

## Checkered Mates

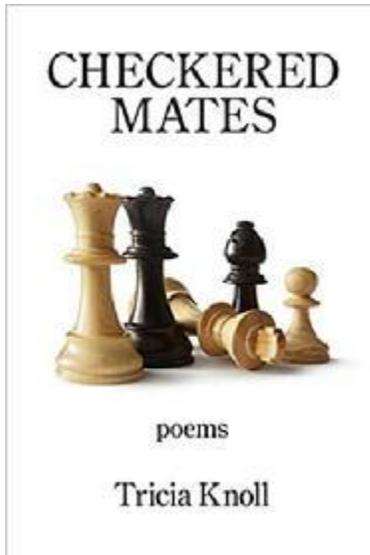
By Tricia Knoll

Kelsay Books, 2021

54 Pages

ISBN-13: 9781954353138

### Review by Joan Leotta



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For chess players everywhere, the back and forth and strategy of dealing with other humans presented in this superb chapbook will be familiar to you—though expressed in new and wonderful ways by each of Tricia Knoll’s poems.

If you are familiar with Tricia’s work, you might be expecting a walk through nature. In this volume, however, she turns her observant, loving, sometimes saddened eye to people. The poems reveal loneliness, love, memories and the onus and the challenge of many types of relationships. The first poem lets us in on Knoll’s perspective as she puts together this set of poems. She tells us about her “mates” many of whom we will see in the succeeding pages.

In all of the poems, her attention to poetic craft shines. For me, the best part of each poem, even the painfully sad, is the way she builds her images from often subtle openings to a superb finale.

So powerful are some of these last lines, they may well inspire you, the reader to write a responding work. I was inspired by the last line in the title poem, about a robot petting zoo. The way in which she has spread *Un-mooning the Moon* on the page, it can be read as three separate endings, unique solutions to the issues raised in the poem and each powerful and stunning. I never thought so much about a cat and moon until Knoll opened my heart with this poem.

My two favorites are the tiny poem, *Detailing* and its neighbor, *Lament of the Heirloom Red Tongue Deer Lettuce*. The former has one of the most power-packed codas in the book: “a rear-view mirror aimed to see me as I think I am.” In the latter, as we learn to plant and care for this rare lettuce, she reveals that her lover should have cared for her in just this same way—the revelation comes in the last lines and packs quite a punch with its simple elegance.

The beauty and depth of her words will, I know, beckons me back to its pages again and again, as I find and mine new layers in each poem. Knoll takes ordinary things and transforms them into amazing emotional experiences. In the last poem she gives instruction on how a woman kisses a ghost she knows. Knoll says, “Words may not be necessary...”

But, trust me, this poet’s words are certainly necessary. A worthy addition to any book collection.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Joan Leotta plays with words on page and stage. Her poems, articles, essays, and short stories have appeared widely across the English-speaking world. She has been a Tupelo Press 30/30 author, and a Gilbert Chappell Fellow. Her chapbook, *Languid Lusciousness with Lemon*, is out from

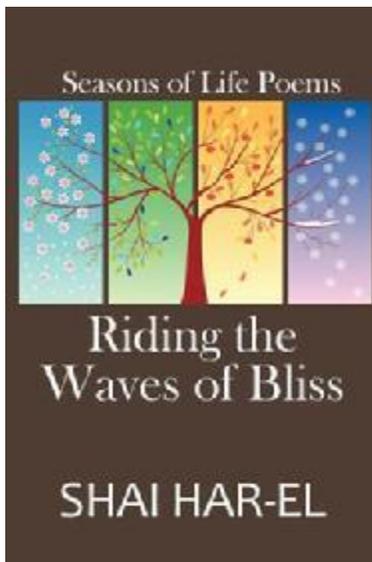
Finishing Line Press. Her chapbooks *Nature's Gifts* is free from Stanzaic Stylings. *Dancing Under the Moon* and *Morning by Morning*, mini-chapbooks are free through Origami Press. As a performer, she tells folk and personal tales featuring food, family, nature, and strong women. She relaxes by walking the beach and sitting around the table laughing and talking with family and friends.

Posted June 1, 2021

## *Riding the Waves of Bliss* *Seasons of Life Poems*

By Shai Har-El  
Homestead Lighthouse Press,  
2020  
152 Pages  
ISBN-13: 9781950475087

### Review by Barbara Eaton



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According to Gwendolyn Brooks, “*Poetry is life distilled.*” According to William Wordsworth, poetry is “*emotion recollected in tranquility.*” Shai Har-El, in his recent poetry collection, *Riding the Waves of Bliss: Seasons of Life Poems*, succeeds in distilling his own life, recalling the chronological stages of life from a vantage point of tranquility.

Dr. Har-El, historian, writer, poet, educator, rabbi, activist, and businessman, outlines the larger purpose of his book in the introduction: he describes his inner world as a way of reaching towards the universal. Each poem is a window into his soul. His terrain is what he calls the “four landscapes of being”: body, heart, mind, and spirit.

In his preface, Dr. Har-El puts forth one of my favorite biblical quotations, “*To everything there is a season....*” from the Book of Ecclesiastes. And he states his main theme: “*Seasons change. So does human life.*” The first poem that appears is “The Tree of Life.” In this poem, Har-El explains that his own life is essentially the biblical story writ small. The poems that follow are neatly divided into five chapters that delineate the five stages of his life: “Yearning and Longing,” “Love and Intimacy,” “Oneness and Harmony,” “Awakening and Illumination,” and “Death and Grieving.”

In “Yearning and Longing,” Har-El expresses his wish to return to Israel, the land of his birth, and his wish to return to his youth. He acknowledges that this is impossible, so he recreates his childhood home and childhood memories in his poetry. The last lines in these poems are especially moving. Also moving is his wish to return to Earth to see his grandchildren as adults, and his desire to re-experience first love.

The title poem, “Riding the Waves of Bliss,” appears in the second chapter, “Love and Intimacy,” which is composed of love poems to his dear departed wife, Rosie. Love, according to the poet, is physical, sensuous, spiritual, and eternal. Love is a religious experience in which the physical and the spiritual, the finite and the infinite, are fused. Love, the subtle knot that

makes us man, connects lovers, families, and ultimately all of mankind. These love poems are, to my mind, the strongest poems in the collection.

The third chapter, "Oneness and Harmony," contains poems that express the poet's dream for the world: peace and a universal acknowledgment of our common humanity.

"Awakening and Illumination" traces the poet's journey from bewilderment to an awareness of God's plan and his place in that plan.

In "Death and Grieving," Har-El muses on the losses he has suffered: his father and brother, and contemplates his own death, which he faces with wry humor. He ends with a mysterious, magical affirmation: "he was, he is and shall be."

*Riding the Waves of Bliss* is a lovely book, a distillation of the poet's exemplary life and a celebration of his faith. Although there are a few curious typographical errors (clothe, p. 3; pleas, p. 69; altar, p. 109; and sew, p. 117) the book is carefully produced and clearly a labor of love.

Wordsworth also states, "Poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and I would encourage this poet to mix in a little spontaneity with the powerful feelings in this most moving and beautiful work.

Thank you, Dr. Har-El. You inspired me, and I am hopeful that you will inspire many others.

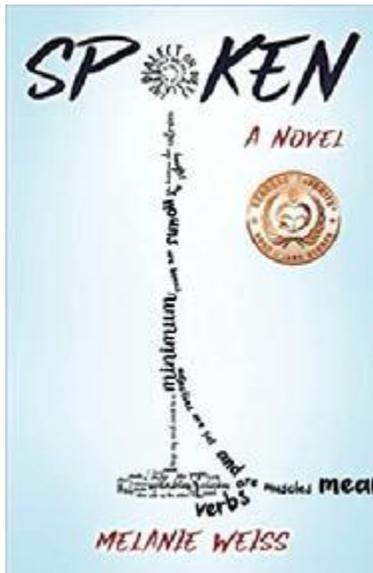
===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Barbara Eaton is a poet and semi-retired community college instructor.

Posted June 1, 2021

*Spoken*  
A Novel

By Melanie Weiss  
Rosehip Publishing, 2019  
200 Pages  
ISBN-13: 978-0988609839

Review by Elizabeth Joy  
Levinson



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As a high school English teacher, I frequently read young adult fiction. Mostly because I am looking for books I can recommend to my young readers, but also because I have come to enjoy the genre. While it is sometimes a guilty pleasure, it often is less guilty than you would think. *Spoken* by Melanie Weiss, for instance, offers insight into the lives of teens, discusses the craft of writing poetry, and centers around a narrative that is compelling for readers of all ages.

*Spoken* focuses on Roman, a freshman whose life is turned upside down by the mistakes of his mother. His comfortable life in L.A. is disrupted and he is forced to move to the midwest in an attempt to escape the Hollywood scandal surrounding his mother. He goes from having all the comforts a fourteen year old boy would want to living in his grandmother's meditation room, sleeping on a pull-out sofa.

He is determined, at first, to return to L.A., despite how unlikely the reader can see this is. But his new midwestern town grows on him and he finds a community. While never explicitly stated, it seems he didn't have quite the same sense of belonging in L.A. With encouragement from his newfound friends, Roman joins the school's poetry club. Even early in the novel, the reader can see that Roman is a poet, in this first person narrative he often employs devices like imagery and simile. Take for instance this description of his mother, "To borrow from Grandpa's chemistry speak, she's, well, liquid. Like water rushing with such force it pulls everything in its wake along for the ride. Mostly over unfamiliar terrain dotted with jagged rocks, but also, I gotta admit, toward some pretty phenomenal places, too." While it seems he mostly joins the club because of a girl, he clearly belongs there. In the club, he finds his voice and in his friend, Zuzu, he finds a trusting confidant to whom he can reveal a family secret he had previously kept to himself. Zuzu sets out on a plan to set things right for Roman, but only by unleashing his poetic voice is he able to finally achieve his dream.

The lives of teens are fraught and spoken word and poetry are natural outlets for many young people. I know I often tell my students that I wish I had grown up with a program like Louder Than a Bomb & organizations like Young Chicago Authors. Other novels have also focused on the power of poetry to heal - Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* and *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes both come to mind. But there is room for *Spoken* at the table. In *Spoken*, Weiss not only provides a protagonist who finds himself in his poetry club, he also begins to recognize his own privilege when he hears the poetry of his peers, when he learns of their challenges. And just as I try to tell my students, there is room for all of their stories.

=== ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Elizabeth Levinson is a Chicago based

poet and high school teacher. Her second chapbook, Running Aground, is published by Finishing Line Press.  
Posted June 1, 2021

## *Truth or Dare: Poetry*

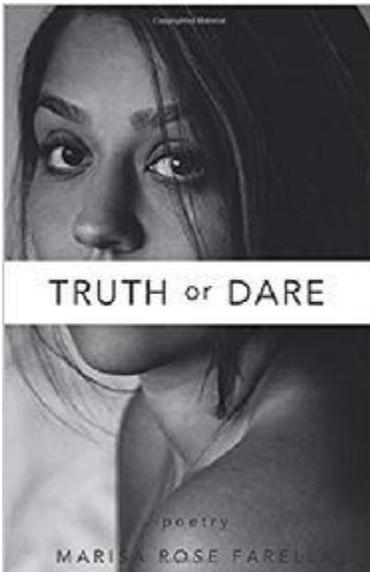
By Marissa Rose Farella

Independently Published, 2020

275 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1679156380

## Review by Arlyn Miller



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In the book's introduction, Farella cues readers that we are in for an intriguing and novel (pun intended) experience with poetry:

"I have learned early on that life is a simple, yet complex game of Truth or Dare. By walking the path of truth, I have not only learned to celebrate vulnerabilities, but I have dared to take the risks that come with life and love. I hope you find the courage within yourself to do the same.

Now let's play a game."

Beneath this introduction on the left hand page (itself an unusual formatting choice), Farella poses a series of sixteen questions to the reader in the form of a poem titled, "Truth". The list begins with the question, "Who are you?" and includes, "Who has broken your heart?" and "Whose heart have you broken?" She challenges the reader, "Are you honest with yourself?" "Are you willing to take risks for love?" "How did you practice self love?"

On the facing right hand page Farella issues sixteen dares in the form of a poem, beginning with "I dare you to feel." and including, "I dare you to say no if you want to say no." "I dare you to say yes if you want to say yes."

At the bottom of the page, we have the author's handwritten signature: *With love, Marisa.*

Following this compelling introduction, the book is organized into two sections: Truth and Dare. The poems in each section reflect the poet's own reckoning with the questions and dares she poses in the introduction. Some are as short as one or two lines, sometimes even beginning on left page and continuing on the right page, as with:

The devil lies and now he lies between me and you.

A few of my favorite poems from Truth include:

Your heart is home but I'm locked out.

---

You will forever be  
My favorite shade  
of the grayest days.

---

I am more than mi mistakes.

A few of my favorite poems from Dare include:

I looked back at my demons  
and said, "Let's talk."

"Maybe we can compromise,  
let's go for a walk."

---

Let's be together,  
let's give us a shot.

I pulled the trigger,  
you did not.

---

*To the sun,*

How do you trust the moon will return to you each night  
[printed on left hand page]

even after knowing all he's done in the dark?  
[printed on right hand page]

For me, as a poet, poetry-based creative writing teacher, and editor, what I love most about *Truth or Dare* is Farella's innovative and cunning use of space on the page and her thoughtful interspersing of blank pages and of what appears to be her handwriting. As a reader, I appreciate that Farella sticks with conventional punctuation and recognizable rhetorical structure, thereby providing readers with solid ground upon which to traverse the ingenious terrain she lays out before us.

This is a book worth buying and reading. If you do, you'll more fully understand what I've described discursively, which simply can't do justice to the poetic artistry of *Truth or Dare*. And while waiting for the book to arrive, I dare you to contemplate the truth of one of Farella's concluding poems:

*The hardest love letter to write and read  
will forever be the one to me.*

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Arlyn Miller is the creative engine behind Poetic License Writing Workshops and Literary Press and

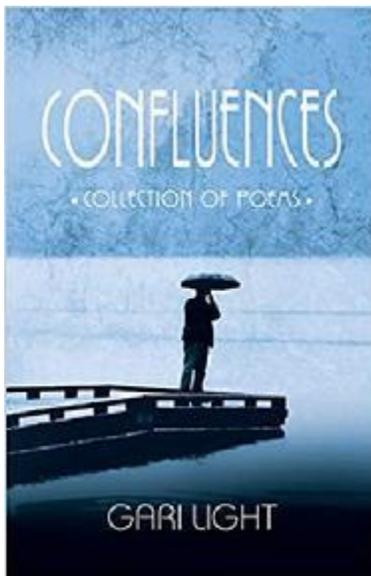
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Posted June 1, 2021

## *Confluences*

By Gari Light  
Bagiry & Company, 2020  
109 Pages  
ISBN-13: 9781734446005

### Review by Lennart Lundh



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To begin: Read this book. You'll be glad you did.

I

In the first of the book's three sections, there is open war, again, or at least angry conflict: between countries, factions, ideologies, cultures, whatever, a man and a woman. There is flight to a promised land and the hopefully kept promise of a better life. The flowing together might be peaceful, or it might not, just as the varying line lengths and unbroken stanzas contain unexpected staccato bursts.

"August. Morning. The Current War" (p. 40):

The Army captain was dying  
in a vivid sunflower field in Ukraine.

//

There will be no mercy to anyone captured,  
as there would be no welcoming music,  
to whoever escaped this calamity whole and alive,  
as the price of a life was declining abruptly.

"Let the Ocean Behold" (p. 23):

all those repeated errors  
by those self-absorbed fanatics  
who were always so certain  
at the end appearing blind

"Contemplating Victoria Island" (p. 32)

. . . why go to America? --

summers are brutally scorching over there...

Let's think of Canada, it's kinder and more sentimental --  
that's where we would have you land.

The language, the words to Light's visions, lies in waiting for the reader, to suspend them with surprise, as in "'Werther is already written, the sail is white'" (p. 38): "Her hands in the fog do appear ghostly / as if they were never raised up to the heavens, / the musical sounds end up being costly."

And there is tenderness, there are miracles, and there is hope, as in "An Epiphany" (p 44):

Let's just get there again --  
to that unforgettable place,  
where the rain, as it falls,  
whispers names on the cobblestone surface.

//  
the miracles are ridiculed  
by the soulless and clever,  
yet, those latter will lose,  
just as long as we get there on time.

## II

The center group of poems deals largely with confluences undone, lovers and couples going their separate ways, such as "Cinematique" (p. 51), where "They walk on the wet / cobblestones to separate carriages, parting without saying a word..."

This filmography of the estranging and estranged is akin to a river, formed of small joinings into great significance, only to come undone in a fanning delta. Near the end of the section, this similarity between humans and larger geographies is confirmed in "Full Moon Retrospective" (p. 68):

In retrospect a June full moon consists  
of its half over Jerusalem,  
seven-eighths of the one reflecting in Kiev,  
and just a fraction of the local one,  
which is intentionally flawed

## III

The final section treats the dual nature of our confluences, nature drawing together to bring people together in Chicago, Manhattan, the joining of joinings that is the length of California and the amalgam of the Mediterranean coasts. In "A Seascape Fragment" (p. 80):

Coastal legends are abundant  
with the prose interpretations  
of the kind that make the poems  
sort of blend and less creative...  
Seems alternatively awkward  
to suggest that seascape artists  
rhyme the images in meter...

while in "Snow and Fog of the January Kind" (p. 95), the poet reminds readers:

. . . while relatively north to the Gulfstream,  
it's sort of west to the appearance of New Yorkers  
to Californians, it is the eastern beam,  
yet south of Montreal on southern scorchers.

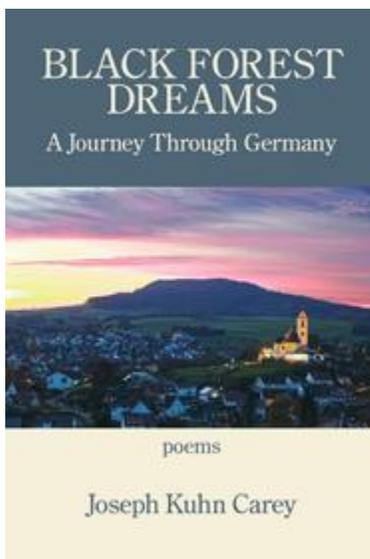
This place is much inherent in the craft  
outside of rhymes, acidic words and crude ellipses,  
we ended up here, finishing the draft,  
belonging elsewhere, as was prophesied by gypsies

Again: Read this book. Then put it on your shelf of books to revisit over the years. Immerse yourself, and become part of a larger river.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Lennart Lundh is a poet, photographer, short-fictionist, and historian. His work has appeared internationally since 1965. Posted June 1, 2021

***Black Forest Dreams:  
A Journey Through  
Germany***  
**Joseph Kuhn Carey**  
Kelsay Books, 2021  
86 Pages  
ISBN: 978-1952326752

**Review by Terry Loncaric**



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I have long admired the lyricism of Joseph Kuhn Carey's poetry. I respect the clarity of his writing and the beguiling nature of his narratives. Every poem in Carey's latest collection, *Black Forest Dreams: A Journey Through Germany*, lives up to the title of transporting the reader with lush, dreamy images and stories of family, heritage, and the rugged landscape of his ancestral homeland. Along the way, we delight with Carey in such palpable memories as watching a ship that sailed "like sugar cubes through molasses" and enjoying a nightfall that crept upon him "like trickles from a half turned-off faucet."

As the Chicago suburban author paints pictures of "a beautiful green landscape" and "deep dark quietude," he presents more than a series of intriguing vacation post cards. He crafts a love letter to a land with many "endless, expanding, serene" layers. He shares the compelling allure of his ancestral homeland in "The Black Forest is a Dream."

*A mysterious mingling of woods, paths  
roads and streams, where  
past and present join hands  
and deftly dance across  
the alluring landscape . . .*

He continues to describe, in "The Black Forest is a Dream," the images that Germany has planted into his brain and spilled into his poetry. There is an earthy flavor to Carey's memories that sinks into your soul.

*. . . until all you hear is a sweet simple folk song  
and all you see is a scythe,  
a spoon, a motorcycle,  
a boy and a girl and  
love and hope flickering  
in an old black and white movie  
on a stucco farmhouse wall. . .*

Carey's poems are lovely in their simplicity, yet complex and textured in their narrative development. In "Watching the Scenery," Carey weaves the simplest of details into a compelling story-poem. There is a musicality in Carey's description of the delightful twists and turns of a family bus trip, fueled by his clever use of action verbs. (In its entirety)

*Watching the Black Forest scenery  
rolling, dancing, flashing by  
from the big clean window of a bus,  
humming along the autobahn,  
curving along back roads,  
spinning huge wheels through  
little towns with proud churches  
and welcoming gasthouses,  
each happily content to be small  
and part of the swirling surrounding  
wooded hills that flow like green rivers  
through the dark and light,  
thinking about good beer, cuckoo clocks,  
and Schwartzwalder Kirschtorte,  
a chocolate dessert that can bring  
a strong Schwabian lumberjack  
to his rugged, calloused knees.*

The last four lines, of course, make me salivate as a lover of desserts. Of all the descriptions of desserts I have read, this by far is the funniest.

Carey is clearly a master of juxtaposition. He can introduce humor to deliver an added punch, yet it does not disrupt the flow of his finely-chiseled narratives. The author ponders the ridiculousness of "Lederhosen," for example, without being disrespectful to this odd-looking German garment.

*Lederhosen  
are so crazy-looking,  
they make you laugh,  
but then you look closely,  
and you can tell they're  
beautifully made and  
full of ornate, colorful stitching . . .*

*Black Forest Dreams* shares the full depth of Carey's travel adventures, from visiting an open market "as the sun drizzles down like a daytime ice cream sundae delight" to eating pizza and pasta with his wife and children on a rainy day in Wiesbaden, "huddled together like birds in a nest."

Sometimes the poet is at his best when he uses the metaphor of travel to describe the connection of family. He takes a simple utensil, "Grandma's Wooden Spoon," and brings it to life in the animation of his words. The movement of each line paints a picture of Grandma in the kitchen "bustling in her colorful apron."

*Grandma's wooden spoon  
sits proudly in the drawer,  
smooth as silk from years of use,  
easy to handle, full of love,  
ready to turn again in circles  
like the hand of time itself  
to make her reappear bustling*

*here and there in a colorful apron.*

Carey takes the reader on a journey through his German heritage that exudes old world charm and human emotion. "Thinking of Germany" pays homage to his ancestors in a soulful, almost haunting way. Carey takes you back in time with his deft storytelling.

*Thinking of Germany,  
of Black Forest relatives unseen  
for forty years,  
of the house (still there)  
that Grandma Kuhn and  
her brother (my godfather) Reinhold grew up in  
way down south in tiny Seitingen/Oberflacht,  
where farming was a way of life,  
and steady muscles were required  
for milking the cows and feeding the chickens . . .*

In these days of Covid, when travel might not be an option, I love that you can still take a trip to a far-away land in a poet's masterful use of language. In *Black Forest Dreams*, Joseph Kuhn Carey captures lyrical moments, whimsical adventures, and family discoveries as he explores the rich layers of his German heritage. Carey reveals a landscape that changes with the turn of a bus wheel, from mountains to forests and green rivers. His poems are much more than simple travel narratives. Carey's poems reveal his longings to connect with the soul of his homeland. His poems resonate with the traveler in each of us.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Terry Loncaric, of Hampshire, Illinois, is the author of *Crashing in Velvet* for Finishing Line Press. Her poems have appeared locally, and nationally, on storefronts, newspapers, and anthologies. She has hosted many poetry events in the Chicago suburbs.

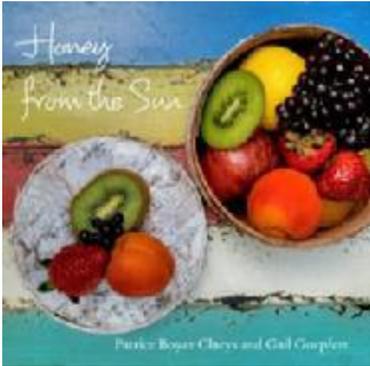
Posted May 1, 2021

## *Honey From The Sun*

By Patrice Claeys Boyer &  
Gail Goepfert

Independently Published, 2020

Review by Marcia J.  
Pradzinski



To purchase copies, email the  
authors - patriceclaeys@aol.com  
or gaile13@aol.com

Patrice Boyer Claeys and Gail Goepfert have created *Honey from the Sun*, an enticing, colorful collection that melds stunning images of fruit with engaging, skilled verse. Boyer Claeys employs her expertise at curating lines from other poets to create centos that offer the narrator's ruminations about each kind of fruit. Each poem is accompanied by one of Goepfert's luscious photos to create a sensory banquet for the reader.

With the description of the pineapple, orange, and mango the narrator reflects on the deficiency of superficial judgments.

The pineapple sits on a round wooden tray next to a crimson-petaled Hibiscus blossom:

*It is all craggy protection  
heft  
in raised detail.*

*...The room within -  
bewildering delight.*

*It's sweeter than syrup  
liquid and shifting  
laden with brown sugar scent  
of being alive  
in summer*

*Under the skin, the perfect life.*

The fruit's skin misleads the eye; it disguises the pineapple's mouth-watering interior. The orange sits on a plate with a spiraled peel at its side, a strawberry balanced on its top:

*...They grow polished armor  
making a fist*

*Under the cloche -  
lamp-bright rind -*

*between nakedness and nothing*

*a neon heart flickers.*

Vulnerability often hides under a cover of strength. A surface conceals a complete picture.

A cubed mango rests against a gerbera daisy's red-orange fringe in a heart-shaped bowl. Sprouting from the fruit's belly is a golden-nosed anemone with wild gardenia blooms nearby:

*Let me tell you this -*

*You start by loving yourself*

*from the inside out.*

The narrator gives voice to the mango's wisdom and it's almost as if the fruit has spoken. The kiwi reflection */Faux fur -/homely as a house/* clarifies the universal conundrum regarding appearances: *It's that odd/the paradox/of inside and outside.*

Other reflections arise after the poet's close observation of a pear, cherries, and Alpine Strawberries.

Three pear slices nestle in a wine glass next to a burst of hydrangea petals:

*For those whose world  
mirrors the empty glass*

*juice in our mouths  
from a ripe pear  
smooths the broken places.*

*Often a sweetness comes  
drop by drop.*

Cherries lie loose like lost worry beads:

*...Each time I eat them  
I stop breathing  
for I have had too much  
perfection.*

Alpine strawberries cuddle on a wreath of Juniper sprigs:

*It is enough -  
the bond of living things everywhere.*

This thought runs throughout this enchanting volume. A feast for the eyes, the heart, and the mind, this book is well worth owning - and sharing.

Boyer Claeys and Goepfert each had a book released last year in the midst of the pandemic: Gail Goepfert's *Get Up Said the World* and Boyer Claeys' *The Machinery of Grace*; I highly recommend both as well their new collaboration, *The Hard Business of Living*, a poetry chapbook to be released in June 2021 as part of the Summer Chapbook Series of *Seven Kitchens Press*.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Marcia J. Pradzinski is a poet and retired ESL instructor. She served as a poetry judge for The

Society of Midland Authors and is currently a board member of Poets and Patrons of Chicago. *Finishing Line Press* published her first poetry chapbook, *Left Behind*, in 2015.

Posted May 1, 2021

## *Music Speaks*

By Bill Cushing

lulu.com, 2019

32 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-0359827015

**Music Speaks** is a beautifully produced, creatively illustrated chapbook of ten poems about music and musicians, plus two additional poems concerning musicians who died after the first ten poems were collected for the book. The focus is primarily on jazz and blues, but there is one poem on a classical composition and another on street musicians.

The poet wisely does not attempt to reproduce the variety of sounds in music in verbal form. Instead he surprises us by mixing different sensory phrases with the feel of the music and mixing musical terms with decidedly non-musical words. For example, near the end of the poem *On Modest Mussourgsky's "Bydlo"*, the aftermath of hearing the piece is described as

A wake is left—  
strong pungent odor  
of musk mixed  
with the sweet sharpness  
of the cut stalks  
being carried  
to the village beyond

Or again in the poem *Listening to Bird*, “chromatic is paired with “gravity,” or in the poem *Music isn't about standing still and being safe*, about Miles Davis, music played by the river is “spawned,” and later described as “a blue flame/jumping/off a gas stove/igniting everything.”

Descriptions of the settings in which the music is played also add depth to the perceptions of sound. In the poem *Blakesong*, the poet describes how jazz pianist Eubie Blake got his start in a Baltimore brothel where he “filled time” for men “waiting/for the girl of—if not their dreams—at least/their choice that evening.” And in *'Zooz's Brasshouse' Busking*, about street musicians, the poet notes that “one guy stirs in/a twenty” into the bucket that holds the musicians’ hard-earned money.

The only negatives are the lack of women musicians and the occasional lapses of language. The only poem about women musicians is “Ode to Nina Simone.” On the theory that the poet writes best about the life he knows, this is defensible if the poet did not listen to women jazz/blues artists, but one misses them nonetheless (think Billie Holiday, Nancy Wilson, Nina Simone). Possibly the poet wanted to limit his collection to

## Review by Carol L. Gloor



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instrumentalists, not singers.

On language, in the poem about Miles Davis, the poet slips into generalities about how categories always take a back seat

to creativity  
and rhythm  
space  
and feeling  
spirit

And in the same poem the musician is first described as a “beacon” and then as a “flagship.” Although both nouns have nautical connotations, “beacon” could have been sustained by a bit more riffing on the theme of light. Or in the poem *Listening to Bird*, the poet describes the sound as “breaking branches,” which works fine alone, but then adds the superfluous “of music.”

But these omissions and lapses do not detract from the book as a whole. If you want to spend a cheerful hour as we come out of our sad pandemic, spend it with **Music Speaks**.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Carol L. Gloor’s poetry chapbook, *Assisted Living*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2013, and her full length poetry collection, *Falling Back*, was published by WordPoetry in 2018. Her poems have been published in many journals and anthologies, most recently in *Gyroscope*, and she is a member of the Chicago poetry collective Egg Money Poets.

Posted May 1, 2021

***Practicing Yoga in a Former Shoe Factory***  
**By Heather Corbally Bryant**  
Finishing Line Press, 2020  
108 Pages  
ISBN-13: 978-1-64662-228-3

## Review by Gay Guard Chamberlin



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Emily Dickinson famously said, “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.” As soon as I began reading *Practicing Yoga in a Former Shoe Factory*, I “heard” the poet’s words as an active voice in my head, as if I were in conversation with a close friend. In fact, I became so enthused that I contacted her through her publisher, and she agreed to be interviewed on Zoom for this review and for my own ongoing literary inspiration. In person, she is as gracious and kind as the presence I had imagined.

What I found in this beautiful volume is a poet working at an advanced black belt level, in harmony with her muse, relentless in her truth-telling. These poems are accessible, brave, intimate, and thoughtful. Bryant, who has written a poem a day for years, began writing when she was 6 years old. She has now amassed more than 6,500 poems, and even though she made fun of herself, saying, “Some are ‘poems’,” making air quotes around the word, this is her ninth book. *Practicing Yoga in a Former Shoe Factory*

is quite a generous collection with 88 excellent and skillfully constructed poems. Most are free verse, some are more formal; all have a dignity which this reader associates with master-poets like Denise Levertov, Pablo Neruda, Toi Derricotte, and Ellen Bass.

Using strong meter and rhythm as well as exquisite (usually internal) rhyme, *Practicing Yoga in a Former Shoe Factory* explores themes of love and loss, family life, difficult pregnancies and births, the death of her elderly mother, and her journey of awakening as she made her way out of an abusive marriage, and into freedom. (Spoiler alert: she has now reunited with, and married, the former love of her life from 36 years ago!)

Like all good poets, Bryant pays constant attention to the ineffable and the ephemeral, the tiny and easily overlooked. In “The Ground Round, Lawrence, 1982”, she says:

*Maybe that’s part of my poetry—to remember what other  
People forget—*

Notice the ways she pays homage to both the natural world and to women’s lives in the opening lines of “Crevices”:

*Like ochre lichen growing in crevices between  
Rocks, a woman’s art seeds itself, choosing private  
Spaces, places hidden from ordinary view...*

Initially I was attracted by the book title, hinting that it might be full of humorous poems; instead, I was pleasantly surprised, and then awestruck, by the profundity of the entire collection. While

there is certainly humor present, it is of a subtle and clever kind, like in this line when she “riffs” on citrus fruit in “Winter Song”:

*...when lemon  
Light slices our eyes...*

I like how much she cares about weather in all its forms, from benign to destructive. Her poems are equally grounded in time and space as well, with careful specificity referring to the day and the hour, the month of the year and seasons, the landscape and geography of place. Some of them are set in Ireland where she has spent a lot of time. (Additionally, her best-known volume of poems, *James Joyce’s Water Closet*, is completely set in the Emerald Isle.)

Color is another constant element in her work which we talked about. She “almost became a painter,” and remains interested in, and stays current with, changes in color theory and art. Another constant is her obvious love of the plant, animal, and mineral kingdoms. Like Mary Oliver, she identifies with the life of other, very-different-from-us, creatures. In “Red Dragonfly,” she recounts:

*As if by chance we met, and I looked hard at every  
Line and wing—  
The same way words tumble from my pen—  
Until I etch and scratch against the paper—*

And speaking of scratches on the paper, this reader was amazed that a majority of her poems are liberally sprinkled with the em dash, so closely associated with Emily Dickinson’s work. Like Dickinson, Bryant dares to eschew a more conventional punctuation for the elongated dash, creating a heightened sense of urgency and movement. Indeed, in our conversation, she reported she often “writes in a torrent,” and “hates punctuation and struggles with commas.”

There is an intriguing economy and brevity to her words, and, at the same time, an utter lushness. Like Sharon Olds, and other modern “confessional poets,” Bryant writes with intimacy, authenticity, and transparency about life, warts and all. She doesn’t back away from the painful truth of her past yet, like the very best writers, she maintains the needed delicate balance between simply “spilling one’s guts” and elevating raw material into something artful. When we discussed this, Bryant said she is “always interested in the process of moving from Unknowing to Knowing,” and that she finds hope and courage in reading memoirs by women who have also survived abuse. In “Walking Whitby Beach with my Daughter,” she seems to address her readers as well her daughter:

*- I hope some of my scars will show  
You how to live differently—*

Notice the finesse in her powerful poem, “The Onion”:

*I.*

*Here are some words I don't know how to say aloud:  
I am like an onion, the food that scares me maybe  
Because I am so much like it—my layers go deep—*

*I have been threatened, taunted, mocked, debased,  
Raped—all in the name of love—I have been told I was  
Crazy, stupid, foolish, fat, and lazy—I have been lied*

*To, cheated, given the silent treatment, slapped, pushed  
Against a wall, shoved out of a moving car in Michigan--  
Told that I would never be loved again—I have been left*

*When I was bleeding to death, dropped off at the  
Hospital to find my way, I have been told that I was the most  
Beautiful woman on earth, also the ugliest woman in the*

*Universe, that I was brilliant, impossible, dumb, selfish—  
Told that I was perfect, told that I was complete dirt—*

*II.*

*That I was unlovable; I have been left many times, once at a  
McDonald's in North Carolina with three tiny children and no  
Wallet for more than an hour—have been told I wouldn't*

*Even be a good nanny, that I couldn't do anything right, that  
My PhD was wasted on me, my dissertation a fiction—so please  
Forgive me telling you of my secret history—it has left me*

*Feeling ashamed, foolish, filled with shame, completely lost  
In the universe—sometimes—so please forgive me as I blunder  
My way back—my abuse was secret, no one else knew—there*

*Was always another woman waiting in the shadows, someone  
Who could jump in one instant to fill my shoes—forgive me for  
Being sometimes confused as I make my way back to belief,*

*To certainty, to a love that is whole and pure and new and  
true—*

*That is what I am learning for the first time in my life with you.*

Another strength is the way her poems seem to be in dialogue with one another, often printed on facing pages. I was impressed by the clarity and intentionality of her poem order, so that her collection unfolds like a good novel. In our conversation, I

learned this is called the theory of adjacency, something she has studied and published scholarly articles. Her PhD dissertation was on the Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen, and she published as an award-winning biography of her, *How Will the Heart Endure: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of War*. Currently, Bryant is a Lecturer in the Writing Program at Wellesley College. (<https://www.heathercorballybryant.com/>)

Lastly, note how this poem, “A Fire Storm” (which put me in mind of Yeats, one of her influences), centers you as you read it.

*When I think of the words, they fly through  
My mind, electric and crackling, one after  
The other, a story begins to come to me,  
Best as I can see, sitting in this quiet space,  
I imagine a whole world, people marching  
Through it—and I begin to know what I was  
Put here on earth to do—after so many false  
Starts, I was to tell the story right from my  
Heart, all those years of wandering have  
Brought me back to where I wanted to be  
For the first time—in my mind now,  
I know which way I need to turn.*

This is a poet I heartily recommend, especially during these isolating and difficult pandemic times. This book in particular will make a great gift for any one whose life is getting rearranged, or who just wants to enjoy superb poetry. As in her “Queen Anne Cherries,” you may find yourself wanting:

*... to taste, to enjoy, to savor,  
To linger over as we feel just who  
We might be on our way to becoming.*

Heather Corbally Bryant’s tenth book, *Orchard Days*, also by Finishing Line Press, is forthcoming in mid-June. Pre-orders are encouraged.

<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/orchard-days-by-heather-corbally-bryant/>

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Gay Guard-Chamberlin is a Chicago poet and artist. Her first volume of poems, *Red Thread Through a Rusty Needle*, was published by New Wind Publishing in 2019. As often as possible, she performs and teaches as *Sibling Revelry* with her sister, Anara Guard. <https://newwindpublishing.com/book/red-thread-through-a-rusty-needle>

Posted May 1, 2021

***When The Virus Came Calling: COVID-19 Strikes America***

**Edited By Thelma T. Reyna**

Golden Foothills Press, 2020  
267 Pages  
ISBN-13: 978-0996963275

**Review by Michael Escoubas**

“In order to write about life,” Ernest Hemmingway once wrote, “You must first live it,” I thought about that quote as I prepared to review *When the Virus Came Calling*. Indeed, the poets whose work appears within these pages, understand Hemingway’s famous dictum. Editor Thelma T. Reyna’s thoughtfully arranged anthology offers valuable perspectives on the viral scourge which has gripped America and the world, like the tentacles of a giant squid.

Limiting the anthology’s scope to the American experience, 45 distinguished authors have produced a compelling collection coalescing around four dimensions: *Invasion, Seclusion, Introspection* and *Realizations*.

**Invasion (January/February)**

Gerda Govine Ituarte’s poem, “Bloom” is the perfect lead-off poem in that it asks an important question: What can poets do to make the world a better place?” While this question is always relevant, it seems especially so in the present moment. Ituarte’s desire is to:

let each of us as poets create  
words that feed our souls  
free our minds make us thankful  
to be alive

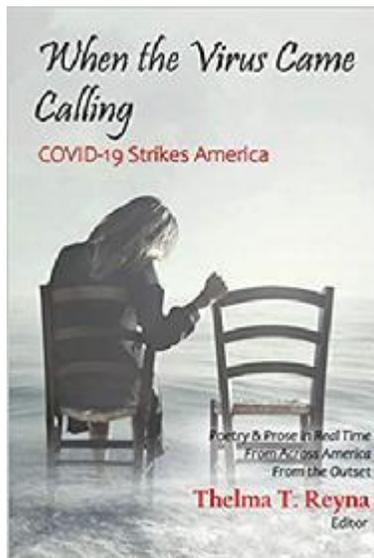
In my personal life I have always desired to be a “difference-maker.” One of the ways we poets CAN make a difference is by facing issues head-on. Michael Haussler’s “This year’s Corona COVID-19,” does this. He’s been here before: “I went through this twice. / Fifty-seven Sixty-eight / A million dead each.” // Speaking from experience, Haussler knows what this latest invasion is about:

How quickly distance  
Becomes the new social norm.  
Jacked into our screens.

If the Earth itself could weigh-in about the origins of Covid-19, what would she say? “Mother Earth Speaks,” by Judie Rae, skillfully uses personification to shake this reviewer to the core of his being. Chronicling the many blessings given to mankind . . . then reviewing what mankind (“I”) have done with those blessings . . . suffice to say, I came away with a fresh perspective.

**Seclusion (March)**

Throughout this section, I was struck by the variety of responses to the hard reality of seclusion. With the world quiet, Michael Haussler’s personal essay reflects on Rachel Carson’s environmental masterpiece, *Silent Spring*. Carson, whose writing ability is equal to that of many poet’s, inspires Haussler to see the world’s beauty in fresh ways. The pandemic



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“pause” makes such “seeing” possible. He points out that the pandemic is not the only enemy we face.

Teachers write about relationships with their students and the challenges seclusion poses for education. These poems and essays capture something special about courage, perseverance, and love.

“Cold Vivid State I,” by GT Foster, lashes out at the social, economic, and spiritual suffering conferred on California when Governor Gavin Newsome shut down the state. I read this poem as applicable nationwide.

“Waiting It Out” by Martina Gallegos, does a good job of expressing the frustration shared by many:

In a dimmed-out living room  
I can hear the rain outside  
This goddamn virus  
is making me feel sad

Staying home in self-isolation  
depression is lurking in  
Two long weeks cooped up inside  
with only short visits to the garden

I try to tune out my feelings  
and listen to the friendly rain  
so I can keep at least mildly sane  
till the virus can infect itself dead

### **Introspection (April/May)**

Moving into the front lines of the battle, many poems describe conditions in stark military terms. The horror of “makeshift morgues,” bodies “wrapped in shrouds,” and a world “populated by spacemen in white hazmat suits,” form the landscape.

Nancy Shiffrin’s poem “My Doctor Calls” captures part of the collateral damage inherent in lockdowns:

he wants to know  
why I missed my last appointment  
do I have a fever  
shortness of breath  
gastric distress  
muscle spasms  
dizziness  
do I need a video conference

In this section the poets look death in the face, contemplate the

innumerable frustrations of lockdowns, as they invite readers to join them together, watching the world pass in plague-time. Your reviewer came away from this section feeling encouraged and supported through shared experiences.

### Realizations (June/July)

Though not specifically stated, I definitely sensed strains of Bob Dylan's *The Times They Are 'a Changin'* as I identified with this last section of poems. Why would I channel one of the most influential poets/anthems of the 1960s? If this anthology does anything, it has challenged the way this reviewer thinks. New thinking, new realizations are hard to come by. The decade of the 1960s, dealing as it did, with war, assassinations, and racial tensions signaled that life in this country would never be, could never be, the same again. 2020 seems to have compacted a decade of change within the confines of a few short months.

On July 30, 2020, John Lewis wrote an essay for the NY Times. Thelma T. Reyna uses excerpts from Lewis' essay in her poem "Panoply of Gods." Reyna chose these lines as the poem's epigraph:

"Answer the highest call of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe . . . the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way."

Through the work of dedicated poets like those whose work appears in *When the Virus Came Calling*, the country we love will surely find that elusive *more excellent way*.

===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 May 1, 2021

## *Running Aground*

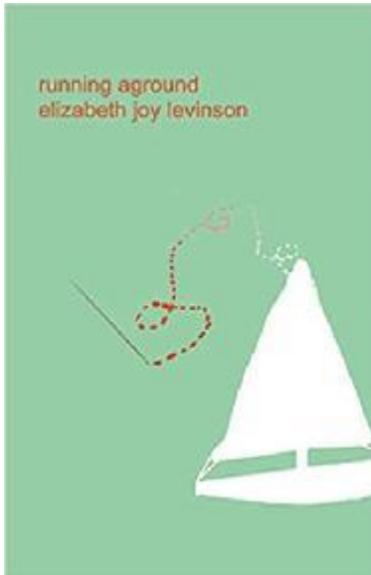
By Elizabeth Joy Levinson

Finishing Line Press, 2020

34 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1646622795

### Review by Aleca Black



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Elizabeth Joy Levinson's *Running Aground* captivates from the opening line of "I am sorry I have existed, taken up space, opened my mouth and spoken/or opened my mouth and did not speak." Her mingled defiance and apology set the tone for a visceral world of heat, bugs, rootlessness, and splintered family ties.

Perhaps the most compelling narratives in the chapbook are Levinson's sense of isolation and difficult relationship with her family. Through poems like "The Fire-Eater", "Homecoming", and "My Father's Hands", Levinson describes a larger-than-life father figure who pulls his family from town to town, expectant of their attention but giving little in return. At the same time, Levinson seems to grieve the fact that her father 'runs aground' in the penultimate work of the book, "Recovering", describing with apparent sadness her father's journey "where he sees no one/neither is he seen." This invisibility is something that Levinson ascribes to herself earlier in the book, recounting "how easy to pretend/you were a song story/when there was no place/your story belonged" in the poem "Things no one told my parents and, also, why I got a D in geography". She describes feeling like her environment is "the silver ball/of a pinhead", rather than a magnet guiding her home. Even siblings are regarded like strangers—"my gaze sweeps over my sisters/but holds onto the landscape." The ocean permeates their wanderings, the only constant in her life. The isolation and transience that Levinson describes weaves its way through each poem, highlighting the struggle between feeling defiantly separate from those around you and still yearning for acceptance.

The ocean, its inhabitants, and the natural world are another trope within the book. In her second poem, "The portrait of an addict as the elements", Levinson effectively twists each element of fire/water/earth/air into the experience of addiction within the body. This use of the elements highlights an underlying theme; the role of the natural in our lives, from inescapable insects to the unstoppable force of a hurricane. As Levinson holds a degree in biology, it is not surprising that her creative eye also captures the minutia of her environment. Her descriptions draw the reader in, lulled by rocking waves and warm, sleepy afternoons, while still reminding them of the power and death ever-present in the world around them.

As an amateur reviewer, I feel unqualified to offer deep literary insights into *Running Aground*. All I can tell you is how it made me feel- swept away to a hot Florida day, muggy under the shade of scraggly trees, rooted in a sense of unbelonging yet tied inescapably to the sea.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Aleca Black is a lifelong reader and

has recently begun dabbling in poetry. She has a BA in English from the College of William and Mary.

Posted April 1, 2021

## *I Have Grown Two Hearts*

By Zöe Síobhan Howarth-Lowe

The Hedgehog Poetry Press,  
2020

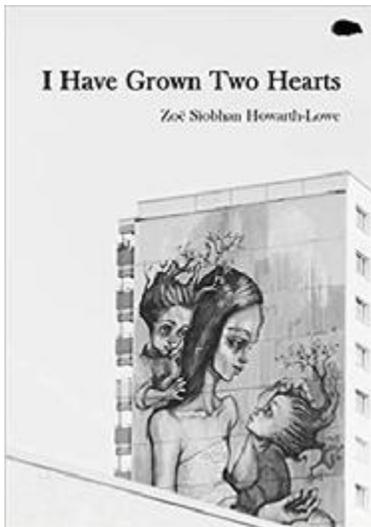
36 Pages

ISBN-13: 978-1913499105

In, *I have Grown Two Hearts*, Zoe Howarth-Lowe takes us on a journey through motherhood and beyond. These are poems that bring tenderness into close focus alongside the roller coaster demands of everyday parenting. We grow alongside her children, beginning in an I.V.F clinic and traveling the gamut of mothering through her experiences and back to being a child herself. These are honest poems, with the skill to effectively recreate her world, they speak of love laid bare and the reality of balancing parenting demands. They are frank and never sentimental. She so aptly describes the initial experience in, *Pregnancy*:

## Review by Tina Cole

*constantly doing two things at once  
creating a baby  
and everything else.*



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Howarth-Lowe uses rich language and draws upon a wide emotional range to focus the various perspectives and experiences of motherhood. The voice is strong and clear with no variance in tone from the dedication she feels to her tasks, she speaks of joys and tribulations with equal vigour. The different forms of poems keep the collection light and interesting. As a reader you are drawn along with themes about the developing child through early motherhood / trying to get a child to sleep as in, *Lullaby*:

*tiny newborn  
we jig along the corridor, whirling and twirling .....  
.... midnight, each moment jinks along like the banjo string  
plucking.*

Then to the intimate comfort of a family sharing a bed, the jumble tangle of bodies and tender moments in, *Little Souls*:

*A nest of parents and siblings  
There are four of us here  
untidy.*

To managing the tantrums of a five year old in; *You Don't Fit the Way You Used To*,

*I am unable to explain my inadequacies  
to your nearly five year old stamping foot.  
..... I cannot carry you home*

These poems have a fine, careful, boldness that anyone who has been through motherhood can instantly identify with. There is longing, there is frustration, there is anxiety, but there is never anger or regret.

The collection contains poems covering topics that you might find in any, 'Guide to'. The wonder of new life, the terrible sadness of miscarriage, sleepless nights, the strong emotional bond between parent and child, the need to let go and how to manage the everyday small, issues with tolerance and sensitivity.

It is also interspaced with poems about her life in general, their movement to the north of England as in, *Northbound*. Also, a poem about the horrors of birthing long ago in, *The American Museum*, with the strong lines:

*willing the head and shoulders  
of this child to erupt from her  
..... struggle and kick;  
elbow its own way free..*

and two poems about her relationship with her father which I found, particularly moving;

*Going Back -*

*Hand in hand /in silence / ...and we remembered*

*Image on a Brass Lion -*

*for a second/ I see with your eyes/ and I become the father/  
gripping his daughter's hand.*

Placed at the end of the collection these allow the reader to fully reflect on the child - parent circle.

These are poems that roll the words of parenthood around in the mouth like marbles, they talk in the plain language of feelings, sometimes witty and sometimes deeply moving. Zoe writes with a conviction and vividness that so effectively draws us into her world. They seem effortless in their simple style and yet have lines that go right to the heart. A must read for any prospective parent/grandparent or godparent.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Tina Cole lives in the U.K. near the border with Wales. She is a retired Headteacher, (School Principal) and has worked as a consultant with schools and Universities. She is now a poet, reviewer and leads workshops with both adults and children and organises an annual children's poetry competition (currently stalled due to the

pandemic), [yppc2019.org](http://yppc2019.org). Her published poems have appeared in U.K. magazines such as, *Brittle Star*, *Creative Countryside*, *Poetry Café*, *Mslexia*, *Aesthetica*, *The Guardian* newspaper and in many poetry collections. In 2021 her second collection will be published by Yaffle Press. She is currently undertaking a Master's degree in creative writing at Manchester University.

Posted April 1, 2021

## *poetry of the engineer*

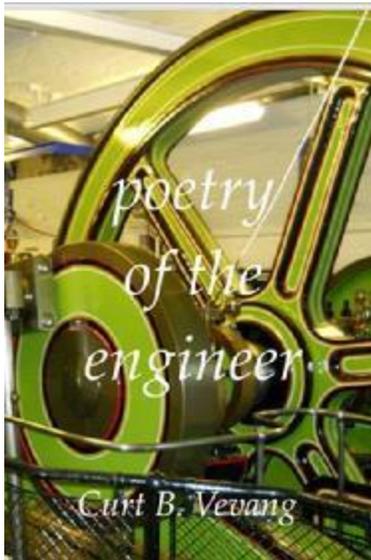
By Curt Vevang

Self-published, 2021

79 Pages

ISBN-13: 979-8-69-705324-9

Review by Cassandra  
McGovern



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A stunningly colorful cover drew me into Curt's narrative book, "poetry of the engineer," a photo of "The vintage steam engine circa 1900 used for many years to raise and lower the Tower Bridge in London." Curt underscores in his bio, "Yes, I am an engineer. Who else would put a steam engine on the cover of a poetry book." Curt's "Forward" further sets a wry tone: "Engineers are considered left brain creatures, analytical and methodical. That's why we are called propeller heads and wear white socks....Conversely, those that are the "more creative types", like poets are considered to be right brained. They wear sandals and no socks."

Many poems are rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter, others are in various length stanzas, as well as a *villanelle for the Cubbies: At Wrigley Field*. Curt's poems are witty, poignant, many last lines quite insightful, often a twist on ways of thinking that I hadn't considered.

In *I Didn't Know How Bad I Had It*, he narrates boyhood memories on the North Side of Chicago living above two different taverns his first five years, one having "A brown bear on a leash would/dance at the juke box to "You Are My Sunshine." At another bar, The Television Inn, he recalls they had the first TV in the neighborhood and that he cried when Whitey the bookie "was cuffed and loaded into a paddy wagon." These fine details in many of the poems makes the reader feel present, yet back in time within Curt's memories.

In *The Spirit of a Norwegian Village*, I envisioned the author's relatives in a lovely town in Norway, with its Lutheran church, and "the joyous day when King Olaf stopped by," yet surprisingly ends with inviting the reader to "Stop in for a cup next time you're close by,/Route 71, Norway, Illinois." Several black and white illustrations further complement poems. In *Mighty Megan at the Bat*, three photos show a six-year-old as she hits the ball, running to several bases: "Megan heads to first, she takes it in stride,/with a little smirk that's so hard to hide...Megan reaches the bag with time to spare/two steps ahead of the ball getting there."

My favorite poem, *Shades of Grey*, accompanied by an illustration in grey shading, relays in four stanzas a close-up portrait of a seaman: "The visor of his leather cap hides much/of his furrowed brow./Steel wool eyebrows head off in every direction." Again, the details give a feeling that Curt knows the character well.

A fine collection of thoughtful and fun poetry. Highly recommended.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Cassandra McGovern retired as a reference librarian and began writing poetry and memoir. The latter have appeared in several journals, including *The Massachusetts Review* and *OxMag*. Two anthologies include thirteen poems: *Five Poets Write about Aging, Illness, and Mortality*, 2011, and *Fresh Pipes*, 2013. Additional poems have appeared in *Atomic Press*, *Olentangy Review*, and *Not Very Quiet*. Besides collecting and teaching about Illuminated Manuscripts, she is currently writing a poetry chapbook of fictional families in Medieval England.

Posted April 1, 2021

## ***Dead Shark on the N Train***

**By Susana H. Case**  
Broadstone Books, 2020  
85 Pages  
ISBN-13: 978-1937968663

## **Review by Mike Freveletti**

With Susana H. Case's book, *Dead Shark on the N Train*, there's brevity and substance. It has the 'do this, do that' poetic device made famous by Frank O'Hara and right on the next page the poet gives us a poem that would make the Surrealists proud. There is so much to love about this collection in its ties to New York City across some of the pages and its nods to names like Otis Redding and T.S. Eliot but that is not all, dear readers. Can you guess what was tucked right into the middle section of this collection? Poetry written as a response to small miniature crime scenes depicted with dolls. Yeah, that's how eclectic this collection was. And yes, I understand you might be puzzled but let's get to it.

The first section of three separate sections breaking up the collection is titled, "Living Dolls". I was struck by the poem "The Unpublished Poems of Marilyn Monroe" which is an incredible title and one of my favorite poems in the entire collection. "*Marilyn in a striped swimsuit, Reading Ulysses*" conjured up, of course, the photo of Monroe reading Ulysses, a book I love. Why take a photo of Monroe reading one of the most difficult books of all time? What was the point? The poet weighs in, "*she wanted blondes to be thought sexy and astute/she wanted herself to be thought astute*". The poem is about self-image, it's about Monroe, it's about what the public

thought about her and how she wanted to be taken seriously. We even get an appearance in the poem by Arthur Miller, right as he was defying the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The poem had me wishing I could see if Monroe had annotated her copy of *Ulysses*.

Section two, titled “Crime Scenes”, is by far my favorite section. We’re told on the title page for this section the following, “*after Frances Glessner Lee, creator of the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, three-dimensional crime scenes made in the 1940s and 1950s and used for teaching criminal investigation.*” “Laundry Line”, written with the photo labeled Scene 2 Attic goes, “*In the attic, love letters scatter/like dead leaves/beneath a woman’s dangling feet/it’s Christmas Eve*”, sounds a bit like the start to a Patricia Highsmith novel, doesn’t it? That’s the first stanza and the bookend is, “*the snow is muddled on the outside path/the door is open/looking closely, her face is scuffed,*” The word choice is spare and it feels as though you’re reading a crime scene report written by an overly poetic detective who is sure to hear about their flowery language in the morning from a superior.

Section three, “Storm Clouds”, has a few poems with one word titles with the best being, “Hair”, inspired by a Jack Gilbert poem according to the poet’s notes. “*I’d like to think you kept/those threads, the way someone in love/might have sealed them in a locket*”, has two people who are clearly no longer in love. Alas, the final stanza illuminates the reality, “*Of course you didn’t keep my hair/why would you want to do such a thing?*” Hair can be more than just hair and just like anything else, it can be imbued with meaning. The poet shows how easily poetry can turn the quotidian into something truly magnificent.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez makes an appearance and so does Werner Herzog. There are so many different things going on in this collection, like a restaurant with a huge menu of questionable items. In here though? They all work together. I don’t often finish reading a book of poetry and say to myself, man, that was just fun to read. This was *fun*. Did I mention that it has a Bloody Mary recipe? To the book and the poet I say, cheers.

===ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Mike Freveletti is a poet, short fiction writer and occasional dabbler in literary criticism. His work has appeared both online and in print.

Posted April 1, 2021