

## **Angular Embrace**

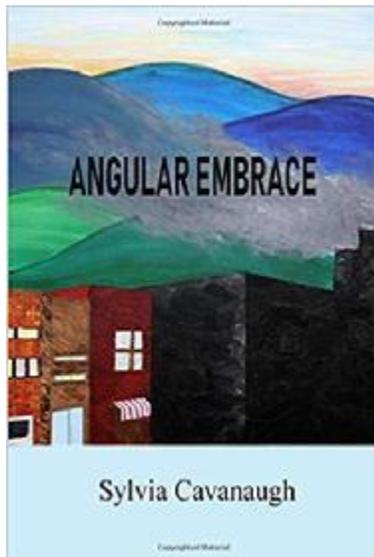
**By Sylvia Cavanaugh**

Kelsay Books, 2018

49 Pages

ISBN - 13-978-1-947465-42-8

**Review by Barbara Eaton**



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Family and childhood memories form the focus of Sylvia Cavanaugh's collection of poems, *Angular Embrace*.

The poet grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in the 1960's and 70's, not far from her Irish coal mining relatives in Schuylkill County.

What strikes me about these poems is their imagery: simple, humble, homespun, yet paradoxically rich. "Finding Frozen Peas" follows a day's winding journey in the life of a child, ending with the return home to Mother preparing dinner on the stove. Very moving.

"Black-eyed Susans" describes a peak childhood experience -- hiking through the Appalachian mountains with grandmother, grandfather, aunt, and mother and coming unexpectedly upon the profuse wild blooms. The poet tries to re-create this experience for her own children, so they might know how she was "once loved/by the wild mountainside."

In "My Lipstick," Cavanaugh recounts a trip to the opera with her grandmother, and muses on youth and aging. "Who does a grown woman become/anyway/when she coats her lips with color?"

The poet closes with "Seed Pod," my favorite poem in the collection. She describes summer turning into fall, all the colors and the music "in the memory of her waning years."

As Joseph Weitzel, former Lancaster County Poet Laureate, notes, even though these poems present memories of childhood, Sylvia Cavanaugh "has a keen awareness of the adult she has become."

One wonders if these poems are a gift to the poet's children. They certainly are a gift to us.

===About the reviewer: Barbara Eaton is a poet and semi-retired community college instructor.

Posted September 1, 2020

## **Body of Water**

**By Jeff Santosuosso**

Clare Songbirds Publishing House

Poetry Series, 2018

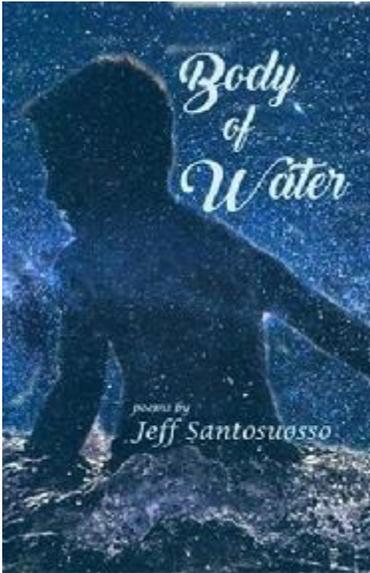
29 pages

ISBN: 9781947653399

**Review by Elizabeth Levinson**

This chapbook functions as a body of water. Each poem informs the next, the way a river feeds a body of water, or the way a one wave gives way to another. Water, as the thread that pulls these poems together, does it with its natural fluidity, allowing for poems to move through a variety of topics and forms, while still tied together enough to lend this chapbook the same satisfaction reading a chapbook with a more focused subject might have. Because that is the real joy of reading a chapbook, yes? That it allows us to see a thing in new and multiple lights. To be both expansive and specific, and contained, so that it doesn't simply feel like a truncated collection.

The first poem, "Warmth," is appropriately a birthing poem. While a little on the nose, its mention of ice gives the poem an almost



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primordial feel, the opening line, “I was born in a thaw” calling to mind the end of an ice-age or at least a reminder that we are all thaw, all the water that births us, that moves through us or washes us over as we emerge. In its economy, this poem sets up the rest of the chapbook -- water appears in lyrical musings or as a character in a single narrator’s life story. But each poem can be traced back to this motif as can anything in life.

In “The Blue,” there is a lapping back as well, to the Aegean Sea, which functions as an ode, until the last stanza when the narrator recalls his Greek grandmother and the whole history of the Aegean takes on new meaning. The narrator recounts so much history, but then becomes a part of the history.

But we also travel through land, through Missouri and Ontario, we drink milk from Greenland and taste maple syrup from Canada. We are bathed in rain, we are bathed in sprinklers. And finally, we are bathed in Walden Pond. *Body of Water* is a beach read for the landlocked: sensual, musical, reflective.

===About the reviewer: Elizabeth Levinson is a Chicago based poet and high school teacher. Her second chapbook, [Running Aground](#), is available for advance orders from [Finishing Line Press](#).

Posted September 1, 2020

## ***Steve Henderson in Poetry and Paint***

**By Michael Escoubas**

Self-Published, 2019

83 pages

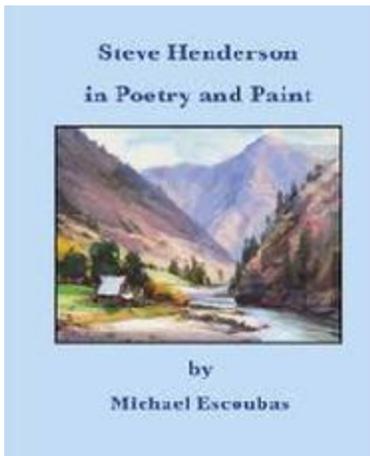
Copies available through Amazon or order directly from the author at [farside747@hotmail.com](mailto:farside747@hotmail.com)

In *Steve Henderson in Poetry and Paint*, by Poet Michael Escoubas, we are offered an exceptional collection of ekphrastic poems complementing the art pieces of Henderson, a nationally-known painter. Escoubas’ poems are inspired by thirty-two of Henderson’s pieces, the latter reproduced in the collection.

Through the flow of Escoubas’ pen, all five of the readers’ senses are stimulated, as we experience nature’s glory through amazing detail, leaving the gloom of everyday life and struggles behind- just as Henderson strives to achieve through his art’s “emotional realism.”

## **Review by Charlotte Digregorio**

William Wordsworth said that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility,” and we are reminded of this in reading Escoubas’ stunning collection. He writes with an uncommon facility of language. Alliteration and assonance please the readers’ ear throughout, and the line breaks are skillful.



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Even if one doesn't normally read and write nature poems, they'll likely change their minds after reading this book. Escoubas leaps into nature scenes from Henderson's work, writing elegantly. His poems are a celebration of the landscape, seasonal changes, and the natural phenomena around him- sparked by Henderson's work and the poet's spiritual and creative soul.

Many of Henderson's scenes prompt Escoubas to reminisce of childhood experiences. In "Autumn Memories," the poet writes:

I leave the car by the gate/ to recall again the white-rock path/ I walked as a boy: / I still love the white dust on my shoes, / the ancient maple's flaming leaves, / its bark brittle with age. / A gaggle of geese compete/ for space as I slow-walk the lane.

On a personal note, I was born and raised in the Northwest, and Escoubas/Henderson take me back to the region in "Along the Salmon River":

. . . I feel the bubbly rush /of Chinook, Sawtooth and Kokanee/ their opalescent bodies shimmer/ in sunlight. I lose all sense/ of myself. I'm a twig/ among purple mountains/ the mountains wrap themselves/ in chiffon clouds.

Escoubas' imagistic poems reveal his spiritual side. Often, in his work, we are struck by the beauty found in the ordinary-shapes and colors in nature that we often take for granted. In "Banking on the Columbia," we read:

How could I have missed it? / Love, I mean, given that God/ has surrounded me with Himself, / in the way the river kisses the shore, / in the way woodland colors take me/ back to Joseph's coat. In the sun's/ dependable rise, like God, always there, / in the clouds, white as swaddling clothes.

Escoubas remembers many of his childhood experiences with his brothers and sister. In "Verdant Banks," he vividly describes experiencing the spiritual in nature on a Sunday morning before leaving for church.

As we dip our feet in the stream, / dragonflies in purple robes/ sing hymns, a croaking bullfrog/ adds the bass-note, the breeze/ and trees bid us stay for *potluck*.

Still other artistic pieces by Henderson, allow him to reminisce. This is a scene in the meadow with his sister :

. . . shoes drenched through/ to our socks, washed by/ high grasses-fragrant/ apple blossoms fell/ in clumps after spring's/ first rain.

Throughout the book, the reader is struck by precise nouns, adjectives, and verbs that make us feel as if we are present. In "Emergence," we experience:

. . . Colors emerge, / reticent at first: half-green/ grasses yawn as snow recedes/ in splotches down the hill./ Violets/ take a bow, first lilies sport/ saffron gowns. Everything seems/ a little tipsy as the breeze/ teases, *Let's get up some mischief*.

Here is a beautiful analogy in "First Light":

How dawn appears/ without sound/ on tippy-toes, / like a mother checking/ on her sleeping child, /

Further, in “Dreamcatcher,” we share in the poet’s delight:  
I catch my dreams/ on the sticky strings of a spider’s web/ I catch my dreams/ mirrored on a raindrop on a lilac’s leaf/ I catch my dreams/ in the emerald shimmerings of wet grass/ I catch my dreams/ in a burst of juice from a fat blackberry/

When I recently asked Escoubas if he first started writing poetry in the ekphrastic form, he replied: “I didn’t begin writing ekphrastic poetry, but worked into it gradually, allowing photos/ especially works of art, to stimulate me in particular ways . . . I try to write in such a way that my reader wouldn’t need the visual to “see” the picture.”

Escoubas has certainly succeeded in his goal.

This book is highly recommended. Readers will learn about the art of writing fine poetry through Escoubas. He is the editor of *Quill and Parchment*.

===About the reviewer: Charlotte Digregorio is the author of seven books, including her latest, *Ripples of Air: Poems of Healing*.  
Posted September 1, 2020

## ***Poetry With A Passion***

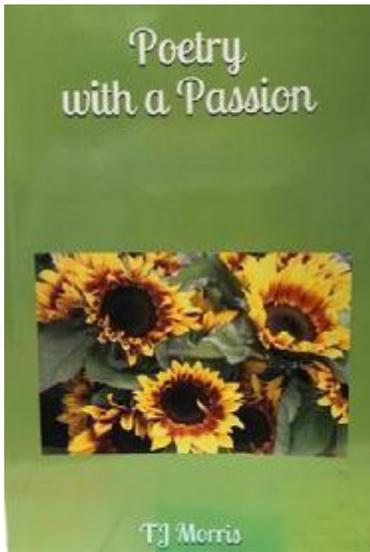
**By Storiword/T.J. Morris**  
Self-Published, 2019  
86 Pages  
ISBN: 9781076042439

T.J. Morris has created through her poems what every woman needs to hear at some point in their lives. Our mothers, sisters and best friends who know us the best, who give us words of love and support are present in this publication. She has combined a selection of poems from her previously published poetry book “A True Heart” with her new poems to give us a journey - her journey, our journey to self-love and confidence.

Ms. Morris begins with an appropriately titled poem, “Starting”. She captures the angst of starting anew.

**Review by Mary Beth  
Bretzlauf**

*Starting*  
*That personal human revolution...*



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*It was time to stop lying to the true me,  
So I could get to the true me  
Starting at Point A  
Maybe I might make it Point B*

Her poem “Do Yo Thang!” is an anthem to being yourself. It reads like a song or even like a girls’ night in with a bottle of wine that fuels introspective conversations. Her words resonate with you because her experiences are our experiences. When she straps her proverbial boots on, we do it right along with her.

Poems like “Fear” and “Where’s the Dream?” hold up a mirror for us to see her life clearly

*fear keeps us in prison  
and we have to learn how to set ourselves free*

and

*What happened to the dream?  
The happy times and wedding rings*

In ‘Why Am I Angry?’, Ms. Morris writes:

*I’m sleeping with my car keys in my hand....*

Her line about sleeping with the car keys in her hand is a haunting image. There are probably women all around this world that do the same thing - clutching onto the last token of freedom for a chance to achieve it.

*...that woman that I wanted to be  
a woman that has strong roots  
like a big beautiful tree*

That big beautiful tree she wishes to be, that we all have wished to be and have become, is just another example of how much we have in common with the poet.

Ms. Morris shares her survival, her self-discovery of strength and courage during her husband’s addiction and you can feel her pain, sorrow and fear along with her vulnerability. Her poems are cathartic monologues and in saying that, I can see one day perhaps they could be performed on a minimal stage by women of all shapes, sizes, economic backgrounds, and colors. So many of her poems sing with honesty the raw pain of betrayal and how she came out the other side.

For full disclosure, I saw Ms. Morris read a couple of these poems before I purchased the book. I felt this was an advantage, a test drive of sorts, because when I sat down to read this book later that night, I had her lyrical voice in my head. To see her recite these pages is like that performance I mentioned above - powerful.

Ms. Morris also writes historical fiction. In reading her book, “Blood is

Thicker Color” (also available on Amazon), I discovered her gift for writing authentic dialogue stems from those monologues we read in this book of poetry.

===About the reviewer: Mary Beth Bretzlauf is a member of Poet & Patrons, and the Illinois State Poetry Society of which she is North Chapter Facilitator and Board Member.

Posted September 1, 2020

## *Pequod Poems: Gamming with Moby-Dick*

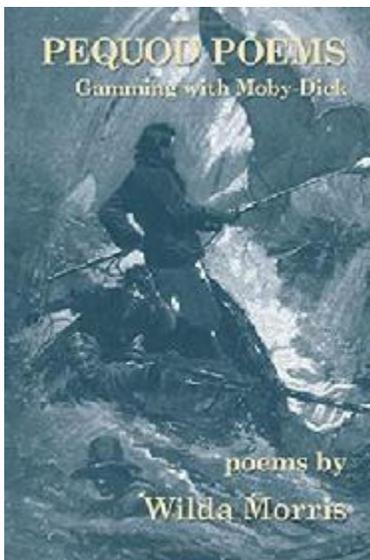
By Wilda Morris

Kelsay Books, 2019

115 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1949229608

### Review by Mike Freveletti



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Located in Chapter 53 of my copy of Moby-Dick I'm provided with the definition of "gam", a whaling term that is explained as the social meeting of two whaling ships where the captains meet on one of the ships and the first mates on the other. Sound familiar? No? Yeah, me either but I'm sure the poet, Wilda Morris, of this Moby-Dick themed poetry collection, *Pequod Poems, Gamming with Moby-Dick*, absolutely knows what gam means. In literature, reading Moby-Dick is a feat that has tested readers for eons. This is not a review of Moby-Dick. What this is, is an appreciation of a book of poetry broken into five parts crafted so meticulously that it not only holds the spirit of the novel but expands on it in a way that's fresh and interesting. The sheer volume of poetic devices, which I'll get to later, is one of the stars of the show reading this collection but what I was most intrigued by was the poet's interpretation of the source text.

*Pequod Poems* is clearly of labor of love for Melville's creation and by extension poetry's ability to tell stories in a multitude of different ways. The poet at times strikes a somewhat metafictional investigation by taking a chapter from the novel and creating her own narrative poetry through augmentation of Melville's plots and sub plots. From "White according to Ishmael", an erasure poem, we're treated to a story from the poet on how Ishmael might've interpreted the whiteness of the whale or simply what can be imagined about white as a shade. Lines like "*whiteness enhances beauty/in marbles pearls/snow-white charger/ermine*", an image that pushes the ever-present metaphor toward a fascinating point of view.

You cannot read this book of poetry without appreciating the experimentation with different forms both known and obscure or even thought up. I'll name a few here: sonnets, terza Rima, rondeau, erasure, lipogram and my personal favorite the pantoum titled "The Song of the Maltese Sailor". Lines from that poem sing off the page, "*a voluptuous swell would waltz me off/hug me, kiss me and caress me/as I glided to the vibrant rhythm/of the ocean's pulsing dance*", beautifully rendered as a parallel between the swaying of the ocean and the way one can sway on the dance floor. The book is educational in its ability to expose you to new ways of poem construction, teaching you how to read it as you go along which is something I've heard in my reading of poetry that I agree wholeheartedly with.

One section of the collection titled, "Memos to Herman Melville" was particularly fun to thumb through for the poet's inquiry into why

Melville made the choices he did throughout his writing of *Moby-Dick*. A standout is “Whales” that starts with, “*Ishmael was convinced whales are fish/of course they aren’t/I think you knew they are mammals just like us/this was just one of your little jokes wasn’t it?*”, playful isn’t it? A dialogue between poet and novelist on the page some 150 odd years later. Again, it bears repeating the analysis the poet has undertaken in the way she synthesizes different situations and themes in the novel and puts a poetic spin on them. A ton of fun to read.

To enjoy this collection you need not have read *Moby-Dick*, this is true, but I would recommend reading *Pequod Poems* and considering a *Moby-Dick* novel reading voyage after you’re done. If you don’t end up reading the big book so be it, at least you’ve ended up with a fascinating journey through the text via poetry. Not a bad way to journey through a classic.

=== About the Reviewer: Mike Freveletti is poet, short fiction writer and occasional dabbler in literary criticism. His work has appeared both online and in print.

Posted August 1, 2020

## ***Poetry As We Like It***

**By Curt Vevang**

Self-published, 2020

49 Pages

ISBN: 9781725941335

**Review by Mary Beth  
Bretzlauf**



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Poet Curt Vevang presents a bold statement with his title, *Poetry As We Like It*. I mean, how does he know what I like? Perhaps I’m a sonnet girl or a prolific haiku poet (*yeah, right*). Even our poet acknowledges the “ambitious goal” he set for himself as you read his forward. However, this poetic old soul does not disappoint.

Personally, I bow to anyone who can rhyme with the ease of lazy summer mornings. I find I have to tackle that when I’m in the mood. In this collection of poems, we discover Mr. Vevang is a master at rhyming. I was also pleased to see his non-rhyming poems were just as masterful.

In “America’s Back Roads” Curt takes us on a trip across America, snippets of scenes so common we overlook them.

*Cemetery grave markers, tall enough to be seen from the road,  
tilt at random angles on a neglected landscape  
that has heaved and settled over the years.*

The poem “The Awards Banquet” is so timely during this pandemic that I wonder when he wrote it. He reminds of the everyday heroes we are saluting these days - and nudges us to salute others who are overlooked.

As a writer and poet, I adored his poem, “The Blank Page” which pays homage to every writer who battles their inner critic and a defiant computer.

*I thought a muse was supposed to help?  
But she, he, it, only asks questions,  
raises doubts, assaults my character*

This is a poet with a wonderful sense of humor. In “Twenty-Four Roses For You”, we see his missteps in sending sentiments to his wife. In “Dawn’s Early Light” we are entertained by the narrator sneaking off at before daybreak to spend time fishing.

Poignant poems like “To My Grandchildren”, “The Man Who Came for Dinner”, “May you Always Brake for Butterflies” and “Owed to the Life of a Soldier” grab our heartstrings and form a lump in your throat with lines like these about a soldier named Jane:

*I have what she earned, I’ve hardly a care,  
She lies in that bed. War is not all fair.*

Or in “To My Grandchildren” he gives them wise words to follow:

*Be your own person, follow your conscience.*

And of “The Man Who Came to Dinner” he writes:

*A few steps and we realized he didn’t ask for money,  
he was asking for food.  
We looked back. He was gone.*

Mr. Vevang is happy to share one of his poems each month if you send him an email at [curt@curtvevang.com](mailto:curt@curtvevang.com). You won’t be disappointed with a little sunshine in your inbox.

Every poem holds that part of this poet that is most honest and completely him. I enjoyed this collection and I look forward to more, because this is poetry as I like it - very much!

===About the Reviewer: Mary Beth Bretzlauf is a member of Poet & Patrons, and the Illinois State Poetry Society of which she is North Chapter Facilitator and Board Member.

Posted August 1, 2020

## ***Sympathetic Magic***

**By Herb Berman**  
Self-Published, 2020

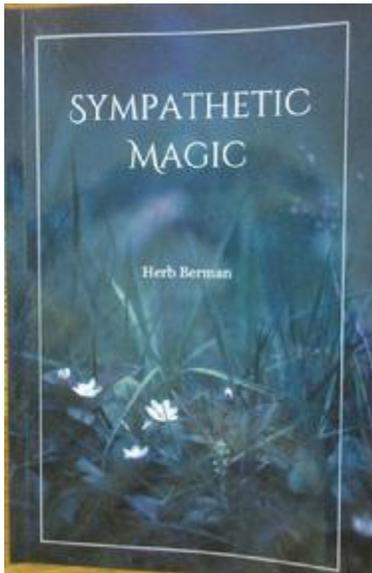
Copies available for \$15 ordering directly from the author. Proceeds donated to Highland Park Poetry. Send email to [hmbsib@gmail.com](mailto:hmbsib@gmail.com)

**Review by Gail Denham**

One of the first things I appreciated about Berman’s poetry is that it’s so easy to read, follow, and understand. That’s a biggie for me - as often poetic works are long and seem rather ornate, rather than meaningful or readable.

The theme of *Sympathetic Magic* is life itself, enjoying what is here and now - a great message. Berman’s poems spoke of growing older, making the most of today. “sing, laugh, exult...May (the month of May) may never shine this way again.”(pg. 38). The theme that we won’t pass this way again is valid. Underlying themes were death and dying.

Berman wrote of the seasons: In Winter, “Walk in the wind...feel life in the ice.” (pg. 48) And I liked the ending of that poem, “Those who are blessed must bless the world in turn.” Berman wrote about how fast the seasons speed by (page 41) “the tireless dance of seasons.”

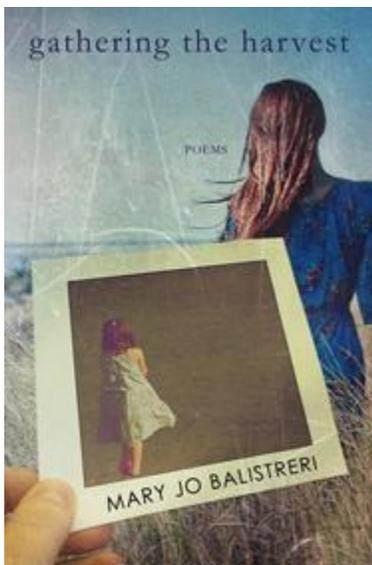


## *Gathering the Harvest*

By Mary Jo Balistreri  
 Bellowing Ark Press, Second  
 Printing, 2020  
 81 Pages

A signed copy is available through  
 the author. Email:  
 joeybfl@gmail.com

## Review by Charlotte Digregorio



*Sympathetic Magic* deals with many subjects - cities - the poor - growing older. There's a section on love, and I enjoyed touches of humor - acceptance of snow, but "I won't say I love the soft spring rain." (pg. 19) Me either. I'd rather it only rained at night as (I believe) it did in the garden of Eden.

And I especially appreciated his take on poets (pg. 12). Poets "swallow the world...The world we know hates poets. The world we know dies without us." Well said.

===About the reviewer: Gail Denham's stories, poetry, newspaper articles and photos have appeared in numerous publications, nationally and internationally.

Posted August 1, 2020

In *Gathering the Harvest*, Mary Jo Balistreri has created a stunningly beautiful, deeply personal, and generous collection of poems that brings us closer to insights, truths, and wisdom relevant to our own lives. Balistreri has the courage to face life's challenges and write about them with clarity, thoughtfulness, and honesty. The poet shows us that life's problems can be overcome. Her poetry speaks of losses, such as the death of her young grandson and her parents, and her own illnesses, throat cancer and Mitochondrial Disease, the latter that resulted in hearing loss, and involved two years of recovery, learning how to walk, eat, write, and speak clearly again.

However, this book offers much delightful reading, rather than just expressions of sadness. Balistreri shares precise memories of enjoying friendship and family, the awe of nature, and childhood memories that are all relatable.

There is, for example, her sightless great-grandmother touching her life as a young girl, and likely influencing her later in life when she lost her hearing.

In "A Letter to Great-Gramma Belle," she tells of baking sugar cookies with her, writing skillfully with unusual line breaks, as she does throughout the book:

You taught me to see with my hands. If / the texture felt thin, it needed flour, too thick, / it needed milk. When the dough was ready / to shape you said to me / *Close your eyes. Let the dough sing to you.*

You taught me how heat has different / smells as it rises. I learned to sense when the oven / was hot enough, when the cookies were done.

In the collection's title poem, "Gathering the Harvest," her precise imagery is especially captivating for its alliteration and assonance:

We picnic on a knoll overlooking the river / that wears its skin like a party dress / aglow with glistening beads, its curves like hips / as it moves sinuously around the bends. / Clusters of berries glisten in the

bushes.

The poem's final stanza seems to speak to us all in broader terms with the wisdom to keep moving forward throughout our lives:

We look now over the distance we've come, / layer upon layer of golden-green hills/ airbrushed to ever softer hues in the distance. / We scoop them up into the net of memory, / winding back upon itself, moving forward.

In "The Bracelet," a very touching poem, she recalls her mother's last breaths:

I unfastened/ the magnetic bracelet/ from your wrist, / the one we thought /might cure you/ and put it on . . . It's been two years, Mom / and I still wear/ the bracelet./ The drifts shift, / a hint of my heart/ song returns. Still, / the rawness bites/ and seeps into/ the cracks when/ I least expect it./ It's then I hear/ your voice, / the one that called me/ "Joey."

*(I, too, put a magnetic bracelet on my mother's arm when she was bedridden, hoping that somehow it would cure her. We never give up on loved ones, and hope for miracles.)*

There is wisdom throughout Balistreri's poetry. Wondering whether her throat cancer has spread, she is left in limbo in "After the C-Scan." We can feel her fear and anxiety, and her analogy about life's brevity is insightful:

I walk to the stove, wait for the teakettle's whistle, / thinking how fast the fog erased everything in sight. / Like an undetected cancer cell? The starlings were there/ then not, / leaving no trace of ever having existed.

Balistreri, the ever-hopeful and grateful poet, always sees the positive in her life's experiences. In "Beneath Van Gogh Clouds," she writes of her hearing loss, a profound one, as she was a concert pianist:

I can no longer hear Chopin. I can no longer hear music/ at all. My brain refuses to recognize the sound/ of the piano I played for years. But today, / the music of sails, smooth legato of the boats, / connects me to the Chopin of memory.

Read this book. It's a treasure! Through all the poet's trials, we see Balistreri lives graciously, accepting what comes with measured perspective and gratitude for life at each juncture, aware of the beauty around here. Her book gives us all hope. You will come away with a sense of profound gratitude and appreciation for both the small and large "goodness" in your life. You will also know that painful experiences are not in vain, but will spur you to experience future goodness more deeply.

===About the Reviewer: Charlotte Digregorio is the author of seven books, including her latest, *Ripples of Air: Poems of Healing*.

Posted August 1, 2020

## *Ripples of Air* *Poems of Healing*

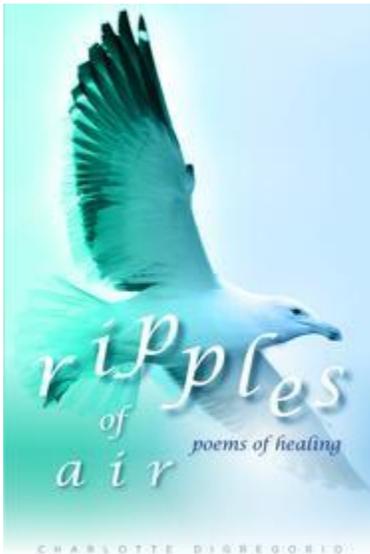
By Charlotte Digregorio  
Artful Communicators, 2020  
236 Pages  
ISBN-13: 978-0-9912139-1-7

To order, email  
artfulcommunicators@icloud.com.  
Also available on Amazon.

*"I get discouraged when I encounter poetry that is supposed to be great poetry but is so hard to understand that I give up after reading just a few lines."*

I frequently hear this among friends when I mention that I write poetry. I didn't always have an adequate comeback . . . until now. Today, I would introduce my sincere but uninformed friends to Charlotte Digregorio's new collection, *Ripples of Air: Poems of Healing*. Packed into a mere 236 pages, lucky readers encounter some 14 distinct poetic forms. The volume contains something for everyone: from compact oriental forms, to sonnets, to the little known etheree, to fun forms such as acrostics and limericks, free verse and more. It is all here, written in an accessible style for all to savor.

### Review by Michael Escoubas



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The book is arranged in 12 sections. These include: Nostalgia, Peace, Creatures, People, Work, The Heart, Season's Potpourri, Solitude, Art, Wonder and Whimsy, The Spiritual, and Aging, Illness, Death (these last three comprise one whole section). Each section is introduced by a short narrative that provides background, context and life-application to the poems that follow. Variety and mature craftsmanship showcase each section.

Like many readers, I tend to shortchange introductions to the books I review. Not this time! The collection is subtitled *Poems of Healing*. For Digregorio, the introduction becomes a vehicle for making her case for the entire book. Who among us has not needed healing? Who among us has not spent time in the cave of despair? Who among us has not needed an outlet for anger or loss? Who among us has not strolled through fragrant gardens and longed for a way to express how it felt? Trust me on this one: spend quality time on Digregorio's six page intro.

In section 4, "People," Digregorio reveals her sensitivity to the human condition, with poems about the plight of the homeless, and these excerpts from *Foreigner*

He arrives in his fifties  
from his native land  
living unknown.

Soft gray eyes, a calm smile,  
voice cadenced  
approaching a spring song.

*As the poem develops . . .*

He tells me today is  
the best of yesterday,

something to remember  
in twilight skies when  
winds are with him.

Heightening the emotional effect of “People,” is an impressive array of modern haiku, senryu and tanka which capture the poignancy of human interaction or, at times, the despair of people in great need while the rest of us have plenty

at our thanksgiving table  
i say grace, mindful of  
the young man in the park  
cocooned from hunger  
face buried in his knees

I’ve provided no more than a gentle breeze in this review; but hopefully, just enough *Ripples of Air*, to make purchasing a copy of Charlotte Digregorio’s *Poems of Healing*, the next important thing you do 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.

Posted July 1, 2020

***Flatman: Poems of Protest  
in the Trump Era***

**By Cheryl Caesar**  
Thurston Howl Publications, 2020  
42 Pages  
ISBN-13: 979-8630347008

Cheryl Caesar, in *Flatman: Poems of Protest in the Trump Era*, adds her voice to the growing chorus of outrage in the United States today

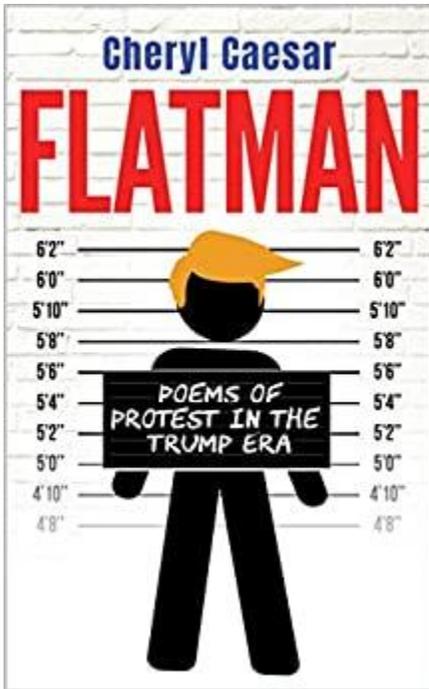
The poems chronicle political events from September 2018 to May 2019. And while there is not much new here, the poems aptly express the American people’s response to being thrown under the bus time and time again.

To be fair, Caesar’s portrayal of President Trump is no more than a caricature, a two-dimensional puppet-villain who survives on Big Macs. Trump is first and foremost a businessman, and the strengths and weaknesses of his presidency can all be traced back to this one simple fact.

**Review by Barbara Eaton**

Most moving to me were "Flowers and Candles," "Michael Cohen Testifies Before Congress," "Letter to Our Lady," and "Don't Give Up on Us, Baby: A Letter to Europe."

These lines from "Flowers and Candles" rank among Caesar's loveliest: "They have guns but we have flowers/and candles. Look: people/are laying flowers everywhere," and "your face and your son's like bright planets/in the darkness, your arms/circling like a protecting sky."



"Letter to Our Lady" paints a beautiful, evocative picture of Notre Dame cathedral and asks a most poignant, pertinent question: "Why do you mourn a building, and burn your world?"

In sum, Cheryl Caesar's poems provide us with a detailed record of American history that is informative and should prove useful in the years to come. I would like to have seen more compassion for the American people, such as we see in Garry Trudeau's cartoon in the Chicago Tribune on June 14, 2020: after praising himself and blaming others (former President Obama, governors, the press), President Trump reluctantly acknowledges the daily death toll from the Coronavirus.

And I would like to have seen a little compassion for President Trump. He did not, as the back cover of the book explicitly stated, "unleash" the Coronavirus. That was done in Wuhan, China. Like it or not, he is our current president, and if he goes down, we all go down.

By all means buy this book, read it, and vote. Vote your conscience. And pray.

==== ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Barbara Eaton is a poet and semi-retired community college instructor.

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