

SUGAR
HOUSE
REVIEW



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POETRY

SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

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MULBERRY TREE

Someone playing flute, the music coming from
an open second-floor window,

sky overcast, and we're in front
of a mulberry tree,
its leaves wet. I need to memorize

the kind of tree it is, a way
of hanging on to this moment.

It'll be on a test, the one in which I'm likely

to forget what the tree's called and so
start to lose my connection to the memory, maybe
to memory altogether,

the first loose thread unraveling.
Flute music woven through the branches

and our conversation.
I wonder who even plays flute anymore
but I'm grateful. Love will be

on the test too, or is it the test itself? Love

when the answers
aren't easy. Love when it's not all new.

TELEPHOBIA

When you ask again if I believe in forever
demanding I commit, grasp the question

by its roots and pull, I remind you of my fear
of landlines. The insistent chiming, the way

it transfigured my lungs into panicked doves,
wings beating my ribcage, how, as a child,

I hid from that peppy ringtone like a monster
and still leave you on read, let loved ones

dangle into voicemail. How can I explain
the void on the end of the line, anyone

could be calling, how deep space vibrates
like the voice on a cell? How, somewhere inside,

I want to destroy you, who I've loved enough
to write this poem, with tender words

some of which must survive, go on and on,
reverberating, the way that I love you, but not

enough. The way I think forever is not an answer,
but a question. Forever, the phone that was ringing.

CULLET

I've swallowed glass for every bottle
you drank. Call me terror. Call me
reckonings you looked for
in the bathroom mirror. Call

me shit that oughta been slapped
out of you younger, before the old
men touched you in a stained-
glass cathedral. Call me window

broken by your ruined knuckles. My
blood is your blood; my nose is your
mother's nose. Compared to you, I am
summer that never ends, tempered glass,

a nest of unhatched eggs. I say *hello* & you
pray my name back to me.

X NIHILO

You're akin to a kitten on fire. Your hair harpoons
black barb & lily irons without release. Release
me. Late at night the neighborhood ducks huddle.
I polish my nails with tar. I read the ceiling for progress,
purpose. You're somewhere in this dark
Sistine Chapel dancing with an ice cube on your tongue,
a Molotov cocktail & the lit matchsticks your pupils become
when the sky goes blank with sin. I don't want to be
in your room again. I bury myself in the spaces
between spaces with glue & a dirty cue ball. I land in every pocket.
I cannot escape the wet dryer sheets or the Polaroid of the treasure
map of your forehead. Tell me the one where the clay pigeon is tossed high
& the rifle is cocked & I'm the bullet & you're the shatter & the sun
fiddles the song that creates beauty out of such a loud nothing.

WALK W/ME TO SOMEWHERE OZONE

I bought a TV with the stimulus check & left
it in the alley just to feel greed like sand
fountain through my hands. I bought a used John
Prine record & drank from its oasis. The hallelujah lips
of his cigar guitar sighing nettles through my hair.
Halos & how easily they break open. Death & what
we never give back to it. I bought a line of coke w/my line
of credit. I swam backwards until 9 a.m. Got on a plane
to Rhode Island not knowing if it would make me
smaller or worse off. Turns out Providence < providence.
When I gave my wool jacket to the train stranger
made out of clouds & dusty lyrics, I disappeared
inside an empty turtle shell. In the news these days
all I see is code. 1.0.1.1.0. The earth is not the earth.
The world is a word you can clip open with needle-nose pliers.
Call me a liar and I'll prove to you anything is impossible.

AMERICA

at eight am through the reflecting gray
of my laptop screen i can see eight
vultures eating a dead deer under the deader
trees two weeks later all i can see are ribs
protruding through once-flesh nibbled on
by lingering birds we talk about creeley
as i watch the bones become bonier tips
sharpened into points into spears

yesterday i stopped when i heard some
maintenance staff say *carcass* and asked
if they'd seen the deer behind the abbe building
and they laughed saying *it's been taken
care of* femurs shredded into flakes in some
incinerator down the road where a minimum
wage worker eats bologna and cheese on rye

leo texts me after his ultimate
frisbee practice: *casey there were rabbit guts
and intestines all across the frisbee field no hide,
just insides spread across the field* he thinks
it was rabbit cuz russ saw the grassy innards
and said *yup, that's rabbit* and told them to keep playing
so they did. and marcel was making bizarre jokes
about cannibalism—some *real fucked-up shit*,
i'm told. i ask if it smelled and he says like dew
and gore but the sweaty pinnies outsmelled it

no one knows what it was or how it died cuz
only viscera was left *like wouldn't a fox eat
the insides?* leo presses *and why scattered so far?*
and when i ask *could all of that even come from one rabbit*
he tells me *go out there and count the organs*

A MOMENTARY STAY

Outside my window, the sound of some small slaughter.

It's night, and the woods, not fifteen feet away,
belong to those killers with the keenest eyes:

the coyotes we never see, though we find their hairy scat,
the foxes I have seen playing like dogs, and the owls
that pounce as quietly
and suddenly as a stroke.

It could be any one of them ripping the scream
out of an animal I'm also unsure of.

Maybe a raccoon,
maybe a possum, maybe the rabbit we love
to watch eat the low-hanging blackberries.

The scream didn't wake me, though. I was already up
worrying about other fears before this specific terror lit the night.

So I go downstairs, check on my sleeping daughter,
head outside with a flashlight that can only cough a flicker,

and—what else is there to do?—shout at the darkness
that actually seems to listen to my voice
and stops
what will continue later, and elsewhere, without me.

DEPRESSION IN SAINT-MÉLOIR DES ONDES

The donkey my daughter loves
cannot reach the flowers that grow
in the film of soil the ocean breeze
has lifted to the roof of the barn.

We don't know what they're called
and speak too little of the language
to ask the farmhand their name,
though we can tell they're delicious

by the way the donkey cocks its head
to two o'clock toward the roof
and strains its prehensile lips
to almost reach them, an effort

that looks like remembering
a word you can almost remember
how it nearly touches the voice—
"It's on the tip of my tongue," we say.

And I don't know what to say
to myself, or the man I become,
inside those days and nights of hurt
I cannot argue my way out of.

I know it won't be enough to say,
"Remember the orchard over there,
its plums and cherries, and apples
just forming from the blooms."

Not enough to remember the tides
we hear beyond the meadow, how
they leave the beach cracked
like ancient porcelain. Not enough

to repeat the Auden lines I muttered
to myself last night at the restaurant
when I felt the depression coming on,
eerie as a suspicion of being watched.

“The lights must never go out,”
I said, “the music must always play.”
And it almost worked: the intoxication
of asking for and receiving the tray

of oysters gleaming like an ornate clock,
then the bouquet of mussels,
and the baked sea bream symmetrical
as a well-wrapped Christmas gift.

But I’ve learned that you can love
pleasure and still want to die
while absolutely not wanting to die,
a situation that requires, if nothing else,

some patience, the precise gentleness
the donkey grants my daughter’s hand
as she offers the wanted flowers
to the mouth that destroys and loves them.

WILD STRAWBERRIES

June morning I'm asking Siri
if wild strawberries are poisonous
because Omi keeps picking them
and holding out her berry-gritted
red fingers for me to inspect.
The problem is whatever Siri says,
I'm not even sure the tiny red
petaled bulbs are wild strawberries,
though I know a dandelion
when I see one and she's got a thing
for those as well.

REVERIE ON FRACTURE AND KNITTING

I used to dream of driveways
 full of grapenuts instead of gravel. Why

cereal mattered
 so much, I don't know. Why, after

my grandmother died, my father couldn't listen
 to the growl of a vacuum

for months, I don't know. Sometimes,
 I wonder, if I were to sprint through spruce

trees in darkness, how hard
 would my body blush

and who would listen? Remember
 bread. Remember the slow slurping

of the sun. Remember windows. And *the colors*
 in the sky are nice here, I say to someone else

who agrees. And I'll keep trying to speak
 these missing things whole. And we will

try our whole lives to keep our bones
 inside our bodies. My semiotics professor

tells me evolution is an accumulation
 of accidents. I think of all the accidents

that brought me
 here and didn't. I didn't get stuck

in the birth canal; I didn't fall
 from a bicycle and become a stain

on the street's torso. Yes, I've broken
 a few bones. I have.

I AM TOLD ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO,
I WOULDN'T HAVE SURVIVED CHILDBIRTH

The cool, bare feet
of leaves trip across
a dark road another
memory, silk-thin, blessing
through distracted lungs,
another wave slips off
the white ring the moon
never gave it. I hotbox
every grief that isn't mine
to mourn—her heart clapping
against darkness as sharply
as a hoof hitting a puddle,
the bloodshot evening
a musket ball was drawn
from the speechless body
of a tree, another pain
a mother tucked in. Sometimes,
I catch time mispronouncing itself
with a toothy smile, the slang
of a dead woman's face uncoiling
into my own. In
 the waiting room, a girl
stares at me as she holds
her mother's leg. I don't
recognize her but still
 she puts up
a hand

OPEN HEART SURGERY

Bowing in their paper crowns, the surgeons
settle down for dinner
in the dining room of my father's body.
A good son, I set the table: bone china, copperware.
The silver gently gleaming. I don't know what to do
about the heart, that horn of plenty.
In the myth, infant Zeus breaks the horn
of the she-goat who nurses him.
Her name means *Run to tenderness*.
My father's body is the book
of worship on the table, open
to a razor-thin page, warmed
by strangers' hands. He is the winter apples
I offer our guests, an orchard—
red curtain I hide behind.
Ashamed, Zeus blesses the horn
with infinite abundance. This teaches me
to apologize with both hands: Dad,
I haven't called you in thirty-three days.
I eat well. I know most days you eat alone,
at a bar downtown, watching whatever's on.

THE SOFT ARMOR

From my mother, I inherit the soft
armor of worry.

See: the wool socks
she keeps stashed in the glovebox
like a revolver, *in case we break down*.

A week before my father's surgery
I ignore his calls. I dig a trench
beyond which the crop-fire of love
can't leap.

See: all the years away
I never bothered returning home.

See: the field of ragweed
growing in the shadow of the silo
my sister crashed her car into
when I called to tell her about
our mother's brain tumor.

Once, my mother stopped our car
on the shoulder of the highway
and walked out into a field of corn.
When she finally disappeared,
my mother was the cornfield.

From my father, I inherit his tongue
of clouded silver.

See: silo, sister.

See: my voice like a draft animal
with a shattered hoof I put down
in my mother's hospital room.

When she returned from the cornfield
my mother said *I needed a minute alone.*

YOUTH A WILDER THING SHE OUTRAN

In memory of Kay Stevens

The trees showed off their great white
bones when she coughed and card-tabled
into herself like ribs and lungs working
against one another, both failing
imprecisely. All of this ours now
to deal out: a mink coat, letters in the bedside table,
the new carpet, all of the dust, somewhere,
my mom's baby teeth and her sister's
wedding pictures, secrets she forgot she kept
in the recipe boxes. Casually, I saw her breathe
*I'm ready to tell you what nights hold
closer than darkness.* Like shells
she put in my hands in Capitola, holding her fingers
over mine to show me how to peel open
the mussel. Can I say she was the most private woman
I ever knew without a little blood to mix
in the sand? How late, how alike,
how aloof. I only know now
that she was the first to know.
That without catching her breath,
she pulled her whole self, warm, out of the dryer
and creased each seam as carefully as before.

TIRED OF BEING A LESBIAN

At the hill's base, the valley overtakes the sky, winning
for variation and brightness. My mother lights the stove
pushing gas through its teeth. Even the cows' hunger

holds its breath when the sugar and almonds melt
into the butter. All night there will be stirring:
the neighbor's bull at the fence will find new depth

to his throat; the pot will salivate itself into toffee;
the fog will roll over the barbed wire, the porch, the dog's
twisting under the heat lamp; I pull a blanket steeped

in the hot sugar smell over my head. J. and I could kiss
here too, I think, elongating myself over the impossible
distance and the shadow thrown across it.

OFTEN IN DREAMS SHE WAS MY GIRLFRIEND UNTIL
I REMEMBERED, STILL ASLEEP, THAT IT WASN'T OKAY

Her hair was a miracle of brown-black curls, spring coiled and shiny, and she sprayed it with TRESemmé and hung it over the edge of the bed while she slept on slumber-party Saturday nights so she wouldn't have to wash it before church, and six birthmarks half a shade darker than the rest of her creamy olive skin traced her cheek from one earlobe to the corner of her mouth. At video dances, held tight to the stiffening groin of my own partner, I watched her unfocused eyes and bored frown while a punk kid, thick chain padlocked around his neck, nuzzled hers. Did she like it? I couldn't tell, but when they broke up, he carved her name into his chest with the point of his knife. I still think of how those letters, crooked and keloid, must mark him after all these years. She introduced me, kid from a canned-fruit-cocktail family, to the pomegranate, its pressed paper rind, those nestled ruby cells, each with a seed that nearly filled it. So many tiny morsels and so much work to get their meager juice. But sweet enough to make it worth it. To stain my hands, my face, my precious white cotton leggings with the delicate cuff of lace at each ankle. On a night when we'd driven three hours south to walk the strange, thrilling circuit of the nearest shopping mall (Orange Julius! The Gap!), we lay on our stiff-sheeted hotel bed in our tank tops and underwear, facing each other in the dark, and she asked me if I'd ever thought about kissing a girl. I said yes. Then we stayed silent and still until morning, neither of us rolling over to get comfortable or adjusting our hard pillows or hanging our hair over the bed's edge to keep it neat. I could hardly hear her breathe.

WHEN I WAS AFRAID

The bear in the room every night. Because bears somewhere, bears everywhere. Bear in the room because bears in the world, because if it can happen, it is. Happening. His feral bulk somehow in the house—no, not somehow because I know how, read an article about a bear busting a screen off a bathroom window, climbing through. The bear in the room because one bear somewhere one time busted through, looking for food. Was in a room. Was hungry enough. This bear hungry, too? All bears everywhere hungry. All hungry bears in the room. Their claws. Their teeth. Their unknowable intentions. No, I know their intentions—my father told me the story of a man mauled in daylight on a soccer field. That bear mauling means this bear in my bedroom means to maul me. All mauling bears in my bedroom, on their hind legs. Because one time. Because bears.

LIMB OF WATER

Certain I will remain with my demise—
less than an entirety of morning.

Certain I slept & lost my flesh,
kept by a gray-white dolphin.

But there's the girl—still here,
obscure. So, I present a mallet

to the ocean floor. Crush &
crush & crush some more,

even when the darkest basalt
disappears & the lamprey eel returns.

Certain I can breathe. Certain
the air is different up there—

I need nothing of it to survive.

AT YOUVILLE PLACE

Despite the fisher cats,
this chair is her field.

She rests under the bright canopy
and its low conversation makes her open

her fist, release. My mother
is common, a quiet dinner

growing quieter in her black purse.
Her compact mirror content with dreaming

of how to dream about something
while her body rises

out of its slender girl.
The one she heard for years

far from moonlight, boxed and awake.
A polished rock in the dirt of the field.

“There, there waits the ark” by Kamelya Omayma Youssef

I see the ark, the Arabic letter,
as a winking emoji like
what my mother does after telling
a bad joke. Everything these days
turns into a mother poem.
There's something
about the ambiguous loss
of her compelling me
to write her in.
Now's accepting
it is what it is.
She occupies the
wingback chair. Last
week's paper reports
the missing girl she
says looks like me.

OCCHIOLISM

God-lady died in the pine grove
near the bend in the road. Nowadays,

she palms the cold moss, slips between needles,
quiets herself on the forge-gray rock.

I'm letting my cat sleep over the foot of
this sleepless observer, holding close

his neon leash. I'm letting the bark beetles
fornicate, far from the nosy hardware man

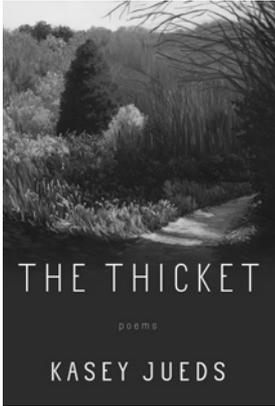
who welds my key. Off grid, the tree
to my childhood bends south.

God-lady gives singing lessons.
She's the occasional flock of starlings.

I'm the owl closing its heavy lids.

THE THICKET
BY KASEY JUEDS
(University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021)

REVIEW BY KATHERINE INDERMAUR



Kasey Jueds' second poetry collection brims with vivacious imagery that encompasses both the enchantment and danger presented by the mysterious natural world. I caught myself returning to the spells cast by these lyrical poems over and over, wanting to step in this book's verdant magic as much as fresh air.

The landscape of *The Thicket* is one "where the deer / keep their secrets" as much as it is where "winter tenses its solitary muscle, and food // turns scarce." Elements of the fable and fairytale recur, particularly in reference to the Grimm brothers' "Little Briar Rose," often retold now as "Sleeping Beauty." Throughout the collection, the female speaker's tender but insistent ethic emerges,

one where "nothing at the edge of woods or fall / is meant to be untangled" and still "each softness is kin to the next." For Jueds, the tangle of this world is what keeps us all looking, and when we are looking together, we can't help but recognize kinship.

Perhaps because we are thus implicated in the wilds of *The Thicket*, familiar spaces appear beyond any fairytale forest. Here, too, is the backyard—the landscaped neighborhood and city streets entangled with abandoned barns and reclaimed meadows. In "Love Poem with No Mountains in Sight," Jueds writes:

*A dog barks from streets away
and my heart casts itself past*

*the tender border her calling makes. As we
are always casting ourselves across edges*

*and streets, as I once stepped from a curb just when
the icon of the walking figure on the sign began*

*to pulse, and realized in that second that
I loved you.*

These are the places where we fall in love with one another, the places that hold our first loves and mark us for it. So, too, in “That Far North,” where the speaker breaks out into a rash after having kissed her lover while unknowingly brushing against poison ivy, and is “glad to have . . . / the fire she felt / pressing outward / to make itself known on skin.”

For a speaker who aims to believe in this ethic she uncovers in the natural world’s profound and apparent entanglement, it is at first surprising how central a role distance plays in these poems. Many depict open spaces, which—while contributing to an abiding sense of calm throughout the work—are not without their difficulty. The speaker is often beckoning, hopeful, as in “The Far Field” (there’s “Far” again): “I could say I do not / know you, don’t understand // what listening I am calling / toward. And still. Come close.” These are places where deer approach close enough for us to note the sun through the translucent edges of their ears, but not close enough to touch. There exists a tension in *The Thicket* between distance and intimacy, perhaps most memorably depicted in “At Cape Henlopen,” where two lovers embark on a camping trip together:

*We walk in light
so steep I can see each single stitch
of your gray sweater, its hem and sleeve; see
for a moment how we’re knitted together
in the wind that keeps tearing us gently from our names.*

It takes this distance and the sunlight between them for the speaker to recognize with awe her and her lover’s closeness. It is fitting, then, that Jueds never ultimately disentangles intimacy from distance. This tension is where the sensuality of *The Thicket* thrives, much like its namesake snarl whose shadow beckons while concealing the thorns we all know are there.

Jueds also employs repetition toward this sensual effect across the book. A series of five “Litany” poems appear throughout, but Jueds doesn’t limit litany to this series alone. In “Not All the Winds Have Names,” every line begins with the word “body”: “Body of the deep north, the narrow road. / Body remembering: fox in the middle of the harrowed field in a linger of afternoon light.” Such anaphora opens up the realm of the poem to prayer, to magic spell, like the chant inside enchantment. With each iteration of “body,” the text reaches further beyond the page and toward real rhythm, real tongue. It labors to close that distance.

When *The Thicket* is at its most lyrical and most pleasurable, it arrives at its most sensual, as in “Of Pink”:

*You came late
to pink, though pink was always
here. The one who holds
your face in both hands. The one
who says I see you. Nothing silks so.
Pink of oh. Pink of see-me.
Of labia and lip, of welts
raised by poison ivy on the tender
inlet of wrist.*

Jueds has a fantastically skillful ear. Here she builds intimacy by layering vivid imagery atop fricative sound. The way the repeated sibilance in “who says I see you. Nothing silks so” tangles our tongues against our lips is not too far, after all, from any earnest tryst—just far enough for us to see the kinship, and yearn.

IN THE HOUR BEFORE YOU WAKE

I stroll unfamiliar streets, jet lagged across a parking lot lined with refurbished *Trabis*, past concrete facades shuttered overnight, front doors tagged in graffiti both brash and beautiful, names on intercoms I do not dare buzz, but want to. Who would even answer, invite me in at this hour? It is that early spell of fall. Quiet. Leaves just touched by frost that stems have not yet relinquished. Alone in the botanical garden I quiz myself on herbs, medicinal and seductive in the onset of decay. *Cascading. Verdant.* Descriptions to slip into conversation later over breakfast, to reinforce their meaning. A breeze disrupts the goldenrod. In the bitter orange a penduline tit flits from branch to axillary branch, where teenagers have affixed poems with bright red ribbon: A girl waiting at the lip of a fountain sketching ivy borders in a notepad. A man in a white suit who wanders a cemetery in the woods looking for a name that doesn't exist.

NAVI

Und wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, dann leben sie noch heute
(*And if they're not dead, then they're still alive today;*
or, more commonly: *And they lived happily ever after*)

—Brothers Grimm

Left of the fork where the path is darkest, follow
beech and deadwood until sirens on the street

dissipate replaced by breeze, leaves softly jostled,
the occasional call of the nuthatch, where the dot

on the phone's GPS (*Navi* for short) drops you
in the middle of the lake 300 meters to your right,

tells you this is where you exist. Continue deeper. Past
the hunting blind, the felled pine encrusted in gilled

mushrooms, the rusted caravan nestled down the bank.
How did it even get here? No road. Its front

completely encased with ivy. If Hänsel and Gretel were
alive today, this is what they'd find. Not pastry,

but aluminum. A more practical entrapment. *Und wenn*
sie nicht gestorben sind... Our own versions of the tales

sanitized for joyful endings. No blood-filled shoes,
the devil sparing the miller's daughter if only you chop

off her hands, no millstone dropped onto the skull
by a snow-white bird from atop the juniper tree. This,

the inventory of your pocket: a thumbtack, stick of gum,
three one-cent coins you'll never use, so you fling one

with your thumb as an offering before heading
for the next curve, the incline up a hill into a clearing

that reveals coals still burning in a fire pit and a pavilion
tagged in graffiti, the branches beyond parting just enough

to expose blue sky and the castle on the other side
of the valley. Only then does the phone ping and the dot

slides briskly into place to locate you. But only for
a second. You know you must move on. Return home.

To the dark of the forest where the dot will list
and once again submerge itself at the bottom of the lake.

THE BAY ISLAND INN

It is a kind of illness
to be this tired. This sleepless.

Far from the city, seven ferries
lattice the harbor. I lean
into the back porch, survey
the field and countryside beyond.

The proprietor contemplates
his hound patrolling the perimeter—
she has the body of an old horse,
but takes her job seriously.

It's getting cooler—ferries
asleep in their slippers now.

I lift my glass to the fields
where armies of withering
stalks bow to the thresher.

NEWBORN HYMN

Did you know for the part of our lives we spend asleep we cannot create a past? That we're all but two-thirds of a whole. That that's the part of ourselves we can never see but know of from its shameless traces: body stain / lost will / ghost wandering the sunflower field out my window . . . When I finally pulled myself out of bed, I took to the tracks my ghost left in the field's peaty soil the night before & was led to a collapsed anthill being circled by a sleek horse, a mare, where inside her half-eyed foal dozed awake. Like it had slept there for days . . . Because even when trapped mothers will wait. Because it was never chance that caused the earth to cave, not unwanted. Lately, it's been raining days on end. & so upon finding, I swamped my hands into that earth's shining red clay bath & handled the baby in its rhythmic panic—bleats & squirms—tight to my chest, till I was successful in pulling her out of the hole to then have her fill of the mare's milk . . . When as a child I heard such accidents called *hiding*, I never thought of the ways we wait to be *found*. Or of the joyous moments let between us. Or of that private sad wonder we feel for moments that seemingly linger at the back of all of our lives: that someone lying on the bedspread you both once shared / the son ready by the burnpile, holding in brief contemplation his mother's diaries he thinks no one should read . . . We're lucky in such pathetic hardships. Because we're all born witches, crafted of heavy stone, & arranged to a cold lake to marry. & it's another hot day, isn't it? & these hot days just keep arriving . . .

PLANTED STONES

It occurs to me that I hear things . . . & it occurs to me
I ought to be concerned if I've been listening enough.

Life works like that. In *suddens*. Wherein familiar chimes

touch again. Aftersounds of neighbors' slammed doors
eventually fade. Noticeable by the absence of their dog's

bark. Then them going to bed with that shared secret.

Wherein everything leads to sex. That inevitable path.
Feed & fate. So the eight grackles out my window quietly

Swoop. Their single high shrill from towering high wires

to netted grass below. Freely skittering along as my desk
bears the late evening sun . . . I hear a loose cabinet shift

empty from some stray wind. I peck at my little dinner.

My toes writhe in their slippers too small. & again pain
somehow offers its loving eye. & so it occurs to me I

can barely recall my own fights or release of rescue—

though plenty of men spent their time punishing me
to save me. & by now the faces I have remembered are

a burden. & so with everyone I speak I feel like I'm in

some sort of trouble. Because I've made trouble. But I
don't want for misery, no. Not like the boy from the old

folk-ballad I once heard. Who planted dirty stones.

Chiseled their marble bloom. To open their mouths &
endure their overdue & inescapable singing.

RUTILANT

Ripeness is all.

—King Lear

First the flow of the direction south
through the empty spaces between shimmer
and still, the soft sounds of leaf dance
and quiver. Then the pale coolness of face
against white bark. The sudden flush
of finding my father's name carved
eighty-three years past. And now the scent
of a wind-whipped branch, pungent
sweetness moving over the lips and tongue

After a stumble and skid the etch of blood
in the lines of my hand.
The walk home dragging memory
in a long sack of white light as I did
when a child making my way back
to weighing camp from the cotton fields
where Dad and Johnny Ray await
by the twilight fire, cold Schlitz in hand
counting my steps as I come

1 Oct 2021

Boulder, Utah

For Michael Branch

LOVE POEM

Post, Texas, 1950s

All my life I've loved
Sister Vera Mae Gollehon
who was seventy-four when
I was in the sixth grade

She was the kind of woman
who carried a pillow
to the Church of Christ
to sit on only because

it worked as a muffler
when she flatulated And
she always carried
a Baby Jesus fan

she could snap open
with a wristflick
even in winter Oh
but how she would sing

in an a capella soprano vibrato
that could almost break
into yodel with deliberation
and exuberance as

a role model for the children
how to achieve a closer
walk with thee, fanning
the air all the way

*Cliff Notes Writing Conference 2021
Boulder, Utah*

For Nancy Takacs

MY ANGELS

After all that listening
to their pure soprano

voices, it's time to rewild,
time to reset the cerebrum

& musculature back to awe.
Tonight, the sky has broken out

all of its tangerine swagger,
& I'm letting it ransack

my bones, letting it become me,
the way rain, on contact,

translates itself into a fraction
of the lake. It's good practice

because one day I'll say
my name so that the syllables

fog up the air, & then
the air will be wiped clean.

I can work with erasure
because the angel on my shoulder

has to tag-team the next.
In this chain-linked series

of wings each is more exhausted
than the last. Let's frame it

like this: I'm a big celestial
employer. They call me

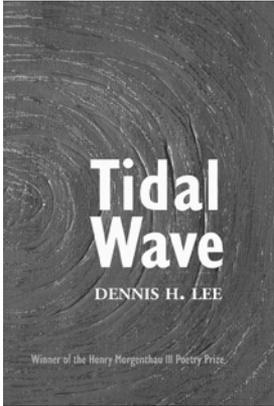
the cosmic treadmill.
Let their perfect little entourage

go baroque & bone weary
because I can't pass up

the universe's continual
double-dog dare.

TIDAL WAVE
BY DENNIS H. LEE
(Passager Books, 2020)

REVIEW BY ERICA GOSS



Dennis H. Lee's award-winning collection *Tidal Wave* opens with a quote from *Captain Newman, M.D.*, Leo Rosten's 1961 novel about a World-War-II-army psychiatrist. In the quote, a cynic, a mystic, and a "man who loved reason" are asked what they would do if the island they were on disappeared under a tidal wave. The cynic would indulge his carnal desires, the mystic would make sacrifices and pray, and the man who loved reason would immediately "study how to live under water." *Tidal Wave* reflects all three attitudes, with poems that focus on humor, food, and above all, a pragmatic view of the past.

Beginning in early childhood, the poems in *Tidal Wave* follow the trajectory of a long, well-lived life. In the book's first poem, "Coney Island—July 4, 1952," a summer day unfolds, with carefully chosen details describing a comfortable if slightly cloying atmosphere: "Grandma's beef smoke / oils the underside of leaves" and "chicken fat soaks into brown paper bags." The poem's last lines evoke summer's appeal, as well as its torpor, as seen through the eyes of a child:

*I sit on the fire escape with kosher chicken and comics.
Grandma speaks Yiddish into the soup.
Tonight's sky will be brighter than the Ferris wheel.*

These lines evoke childhood in a specific place at a specific time, and a way of life that no longer exists except in the fragments of memory.

Tidal Wave is not especially nostalgic in tone—the poems don't reveal an over-riding longing for the past, nor do they romanticize it. Instead, they offer a glimpse into how memory operates, as in "Leaning in my tired seat." As the speaker falls into a half-sleep while riding on a subway train, memories unspool from the present to the recent, and then the very distant past. In that half-awake, half-asleep state, he recalls a grandfather "dreaming of Russia, / of cows in a small fenced pasture along the road he walks carrying / eggs in a basket for his grandmother who had kind blue eyes. Sad, / but kind."

The rituals of preparing and consuming food play a major role in this book. In “Arpeggio,” Lee details the sensual qualities of bread:

*I liked to tear clumps of challah
from the round braided pile of bread,
squincing the piece in my hand to help
leverage the tearing, then watch it
slowly rise back to fluff.*

The action of “squincing” the bread and watching it rise again is as important as eating it. In the poem, food and its savory delights open a floodgate of potent memories: malteds, bagels, and Maxwell House instant coffee, to which his grandmother added “three teaspoons of / sugar, then slowly poured in heavy cream / so I could watch it spiral and cloud its way down.” The poem reminds us that the taste, aroma, and texture of food have the power to bring back memories.

Eating is not always pleasurable, however. In “Lunch,” the speaker can’t find a group he feels comfortable with, “the accountants are talking baseball / ... I don’t know sports,” “the secretaries / ... know too much,” “the guys from the plant are too / down-to-earth ... / They might just eat you.” The poem brings to mind the classic high school lunchroom scene where an unpopular kid searches for a group to sit with. Similarly, the anticipation of eating something delicious can quickly sour; in “The hand sanitizer at my new bar,” the penetrating odor of hand sanitizer ruins the flavor of peanuts: “my scotch won’t kill it. Not even / jalapeños.”

In “Eating Crab,” Lee compares reading the Bible to eating crab: “I have been tearing through the Bible, / looking for those morsels people / talk about.” The process of eating a crab, with its cracking and pulling meat from small cavities, is an apt metaphor for attempting to glean meaning from a dense and difficult text. As Lee writes about reading the Bible, “the little that reaches my mouth— / well, I’m not sure it’s worth the effort.” By the end of the poem, however, he’s found something that justifies that effort:

*A few little strands, sweet and succulent,
and I draw them through my lips slowly,
savoring. My hands need washing.
I do not wear a bib. My plate
is filled with cracked discards.*

Lee has an ear for the absurd, as in “My Doctor’s Dog,” which expounds on physicians having animals in their offices—a dog, a horse, chickens—following,

presumably, the therapy-animal model intended to put their patients at ease. It has the opposite effect on the speaker, who objects to “slobber on the pen” or the way the doctor’s dog “sniffs all over my legs.” He concludes that he’ll need to start a program of “self-healing.”

“Before you write from the heart” is an irreverent take on the gatekeepers of the literary world. In the poem, the speaker receives advice from an imaginary medical team. We quickly understand that they are editors posing as doctors:

*We will inject
a dye that...will show when you begin
writing from the heart and when you stop.*

The patient has no choice but to agree with the findings, “which will have no effect on the content / of any subsequent rejection slips we send.”

Some of these poems veer into darker territory. In “On Dark Wings,” the speaker holds the hand of his dying wife; her impending death filters through the poem with his gradual comprehension. From the “anticipation / ... of a vacation” to “her dead hand” with its “gold meaningless band,” the poem gathers itself into grief as it ends, with the speaker too stunned to “even ask the questions.”

In “The Blood Room,” a child observes a patient “knitting needles in your hands, / IV needles stuck into your flesh.” The child’s curiosity regarding the woman knitting is at odds with her shyness; the knitter stays focused on her craft. The poem captures the absurd yet somehow appropriate pairing of IV and knitting needles; the child’s reaction holds these elements together.

Looking back at experiences doesn’t always bring understanding. In the collection’s title poem, “Tidal Wave,” an event that occurred at a beloved lake still mystifies, even after so many years: “what looked like a wall / of water, a giant wave, was coming right at me.” Unprepared for this catastrophe, he simply reacts: “I / dropped my rod and ran for the hotel,” unlike the measured responses of the cynic, the mystic, and the man who loved reason. The poem also reminds us that age doesn’t necessarily lead to wisdom—sometimes reflection just intensifies the confusion.

Tidal Wave shows us how memories lie in wait, so often surfacing during moments when we are otherwise engaged. Accessible and straightforward, and imbued with a wry sense of humor, this book is the work of a poet who’s witnessed an enormous amount of change, and whose memories’ power and energy have not diminished.

ESCHATOLOGY

We live between
The Imperial March
and evacuation
of the Death Star

SPRING HAIKU

Like a busted echo
my first slinky
tangled on the carpet

THE STRIPE

Reality: nothing is very interesting.
Many things are entertaining, many beautiful,
and most debilitatingly sad.
It's incredible to see you after, what, centuries?
We used to love each other very much.
Bizarre to meet together in this queue
toward wonderful livelihood: in the past
you were so carefree, at least in my imagination
where you spent most of your time.
Reality: nothing is carefree.
Most things carry irreconcilable burdens.
All we ever talk about is boring psychology.
When I say "things," what I mean is "phenomena."
It's irrational to think we'll ever reach an end.

PLUTONOMY

What exactly is a worm: not a reptile, obviously
not a mammal, nor insect nor... Cocoons work
how: the caterpillar melts into a soup and then becomes
a butterfly? Inspirational pseudoscience, as in, dispiriting
science. Market fluctuations, trivia about zoology
and arcane myth. Data tells us everything
we ever need to know, and what we need to know
appears as an immense collection of responsibility.
A rigid, disciplined approach and then these flimsy
dumb results: kids screaming about ghosts inside the pantry.
I used to daydream about the earth not as an earth
exactly but as a genus of the larger world in which
space situates itself. It was nonsense, basically.
Everything is easy, but so much harder than we thought.

BLACK AND BLUE FISH

I take curtains off a west-facing window, fold them tightly, peer out into the open. Not much to see: a dog, a house, a street. Paint a diagram on the glass with a brush's bristles fanned so the paint is not too thick, so light threads through. I feel best with my phone tucked under blankets. Walk to the store, where I meet a woman who needs just one cup of flour. *Sure*. I bring her to my house, give her coffee and one cup of flour while she tells me of the mountain she has just returned from, all its height and weight, what a disjuncture returning, and back home she found a fire had consumed all her old photographs and blankets, leaving only a brick cocoon and an aluminum-rod bed. *Oh dear*. I blow over steam and the dog outside barks. *But what of you?* she asks. *Tell me of you*. I say, *Nothing much here. But well, let me show you something. A detail*. Outside we peer through the painted panes as though we are light. Her face settles, sinks, and she backs away slowly, holding the flour to her chest. A swampy yard has overtaken my feet, so when I try to follow, I find I cannot. I cannot leave my feet, so I survey the yard, which reminds me of a stream. The road: the sound of boats. The barking dog approaching bites at the swamp around my feet and my ankles until I am free. I float up the hill as the rains begin, my eyes still on the window. I don't know what she saw, of course, what feared. All the furniture from the side of the road; all the decorations mass produced. From the outside looking in, I could be anyone, really. But the bristled paint; the panes. I look away from the house to my hands where the flour in the rain has become batter. I look down at my feet, which are fish now. I look down to the yard, a river. I look to the house, my boat, my home. I float. I go inside, unbury my phone from its bed of rest. I wish to know what makes one *one*. I ask the internet. Who's afraid of? Battered fish sticks. Recipes for. Fear? It's only a word. Run? It's only time. Take time. Rest. Your boat awaits. The dog barks. It's bobbing outside the painting. I open the window.

LAS MENINAS

*I cannot explain the action of leveling,
Why it should all boil down to one
Uniform substance, a magma of interiors.*

—John Ashbery, “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror”

Cantus Firmus

Everything is wrong from the right perspective,
but you knew that, didn't you, Velázquez? Sweep
of canvas raised sail-like and stretched
on frame set in the Pieza Principal of the Royal Alcázar,
window light oblique on preliminary sketches
and the palette's oily blossoms of carbon black,
red lake, lead white, azurite, vermilion, ochre.

Sequential expatiation of brushwork and,
as if snapshot, eruption of the realized:
the Pieza fastened upon the canvas
as a simple drab box devoid of molding
or coffers, unremarkable save the dozen paintings
that break the smooth walls, and centered at bottom
on the Infanta Margaret Theresa, her face
angled toward and fully illuminated
by window light that hazes cornsilk locks;

but she stares at the viewer, torso a corseted cinch
flaring into a richly embroidered panniered skirt,
white-on-white brocade pattern contrasted
by orange flowers on chest and in hair,
pool of spilled shadow hiding feet. Her meninas attend,
doña Isabel de Velasco poised to curtsy at left,
and doña María Agustina Sarmiento de Sotomayor
kneeling at right to proffer a red cup on a golden tray,
their white-flowered brunette tresses
and sea-dark skirts an inverse reflection
of the Infanta, as are the achondroplastic
Mari Bárbola in her midnight cyan dress,
and her umber dwarf companion Nicolás Pertusato,

who further counter each other in the steadfast gaze
of Bárbola out of the frame versus Pertusato's rapture
at the mastiff that dozes before him and which he nudges
with a slipper. Above and behind, a further sextet:
doña Marcela de Ulloa, the Infanta's chaperone,
mysterious in her mourning and addressing
a nameless *guardadamas*, their figures cloistered
in the shuttered alcove; Don José Nieto Velázquez,
the queen's chamberlain, silhouetted on staircase
in the bright rectangle of open door at the room's rear;
and held in the opaline bevels of an ebony mirror,
the reflections of King Philip IV and Queen Mariana.

And you, Velázquez, leaning out from the easel
on which we presume you paint that which we view
to check perhaps a line of skirt or daub of white,
red cross of the Order of Santiago on your chest,
the keys of your office as palace chamberlain on your belt.
Baroque painter Luca Giordano claimed it
the "theology of painting"; Honour and Fleming
deemed it "perhaps the most searching comment
ever made on the possibilities of the easel painting."

You've left us behind, marooned
in this wing of the Prado as the shock of recognition
arrests: that we are the perceived, countenances doubled
and made regal in the looking glass; and so the mind
oscillates between self and selves even as the painting
performs its synchronous draw and thrust, bright
iris proscenium of unshuttered faces seeping back
into the obscured velleities of mid-room and corner
that can only ever be a resolution of the eye,
a lightning storm that crawls the gray acclivities
and resonates the echoes of the seen—

like, in fact, the hazy mirror that manifests regality;
and so a focal shift interrupts the reverie,
imposes a duality on the monolith of self
that ejects even as it envelops, transposes,
and we find the child our own: Margaret,
firstborn of a marriage conceived after the deaths
of the previous queen and ten of her eleven children
at an average of one coffin every two years
for a quarter century, but now this child,
here and whole, too young to grasp the import of self
and so boundlessly forgetting not to skip
and laugh the long hallways or tuck a timid face
behind your knee—and yet who holds
a pose beyond her years when a painter draws
the contours of a jaw or eye, and gazes
at the Rubens and van Eycks that line the walls
as if she knows the eyes that will in time look up at her.

This your gift, Velázquez: exposition of mundanity
as slab of admixed pigments thinly smeared
on woven substrate whose fibers visibly texture
brushwork, resolution of line and image blurring
in proportion to proximity until reduced to haze:
pupils as cat's-eye swirl of brown and black edged
with crescent shock of white; delicate dress flowers
as hasty ruddish-ebon dash with spittled ivory gobs;
how a triangle of black and tan becomes
a mastiff's nose, or a spidery crawl
of white-laced blue against a bed of black
creates a pleat. Except the answers are too
evident, the reduction fails to reveal the whole,
as in how the studied felix of a cursive line
becomes a name and therefore a face that rises
through the dross—someone who used to be
important, but now whose features won't coalesce
other than an aquiline nose or chipped incisor,
and beyond that a half-envisioned blur.

In which case perspective must be found
in distance, line and stroke compounded
into grammared form, dilation effected
into clarity of detail. Thus your longhandled
brushes, which allowed you
to “stand back and judge the total effect”
of the “smears and blobs of paint” on your canvas
(Honour and Fleming), figures and doorways
and mirrors emerging from minutiae overruled
in favor of gestalt, and the limits revealed
as that of the viewer who conflated
what was only meant to be seen from across a room
lit by sunlight filtered through old glass.

Omphalos

But these are as discoveries of what others
have already seen and not bothered to mention.
History grows long, and there is after all
only so much that can be considered
and even less put into words before the noticed
retracts like a lighthouse seen through a backwards
cracked spyglass, or is supplanted by a closer
bauble. We lost your grave, Velázquez,
not a century and a half later, razed the church
that rested you and your wife Juana
for a plaza we did not even name for you,
and now tourists sweat their pastel flip-flops
above your bones and raise their voices
as the Tempranillo engorges their veins.

And did you hear voices as you worked—
initially tempered, impugning,
but with increasing surety of purpose
as the interior vision congealed? Did the work
escape you, gain life, thrash rudely at the strictures
of self-imposed dictum and then asudden
discover pinions and pierce the window,

the hand you thought your own in spasm
to encompass the ardent vista, your corpus
petty in the blaze even as the dread of frivoled
deluge constricted your frame, worked
the rhythm of your mind until the balance wheel
slipped the pallet fork and freewheeled in frictionless
ecstasy, dreams emblazoned with the corollary
that woke you insensed to a midnight fevered pitch?

And if so, how to scope the whole? The paradox of art
that it can only be fully seen when done, etherized
so its constituents can be weighed against themselves.
The intellect too small for the task previous,
and in creation often so dimly aware
of even the silhouette. Art then a fumbling
of illusions, pilgrimage to storied shrine
of unknown place and deity, aleatory flotsam
that must nevertheless be incorporated
as if purposive. The mind a gray burro
separated from drove, lost in deep arroyos
but casually attentive, terrain vaguely familiar
and hushed, and anyway the belly full,
the afternoon suffused with that sort of cool
blueness that lubricates into past tense,
eye and ear noting but not lingering
on lavender, kermes oak, quail hen, cicada,
paths chosen without concern or intent
save their pleasant faceting against hypnotic plod,
or how this one seems slightly less rutted;
and how the dirt fans into familiar scree
and the legs become more sure in their meander;
how a trickle slivers the caliche and stains the slope
in widening runnels, thickens the air
with an earthy musk, the body turning
of its own volition to follow; how the nascent
wildflowers quicken in violet and crimson,
usher to the small pond that already fuses
split earth and echoes the raucous crows,
the water cold and bright on the tongue.

Or does that too neatly enclose the scene?
Art instead as nova mused choate, scintillant
existence on subscribed medium; artist then
mere passalong, and skill the meter
used to judge the variance. The mind a chisel set
to marble block, stone dust aslant
in workshop window above the revelation
of point to tooth, drill to rasp, genesis
of form taut beneath surface and revealed
in flakes as overscaled right hand cupped
in gentle flexion around projectile palmed
for sling draped over left shoulder, body
contrapposto and seemingly relaxed,
but head torqued and countenance drawn
as if in fearful agony at reluctant sight of foe,
exposed phallus flaccid; simulacrum so advanced
as to produce illusory pulse of engorged vein,
finger twitch, quadriceps tense, the foot
lifting from pedestal to splay toes on floor,
the figure thus a veil lifted after an eternity of blindness.

The dialectic seethes, demands
to be decanted into an ornate bottle
on a tidy shelf—when actually the gulf so large
as to reveal its meaninglessness, which is not to say
without value in the asking, but as something
that should be resolved quickly and without apology,
a coin flipped to take the train to Rome or Paris.
And so naturally the unanswerable how
of those lives that, for all their effort, ended
more or less where they began: who never built
the architecture necessary to sustain a city
and lined their thoroughfares with rote
and vacuous tenements whose shuttered windows
hide unpainted walls and chairless floors.

What makes the difference? Or is that not
the question? Which to choose: the ease
and cruelty of an endless mesa, footfall
in familiar trudge, the footpath straight and clear
and marked with cairns; or the cruel exertion
of an endless slope of scree, legs and lungs inflamed,
the safeness of a footfall only visible in retrospect
and little but the mind to drive the body on?
To suffer madness born of tedium or strain?
Or is it more innate? That some are simply born
to both release and hold, to let a source's
unfamiliar currents shape the chasm
and fear neither undercut nor cataract.
To think in pictures that are not themselves.
To find a greater comfort in the opposite of certainty.

Solip

The eye hastens to the margins, the unread plaque,
the overlooked muntins that split the windowlight
and how the light refuses the divide except in shadow.
To settle on the browning park across the street; the dog
that turns to sniff its waste against the yanking leash;
the pigeons stuffed with refuse, infinity descended
as a rat with wings to choke on filtered butts.
The proximal a gyre that both impels and fetters:
a blackbird grind erupted scattershot and irredeemable,
sky a pointillist Brownian motion fugue,
coronal mass ejection blistered on the eye
so all is freckled dark and indistinguished.
What point in art when this the still point?
Too much the vantage of a depthless plane
reflecting self to self; a pixelated noise
that hugs the warmth of shallows and cringes
at the deeper blues that rise beyond the coastal shelf.

It's always been this way, of course, Velázquez,
but then what would you of us, so roiled
with assumption of intent? The way
so many sentences begin the way. How so many
of our lines begin with how. And all the likenesses
that refract like the difference between the mirror-self
and model that in its glister seems antithetical.
The way a jeweler drills the girl's extracted incisor
for a hole to fit the necklace chain.
How peeling cherry veneer unmasks particleboard.
So too the pyrite shards of line and phrase
that scatterfall across the page like winter leaves
and constellate in apophenic clarity: unexpected
resolution of sparrow, orange tree, thyme
against the snowbank and the finger that must trace
the airy shapes to guide another eye to so converge.

How sporadically a morning glory novum glints
briefly before dully, rotely grafted onto chamomile
and pinkly steeped: the familiar rendered elliptical
and full-throttled across salt flat, velocity
supplanting delicacy, as in the death-mask
of a forgotten king, lips slightly parted but eyes
hammered shut, delicate golden crescent of brow
and cheek compacted, flattened by graveled humus
that split the tomb slab to fill the cavity
and now must be hauled away in wheelbarrows
and fruitlessly sifted for residue, layers of screen
only inverting the obviate, similarity in dissimilarity
revealed as a pink blister on the bird far overhead,
which may itself only be the product of a fiber clump
in the vitreous, an unnecessary wandering
from what was intended, as if denotation
were only found in parallels and no thing can exist
except in unbecoming and the monotony
of its bathetic shatters splayed on the cave wall.

Da Vinci is purported to have said, "Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen."

What paintings are we now writing?

What writings are we painting? Would you see art in *Guernica*? The way the face refuses to align the horns, the dead man's eyes as offset almonds, how the tear-shaped head distends the window and the lines all slapdash rough to break and intersect the planes as if forgotten pentimenti? What of *One: Number 31, 1950*, a drizzled house paint smear so quickly sopped that Pollock left a fly embedded in a corner near a Mandelbrot of black and white?

But then the idiocy of valuing the standards of an age against another as if telos, as if a nascent rifted margin kept the present unprofanable. And also the measured necessity. Less the ethanol garble of mastery; a rudderless cargo ship foundered and bled out, streams of Prosecco awash through a hull rift and smeared with oil slick, a runnel of rainbow excretion for coral to filter and sea bass to gillsuck and sink to the scavenger's strip; the faith of believers who hold up their rulers against the horizon and see only what they believe; a hang-fired arquebus quizzed in reverse; the penance that lesions in pustules and buboes and leaves only families withered like milkmaids in drought-stricken fields, blank eyes agape at the sun, and all the ripe bodies to gather and wash clean by hand and anoint, the faces to touch as the bodies are wrapped and released in the river, the fish on the stove for the meal.

Because we almost lost *Las Meninas* in a fire,
not eighty years before we lost you:
Christmas Eve emblazoned on the Alcázar
in buttered crimson talons rooted in the quarters
of Jean Ranc, the royal family's portraitist,
whose failing eyesight hid the tongues
until he had no other options, but celebrants
mistook the fire bells for joyful chiming, five-hundred works
of art lost to char and bubbled oil before the blaze
was doused, *Las Meninas* only salvaged sliced from frame
and hurled from window. Because the centuries
of visitors and smoke and car exhaust and greasy roils
of coal egest that slipped the windows left
their yellowed tooth marks on the varnish,
but when conservators impeccably removed
the stains, visitors complained the painting
didn't look the same, meaning it looked
the way it did when you were done.

Yet Picasso painted fifty-eight interpretations
of *Las Meninas* between August and December 1957,
a near-frantic rectilinear and disproportional
cubist paintslap of a finished product
almost every other day: a lineage of open
reference, yet every work both encapsulation
and transmutation, each iteration a necessary
fractional removal. Yet Michelangelo dissected
dozens of cadavers, sketched the femur knurl,
the clotted gnarl of hippocampus, filled his studio
with molds of muscles posed at different angles
to ensure a "perfect... well-proportioned composition
of the human body" (Vasari); studied so intensely
that his peers proclaimed his knowledge of anatomy
was first among the doctors. Yet Gaudí conceived
a hallowed rapture: drew his lines from nature
to envision columns eased to oculi to maximize
the light; mapped a triptych grand facade
as lithic witness to the life and passion of the word

and what awaits beyond the colophon; and capped
his exaltation with a crown of spires that vault
to just below the apex of the distant hills
so man does not encompass God—
the sum of which Gaudí perceived he wouldn't see,
but said of the extended labor, "My client
is not in a hurry." And still the resolution
fails. So much is knowing when the pattern fails.
When the referent degrades to reference.

Alkahest

Look: the daughter's arm was wrapped
around the father on the riverbank.
Though it doesn't matter, say they'd come here
after thirteen hundred miles in search of something
better. If it makes it better, say they left because
the father saw another body on the way to work.
Either way, he took his two-year-old and headed
north on asphalt trails above the porous karst,
past abandoned reservoirs and blue cenotes,
the withered gods that creep the temples
claimed by forest when the rains refused
the calls of kings. And reached the border.
And saw the lines, the people turned away.
Was told he'd have to wait, or go back.
If it makes it better, say he heard about the gangs
that waited back for those who couldn't cross,
who took them in and sent a ransom note.

Either way, he saw the river and the country just
beyond. The water cold on ankle, waist, the daughter
clutched around his neck. The absence of a foothold.
Though it doesn't matter, say they made it twenty yards
before the current pulled them down. Say at least
for twenty yards until the river took their bodies
that there wasn't fear. If it makes it better, say
it happened quickly. Either way, the riverbank

declaimed in still life: sepia reed thickets
like sun-bleached tibia snapped at base
and woven slipshod into brittle hammocks;
spattered black mouth orphanage of azure
aluminum cans; sullen bilious river muddle.
Prone half-submerged, the family surfaces
in negative transcendence, outline of waterlogged
diaper through red shorts, the father's spine crevasse,
how his shirt also wraps around the girl to fasten her,
both heads thrust through a single collar.
Her right arm across his shoulders. The eye
demands to hold, demands to be retracted.
To haven't seen. Else interpose the self in frame
and haunt the loop of lung and water. But look:
to fail this fails us all. Either way, the water pulls
the bodies down and gurgles on. The absence
of reverberation.

And say at last we shake ourselves
and look up from our canvas, find
the margins pushing at the windows, the light
grown cold, the guards announcing that the doors
are closing. So we stumble back to the hotel
to drink a glass of wine, and in the morning
wipe the mirror clean of shower fog. The face
at first is unfamiliar, but reassembles
with practiced ease. Outside, the light
is bright again, the croissant at the café
crumbles on our lips. On the riverbank,
a man throws bread to ducks. Another crouches
in the street, pulls guitar from case, plays flamenco.
The song is sweet and fast and fills the plaza,
and we nod with the other tourists, then pay the bill
and leave before he asks for change.

Poem's title borrowed from Diego Velázquez's 1656 painting Las Meninas.

WATCHING CNN WITHOUT SOUND IN THE HOTEL LOBBY BAR

All the gestures matter more and how their lips move. How the one sort of adjusts himself in his seat and takes the stance of debate—tired of listening, wanting to speak. There's four and then three and then two, briefly, and then someone far, far away with a scarf artfully wrapped around her neck using her hands to emphasize. Behind her, it's dark and there's only one dim light in the distance and even from where I'm at, I can tell it's hot where she is and that makeup is a useless thing. Back in the studio, their faces are so caked it's as if I could reach forward and scrape the foundation off like I did that horrid wallpaper in my apartment on Porter. Their eyes are all too blue and their hair unnaturally vibrant while they comment on this particular invasion and its ramifications. Or so I understand from the feed that keeps repeating itself. Flash—to this moment, here. Flash—to this one, now. And then we're back to a circle and the one and then the other, and how if you look long enough you start to imagine they're not even human.

HAPA

Taking my order by phone, she asks me
What do you look like? So I can find you?

Except that's not how she says it. Dropping
words the way my Korean mother does,

still making herself understood, she waits
while I decide. Pausing, as I do, as

I have done since the first time someone asked
me with genuine interest *what are you?*

I answer this woman in a way I
know already she will never accept,

take the chance I never take. *Yes*, she says,
I think I know you. Spotting her just as

she comes through the door, I wait for her to
scan the room, find me and then decide. She

approaches, tosses bags on the table,
mouths the word I know she's thinking, the word

I've heard a dozen times. *Hapa*. It is
the one my mother hates, the reason why

I was grown before she took me home to
meet her people. I see her stiff face, black

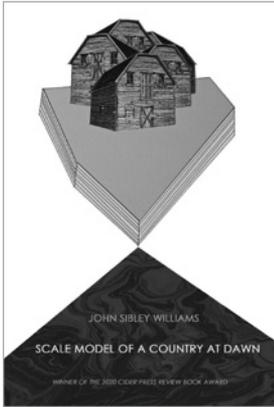
eyes of resentment at their turned backs, their
conditional love. Now I speak the truth

of who I am, or at least half of who
I am. This woman receives from me a

wide smile. I thank her, watch her go knowing
half a truth is better than any lie.

SCALE MODEL OF A COUNTRY AT DAWN
BY JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS
(Cider Press Review, 2022)

REVIEW BY LINDA SCHELLER



The landscape of loss is a personal topography we traverse when those who are dear to us die. In his new book of poetry, *Scale Model of a Country at Dawn*, John Sibley Williams contemplates loss and its aftermath in poems that depict life's evanescence and beauty with clarity and grace. Winner of the 2020 Cider Press Review Book Award, this collection offers nuanced perspectives on mortality that suggested to me a glass paperweight containing a microcosm. The reader encounters the crumbling houses of childhood, dark forests, a cliff, burning barns, the “multi-colored living field,” islands. These archetypal landmarks effectively connect the speaker’s experiences with

memories and emotions from the reader’s own life.

Scale Model of a Country at Dawn opens with “The Gift,” a prologue in which the speaker pledges to make and give “something the light must struggle to enter.” Throughout the book there are allusions to profound losses in a muted elegiac tone. Williams’ studied restraint creates enigmas of loss so that reading the poems is akin to unearthing the bones that once comprised a body’s architecture, or smelling the smoke that lingers after fire. Carefully placed hints snagged my attention, and I felt compelled to read and then reread the entire book to better understand these losses and their ramifications.

The book’s eponymous poem begins with an epigraph defining a Hobson’s choice, the decision to accept or refuse the one thing offered. Time offers the quintessential Hobson’s choice: move forward or not at all. The only possible way to return to the past is through memory, a model of dubious verisimilitude by virtue of limited perspective and emotional refraction. It is important to note the time chosen for regarding this model of the past, since dawn implies the rebirth of hope, perhaps even joy, as the world of light, color, and clarity returns following a period of darkness.

The title poem consists of unrhymed couplets, the form Williams uses in the

book's first and last poem and in almost one-third of the collection. Enjambment spills images over lines and across the spaces between stanzas in a cleaving that severs, then connects thought:

*Either side of a saw, either a beheaded mountain
or not enough coal to last the winter; a startled*

*horse beats itself against an open barn door,
imitating flight, while the hay catches fire, &*

*emptied of organs, painted to look less still,
my mother has never looked more herself.*

After a parent, caregiver, or another person integral to one's life dies, memories and unanswered questions are likely to become focal points in which the relationship's dynamics as well as the survivor's self-regard are scrutinized. *Scale Model of a Country at Dawn* conveys these struggles and complicated emotions with admirable honesty. These beginning lines from "Controlled Burn" convey dread and doubt with ominous imagery and terse analogies:

*Acre after acre left unburnt.
Full families of wolves gone
unshot. & the chickens we keep
to teach our children where meat
comes from are getting nervous.
The wire-thin pen cannot stop
the world from entering. Like how
quitting cigarettes only delays
a mother's cancer. Like all those
desperate prayers that refuse
to restrain night.*

Williams employs an ampersand in place of the word "and" even at the beginning of an utterance that culminates in a full stop, as seen in the excerpt above. The use of a symbol to represent this conjunction echoes the poet's skill at weaving symbolic meaning into myriad images of animals, objects, and geographic features. There is, however, one poem about two-thirds of the way through the book that didn't have ampersands nor the double slashes that appear in some other poems. The switch to formality gave me pause. I was curious to know the reason behind this choice, and the change caused me to slow down and read more carefully. "Fever" begins:

*When you hold your child's body like this,
cold as unexcavated earth, wet with want,*

*making oaths to anything that will listen, please
and god and the usual silences, so much useless*

*splendor cradled fetally between raw open hands.
When the field just keeps going without you.*

The poem is stunning in its heartbreaking vulnerability. Of all the memories considered in this collection, the formality in this particular poem bespeaks exceptional anguish. As Emily Dickinson wrote, “After great pain, a formal feeling comes—” The frame of reference in “Fever” may well be, in Dickinson’s words, “the Hour of Lead— / Remembered, if outlived.”

The terror and shame in “Fever” are associated with “dark steeped night” and “gut-shot worship.” Left with “the usual silences” after a terrible event or devastating loss, even the most stalwart believers might well question their convictions. Certainly I did with the death of my grandmother, and then decades later when I lost my father and youngest brother. The poems in *Scale Model of a Country at Dawn* alluding to death and doubt resonated. Williams conveys the anguish of loss and the memory of trauma with extraordinary sensitivity. As I read these poems, I felt an empathic kinship with the speaker whose experiences of loss and doubt were superimposed on my own.

The contemplation of one’s own mortality is given vivid evocation in “Synonyms for Paradise,” a poem near the beginning of the book. Williams writes:

It hurts me to do it, but let's let the synonyms

*for joy & for grief bleed together, like salt
& fresh water, like poles of a magnet.
That we all die before we're finished
is no excuse to abandon this worn-out*

*car by the side of some nameless road,
flipped over, only partially on fire.
That we should know when we see it
is not the same thing as a promise.*

The stark truth “we all die before we’re finished” is followed by a whimsical metaphor comparing life to an old car “flipped over, only partially on fire.” The

dry humor conjured by that description never fails to make me smile, yet the next statement is a profound challenge. Within the poem and throughout the book, juxtaposed opposites like “joy” and “grief,” “salt,” and “fresh water” perfectly balance one another.

As in all the poems in this book, musical intonation carries the reader through “Parallax,” a gorgeous poem that combines the profound and the ordinary in shifting perspectives and indentation:

One could almost say

*illusion, that all this seeing
is a trick the light plays to keep us*

*rooted in place. In this case,
driver, subject. If things worked out*

differently, we'd be out there wandering the object-heavy night

*dreaming that our raised thumb meant
you can trust me & unarmed, then drinking
the moon from crushed cans rusting by the road.*

The last section of the book, “Object Permanence,” is notable for poems that seek resolution and find endurance in a considered acceptance. Tentative joy emerges from the ashes and regrets, and gradually the sharp outlines of loss begin to blur. The speaker regards his own children with wonder akin to breath caught in surprise and released in awe. In one of the book’s last poems, “Restoration,” we read:

*In the absence of repair, I'll make due
with telling my children this failing house
& the country we planted it in & the world
that refuses to stop blooming around us*

& the stars can be shelter enough.

During our lifetime, each of us travels through our own little country with its own particular landscape. Yes, there is loss, but there is also love, beauty, and hope. As the poem “Larynx” proclaims, “the world is worth singing into.” In *Scale Model of a Country at Dawn*, John Sibley Williams urges us to savor the journey and cherish those with whom we travel.

THE FIGHT

My son's principal calls on the day
of his first fight. First grade.
A boy pushed him out of line,
and he pushed back. Pushing then hitting—
they are six. A white boy's father
might say, *good for you,*
standing up for yourself.
My husband says, *there are injustices*
coming all the time. Sometimes you have to be
the bigger man. He is six. He cries
in bed, *I'm a bad boy,* and I hate
America. I hate what I can't stop
it saying to my son. Outside our window,
a dog passes on a leash and our dog
goes crazy with barking. I don't
bother to stop her—her nose and teeth
crashing at the glass.

POEM WRITTEN ON THE DAY OF A FUNERAL
I COULD NOT ATTEND

Grief rattles and follows behind me as my son
crosses each bump and line of the sidewalk
on his scooter. There is the instinct to protect
myself, having been hit at the ankle more than once.

Go in front so I can see you, I say,
though seeing is not always better,
photos sent from the family of her
body, fitted into casket, still and painted.
White dress. Blanket beneath her
starred and blue as a bird. I loved her

but not always well.

That's the part of a funeral I can't take: closing the casket,
last chance to see someone. Once
I went to the funeral of a man I'd never met and cried
when his son closed the casket.
All he had now were pictures.

My son, bright in the morning
and ahead of me now, whirs past a neighbor's
boulevard garden, hit with an iris
angled over the edge of the walk.

How often beauty brushes past
us without notice.

How we even abuse it: my grandmother's garden
when I was a girl. She let me play however I wanted.
Bored afternoons I peeled the pods
of the money plant and snapped the dragons' heads.

WHAT TO SAY AFTER A CERTAIN KIND OF MAN
BEGS FOR HIS LIFE

“Mantids are sometimes called praying mantids or soothsayers (Greek, manti = soothsayer) because their forelegs are held in a supplicatory position resembling prayer. Nearly 2,000 species have been described.”

—Timothy J. Gibb, Contemporary Insect Diagnostics

When I tell you you're a snack I mean
for real. Look at you. You got the motion,
that roll and roll swagger. The way you swivel
your head and track me with those big red eyes—
you see what I'm not: the petal-limbed orchid,
the dancing devil's flower, hands up. No unicorns
here, either; I'm just like other girls. And I'm not
a leaf or a ghost, I couldn't hide if I wanted to.
I pray out in the open. I can leap like a cat, adapt

in mid-air. I can tear a hummingbird right out
of the blue, a different kind of honeyeater. Isn't
that what you came for? You already lost your
head for me, though you'll tell yourself it's all
for the thrill, all for the kids. And when I turn
back for that first kiss, you'll ignore every
warning, even the last: My God, look at you.
Look at what you made me do.

HOPE IS THE SECRET INSIDE A BELL PEPPER

when you slice it open
to scrape out the seeds
and find a miniature made
of red and fire
sharing the same stem:
how it's waxed and crumpled,
and beautifully hollow,
and clenched inside the chest

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARE

Guilt needs
Partial sun
Ample watering
Each morning and
Leaf-trimming
Weekly.
Its roots
Run deep
Out of sight
So that the gray
Whale of its body
Drags up
The whole earth
As you pull it free.

FIRST FALL AFTER OUR SON'S LOSS

Winter came today, a whole season early
the pelt of wind-driven rain, the heavy
breathing of spruce and fir and alder
in their wild dance. The sunlight softened,
mediated all day by water overhead,
the shadows all lost, the crows dispersed
and silent, hummingbirds withdrawn
to darker caves of trunks and limbs.
We hid, too. We watched from our windows
as the world opened its heart, a fist unfurled
and displayed, weather stripped bare, exposed
to voyeurs, to gawkers, to tourists sealed
in their hermetic ships. We did not speak.
We, each in our separate panes sequestered,
kept our counsel clenched close, our hearts
in folded fists with knuckle knots hardened
by cracking. I did not know what you thought.
I thought *alpha* and *omega*. I thought
where are we. I thought *how unlike*
the line of deer—four does and three fawns—
in slow procession under the trees.

SUBURBAN FOLKLORE

My brother wants to see wolves
take down a white-tailed deer, offer

him their young to raise as his own.
As children, we were birds making nests

of fresh-cut grass, our arms the wingspan
of endangered eagles. Sit with me, I'd say,

in the nest I've made. See how I could
be a mother, too, bringing mulberries

packed in the cuff of my jeans, yard
the culmination of fearsome teeth.

When I pray, it's to marigolds,
the devil of a snake coiled

on the sidewalk I take to get bread.
I want to feed anything that won't

ask me to keep it. Send me the hornet,
o lord, a string of spiders' eggs,

my brother weaving shoestrings into
intricate nets. I don't know who showed

him how to capture what he wants,
to build a perfect web and wait.

EVOLUTIONARY RECORD

Once, the bat used the same senses as me, before echolocation ventured out of his head, into the dark, and returned, reverberating, to his skull's enclosure.

Then, he evolved to be free from seeing, smelling, or touching to perceive the positioning of things. Lost need for hands, features we might have shared, if time

had traveled forward differently. Uncertainties fluttered, appended to his sides, in the beginning. These possibilities of arms withdrew into his shoulders. After, five phalanges

remained, one stuck up and out, as a reminder of thumbs. But the other bones thinned, and the pinkies, if that's what they almost were, are evasive in their places at the elbows.

Membranes the bat glided on didn't shrink to rudimentary webs I see between my digits when spread in the gesture that shows I grip nothing. His skin grew instead into wings.

Once, I was told bats tangled in girls' curls. A girl can believe others will fling themselves into being near, when their gazes have just started to be laid on her form's unfurling. She may

not worry about why the bat extended what could have been hands to take flight, rise beyond reach. She does not yet know anything well enough for it to feel old, how parts of the body

can fold, or the shape of prayer. Prayer: Let the one asleep in this bed keep waking, limbs tangled in mine, even when my hair, knotted round his finger, adds to the ring he wears, more silver to the binding.

RUGER LONG RIFLE

.22

What if a tool saved your kin? A metal made dear, each generation its
own rattlesnake-rabid-dog-starvation story—

How do you judge the old hands, calloused by love,
that pulled the trigger, the slaughter that fed your father's
fathers? What of this tool now,
polished by ancestors' sweat?

Would you pass it on,
would you place it in
your son's soft hands?

BETH SUTER

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Near dark the clouds crowd
over the milkwhite moon—
the only night it remembers to rain
that whole terrible summer.
They move inside, treat the stranger
to a cold Bud and a charred dog,
and he talks a long time
about strategies for lucid dreaming.
Later they pass the glass pipe
and the dogs nose out
from the back bedroom,
hoping one of these zombies
is still up for a little belly scratching.
Steady rain against the street like
the hiss of a bad home recording.
On the counter radio the DJ
plays a march by J. Philip Sousa
intended for fireworks that never fire.
The refrigerator rumbles, mindlessly
turning water into tiny cubes of ice.

QUESTIONS FOR WITTGENSTEIN

If Carnap's principle of verification fails
because what is employed to verify
must in turn be verified to infinite regress,
and if Popper's theory of falsification
founders on similar reefs
because the measure of falsification must be verified,
then the suspicion that this writing is not a poem
because there are no stanzas
and the lack of rhyme for Shakespeare
would serve to falsify
is in turn falsified,
do I declare myself acquitted?
And because I am at a loss
when it comes to telling if the bob of the leg
of the girl whose jeans are more hole than fabric
has come to kick, and if so is the kick a tell,
if so, Ludwig, what is it telling?

VERIFIKATIONISMUS

qtd. L. Wittgenstein

“I shall first speak of the ordinary ‘all,’ e.g. ‘All men in this room are wearing trousers.’ How do I know this? The sentence means ‘Professor Schlick is wearing trousers, Waismann is wearing trousers, Wittgenstein is wearing trousers, and no one else is present.’ Every complete enumeration must end with the words ‘and nothing else.’”

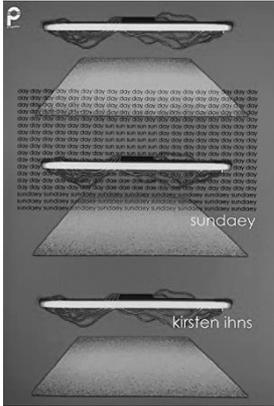
By which Wittgenstein meant that my father and I were not in the room, thus may or may not have been wearing trousers. But in fact, we were. We always did.

My dad was the only man I knew who said *trousers* instead of *pants*, which made me the only kid who wore trousers, but albeit conspicuous, I loved the gravelly sound of the word and the bond we shared when he said it.

In college, we joked diminutively about “dropping trou,” but this many years later I don’t recall why the phrase had such currency and incurred such jocularity. Still, I dropped as often as I could, soundlessly. If Wittgenstein hadn’t seen it, he wouldn’t have believed it. Had he, he would have.
And nothing else.

SUNDAEY
BY KIRSTEN IHNS
(Propeller Books, 2020)

REVIEW BY ERAN EADS



“There’s something to be said about not saying anything.”

—Janet Jackson

“I know / I don’t know / that’s what I do know”

—also Janet Jackson

Sans serif on the hard pink shell of the cover greets the reader of Kirsten Ihns’ debut poetry collection *sunday*. The flamingo-milk-stained edges of the book are ostentatious and cube the rectangularity of the outer presentation; this dimensionality further brings it to life. I know, I know, a book, its cover... judging! But the performance of the color

captivates like a robin’s egg.

Note: I know Ihns and attended the Iowa Writers’ Workshop with her. For the purposes of transparency and ethical behavior, that must be known. I consider this to be a re-view versus a review, and I consider that distinction to not only allow but to explain my compulsion to write.

Perched in the “day,” a block text in limbo between the table of contents and numbered pages, “sun” then “daey” are presented. More of these block-text poems will emerge throughout the pages, almost migratory in their return back to meaning and with something small flitting in to disturb them.

The introductory poem is “yes, hello.” It is a strange beginning. It is rattling to begin with a confirmed response. In my own rereadings, I gloss the first couplet then read “I was taken out to dance and click.” Here and throughout the book, Ihns boggles with her specificity. I want to laugh at it as a line. It feels like all it can be doing is humorous. The last two words stretch the sincerity of the entire line. This is later followed by “mostly, I like things I can find.” This seems to be a crucial creation method for Ihns, her ability to listen and find, yet before the line can even end it plunges back into “by means of batherwater / behavior.” With the turn, she is no longer nest-collecting an identity but bobbing in bathwater

to find. What bird is this?

The “i have left The Amazing Hair Day, for you” first line of the second poem, “the world of flying motor objects,” is instantly humanoid and shifts with the following lines into a demand. It is lyric, it is appealing, and it is “v” self-aware. However, it is not self-identifying. Much of the collection is self-aware and even alights momentarily near self-conscious. In “of the five senses, desire is the sixth,” the creature-speaker acknowledges creatureness but admits “sometimes it’s hard to know one is.” Yes.

Sometimes the poems preen and carefully tumble line by line, but mostly they dart around as if trapped in/on the cage/page. Line uniformity seems to scare the speaker; it is avoided. In its place, sound is prioritized. Sometimes words seem to only exist because of their sound. Each a careful tweet (and often tweet-able) moment that builds into song. Then “lol wat.”

The warble of the longer forms, while grounding the sometimes-flighty collection, blends seamlessly into the smaller chirping one-page poems that are sonically strongest. These poems are “the kind of pleasure you can gnaw and not diminish,” and it is often difficult to differentiate between their playful sensuality and their playfulness. Each so wholly convinces the reader to get caught up in the rapture of their sound.

Speaking of “rapture,” after a book-length deluge of good and great poetry, this poem is something beyond. It is a spectacular poem that I still find surprising three years after its publication (originally online in *BOAAT*). A person could spend years with this poem. I did. I will continue to. Each time I teach it, students are marveled by its seeming simplicity and eventual density. And the last three lines! After experiencing “rapture,” one can return to the page before page one and see in block text of “day” a door of “sun” and “dae.” This is what the book is, “a new door” leading to “the same building / as the others.” It’s a bird’s-eye-view of the door and it is also an invitation inside.

There are moments to openly chortle: I don’t know how to read the title “quat swan” and not laugh. That is the grammar of Ihns’ debut. And by “quat swan” it is all beginning to be a language of its own, understandable when one follows the flight. Then the Greek mythological figure Leda appears in the poem, or actually, the speaker commands the reader not to be “reading that in.” The repetitive negative command is a trick to the human mind and a confirmation that one should “reference to leda in the swan” regardless of what the speaker says. Again specificity turns the entire myth on its head with the replacement of

“and” with “in.” As if Yeats’ sonnet needed further complications, Ihns steps in and complicates. This poem begins by engaging in hilarity and sacrificing then resurrecting the swan “on the lawn / like geese.”

This is the part where the ruse of the lyric-rouged lines begins to truly glimmer through. The speaker seems most “honest” as a bird, as a creature, as anything that is not human. Even inanimate objects have believable sentience in her lines.

The eye feathers of I-statements are a wonderful vehicle to guide the reader along a carefully curated flight path. Any other thing with eyes knows how to follow. When lines like “i refuge like my body is adornment” come it is both definitely contrived and certainly sincere. Then there are lines that are a way for the reader to “fix it how you like it,” although this writer cedes no control.

A desperate bird will lure predators away from a nest with hopping and singing—any successful distraction. In this debut, Ihns is birdlike, though her distraction-song is not desperate, but consciously useful. By the end, a reader may be encouraged to lean away from trusting her “I.” The lyric continues to appear on the page but it is mostly pecked to near-death, cannibalized to serve the sound of each line. Trusting the musicality of the Ihns’ lines is far more successful.

Out of the pink shell of *sundaey* hatches a knowledgeable bird: capable of human imitation like a crow, yet tropically showy. Even when contemporary means a time and not the now we know it, Ihns will never be accused of writing contemporary poetry. Instead she offers *sundaey*, “a new door,” a novel method for meaning makers to experience the strange.

What does it all mean? Sometimes it’s warning. Sometimes mourning. Sometimes it’s a playful morning tune. Most of the time it flutters between f**king and I-don’t-f**king-get-it. In that fluttering, the music of the verse remains undeniable. This is a strong first collection and an important debut.

EVERYWHERE I LOOK I SEE A RODEO

White bulls and a crowd of blue jeans
are the sky today.

Purple yellow pink horses
riding the wind are the wild show
of tulips in our garden. Calf
with his legs tied is
a tulip bulb. Red sash
of the cowboys, a poppy.
Announcer: the bumblebee
in a foxglove tube.

The clown hiding in his barrel
lathered in lipstick,
smile wide as a half moon,
blond wig and bright pantaloons
is your heart
peering out now and then
to tell a joke
and run.

Chasing the bull, his horns
big as myth,
his hooves
making music
is called riding a poem.

Everywhere I look I see
a rodeo.

I love the world like the buster's hand
loves the horn of the saddle,
white mountains of his knuckles
trembling.

It loves me back like pink
jewel-studded hats, swish
of polyester pants, soft shadows
of leather fringe. It loves me
like snow cones cotton candy
churros nachos burgers dogs.

It loves me like a kid
loves his fingers, licks each
one long, grease stain
on his knee.

I fight grief the way the bronco
bucks that wily man on his back,
the arc of those seizures
a kind of prayer.

Like the calf roped and tumbling
I too lie limp at the end
of all things. I am spurred,
wrangled, rounded
up, hog-
tied by the holy.

Everywhere I look
I see
a rodeo.

Love, the cowboy's kid gloves
limp and crisscrossed
over the horse's back
are the two of us on a Saturday
morning.

At night we chase our boys
down to bed,
hover over them, wild things
we've caught,
their breathing the rhythm
of hooves,
their falling eyelids
the parachutes
dropping down
soundlessly
just before the arena
lights pop on.

TO MY DAUGHTER

In the future, starlings will chatter
in the maples. A little, white moth
will flop around in wet grass and a dog
will take it in his mouth, then drop it in surprise.
In the future, there will be smoke, there will be
firelight on faces, there will be music
from stringed instruments, human voices.
Someone will shout at a horse race, someone
will slip on slick stairs, bruise a hip.
There will be words on clean pages. A girl
will read them aloud in a yellow room,
sunlight from a window warming her legs
stretched out on her bed. In the future,
there will be other plagues, other sufferings, people
will hoard food, buy guns, mock each other
in courthouses. Your body's quick wit
knows how to survive it. Fools will shout
in the streets, and you will
ride your bike past the city
to tall trees, glittering water. You will find
people with bright faces, laughter, fruit
set out on long tables. Men will talk
gravely on the news, and you will watch
the river, memorize its colors,
draw in your journal the green spots
on a beetle's wings. You will be alone sometimes,
but full. The moon will rise, soft lights
will come on, the world will turn gentle
when you least expect it. If you can't sleep,
you will brush your long hair
and hum songs to the dark through your wall.

CHANGING THE REAR BRAKES, I WATCH MY DEATH APPROACH

*“...if you’re
old enough to read this you know what
work is, although you may not do it.”*

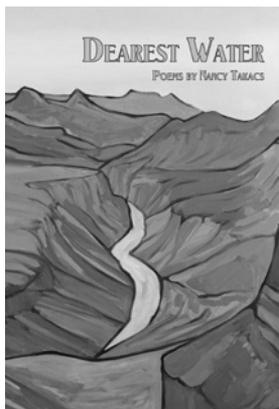
—Philip Levine, “What Work Is”

You could have walked past that pockmarked driveway
never seeing the honey locust in the backyard,
behind the birch in the front where the dog tied to the porch
is making a ruckus, where rain began to fall, lightly at first,
then pinging across the roof, splashing
from the slapdash PVC downspouts,
as if these small misdirections could stop the brick
and concrete walls from sloping, bowing, from becoming dust,
where two brothers and their father crouch,
waterlogged, beneath the wheel well of a too-old car,
soaking in the grayest Pittsburgh rain, finagling bits with the needle-nose,
losing grip on the brake springs that are unwilling to stretch
across the pads, cursing each slipping piece, flinching
at the sharp and delicate kickback, tired after long
sledgehammering those rear drums apart,
only to break what was within, prying open a decade-
and-a-half of rust suturing metal
to metal, a thick and barnacled crust, heavy
and toxic as the brake fluids spilling now from the broken rubber wheel cylinder
busted open and bleeding
from all the hammering, refusing to compress
with the springs, to be anything but an obstacle, another part to repair,
for this family who cannot afford to move
beneath the mortgages, second mortgages, rent, repairs,
credit cards. You see now, both brothers still squatting,
both over thirty, both struggling to make
ends meet, like their father who works part-time even after retirement.
Look closer: as far as you’ve come, you still haven’t figured out
what it is. You want to keep walking, away from each decade
of sweat, stress, and toil and call it work. You wanted to march
on Labor Day with the teachers union but you have never taught. Instead
you tried to help yourself, went nowhere. Whether you have ever taken a sledge
to a tire and missed, felt your skin frying

on some manifold or forgot to flip the emergency brake
of your car and watched it tumble from the aluminum car jack
that came with the used Nissan and the tire iron that never fit the spare,
the car that just has to make it eight more months,
just eight more months, whether you have done this all
during overtime or in the morning before your shift,
you still don't know what it is, because the work
is still not finished, is only beginning, is learning to say
how much they mean to you, to wonder
why you need this breaking to say anything at all, before everything becomes dust,
and when they are nagging and failing, and asking a lot of you,
more than you have, and even when you can't fathom what they mean,
and your father might very well be the strangest man on earth,
you must begin to commit to the long work, the long shift,
to repair what you've never had,
you must realize that there are no punch cards
to measure the dollars saved or lost. There is only rain
sleeting across the roof, falling from that front porch
where you never sat together long enough, you
never enjoyed sitting in that cramped house, you were trying
to escape. You have always been trying to escape. You never will, and now
knowing this you could begin to understand. You could begin to rejoice.

DEAREST WATER
BY NANCY TAKACS
(Mayapple Press, 2022)

REVIEW BY KEVIN MILLER



Nancy Takacs' new collection *Dearest Water* reveres life's wild, jeweled beauty. The title's opening endearment is language to fit the times. Beloved, these poems consider precious resources, people, and places with a fury to fight extinction. Takacs' keen sensibilities and exact language combine with a painter's eye for color and texture to showcase natural, sacred places. Her poems are diverse in approach including lyric, narrative, direct address, and persona poems. These poems are affirmations edged with tenderness, steeped in compassion, wary of danger.

The section "For Women Only" opens with a poem after Tony Hoagland's "For Men Only." Takacs' poem, also the section title, responds with a sleek confidence, "it wasn't easy inventing the language, / turning our mmm's and ahh's / into hummingbirds and gardens." She finds strength in the women's 'wings':

*My mothers and I went on
to invent many gardens,
rambling roses, apple trees.
We fluttered in the honeysuckle
trailing our green wings behind us.*

This poem shows the hollow-bone strength of women, the beauty of the garden, the transformation to strength, and recurring wings:

*We ate outside listening
to the sparrows and chickadees,
on our glass table that shattered
once when lightning struck it.*

*It was then we invented
the portable table,*

*sprang it open near lakes
where we swam the butterfly
to the deep, and back a couple of times.*

It highlights resilience, the ability to soar, and humor. The women of section one “dwell in possibility,” the windows numerous, the doors are “Superior Doors.” In a timely “supply-chain” phrase, they are “out of doors” and into the wild.

In “Remnants,” aunt and niece share a special after-Mass trip to the garment district. Takacs’ tactile sense is a recurring touch throughout the collection:

*she was so good
at her own designs
and invisible seams
she became loose with pleasure
as our palms felt the prickles
of weave, our wrists the feather
of selvage.*

*Over our arms
we hung watered silks
and sheer chiffons*

The result of the shared knowledge that aunt teaches niece is as strong as the toughest fabric: “I learned about luxury / for almost nothing, how to eye / the sharp store owner, / and bargain bitterly / for whatever I love.”

Takacs blends practical knowing with the niece’s fierce learning, and “bargain bitterly for whatever I love” is the poet at her finest. Another example of the felt image occurs in “Making Up.” She captures the reconnection of lovers after an argument. In this deft, tactile image, Takacs describes a tentative reconciliation: “holding a hand can be like a hornet in a balloon.” The sting in relationships comes with the territory as she ends “Fossil Fish,” a poem about parents after a day of fishing ends with its own sharp truth: “some days / they baited their lines / and never argued.”

In “The Beekeeper,” Takacs praises the woman artist, keeper, and student who “watches to see what they will do.” And what the keeper learns from the bees, she uses to teach us: “she has learned the word *let*, the word *inter*, // leaves the bees more / than enough honey for winter.” And this line instructs us: “She is careful / not to walk between the beelines / from heather to hives.” Pay attention.

Interspersed with her work with the bees, the artist-beekeeper returns to sculpting “the girl / who has been all along cradling the bird / in her light-filled studio.” In a sense the description of the keeper mirrors the work of the poet. “She is in love with the work / that has come from flowers” is apt for keeper and poet. As the artist beekeeper moves from bees to sculpting, Takacs deftly shifts between precious resources, people, places, and things wild.

The poet respects the beeline, finds her way around, her way out of the way with care for what is wild. Poems meander into discovery, praise, and surprise. In “Amethysts” a neighbor, Diane, faces a series of physical setbacks with charms and wisdom. “Once a union negotiator, / Diane flew the world, / working her charm.” Diane says, “I’m a good witch, careful with amethysts. I drink / two glasses of wine each day at six.”

The wonders of the path reveal gems, foreshadow the weave of the wild and hidden jewels in later sections. In the poem “Utah Garden,” “poppies are the ones raising hell... their flaming crepe, / their centers dark / and alive as bees.” The opening section ends with the speaker sitting in her son’s room, in her mother’s maple chair, where she reflects on the story of her conception. In “Resurfacing,” she paints:

*in a warm bath, I stab and swirl
my brushes in Forest, Viridian, Spring,
letting them bleed new leaves
that wander into a desert April,
drift and burst into stars.*

The poet is in the comfort of dearest water alive with possibilities and watercolor.

The section “Wildness” opens with the poem “Wolverine,” a work of praise and wit as the speaker tells the skunk bear they are alike, loners, then admits being “too soft, lounging on her futon... digesting tasty memories of Proust.” Takacs’ self-effacing humor is refreshing. She shows scorn for those boiling lobsters alive and chagrin for her own eating the eyed scallops. It is a complex journey from sweater wool to wolf hunts.

“The Garden State” moves between New Jersey and Wisconsin, and it ends with two couplets searing a kept memory:

my mother always knowing where I was

as she eased open the window screen,

*pinning our swimsuits on the line,
not yet calling me in for supper.*

The image of the mother pinning suits is powerful, the sacred moments between the call for dinner, perfect.

In keeping with the beekeeper and the notion of women who know and show the way, “the oldest woman in Minocqua” walks on water and knows the difference between ICE and ice and tells. In “Ice,” the talkative store owner at lakeside:

*cleats across it till spring, earrings dangling
beneath her earmuffs, to talk politics, telling
others over their sausage gravy that climate
change is on our doorsteps, and now ICE*

*is using our taxpayer money to deport
all the good people in cities—*

The path out of the beeline winds to precious resources. The collection’s title poem, “Dearest Water,” is its most haunting poem. In twenty-two lines, a direct and unwavering thump to the chest makes clear how dear water can be.

The poem “Meditation” ends with this stanza:

*Or when I say a prayer
why I always think of what is woven.
Not a prickly pear, alone.*

The weave continues in these poems. The prickly pear’s fruit bears striking resemblance to the votive candle. A focused offering, lovely in its image, still the prayer we have in this collection is “what is woven.” Takacs makes loose ties, airy in their plait, as the final stanza in the section on hidden jewels shows:

*It’s not a long way off,
this end not really an end
but a way of going wholly
into our wings, into
the hearts of our bodies.*

Wholly and holy, the collection closes with two longer poems in a section called “Notes to God from County Road H.” The first of the two, “Drought,” continues the emphasis on dearest water. Takacs’ note-like style offers a series of short, conversational prayers, “Notes to God,” or notes to self in their own prayer-like consideration:

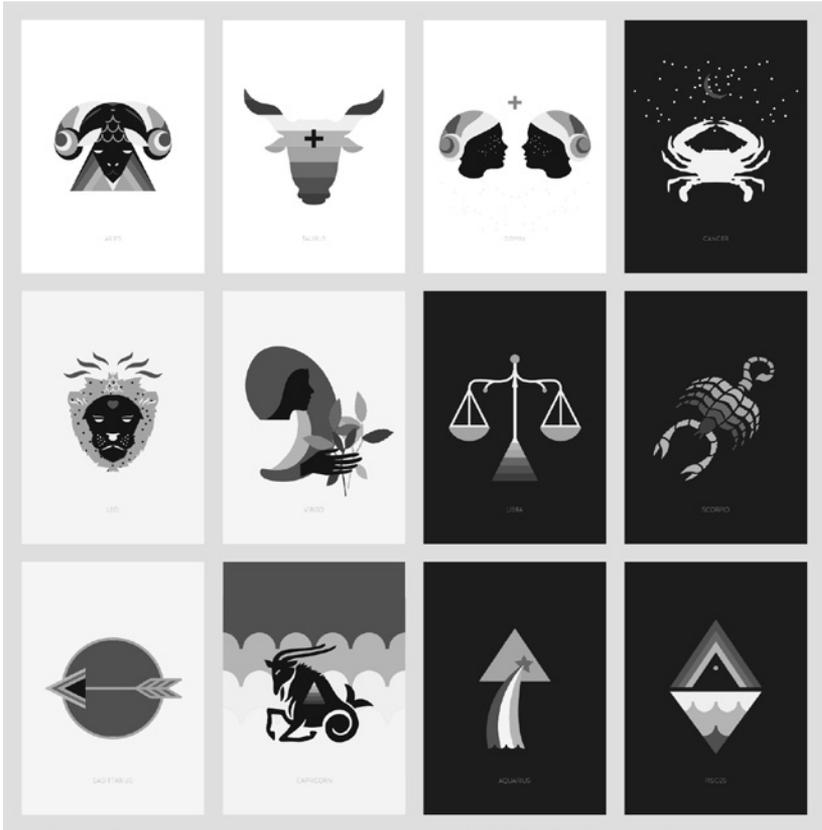
*I watch the soft mouths
of range cows,
in the hot desert, eating the last
bale of alfalfa.*

*They are black,
so beautifully black,
breaths wet and green
as they sway toward
my empty hands.*

Nancy Takacs’ poems continue the care and keeping of sacred beings, places, and resources. *Dearest Water* is a reverent bow to water, to what is precious and essential until the end, “which is not really an end / but a way of going wholly / into our wings, into / the hearts of our bodies.”

SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER



ONE REVIEW AND 12 LISTS: INSPIRED BY OCEAN VUONG

This issue, I bent the shape of astrological space to include a review of Ocean Vuong's Time Is a Mother in tandem with a set of Zodiacal list poems for each sign. In light of Vuong's own list poem and inspired by his idea of poems that "track the debris of living," I can only hope this unlikely marriage feels seamless.

I happened upon a radio interview with Ocean Vuong recently (Terry Gross, NPR, *Fresh Air*). He was being interviewed about his newest collection of poetry, *Time Is a Mother*. I was taken by Vuong's vulnerability as he spoke, elegiacally and with grief, about a book signing with his mother in attendance. When her presence was noted, the audience applauded her. Vuong tenderly articulated the heartbreak of hearing the applause. He'd come to understand his mother as the true artist, an immigrant from Vietnam, who'd spent her years working in a nail salon. He believed that to be a true survivor like his mother one had to be creative, and that survival might be the highest and greatest act of creativity—one worthy of applause.

This collection was published after Vuong's mother died of breast cancer. He ritualizes grief in each poem, with his mother/muse bound to each stanza, even if the poem isn't about her. The book also sits under the spell of a title that holds a double entendre. One, time is a visceral bedmate when we've lost someone essential to our identity (someone like our mother) and two, that time, profanely yet sacredly, can, in all its rawness, *hurt like a mother*.

In the interview Vuong read from his poem "Amazon History of a Former Nail Salon Worker." It's a list poem with each stanza defined by months and what was in his mother's Amazon queue as she died of cancer. This is the first stanza:

Mar.

Advil (ibuprofen), 4 pack
Sally Hansen Pink Nail Polish, 6 pack
Clorox Bleach, industrial size
Diane hair pins, 4 pack
Seafoam handheld mirror
"I Love New York" T-shirt, white, small

Vuong speaks to this poem as a way to track the debris of living and that objects speak clearly—we buy because we hope. He uses the entire course of the collection to inhabit many themes: queerness, sexuality, alienation, growing up as a person of color. Yet this collection always comes back to his origins, the indelible imprint of a mother on a body, even on a body of work.

This review of Time Is a Mother was first published online at Back of Beyond Books' website.

* * *

ARIES: *March 21 to April 19*

Red Pop Rocks.

Crepe paper, yellow.

Homemade firestarter, wax, dryer lint, pinecones.

Crayolas. Silver worn thin.

Poppy spray.

TAURUS: *April 20 to May 20*

Grapes.

Sensual vegetables.

Well-worn socks.

Two wineglass stains on the windowsill.

Hot water bottle.

GEMINI: *May 21 to June 20*

Audio recorder.

One cat, the curiouser the better.

Meditation app.

Three friendships that yield delight.

Necessary distraction.

CANCER: *June 21 to July 22*

One copy of Joan Didion's list.

Three bins of pajamas.

A window in every room.

Refrigerator magnet of Frida Kahlo.

Clawfoot tub.

LEO: *July 23 to August 22*

Suntan lotion.

One hairdresser who's become a close friend.

Old ticket stubs.

Flashlights and candles.

The recurring dream of conducting a symphony.

VIRGO: *August 23 to September 22*

Cellar full of preserves.

Top-of-the-line vacuum, and for that matter,
cleaning supplies that can be described as sexy.

To-go menus, multiples.

Twitterable thoughts.

LIBRA: *September 23 to October 22*

Architecture Digest.

Morning light.

Pink salt.

1000-piece puzzle of Monet's Garden.

Memoirs about relationship.

SCORPIO: *October 23 to November 21*

Tarot deck.

Lush concepts.

Spell books, yet great annoyance at spell check.

True crime queued, streaming.

Nostalgia from all those crushes.

SAGITTARIUS: *November 22 to December 21*

Walking shoes.

Lonely Planet guide to everywhere.

Plans laid at the door.

David Chang's *Lucky Peach*.

Journals as adventure logs.

CAPRICORN: *December 22 to January 19*

Apples and apples.

Wild foraged mushrooms.

Portal to past and future, present
always in the middle.

Time as reality, time as abstraction.

AQUARIUS: *January 20 to February 18*

VR headset.

A tendency to hang clothes on the line.

Cryptocurrency, or a penchant for mining.

Kites, for windy days.

Running shoes.

PISCES: *February 19 to March 20*

Fish aquarium.

Actual dancing shoes.

A periodic table of the elements tattoo.

Other pets, probably dogs.

Thirst.

SUGAR SUITES



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



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full piece includes video + 2nd poem



A SILENT MOVEMENT

Small waves scrape the bottom of my kayak.

I push a water lily larger than my hands below the water.
Its waxy leaf rocks beneath,
a silent movement.

As it pushes itself back above, beads of water tumble off
its pad until one bead is left,
glistening in the midday sun.

I push it around with my hand, small beads slipping from the base of my thumb,
palm to palm.

I trace its lingering stem until it disappears into murkier water
or nothingness.

Close by a fish breaks the calm.
Small ripples reach my boat.

A pause in the world,
no breath.

I dip my fingers in the water,
too warm
like the air.

I'm floating on a body
of
water that shouldn't be here, or maybe —

what is the difference between the hands of men and mother nature anymore?

poetic short film



ON THE COUCH WITH MY DEPRESSION



POET'S STATEMENT: I wrote this poem while I was spending a few weeks in New York trying to run away from my depression (it didn't work). It's basically a moment-by-moment breakdown of that one day and how, even though nothing went wrong and I was super aware of my self-care, still, depression nailed me to that couch.

The idea behind the poetic short films project is to make poems more accessible and less intimidating. Trying to slide poetry in front of people by stealth, I guess. I'm so proud of Angharad Gladding and the film she made, and I'm proud that the poem and the film aren't about offering some magical upbeat resolution to depression, but about capturing how depression shows up and that's it. It's depression, showing up, again. It'll keep you on the couch, even when all you need to do is brush your teeth and put on your shoes.

three paintings paired with three poems



POINT ABOVE THE TREES



I know it's there
at a point just above the trees.

The clouds hang in the branches today
heavy with bee bass honey,

steamed and gray blind.
The world blocks me.

I know there is a point
the white planes stretch to reach.

What the hell is up there
that's so damn important?

Can't I have just one slice
of yellow from the blue pie?

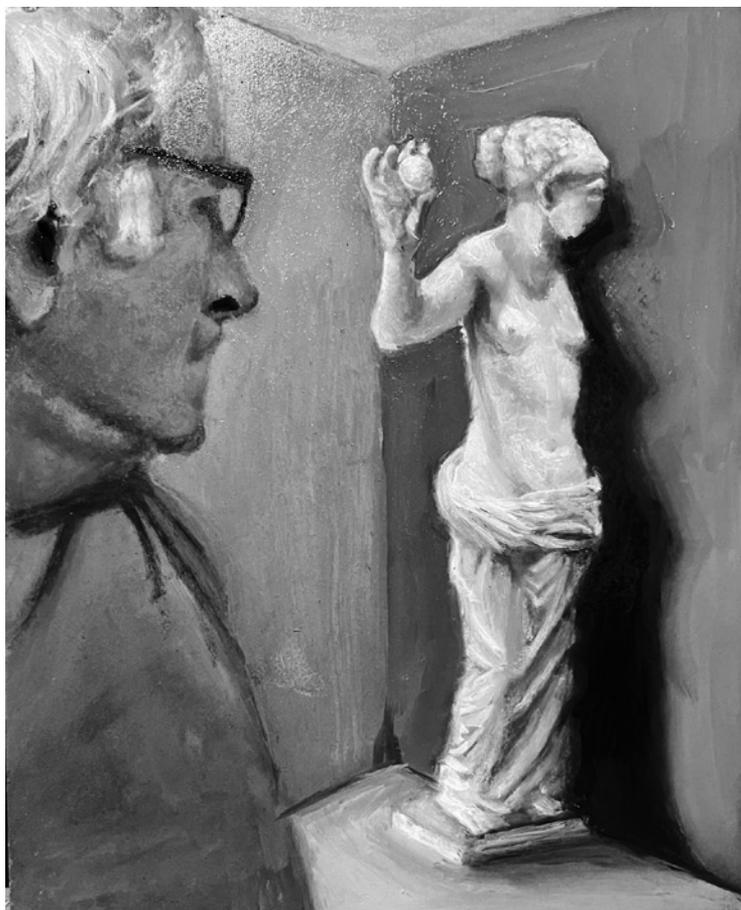
Hello up there, we're
all standing around in the park

like birds on down time
repairing each other's wings.

three paintings paired with three poems



STROLLING THROUGH THE MUSEUM



I came upon
an alabaster statue
of a gorgeous woman
half sticking out of
a wall.

She was so beautiful
I began falling in love
with just half of her.

I wanted to see
if there was more.
There was an old, vacant
optometrist shop next door
with dusty models of eyeballs
in the window case.

Later that night,
I busted through the window,
climbed through some trash
and found a small locked room.
I busted down the door
and there was the other half of her,
but alive, flesh and blood,
half sucked in the wall.

I've come to save you!
Oh perfect, she said. A man
come to save me.

Then with a whoosh she
was sucked through the wall.

I heard a muffled crash,
next door and something
shattering on the floor.

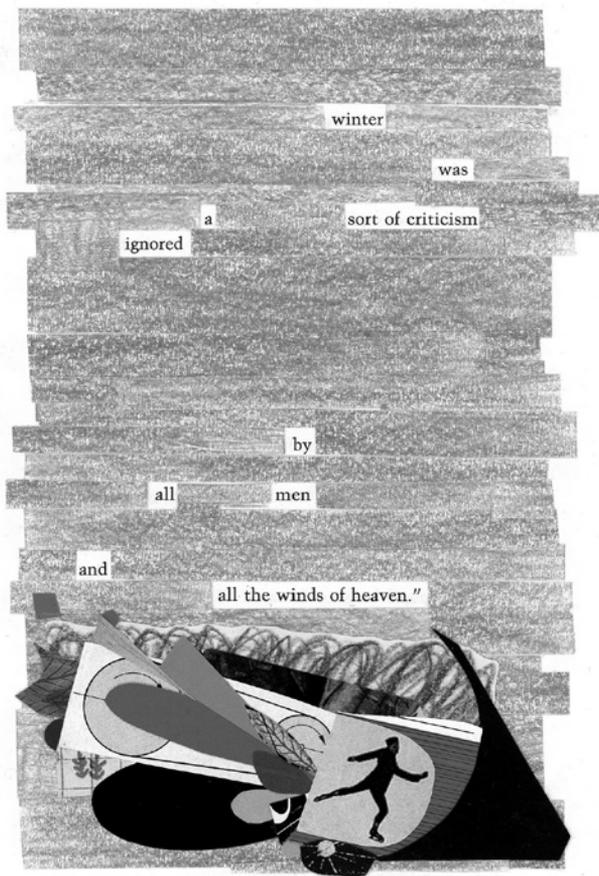
I really don't
understand museums.

three visual poems



WINTER WAS A SORT OF CRITICISM

CLASSIC CRIMES



- Maya Abu Al-Hayyat, translated by Fady Joudah, *You Can Be the Last Leaf*, Milkweed Editions 2022
- Kathleen Balma, *From Your Hostess at the T&A Museum*, Eyewear Publishing, 2022
- Todd Copeland, *Like All Light*, Gunpowder Press, 2022
- Lisa Dordal, *Water Lessons*, Black Lawrence Press, 2022
- Kim Dower, *I Wore This Dress Today for You, Mom*, Red Hen Press, 2022
- Hannah Emerson, *The Kissing of Kissing*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Robert Fillman, *House Bird*, Terrapin Books, 2022
- Marie Gauthier, *Leave No Wake*, Pine Row Press, 2022
- Andrew Gottlieb, *Tales of a Distance*, Wandering Aengus Press, 2022
- Justin Hamm, *Drinking Guinness with the Dead*, Spartan Press, 2022
- Paul Hunter, *Mr. Brick & the Boys*, Davila Art & Books, 2022
- Sara Eliza Johnson, *Vapor*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Krista J.H. Leahy & Barbara Schwartz, *Nothing But Light*, Circling Rivers, 2022
- courtney marie, *songs we used to dance to*, Goliad Media, 2022
- Peter Markus, *When Our Fathers Return to Us as Birds*, Wayne State University Press, 2021
- No'u Revilla, *Ask the Brindled*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Rolli, *Plumstuff*, 8th House Publishing, 2022
- Gabriel Rosenstock, *Daybreak: Poem-Prayers for Prisoners*, Smashwords, 2022
- Arra Lynn Ross, *Day of the Child*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Frank Rossini, *Last Confession*, sight | for | sight books, 2021
- Mike Silverton, *Anvil on a Shoestring*, Sagging Meniscus Press, 2022
- Ryann Stevenson, *Human Resources*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- Brian Tierney, *Rise and Float*, Milkweed Editions, 2022
- John Sibley Williams, *The Drowning House*, Elixir Press, 2022
- Shelley Wong, *As She Appears*, YesYes Books, 2022
- Anne Yarbrough, *Refinery*, Broadkill River Press, 2021

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

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AMY CHILDRESS is a book artist, writer, and librarian residing next to the Wasatch Mountains in Salt Lake City. She completed her MFA at the University of Iowa Center for the Book in 2021 and her MLS from the University of Iowa in 2020. She has studied European, Eastern and Indo-Islamic papermaking techniques with Timothy Barrett and Nicholas Cladis. She has taught book arts workshops at various libraries in Iowa and Utah, as well as for the Morgan Paper Conservatory. In 2020, she was awarded a Caxton Club grant for her thesis book, *Inhabited*. Her artist books and broadsides are held in academic and private collections in the United States and abroad. Her work explores the parallel between the subtle moments that happen in nature and in interpersonal relationships.

AIMEE WRIGHT CLOW is a writer and book designer living in Durham, NC with their cats, Bifo and Susan G. Their writing and video poems have appeared in journals including *Salt Hill*, *The Bennington Review*, [PANK], *A Gathering of the Tribes*, *Can We Have Our Ball Back*, *Ghost Proposal*, and *The Lifted Brow*. Their book arts project, *A Brief Map of Albany*, is available from Utilities Included.

PAULA COLANGELO has taught poetry in healing-focused rehabilitation programs. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *SWWIM Every Day*, and *Canary Literary Magazine*. Her book reviews appear in *Pleiades* and *Rain Taxi*.

AIDAN COLEMAN has published three collections of poetry and his work has appeared in *Best Australian Poems*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Glasgow Review of Books*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. His most recent book of poems, *Mount Sumptuous* (2020), was published by Wakefield Press.

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COURT N. FUND is a poet, playwright, oral historian, and all-around cowperson. Between writing and research projects, they are a backcountry cook and wrangler in the high Sierras. Court's poetry queers rural lexicons, troubles binaries, and re-centers queer longing in natural landscapes. Their work can be

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KEVIN KING is the author of the novel *All the Stars Came Out That Night* (Dutton). His first poetry book, *Ursprache*, was published in January 2022. He is the recipient of a poetry fellowship from the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts and has published in numerous journals, including *Ploughshares*, *Stand*, and *Threepenny Review*, etc. His CNF piece “Back from Abroad” was published recently in the *Potomac Review*. He has poems in recent issues of *The Minnesota Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Spillway*, *Arc*, and *Chiron Review*.

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DAVID LEE was Utah's first poet laureate; in 2001 he was finalist-runner-up for United States Poet Laureate. He is the author of two dozen volumes of poetry, including *The Porcine Canticles*, *A Legacy of Shadows*, *So Quietly the Earth*, and *Last Call*. Lee is a former seminary student, semi-pro baseball player, and hog farmer. His awards include multiple fellowships from the NEA and NEH, Western States Book Award, Mountain and Plains States Booksellers Awards, Critics Choice Award, Utah Book Awards, Elkhorn Poetry Prize, Evolutionary Poem of the Year, and Utah Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts. Retired, he scribbles and wanders rural roads and byways, all at about the

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ROSE MCLARNEY'S collections of poems are *Forage* and *Its Day Being Gone*, both from Penguin Poets, as well as *The Always Broken Plates of Mountains* (Four Way Books). She is coeditor of *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia* (University of Georgia Press) and the journal *Southern Humanities Review*. Rose has been awarded fellowships by the MacDowell Colony and Bread Loaf and Sewanee Writers' Conferences; served as Dartmouth Poet in Residence at the Frost Place; and is winner of the National Poetry Series, the Chaffin Award for Achievement in Appalachian Writing, and the Fellowship of Southern Writers' New Writing Award for Poetry, among other prizes. Her writing appears in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review*, *New England Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Blackbird*, *The Oxford American*, and *American Poetry Review*. Currently, she is associate professor of creative writing at Auburn University.

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

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

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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.

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