we're always interfering. Why are we interfering? Because we're better than they are. Why are we better than they are? Because we're free. Why are we free? Because we waged a war to worship our own gods. Why did we wage a war to worship our own gods? Because we felt oppressed. Why did we feel oppressed? Because they put us in the jails.

WHY SOME GIRLS KEEP MOVING

It's just that there are so many

 chairs. The large one sighs
under my weight engulfs my fears
 promises to hold me
 no matter what. A smaller one
shoves me forward onto my toes
 says *sit up you* and like
 any hungry child

I keep shifting. Soft chairs hard
 chairs, chairs that spin. Someplace to
 settle

whatever that means. Like a matryoshka
 I peel off personas drape them on furniture
stand there bare among the hulls.
 It's embarrassing maybe this one maybe that.

Maybe never. Frost accumulates
 on the panes. Sometimes there are
 eyes in the woods outside
 sometimes a girl's voice whispers
run.

COMPILATION

AFTER *THE AGE OF CONSENT*

Ran there—turned there—to a small market village in the U.K. with a castle—*Run away—turn away—run away—turn away*—I came out when this song came out—not in the N.H. valley where the worn down mountains protected?—me?—a city-boy who climbed out of a man—a man well-before his voice changed—running & turning.

BEING CARRIED ON A LITTER BY TWO SHIRTLESS BODYBUILDERS TO “JUSTIFY MY LOVE” AT THE CARGO CLUB

It rained that afternoon like most others & all the genuflecting prairie dogs the dogs noticed. I was a prairie dog—now a dog.

FURTHERMORE “GOOD LIFE”

Released in late ‘88 in the U.K. where I studied distance, but this song is about my spell in San Francisco. I digress: Rimbaud who used exclamation points in his first lines & I believe well before syphilis, but how many episodes between the last time & his demise. Back in San Francisco & a hate crime in the Castro—perhaps they sensed the vulnerability my father caused—near the corner of 18th where I, with two other young gays likely dead now, were promoting THE BOX, a venue for dancing L’s, G’s & B’s—this song blaring as I pulsed innocence all before.

FURTHERMORE “DO YOU REALLY WANT TO HURT ME”

Blue hair extensions at a salon near Kensington Station: is this why I went to the U.K. in the first place? Why I returned stylistically toned-down & bodily toned-up a decade later? & fell in love? I haven’t been back—*I could waste a thousand years.*

LISTENING TO “I DO NOT WANT WHAT I HAVEN’T GOT” WHILE DRIVING THE KANCAMAGUS

Cadence dictated how I drove, as if the car was my body & then the road too, an out-of-body experience as I headed west on the winding 56 miles. I didn’t know loss then like I know it now. *& I love my boy... I don’t want him to be aware that there’s any such thing as grieving* reminds me of my mom, though she didn’t lose her teenage son to suicide. It could’ve been me, but perhaps I felt the lyrics of others.

AFTER LEARNING

Bought the CD at Sonic Boom. After, I looked for salmon—Chinook. Instead, saw apparitions of them ghosting the ladders. Then flipped pinball. I passed on the sensory deprivation tank & the museum was closed. When is me. Sorry about all the questions here. Later I write, “The rock. Water molecules. The body’s always different...”

FURTHERMORE “UNDER PRESSURE”

We are all definitions of *record* & *recording*. I might even be human. Would you like to accompany me for a tahini brown-butter donut after a brisk walk at Mt. Auburn’s? Or perhaps a cheese & pickle sandwich with some warm broth in a thermos we share? in a potter’s field on the other side of the state? Please remember we have yet to meet.

LISTENING TO MAX RICHTER’S “THE DEPARTURE” ON REPEAT

I overheard the botanist say to high schoolers at the public gardens, “Look behind the flower for the swollen base.” It took my breath away & a young woman, in the periphery of her peers, noticed. She continued to look without it feeling like a stare, as if I was standing in shallow quicksand. I didn’t feel shame at first, then walked away and only looked back once. I imagined myself just before out of sight.

FURTHERMORE “YOU”

How could you ever leave me without a chance to try? Why aren’t there different words in English for each kind of loss? Earlier in the shower I said to myself, “I am proud of you.” I’m clean. Wonder why I get emotional when men are kind to one another. You’re often in the background & sometimes not even whispering. If I stop punishing myself will you surface?

FRAGMENTS II

You could bind the canon in skin, or parchment.
But the truth was on pottery shards. The inconsequential.

We are most honest when unprepared. Struck truthful
in a moment of terror, without pen or paper. Write faster.

Terror is always forthcoming. Like pressure on a specific point,
which trickles outwards to reveal our honest faults. Splinter here.

My people invent *kintsugi*. Less a technique and more a faith.
Faith: that form erupts magnificent from the broken thing. Scar paint.

We are helpless in the face of confession. In her upturned chin,
begging, "Admit. Admit you need me. Admit you need love." I split.

In the way the broken vessel is helpless to pour. No matter
how much it tries to hold itself to a standard of function. Spill out.

Gather up your dreams. Gather up the things you have named "dreams,"
which are just the chipped plates of your dropped stars. Don't cry.

Did you know tears are sieved blood? Spit, too. We are just
one leaky vessel trying to keep everything in. Keep trying.

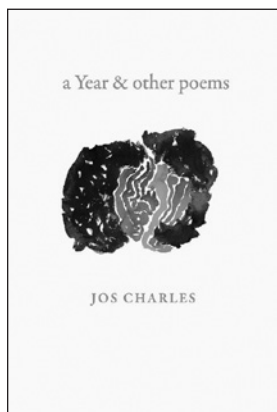
could I stand on it. would I sink
in to my knees before I came
upon my mother and her Mary,
who I can't believe in,
how long would I stand before I
too was enveloped in the cold of the
airborne particle. how much longer
must she be dead
before she doesn't
recognize my face.
it's a needle still
the cloud I have
been insisting
on the image that
I don't want to see
the image I want kept
clouded and forever
far from the crystalline
such a definition.
always, again.
a needle.

HYDRANGEA

I smell water in the air here, it's water the air here
that fills a bubble so unlike a diamond
to return to the air a feeble stone in its
sound chirped through
vibrate and empty
so unlike a diamond
you carved on the bed so far
are mine in an earth place
radiolocate the marveling body in
clear water over clear water another cellophane
layer and the ocean below the ocean is dark
somehow I've touched only
the first ten feet true how this particle
and the far particle are
the same in time and so outside
of it I changed
my density changed my
mind for a plenty and deeper likeness
the blossoming multiple
loosening capsule
an excellent fiber
the sea-den is wrapped in velvet
you've welcomed the gentle thing to eat it
baby ocean baby-fur-foam liken to
a quiet sort
absorbed in its saltshine the untold swarms from a
cup shape of a seed filling
many-headed the diamond pulls a face
from a crown

A YEAR & OTHER POEMS
BY JOS CHARLES
(Milkweed Editions, 2022)

REVIEW BY MILLIE TULLIS



In her third poetry collection, *a Year & other poems*, Jos Charles explores time, environment, and longing through her lyric, expansive forms. As its title suggests, this collection is built around a long poem, “a Year,” which is divided into twelve sections named after each month. Several shorter poems open and close the collection. Charles’ poems frequently echo across time and space, yet the images in her poems root the reader in the speaker’s localized environment. These are poems that recognize the speaker’s dead in her present, and collective history in the materiality of our language.

The collection’s first poem, “LIKE YOU” introduces the reader to the way many of Charles’ poems will move. Charles often utilizes imagistic short lines and informative leaps of white space. Charles’ collection offers forms that feel fresh and expansive throughout, and the widely spaced lines of “LIKE YOU” introduce her reader to this effect:

square pin calendars to walls

& hear, I have heard, of inventories of

names dead unspoken

as if the first.

The speaker’s beloved you(s) haunt and echo throughout the collection, which Charles dedicated “for the lost—.” In the “January” section of “a Year,” Charles writes,

Rosemary

dead Naomi at the clinic

Leah in the hospice in bed

& debt Throwing a book

to the thresher a poet read

So much less than our

nakedness a chorus

a garland

of changing names

Charles' short, image-heavy lines collapse the space between present observation and the remembered absence of the lost beloveds. In the beginning of "February" the speaker seems prompted to remembrance by rhyme: "heard a pool deflate / Monday you would be / twenty-eight." Charles reminds us that the dead are always tied to our sense of time. The powerful effect of quiet remembrance, "Monday you would be / twenty-eight," also recalls the everyday nature of grief.

Charles' poems frequently give the reader a sense of rooted, localized time through her sharp, documenting images. The reader may feel that she too is walking past the "faded fence a pear / rot in the sun" and observing alongside the speaker. In "January," Charles describes a woman on the beach:

*between us stooping
to rock a woman rises
armful of color of
evening
kelp.*

Charles creates effective images of these otherwise quotidian moments through her combination of careful sentences and the surprising, often energizing line breaks and rhythms that slow her reader and emphasize each detail of the unfolding image.

The smallness of many of her poems coupled with her informative use of white space allow readers to linger on these quiet images with the speaker. Charles begins "January" with an image-rooted landscape, "desert hills all / aflame." She then allows the reader to step into the window and look through the screen at

*... The old hopes
an oak shook through a screen*

Our separate smoke

caught

in the same ascent Months

I move in you

Charles' frequent and carefully crafted use of white space lets her reader dwell in silence as well as language. Throughout this collection, Charles' poems invite her reader to move a little slower, to listen longer, and to look.

The images in this collection often illustrate an intermingling between the self and her environment. The beginning of "July" might remind Charles' reader of the opening of "January." Six months later, California burns again:

... California

a fire my mind

entirely

a house of cinder in

a house of cinder

Charles' forms and images often collapse the space between the speaker's body and the images that compose her world. By bringing the fire into the speaker's body, Charles powerfully reflects the significant, and increasingly damaging, relationship between our burning landscapes and ourselves.

Charles' poems speak through an "I" that is continually conscious of and interacting with her past through language. In "March," she writes:

The hour has an understory

I was a child pulling grass in the understory

dissembling until we met When I'd

pull branch to ledge & sing all

afternoon one song

atop another

The strange and powerful image of "one song / atop another" reflects the frequent stacking effect of many of Charles' lines, as well as the present's intimate relationship with the past. Charles' poems create lyric space where the personal past is rendered present.

Charles' collection
offers forms
that feel fresh and
expansive ...

In “October,” Charles mingles the present with memory and myth to remarkable effect, showing the weight of cultural and historical memory on the self. She begins by asking, “& were you alive / last it rained”? The speaker then dips into a memory of “sisters ahead la la / they said if we could / la la no.” The speaker describes herself with a familiar image from myth, the Spartans hiding in the belly of the Trojan horse: “my brain la / a living horse wooden / soldiers in it.” In “December,” Charles writes,

*(Such silence sudden
now in the clearing A tarp
chains the lot of our speech*

Sunday

*no women washing at the washing
stones The past is the only
the only mutable thing)*

By blending the past and present through image and attentive line work, Charles’ poems begin to embody the powerful ways we carry the past, personal and collective, with us.

Charles’ poems are expansive in their language and forms, and gorgeously rendered. Reading these poems, I remembered May Swenson’s preface from *Poems to Solve*. Swenson describes how “a poem, read for the first time, can offer the same pleasure as opening a wrapped box. There is anticipation of untying an intriguing knot of words, of unloosing all their intimations like loops, of lifting out—as if from under cover—an unexpected idea or fresh sensation.” *a Year & other poems* is full of this “fresh sensation.” And like a box from myth, the contents expand far beyond their container. These poems are generally small on the page. They tread softly. And they create powerful lyric spaces in time where meaning lingers, echoes.

NOTE FROM APPARENT MAGNITUDE TO LUMINOSITY

Take a second to disregard the yawning pupils
of the telescope-tethered. I know you've been busy

with energy, energy, energy—how much something
puts out, how to measure it. I want for a second to ask:

what does all that output matter if everyone else is
too far away to sample the shine? Look, I remember

that summer I woke up one day and you had
inexplicably dimmed 70.25%. It wasn't just

observable as less shedding of charged particles,
I could see myself through you in the mirror. When I called

for breakfast, you walked through the couch. The closer you
got to me, the clearer you became—I could again see the lines

of your face as ghost currents, as the worry of week-late
rent. But as you backed away, you were just the AC wisping

the sediment of the room, asking the shadows if shadow
were a function of brightness or the gulf between light

and what eats it. After a few days you brightened again. It
probably had to do with a series of late-night phone calls

or a letter you got you pressed close to your chest. Not this letter,
not that time, like brightness couldn't be relative, but I would have

recognized my own handwriting. Anyway, with your normal
gleam restored you drifted out the door, down the highway,

not nearly as bright as the shadow you had just been, not nearly
anything I could measure without interval, without the wide

gap between observation and location, the intimate comparison
of what one throws off and what another can catch.

ON LOCATION

The stars are just as bright in the day, but our eyes
hide them like the wall behind a movie screen, the reel
to reel unfurling here before us. The color has thinned

enough I can barely make out the violet sky above the limbs,
the downed signs, the spindled cables. A muffled child
says a cloud killed his cow, reached down and kicked

it off the ground. In the background, a boy sits on a drenched
hill, his feet dug in the mud. Some girls below paint the space
behind his shoulders yellow and blue and green. I know this

is not here. The film has changed hands enough no one
knows exactly where it came from. If the sky would just
relent, we could read the constellations, could fix

the scene's position via triangulation. I slip between the screen
and wall and see the boy backwards. I feel us call to the others
to climb. They laugh but they rise. One begins the hike.

The boy and I turn to her then say, *if the clouds come, from here
we can beat them away.*

ON SILENCE

On the ridges unspooling from each
finger where habits were
formed, where I learned texture
and gesture and moisture
and specific heat. On the careful
pauses between words, between
breaths, between skin sounds
and shivers. On the long
light that whispered across the morning
to say you have found something,
uncovered a stone laid
rainbow against the warm sand. On the tongue,
not just the tip, the laser line
of flavors and how they
symphonize to mean exactly
one thing. On that thing
and how hard it is to say.

BETTER TO ASK FORGIVENESS THAN PERMISSION

My thing lately has been acting like an expert on matters I've no business commenting on. "Maximalism didn't pick up steam in the Tokyo Underground until Decades after the Great Invasion"—that kind of thing. So when I say "It's not that night is some different animal" please know I am mostly shit-full and floundering. "I'm just here for the cookies," my dad would say, hands up like a robber, when he crossed some well known line of etiquette. It could be I'm in the first few miles on the road to nihilism, so many zeroes and black holes out there. But look at the number six: it truly looks like a swish of a saber, or peering down from above at a dancing ghost. I'm sorry if you've come to this place for insight. Try Jeff of ten years ago. He was always crashing cymbals, bleeding tears, piling up his dead in such a pitiable shrine. But of course his fatal flaw was that of the young chef in the kitchen: flourish on flourish until everything tastes like one long drum solo of nothing. And anyway he didn't understand chasing wisdom makes as much sense as teaching Spanish to a fish. Better to leave him there throwing his blue rubber ball against a wall. Let him see the number nine in its trajectory, a blue out in the open like an animal he might catch.

A SNAKE NAMED RUSTY

I guess we're here to be amazed. Either that or we're here to be choked. Either that or...the list expands like exclamation marks at the end of god's name. We live like this: right foot *fear*, left hand *hope*. Sometimes, at takeoffs, say, or before going under for a minor procedure, we ask: what is magic again? The plane whirs or you breathe the goofy air, touching god or god touches you. Gabriel is wearing your face announcing a list of fucked things you've done. You wake feeling like an astronaut who's lost touch with Mission Control. Your brother was going to tell you something before you went. You could tell it was important by the way he approached each word. You know one of you will live perhaps for years without the other. There'd be whole new chapters with novel subplots and characters. Maybe he gets a snake named Rusty. Maybe you take up running with ostriches and bulls. Right hand *Red Rover*, left foot *You're It*. I don't know about you but I know about me. If you give me a fiddle with broken strings that's a kind of music. Right knee *Bloody*, left knee *arthritis*. First home flooded, last home gone. Fourth job failed, seventh job failing. I don't want to scare you but there are ants oozing from the gashed skull of this pomegranate. What would you give, to carry on like them? To carry your dead, their earthly weight, or live in the honeycomb of a loved one's head, busy at your trade, shaken free like those boys my brother held upside down when he was as large as the god behind god? Doesn't it make you want to kiss everything? Put on your bright pads and roller skates? Or do you even care? Do you just want to know what I've done with that fiddle?

MORE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN TO BERLIN THAN I HAVE

You start the day with a Google search: Has Zeno's Paradox been solved? That problem of halves and distance. How, no matter how miniscule the margin between a moving object's starting point and its end, it never, for mathly reasons, arrives. So the arrow shot at the prince's head is forever closing distance, the plane doesn't reach the tower, and endless decades of war never kick off. But then, we counter, it did. So what gives? Moving goal posts, maybe, a hidden thumb on the scales. We'll get to that bridge when we come to it, my father said Yogi Berra often said. I've been admiring this Escher sentence which is a sentence that lands on the surface of the mind easily but soon becomes strange because it doesn't quite have a meaning. It remains in this state of having no clear communicative property other than to communicate strangeness. It is the linguistic equivalent of a staircase joined at four corners, forever going up, or even just a few hours on earth in whatever century you happen to be reading this. Here I am, we say, pronounceable as the letter b in thumb, lamb, honeycomb, bomb. And does it just keep going? Does anything happen? In a sense, I am reading these words as I write them, surprised as you or maybe more when the two marooned hikers find a ranger outpost and in that outpost a frozen body, masked, and when one hiker takes off the mask she does not see the face of her father or even herself though in other versions of this story something just like that happens (the dead man is wearing blue gloves like her mother used to before cancer's wildfire) symbolizing what, exactly? Here is a hand outstretched, stranger, grab it and with me approach but never arrive where we're going. More people have thrown a shoe at the president than I have. See how it works? How meaning like a little league team comprised entirely of tiny Jesuses can break any law, can allow you to press both buttons, the orange one that says comprehending, and the green one that says *huh*? When it was his turn to order lunch the Buddha approached the hot dog cart and said: *make me one with everything*. You'd have laughed had you been there. Hell, you might've wanted that, too.

VISITATION HALF REMEMBERED

If my dad ignited, I never saw it.
Corners enough in the Bronx for him
to grow tall in shade.

He'd've had a hard time now,
all the covers off and people showing
their gorgeous everywhere.

He kept the sharp stuff
in the galley kitchen by stove light
fizzing like a G & T.

In that apartment of hotel tables,
beveled edges, palms and shining
snake plants, hefty trays ashed

but clean, we watched
all the films in the canon.
We laughed our faces off.

EQUINOX

When I'm back to the lake,
mudbone and nettle milk,

when I coil down through
root and gravel where

underground creeks
wash me elemental

and the earth tilts me
through the silt veil,

and back to the lake,
when I fret the yellow grass

and forget the need to float
arm-wide and upward-bright,

when I gentle my way
to the lake, I won't be gone,

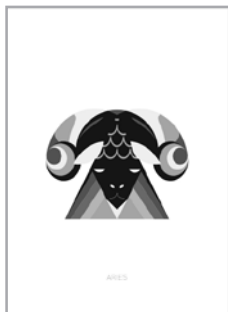
only there now, back
at its clay-deep center

covered over in that fine,
original surprise of green.

SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

ARS POETICA: A ZODIAC FOR POETS



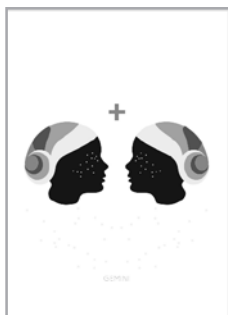
ARIES: *March 21 to April 19*

A poem, for Aries initiates origin stories, sentences that begin as symbols that refer to prime language, prime touch, prime memory, prime word. Less interested in the firsts of the world; more in tune with the world of firsts. At play with intimacy. At one with personal evolution. Hot house flowers planted year-round.



TAURUS: *April 20 to May 20*

A poem, for Taurus decants vintage words: intimation, muddle, burnish, beset. Unable to imagine without touching the thing, word-hands of Taurus reach incessantly for texture, text, context. When a true vintage is found, why mess with a good thing? Drink here. Eat from this plate. Fullness culminates in the red wine stain on the white windowsill.



GEMINI: *May 21 to June 20*

A poem, for Gemini travels along old trade routes, under overpasses, down abandoned dirt roads, along cobblestone paths near known rivers. Unwilling to linger very long, Gemini carries a leather satchel and gathers necessary bits, unexpected pieces. All to unload, and to reassemble as poems of the Found.



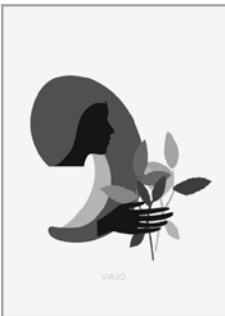
CANCER: *June 21 to July 22*

A poem, for Cancer intuits the past. Is intuiting the past a thing? Is pulling the past forward an exercise? Never one for the glare of the present, Cancer spends each evening lighting candles, sharpening pencils, brewing tea; stepping between worlds. Maestro, conductress, shapeshifter. Liminal symbols apace.



LEO: *July 23 to August 22*

A poem, for Leo performs or rather outperforms all counterparts. The wooden floorboards of the stage, familiar down to the grain. Word and action blocked for comedic timing, deep feeling, relatability. Yet, one never breaks the fourth wall. Iambic monologues leap from hot, stage lights into seated laps. The sun opens amidst the stilled audience.



VIRGO: *August 23 to September 22*

A poem, for Virgo dissects, diagrams and visualizes before anything is put to paper, before anything is spoken. Sometimes, when the word is finally set to paper, it is a sadness. Without the background of gray matter, the word feels naked. Yet, in the touchdown of gravity and open air, and transformation, the word becomes real. This is good.



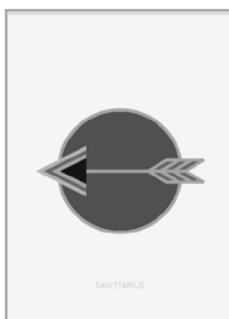
LIBRA: *September 23 to October 22*

A poem, for Libra harmonizes. *Be congruous, be consonant, they will say and yet, they do not fear discord. All symmetry, in rhyme with asymmetry, is a tension of opposites. Can a line of poetry act like an asana? Two arms stretched in two different directions, yet striking an exquisite balance. Where did that emerald hourglass come from?*



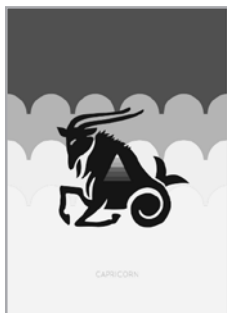
SCORPIO: *October 23 to November 21*

A poem, for Scorpio possesses the password-keys to cryptic code. Words as incantation, chant, invocation, conjuration, magic, spell, rune. A star pyramid, hexagram, a coin toss with pentacles, shrewd manifestor of destiny. Why do we make so much of sibilants? Is it because of the friction of consonants hot against the tongue?



SAGITTARIUS: *November 22 to December 21*

A poem, for Sagittarius activates a buffet of adjectives doing the good work of enhancing real world things. What better role is there? To intensify what at first looks mundane? Unafraid of growth, there stands a pair of boots at the ready, scuffed leather, primed to march for the glory of nouns.



CAPRICORN: *December 22 to January 19*

A poem, for Capricorn builds in the golden light of fall aspens, that thing of beauty that is often referred to as simple. The poem is set upon the tree, love poems speaking of who loves who. Carved hearts. Plus-signs. Bark tattoos. Why do we ignore the poetry set into trees? Here lies the quaking map of love.



AQUARIUS: *January 20 to February 18*

A poem, for Aquarius revolutionizes any hope to speak in formed verse. It is not the sonnets' fault that it is boxed in. The sonnet has its charms. It's just that, verse should be free. How else can you ride the wild voice, that sits at the base of the spine, or at the top of the skull, or in the arch of one's left foot, all places where inspiration begins?



PISCES: *February 19 to March 20*

A poem, for Pisces swims upon the wake of whales. Grand tales. Echolocation. Clicks that cannot translate to air. It is only underwater that we communicate. Opaque mirror. Salty dissolution. What is the measure of a wavelength? What does it feel like to hold water-laden sentences? Is the dream of breathing underwater only for the unawake?

SUGAR SUITES



Sugar Suites houses work that explores our diverse and rapidly changing mediascape, where images, sounds, and interactive elements complicate and illuminate more traditional modes of poetic expression.



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audio poem



AN UNSETTLED SCORE

Transcript of Audio:

There are days where I'm walking down the street, amidst a crowd of people and umbrellas, and I am sure that the world is going to end.

I am running out of paper. My fingers are covered in graphite and ink. I've been making grids, charts, graphs. Every notebook I have is pages full of little boxes, left empty.

The thing is, I don't have the right syllables anymore. They left, along with you.

It is raining again. The rain makes less sense now. Numbers help. Counting helps. If only there was an integer for raindrops.

Perhaps there is joy in unraveling.

visual poem



SMALL HARD MOMENTS

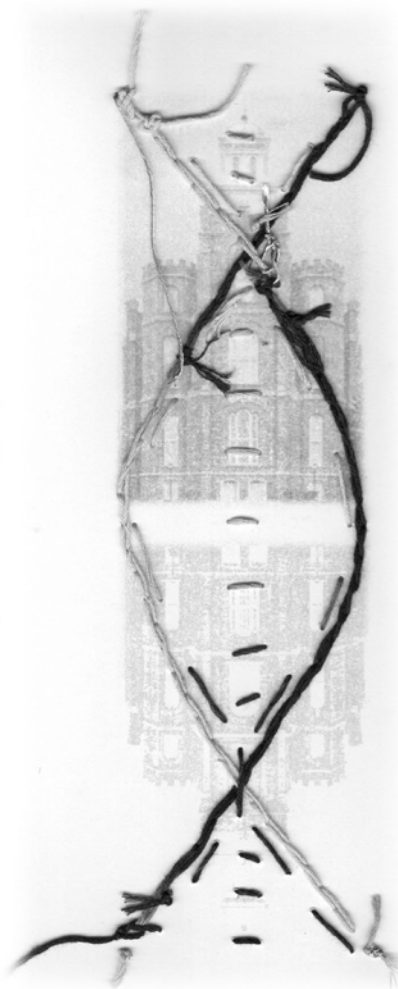
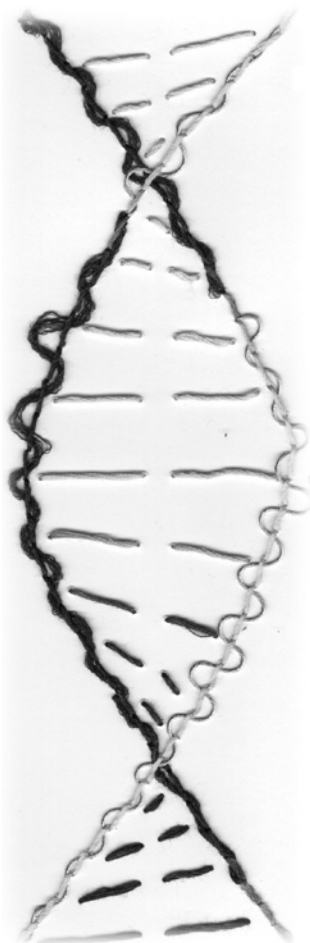


poem + embroidery = poembroidery



O, HOT DOCTRINE OF O

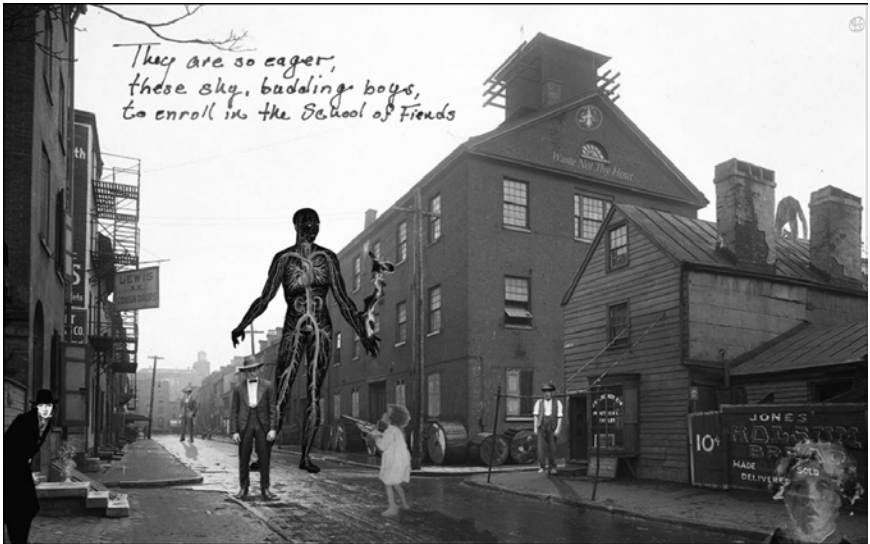
In the dream I descend flights of stairs in the foyer of a Mormon church searching for the glass double doors that will take me to open air gambrels of sky I descend descend descend and find more stairs I walk faster and faster grasping the bannister and now I'm running dry mouth trembling hands fumbling feet over steps no longer steps but carpet slides and still no doors oh hell where are the doors I frantic down another flight into a sudden parlor the grandfather clock's soft tick the lace curtains sunstruck in west-facing windows the organ's still keys and pedals the spill of roses on the sofa the oil painting of Grandma and Grandpa in all-white clothes posing in front of Logan Temple the familial hearth flanked by a dozen of Grandma's dolls some porcelain some plastic the poster my Grandma displays of her polygamist ancestors my ancestors who booked passage from Liverpool to Louisiana to join the Latter-Day Saints in Zion's blooming and on the trail near Ash Hollow a woman with my name my mother's name my grandmother's name who buried her mother beneath a cairn of stones a pioncerium and I'm with her decaying bones wrapped in the same quilt the weight of those stones on my body like a bell my blood ringing loud O hot doctrine O cells honeystung and I'm also always in my grandparents' parlor the glass door will release me to the street lined with lindens and lampposts where Grandma and Grandpa have lived as long as memory I see that door and know I'm a latter-day stain and this house is the house of my descendency my house of faith I can't ever



visual haiku



THE SCHOOL OF FIENDS



ARTIST STATEMENT: "The School of Fiends" is one of a series of visual poems I call Vaiku, or visual haiku, not strictly syllabic but Western haiku, to use Kerouac's term, brief illuminations rendered in the haiku spirit. They capture various moods or tones, at times playful and whimsical, at other times exploring deeper themes but always attempting to be in tune with the haiku's sense of the heightened moment. As with this piece, my visual poetry is drawn from public domain materials with hand-painted and/or hand-drawn elements. The quote "waste not thy hour" appearing on the entablature of the brick building on the right is from Omar Khayyam.

- Stephen Ackerman, *Late Life*, Silverfish Review Press, 2022
- Courtney Peppernel, *The Way Back Home*, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2022
- Erin Wilson, *Blue*, Circling Rivers Press, 2022
- Jeffrey Banks & Maritza Rivera, *Diaspora Café: D.C.*, Day Eight Books, 2022
- Diana Raab, *An Imaginary Affair*, Finishing Line Press, 2022
- Marjorie Maddox, *Begin With a Question*, Paraclette Press, 2022
- Marjorie Maddox, *Heart Speaks, Is Spoken For*, Shanti Arts Publishing, 2022
- Darren C. Demaree, *clawing at the grounded moon*, April Gloaming, 2022
- Tim Hunt, *Voice to Voice in the Dark*, Broadstone Books, 2022
- Wendy Drexler, *Notes from the Column of Memory*, Terrapin Books, 2022
- T.K. Lee, *Scapegoat*, Unsolicited Press, 2022
- Benjamin Niespodziany, *No Further Than the End of the Street*, Okay Donkey Press, 2022
- K. Iver, *Short Film Starring My Beloved's Red Bronco*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Christopher Brean Murray, *Black Observatory*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Ama Codjoe, *Bluest Nude*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Ed Pavlič, *Call It In the Air*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Virginia Aronson, *Little Smiling Hooks*, Cyberwit.net, 2022

If you are interested in reviewing a poetry book for *Sugar House Review*, email our review editor, Michael McLane, at reviews@sugarhousereview.com.

ELLERY BECK is an undergraduate student majoring in English at Salisbury University. A winner of the 2019 AWP Portland Flash Contest and a Pushcart nominee, they are the founding interview editor for *The Shore Poetry* and a poetry reader for *Poet Lore*. They have poems published in *Colorado Review*, *Zone 3*, *The Pinch*, *Fugue*, *Slipstream*, and elsewhere. Ellery is also one of the co-founders of *Beaver Magazine*.

ACE BOGGESS is author of six books of poetry, including *Escape Envy* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2021), *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, and *The Prisoners*. His writing has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, WV, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble.

RONDA PISZK BROATCH is the author of *Lake of Fallen Constellations*, (MoonPath Press). She is the recipient of an Artist Trust GAP Grant. Ronda's journal publications include *Fugue*, *Blackbird*, *2River*, *Sycamore Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Palette Poetry*, and NPR News / KUOW's *All Things Considered*. She is a graduate student working toward her MFA at Pacific Lutheran University's Rainier Writing Workshop.

SARAH C. BROCKHAUS is a creative writing student at Salisbury University from Omaha, NE. She has poems published or forthcoming in *The Shore*, *Broadkill Review*, *Ocean State Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. One of her poems has been nominated for Best of the Net. When she's not writing she enjoys playing volleyball and drinking coffee.

J.L. CONRAD'S first full-length collection of poems, *A Cartography of Birds*, was published by Louisiana State University Press (2002). Her chapbook *Not If But When* won *Salt Hill's* third annual Dead Lake Chapbook Competition (Salt Hill, 2016), and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Pleiades*, *Salamander*, *H_Ngm_N*, *Jellyfish*, *River Styx*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Laurel Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Birdfeast*, and *Forklift, Ohio*, among others.

LGBTQ+ artist, NEA and MacDowell Fellow, and former Key West Poet Laureate, FLOWER CONROY'S books include *Snake Breaking Medusa Disorder*, *A Sentimental Hairpin*, and *Greenest Grass (or You Can't Keep Killing Yourself & Not Expect to Die)*. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *American Literary Review*, *The Yale Review*, and elsewhere.

STEVEN CRAMER'S six poetry collections include *Listen* (MadHat Press, 2020), named a "must read" by the Massachusetts Center for the Book; *Clangings* (Sarabande Books, 2012); and *Goodbye to the Orchard* (Sarabande, 2004), a Sheila Motton Prize-winner and a Massachusetts Honor Book. Published in *The*

Atlantic Monthly, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, et al., and recipient of Massachusetts Cultural Council and NEA fellowships, he founded and currently teaches in Lesley University's Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing.

JIMMIE CUMBIE lives in Chicago. His poems have appeared in numerous online and print publications, most recently in *Plume*, *North American Review*, *Spillway*, and *Midwestern Gothic*. Cumbie has been involved in Chicago's rich theater scene, having had his plays produced at A Red Orchid, Stage Left, Bailiwick, Voltaire, and various regional festivals.

SARA DALLMAYR is originally from Kalamazoo, MI, where she attended Western Michigan University. Dallmayr's work has appeared in *Laurel Review*, *Third Coast*, *High Shelf Press*, *SWWIM*, and elsewhere. Dallmayr works for the post office as a rural carrier. She currently lives in South Bend, IN with her husband and cats.

JULIE DEBOER is a poet and psychotherapist living in Seattle, WA. Her work is forthcoming in *Bracken Magazine*.

JAMES DIAZ is the author of *This Someone I Call Stranger* (Indolent Books, 2018), *All Things Beautiful Are Bent* (Alien Buddha, 2021), and the forthcoming *Motel Prayers* (Alien Buddha, 2022). They are the founding editor of the online, literary arts journal and intentional community *Anti-Heroic Chic*. Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Thrush Poetry Journal*, *Corporeal*, *The Madrigal*, *The Lumiere Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *Selcouth Station*, *Moss Puppy*, *Apricity*, and *Wrong Doing Mag*. They live in upstate New York.

JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ is a 2017 NEA Poetry Fellow. He is the author of *The Fire Eater* (Texas Review Press, 2020). His work appears in *The American Poetry Review*, *Bennington Review*, *Chestnut Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Georgia Review*, *Huizache*, *Iowa Review*, *The Journal*, *Los Angeles Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Poetry*, *Southeast Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Witness Magazine*, *The Yale Review*, and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading Anthology 2011*. He teaches creative writing online and edits for *Frontier Poetry*.

ROBERT DUNSDON has had a varied career, during which he has been published in poetry magazines, anthologies, and newspapers.

KERRY JAMES EVANS is the author of *Bangalore* (Copper Canyon), a Lannan Literary Selection. The recipient of a 2015 NEA Fellowship and a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship from Sewanee Writers' Conference, his poems have appeared in *Agni*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, and elsewhere. He lives in Milledgeville, GA, where he teaches in the MFA program at Georgia College & State University and serves as the poetry editor for *Arts & Letters*.

JUDITH FOX wrote nonfiction articles for national magazines, but didn't start studying and writing poetry seriously until the spare text she wrote for her award-winning photography book, *I Still Do: Loving and Living with Alzheimer's*, rekindled a life-long love of poetry. She is a finalist for BLR's spring 2022 poetry prize and her poems appear in a number of journals and reviews. Fox is also a fine art photographer; her photographs have been exhibited globally and are in museum collections including LACMA, VMFA, MOPA, and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin. Fox is twice-widowed, lives in Los Angeles, and is working on a chapbook currently titled: "Between Verse and Chorus." JudithFox.com.

MAG GABBERT is the author of the forthcoming collection *Sex Depression Animals* (Mad Creek Books, 2023), winner of the 2021 The Journal Charles B. Wheeler Prize in Poetry, and the chapbook *Miniml Poems* (Cooper Dillon Books, 2020). Her work can also be found in *American Poetry Review*, *Pleiades*, *The Paris Review Daily*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Waxwing*, and elsewhere. Mag has a PhD from Texas Tech University and an MFA from The University of California at Riverside; she's received poetry fellowships from Idyllwild Arts and Poetry at Round Top; and, in 2021, she was awarded a 92Y Discovery Award. She teaches at Southern Methodist University and serves as the interviews editor for *Underblong Journal*.

SIDNE K. GARD is a writer and artist studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Their work is interdisciplinary, blending the lines between poetry, art, and technology. They have a regular column at *F News Magazine*, "Loving the Monster," which focuses on monsters in media and how those monsters represent the world. In high school, they received a Certificate of Artistry at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts. Now they are focused on exploring how to use new medias like audio and coding along with traditional forms like comics, fashion, and illustration to further their poetry and storytelling.

YONI HAMMER-KOSSOY is a poet, translator, and educator, whose writing appears in numerous international journals and anthologies. A graduate of the Shandy Rudoff program in creative writing at Bar Ilan University, he is the winner of the 2020 Andrea Moriah Prize in Poetry. Yoni is originally from Brooklyn, NY, and has been living in Israel with his family for more than 25 years.

NORA HIKARI is an Asian American transgender poet and artist based in Philadelphia. She is a 2022 Lambda Literary fellow, and her work is published or forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Washington Square Review*, *Palette Poetry*, *Foglifter*, *The Journal*, and others. Her chapbook, *GIRL 2.0*, was a Robin Becker Series winner and is available at Seven Kitchens Press. She was a finalist for the Red Hen Press Benjamin Saltman Award, and can be found at NorahiKari.com.

KELLY ROSE HOFFER earned an MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her first book of poems *Undershore* was selected by Diana Khoi Nguyen for the 2021 Lightscatter Press Prize, and is forthcoming in spring of 2023. Her book manuscript "Fire Series" was a finalist for the 2021 National Poetry Series. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Gulf Coast*, *Chicago Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Mississippi Review*, *Prelude*, *The Bennington Review*, and *Second Factory* from Ugly Duckling Presse, among others. She is currently pursuing a PhD in literatures in English at Cornell University. Learn more at: KellyRoseHoffer.com

LAURA REECE HOGAN is the author of *Litany of Flights* (Paraclete Press, 2020), winner of the Paraclete Poetry Prize, the chapbook *O Garden-Dweller* (Finishing Line Press), and the nonfiction book *I Live, No Longer I* (Wipf and Stock). Her poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in *Scientific American*, *RHINO*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *River Heron River*, *Cloudbank*, *DMQ Review*, and other publications. She can be found online at LauraReeceHogan.com.

CHARLOTTE HOWE is an artist and writer who lives in Salt Lake City. She retired after 21 years teaching writing and publication at Salt Lake Community College and now spends her days in her art studio making mixed media collages, linocut prints, and original artist books.

Born in an island archipelago, ITHACAN now resides somewhere north of El Paso. ithacan's published work includes visual prose and poetry, most recently in *Poemeleon*.

JENNIFER KEITH is a web content writer for Johns Hopkins Medicine. Her poems have appeared in *Sewanee Theological Review*, *The Nebraska Review*, *The Free State Review*, *Fledgling Rag*, *Unsplendid*, and elsewhere. Keith is the recipient of the 2014 John Elsberg poetry prize, and her poem "Eating Walnuts" was selected by Sherman Alexie for inclusion in *Best American Poetry 2015*. In 2021 her poem "Cooper's Hawk" was a finalist for the Erskine J. Poetry Prize from *Smartish Pace* and another poem received honorable mention in *Passager's* poetry contest. She lives in Baltimore, MD.

KATE KEARNS is a Maine poet with an MFA from Lesley University. She has published a chapbook, *How to Love an Introvert* (Finishing Line Press, 2015) and her debut full-length book is coming in 2023 from Littoral Books. Her poems have appeared in *Peregrine*, *Salamander*, *Maine Sunday Telegram*, *Northern New England Review*, *Literary Mama*, and other print and online journals. Learn more about her work at KateKearns.com.

SHEREE LA PUMA is an award-winning writer whose work has appeared in *The Penn Review*, *Redivider*, *The Maine Review*, *Rust + Moth*, and *Catamaran Literary Reader*, among others. She earned her MFA in writing from CalArts. Her poetry has been nominated for Best of The Net and the Pushcart Prize. She has a new chapbook, *Broken: Do Not Use* (Main Street Rag Publishing). ShereeLaPuma.com

MICHAEL MARK'S poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *Pleiades*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Southern Review*, *Waxwing*, and other places. He was the recipient of the Anthony Hecht Scholarship at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. MichaelJMark.com

KEVIN MCLELLAN is the author of: *In Other Words You/* (forthcoming 2023 Word Works, 2022 Hilary Tham Capital Collection winner judged by Timothy Liu), *Ornithology* (2019 Massachusetts Book Awards recipient), and *Tributary*; the book objects, *Hemispheres* (resides in the Poetry Center, University of Arizona and other special collections) and *[box]* (resides in the Blue Star Collection, Harvard University and other special collections); and the chapbook, *Round Trip*. Kevin makes videos under the name Duck Hunting with the Grammarian, and his video *Dick* won Best Short Form Short at the LGBTQ+ Los Angeles Film Festival and it also showed in the Flickers' Rhode Island Film Festival, the Tag! Queer Film Festival, the Berlin Short Film Festival, and the Vancouver Queer Film Festival. He lives in Cambridge, MA. KevMcLellan.com

JAMES MILLER is a native of the Texas Gulf Coast. He is published in *Best Small Fictions 2021* (Sonder Press) and in the *Marvelous Verses* anthology (Daily Drunk Press). Recent pieces have appeared or are forthcoming in *The McNeese Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *On the Seawall*, *Phoebe*, *Yemassee*, *The Madison Review*, *Neologism*, *Press Pause*, *Coal Hill Review*, *The Shore*, and *Indianapolis Review*. Follow on Twitter: [@AndrewM1621](https://twitter.com/AndrewM1621). JamesMillerPoetry.com.

Always drawn to water and the outdoors, JAN MINICH cruises Lake Superior's summer in a small boat, and hikes and skis Utah canyons' winters. His new book *Coming into Grace Harbor* will appear Spring 2023 from Broadstone Press. His other books include *The Letters of Silver Dollar* and *Wild Roses*. Jan lives in Wellington, UT, with his wife, poet Nancy Takacs, and their two chihuahuas.

SATI MOOKHERJEE is a poet and lyricist whose work has appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies (e.g. *Cream City Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Sonora Review*). She has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and was awarded an Artist Trust—Washington State Arts Commission Achievement Award. She has collaborated with contemporary classical composers on song cycles and individual pieces that were performed (e.g. *The Esoterics*, *Contemporary*

Chamber Composers and Players, soprano Hope Wechkin), and/or recorded (“Leaning Toward the Fiddler,” Ravello Records). Her debut poetry collection, *Eye*, was published in 2022 (Ravenna Press).

Native of Boston and Martha’s Vineyard, MA., STELIOS MORMORIS is CEO of SCENT BEAUTY, Inc. Citizen of Greece and the U.S., Stelios was born in New York, and lived most of his adult life in Paris. He has been published in *Book of Lit Matches*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Fourth River*, *Good Life Review*, *Green Hills Literary Review*, *High Shelf Press*, *Humana Obscura*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Press*, *Spillway*, *Ravens Perch*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Verse*, *Whelk Walk Review*, and other literary journals. Stelios’ debut book of poetry titled *The Oculus* was released from Tupelo Press (2022). Besides reading and writing poetry, Stelios is an avid gardener, sailor, and contemporary artist, specializing in abstract oil painting.

JANE MORTON is a poet based in Tuscaloosa, AL. They recently completed their MFA at the University of Alabama, where they were online editor for *Black Warrior Review*. Their poems are published or forthcoming in *Boulevard*, *Passages North*, *Ninth Letter*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Booth*, and *Meridian*, among other journals. They recently completed a poetry residency with Sundress Publications.

LARRY NARRON is a writer from southern California. His poems have appeared in *Phoebe*, *Bayou*, *Hobart*, *Booth*, *The Pinch*, *Slice*, *The Boiler*, and *Berkeley Poetry Review*, among others. They’ve been nominated for the Best of the Net and Best New Poets. Larry’s first chapbook, *Wasted Afterlives*, was published in 2020 by Main Street Rag.

JOHN A. NIEVES is a hardcore *Sugar House* fan. He has poems forthcoming or recently published in journals such as: *North American Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *32 Poems*, *Harvard Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. He won the Indiana Review Poetry Contest and his first book, *Curio*, won the Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award Judge’s Prize. He is associate professor of English at Salisbury University and an editor of *The Shore Poetry*. He received his MA from University of South Florida and his PhD from the University of Missouri.

DION O’REILLY’S debut book, *Ghost Dogs* (Terrapin 2020) was shortlisted for several prizes including The Catamaran Prize and The Eric Hoffer Award. Her second collection, *Sadness of the Apex Predator*, was chosen for the Portage Poetry Series out of University of Wisconsin’s Cornerstone Press and will be published in 2024. Her work appears in *The Sun*, *Rattle*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Narrative*, and *The Slowdown*, among others. She facilitates workshops with poets from all over the US and hosts a poetry podcast at *The Hive Poetry Collective*.

SUPHIL LEE PARK (수필 리 박 / 秀筆 李 朴) is the author of the poetry collection *Present Tense Complex*, winner of the Marystina Santiestevan Prize (Conduit Books & Ephemera, 2021) and a poetry chapbook, *Still Life*, selected by Ilya Kaminsky as the winner of the 2022 Tomaž Šalamun Prize, forthcoming from Factory Hollow Press in 2023. Find more about her at Suphil-Lee-Park.com.

DAYNA PATTERSON is a Thea-curious recovering Mormon, fungophile, macrophotography enthusiast, and textile artist. She's the author of *Titania in Yellow* (Porkbelly Press, 2019) and *If Mother Braids a Waterfall* (Signature Books, 2020). Her book *O Lady, Speak Again* is forthcoming from Signature Books in early 2023. Honors include the Association for Mormon Letters Poetry Award and the 2019 #DignityNotDetention Poetry Prize judged by Ilya Kaminsky. Her creative work has appeared recently in *EcoTheo*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Whale Road Review*. She's the founding editor (now emerita) of *Psalterly & Lyre* and a co-editor of *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*. In her spare time, she curates *Poetry + Fungus*, a pairing of poetry books and species from the fungal world. DaynaPatterson.com

SARA POTOCSNY is a writer living in Brooklyn, NY. She has her MFA in creative writing from Syracuse University. She has work in or forthcoming in the *Los Angeles Review*, *Nashville Review*, *Juked*, *Hobart*, *Radar*, *HAD*, *The Racket*, *Rejection Letters*, and others. You can find her on twitter at @sarapotocsny and IG at @spotocsny.

DAVID RICHARDS is a writer and software developer. He lives with his family in the Utah desert. His work appears or is forthcoming in *Nurture*, *UCity Review*, and *Indianapolis Review*. You can find him online at DavidRichardsWrites.com.

TODD ROBINSON is the author of *Mass for Shut-Ins* (Backwaters/University of Nebraska Press, 2018) and a chapbook, *Note at Heart Rock* (Main Street Rag, 2012). His work has recently appeared in *North American Review*, *Weber—The Contemporary West*, *I-70 Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *The Pinch*. He records regular book reviews for classical radio station KVNO and is an assistant professor in the Writer's Workshop at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

ISABELLE SHEPHERD is a poet from West Virginia. She now lives in Wilmington, NC, where she received her MFA from University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *DIAGRAM*, *The Journal*, *Ninth Letter*, *Redivider*, *Sixth Finch*, and elsewhere. She was a runner-up in the 2015 Pinch Literary Awards, judged by Ada Limón; a finalist in the NC State Poetry Competition, judged by Yusef Komunyakaa; and a semifinalist in YesYes Books' Pamet River Prize. More of her work and upcoming reading dates can be found on IsabelleShepherd.com.

OLIVIA M SOKOLOWSKI is a poet currently pursuing her PhD at Florida State University. She earned her MFA at University of North Carolina Wilmington and her undergraduate degree at Berry College. Her work is recently featured or forthcoming in *Lake Effect*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Peach Mag*. You can find Olivia online at OliviaSoko.com.

MELISSA STRILECKI has work recently published or forthcoming in *The Shore*, *Volume Poetry*, *Gordon Square Review*, *Faultline*, and *Rogue Agent*. She lives in Seattle.

MILLIE TULLIS is a poet and folklorist from northern Utah. She received an MFA from George Mason University in 2021 and is currently studying folklore at Utah State University. Her poetry has been published in *Rock & Sling*, *Cimarron Review*, *Juked*, *Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. She is the editor-in-chief of *Psalter & Lyre*, an online journal publishing literature at the intersection of faith and doubt. You can find her on twitter @millie_tullis.

MILES WAGGENER is the author of four books of poetry: *Phoenix Suites*, *Sky Harbor*, *Desert Center*, and most recently *Superstition Freeway*, published by The Word Works of Washington, DC. He has been the recipient of The Washington Prize as well as individual grants from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Nebraska Arts Council. His poems have appeared widely in such journals as *The Antioch Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *North American Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Cutbank*, and *Gulfcoast*. He heads the creative writing program at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

LAUREN K. WATEL'S poetry, fiction, essays, and translations have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The Nation*, *Narrative*, *Tin House*, *Antioch Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Slate*, *Colorado Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Poetry International*, *Ploughshares*, and the *Collected Poems of Marcel Proust*, among others. She was awarded a visiting artist residency at the American Academy in Rome as well as a Distinguished Fellowship at Hambidge Art Center. Her work has also won awards from *Poets and Writers*, *Moment Magazine-Karma Foundation*, and *Mississippi Review*. Her prose poem "The House She Lived In" honoring Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was set to music by Pulitzer-winning composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, and premiered at the Dallas Symphony.

ADAM D. WEEKS has a BA in creative writing from Salisbury University and is currently an elementary literacy tutor in Baltimore. He is the social media manager for *The Shore*, a poetry reader for *Quarterly West*, and a founding editor of *Beaver Magazine*. He won the 2022 Third Wednesday Poetry Contest, has been a Pushcart Prize nominee, and has poetry published or forthcoming in *Fugue*, *Poet Lore*, *Sweet: A Literary Confection*, *Sycamore Review*, *Thrush*, and elsewhere.

JEFF WHITNEY'S most recent collection, *Sixteen Stories*, is forthcoming from Flume Press. Recent poems can be found or found soon in *Adroit*, *Cherry Tree*, *Kenyon Review*, *Mudroom*, and *Poetry Northwest*. He lives in Portland, OR.

MELODY WILSON'S recent work appears in *Quartet*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *The Shore*, *Whale Road Review*, *Timberline Review*, *SWWIM*, and *Tar River Poetry*. She received the 2021 Kay Snow Award, Honorable Mention for the 2021 Oberon Poetry Award, and finalist in the 2021 Patricia Dobler Poetry Award.

HOLLI ZOLLINGER is a self-taught artist who has made a career of her talents: drawing, painting, and surface design. She is continually inspired by her surroundings living in the desert town of Moab, UT. She is highly motivated by the art of creativity and incorporates the color, texture, and pattern she sees in the world around her. Holli's work has been published and featured worldwide. HolliZollinger.com

A native of Utah, SHARI ZOLLINGER divides her time between her work as a professional astrologer and independent bookseller. She has been known to write a poetic verse or two with published work in *Sugar House Review* and *Redactions*. She recently published *Carrying Her Stone*, a collection of poems based on the work of Auguste Rodin.

SUGAR'S MISSION, VISION, VALUES



MISSION:

Sugar House Review promotes an eclectic range of poets through publishing and live events to build nationally connected literary communities and foster the literary arts in Utah.

VALUES:

Submitting work to *Sugar House Review* is an act of generosity: *Sugar House Review* is honored that poets submit their work to be considered for publication. Each submission sent to us is read by at least two readers, generally more. We are invested in our contributors and we take their work seriously.

Poetry and the literary arts are sacred vehicles through which ideas become conversations. We believe that the transaction between writer and audience, reader and listener, can teach life-affirming habits of patience, empathy, self-awareness, and critical thinking.

Sugar House Review is committed to collaborating to achieve its mission and to help like-minded organizations and partners to achieve theirs. In the past, we have worked with churches, bookstores, art galleries, advocacy groups, grant makers, coffee shops, schools, universities, individual artists, and other literary projects.

We believe that a remarkable variety of exciting things is happening in contemporary poetry. We work to assure this excitement continues by publishing and promoting as wide a range of poets, voices, and styles as possible.

We celebrate the diversity of gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, race, religion, region, and any other category that informs creativity and identity. Poetry is an assertion of voice that is strongest when enacted and celebrated by a “teeming nation of nations” (as Walt Whitman described).

We are committed to treating our poets with kindness, professionalism, and just a bit of whimsy to keep things fresh. Our lives center around poetry because we choose that they should. Our intent is that anyone who publishes with us, reads for us, or works with us feels valued throughout the process and is pleased with the results of our relationship.

HISTORY:

Sugar House Review has published 23 serialized issues since 2009. We have released one spring/summer and one fall/winter issue each year, with double-length anniversary issues in 2014 and 2019. Our editors and readers evaluate submissions during allotted periods, choosing pieces that best represent our mission of publishing an eclectic range of voices. In addition to publishing national and international poets, we place emphasis on showcasing local and regional poets to contribute to our region’s poetry community and to lower barriers for live events.

Work first published in *Sugar House Review* has appeared in *Verse Daily*, *Poetry Daily*, and four Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses anthologies.

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