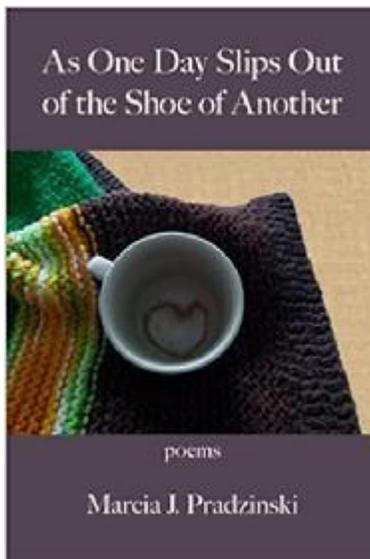


As One Day Slips Out of the Shoe of Another

By Marcia J. Pradzinski
Kelsay Books, 2021
64 Pages
ISBN-13: 978-1-954353-78-7

Review by Sue Roupp



Sometimes one comes upon a memoir offered in a new format. Marcia J. Pradzinski has published a fascinating memoir in a poetry format. Her poetry offers excellent metaphors and descriptions of dealing with family giving us a way to place those described in time and importance. For example, in “When I Ask My Father to Sign College Prep Forms:”
“He lights his Camel and stands up
from his chair to face me.

His shoulders
forward and down

as he taps the Camel
over the ashtray. The cigarette,

a teacher’s wooden pointer -
“You’re just a machinist daughter.”

Smoke curls the air,
dissolves his face.

This poem, like the rest of her poetry, is a marvelous combination of telling her story in a briefer poetry format and keeping us turning the page to see what will be next. Here we are clear about how the father thinks the writer should stick to his designated class but in the last stanza we see “dissolves his face” allowing the reader to see her dismiss his warning.

We are introduced to where she grew up and her mom on Walton Street in Chicago via *Renovation on Walton Street*: “Green wallpaper comes down in strips, green, not as light as mint or as dark as the avocado above the stove and fridge...Green replaced a dusty rose my mother had tired of.../When I was in grade school I wanted to change my mother...strip her clean, trade in her plump body for one like the younger, slimmer mothers I saw at school, take her out of her sensible shoes, put in in stilletos.”

In the *Day Slides By*

as the sun makes room
for the moon,

I fall into a daze
that shrouds losses
deeper
than my misplaced keys
or coffee cup...until

a train howls pas a sturdy brick façade
Its back lot, vacant and vast
in icy moonlight

kays bare
a wellspring of tears.

We readers can identify with sorrow and losses as we go through life remembering our family or origin and our own struggles to become an independent person overcoming doubts and fears, through a kind of existential ennui until we get to acceptance of who we are doubts and all.

Marcia ends this fine book with “Vespers”

when the last shadow falls out of the day
and the sun turns into the moon
and the vestments above become constellations
nothing is gone but the noise
 crowds carry away in their trucks
 children dream of in their sleep
 and mothers silence with their whispers

When dusk dreams of the sun
As it drifts into sleep
The present becomes the past,
And one day slips out of the shoe of another.”

I highly recommend this memoir poetry book - do buy it, read it, reflect on it - you will be enriched by it - is a book you will return to for its depth and forms, and content. It will reside on your bookshelf for many years.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Sue Roupp is the author of *Memoir Writing in 6 Easy Steps*. Her forthcoming poetry book is *Time Out*. Sue is an editor and workshop facilitator offering classes on memoir, poetry, fiction, non-fiction.

Posted December 1, 2021

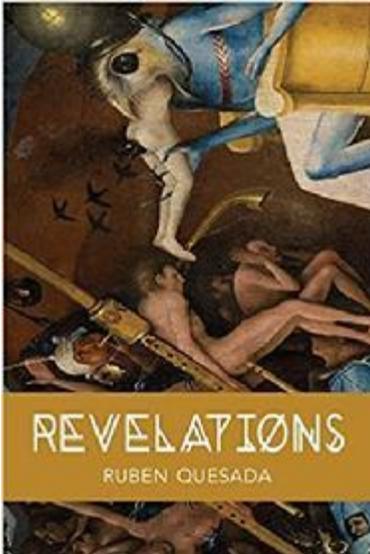
Revelations

By Ruben Quesada
Sibling Rivalry Press, 2018
38 Pages
ISBN-13: 978-1943977543

Three years ago, an independent publishing house called Sibling Rivalry Press released a slim 4X6 volume entitled *Revelations*. Within it, Ruben Quesada presents a handful of poetic prose, translations, and carefully structured poetry in often unrestricted forms. A total of twenty poems are wrapped in the iconic art of Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*, which crafts a scene filled with isolated chaos and dramatic urgency.

Review by Kathryn Staublin

The title of the poetry collection lends itself to the last book of the Christian Bible, in which the mysterious end of times and the



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deliverance from evil come together in a surge of symbolism: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The prose poetry is written in a style that nearly mimics stream of consciousness, flowing without interruption from one idea to the next. The result is an intense submersion into a dreamworld fog, disrupted by shards of reality and yet softened by intense visual imagery and rhythmic language. For example, in the poem “II,” Quesada begins with the image of an angel, coupled with “stone roses” and the “sweet coral honeysuckle sap of earth” (lines 1, 2, and 4). The natural elements maintain consistency until the end, when the language shifts to include more disquieting diction: “each coarse head of the field / whips and pivots like the loose neck of a goose.”

Elegant translations of Luis Cernuda’s poetry pair refreshingly alongside a mix of Quesada’s form and prose, revealing the depth of Quesada’s skill and education. Biblical allusions are ripe with spiritual fluency, and yet childhood memories, historical conflict, and flickers of emotional appeals leave the reader somewhere between a present, unsettling reality and the lingering pain of the past.

Quesada’s style contains hints of Ocean Vuong (*Night Sky with Exit Wounds*) and Anita Endrezze (*Enigma*). Combined with vague outlines of Brian Strand, this collection becomes an amalgamation of artistic talent, skillfully woven content, and critical thought.

Despite the beautiful language and carefully crafted lines, in the end the reader is left with a phantom thirst, the urge to see one more scene through this poet’s unique lens. The volume is so slim, in fact, that the spine does not even have room to bear the title or the poet’s name. Amongst other works of a similar kind, the collection could be easily left on the shelf—not forgotten, but “[f]uriously made dim” between loftier volumes of the 21st century (“Fall Feeling,” line 16).

Only the voices of giants overshadow the desire for more of Quesada’s work. Until a new, more substantial volume arises from the creator of this beautiful, but brief collection, *Revelations* must lie in waiting as a thematic whisper silhouetted against its competition.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Kathryn Staublin is a writer and English teacher from central Indiana who encourages her students to write every day, if only for the sake of writing. Her most recent work has appeared in *Illumination*, *Better Advice*,

and *Writer's Blokke*.

Posted December 1, 2021

Calendar Girls

By Tobi Alfier

Cholla Needles Arts & Literary
Library, 2021

26 Pages

ISBN-13: 9798481909332

Review by Michael Escoubas

*This review is reprinted with
the kind permission of Quill &
Parchment*



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In his seminal poem, “The Human Seasons,” by John Keats, Spring is *lusty*, Summer is *nearest unto heaven*, in Autumn *fair things pass by unheeded as a thresh hold brook*, and Winter, *has his pale misfeature*. Keats is relating to the seasons as a framework for life. I thought about Keats’ wisdom and my own approach to calendars. For me, calendars with their convenient little squares where I make my lists and check items off as I complete them, mean little more to me than a tool; a utilitarian instrument to get me through the day, the week, the month, and so on. However, upon receiving my review copy of Tobi Alfier’s *Calendar Girls: Poems 2022*, I’ve taken the occasion to refresh the browser of my mind, to open the door of fresh perspectives on time and on life. I’m glad I did.

This beautifully appointed 8 ½” x 11” perfect bound calendar, can be imagined as a poetry book *with* a 2022 calendar or as a 2022 calendar *with* poetry. Your reviewer prefers the latter. I like to begin each month with the current poem superimposed on the artwork appropriate to each month. Eight photographers contributed to the art works chosen for the final draught. [See listing at the end.]

I know good ekphrastic poetry when I read it. The Greek term *ekphrasis*, refers to “description.” That is to say, the poet engages in *describing* the visual subject before her. But there is more to this process than mere description. The poet invests herself emotionally and intellectually in her subject. She is not a forensic scientist; she sings out with full throat and open heart the impact conferred by her subject.

In this case, the seasons provide the visual. With a keen eye for nature’s nuances and a practiced ear for rhythm and cadence, Alfier writes her representative poems in couplet form. Twenty lines suffice for each month. The style is a perfect fit for the page. She employs a 16-point, sans serif type font for easy-on-the-eye reading.

Most importantly, however, these are good poems. The poet knows what she is doing. Her lines flow naturally, unforced. She does not attempt to rhyme her lines. I appreciate this because invariably a commitment to rhyme at all costs results in contrived artificiality. Instead, Alfier expresses how each month moves her. This is not greeting card verse. For example, she sees January as a month in which . . .

Secrets course through everything.

There's nowhere to go.

No twilight. No graceful hour
to let the pins from your hair,

shake your mane into your lover's palm.

April highlights a gorgeous field of red poppies, yellow and white daisies, purple clover, all in company with lush green grasses. For this visual delight, Alfier writes:

Spring is a fading map of winter.
As the sun strips ice from fields,

she exhales. It's time to put down
her hair, put on her bracelets,

and spin and spin and spin.

Like a skilled lead-guitarist, Alfier's fingers hit the right notes to fit the music suggested by the photographs.

In June:

The days are fastened to thick, warm weather
as summer begins to begin. Tourists remain

like ghosts in the haunted hell of employment—
calendars still list commitments the way crows

peck at roadkill, heads down, they ignore the steaming
asphalt as they wait for their turns to eat and get the hell gone.

As I noted earlier, this poet does not write greeting card verse, does not deal in Hallmark channel sentimentality. That is what I like about Alfier's verse. She has an innate sense about what people go through in their lives.

October's photograph is of an island shrouded in blue twilight, the water re-flects the dark blue, punctuated by gentle white ripples. Of this scene the poet writes:

She wanted a lover so unique he could be an uncharted island,
was perfectly happy to sit by the fire in her moth-eaten sweater,

listening to the breeze through far-off willows, singing songs
remembered by those who'd never left this town and didn't
care.

He was out there, just as surely as the wind made acorns fall
and moonlight flutter across any water. Soon she will find him,

when she walks away from this town that raised her, the way
September
moves along to make room for October, with all its shadows.

Friends, *Calendar Girls: Poems 2022*, can be imagined as a poetry book with a 2022 calendar or as a 2022 calendar *with* poetry. Whichever way you view this unique work of visual and written art, you will not be disappointed.

Contributing artists: Gábor Adonyi, George B, Aadya Chidanand, Tove Erbs, Dae Jeung Kim, Gael Moisson, Michelle Raponi, Kevin Schmid, r soos.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is editor, contributing poet, and staff book reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*, a 19-year-old literary and cultural arts online poetry journal. This review was originally posted on *Quill and Parchment*.

Posted December 1, 2021

A Way of Looking

By Jianqing Zheng

Silverfish Review Press, 2021

77 Pages

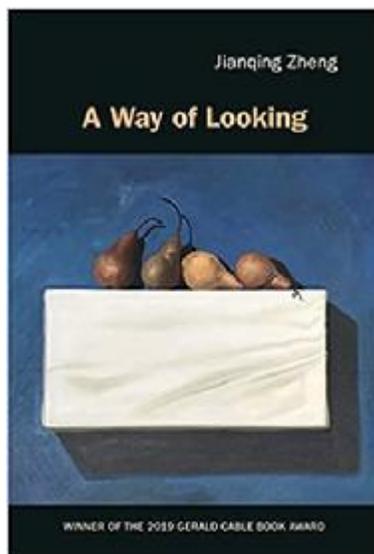
ISBN-13: 9781878851727

Review by Lois Baer Barr

Transplanted at Mississippi Valley State University (an Historically Black University) since 1996, Jianqing Zheng has been adopted by and has adopted the Mississippi Delta as his home. His scholarly interests include Blues singers, Civil Rights leaders, and African American poets. He has published photo essays on Emmett Till and Blues artist Mississippi John Hurt and books on the haikus of Richard Wright and Sonia Sanchez. In his 2019 book, *Enforced Rustication in the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (see my review on this website), Zheng's poetry evokes his life as a young student in rural exile being reeducated as a worker during Mao's revolution.

Now he turns his poetic gifts to haibun. His new collection, winner of the Gerald Cable Book Award, reveals he became a spiritual orphan at four when his grandmother died, and his parents decided he should be a boarding student at kindergarten. Remembrances of the warmth of his grandmother's bedtime stories and kisses recur frequently in the collection serving to shield him from loneliness as a child and as an immigrant. He brings his sharp eye and emotional memory to cityscapes and landscapes as diverse as a shrine in Tokyo and a lonely sunset in the misty Bayou.

The haibun form, traced back to Basho, links essays or stories with haiku. The themes are often memoir and travel, and Zheng follows that ancient tradition with stunning depictions of ghost towns, blues funeral processions in New Orleans, and the ravages of Hurricane Katrina. His poet's eye takes us from the Yazoo River that flows near his university in Itta Bena to the



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Pearl River in China and from the height of Gregory Bald in the Smokies to the well-tended garden of his adopted parents Nell and Don George of Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Jheng packs a lot of emotion and humor into the haikus that condense, contradict, and enrich his prose. In Zheng's imagination, Old Man River no longer just rolls but he "twerks" along. When his son goes to college orientation and announces he's changing his major, Zheng evokes the boy's birth: *birthcry/young parents smile/in tears*. "Katrina Notes on New Orleans" ends: *lunch for evacuees/a boy sops up the gravy/ with a cornbread*. Fellow academicians can empathize with his predicament of keeping Friday afternoon office hours in a deserted building where the only sound comes from: *two weeks gone.../the broken toilet/still flushing*. In the "Eulogy" for his adoptive father, Zheng notes a lonely cat at the window, and we assume that Zheng is himself that forlorn creature. In this final poem of the book, a well-worn jacket awaits the return of the deceased. Jianqing Zheng's new book of haibun is worth a long, long look.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Lois Baer Barr lives in Riverwoods with her husband and her pandemic pup Aggie. You can read her poetry in *Biopoesis* (Poetica Press, 2013) and her stories in *Lope de Vega's Daughter* (Red Bird, 2019). Her work is online at *Alimentum*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Highland Park Poetry*, *The Jewish Literary Review*, *Persimmon Tree*, and *Southern Women's Review* and in print at *cream city review*, *East on Central*, *Valley Voices*, and forthcoming at *Rattle*.

Posted December 1, 2021

Remember: Poems for the 20th Anniversary of 9/11

By Southern Chapter Illinois State Poetry Society

Edited by Kathy Lohrum Cotton
Independently Published, 2021

46 Pages

ISBN-13: 9798471702806

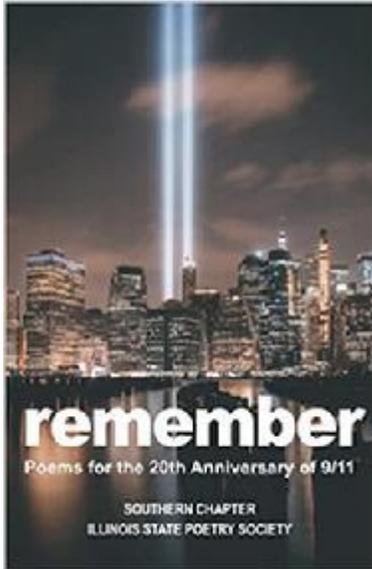
In the introduction to *Remember*, editor Kathy Cotton notes the 20-year-old connection between 9/11 and the September 2021 withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. She reminds us that following 9/11, America had been at war there for some 20 years. It is in the spirit of the Roman god Janus, who wore two faces, one of which looked back; the other looking forward, that the Southern Chapter of the Illinois State Poetry Society offers this new and vibrant anthology.

Remember is organized into two broad divisions: "Remember 9/11," and "Remember Peace & Hope." The poems in each division reach the heart with laser-like precision bringing the event and its many tangents into clear-eyed focus.

Review by Michael Escoubas

This Review is reprinted with kind permission by Quill & Parchment

"The Last Collect Call," by Jacob Erin-Cilberto, captures (almost in slow-motion, as it were) the surrealistic ambience of that awful moment. A moment when "a fractured winged Molotov floats into a bar," / "explosions ripping the heart from a



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nation,” / “all of us below soaked to the skin with ash.” A collection of stunned people grapple with a new reality, one that changed the world forever.

A feature provided by the Editor that I appreciate is a compilation of “September 11, Terror Attacks Fast Facts.” This is an eye-opening list of statistics; but more than mere numbers, the listing opens an imaginative window not often considered in terms of felt impact on families. Spouses kissed goodbye. Children donned their backpacks to catch the bus to school. Untold numbers left their homes, that day, never to return to the life they once had known.

Youth Reaction

Bill Harshbarger’s poem “On September 11” reflects upon the poet’s experiences as an educator, observing his students:

I was teaching a history class
until we all moved to
the cafeteria where large televisions
showed events as they unfolded.

Scenes were stunning and my students
had difficulty distinguishing
"live" coverage from the concept
that it was a movie by film artists.

Their response to the destruction
of the second tower was not
the shock and horror
that some of us experienced,

but rather a kind of admiring surprise
at the extraordinary collision
of an airplane with a tall tower
in New York City.

I did not judge them—
they had not yet seen enough of life
to realize what had just happened
to hundreds (indeed thousands)

of people at that moment.
Twenty years later, we all
can understand the horror
of that infamous day.

Irony of 9/11

I remember how ordinary the day had begun for me. Employed at

a printing company, I was mostly bored attending to the routine things that comprised my typical day. Then news reports began to filter in . . . for some reason, my thoughts centered on the irony of the terrorists “weapon of choice,” The airplane. Candace Armstrong captures my emotions in her poem “Living Beneath a Flight Path, I Wonder”:

Could the Wright Brothers have surmised
manipulation of their invention,
glory to terror in warring skies,
ugly stain upon their jubilation?

Attacks from the air, no longer a question,
reminders of long-ago Pearl Harbor
this retaliation of destruction,
unleashing twenty more years of war
on a world weary of starvation’s gun.

Oh joy! Being earthbound no more!
The freedom of flying
abused by evil’s misapplying.

9/11 Captured Pictorially

Of special note is Cotton’s judicious use of captioned photographs spread throughout the collection. The images offer a commentary-in-pictures. Thoughtfully spaced in relation to the pace and logic of the poems, this feature adds immeasurably to the book’s aesthetic appeal.

Healing and Hope

I often like to say, *Now it’s the poet’s turn*. So much has been written, judged, and legislated about the 9/11 period of our history. It is the purview of poets however, to ring the bell of healing and hope. The power of language is brought to bear powerfully in *Remember*. I was particularly moved by Mike Ruhland’s “Twenty Years After”:

Spots of black smoke
on a little blue ball.
Once. But then again, and again.

Black smoke peppers the orb.
Never ending heartbreak.
The death of innocents again.

Grief rains down.
Please send mercy,
the kind that falleth as gentle as the rain.

Gentle as the rain, is a perfect description of what many long for at this moment in our nation's history. *Remember: Poems for the 20th Anniversary of 9/11*, is a collection worthy of "delivering the goods," on such a noble aspiration.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is editor, contributing poet, and staff book reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*, a 19-year-old literary and cultural arts online poetry journal. This review was originally posted on *Quill and Parchment*.

Posted December 1, 2021

to everything there is

By Donna Vorreyer
Sundress Publications, 2021
84 Pages
ISBN-13: 978-1951979096

Review by Gail Goepfert



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It is likely many will be come to Donna Vorreyer's book, *to everything there is*, familiar with the opening line from the Biblical verse found in Ecclesiastes 3. That familiarity reads like a door ajar; however, if I had but a few words to pinpoint the thrust of this book, I would use Vorreyer's line, "I struggle to name the ache that godzillas its way/through the bright cities of my bones." I wish I had written that line myself; it's a masterful use of "Godzilla" as verb, and it bears the mark of ruin in grief's path. The reader navigates with the poet her grief over the loss of both parents. The heft of it. The eddying pull of it. The deliverance from it, however slight.

Even if we have been there ourselves in our own narratives, Vorreyer's poems seem to ensnare the reader in the narrator's sorrow. I feel like I was thronged by the shadows of her ghosts and grief on page after page. The poet pushes back against loss when she schools us in her efforts to trust the holy in the ceremony of "Ash Wednesday;" even so she acknowledges her struggle to "beat back [her] animal." The mark of ash she leaves church with . . . "says I am no slave to the snake though/I still ache to touch its tail." She also grasps for, later and often, the need, the desire to trust love. It's a way to survive, leaning into love and lover as reserve. These tender moments thread through the book, allowing griever and reader to breathe, to find one's way back to the life that is left—looking "for something to buoy me in my grief." In "Shimmer," she writes,"

I don't want to rise and leave
your head still on the pillow.

.....

Me, dragging all my Marley chains.
You with your ring of iron keys,
your strong patient hands.

Though I am grateful for these interludes, grief is the crux of the book as the speaker both anticipates the agony that comes with loss and death and lives in its belly. She flails about emotionally. She questions: "Tell me, what moon, what stars could I have

conjured, what light, to brighten all her troubled sleep?" She strikes out: "I tell you, I am fed up/with all this wanting." She confronts the inevitable: "I could not keep her." The poet's voice confesses she feels used up in "Once Upon Another Time": It took a lot to snuff that fire, but this world has hushed me to ember." Denial sits with her daily. Even despair surfaces: I catch myself longing for a lake, a canoe, for something fluid in which to drown. My solace waits in water, but here I am, caged in a dark room with only and lamp and a lump of clay."

One of the grimmest images of sitting with grief occurs in "Poem With Her in a Dream as Astronaut:
She [her mother] circles somewhere up there
unmoored, and I am here
my heart in my hand, dripping
like a slab of calf liver.

In "After," a poem formed from lines in Jack Gilbert's *The Great Fires*, there is guilt and regret: I came back from the funeral, going over and over afterward/ what we should have done instead of what we did." How does one then exit this torment?

Vorreyer writes of finding some solace in the world she must pilot as she walks in the cemetery for the first time, her eyes open to what is left behind. Oddly, it feels thankfully like a homecoming.

Wind stirs the grass and the Queen Anne's lace
into song each blade pitch perfect
Even my shadows sooted brutes
reconnect into a sort of applause
How can I be lost in a world
that cracks its heart to please me
pushing life up and up and flowering
despite everything?

At one point, Vorreyer lets a title speak for the movement of the narrative. "After the Death of My Mother, My Father Begins to Fade Away." The poem is a call and response of sorts; she melds emotional rawness and image exquisitely, *I want to tell you that I cried/ ... I never thought that I could/... miss someone this much* with lyrical meditations on the natural world—blazing forsythias, rivers spackled with sun, an oceanic breeze that is "only the beat of barn owl's wings" until the speaker realizes that even the herons grieve with her—"in their grief, the herons will not feed," dragged into a sense of unforeseen oneness.

Not surprisingly, the poet returns to the love that is her sustenance as surely as bread and water. I am moved by these moments. She writes:

. . .“I’m
safe and oh so lucky, walking
out the door each morning
wrapped in
the armor
our certainty.”

And later, she speaks of connectedness with her love:

Like tug captains, we tow the old burdens around
the world—you at the wheel, my eyes on the horizon,
blending our thoughts with the cadence of waves.

.....

But skin still seeks skin. and when we cannot sleep,
we slip out onto the silent deck, like the old
astronomers, look up and sing out for new stars.

In grief, love.

The titled last section of the book, “A Lament Becomes A Lantern,” is a theme hinted at throughout the book. Light is noticed, wrenched free in order to survive. Surely life has its limitations, and in a poem titled just that, the poet writes: “I am searching for new boundaries to what I can bear. It is all that I can hope for.” And later, “spring will come when spring will come.” I want to believe that connection and revived presence come as we wait with Vorreyer for that season of spring.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Gail Goepfert is a *RHINO* editor; her third book, *Self-Portrait with Thorns* and second chapbook, *Hard Business of Living*, will be released in 2021.

Posted November 1, 2021

Communiqué: Poems From The Headlines

By Ed Werstein

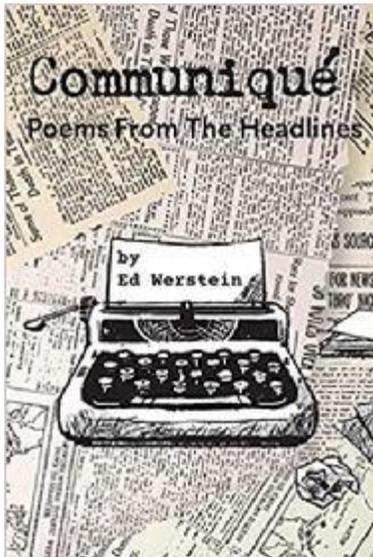
Water’s Edge Press LLC, 2021

85 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1-952526-02-2

From the get-go I was attracted to Ed Werstein’s *Communiqué: Poems From The Headlines*. First, the volume returns me to my days as a journeyman printer for a large commercial printing company. These were the days of “hot-metal” or “letter-press” printing. I spent my days with ink-stained hands, setting type one letter at-a-time in a special tray called a “stick,” and melting “pigs” for use by linotype machines. The aroma of graphite still permeates the air of my mind along with the soft tic, tic, tic of linotype matrices falling into place forming “slugs” that were then made into pages by the skilled hands of printing craftsmen.

Review by Michael Escoubas



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Second and by far the most important feature which attracts me to *Communique*, is what this unique volume has to say about life in America, past, present and future. The poems, formatted like newspaper headlines, complete with source-bylines, speak to where we live. They boldly address ideas and trends that cannot be ignored by thoughtful folk. This is the job of poets, to face life head on, and write the truth. This is what Werstein does as well as any poet this reviewer has met in recent years.

Werstein sets the tone with a quote by recently deceased poet and social activist, Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919-2021):

“If you would be a poet, write living newspapers. Be a reporter from outer space, filing dispatches to some supreme managing editor who believes in full disclosure and has a low tolerance for bullshit.”

As a Ferlinghetti disciple, Werstein showcases a similar “low tolerance.” Where the poet stands on the issues is never in doubt. As a reviewer, I found myself pausing (as thoughtful folk should) to exercise my right to agree or to disagree. Quite often, I suspended judgment pending additional study.

Like the newspapers we encounter each day, Werstein’s volume is divided into sections which include National and Local News, International News, Weather, Sports, Business, Politics, a special section entitled: The War Report, Science, Religion, and Obituaries.

To offer a flavor of both format and content, I reprint in full, “Dear Emmett”:

**Woman Linked to 1955 Emmet Till Murder
Tells Historian Her Claims Were False**
--*New York Times*, January 27, 2017

Dear Emmett,

You’re dead, your mother is dead, Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam,
The men who murdered you and were acquitted, are dead.

The investigation was officially closed long ago. “Bow thy head
O state of Mississippi, Let tears of shame course down thy
cheek,”

wrote Langston Hughes at that time. And there is still so much
hate
in Mississippi. They had to re-make your memorial in 2019.
It’s bulletproof now.

Emmett, only the woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, who accused

you
of ogling and whistling, is still alive. Now, with death
approaching,

she wants to recant her testimony, to unburden her troubled
soul.

I wish she had a soul. I wish there were a
hell for that soul to suffer in.

Your hell, Emmett, was here on Earth. Is justice
60 years late any justice at all?
Emmett, you're still gone. Is America any
Different than on the day you died?

This poem, and many others of similar power, reached me . . . I
found myself troubled, truly troubled with this haunting
question. I'm still troubled.

From International News, "Teaching Women How to Fly," uses an
NPR story about a 1911 garment factory fire in New York City, to
call out the treachery of the wealthy and privileged. Real issues
about working conditions and care for the safety of workers cry
out for attention even today.

"Flag Football," leads off the Sports Section, by offering a sober
reflection about NFL players taking the knee of protest during
the national anthem. This action brought out the consternation
of the Trump administration. They were . . .

Simply kneeling, to call attention to an injustice
suffered by others, and to call attention to the fact
that they saw this as an American problem.

The poem goes on to develop the chasm between Trump's
nationalism and the reasoning behind what the players intended
to convey.

On style, Werstein is a studied craftsman, writing primarily in
free verse, but using other forms, or inventing his own, for
greatest impact on his audience. "May 4," is a must read, prose
poem which revisits the tragic Kent State University shootings of
1970. This tragic event claimed the lives of four innocent
students during the height of the Viet Nam war protests. This
reviewer cannot ignore, the poet's in-sights about the war, and
hold a clear conscious.

No fewer than four Villanelle's are sprinkled throughout the
volume. This utilitarian form lends itself to the touch of sarcasm
which wends its way through much of Werstein's poetry.
"Change of Seasons," is about an injury to famed Green Bay
Packer's QB, Aaron Rodgers, would that his replacement be a

Rodger's clone! "Do Not Go Gentle Off That Overbooked Flight," not only channels Dylan Thomas' classic poem on death, but shines an embarrassing spotlight on how a passenger was treated by employees on an overbooked United flight.

As I worked my way through Werstein's headline news, I asked myself, "Is there any topic, any issue in American life that this poet DOES NOT HAVE an opinion on?" I couldn't think of any. That is precisely why *Communiqué: Poems From The Headlines*, belongs on your bookshelf and in your hands. Don't delay, order your copy today.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is editor, contributing poet, and staff book reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*, a 19-year-old literary and cultural arts online poetry journal. This review was originally posted on *Quill and Parchment*.

Posted November 1, 2021

Big Questions, Little Sleep, 2nd Edition

By Linda Imbler

Bowker, 2021

214 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-0578655765

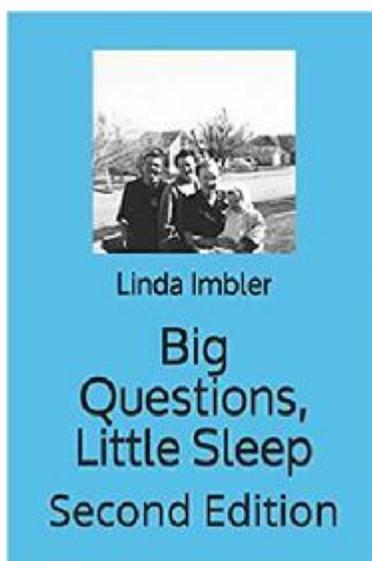
Renowned Illinois poet Allison Joseph has said that every poem is an elegy. Kansas poet Linda Imbler would certainly agree, as all the poems in her new collection center on time, loss, and death. *Big Questions, Little Sleep, Second Edition* (Amazon, 978-0-578-65576-5) is a sprawling, 192-page attempt to answer some of life's toughest questions.

Review by Kate Hutchinson

It's unclear why Imbler decided to publish a second edition of an earlier book when she has 66 new poems included here that might have stood on their own. She has indicated which poems are new by using a larger font for them, and they are mixed in among the older poems. Two main sections divide the book, "TIME" and "DEATH." A sub-section labeled "TRIBUTES" contains some of the book's strongest pieces, poems which honor some of the musicians, writers, and artists that have touched Imbler's life - including B. B. King and Tom Petty. Her poem titled "Bowie" (p. 121) is among the new poems and is one of the few short pieces in the book:

Frail but unswerving,
His death unnerving,
If we'd begged him to stay, would he
With pain and loss of dignity
Now the Starman channels Lazarus,
Major Tom floats free to represent us.

The rest of the poems in *Big Questions, Little Sleep* consist of poems that are generally much broader in scope, where kernels of specific details are infrequent. Imbler is fond of metaphor, and as most of the poems are about time and death, she uses them liberally. In "Pillow," a new poem, she states: "At my



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pillow's command,/Morpheus draws forth,/ slips between the sheets,/ and mirrors the pale ones,/ regrettable as lost or found,/ vestiges of angels or beasts . . ." (p. 65). The syntax here gets lost, but we understand that she is haunted by dreams of the dead. In "Before the Sand Stops," also a poem from the original book, we see a list of life-ending signals in a dying body:

Before the eyes' slow roll back,
and the final, keen fail of the organs,
in the bitter winter of his life,
within this expected altering of circumstances,
the wasted, wizened man,
with the bony and angular face,
prays for a loophole from death.

We are left to wonder if the poet intended this to be a universal statement or if she had a particular man in mind - her father, perhaps? In many instances, I found myself wishing she had included more details that would make the poems more personal. Since time and death are such abstract topics, they become much more interesting when the writer puts a personal stamp on them.

Many of the poems in this collection focus on lost time and nostalgia, such as "Moment" (p. 19) and "Michael's Memories" (p. 55). In this last poem, we see a lovely description of old Michael peering into "the window beyond the glass" of a bookstore, the "glare of the fluorescents reflecting off/ the lily whiteness of paper,/ the touch of supple leather and the smell of binding glue." In the second stanza, Michael is now outside at a campfire scene from his youth, where

. . . friends [tell] genial and generous stories,
wearing vests for warmth as midnight draws near
and upon still burning coals lie
the vestiges of burned hot dogs
and dripping marshmallows.

These are the kind of sensory details that make poems come to life for the reader, and Imbler shows us here she is capable of taking us to a particular place to share her bittersweet feelings about time gone past.

Most of the poems in *Big Questions, Little Sleep* are written in free verse, which suits this poet and her wish to fully probe her abstract thoughts. Imbler's use of form and rhyme in some poems is less artful, though she has shared two sonnets that include some nice turns of phrase, like this final sestet in "A Cup of Tea," (p. 59), one of the recent poems:

She has a way of telling those old tales,

breathing life into personalities,
keeping tea and family lore flowing.
For me not to listen would be betrayal
of her and my ancestors' memories.
So my love for tea and my family keeps growing.

There is much to like in this large collection, as Linda Imbler is a wordsmith whose lifelong passion for tackling some of humanity's thorniest issues is abundantly clear. However, it is this reviewer's opinion that less might have been more when so many poems cover the same ground. Self-publishing has opened a whole new realm of possibilities for writers, which is wonderful; in choosing this route, Imbler must have had good reasons to re-issue many of her previous poems. She also, it seems, chose to publish without an editor who could have tweaked the confusing syntax and punctuation in many of the poems. There are no acknowledgements listed in the book, so we must assume none has been published elsewhere.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Kate Hutchinson is a recently retired high school English teacher whose third collection, *A Matter of Dark Matter*, will be released by Kelsay Books in early 2022. She is on the board of Chicagoland Poets & Patrons and is active with several local poetry groups.

Posted November 1, 2021

Orchard Days

By Heather Corbally Bryant

Finishing Line Press, 2021

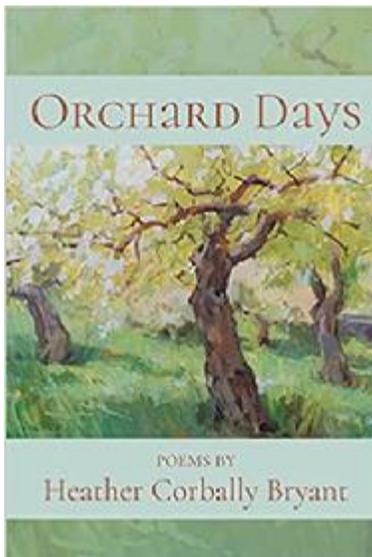
107 Pages

ISBN-13: 978 -1 64662-526 -0

Orchard Days, is a beautifully crafted book of poetry that uses images of apples, trees, and orchards, to depict family history, spousal abuse, and the injustice meted out to women since Eve in the Garden of Eden. The placement on the printed page makes the reader's journey effortless. *Apples* and *Orchard Days* occupy the first two pages. *At the Aquarium* and *Shark Tank, Sydney Aquarium*, are on pages three and four.

Review by Jacqueline Stearns

The setting for many of the poems is an apple orchard, and is often referred to as "Our Orchard." *Apples*, the opening poem, talks about the author's memories of time spent with someone she cares about. The last line reads; "There came very close or



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so I thought to our days of Eden."

A Witch ties Irish history to apples. The witch steals silver apples from trees and is asked; "Did you not know it's bad luck not to leave a few apples on the ground after harvest for the fairie folk?" Who does this witch symbolize? A mother? A lover? What does the theft of the apples represent?

I love how the color silver is interspersed. "A witch plucking the silver apples from our trees." A line from *White Fox*: "Silver against phosphorescent blue. White Fox is a word rainbow. Runs off into a pint green forest."

One of the strongest themes of this work is family history. The author's relationships are hugely impacted by the revelation that she came into being through artificial insemination. *Where I Come From* describes her angst. "I do not come from where I once thought. No one would be the wiser, but for a slip of the tongue."

The author and her husband also faced infertility. Their twins were conceived from implanted embryos. Can infertility issues be passed from one generation to the next? Several poems- *Embryos*, *Birth Petri Dish*, *Eccyesis*, depict the emotional roller coaster of attempting to get pregnant. Implantation. Some embryos not taking root. Finally the good news. "You are expecting at last!" *The News* is a bittersweet poem of the beginning of new lives; the twins have just been born- and the possible end of life. The author's father battles cancer.

As a mother, the author is fiercely loving and loyal. *Northern Leopard Frogs*, and, *East Barehill Pond* paint the deep mother child bond as expressed through a shared love of nature. She also pays homage to her daughter in *My Daughter In Third Grade*, and *To A Daughter Age Nine*.

This writer is a survivor of spousal abuse. Her writing took me on a tour of the dominance, control, and rage: key components of the abuser's personality. The author found the courage to overcome. She left the fear, pain, and damage behind by leaving the situation to create a good life. *To The Edge Of The Light* and *This Dream I've Had*, paint a chilling picture of love turning into evil horror.

The voice in this book is that of every woman. Every woman, every man can relate. Your mind barely processes war and terrorism, then you try to help your children through their questions. *The Old Shirley Meeting House* tells the story of a mother watching her son play his piece in a piano recital, while remembering the day she and her boy waited for her husband at the train station on 9/11.

Orchard Days teaches us that life is a mishmash of good and bad. War. Hate. Love. Forgiveness. Nature, apples, animals, family, parenthood, all part of the same stew.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Jacqueline Stearns holds a bachelor's degree in Mass Media Communications from William Paterson College now University. She is honored to have been published in Highland Park Poetry and several Montclair Write Group Anthologies.

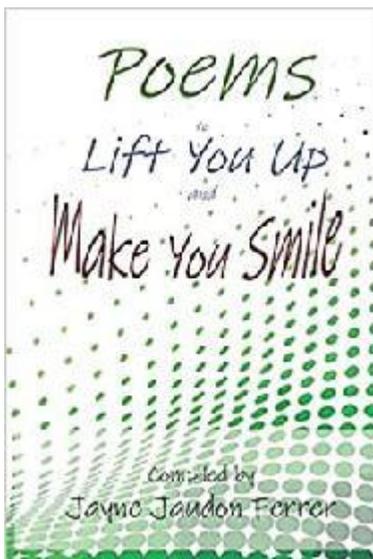
Posted November 1, 2021

Poems to Lift You Up & Make You Smile

Compiled By Jayne Jaudon Ferrer, Editor of *Your Daily Poem*
Parson's Porch Press, 2021
100 Poems with Contributor Biographies
ISBN-13: 978-1-955581-09-7

Review by Michael Escoubas

This review is previously published by Quill & Parchment



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In an age of Covid-19, *Poems to Lift You Up and Make You Smile*, takes on special significance. This anthology is needed now, as never before. However, before sinking too deeply into the pandemic season to justify the worth of poetry, it is important to remember that there has *always* been *something* that, as a people, we want and need to put behind us. The collective calling of poets in any age, is to tell the truth, sometimes with a bit of an edge, but always, in this writer's mind, with a view toward finding the best in people and illuminating the path to hope.

This has been Jayne Jaudon Ferrer's enduring passion for the last 11 years as editor of *Your Daily Poem*. YDP is a valued destination for some of the best-known poets in the country. Yet, Jayne is known for her welcoming spirit to new poets as well. She has a sharp eye for poets on-the-rise and gives many their first significant exposure. Moreover, Jayne's single-minded goal has been "to share the pleasures of poetry with those who may not have had the opportunity to develop an appreciation for that genre."

All of this is reflected in *Poems* and therein lies its appeal. The careful selection of 100 poems, chosen from an archive just shy of 4,000 poems, does exactly what the title says.

As one might expect, the work is comprised of two divisions: *Poems to Lift You Up* and *Poems to Make You Smile*.

Poems to Lift You Up

Kevin Arnold's "One True Song," reminds me that, in a world that values big achievements, it may be the simple things that count the most:

Our simple acts may be the warp and weft

Of the substance of our lives, what is left

Beyond the gifts and wills, the trusts and estates
After our *belles lettres* or *plein air* landscapes

What if our day-to-day actions, in the long slog
Of life are our lasting legacy, our true song?

Arnold's deft use of couplet rhyme and understated style draws
me in, lifts me up.

"Life Lines," by Randy Cadenhead, contains much of the sage
advice I grew up hearing, these excerpts draw back the curtain
on the kind of person this reviewer is striving to become:

Walk where you have never been
and wonder at the beauty of the world.

.

Be moderate in all things,
except goodness.

.

Be moderate in all things,
except goodness.

.

Listen to the music
you can find in silence.

What strikes me as important about this anthology is the role
poetry can play in our everyday lives. The above noted poem,
and so many others, remind us that we are neighbors, that we
share common challenges, that we are united in our suffer-ings
and in our joys.

Phyllis Beckman's "I Am, for the Time, Being," illustrates the
point:

This morning I was musing when
This feeling came along
Reminding me I'm comfy, that
I feel like I belong.

So glad I'm not so worried
About what's next to be
That I miss the present "now"
That life has offered me

When all these special moments

Are noticed one by one
The richness of just living
Can bubble up in fun

So thank you to the giver
Who urges me to take
My time, though it is fleeing,
A mindful life to make!

I am, for the time, being.

Beckman's judicious use of commas made me slow down, caused me to think carefully about the poem's underlying meaning. It's what good poets do.

Poems That Make You Smile

I was already smiling as I reached *Poems'* transitional mid-point! There's just something about being "lifted" that feels good.

Let's lead-off with a poem about America's pastime, Carol Amato's "Baseball in Connecticut." This well-crafted visual poem is about a player at the plate wielding a bat that "was never kid-sized." This is a can't miss delight with an unusual ending.

Michael Estabrook's poem "Laughter," is for anyone who, in their twilight years, doesn't want to be a bother to their children:

My mother called today
wants to pay for her funeral
in advance "so you boys don't have
to worry about it."
But I'm not sure how
one does that, who do you pay
after all she may live
another 15 years so I say
just write me a check you can trust me
\$20,000 ought to cover it.
Been a long time
Since I've heard her laugh so hard.

Estabrook's conciseness, clarity, and studied restraint is a good example of a poet picking up on how funny life can be. I'm certain there was a measure of serious-ness that prompted Michael's mother to phone him with her heart's concern; but it is poetry that elevates tender moments to the level of art.

This collection is sheer delight; bringing out the best in people and in life, illuminating the path of love and hope.

As a side note, *Poems to Lift You Up and Make You Smile*, is not a money-maker for the editor. A significant portion of sales revenue is earmarked for *Parson's Porch*, a food, ministry program that provides bread and milk on a weekly basis for those in need. Sometimes a lift and a smile is all a person needs to make life worth living. Yes, yes indeed.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is editor, contributing poet, and staff book reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*, a 19-year-old literary and cultural arts online poetry journal. This review was originally posted on *Quill and Parchment*.

Posted November 1, 2021

***Poetry In An Age of Panic:
Poems of Strength,
Vulnerability, Loss &
Triumph***

By Terry Loncaric

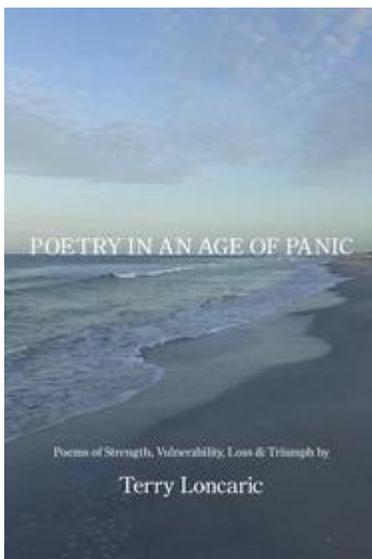
Kelsay Books, 2021

132 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1-63980-011-7

Poets are often watchers, gazers, seers and absorbers, channeling the wind, moon, trees, waves and sun into words and Terry Loncaric is one of the select few who can grasp the glowing crystal ball of life's ebbs, joys and flows and create a tangible tapestry of large & small details and insights. In her newly published poetry book, *Poetry in An Age of Panic: Poems of Strength, Vulnerability, Loss & Triumph*, she searches long and hard throughout her coast-to-coast American travels for truth, justice, love, prayer and grace and finds it in the secret nooks and crannies, like a modern Diogenes with both a bright lamp and a Sherlock Holmes magnifying glass in hand.

**Review by Joseph Kuhn
Carey**



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There's a panoply of bright colors and textures spread throughout her book and the writing touches on a wide array of topics, from poems set in Santa Fe, New Orleans, Florida, California, Chicago and Maine, to painter Georgia O'Keeffe, the sculptor Auguste Rodin, her father's forty years of rough, gritty work in the Gary, Indiana, steel mills, a vivid lecture in college by Gloria Steinem, the horrible, tragic demise of George Floyd, her encounters with students in high school hallways as a teacher, America's recent political turmoil, Kamala Harris' impressive career, oceans, walks in quiet woods, young and mature love, bold flamenco dance and sensuous hot gypsy jazz, the smell and look of morning coffee, a beloved pair of Earth Shoes, the soothing ways of nature, the powerful loss of her mother and her journey through grief to restored faith, the cosmos and her place in it, the joy of snow and brandy, the magic of tasty food in all its multitudinous forms, and a true, deep love of her cats, who buoy her up with their endless devotion, touch and easy daily erasure of all worries and woes.

In one of the earliest poems in the book, "Glorious Flight," Terry delves beautifully into what draws her to poetry and sets her journeys of exploration into motion:

*The poet in me
is awakened by mystery,
the shadows of trees,
the trajectory of stars.
Logic may steady my course,
but each time I veer
from the path,
mystery sweetens my life,
stokes my spontaneity,
reminds me of my longings,
never wrecks my soul
with suffocating limitations
Mystery keeps changing
my itinerary,
keeps me in glorious,
unpredictable flight.*

Soon thereafter, in “The Pleasure of the Poet,” she delightfully expounds a bit further on the poetical impulse and states:

*I love that moment
the words
swirl
in your
head,
perform
their crazy dance
then,
with elegance,
creep
upon
the multitudes...*

*To see
your
words
flip and fly
like acrobats,
fueled by adrenaline,
that is the pleasure
of the poet,
that surge of
absolute risk,
not knowing
exactly
where your words
will swoop,
then land.*

There is a joyful theatricality to some of the poems, too, along

with many well-woven references to painting and sculpture as part of the poet's writing approach. In "The Grace of Light," Terry explores artist Georgia O'Keeffe's colorful, vivid works:

*Shafts of radiant light spill
from freckled clouds,
some people see God's
penetrating gaze,
Georgie O'Keeffe saw
a horizon that could disappear
inside a swirly, fiery canvas.
In nature's light,
I feel the vastness of my life,
the meandering paths
of hope and restoration,
the steepness of my imagination,
the strength of the earth's
soothing embrace.
In this silvery stillness,
I am swimming inside
Georgia's gush of colors,
melting into
this perfect moment
of grace.*

In order to contemplate the complexity of the cosmos, of course, a poet must have fuel, and Terry also wonderfully details the joys of coffee ("A hiss and a whistle, dancing brown beans"), sweets ("the fierce aroma of chocolate that smacks my senses"), alluring exotic meals ("delicate courses of Chinese food, crunchy and tangy, plump strawberries dipped in cream cheese and whipped cream, washed down with tiny, sneaky cups of fiery sake") and, most of all, in "Lobster Ecstasy," a memorable encounter with an absolutely perfect simple sandwich at a roadside stand in the twisting forests of Maine:

*As I zigged and zagged
along forests, the
ocean, and quaint
little towns,
I almost missed it,
the humble lobster stand
with its aroma of
succulent, sweet meat
on a huge buttery
roll, wrapped tightly
in paper, like a baby
in a blanket,
no fancy extras,
just the mouth-melting
crustacean.*

*The best meal
I ever had on a picnic
table with strangers.
So good it made me
want to moan out loud.*

But, throughout her book of poems, Terry is also searching for the inner soul of nature, which can offer soothing balm in this current world of turmoil, stress, and panic. In “Miracles of Life,” a walk outdoors gives her “a chance to grasp miracles of life,” while she “admires the patience of flowers budging slowly through the soil then twisting into the warmth of the sun” and observes as a “honey bee lingered inside a tall wildflower, their colors magically mingling, a whirling pin wheel of splendid shades.” In “To Be A Tree,” she wishes to blend in further with the great outdoors:

*To have long,
strong arms
that shake and
bob in the breeze,
to feel the brush stroke
of every season...*

*Oh, to be a tree,
to remain permanently
tangled in the wild roots
of so many generations,
to outlast the foibles of humans,
who embraced my roughness
and admired my beauty.*

There is so much to admire in this marvelous and meaningful collection of poems, which was truly a pleasure to read. Terry Loncaric has traveled near and far across this sprawling crazy quilt of American states and she’s spotted the essences and secrets in the spaces between the musical notes and the sweet silences that separate word from word. As the opening single epigraph line of the book states, “Only when we leave the traffic, can we slip into the silence, and dwell in the sacred space of poetry.” Terry has most definitely created a special spiritual “church” of words, thoughts, love and faith in *Poetry in an Age of Panic*, and, as she so nobly declares in her poem, “Polarities” (as one who has sought and found wisdom and wishes to humbly pass bits of this peaceful gift of knowledge on to any poets, readers and students who follow behind):

*I never give up on love, truth or peace,
and when my life seems scattered,
like a thousand puzzle pieces,
I never stop rearranging it.*

*In contradiction, there is clarity,
in falling, there is rising,
in breathing, there is hope,
in hope, there is transformation*

So, take a meaningful, rewarding walk in the winding woods of life with Terry Loncaric's fine poetic wine at your side and "find joy in the confetti of these ordinary moments we so bravely share." After all, as she so ably and thoughtfully notes in "World Citizens, Now and Forever," "...we are a Beatles song sung by many voices," and doesn't singing (and poetry) connect the heavens and earth and softly soothe the worried, blues-filled soul?

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Joseph Kuhn Carey, of Glencoe, Illinois, a real estate manager by day and a poet by night, is the author of two full-length books of poetry: *Black Forest Dreams* (Kelsay Books, 2021) and *Postcards From Poland* (Chicago Poetry Press, 2014). His poems have also appeared on the insides of buses, in storefront windows and poetry/art exhibits, within cinematic videos created by his son, Joey, and in numerous Highland Park Poetry and Illinois State Poetry Society collections. He has also released two CDs of original songs for children along with his brother, Bill ("The Caboose is Loose" and "Mighty Big Broom").

Posted October 1, 2021

Forged

By Tina Cole

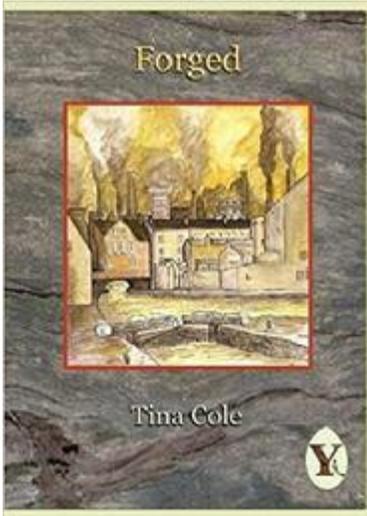
Yaffle Press, 2021

28 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1-913122-24-9

**Review by Lynn
White**

I am so pleased to have the opportunity to review this collection of poems. *Forged* in a different age they are now part of a past which speaks to my own growing years and "the person who left roots behind, tried to grow an oak without them" as "I put away my accent". I wonder how many others have been there and done the same, countless, I think, and all will find so much here to trigger those fickle memories of their "freeze frame(d)" times. And for the ones who stayed rooted, there is just as much to love in these words, in the characters and eccentricities that live on in the family stories or newly fashionable crafts of "Peg rugs and wool winding", in the ring of memories from the sounds of "a stick down across railings" and in the shock of meeting a childhood friend from a lifetime ago, or maybe much less, and discovering one of those "golden-curl'd girls who quickly became crone" and spread like their



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mothers “Lurpak wide”.

The quotes I have chosen above begin to illustrate the beauty and depth of the language used. It made me think of the prose and poetry DH Lawrence at his best, for example, in the dreams of the sea and “the tide-tongue licking a sky”, the man who “considers himself old, like the edge of winter when the frost has lidded the earth” and the many, many evocations of the tight knit industrialised community with it’s “bravura of cackle speak that squabble squawked” and the “factory worn father cycling five miles home on an old bone shaker”, “the muddy boots abandoned on the sodden mat” with “the workhouse fears and the dread of idle hands”. All speak strongly to his writing of a still earlier time.

The stirrings of *Under Milkwood* are also strong in the way the characters and their times are drawn - “the throats swarf-rattled, hair machine oil slicked” and “mouths oozing a slurry of black pudding excuses” and the grandmother who “sits palms blessing black leaded heat” and how in the end “When no one is looking death curls inside”. No one could fail to visualise and be moved by these characters placed so strongly in their time and place.

It seems that ‘Forged’ speaks to a time “When so much of the world was off kilter, it was hard to hold on”. But isn’t that now? So, although rooted firmly in a particular time and place it also speaks to our times - whenever and wherever they are, whoever and wherever we are. And still we never “notice the shrinking, (as) time wore them down, faded tightened skins, dulled their glow”. This is a universal statement, part of all our lives, our own fickle memories and customised past which we revisit again and again.

So, I’ll end where Tina Cole begins with her quote from Brecht’s ‘Motto’: “In the dark times/ Will there be singing?/ Yes, there will be singing./ About dark times.” ‘Forged’ is rooted in such dark times but in the singing of her words Tina Coles brings the sunshine streaming through them.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Lynn White’s life was forged in a very similar environment to that described in this collection of poems. She now resides in a small post-industrial town in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

Posted October 1, 2021

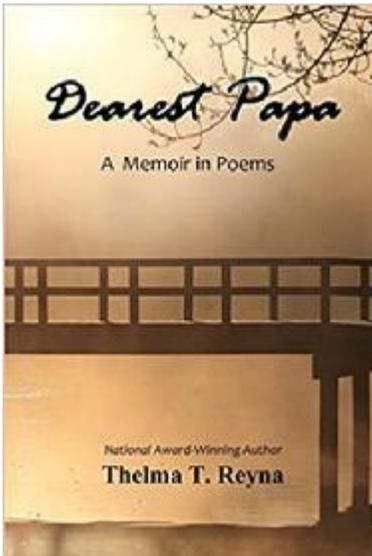
***Dearest Papa: A
Memoir in Poems***

In the foreword to *Dearest Papa*, her memoir honoring her late husband, Thelma T. Reyna avers, “Our lives, all lives unspool with time, unexpected paths take unexpected turns and the unexpected awaits at

By Thelma T. Reyna
Golden Foothills Press,
2020
65 Pages
ISBN-13: 978-0-578-64373-
1

Review by Michael Escoubas

*This review was
previously
published in
Quill & Parchment.*



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each curve in our journeys.” No one, least of all Thelma and Victor, expected anything other than a successful minor surgery that day; followed by dinner already planned at their favorite restaurant. Something unexpected raised its ugly head. The arts, and poetry, lends itself to the unexpected, to those things that give a “gut-punch” to the lives of regular people, changing them forever, often growing them to new heights not imagined before.

Thelma’s compelling memoir is arranged in five parts: I. Beginnings, II. Endings, III. Mournings, IV. Balms, and V. Resolutions. Some 12 pages of photographs are salt and peppered throughout the book. These judiciously placed photos depict a smiling, confident Victor, a wedding picture, family members, sports trophies and other treasures that lend a special poignancy to Reyna’s superb poetry. Her poems arise from a sharing of life between two people whose love remained undeterred even by the unspooling of life due to something totally unexpected that changed the trajectory of their lives forever.

From “Beginnings” I was struck by the poet’s openness about shared love. This is evident in an excerpt from “Pete and Tillie”:

When my breasts were young and round, my husband named them one night as we lay in afterward euphoria.

Pete.
and.
Tillie.

He tapped each one with a fingertip light as a feather’s tip. Monarch knighting heroes with the delicate touch of a sword. Pete and Tillie.

What comfort, what ease, resides in Thelma’s heart as she lifts the veil on intimacies shared. Caresses not of lust but foreshadowings of deeper love reaching beyond physical borders.

Poems throughout “Beginnings” paint a portrait of Victor’s dedication to his students as an educator, his love of sports, his impressive physical appearance, and stamina.

“Timeless Teaching” bears witness to Vic’s advocacy for a troubled student from a broken home. Because of his testimony the student was allowed to stay in school under Vic’s mentorship and tutelage. This was *teaching* that paved the way for a kid to have a better life

I was surprised that poems about “Endings” were placed early in the memoir. As I worked my way through the collection I easily understood why. Endings, I reasoned, naturally belong at the end. Not so here. As Victor walked barefoot through his house one day, he was bitten by the family cat. Victor thought nothing of it, said nothing. I would have done the exact same thing. The event was like a comma in a sentence,

something one barely notices. However, this triviality led ultimately to infection, infection to gangrene, gangrene to amputation of Vic's right foot. The poem, "Cat Bite" is a must read to understand the full picture.

"Papa," as Victor was affectionally known, tolerated the amputation procedure well, even against menacing odds. It was a different procedure, minor by comparison, that resulted in Papa's death. The prose poem "Moment" is one of the best descriptions I've read about what a patient knows or understands at the end of life.

Within the context of endings," I proudly reprint in full Thelma's heart presented in "How Poems are Born":

While walking room to room, to tuck
bedsheets in around the edge, to
wash my cup in morning light of
sink

drop soiled laundry in the tub, wipe coffee
stains from tile, sweep lint from sofa cushions
crumpled flat, fill cubbies with his
books

fingers, hands, legs move like 'motions
clearing dust, while poems rush in like
fools, disembodied, spinning reels of
recollection

stringing phrases, weaving words he spoke,
parsing empty spaces of the life lived here, making
sense of him and me and death, the poems are
born

Moving ever-so-gently into "Mourning," Thelma recalls small things, things just between "Papa" and herself. His favorite cologne, the fragrance of the man, so much more than the liquid he splashed on. The "Potty Cat" that greets her every morning, with those mesmerizing green eyes. And the house itself that "will never be / the same again." She wonders if there is really such a thing as "Broken Heart Syndrome," where "Disasters shred our fibers like thieves picking / pockets in broad day."

"Ordinary Things: Tanka Sequence," echoes Mother Teresa's timeless saying: *Do small things with great love*. The poem is divided into 3 divisions of four tanka sequences each: 1. Work; 2. Self; 3. Family. Each paints a subtle picture of the man, his doings, his leavings, his loves. Don't skip this one.

What shall we do about life when the best part of life is gone? I find so

much value in section IV, “Balms.” I can’t help thinking, that without poetry, Thelma’s loss would have been unbearable. I felt her leaning into poetry, reaching deeply into poetry for what she needed, for ways to both understand what happened, (even as if looking into a steamy mirror), and beyond mere understanding, rising toward redemption, toward hope, toward peace.

“So Much Goodness in This World” is a prime example. Four sestets highlight the goodness she finds; here is the opening sestet:

I marvel at unconditioned love,
The givers giving when cameras are off,
Microphones still or gone,
Without name tags, the press,
Tax breaks or trophies,
Unpaid.

After “Balms” Thelma is far from finished. Section V. Resolutions, suggests con-crete actions about how to live and what to do to sustain the life and values of her dear Papa. I was struck by “Candle,” a simple, yet profound resolution that lights Thelma’s path . . . let it also light everyone’s path:

*Death is not the end of the light;
It is putting out the candle
Because the dawn has come.*
--Tagore

aurora’s
fingers
pinch
flame
spread
iridescent
skirts
on
clouds
fan
gray
away
dawn
can’t
die
light
never
snuffed
galaxies
prove
this

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is editor, contributing poet, and staff book reviewer for *Quill and Parchment*, a 19-year-old literary and cultural arts online poetry journal. This review was originally posted on *Quill and Parchment*.

Posted October 1, 2021

Not As It Seems

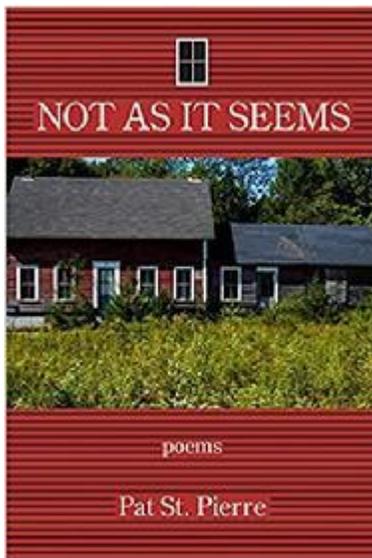
By Pat St. Pierre

Kelsay Books, 2021

36 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1954353732

Review by Irene Savine



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The other day, I found myself saying to a committee member of an arts project I'm involved with: "Writers need readers". As the words came out of my mouth, I realized its truth. The writer may write without expectation of being read, yet still, the need exists. The reader who meets that need may be taking a risk - a book demands a responsibility of witnessing what the writer needs to say. In Pat St. Pierre's collection of poems, "Not As It Seems" the reader takes on that responsibility from the first poem, "The Family In The Red House", and then throughout the poems in St. Pierre's book.

St. Pierre takes us on a journey about her family and relationships knit together with nature poems. To get there, the reader has to be willing to walk with her. She starts with "The Family In The Red House", a poem that offers us an echo of Frost as the poet is out walking in the woods. When the poet sees a decaying house, the reader surveys it, along with her, at a distance. We readers are sure she'll have the sense to stay outside, but she doesn't. In we go, seeing the disquieting things she sees: decaying food, a single unmade bed. The occupants of the house left in haste, but why? When the poet discovers a trap door, and the skeletal remains of a family in the cellar beneath, we are struck by the unexpected image. Definitely, this is not what it seems, but what it stands for won't be revealed unless we keep reading.

St. Pierre continues the theme of houses and the families who occupy them in the poem "The Shadows". This time, the house and its occupants age together, but are haunted by the death of a previous resident. The aged owner wraps a child ghost in her shawl and the two are silent forever more. What happens to them, again, is a mystery. Does advanced age bring the once young owner of the house closer to the past? Or does death come to her in the form of a ghostly child? The reader can only guess while being chilled by the ghost story the poet tells.

I did wonder what the poet feels about both of these houses as the poems primarily relate images and not her emotions. St. Pierre is a cool observer. However, in "Memories of You" the poet admits to being haunted by someone she loved who caused enough pain that she can't recall good memories anymore. Perhaps the houses are the relationships she's had within her family and the poet feels herself dying in those houses

in different ways. The next poem, “Loneliness of the Heart”, is in second person. Maybe the poet is talking to herself about the pain of revealing oneself to a distant other or perhaps it’s an observance of someone else. Either way, the two poems hint that strong feelings are happening beneath the surface.

Nature is integral in St. Pierre’s writing, we watch autumn and, frequently, winter (fitting for an Illinois poet) descend. “Winter Arrival” gives us the hazy, wobbly feeling of driving in a snowstorm and then we are presented with the title poem, “Not As It Seems”. Here, the poet is concerned with what happens when you follow your heart, but the outcome is not the happiness we’re promised when we choose heart over head. Has the poet’s heart brought her to the red house only to find herself abandoned? Rainbows and rainstorms, an early transition to autumn follow.

St. Pierre has her own family to confront and toward the end of the book, she does. Her mother kept a secret from her, her son predeceased her. As readers, we can now understand why it is St. Pierre needed to write as she finally turns her observing eye on herself in “Planting Flowers”. Consistent with the title, she’s not doing what it seems. She isn’t out planting in her garden, but cleaning family graves on Memorial Day. She can’t face her son’s headstone and leaves the cemetery awash in tears like the rains in her earlier poem, “The Rainbow”. This is where the poet is her best - when she leaves the metaphors behind and scrupulously observes her own emotions in response to her experience and nature’s delights and threats.

We’re left with one last sunburst in “The Seasons Of Love”. Here, St. Pierre describes love as the changes of her beloved seasons, always ready for renewal, despite the shadows. On this hopeful note, the collection ends. Our job as witness is over and we’ve been quietly enriched by the journey.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Irene Savine is a creative writer and marketing communications professional. She lives in Highland Park, Illinois with her husband, two kids and a very entertaining beagle.

Posted October 1, 2021

Shoes: Poems About Footwear

Co-Edited By Jennifer Dotson & Mary Beth Bretzlauf
Highland Park Poetry Press, 2021

Several years ago, my wife fulfilled one of my life-long aspirations by gifting me with a pair of cowboy boots. Since finding comfortable footwear has always been problematic, my new boots, fashioned from fine leather with a decorative design are the most comfortable “shoes” I’ve ever had. I mention this rather obscure event as I prepare to review *Shoes: Poems About Footwear*. They say that the best poetry derives from life’s

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Review by Michael Escoubas

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common things. So true. This collection *fetes* the *feet* of the lives we live! Not only that, out of this most common of themes something else emerges: Being real, being authentic. The truth (which is always the poet's goal) becomes manifest as the poems in this collection inevitably reveal the kind of people we are, amid the lives we live.

First off, I was struck by the cover artistry. The front cover, designed by Monica Cardestam, pictures an incredibly "high" high-heel with a bow and spangles. It is doubtful that anyone would wear such a shoe. (Ladies feel free to correct me on this one!) By way of contrast, the back cover, designed by Gail Denham, features a pair of worn-out work shoes, scuffed, cut, completely spent by wear and work. Thus, contrasting metaphors greet us tongue-in-cheek with a spoonful of truth.

Shoes is organized into four sections: 1: Working Shoes, 2: Comfort and fit, 3: A Closet Full, and 4: Fashion Statement. We work, we seek pleasure, we accumu-late, and we seek to set ourselves apart in a world that often demands conformity. All of this and more finds expression through the erudite poems included by co-editors Dotson and Bretzlauf. Highland Park Poetry Society, Highland Park, IL, has established itself as among the premier poetry societies in the country. Its membership is worldwide. Thus, the diversity and quality of each poem bears witness to HPP's well-deserved reputation.

"Empty Boots," by Tricia Knoll, opens Section 1, with lessons from history that left boots empty after "The Trail of Tears," or empty because of gun violence. "My sign says empty shoes / for the shot deads." Caroline Johnson's "Blue Shoes," incorporates players from Greek mythology imagining the role shoes played in the stories connected with each.

On another level, I'm especially drawn to the vibrant sounds of Joan Leotta's "Shoes from Two Dance Classes":

Click Clack, clickety.
Tap shoes
beat out a soft
tattoo along the stone
floor of grandma's
porch and our kitchen
linoleum.
I tried to love the
soft satin pink
ballet slippers
from my other class,
but they were so
aloof, never speaking
always tsk tsking

me to tighten the
so we could silently
glide wherever.
Sigh. I'm a click clack,
tap, tap kind of girl.
I gave away those
ballet slippers,
very lightly worn,
but kept the tap shoes
until only my hands
could fit in them,
and click clack
them on the floor.

Who among us hasn't felt the life-tensions Leotta outlines in this poem?

The economical language of Chinese poet William Marr opens Section 2, "Shoes New and Old":

with every step
the pretentious
new shoes
jeer
at the memory
of
the old

Profound truth contained within the device of understatement. Continuing with the oriental forms, I identify with the "comfort" showcased in a haiku by Charlotte Di-gregorio:

Good Friday . . .
walking to confession
in worn shoes

Yes, worn shoes, how we need them to take our feet to the doorstep of the soul's deepest needs. Julie Sheldon imagines a centipede shopping for "New Shoes." The humor and vibrant visuals in this poem are captivating! For a practical take on the value of shoes, I appreciated Daniel J. Fitzgerald's poem, "Benefit":

I walked a mile
in another man's shoe,
wondering why my feet didn't hurt.
Of course they won't,
you silly person.
He broke them in for you.
You are reaping the
the benefits of his journey.

I smile reading the poems in Section 3, “A Closet Full.” I often chide my wife for the shoes she leaves laying around the house. I call them landmines. The abundance of shoes and the things we do with them fill our lives with truth and joy. Shoes are versatile, they represent a lifetime of memories, as Judith MK Kaufman observes: “there are Baby Booties, Mary Janes, Saddle Shoes, Sneakers, Penny Loafers, Little Heels, and of course High Heels.” Don’t miss the ending on this one.

Sliding into Section 4, “Fashion Statement,” readers encounter poems about old blue pumps being washed out to sea, stilettos that blister heels, Doc Martens that are “Bright and shiny, comfy but bulky.” There are “lost shoes,” shoes that define Nancy Pelosi’s ability to “Command Congress,” black leather school shoes that never get polished as a matter of principle. There are “frumpy” shoes, rental shoes and shoes that transform life altogether. Is there anything that *shoes* can’t do?

While the foregoing question is wrapped in fun, Jennifer Dotson’s, “Pantoum for Mrs. Hardcastle,” seems to anticipate a response:

Putting on the costume changes the actress.
The black shoes with pointed toes and fluted heels
begin to alter my posture, my step, my gait.
The corset tightens, straightening my spine.

The black shoes with pointed toes and fluted heels
are suggestive of the eighteenth century.
The corset tightens, straightening my spine
to become Lady Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer*,

Something suggestive of the eighteenth century.
The wig towers above my brow with sculpted, powdered curls
and I become Lady Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer*.
Contours of shadow and light make my features visible.

The wig towering above my brow with sculpted, powdered curls,
and my speech transforms to her British syllables.
Contours of shadow and light make my features visible.
A critic said my voice could summon dogs from afar.

My speech transformed to her British syllables.
My being altered—my posture, my step, my gait—
a critic said my voice could summon dogs from afar.
Putting on the costume changes the actress.

Note: Italics in the last line by the reviewer.

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