

SUGAR  
HOUSE  
REVIEW



#22



SPRING/SUMMER 2021  
POETRY

# SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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## SLOW MOTION

The bus turns a corner. At the margin  
an uprooted big leaf maple, the hem of a river.  
Piles of shells throated from ocean.

What am I looking at? Poles, a meadow,  
a storefront: all generous and empty.  
Sometimes, empty is what we do with ourselves.

I arrive to my small room.  
A bee belts the glass and works again  
with its black shoes.  
As proof I exist, my pack at the door.

In the middle of this stillness, I call my father.  
His words settle along the salal  
in dry spirals. I see things to be equal:

the furl of ferns and an osprey rocketed from the pines.  
How else might we begin?

Everywhere I look, morning, night,  
grass blade by blade, the towing sky.

## FEATHERS

Inside a garden  
haunted by echoes,

Baba taught me to make ink  
from sugar.

I watched it turn brown  
and then began to stir.

Fire conquered the granules  
and melted them holy.

Because dead things can house a garden,  
we carved pens from raffia.

On Baba's dusty shelves,  
Gods' names were written in perfect rows.

We washed the slate into a keg,  
a cup or two for our pregnant neighbors.

A nightingale arrives a new country without a feather,  
its calamus was carved into a weapon

sharp enough to write histories  
of how we got our fingers stained in black.

## COSMOLOGY OF VENUS WITH A LAMP IN HAND

All that glitters is rendered invisible  
in the brightness of Venus.

Baba's house was an observatory at night  
and a court of broken memories when the sky is sober.

In my hand is a cat I named  
in a foreign language.

I want to be loved with open eyes  
else, I will name everything I owned after Baba.

Here, scars are not visible—and  
the ring around Venus continues to grow.

It is pregnant with shadows,  
soon a new planet will be born.

Everything remains nameless until they move closer  
to earth, or visible to the human eyes.

A lost moonlet circumnavigates the barrack,  
where we seek refuge because the sky turns violet.

We returned the stones around our necks to the mud,  
that is how we safeguard the light from fading out.

IF BEG MEANS OBVIOUS, ACQUIRE, AND ASK

What was it that I asked for? I know  
I trusted him to pour a drink that vanished

Ounces of the night. It looked unchanged,  
Yet I gathered some sleep on an eyelash,

My eye, forgiving, making up its mind not to  
Sting from a salt finger's touch: accident-

Al. Brown. A man with home and work, still and all  
Begged me to wreck him, to make the shape

Of an accidental music note bare. I mistook my wagging  
Forefinger as crystalline clear not rock, not a foretold pillar:

Not forgiveness, failing to index turn down  
With a mouth. My bones were so frail; he could've chewed them

Or chose to swallow how hyenas with choice  
Too, choose, and so are spotted laughing—calcium, phosphorous

Transferred to him and then, from me  
Now, an old friend, the old having nothing

To do with time, but looking back at a journey  
Beginning—what beg could've also stood for—

## THE SUGAR IN MY TANK

You ensure the large beginning I can't guarantee:  
A room glossed with a thick coat of sugar  
Dust dispersed in the air, from banging  
Your palms on the table, then striking a match  
And seeing a chain of ignited particles, stimulated  
By the air, swearing I was created,  
Not creating gayness. I'm introduced  
As one who couldn't restrain tragedy,  
Like a rare cancer, a pelvic neuroblastoma  
Making me bend to back pain.  
What if you made a baby, and didn't  
Replicate a genetic curse;  
Assure each member of the family  
The strength of hell was in your bedroom;  
Ensure the blame's brought to you,  
Reassure? Reassure. I'm uncertain of how I fell out of favor  
With my father. I don't know if it was fate  
Like you told everyone, or an experiment in  
Which somehow, in the same story, you tell everyone.

## CAREFUL

When the detective stares at her  
reflection in the assassin's armoire

or pilfers a wine bottle from her fridge,  
the audience is primed to imagine

her counterpart in her position. This  
exchange makes them not interchangeable

but inseparable, having occupied  
each other's lives, having saved the other—

and the audience—time. While the detective  
luxuriates like the pursued, the pursued

is free, perhaps, to perform the minor  
tasks the audience undertakes daily,

such as smoking a joint before calling  
home or driving to Trader Joe's.

On the rearview mirror,  
there are two spiders, belly-to-belly.

One is real, one is on hand just in case  
the other forgets. This spider is not

clinging to its life while I drive. It clings  
to its web. Now, it's the function of the web

to carry the spider, just as it was  
my mom's role to bludgeon every spider

in the house, and my role to pretend  
not to look away, and here, when I don't

smother the spider huddled in the corner  
of the mirror, I fear the audience

will get the wrong impression of her.  
I worry I'm making the wrong impression.

## UPON WAKING, IN A HUSH

To be honest, the sea frightened me at first:  
the expanse, sure, but also its restlessness  
—come now, then go ... the lift and fall—and how  
totally into its restlessness some had, I was told,  
been swept. Undertow, they call that. A name  
I like and which can, I think, well describe what  
it is to love another person. The unseen pull.  
The way one only knows it's happening, if  
they ever do, once it's already happened.  
And so, for years, not stupidly, I did not swim  
—if I'm frightened, shouldn't I be?  
Waking with a hand around my ribs—a fair hand,  
familiar—which way can I assume it is pulling?  
Not rescue.

Nor desertion.

*What's with the pillow?*  
you asked, *all night you had it over your face.*  
Sometimes, maybe, to practice breathlessness  
is, in some ancient and childish way, to avoid  
the real drowning. *They were too bright,* I said,  
*through the window, the stars.*

PORTRAIT OF A SMALL TOWN  
AT GOLDEN HOUR

Surely this is the light you wanted. Everything turned  
to amber in the afternoon. The windows peering out  
over honeycombs, tessellated mountain ranges.  
This, the only memory I have—  
a twilight wash, haloed by nettles and pricker bushes.  
The moon like a canker sore on the tree line.  
Or maybe, I am remembering a dirt road at dusk,  
a head angled out the car window, out past  
Guernsey cows and paint-peeled steeples, out towards  
the mechanized hum of campfire songs. Or was it  
on a secret beach somewhere? Pruned hands  
cupping the sunset, splashing it around, panning for what  
lay at the bottom. What lay at the bottom of all this.  
That has to be it. Us tap dancing on zebra mussels,  
all tangled up in tape hiss, burnt away  
in a lens flare we fed for far too long.

PORTRAIT OF A SMALL TOWN  
WITH GAZEBO STATIC

again, the apothecary  
up in flames—an arson? or an offering

comeuppance again coming up unannounced

this year, I have resolved to settle back,  
to feel better

to let the days get late early now

the gazebo turned to static  
the streetlights off

galivanting,  
giving it away—

whatever it is to not know you are afraid  
is what I fear

to wake up one day, fine

## LOBELIA

She couldn't bear the cabin any longer,  
hiked out despite chill, fall wind,  
spatters of rain that blurred her lenses.

Up on a slope, a cluster of horses (sorrel, bay),  
a white cow and her calf crop the tall grass,  
turn broad rumps when she calls.

Blue lobelia flickers through the haze of mist  
that blows down the road and loops,  
snake-like, around its curve.

She's almost out of words, almost  
out of time. Soon she'll wind back  
through coiling mountain roads

to the life she tried to set aside—  
with more or less success—this week.  
Home again, she'll stack legal pads

crowded with her sprawling script,  
fill in gaps on bookshelves,  
plunge back into the life where words

must be spoken,  
that world where she can revise nothing,  
where everything depends

on her first rough draft.

## SEASONS AND LIMITS

Let's say this school is called Lakeside Meadow,  
where, on the first of September,  
children gather in the storynook,  
sit crisscross applesauce, press  
knees together and jostle  
for a better view of the picture book  
as the pages make their papery swishing,  
hushing.

Beyond the shelter of bookshelves—  
beyond the walls of this library  
and wire fence lines—pastureland swoons  
in each of the four directions,  
grasses and live oaks, where doves migrate  
and nest, feed on seeds and snails,  
the doves' earth-gray feathers as soft  
as the coos that greet our arrival  
each day, except this one.

"It's only the doves," the principal writes  
in a staff email. "It's only the opening  
of hunting season."

We are not to be alarmed, no need  
to shelter our charges, as the air rings  
with the disconnected snap of shotgun fire  
from hunters we can't see,  
but who likely stalk the fields as one long, thin  
snake, as they have done for generations, before  
the arrival of swing sets and bright yellow circling buses.

This is a secret we cannot keep from the children.

Today in the storynook I read  
a book about doves: white-winged, spotted, turtle, mourning.  
The children listen, raise hands, and tell me  
how to say dove in the languages of their homes:  
*paloma, ghugī, dav, gēzi, golub'.*

The school is not called Lakeside Meadow.  
I have lied to you, dear reader.  
I don't need to tell you the reason.

## STODGE MEADOW POND

His whittled tongue so sharp and lizard blue,  
our British son arrives unsunned and clock-  
shy, dusking summer pondside. Winter boots  
unwieldy comfort, shock of water's balk.

Our daughter, bunkers up in bed all hours,  
deciphers currents, fevered notes that she  
has written self-to-self. Unknocking doors,  
unshelving stars, her mood is mystery.

The naiads crack their homes, those gray and frightful  
tanks, convulse, shed their armor, burst  
cerulean, all shimmer, arrowed light.  
Abandoned husks: forgotten, crumpled curses.

Now stow the oars, love, drift beyond the rise—  
let's learn to hum the waltz of dragonflies.

## RETURN OF THE TENOR

Last night I heard the cellomoan  
of that hoot owl again.

Most evenings it sounds like  
Pablo Casals, but this time he

was my dead father humming  
Italian Opera. We rode arias

from *Aida*, *Tosca*, and *Pagliacci*  
straight through to Maryland.

The second we crossed the Mason  
Dixon, the curtain came down.

## CHARADED ELEGY

Two words. First word: The emergency of my mouth  
running through the field of dragonflies

as they sewed shut the lips of misbehaving children  
and I had misbehaved—

tied pebbles together with strands of hair  
so when tossed in the air and attacked as prey

the dragonflies, tangled, were dragged to the ground.

Sounds like:

My only hope of speaking again

was to cover my mouth,  
but my hands only fell like leaves.

Second word: My life was waking early to feed  
the chickens in my mother, sacrificing

to keep her sun stoked. She rarely got my name right;  
sometimes I was my father,

others the dog that died  
years ago. She thought every bird the same bird.

I try to regard forgetfulness as essential to survival

because love is insatiable, whether it's wanting  
to be remembered

or trying to say goodbye

and sometimes it's better to not know, to think  
you are the one on the firing squad holding blanks.

## AVE GENEROSA

I think about you all the time.

I've been ordered by my confessor to write these visions down.

The original harmony of creation could be banished from this couch and you'd be there with a disclaimer, laughing hysterically.

Because you're a "living spark of god."

Because you're a phantasmagorical problem who will be lovingly remembered for hearing new strains of weirdness in some dead star.

Because you've got great tits.

Because I cleaned your kitchen even after you said, "Don't fuck with my spoon."

Because of every last possible lie.

Because a plate was placed by the table every night at 6 and I ate off the floor.

Because you are the lily that dazzles.

I'd like to explore the suggestion that "your flesh has known delight; like the grassland touched by dew and immersed in its freshness."

Because I still want to believe them.

Now stop and clean your fingers, then go back to your chores.

YOUR FASCINATION WITH BEYONCÉ,  
NASCAR, CRIME AND DEATH

Our complexity, our creeds, our engineers, our shamans,

Our osteoarthritis, our legislative powers, our state troopers, our consent,  
Our baby monitors, our tick-borne illnesses, our genetic information,

Our consumer safety reports, our escalating tensions, our irrational behaviors,  
Our overwhelming evidence, our diesel-burning trucks,

Our irrigation systems, our decision fatigue, our future reincarnations,

Our skin, our spit, our sweat, our fireflies, our cousins, our gravitational pull,  
Our primary care providers, our reusable plastic bags, our fucked-up circadian  
rhythms,

Our late night talk show hosts, our hypodermic needles, our fluidity, our fear,  
Our Pop-Tarts, our inventions, our boss's counter offers,

Our automatic weapons, our rookies of the year, our cases of bottled water,  
Our close and loving bonds, our public broadcasting systems

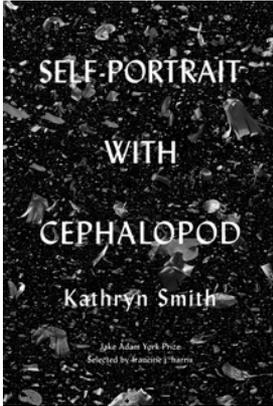


# SELF-PORTRAIT WITH CEPHALOPOD

BY KATHRYN SMITH

(Milkweed Editions, 2021)

REVIEW BY STAR COULBROOKE



Kathryn Smith accomplishes a balance of mystery, hard truth, and lyrical sensibility in this volume whose poems teem with mammalian peculiarities (“our young feeding on us”) and oceanic transmigrations (“intricate reefs of plastic / and dread.”) She sets out the syllabus on page one in “Ode to Super Friends and Nature Television” (from which the previous lines are quoted) by donning her “anthropocene coping mechanism,” a “cephalopod T-shirt,” and “ring.”

This is our first hint that we will need a dictionary and a heightened curiosity about the planet we live on to get us through the course. Why cephalopod?

It’s a marine mollusk, with tentacles, large eyes, and a beak. It squirts ink as a defense mechanism. Wearing her “octopus shirt” and “pants the color of a sea cucumber,” the speaker in “Ode” calls to her superhero friends for help (“Wonder Twin powers, activate!”), because nothing is in her control. Or is it?

“On a planet poised for disaster,” our human reach is its destruction. The speaker’s “tentacles” may not be able to stop the hands that sign away our lands and waters to industrial disaster, but they can write poems. A poet’s “large eyes” are capable of taking in the whole picture and recording it in intricately damning detail. The “beak” of cephalopod poet is chitinous: tough, protective, semi-transparent, the main component of arthropod exoskeletons, or, in this case, the poet’s tough outer shell. Smith speaks through her writing, “squirts ink” to defend the world she sees too well.

The entire collection is a marvel, a wonderment of how to live with such creatures of mystery as those in the sea and the soil, as well as those in human form. The quandary of our mortal existence in the anthropogenic age to which we are forever bound appears in poem after poem, line after line, alongside the creatures and the elements that bind us, as in “When I Stepped on the Mouth of Other Creatures, I Did Not Apologize”:

*I consider it constantly,*

*in every cliff where roots strain to hang on,  
every chamber spiraled with sand. First  
the snail died, then the crab. I offer my finger*

*to the anemone's blind suckle. I can't  
feed anything. The tide carries its living  
and its dead together, lets the shore*

*reveal and retreat. When does the body  
become distinct from the mind?*

The narrator of sea and sand has journeyed home with creatures “cradled / in tissue,” only to discover the stench of death upon unwrapping her parcel. She realizes the inevitability of ocean tides and what they carry, which leads her to question the body/mind connection, how they flow together and when they might not.

These body/mind connections extend from creatures of the ocean to things of the garden. “Self-Portrait with Cephalopod and Digitalis Purpurea” begins with the narrator musing, “a girl doesn’t need a reason to place / a foxglove blossom on her tongue. It’s enough / to like the idea that the heart could stop because / of flowers.”

The heart of the girl and the poem is the narrator at an eighth-grade prom, dressed in a homemade gown with a ridiculous “seafoam bow,” her date leaving without her and ignoring her for the next four years of high school. It brings her to deeper considerations than the “risk” of trying to achieve beauty, or “knowing how little meets our expectations.”

*Have you ever wondered  
what's beneath the skin, working? I know  
so little, I wouldn't recognize my own heart if I saw it  
outside my body. I wouldn't know my own bones  
arranged in an ocean bed, an octopus coaxing  
them to root in the sea floor until their stalks  
grew thick with mouthlike blooms.*

In all these poems, questions of the universe are framed in questions of body and ocean, with a good measure of human history thrown in. Smith’s question-

ing nature honors the millennia of sciences that bring her to such poems as “Situs Inversus,” an eleven-part examination of what makes us mortal. It moves from physical placement of the heart to what it means aside from its pure physicality, in which it might have a spiritual companion, perhaps the soul.

*I was considering the soul  
and where it resides and whether  
it's like an organ, and if so,  
if the body's functioning  
requires it, like the heart, lungs,  
etc., or if the soul, like the spleen  
or the gall bladder or the eyes,  
is something the body  
can live without.*

The speaker asks, “do you know where your heart is?” As a schoolgirl, she has dissected a squid “to know where among the tentacled mess / lay its center.” After class, the students fried it in a skillet. “It tasted like everything I didn't know / about the world's inner workings.” As Smith delves deeper into the workings of sea creatures and human creatures in this poem of science, history, and gastronomy, she brings us to the crux: “the heart isn't shaped / like its symbol. The soul is a mystery.” Like the ocean, the body holds a secret knowledge. We still do not know all there is below the surface.

This deep questioning of human mortality takes up the fourth and final part of the collection. It builds from Part 1, where we get the wry social critic of the tech age who “implore[s] our screens to refresh” with some hard truths of current times in opposition to our biblical “Creation Myth,” looks askance at our old-fashioned take on “Dumb Beasts,” and pushes us beyond our “Job Qualifications” for living in a world where “There Are So Many Ways to Decide What to Kill and What to Rescue.”

Part 2 gives us spells, psalms, and parables, all slightly skewed for effect. “Spell to Turn the World Around” works like the superhero we met in the introductory poem, called to thwart tragedies that occur before the hero can don her powerful costume. She calls on her friends to “collect” all who are “battered / in the night by creatures bent on malice.”

In “Psalm Formula: Anti-Epistle,” humor vies with sarcasm for an all-too-knowing take on the anthropogenic age we live in.

*I am fearfully and wonderfully  
made, made wonderfully  
fearful.*

[...]

*I will dwell  
in the house of the Lord,*

[...]

*where the tables  
are all overturned.*

The psalms and parables section ends with “Meditation Among the Fragments,” with the speaker collecting “ancient litter” on the ocean’s shore. “[I]n such a vast / calcifying tumbler,” she asks, “who could keep / what’s necessary?” Understanding the fragility of “life / lived at the edges,” she feels the sand slip beneath her feet. “Let the tide, as it / will, draw in.”

The poet as activist has a mix of roles and obligations to fulfill. One of them, as Smith lays out so lyrically in Part 3, is to inform others of danger, not only dangers that await us by fate or accident, but dangers we bring on ourselves. Some of these are byproducts of technology, as in the poem “Sulfur,” about the invention of wood milling machinery to make paper, with its “belching / hell-stench.” Smith places “brimstone” next to “god,” turns “sulfurous air” into “white plumes,” trades “explosive powder” for “immortality,” and bathes the “byproduct of danger” in “healing waters.” Ironies are magnified in Smith’s poetics.

In a world heavily skewed to human existence, where industry and technology have tipped the planet to a place that feels entirely beyond our control, Smith’s poems call on our deeper senses of body/mind/soul as counterweights to the paradoxes of what science has wrought. These are poems of sorrow, yes, but also of marvel and wonderment. They ask us to honor mystery, to give up all we thought was possible and try on our new knowledge like a shield.

## I LIVE IN THE TENT OF THIS BODY

2 Peter 1:13

And it provides a meager cover, falls, frays,  
leaks more each year, yadda, yadda; yeah,

it's a metaphor. Okay, let's say the tent  
has the requisite door, one that zippers up and down—

an opening, or closing, where the out  
comes in and the in goes out—and let's call

that my body's mouth, tooth for zipper-tooth.  
If a rhetorician unzipped my mouth and crawled

inside, we would pronounce this wind-flapped  
body the *tenor*, the *ground*, the metaphorical

*target*. My mouth still agape, we would tape  
meticulously lettered placards on the tent

naming it the *vehicle*, the *figure*, the *source*.  
My rhetorician's rule of three would also

decree it the maximum number of days I could go  
without showers if we are to share this tent.

Shoes and socks must be left outside; am I some  
sort of barbarian? There will be no avoiding

the cold tangle of our feet when we lie on my  
sleeping pad, and no debating who is big spoon

and who is little.

# EARTHQUAKE SENSORS RECORD UNPRECEDENTED DROP IN HUMAN ACTIVITY DUE TO PANDEMIC

*Scientists studying the Earth's natural tremors have to subtract the background noise from all the humans stomping around.*

I lifted up my pregnant belly  
with my hands  
and placed my belly  
on the body pillow  
and wrapped my legs around it  
and grabbed my man's  
two fists  
and with my back told him  
to push them  
just above my ass  
and he rolled  
the other way  
and Americans said  
*if fracking  
causes birth defects  
and cancer it's OK  
because  
we love cheap gas*  
and I couldn't fall asleep  
for *hours* thinking about how  
the biggest fracking earthquake  
was a mag 4 in Texas  
and the weight of my abdomen  
rolled heavy with cargo  
an elbow in New York  
a heel in California  
a broad back in the Dakotas  
for hours a finger poking  
under the Florida Keys  
and energy released in waves  
causes the ground to shake  
and my palms pick up  
the signal

*Title and epigraph are from eponymous July 23, 2020 Washington Post article by  
Joel Achenbach*

## COYOTE

at a point, it is accepted.  
a man washes his  
hands in gravel.  
a tree births a smaller tree.

but you've known this.  
your grandfather used  
to carry rocks for miles  
out of the earth.  
and then there was mother,  
who immediately curled up  
when her face first touched his chest,

as if in preparation.

## YOUNGEST OF THE HUNTING PARTY

His or her quiet coming.  
Curing insomnia.  
How north we were.  
How wolves.

## OF THE AIR

The man couldn't decide between meadow and prairie  
so he called the bird sparrow  
and took a break by moving on to mammals  
as they seemed easier,  
what with their fur and large eyes of oil.  
The sparrows left that part of the garden  
and began creating subspecies,  
all of them singing.

To make the man return to sparrows, the god gave verses  
about hair and farthings,  
which the man heard, not as money, but a thing far from him,  
like a city or another planet. He named those for love,  
or war, depending on how he was feeling, see, he could name  
much more than the living. The sparrows  
blinked bits of coal  
with third eyelids that were concealed.

## CONCLAVE

This winter, there are so many cardinals  
the woods can't hold them. They overflow the roads  
and railroad crossings like flames a child  
is criticized for drawing: shouldn't fire be orange or yellow,  
maybe some combination? Yet she continues,  
tongue between her lips pressed with the same pressure  
as her fingers across the desk on the paper.  
Time was, her mother told her, cardinals were collected  
and sold north as songbirds. The child's classroom  
can be locked, can be barricaded, we'll throw pencils, scissors.  
Weekends, the cardinals fly in front of them, sudden out of forests  
that hold the shades of ashes,  
their bodies even more vibrant because the sun  
hasn't been out for weeks, although it never rains or snows.  
Females an old bruise on fire,  
males red fire completely, they move as the path a sword  
is cutting. With such a big box of crayons,  
there are so many more choices like orange-red, and red-orange: side  
by side, can't you see the difference?  
Why would you ask for one named blood?  
They sang better, her mother has read, if captured  
rather than born in captivity.  
No one is left alive who remembers.

## PAIR OF HOLSTEINS

Did you say the driver was pregnant?  
Her belly swollen

behind the steering wheel?  
Were the cows black and white?

How far had they roamed from the ranch?  
What was the speed limit

on the highway? Did you say  
she couldn't speak English?

How long did it take  
for the authorities to arrive?

Did you know it's illegal for a sheriff  
to discharge a weapon on a state highway?

Even if the downed cows  
are bellowing, twitching, collapsed

at the side of the road?  
What made you think of the hammer?

Did you search your car  
for anything that might help?

When you slung the tool  
from behind your shoulder

as hard as you could onto the cow's  
skull, did you think it might crack? Cave in

and crush the brain?  
Kill it instantly?

What did the woman say?  
Did the sheriff make you leave?

Threaten to arrest you  
for getting up in his face?

Even though you were trying  
to be humane? The black and white

cows bled until they died  
and the rancher never knew.

## CORE

He stood at the kitchen counter  
smiling at the teetering pile of apples we'd picked  
at the orchard off the interstate,  
wanted to know how we'd ever eat them all  
and though I knew we wouldn't—  
that a dozen or so would mush and brown  
in the bottom of the refrigerator—  
I laughed at his question  
picked up a paring knife  
and cut the red orb of my heart widthwise  
revealing a witch's star.

## DOES MY BROTHER DREAM OF SHOWERS?

My sister is my brother now. Out  
of the stuffed rabbit's hide, he pulls  
a flashlight, a marker, a knife,

arterial threads dangling.  
I am drunk; think about  
when he was she and she was eight years old.

At a Build-a-Bear outside Salt Lake,  
my little sister picked the rabbit's limp  
hide, little pelt on a hook. Together we filled

it with white stuffing; my sister kissed  
her wishes into a tiny red heart, slipped  
it inside before running fat thread up

the rabbit's backside.  
I am 24 and not blacked out yet;  
my sister is my brother now and he is now 14.

He brings the rabbit to our sleepover, matted  
with age and love and drool. My brother wears  
a girdle to keep the budding breasts in; when I was

14, I also hid my body inside XL hoodies, boot-cut  
jeans. When I pass out, I dream of my brother's  
father following me into the shower again.

There is a red pocketknife where the little  
rabbit heart used to be.

## MELTDOWN

I won't deny I'm fragile. There's been incidental damage in transit.  
Who will sign? It was raining Cesium-138 the morning I was born.  
It was in the green apples I ate in the garden. I've secreted away  
Iodine-131 in my organs. I've listened to the clicking of the dosimeter.  
I learned how to use a Geiger counter to measure snow as a child. I  
grew green and fragrant, tumors in my liver and thyroid, blood and  
bone corrupted, uncontrolled. Like the deer and wolves that escape  
government detection, like the hot wasps, swallows, and catfish, I  
will build a home somewhere you'd never expect, ticking away until  
meltdown. You can house me in concrete, silver, cadmium towers.  
Like a fairy tale, there are terrors underground, women motionless in  
coffins, babies wailing without mothers, ready and waiting to inflict  
judgement, foxfire a dull green flame on the horizon.

## FOREST AND DOVE

(Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington)

•  
—too soft, the sky a crib  
sheet blued by throat  
sacs frog song a sponge  
pressed to forest's chest  
fevered & chewed

by nerve hosiery snagged & combed  
brown by tibia's bristle  
a roach scuttle & hormone molt

white, the bird's eye: a cassette  
wheel's teeth a minor class of lamprey  
ringed & turned  
about the little finger

bird's tail & body: a lasso  
tossed & stitched  
bird's feet: two rakes treading

○

she, his *femme enfant*  
his hands clutched about her breast  
before Metrazol  
shock / asylums her mother,  
she painted biscuit boxes

## FRANGIPANI

Our ungodly mother  
scavenged the passages of nineties Honolulu  
grease-soaked bag of onion rings in tow.

In her tragicomic muumuu and novelty shells,  
always caching inane artifacts. A decorator crab  
imbibing all she could before the neon winked its last.

While my sister and I kept watch from a hotel balcony  
employed by our father to signal her arrival  
like two tiny Paul Reveres.

How we trained ourselves to recognize  
the clink and crinkle of her midnight wanderings  
and smashed the bottles, as if christening some hopeful venture.

Something about that airport plumeria  
unfurling its heady petals and signaling  
we now needed to be mothered—

wrought chaos. As we wrested  
keycards from her palsied fingers  
and prayed for sunrise.

AFTER THE INBODY SCAN AT THE GYM TELLS  
ME I'M OBESE

I'm mostly scared of me  
—not now, but at 16.

She knew this would happen.  
She hissed this in my ear for years.

I don't know if I invited her  
or she knew to come

after the machine told me  
who I was.

Under the door drifts perfume  
from the girls' locker room.

A pop of gum and a knock. Her knock.

## EPISTLE WITH NECROPSY

Here, a gray whale washed onto the beach.  
I would have told you  
how they fastened chains to her scarred body  
and pulled her back to sea,  
how they dissected and sawed, how they'll tenderly  
section her flesh, under the cold lights of some laboratory.

The whale labored northward and failed here.  
They think she starved, her body  
burning its meager stores of blubber,  
her lion-sized heart pumping against its own failing.

I would have told you, but I might  
have confused the whale's heart with my own.  
In the bright, exacting light of your gaze, how would I hide  
that I still love all your phytoplankton,  
all your phosphorescence and krill.

We once talked about ordinary news—  
I once stored the happenings of my days  
in a pocket to tell you later.

The whale gleamed on the beach  
in the hem of the surf.

There were others this spring  
along the coast. Yes, the warming oceans.  
Yes, acidification, the scarcity  
of benthic amphipods  
in the whales' winter home.

Most of what's terrible in this world I cannot right.

Sometimes, pressed flesh to flesh                    I'd feel  
the ocean between our skins, cold, impossible.

The whales trace their northward paths  
then south again each winter:  
migration longer than any other mammal.

The beach is empty when I return, not even  
her oily smell, not an imprint of the weighty flank—  
the ocean's illusion of cleaning its slate.

I will not say  
dissolve me in your briny waters,  
feed me on your Lethean kelp falls,  
glitter me like a wavelet.

I will not call.

Somewhere, the whale's been laid open  
with a love that cuts to the bone.  
Somewhere the flensing knife grows dull.

Somewhere, her enormous hunger  
has been cross-sectioned and held to their lenses  
while what's left, adrift, feeds gulls.

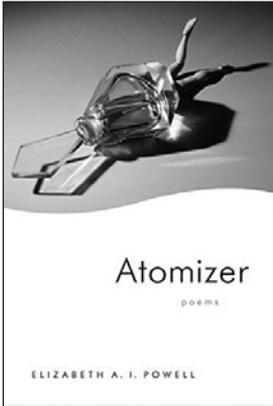
## TAKING IT

My friend sends an email linked to news about women freezing their eggs—*as early as possible in their 30s*, she says. My fiancé is on the phone with “his” jeweler about Christmas diamonds. I don’t like diamonds, the way they look obligatory and mean. My eggs, I’m told, degrade a little more each year. There’s a surgical mesh—I don’t quite understand this—I could have implanted in my breasts, “to give them a natural lift again,” to make me look like a woman whose eggs are still intact, who men still want. I read this in an in-flight magazine. “*You know* how women over 40 are invisible,” says the man ahead of me in the grocery line. “I don’t have any problem getting laid. *She’s* gonna know she screwed up real soon though, my ex.” Snow comes early this year and turns the roads to diamond lacquer. My affianced canceled his flight for uncertain reasons, and I *might* brave the drive to my parents’. I remember when Thanksgiving was fleeced by a fire. We’d ice cookies and decorate a tree. At 16, ferrying deviled eggs on a cut-glass plate, I overheard grandmother telling mother I had a nice figure—my breasts, then, in no need of mesh. Still, the feeling wasn’t gladness but shame. “If I come out, you’ll only start a fight,” the fiancé says because I am, like the rest of my sex, irrational, though on the upside, I know how to bake a pie and I like, he says with certainty, cleaning things. “Your house is always so clean.” I hate to clean, just less than I hate a mess. The line between when he means it and when he’s goading often erodes. Snow keeps sifting through

the streetlights like static, like the silver  
notes of an oboe. It's true I've wanted  
a wedding, photogenic with tea lights,  
a real band. It's true the venue's already  
booked. Of my one book, the older  
male writer said, "It's too feminine—  
the title and also that dress on your cover."  
The woman's body, her diamonds,  
the gown, an embarrassment  
of curves and froth. "Emotional,"  
the fiancé says. "You get emotional."  
I froth yes, in flounces of poems. It's true  
mom taught me how to make sauces,  
true she taught me how to just take it.  
It's true I've already tasted the cake  
and found it much too sad.

*ATOMIZER*  
BY ELIZABETH A. I. POWELL  
(Louisiana State University Press, 2020)

REVIEW BY JAMIE WENDT



Elizabeth A. I. Powell's newest collection of poetry, *Atomizer*, is a lyrically critical examination of American culture with a specific (and often humorous) critique of online dating and the associations of smells; odors and sensuous scents drift into poems from memory and art, connecting humans to each other. Readers of Powell's previous works, especially her poetry collection *Willy Loman's Reckless Daughter*, and her novel, *Concerning the Holy Ghost's Interpretation of J. Crew Catalogues*, will notice her continued fascination with how art builds a collective memory for future generations and how memory and relationships expose the way humans react to their environment.

Within the title poem "Atomizer," Powell begins many stanzas with the label "(Memory)" interspersed with sensory experiences relating to dating and the scents associated with love and specific romances. Powell's ability to transition from explicit childhood memories to ideas about the power of scent helps the poem build upon the speaker's experiences of searching for her own identity. As the poem continues, it becomes more critical of online dating:

*A formula means to build a form that contains sensual interplays that exist within sense.*

*(Memory): Sometimes we argued under the hot sun of coriander and citrus, or an orchard of pomegranates that tried to set us free from algorithms that market us.*

*The base notes bring depth, solidity to a scent, an associative connection.*

This poem introduces some of the associative leaps that Powell will continue to make throughout the rest of the book as she repeatedly uses smells and other

sensory language to question the speaker's frequent desire for romance and love despite the lack of a suitable partner.

Powell mixes dark imagery with humor, particularly when writing about men's sexuality, including an "insemination man" who comes to her grandmother's farm and is described as "Mysterycow juice God." The speaker knows that she "will read *The Handmaid's Tale* soon enough" and then reflects on how much American society loves milk: "Starbucks... make[s] baby formula for grown-ups." Her cheeky comments about cultural obsessions, from Starbucks to sex, fuse together with the peculiarities of the situations she creates, whether it's an insemination man coming to the farm or other childhood moments, like getting her mouth washed out with soap in "Ars Poetica," due to the speaker's

[ ... ] *nasty sentiments:*  
                                  *how I loved the world so hard I hated it.*  
*Things either clean or dirty,*  
                                  *smelled lovely or nasty,*  
*my mother tried to make me say it nicely. I couldn't.*

There is a consistent tension within Powell's poems from how the speaker wants to express her views of the world compared to how society refuses her ideas and neglects her. In "Killing Rabbits," Powell confronts the confusing, contradictory information about sex and puberty to which children are exposed and how they are then left to fend for themselves, resulting in "killed rabbits," which becomes a metaphor for unborn babies. Powell circles around images to tell a story, so that scattered throughout the poem are phrases such as: "I have killed a rabbit," "this is before the abortion clinic bombings," "Peter Rabbit was almost killed," "Peter Rabbit ate soporific lettuces," "everything I touch wilts," "we use pull out methods," "we fuck like rabbits," and "death is everywhere and pretends to be life." Powell's stream-of-consciousness associations build layers of meaning throughout her poems, folding cultural references into the traumas of the speaker.

Powell is successful at writing long poems that extend for a few pages, as many of her poems do, often divided into sections. One such poem, "E-Diptych," highlights the constructed narratives of online dating sites users as a means to create a digital identity for both themselves and their potential matches:

[ ... ] *And when he*  
*writes me, he makes me,*  
*and when I make him, I write him.*

*We are invented, by the wanting  
and not having of others.*

Adding to her critique of the way people view online dating sites, Powell writes in the second section of this poem, “you live in this little box spread across / the screen of pixelated desires.” She builds on the loneliness of the dating site’s patrons who are disappointed when someone’s hair doesn’t actually match the photograph, and Powell plays with the truth and lies of these online profiles, despite the fact that the speaker does feel desperate and wants to find a lover and companion in many of her poems, including “Shulammite,” where the speaker swipes through photographs of potential dates on her phone, but finding someone honest is nearly impossible.

Powell elaborates on the power of odors in connection to memory as she moves into a series of poems focused on specific family history, such as “In Vilnius,” and poems about Vermont, including “Burlington Is Nuts Today” and “Lying Perfume Bottle of Chanel Pour Monsieur.” The latter poem begins with the sensual line, “tell me everything,’ he said” as if the reader has entered a romantic encounter of a man eager to learn about his new lover’s past. Powell continues with the statement that “odor is identity’s first ardor,” and later, “there’s something familiar / about the animalistic scent, the refined contradiction.” She concludes:

*Fantasy is what we create when we have nothing*

*left to say about a world that has left us trendy,  
fetishized, and empty. He researched me as an olfactory  
curator might, my social media Lysol life,  
how to turn moments into hyperrealism.*

Powell’s criticism of some of the foundations of modern American culture are particularly acute, as she continues threading sensory details emphasizing scents that allow the reader to inhale each memory and moment. Powell sporadically includes ekphrastic responses that often include mentions of perfumes and atomizers as a means for women to assert their identity or achieve a particular purpose, as in “Judith Perfumes Herself,” after Judith Chicago’s Judith setting at *The Dinner Party*, whose “elegance of ritual” involves “behead[ing] Holofernes” while “bearing / her fragrant skin, newly perfumed, like a soul.” She emphasizes Judith’s power through her actions as well as her fragrance and its power of seduction.

Elaborating on her critique of dating culture, Powell makes fun of stationary

exercise equipment, which has TV as “its only scenery” and “beeps phony miles and pretends hills,” seemingly gifted to the speaker so that she “won’t morph into your ex-wife instead of your trophy.”

Powell’s blunt, humorous explorations of American values, healthy lifestyles, as well as relationships and dating, keep each poem fresh and interesting as this collection builds and culminates.

TO THE MAN IN LINE FOR TACOS  
WHO ISN'T BRIAN

Brian-browed with eyes Brian-blue      you were Brian for sure      til you  
spoke.      Your voice      its un-Brian baritone      saved me. So glad to see you  
him      an acquaintance-in-law I well enough like      but so not the same  
five faces I've seen for weeks I nearly leapt all six feet to get to you. Not even Brian  
is Brian anymore      not Before Brian whom I haven't seen in years      divorced  
now      I keep forgetting. Not-Brian      when my eyes leaned over my mask  
eager with not impatience but recognition      did I freak you out      or am  
I a long-out-of-touch top-half doppelganger      too? Stalking laps around my  
house today      —was it today?—      I pulled a book      a favorite since  
high school      from its slice of shelf. The inscription a teenage relic      five  
neat lines from the first love whose gentle heart I cherished and smashed with  
earnest inexperienced fumbling. He's not Brian either      but      good sir on  
this my first outing in sixteen days      my mind won't be wrangled into line.  
Not Brian      we're in line for tacos while our country goes hungry for air.  
Have you settled with yourself yet? If so      how? Not Brian your carne asadas  
with guac and a lime      are up.

## GYMNASIA

Rylan oh my gosh  
do you remember that time  
we were playing dodgeball  
in gym class freshman year?  
My nose had just started to bleed  
and there was a small planet  
coming right at you.  
Your face was like a small  
eclipse. I know you loved me,  
our bruise in time, I know it,  
because everything slowed  
to nothing. The gymnasium  
with its high windows and  
glossed wood floor. The bleachers  
emptied of sound and pushed  
into themselves. All the perfect  
red spheres hanging in the  
too bright air. A halo, all the  
shirtless men, a halo, the smell of blood,  
a halo, please say you remember it.

## SOME DAYS THE WORDS PILE UP

Some days the words pile up, damp  
branches, sad sheaves of wheat.  
They cover everything. The sun  
looks away. There is a sorrowful  
light. The person next to me at the  
café asks me to watch their  
belongings, and I do. Take care.  
Fare well. Drive safe. Will I ever  
be finished with telling others to do  
what I can't? Some fires start from  
nothing: no spark, no smoke.  
A rushing heat comes over me.

[ YOU FLIP THIS JACKET ... ]

You flip this jacket over the shoulder  
where a wing should be—a carefree strut  
that weighs nothing now, can hear you lift

till one sleeve is closer to the other  
—it's feathers you're after, the climb  
to when this hillside was an avalanche

covering these dead with its warmth  
the way each row spreads out  
and side by side the slow climbing turn

is buried under the small stones  
still listening for evenings and cries  
while you walk by in soft slippers.

[ STILL ON THE MOVE ... ]

Still on the move, you dead  
make your way underneath  
pressing against each other

—you become the hillside  
where there was none before  
though the ground is far off

the way soldiers after a battle  
will stand at attention  
to make things stay

—side by side given medals  
not made from stone  
though one arm slides into its sleeve

reaching out as the slow bend  
that carried your gravestone  
to the surface, unbuttoned, dead.

## CROWS

*Memorial Day cookout, circa 1948*

Dad says, *if you split their tongues they talk,*  
and points to a few crows in the maples.  
Uncle Earl, who'd been to war, says, *Bullshit.*

*They're like Spitfires,* Earl says,  
*always ready to scramble to meet the enemy.*  
Dad says, *No, split their tongues, they'll talk.*

Mom clears the bloody plates of ribs away,  
passes slabs of chocolate cake. And Earl,  
who flew in the war, says, *John, that's just bull.*

And now we all hear harsh cries: crows  
flock from all corners of the sky.  
Dad says, *If you split their tongues ...*

A red-tail skims low, a stolen chick  
tight in its talons, a fury of wings in pursuit.  
Earl, grits his teeth: *See what I said?*

The crows dive-bomb the hawk, unable  
to loft with a dead chick in its grip.  
Dad says, *I'd like to know what they'd say.*  
*They'd say,* Earl says, *that war is bull.*

## THE WEIGHT OF A RHINOCEROS

A few facts that not many living people know:  
flamingoes bend their legs at the ankle  
not the knee. Roller coasters were invented  
to distract Americans from their sadnesses.  
In 1963 a fly landed on the back of a rhinoceros

and fell in love with its unyielding gray skin.  
If you listen closely enough, the lightbulb is  
whispering the words: *electricity turns me on*.  
The honeybee that thought my coffee mug  
was a flower has no attachment to family.

This honeybee expresses my loneliness for me.  
This honeybee has no idea about electricity.  
Facts that only I know: scientists have created  
a functioning guitar the size of a human blood cell.  
When the blood stopped coagulating in my father's arm,

flies were drawn to it, sadness flashed before his eyes  
like a lightbulb, life all of a sudden seemed so easy  
to stop. The stop sign has been an octagon  
since 1922 because humans recognize shape  
before detail. Matisse cut out a few triangles,

hung them up on his wall, and called them a garden.  
Before I ever saw a blood clot, I assumed  
they were circular, but the one in my father's arm  
looked more like a pyramid. I have never been  
to the pyramids. The facts I know about pyramids,

everybody else already knows. They point towards  
the north, it's a mystery how they were built,  
each piece of limestone is equivalent to the weight  
of a rhinoceros. I could tell you the weight  
of a rhinoceros, if I really wanted to. I could call

the shape of my sadness *The Weight of a Rhinoceros*.  
I could call it *A Day*. But there are more facts  
that not many living people know: Once upon a time,  
everywhere you looked there were dinosaurs.  
This is our name for them, but they may have preferred

*sunflower, or unshapely wave, or lanky geese.*  
They may have preferred *people*. There were *people*  
on the planet, and now there are not. The earth  
has no attachment to family. When my father  
was all sewed up, we went to an amusement park.

One hundred feet above the ground, sadness populates  
the air like birds. Plummeting towards the earth,  
one by one, the human being loses sight  
of the shape of things: the direction due north,  
the bent flamingo ankle, the red octagon in the mind

shouting *go, please just go, don't stop for anything.*

## NOW WE COME TO TICKS AND TOCKS

Totally giddy and grinning as I recall the fox we happened upon,  
its eyes the curious eyes of a toddler.

That night a full moon

like a wheel of brie. We were always playing The Garden Game,  
my daughter and I, which I'd picked up for a dollar  
at Goodwill. Entertained by cards

that said we'd forgotten to mulch, to nourish the humus,  
which of course we pronounced *hummus*,  
she being a vegan and all.

But now she's fifteen, another word for sulky, disgusted,  
annoyed, as in you *really should consider*  
*the application of eyeliner*. The moon

told me I was almost fifty-nine. What I told it was how  
it would never be a place where arugula seeds  
would grow, but by then it was morning,

the moon on the other side of the world, the clouds and wind  
friends we like to gossip with, all the while thinking  
she's that fox, not as in *she's such a fox*,

more in the way the fox stayed close, kept going in  
and out of sight, never getting within thirty feet.  
*We are wasting precious time*,

Miss Everett used to say. Well, sure, honey,  
isn't that the human condition?  
Waddling through time

like the duck my daughter turned me into? We christened the fox  
Mr. Fox, and she told me *Fox-n-Sox* freaked her out,  
scrambled her brain with the chicks and bricks,

with the *quick trick chick stack*, made her feel like a slug  
in salt. Then she let me spin again, and I told her  
I'd always love foxes.

## BRIGHT SHADOW

*Why is the moon following us,*  
I ask my dad from the backseat.  
Following like a dog

when you have a treat  
in your pocket. The moon  
glides across the open night

above the field skimming  
the pointy tops of trees  
and telephone poles,

playing tag with our car,  
a hovering nightlight,  
never dropping pace.

*That's an optical illusion,*  
he tells me, *because it's*  
*so far away.*

Funny, I thought following  
is what things do to stay close.  
For being so far, it sure keeps up.

## HUMIDITY

I was still a girl. At dusk,  
I saw rows of pear trees,  
trunks brushed halfway  
up in lime, running back  
over the hillside. In the  
end

- I turned myself into a  
headlight. *C'mon out,*  
*you janky misty*  
*Motherfuckers—*

- Drawn to change  
falling into a dish of  
change (paper clips also,  
safety pins), I am like my  
mother, oh very like

- Dropping, at night,  
toward the runway,  
toward landing lights?  
Voices, sea-green, rising  
from the ribs of  
shipwreck

- Amy Lord's older  
brothers jumped down,  
one with a boom box.  
Little Feat, or some shit,  
carried through woods,  
through pines

- (Earlier they'd been on  
top of the gates, getting  
high)

- A driver lays on the horn. The crows, gathered around a dead crow on Sheridan, scatter overhead. They keep returning then breaking up, returning and breaking up

- The orchard, of course, always was an order, even drifting like that

- We live off I-80, the acceleration of semis, leveling out after the descent, a constant, throaty presence

- The bigger girls kept walking up the trail, then they turned, they walked back through us

## JITTERY NOCTURNE

Outside after a bad dream —no stars,  
no canopy of leaves— just streets

and down those streets, like large  
flat rocks in the middle of a stream, my neighbors' houses.

•

But sometimes, walking around, straight ahead  
on sidewalks, I correspond with arguments

swimming at the heart of houses, and move parallel

to their interiors: old clothes, crates,  
canned peaches —everything

sinking to the bottom of the bottom of houses.

•

Rain, starting slowly, thuds

the metal bottom of a boat— a sound you know in the middle  
of the night in houses. And there's a current pulling

at the boat, the movement of debt— we do not

own these houses.

•

Often I am brushed on the leg —right in the kitchen!—  
by a fish, yet my sisters trust the integrity of houses.

Lately I'm happy to be having the sex I am having  
most often now, inside of houses.

Those tiny, inquisitive sea horses, flickering  
here and there— how *they* addressed us we will remember in houses.

•

Later, like an allowance, the moon comes round: fat, white

Later the moon floods  
the alleys, empties the rooms of our houses.

•

How I know I am not happens most often in houses:  
creaking the floorboards, slowly breathing in houses.

## MAYBE I AM HERE

and there you are, sort of, like a row of trophies seen through a picture window, very green-gold, but anymore, Lemon Drop, I am not a woman who can sleep with whomever she wants. In the house

my skin jitters, a wind picked up across a lake, and I keep opening windows *hello? hello?* but the sun just sticks, lozenged in trees wind-stripped. Some days, things

look strangely: a single shoe on the sidewalk or a pot, in sunlight, on a stoop. Some days nothing will jimmy the vision. Pop-Tart, what I'm trying to say is I saw mountains in the rearview too, I saw the girl running into the street. Nightly, headlights move across the neighbor's field, empty as a nightgown, or they hover, like someone standing with a set of keys.

## NEW LEAF

I'm binge-watching *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*,  
and somewhere down the block, a backyard party swells,

guitar strum beating upwind to my open windows.  
Mariachi music muscles into dialogue on my screen—

hard-won humor, weary asides. Everyone is suspect.  
Even on the train, I move my eyes down the long

bench, linger on a man's eroding shoes, a woman's  
sculpted hair. What would I remember, questioned

under oath? The past releases clues when least expected,  
perp handcuffed to the table. Old self harangues new

self in the visiting room, Plexiglas pocked between  
them. They lift the phone's toy-like receiver, touch palms

and neutralize magnetic fields that have held them  
in their thrall. Shame ignites, confessions flare.

Filaments drop glittering to the ground.  
Nothing pulls us in the wrong direction.

## LENT

*after a phrase by Alan Walowitz\**

It's winter in the Festival of Us.  
Let's give up, and picnic on the  
cold floors of unkindness.

Where better than this swept-clean  
ridge? What better than these chilled  
metallic sandwiches? The light today

is clinical—bare bulb of sun distinguishing  
each tree within the woods, each branch  
from every other. And if, in such a light,

a man were hanging, nailed, from two branches,  
we'd see the man before we'd recognize a cross.  
My god—this season! Scentless

as a new corpse freshly washed,  
but it sharpens other senses.  
Listen: life is breeding

in ravines and hollow logs.  
Lives are cached beneath our feet,  
young bullets shooting up.

*\* "cold floors of unkindness" borrowed with permission from Alan Walowitz's poem  
"She's Going to Go through Some Things," originally published at the New Verse News*

## EVERYWHERE I GO I HEAR DOORS OPENING

In my mind he's still trying  
to get in I am listening  
without knowing I am listening  
I am afraid even when I seem  
relaxed. If you asked me:  
*Does this music sound*

*like keys*  
*jingling*  
*or footsteps coming up the walk*  
I would deny it  
yet  
in the middle of the track  
I'd turn it off and whisper:

*Listen.*

I'm like a hackled dog braced  
silent by the door into the yard:  
glaring  
into the dark  
refusing to move  
refusing to be comforted  
or reasoned with  
refusing food  
until let out to look and yes  
as everyone who watches scary  
movies knows this decision is  
the beginning of the end is  
how the monster gets back in  
is what my brain demands  
even if I just looked  
even though I know  
he can't be there  
even as my friends  
pack up the wine  
and say *Maybe*  
*we should go.*

## SELF-PORTRAIT AS SELF-CARE MANTRA

Head tilted back, eyes to the light, I squeeze single tears of moisturizer from the glass jar: forehead, cheek, cheek, a cross, martyr mystic blessing that promises to unblemish me.

//

After the hospital everyone brought facemask sheets. In meager bursts of human feeling I'd unpeel the wet paper cut into alien likenesses of a panda bear or cat. I'm not through them yet, gestures of wellness, I am working at them like a rosary, residue oily and chemical so I disobey the package's advice and rinse my face. Yes okay I am refreshed, I am good, I am doing good.

//

I wish I had a tender nickname for myself. "Don't believe it Lizzy" and "Lizzy you are perfect." Anyone who used a nickname on me is long gone. I call myself worse things and I am still the company I keep, alive and unhappy. It's not the being alive that makes me sad but the living part, my nerves so cliché and hysterical.

I fail to protest, compost, to write edgy poems about genitals, fail to scribe care onto my body, translate myself to myself, to stop lying, to know the lie, to build a marvelous cavernous boat and push its belly out to sea, to swallow anything, to sing.

//

In my mother's bathtub I drink her syrupy \$5 wine, squeeze pink goo from its envelope and smear the mask like sticky melted jellyfish debris on my face, wait, something to peel away in 20 minutes. Wine drips and disappears into the steamy water. My face tightens, is tightened around. All of it will come away beneath my nails.

ELIZABETH THERIOT

## SUCH HONESTIES

*He hath studied her will and translated her will,  
out of honesty into English*

—Pistol, William Shakespeare's  
*The Merry Wives of Windsor* 1.3.47–48

Maybe I was born with a pocket dictionary  
of honesty in my chest and a knot under my tongue.

Maybe my mother knew by the way I suckled  
that I'd cut or be cut and maybe

she didn't want to sleep with one eye  
on the door waiting for Alexander to untie me

so she snipped that extra fillet herself  
and filled my mouth with blood

I couldn't tell from milk. When you don't know  
tears from food, you know you are born a girl.

Maybe that dictionary kept on thumping through  
a thousand sets of monkey bars and all

the doors of the grammar school  
on the green hill under the sky crayoned

with clouds and I read story after story  
about girls who'd been enchanted

so that toads fell out of their lips whenever  
they spoke which in those parts was a curse

but seemed to me, and I still do believe it today,  
to be a witching freedom from the faithless

way language bends in the hearer's ear  
quite beyond my own will, my own air.



THE WORRIER  
*October*

*What is the last geranium?*

Blood drops on stone.

*What is the last nasturtium?*

Star on a salad.

*What is the last aster?*

Still-purple hoodoo.

*What does the last sunflower feel?*

Teeth she has lost.

*What do you feel?*

My hands wrapping  
poppyseeds  
in the cadence  
of filo.

Weight of oak  
in my marrow.

## ON MARCH

*For the Welsh Marches  
with lines from "Distortion to Static" by The Roots*

This isn't what we wanted, because who wants a road  
without lines or a song that seems to bleed into elegy—

because it isn't the time for that. It isn't liminal, isn't  
your words as they sing so loud into sky, some slip and carry

to say *rhythmically*, *you got to be* in one place or another. You won't  
tell me to move my body like that. It isn't all about

the static, baby, not the unbecoming. It isn't on the plane,  
not flying low over Wales like a bird looking

for space to land, it isn't time for that either. It's on my arm  
on my drive home, it's singing so soft I can't help but turn

my head and tell it *shush*, and isn't that all we know to do  
now? It's stitched into the sky, singing through teeth

to tell *my part of the song*, *it's goin', it's goin'*,  
*it's gone*—and you're welcome to that too.

## THE RAYS ARE COLORLESS

They wrote the story that concludes with *oh well*.  
It's the canary's call saying we didn't know

how to love it then  
without destroying it now.

Now here is the echo of *oh well* underneath  
your eyelids. See how muddled

the water becomes.  
Just to know there was a chance

is a sound you can see  
on your blush muddied cheeks.

The water is salty enough to float on  
but not enough to preserve flesh

and bone. *We'll be gone*, they say, *in the dirt by then*.  
*Leaving behind our pan of broken*

*nails*. I swim in the salt lake.  
And the sun rays murmur

on my floating chest.

## VARVE

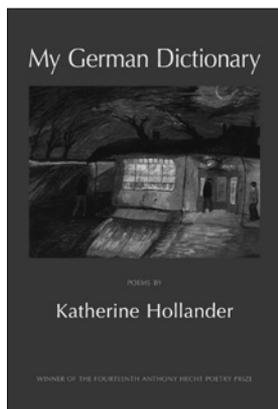
Silt and clay are as good as facts  
in layers of contravening color.  
To be read as you wish to read  
them. Listlessly, longingly, coldly—  
as you wish. It will still be what  
it is: the deposit of a single year  
in a lake. As the cells of rotting  
apples subtly alter ground, as  
layers arrive of regurgitated fur  
and bone. The lake will have  
these layers, but just one season  
at its surface. You look to rain  
to find the starting points of  
snow. The lake can have what's  
left, the disappearing nest, the  
incremental textures of the fall.  
To return most years to what  
is obvious. Choosing asks the  
flattest stones to fly. The lake  
has quiet gears. Water is  
everywhere it goes.

## NUANCE

I see how it gets there, the inbuilt  
lapse in time. Being at once loving  
and beloved, rained on and lost,  
being slender as pine needles in two  
strange places at once. I get what's  
asked by depths of field. I get  
the reason childhood takes a pony  
out at night. The snow, the stars.  
Cloud powder of cuttlefish bone.  
Cloud shadow of goose quill, iron  
gall, pounce. Something light as time  
has worked through clouds for years.  
When Coleridge sat down to write  
what symbol is, he would have had  
to blow the resinous pounce away.  
Then wait for the verb *partakes*  
to dry. And still it is not strange  
enough, to have this something  
in common with clouds, to share  
a day forgetfully with all its distant  
forms. It's like a dresser no one  
took time to empty. The point-  
less weight of a dreamt-up heaven.  
Versus the latest actuality of a flower.  
Now I see where it wants to go.  
Clouds have marked the distance  
in ginger-gray and gutted blue.  
Gold embarking someplace else,  
falling as sure as taking up. That  
seconds are enough to witness  
what a sunlit billow truly owns.  
The lapse is as long as it takes.  
So long as clouds, so long  
as we say  
*So long.*

*MY GERMAN DICTIONARY*  
BY KATHERINE HOLLANDER  
(The Waywiser Press, 2019)

REVIEW BY STAR COULBROOKE



It takes skilled wordcrafting, an ear for clarity, and a penchant for multiple levels of meaning to hone syntax into diction as rich as one's country of origin. Katherine Hollander applies those traits to rouse language from an uncomfortable heritage, fashioning stanzas that expand into layers of national and ancestral history defined with elegant simplicity, intricate imagery, and complex metaphor.

The introductory poem in *My German Dictionary* first presents a simple fact of the speaker's personality:

*I couldn't be a good Jew, so I tried  
to be a good historian. I couldn't be  
a good historian, so I wrote poems.*

Then the poem complicates its assertion by insisting on what the speaker can and cannot write about, not the "Shoah" but the "Somme," not the "heart" as "pocket watch," but "swans / snails, stars, and mud." Images arrive and gather intricacy with each stanza's plea, asking "oak-owls" and "grandfather clocks" to help find her country, and handing readers a "good traveling coat" adorned with "fox fur collar / and a fat gold tassel," along with the enticement of an irresistible metaphor:

*Pull it on, and from the wide sleeve a little  
cedar ladder nudges out, ready to take you away.*

The first few rungs of that aromatic ladder are taken up by the seminal poem in Section I, "Answers to the Question Europe," a series of sonnet-like scenes in a life with the last line of each section set apart in denial or affirmation, as in "dumplings" that "floated like little boats // not making a path I could follow home," or a "half-dead" black cat that "showed me / its beautiful paws, which it

held out // pink as soap, like little cameos.”

Four connected poems comprise the middle of Section I, layering on scenes that pull readers further up the ladder: two German Jewish sisters who look alike and live together amiably except when fighting over “one another’s political affiliations” (“Sophie and Escha, 1929”); a young girl and her parents who live through the Berlin blackouts “at the stove, one burner on / a blue water lily of light” (“General Strike, Berlin 1920”); “dead youths” who “come in, / dragging their next war behind them” (“Great War”); and a wounded soldier taken in by a family of bears in his delirium, bears who took off their skins “and hung them up in the hallway, and without them / they looked just like men” (“The Wounded Soldier”).

To complete this suite of stories on the first few rungs of the ladder, the speaker asserts “Why I Don’t Do Genealogical Research”—assertion in the title, but not in the poem. Here we are treated to a lovely and fragile image, “the soul / like a translucent little figurine,” sustained through multiple other images as refracted and gradual as daylight glinting and graying with sunset, the beams and then the colors and then the soft, dark, descending souls of children whose lives were “very brief” and whose souls, the speaker wishes,

*might have been lifted,  
and tucked, and zipped inside the thick  
impossibly soft fur buntings  
that are the striped trousers  
and silken hoods of my two  
cats, Henry and Christopher,*

housecats whose lives are “gentle,” who are beloved, whose eyes reflect the souls of those children who began transitioning so beautifully in the poem, into the speaker’s “own murdered kinspeople,” and therefore her attitude against genealogical research.

Section II demands a strong and steady hand to hold the ladder, first for “War Suite,” a short poem series of excruciating contrasts, as in “The Family of Skeletons,” all those innocents killed in every war, who “wore our hearts in our breasts like red purses” and “used to eat blackberries / and bouillabaisse, falafel and cherries,” but who now “wear nothing, drink bowlfuls / of air.” Or “The Recruiter” whose heart “cramps like a fist,” who “lures the beautiful boys.” Or “The Parents” who “let the devil in the front door,” whose regret cannot be restrained:

*Our son's face looked into his face  
like a bird charmed by a serpent,  
a flower mesmerized by sun.  
I know now I should have  
let loose the unfriendly dogs.  
I should have barred the door  
with my own body.*

“War Suite” then gives way to the “Book of Icons,” addresses to particular characters from the annals of European history, rendered with intricate description and infinite care. “Rosa Luxemburg,” for instance, who “crossed the border from Germany,” to make “an uneasy home, a mouse / in a knife drawer,” who was killed for her “murderous red language,” but “hush now—here you are”:

*in the meadow you loved so much,  
up to your waist in the deep grass  
and wild flowers, your eyes covered  
with a bright visor of light.*

“Book of Icons” melds with “Exile Diptych,” a poet-historian’s fancy for imagining Bertolt Brecht “abstracted” in Svenborg and searching for “something true” in Hollywood. The final poem of Section II, “Dear Union,” is in protest of Marine Le Pen and is written as an apology to the European Union, which the speaker describes as a lush, benevolent beast with “raisin-scented paws,” a spine “made of bridges,” and “solar panels” for a hat.

Hollander’s skill in storytelling is enhanced by the creative accuracy of a poet/scholar, so that the first two sections of the book have already prepared readers for the third, in which the titles are in German, but there is no translation of the titles inside the poems. Instead, we get definitions in story-like images that impart knowledge of a time and a people we need to recognize if we are to live in a world that goes beyond the trauma of a dark and needlessly oblivious past.

Here are just two poem excerpts, for example. “Die Courage” defines a concept, endowing it with human traits:

*Everything soft or tender,  
be banished. Anything that asks  
mercy, be exiled. A hard  
cheese, that's what you are,  
sinewy, and with a voice*

*like smoke or a spice grater.*

The speaker follows Courage “through the woods,” through poverty and illness, until the concept transforms into human action: “Foolish woman. / Go find your son.”

In “Verliebt,” young lovers begin as innocent creatures destined for a tragic fate:

*Oracular valentine, with the drunk  
little black milk snakes curled up  
on your forehead. Their tongues  
lapped the saucer and they fell  
fast asleep. Your heart a black  
heart, buttoned on with a mitten.*

These 25 poems of definition tempt and thrill with adept imagery. Hollander is one of those rare wordsmiths who can place three or four adjectives in a row and make them work like magic. (See “drunk / little black milk snakes” in “Verliebt,” above, and check out the three-adjective detail in “Ohne,” where “seals sleep on the slick / black living lace that coats the rocks.”)

Hollander’s techniques extend beyond the elements of language, syntax, and imagery. She has organized a manuscript that moves with meaningful intention from the moment that little cedar ladder extends from the sleeve of the traveling coat, “ready to take you away,” to the final moment of the final poem, “Zusammen,” imploring, “Call everyone. Call everything loved. / Take my hand. Let’s go.”

What a privilege to be led by this writer of inspiring intellect into a collection that reveals ever-intensifying histories of people and events, each unfolding in poem after poem, section after section, to culminate in a memorable volume that begs rereading, time after time, like all good tales of seemingly impossible human nature.

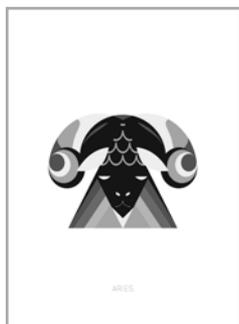
- Carlos Andrés Gómez, *Fractures*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2020
- Jubi Arriola-Headley, *Original Kink*, Sibling Rivalry Press, 2020
- Megan Alpert, *The Animal at Your Side*, Airlie Press, 2020
- Michael Bazzett, *The Echo Chamber*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Roy Bentley, *My Mother's Red Ford: New & Selected Poems 1986–2020*, Lost Horse Press, 2020
- Melissa Broder, *Superdoom: Selected Poems*, Tin House, 2021
- Polly Buckingham, *The River People*, Lost Horse Press, 2020
- David Campos and Maceo Montoya, *American Quasar*, Red Hen Press, 2021
- Victoria Change, *Dear Memory: Letters on Writing, Silence, and Grief*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Ha Kiet Chau, *Eleven Miles to June*, Green Writers Press, 2019
- San Juan de la Cruz (Translated by María Baranda & Paul Hoover), *The Complete Poems of San Juan de la Cruz*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Jeff Ewing, *Wind Apples*, Terrapin Book, 2021
- Robert Hazel, *Praise and Threnody: Collected Poems*, Circling Rivers, 2021
- Jen Karetnick, *The Burning Where Breath Used to Be*, David Robert Books, 2020
- Benjamín Naka-Hasebe Kingsley, *Dēmos: An American Multitude*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Michael Kleber-Diggs, *Worldly Things*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Susanna Lang, Jennifer Grant, Christina Lovin, *Delphi Series Vol IX: Self-Portraits, Year of Convergence, God of Sparrows*, Blue Lyra Press, 2020
- Kurt Luchs, *Falling in the Direction of Up*, Sagging Meniscus Press, 2021
- Carl Marcum, *A Camera Obscura*, Red Hen Press, 2021
- Anna Meister, *What Nothing*, Sundress Publications, 2021
- Wayne Miller, *We the Jury*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Kylan Rice, *Incryptions*, Spuyten Duyvil, 2021
- Derek Sheffield, *Not For Luck*, Michigan State University Press/Wheelbarrow Books, 2021
- Sonia Sanchez, *Collected Poems*, Beacon Press, 2021
- Christine Sloan Stoddard, *Heaven is a Photograph*, CLASH Books, 2020
- Robert VanderMolen, *Skin*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Devon Walker-Figueroa, *Philomath*, Milkweed Editions, 2021

If you are interested in reviewing a poetry book for *Sugar House Review*, email our review editor, Michael McLane, at [reviews@sugarhoureview.com](mailto:reviews@sugarhoureview.com).

# SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

## THE COLLECTIVE ZODIAC



AN ARDOR OF ARIES  
*March 21 to April 19*

Collectively, the color red. Expressed as rage, righteous. Expressed as love, poppy fields, miles and miles. At epicenter, sweat, battleground, readiness.



A TEMPTATION OF TAUREANS  
*April 20 to May 20*

Collectively, grapes in a vineyard. Rustic stone steps lead to a table in the courtyard. All that is lovely sits, chilling, warm, breathing. There is a familiar bird and blue sky.



A JUXTAPOSITION OF GEMINIS  
*May 21 to June 21*

Collectively, bookends. Between solid structures, everything that isn't solid. All words are lies, all words are truth. It matters. But when it doesn't matter, liberation.



## A KINDRED OF CANCERS

*June 22 to July 22*

Collectively, family reunions with red and white gingham tablecloths, watermelon. Relational matrix. Memories disintegrate to dopamine. The substance of bonding.



## A LIAISON OF LEOS

*July 23 to August 22*

Collectively, affection remastered with new instruments. Instruments for synesthesia. When two mediums cross to become one. What color is the letter L?



## A VERNACULAR OF VIRGOS

*August 23 to September 23*

Collectively, vowels, nouns, personal pronouns. Skin-slough gives new meaning to old, tired vocabularies. Intimate communications for the chosen ones.



## A LUSTER OF LIBRAS

*September 23 to October 22*

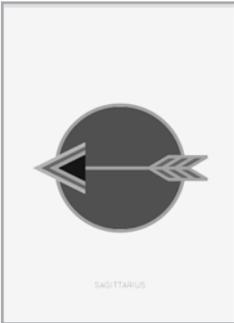
Collectively, libraries of light where books are shelved by hue. Grand staircases with symmetry satisfied. Auras not withholding. Rainbows subsume cliché.



## A SEDUCTION OF SCORPIOS

*October 23 to November 21*

Collectively, matters of the underworld. Styx real as the Mississippi. Rapids beget eddies. Hang your coat on any hook, they will find your scent. Don't be surprised.



## A CIRCUMAMBULATION OF SAGITTARIANS

*November 22 to December 21*

Collectively, old leather boots meant for walking. Pilgrimage. Ten miles of metaphor, or ten miles of track. Horizon as muse. Sunset is the accomplishment.



## A CORNERSTONE OF CAPRICORNS

*December 22 to January 19*

Collectively, atlas-weight. Turning the word dependable inside out. Utterly upend-able. It is time to pay attention, and then it is not. Time, a-frame-a-minute.



## AN ALGORITHM OF AQUARIANS

*January 20 to February 18*

Collectively, data, when analyzed as images or ideas. Trend trekking, a march through X's and O's. Marks. Heights that explain. Patterns in chaos.



## A PREMONITION OF PISCES

*February 19 to March 20*

Collectively, subconscious brews. Drafts with heads thick as thieves. When you get lost in faery minutes become years. Drink like you mean it. See time bend.

HUSSAIN AHMED is a Nigerian poet and environmentalist. His poems are featured or forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Passages North*, *Poet Lore*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Transition Magazine*, and elsewhere.

JOSETTE AKRESH-GONZALES is working on her first book and was a finalist in the 2017 Split Lip Turnbuckle Chapbook Contest. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart and has been published or is forthcoming in *JAMA*, *The Pinch*, *The Journal*, *Breakwater Review*, *PANK*, and many other journals. A recent poem has been included in the anthology *Choice Words* (Haymarket). She cofounded the journal *Clarion* and was its editor for two years. Josette lives in the Boston area with her husband and two boys, and rides her bike to work at a nonprofit medical publisher. You can find her on Twitter @Vivakresh.

BRITT ALLEN is a recent graduate from Utah State University, where she got her Master of Arts in literature and writing to supplement her bachelor's degree in creative writing. She teaches freshman composition for the university and is interested in the eroticism of violence in female confessional and lyric poetry, contributing her own experiences and voice with her art. Her first chapbook, *Harvest*, will be published by Finishing Line Press in July 2021.

REBECCA BAGGETT is the author of *The Woman Who Lives Without Money*, winner of the Terry J. Cox Award, forthcoming from Regal House Press, as well as four chapbook collections. Her work appears in numerous journals and anthologies, including *The Southern Review*, *New England Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Tar River Poetry*. A native of North Carolina, she has lived most of her life in Athens, GA. When not writing, she enjoys reading, gardening, and trying to keep up with her one-year-old grandson.

BLAIR BENJAMIN'S previous work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Threepenny Review*, *Bluestem Magazine*, *Lumina*, *Spillway*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, and *Typehouse*. He is the director of the studios at MASS MoCA residency program for artists and writers in North Adams, MA.

An MFA student at Western Kentucky University, PRINCE BUSH'S other publication credits can be found through PrinceBush.net.

LAUREN CAMP is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Took House* (Tupelo Press, 2020). Her poems have appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Pleiades*, *Poet Lore*, *Slice*, *DIAGRAM*, and other journals. Winner of the Dorset Prize, Lauren has also received fellowships from The Black Earth Institute and The Taft-Nicholson Center, and finalist citations for the Arab American Book Award and the New Mexico-Arizona Book Award. Her work has been translated into Mandarin, Turkish, Spanish, and Arabic. LaurenCamp.com

PATRICIA CASPERS is an award-winning poet, columnist, and journalist. Her poetry has been published widely, most recently in *Barren Magazine*, *Atticus*, *Barnstorm*, and *SWWIM*. She won the Nimrod/Hardman Pablo Neruda Prize for poetry, and her full-length poetry collection, *In the Belly of the Albatross*, was published by Glass Lyre Press and nominated for a Pushcart prize. She has an MFA in poetry from Mills College and lives in the foothills of California where she edits *West Trestle Review*.

STAR COULBROOKE is the Inaugural Poet Laureate of Logan City, UT. Her most recent poetry collections are *Thin Spines of Memory*, *Both Sides from the Middle*, and *City of Poetry*.

MICHELE PENN DIAZ is a neurodivergent writer living in Portland, OR. She works as a glorified receptionist and has a BA in English from San Francisco State University. She loves schnauzers.

COLE EUBANKS is retired as an educator for the Philadelphia, PA and Atlantic City, NJ School Districts. He was the featured poet for Atlantic City's Sovereign Avenue Black History Jazz Celebration for eight years. Cole's work can be found in *Poets Against War*, *Apiary*, *The Journal of Baha'i Studies*, *F(r)iction*, and *Haiku in Action Gallery*.

TAYLOR FEDORCHAK is an MFA candidate at New Mexico State University, where she teaches and is managing editor of *Puerto del Sol*. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Moon City Review*, *decomp*, *The Shore*, *Bluestem Magazine*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and elsewhere.

JEANNINE HALL GAILEY served as the second Poet Laureate of Redmond, WA. She's the author of five books of poetry, including her most recent, *Field Guide to the End of the World* (Moon City Press). Her work appeared in journals such as *Ploughshares* and *Poetry*. Her website is [Webbish6.com](http://Webbish6.com). Twitter and Instagram: @webbish6.

MALISA GARLIEB is a mother, teacher, healer, and metalsmith. She is also a poetry editor for *Mud Season Review*. Her poems have appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Calyx*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rust + Moth*, and elsewhere. *Handing Out Apples in Eden* is her first poetry collection, and there's a second manuscript in the works. Often employing myth, art, and nature, she writes personal histories, while simultaneously unfolding archetypes.

MATTHEW GILBERT'S work has appeared in *PANK*, *Green Briar Review*, *Powder Keg*, *Phoebe Journal*, and elsewhere. They live in Connecticut and measure the general success of life by the ratio of trees to people.

SARAH GRIDLEY is the author of four books of poetry: *Weather Eye Open*, *Green is the Orator*, *Loom*, and *Insofar*. *Loom* was awarded the 2011 Open Book Prize by Carl Phillips, and *Insofar* was awarded the 2019 Green Rose Prize by Forrest Gander. Other honors include the 2018 Cecil Hemley Award and the 2019 Writer Magazine/Emily Dickinson Award from the Poetry Society of America. She is currently pursuing a masters in theological and religious studies at John Carroll University.

TRISH HOPKINSON is a poet, blogger, and advocate for the literary arts. You can find her online at [SelfishPoet.com](http://SelfishPoet.com) and provisionally in Utah, where she runs the regional group Rock Canyon Poets. Hopkinson happily answers to atheist, feminist, and empty nester; and enjoys traveling, live music, wine-tasting, and craft beer.

NATALIE JILL'S most recent work has appeared or is upcoming in *Free State Review*, *Oakland Review*, and *Pendemics Journal*. She is a member of the PoemWorks community in the Boston area.

ELI KARRIN is a poet and teacher residing in Austin, TX. His works have appeared in the *Harvard Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and the anthology *Turn It Up: Poetry in Music from Jazz to Hip Hop*.

KATE KEARNS is a Maine poet with an MFA from Lesley University. Her chapbook, *How to Love an Introvert* came out through Finishing Line Press in 2015, and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Goose River Anthology*, *Soliloquies*, *Literary Mama*, *Aurora*, *Gyroscope Review*, and other print and online journals. Find her online at [KateKearns.com](http://KateKearns.com).

SEAN KELBLEY lives with his husband on a former state experimental farm in southeastern Ohio, in a house they built themselves. He works as an elementary school counselor. Among other places, Sean's poetry has appeared at *Crab Creek Review*, *One*, *Rattle*, *Sheila-Na-Gig Online*, *Still: The Journal*, and *Up North Lit*.

MARCEL LEGROS is a poet and fiction writer from Pittsburgh, PA, and New York, NY. His recent writings attempt to explore the seams between connections, loss, care, alienation, communication, and growth. His poetry has been featured in *jubilat*.

ANGIE MACRI is the author of *Underwater Panther* (Southeast Missouri State University Press), winner of the Cowles Poetry Book Prize. Her recent work appears in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, and *South Dakota Review*. An Arkansas Arts Council fellow, she lives in Hot Springs and teaches at Hendrix College.

LYNN MCGEE is the author of the poetry collections *Tracks* (Broadstone Books, 2019) and *Sober Cooking* (Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2016), as well as two award-winning poetry chapbooks: *Heirloom Bulldog* (Bright Hill Press, 2015) and *Bonanza* (Slapering Hol Press, 1997). “New Leaf” is from her new manuscript, *The TV in the Other Room*. [LynnMcgee.com](http://LynnMcgee.com)

CLAIRE MCQUERRY’S poetry collection *Lacemakers* (Southern Illinois University Press) won the Crab Orchard First Book Prize, and her poems have appeared in *Tin House*, *Waxwing*, *Poetry Northwest*, *American Literary Review*, and other journals. She is an assistant professor at Bradley University.

MEGAN MARY MOORE is the author of *Dwellers* (Unsolicited Press, 2019). Her poetry has appeared in *Rattle* and is forthcoming in *Plainsongs Magazine*. She lives in Cincinnati, where she teaches dance and looks for ghosts.

KATE NORTHROP is a recipient of the Jeannette Haien Ballard Writers Award and fellowships at the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo. Her recent poetry collections are *Clean* (Persea Books) and *cuntstruck* (C and R Press). Northrop is a contributing editor at *The American Poetry Review* and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Wyoming. She lives in Laramie, WY.

DAYNA PATTERSON is a writer, textile artist, and amateur fungophile. She’s the author of *Titania in Yellow* (Porkbelly Press, 2019) and *If Mother Braids a Waterfall* (Signature Books, 2020). Her second full-length poetry collection, *O Lady, Speak Again*, is forthcoming from Signature Books in 2023. She’s also the founding editor-in-chief of *Psalter & Lyre* and a co-editor of *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*. In her spare time, she curates *Poetry + Fungus*. [DaynaPatterson.com](http://DaynaPatterson.com)

SIMON PERCHIK is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Reflection in a Glass Eye* published by Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library in 2020. For more information including free e-books and his essay “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities,” please visit his website at [SimonPerchik.com](http://SimonPerchik.com).

AUSTIN RODENBIKER lives and writes in Texas. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Spillway*, *Hobart*, *Tin House*, *Prelude*, *Narrative*, *PRISM international*, and elsewhere. He’s received funding support for his poetry from the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, the University of Texas at Austin, and the Michener Center for Writers.

MARTHA SILANO is the author of five poetry books, most recently *Gravity Assist* (Saturnalia Books, 2019). She is co-author of *The Daily Poet: Day-By-*

*Day Prompts For Your Writing Practice*, teaches at Bellevue College, and enjoys paddleboarding, hiking, and cuddling up with her favorite feline, Nacho.

CALLIE SMITH is a PhD student specializing in poetry. Before entering the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, she received an MFA in creative writing from the University of Central Arkansas. She loves birds and the color orange.

EMILY SPACEK daylights as a writer and educator and moonlights as a musician and poet. She is from San Jose, CA and currently lives in Salt Lake City, UT.

DIANNE STEPP lives with her husband in southwest Portland, OR where they raise hens and grow garlic, cabbages, figs, and more besides. Her poems have appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies. Her chapbooks, *Half-Moon of Clay* and *Sweet Mercies* were published by Finishing Line Press in 2006 and 2017 respectively.

ROSE STRODE is a poet and essayist whose most recent (2021) work appears in *Dillydoun*, *Buddhist Poetry Review*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Florida Review*. She is a managing editor at Stillhouse Press. When not writing, or helping others with their writing, she rehabilitates overgrown gardens, bakes vegan cakes, and attempts to learn the mountain dulcimer.

ELIZABETH SYLVIA is a writer of poems and other lists who lives with her family in Massachusetts, where she teaches high school English and coaches debate. Elizabeth began submitting poems for publication in 2018; her work has been featured in *Rhino*, *Main Street Rag*, *Literary Mama*, *Noctua Review*, *Pleiades*, and *Chautauqua*.

NANCY TAKACS is the recipient of the 2016 Juniper Prize for Poetry, a 2019 Pushcart Prize, and two 15 Bytes Best Book Awards for Poetry. Author of three books of poetry and several chapbooks, Nancy is currently the poet laureate of Utah's art hub: Helper City, where she directs the Steamboat Mountain reading series. She is also a member of the Board for Utah Humanities. Though she lives most of the year in Wellington, UT, she spends summers in the north woods of Wisconsin, walking the woods and beaches near Lake Superior, and living in a small cabin there with her husband, poet Jan Minich. NancyTakacs.org

ELIZABETH THERIOT is a queer Southern writer with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome. She earned her MFA from The University of Alabama and is writing a memoir about disability and desire. She is a Zoeglossia Fellow and a teaching fellow with the nonprofit Desert Island Supply Company. You can find her work in *Yemassee*, *Barely South Review*, *Winter Tangerine*, *Ghost Proposal*, *Vagabond City*, *A VELVET GIANT*, *Tinderbox*, and others. She lives in Birmingham, AL.

CLARA TRIPPE is a Midwest poet who grew up on occupied Chippewa and Ottawa land. She is a graduate of Grinnell College's English department, and her work has been featured in *The Normal School*, *The Shallow Ends*, *Rust + Moth*, Glass Poetry Press' *Poets Resist* feature, and *Paperbark Literary Magazine*. Clara is a lover of queer theory and freshwater. You can find her on Instagram and Twitter at @mid\_west\_dad.

MATTHEW TUCKNER is a writer from New York. He received his BA from Bennington College and is currently an MFA candidate in creative writing at NYU where he is Assistant Poetry Editor of *Washington Square Review*. He received the 2019 Green Prize for Poetry from the Academy of American Poets, selected by Rick Barot. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Bear Review*, *Coal Hill Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Kestrel*, *The Missouri Review*, TAGVVERK, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among others.

TYLER WAGNER is a poet from Indianapolis. He lives in Seattle, where he is an MFA candidate at the University of Washington.

D.S. WALDMAN teaches creative writing in San Diego, CA. His work has most recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *32 Poems*, and *Colorado Review*. DSWaldman.com

ADAM D. WEEKS is an undergraduate student studying English at Salisbury University. He is the social media manager for *The Shore Poetry* and has poems published or forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *Poet Lore*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Slipstream Press*, *Prairie Margins*, *The Allegheny Review*, and elsewhere.

JAMIE WENDT is the author of *Fruit of the Earth*, a poetry collection published by Main Street Rag Publishing Company, which was a winner of the 2019 Illinois Women's Press Association Book Award and the 2019 National Federation of Press Women Award. She graduated from the University of Nebraska Omaha with an MFA in creative writing, and she received a BA in English and a BS in secondary education from Drake University. Her poetry has been published in *Feminine Rising: Voices of Power and Invisibility*, *Lilith*, *Raleigh Review*, *Minerva Rising*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Saranac Review*. Her essays and book reviews have been published in *Green Mountains Review*, *the Forward*, *Literary Mama*, and others.

ELIZABETH MARIE YOUNG is a queer, Boston-based poet and classical scholar. She has served as an assistant professor of classics and comparative literature at Wellesley College and a research fellow in Greek and Roman studies at Vassar College. Her poems appear in journals including *Jubilat*, *The Chicago Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, and *New American Writing*. Her first book

of poems *Aim Straight at the Fountain and Press Vaporize* won the Motherwell Prize from Fence Books. She is also the author of *Translation as Muse: Poetic Translation in Catullus's Rome*, a book on ancient Roman lyric translation and notions of literary creativity (University of Chicago Press).

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](http://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, VALUES, & HISTORY



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*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:

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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 are 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).

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*Sugar House Review* has published 21 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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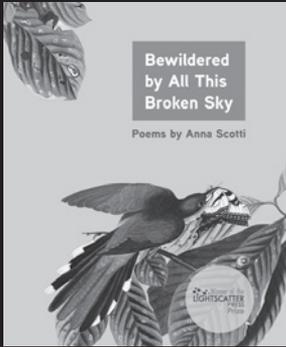
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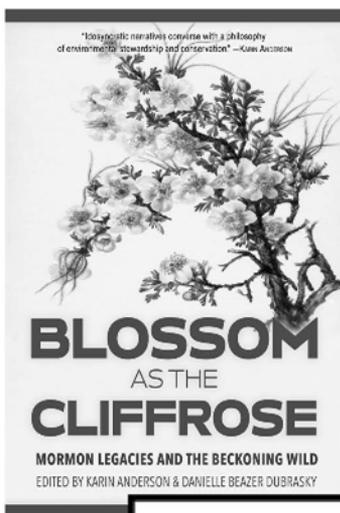
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