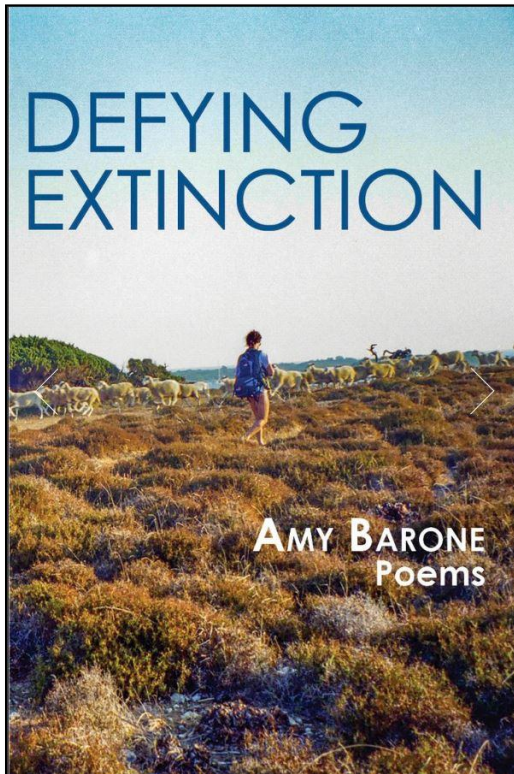


**Archive of Book Reviews published on [www.HighlandParkPoetry.org](http://www.HighlandParkPoetry.org)  
from January – March, 2024**

<b>Defying Extinction</b> .....	2
By Amy Barone (Review Patricia Carragon) .....	2
<b>weatherman</b> .....	5
by Dan Fitzgerald (Review by Marie Asner).....	5
<b>Even the Dog was Quiet</b> .....	7
by Margaret R. Sáraco (Review by Michael Escoubas) .....	7
<b>Double Stream</b> .....	11
Poems by Ellen Dooling Reynard.....	11
Paintings and Drawings by Paul Léon Reynard (Review by Michael Escoubas) .....	11
<b>How to Become Invisible</b> .....	16
by Mary McCarthy (Review by Joan Leotta) .....	16
<b>Late Epistle</b> .....	18
by Anne Myles (Review by Gary Davis).....	18
<b>All the Poems I Never Wrote</b> .....	20
by jacob erin-cilberto (Review by Michael Escoubas) .....	20
<b>A Tale of Two Souls</b> .....	24
by Shai Har-El (Review by Michael Escoubas) .....	24
<b>Departures from Rilke</b> .....	27
By Steven Cramer (Review by Dan Carey).....	27
<b>Quarantine Highway</b> .....	30
by Millicent Borges Accardi (Review by Michael Escoubas).....	30
<b>Born Under the Influence</b> .....	34
by Andrena Zawinski (Review by Michael Escoubas).....	34
<b>Sonnets of Love and Joy: poems</b> .....	38
by Paul Buchheit (Review by Judy Cummings).....	38
<b>Rejection to Acceptance: 57 Poems That Finally Made It</b> .....	40
by Patricia Williams (Review by Michael Escoubas).....	40
<b>A Whispering</b> .....	43
by Geoffrey Heptonstall (Review by Michael Escoubas).....	43



## Defying Extinction

By Amy Barone

Broadstone Books, 2022

ISBN: 978-1-956782-11-0,

88 pp. \$18.50 at

[www.BroadstoneBooks.com](http://www.BroadstoneBooks.com)

\$25 on Amazon

Review by Patricia Carragon

Amy Barone, author of *We Became Summer* (NYQ Books, 2018) and *Kamikaze Dance* (Finishing Line Press, 2015), is back with her latest poetry collection, *Defying Extinction* from Broadstone Books. Each poem is like a travel log, encompassing respect for various cultures and their environments. We travel into the author's past, learn about her need for love and remembrance.

Never boring, she soldiers on through life's predictable and unpredictable moments and records the challenges that are endangering both the planet and humanity. Her journey is divided into five sections: Sacred Places, The Wild, Heirlooms, Love and Family, and Anima Protection.

In Sacred Places, hindsight and preservation are highlighted. Barone observes Nature at her best. On Bermuda's Nonsuch Island, cahows emerge after three hundred years. On Manhattan, the same moon blushes as it did for the Algonquins who gathered strawberry roots and leaves.

Nature is revered in its simplicity as exemplified in *Sanctum*:

*Where an emerald carpet*

*studded with hundreds of trees  
and blueberry bushes*

*is rolled out for heart-weary visitors  
like an ethereal shrine.*

We visit *The Wild*, a section that delves into wildlife and the music scene. From Abruzzo's Brown Bears, a Bronx butterfly in an Italian American neighborhood, a yellow canary in Alabama, "it girls on and off Philly stages, and bad lovers, Barone keeps the beat moving.

Life, even when untamed, is music and how we react is like a dance as we read in *Twilight Flight*:

*find safety in numbers, reach for partners  
as they sway and prance  
Emboldened by a twilight dance,  
they grow larger beneath chameleon heavens.*

In *Heirlooms*, Barone explores the meaning of her section's title. She looks at the classical face on a cameo and wonders if Medea wore one on her journey. She cherishes exotic spices while moving to the Motown beat. Jazz fills her soul. She recalls her father singing a Tin Pan Alley song. Mementos and music are all heirlooms.

*The Bell Museum* touches the sensitivity of the past in the material but even more in recollection. Bells have a history in communication but in the author's case, more poignant:

*In 16<sup>th</sup> century England, handbells were used to send messages,  
as my mother communicated in her final years.  
Etched with feathers and teardrops, the bell now sits on my desk.*

Barone takes us to her family and relationships. Like a photo album, we view her past. We see her startled by a praying mantis and watching *The Edge of Night*. Barone grows up, carries the burdens of adulthood.

In *Secret Flight*, Barone reveals that secrets are best kept undercover. She learns the meaning of regret, one of the many lessons we learn in adulthood:

*A tale of infidelity, indiscretion, lust  
that I should have kept buried, but instead confided*

*when trust and longing triumphed.  
It came to rest on my mother's ears as she lay dying.*

In the final section, Anima Protection, Barone strives to keep memories alive. Ancestral history must not be forgotten. The people who had lost their lives at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory must not be forgotten. Friends who have died must not be forgotten.

However, she must brace herself for betrayal and move on as in *Forgetting*:

*Friends and lovers should be stamped  
with an expiration date to forewarn us  
when the end is near.*

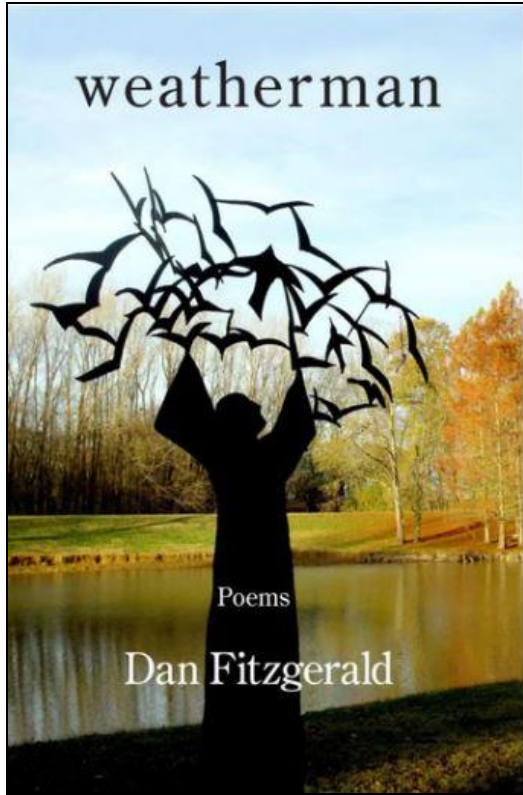
*I struggle to remember the magic . . .  
And stay locked away until I erase*

*the how, the why forever.*

In summary, Barone handles her journey with grace and elegance. Her emotions are in balance with her observations, allowing the reader to embrace her words, thoughts, experiences, and wisdom—even relate to Barone's poetry. *Defying Extinction* is a triumph of words, a masterpiece that deserves to be on everyone's reading list.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Patricia Carragon's recent publications: *Five Fleas Itchy Poetry*, *Fixed and Free Quarterly*, *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Out Loud*, an LGBTQA Literary Arts Anthology (Red or Green Books), *When Women Speak Poetry Anthology*, Vol. 1, among others. Her poem, "Wild Is the Wind," received a 2024 Pushcart Nomination from Poets Wear Prada's The Rainbow Project. Her book *Innocence* is from Finishing Line Press. She hosts Brownstone Poets and is the editor-in-chief of its annual anthology.

Posted March 1, 2024



**weatherman**  
by Dan Fitzgerald

Kelsay Books, 2023  
62 pages  
ISBN 13, 978-1639804625  
Review by Marie Asner

Dan Fitzgerald is a poet who lives in Pontiac, Illinois and observes the weather around him with descriptive poetry. He has won awards for his poetry including being nominated for the Pushcart Award not once, but twice. His poems have been published in “The Writer’s Journal” and “Origami Press” to name a few. “weatherman” is his latest publication.

The first poem in the book is called “weatherman” and tells of what could happen when taking a walk during rain

when legs may be unsteady, “...I must find balance in a world that can change.” As you read, the poems can be divided into the four seasons of the year, spring, summer, fall and winter. Their description puts them into categories, such as “weatherman.” and spring rain. Summer comes and in “A Moment,” one of the longest poems in the collection, “Give me a moment or two...the chance for love to find a heart.” There is also “I Hear The Rain Singing” and water wanting to continue a journey “...wanting the sea.” Then there is “Wind Gust” who hides and comes for “...the lust of skirt against leg.”

In-between seasons, there is also the earth to contend with, as in “Earth Morning” where “Earth’s lungs freeze in mid-breath.” Entering fall, is “A Matter After All,” when the sky begins as blue and then becomes “...boiling and angry.” Just as people can change from friendly to angry. “Sun Code” has the sun asking for attention before it is gone, “...what I am offering today may not be there.” “Winter is “Not Yet Over” when the dark of winter comes sooner each day and “night may have come, but life still claims the day” “Visionary” and words touching like sun, but in December, instead.

Dan Fitzgerald uses sparse words in writing poetry. There is an old newspaper tale about a lead story “...being one short sentence and then expand from there.” In this poetry collection, there are short lines, sometimes sentences for each poem

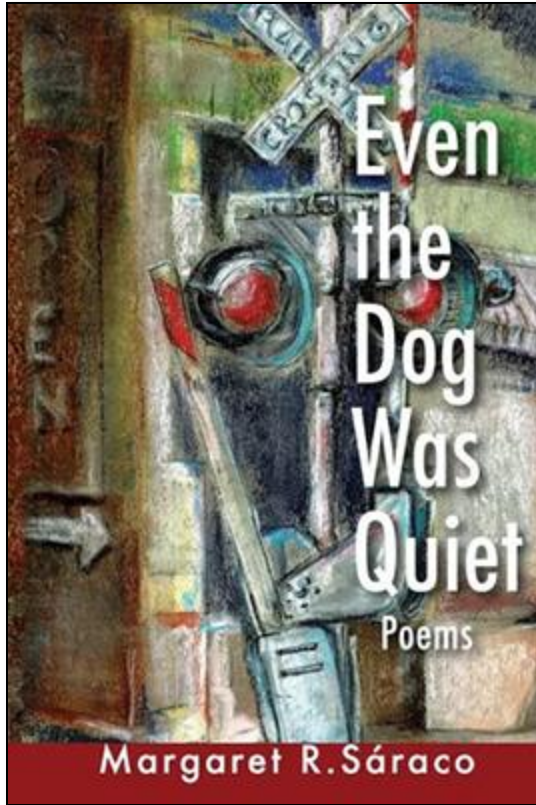
and well-thought out. Why embellish with multiple adjectives when a few distinct words will do. In the line, "...the lust of skirt against leg," we don't need details about dress or pleats, six words give you a picture for your mind. The same with "Storm Clouds" and "...the hues of bruises" gives you the picture of what is happening over your head during a storm.

Fitzgerald's style of poetry is what I call "easy reading." Sit back, relax and let the author describe situations or places or memories in short lines that let you think over what you just read. His writing reminds me of the poetry of Mark Strand and his "Keeping Things Whole" with an ending of "I move to keep things whole." Or, Charles Wright's "The Daughters of Blum," and "...once on a dresser, gloves waiting for hands." In "weatherman," Dan Fitzgerald offers a gentleness that carries one through the book with ease and a chance to see that fewer words have greater meaning

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:** Marie Asner balances a life of being a poet, freelance writer, church musician, book reviewer and entertainment reviewer.

Posted March 1, 2024





## Even the Dog was Quiet by Margaret R. Sáraco

Format: 6" x 9" Perfect Bound  
Paperback  
46 poems ~ 7 B/W drawings ~ 96 pages  
Price: \$15.00  
ISBN-10: 1948521180  
ISBN-13: 9781948521185  
To Order: Amazon.com & Barnes & Noble

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

I was first drawn to Margaret Sáraco's new collection because two of my three adult children give family-like love to four dogs. That is enough dogs for a lifetime! We have no pets. *Even the Dog was Quiet*, segues into Sáraco's world of memories. Her second full-length

collection in as many years is tender and provocative. She savors life. She has opened a fresh world of "seeing and savoring" for me.

The goal of this review is to illustrate Sáraco's world of savoring.

### *Format & Writing Style*

The book is set up in eight segments: *Swoosh!*, *Tall Ships*, *Fruitful*, *To Whom It May Concern*, *Wish You Were Here, Part I*, *Dear So and So*, *Breaking Waves*, and *Wish You Were Here, Part II*. Each heading highlights either four or five poems which develop special moments related to each. Sáraco is good at capturing moments. She seems to know where I live!!

Margaret Sáraco puts the "free" in free verse. I didn't find any poems that rhyme. What I found was an engaging narrative style that alternated between poems with short line breaks living comfortably with prose poems. Her prose style accommodates themes that need a more expansive approach.

### *Free & Easy*

From "Swoosh!" Sáraco draws from her Italian background to portray the love of a devoted Dachshund named *Poppy*. They have a daily routine in which:

Seeing her,  
he coils himself on the sofa  
as she back ends into him.  
Understanding the routine  
he stretches himself out  
so that his head pokes out  
on one side of her  
and his tail the other.

I gave this poem extra time. The way Sáraco develops the relationship between *Poppy* and *Grandma* is a highlight to be savored. She paints pictures. The poem is “Devozione,” (Italian meaning “Devoted One), and is a clue to the collection’s title. After reading this poem I recalled, from my youth, a devoted cocker spaniel named *Mac*. *Mac* was fulfilled in life just being with me and my brothers. Thank you, Margaret.

Exquisite black and white drawings, by Alex Polner, are a nice touch. (Polner also illustrated the cover.) A chiaroscuro illustration precedes each division. Each division features its own poem.



### Fruitful

A bottle of wine and plate  
of watermelon piled high.

Taste the sweet pink fruit  
and the bitter seed.



Drink, drink, drink,

Eat, then come back and have  
some more.

This delightful precursor is followed by “Bricks, Curtains and the Sunday Comics.” Autobiographical, “Bricks” aptly illustrates what being “Fruitful” means to Sáraco. Both she and her ancestors understood the meaning of suffering as they struggled to belong in their new country. These hearty souls did not wallow in self-pity. They were tough and remain so today:

I come from immigrant grandparents, bricklayers and stone makers  
who built their own church when no others would welcome them.

Where men left their sweat in stone and priests implied Heaven’s  
Gates would open for loved ones if they worked for free,  
but no one could test their theory.

As the poem develops “Fruitful” takes on rich dimensions of love, suffering, loss, and triumph. The ending couplet reveals a touch of irony:

I come from families who accepted their place, men worked  
women worked, and everyone knew their place, except me.

In “Wish You Were Here, Part II.” Sáraco’s overall cheerful outlook toward life is impossible to suppress.



The sun hides behind the clouds

but is warm and delightful.

I wish you could see the  
acres of sunflowers  
out my window.

Their yellow petals  
smell like earth,  
illuminating my corner of the world.

Maragaret Sáraco's latest collection is about life distilled through hardship, yes, but punctuated by a keen eye for those moments when, *Even the Dog was Quiet*

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Published March 1, 2024

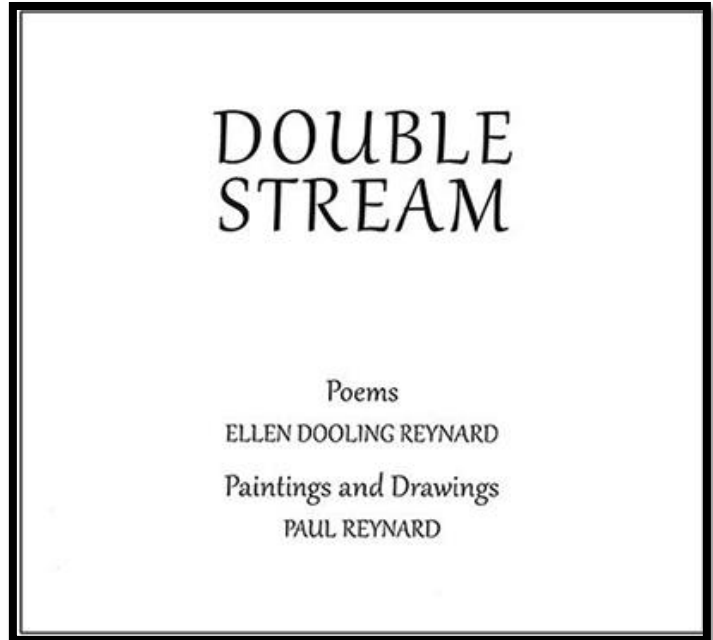
## Double Stream

Poems by Ellen Dooling  
Reynard

Paintings and Drawings by  
Paul Léon Reynard

21 Poems ~ 24 Illustrations ~ 53  
pages

Price: \$25.00  
South 40 Press  
ISBN #: 978-1-7923-9747-9



Gurdjieff Books and Music:

<https://www.gurdjieffbooksandmusic.com>

By the Way Books: <https://www.bythewaybooks.com>

Review by *Michael Escoubas*

The title suggests the overall thrust of this superb collaboration. The artistic talents of Ellen Reynard and her husband, French painter, Paul Léon Reynard (1927-2005), when streamed together, converge into a triumphant double-stream of physical and spiritual beauty.

### *Overview*

I was struck by the book's austere cover. A subtle message emerges: One must open the book, turn the page, get engaged, to experience the powerful mix of art and poetry within. Indeed, isn't this true of life?

*Double Stream* features the visual genius of abstract artist Paul with the equally vivid poetry of wife Ellen. Organized into four parts: **Creations Stories, Water, Life of Christ, and Impressions**, the work features art and poems juxtaposed on facing pages. This design allows for moments of contemplative linkage between visual and poetic treatments of themes. *Double Stream* is not a book for speed readers. Be prepared to wear two types of lenses: one set for stunning colorations, the other for poetry that challenges the mind and spirit. At the end, I appreciated reading interesting bios of Paul and Ellen. It is as if everything in their past served to prepare them to produce *Double Stream*. Additionally, the "About the Art,"

page serves as an appendix documenting each drawing and/or painting as to composition date and medium used.

### *The Journey*

This book is about a spiritual journey. However, it is not a journey scripted from an ivory tower of Biblical clichés filled with “all the right answers.” This journey is sensitive to hard questions, respectful of doubt, and compassionate about life’s complexities.

### *Progression*

It’s first-things-first as **Creation Stories** opines on how the universe began. In “First Movement,” amid the inward fear that even the best science may not know, Reynard draws on a common life-experience:

The woman gazes up at the night sky  
and, spreading her palms  
over her belly, she feels the first  
flutter of the child in her womb.

A shooting star draws it silver path  
across the sky, and the woman smiles.  
She is not afraid to know,  
the great beginning was as gentle  
and as magnificent as this.

Three additional poems in this section: “Space Wind,” “Double Stream and Separation of the Waters,” and “Luminaries,” set the stage for **Water**. In “Alluvions”:

the rains poured down  
forty days and forty nights  
and the waters rose  
from their beds in the sea

tides that did not ebb  
climbed over the shores  
across meadows and deserts  
to submerge the foothills

until the only dry land  
in the midst of the global sea

was a single mountain top

Paul Reynard's paintings of both the rain pouring down, accompanied by a rendition of Mount Ararat ensconced in water and dark clouds, puts the imagination to work:

### **Ararat**

were they able to see  
from the highest peak  
the vast expanse of ocean  
that spread across the earth  
and was still rising  
toward the heights?

did they hear  
the pounding surf  
echo across the endless  
expanse of water  
and fear that tomorrow  
would be their last day?

**The Life of Christ** is considered in three poems: "The Three Magi," "The Cross," and "Icon."



*Icon*

Luminescent, transcendent over suffering and grief,  
outshining the glow of the crossbar, the wounded head rises  
toward the vertical reach of the cross and beyond.

The flow of tears, blood, and sweat dries in the sun.  
His cascading tresses, tinged with gold as though  
the sun rose here in this great mind.

Through the troubled clouds gathered to witness  
the sacrifice, blue sky emerges to promise  
the glory and hope of a new day.

Following up on ideas of “glory,” “hope,” and a “new day,” which close out the previous section, **Impressions** contains seven poems that are more speculative in nature. When dealing with the nature of God, or with God in terms of daily life reality, Reynard knows that:

To seek words  
for the nameless,  
you dip deep within  
the pool of your being  
where impressions  
shift and blend.

The slant of a sunbeam  
through tall grasses,  
the song of the thrush  
at dawn, the curve  
of a perfect rainbow,  
the whisper of rain  
on the window.

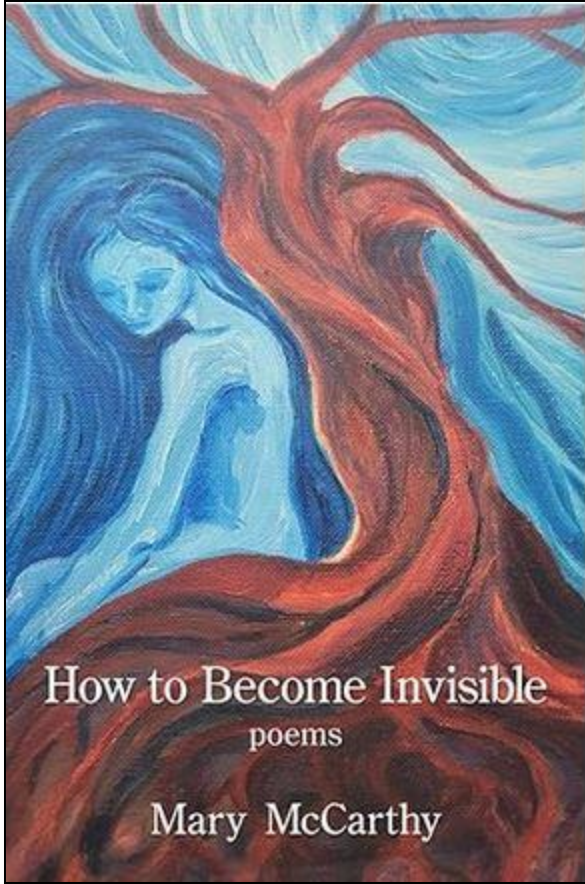
Light and shadow,  
song and silence  
dance across the synapses  
of your brain,  
and a poem is born.

Just as poems are born through the evocations of sunbeams, tall grasses and thrushes testing the reality of misty fields before they fly, so, in *Double Stream*, Paul and Ellen Reynard offer a taste of the divine through poetry and paint . . . as “powerful wings beat / the evening air / shatter the sunset / in headlong flight / to the other side / of night.”

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER** - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Published March 1, 2024





## How to Become Invisible by Mary McCarthy

Cover art is also by McCarthy  
Book available at amazon for \$20  
Kelsay Books (November 25, 2023)

64 pages

**ISBN-13** : 978-1639804771

Review by Joan Leotta

Mary McCarthy, alerts us that we are going to encounter something different, perhaps unexpected on these pages with the first lines of the first poem, *Misfit*: “Before we start, I have to punch a few holes in normal...” Many poets will recognize in themselves the idea of being different from others because of the way we see life. McCarthy’s

poems, however, open up a world beyond the usual differences. She takes us into the realm of bipolar depression. We journey with her in her skiff of words through her roughest waters.

The trip is far more than a tour. This collection of poems is a guide to the inner self. Even if one has not experienced severe depression or bipolar highs and lows, learning how she deals with these is a template for handling any of our own problems and for realizing experiencing lows helps shape us, and that we, like McCarthy, can, through struggles, become stronger in compassion for others. To accomplish this, she applies not only her considerable skills as a writer and visual artist but also the super precise descriptions of an experienced nurse to her own experience, bringing them forth in poetry that is both artful and amazingly descriptive, so much so, that we feel we are there with her experiencing her suffering along with her.

The title poem, *How to Become Invisible*, (and the cover’s wonderful Chagall-like artwork, McCarthy’s own creation), reveal her own struggles with the invisibility that deep suffering brings. She reveals how becoming unseen is rooted not only in our diversity from the world, (in her case magnified by suffering deep depressions and struggling to overcome them) but also in a propensity to speak out. She is

speaking of the swings of bipolar, but as one who is socially awkward and too ready to speak what should remain inside my head, this line from “How to Become Invisible” resonated deeply with me: “Walk too close to the edge of every conversation, answer the words behind the words they say...”

McCarthy’s next series of poems draws on her keen poetic observational skills, expert and spare creative expression and her training as a nurse to allow us to experience her suffering and rejoice with her at the hope she’s found in waging her numerous battles. Lines like “My tears flow endlessly down, a salty river where like a new Ophelia, I barely keep afloat...” ( *Metamorphoses and Mood Swings*) and “You can’t prepare for catastrophe the way you studied for exams...” ( *Challenges*) and “I taste fear bright as metal on my tongue..” ( *Symptoms*) take us deep into her experiences. One of the best descriptions I have ever seen of the times of mania in bipolar comes in the lines of *Talk, Talk, Talk* where she says “I watch myself effervescing like an Alka Seltzer table in a glass of plain water...”

With these lines she leads us gently through her ungentle suffering and guides us out of it. She applies her sharp eye and mind to medication, to treatment, to bad medicine, to doctors, and electric shock, time in the hospital and more. She has written these poems to help heal herself and so that we, like her can shoot up through the waves of depression—that sometimes become a tsunami—and emerge better for it.

We leave this collection understanding that she has, through her own suffering, become more cognizant, empathetic, compassionate toward the suffering of others. “Such grief is not contagious; you were always safe..”( *Your Apology Dear Friend*) to the collection’s final poem, *Invitation*, which asks us to “come to me when you have wrestled with the angel no one else can see..”

I was struck by the beauty and simplicity and power of McCarthy’s work and the deep love for her readers manifest in every line where she reveals herself not simply to us, but for us, so we can, as she has, reach into our sufferings to become strong by caring for others. It’s a beautiful and powerful writing and well worth the reading.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Joan Leotta is an author and story performer. Her work was nominated for Pushcart and Best of Net in 2022. Publications include *Feathers on Stone* poetry chapbook (Mainstreet Rag Press) and *Languid Lusciousness with Lemon* (Finishing Line Press).

Published February 1, 2024



## Late Epistle by Anne Myles

Headmistress Press, 2023

92 Pages

ISBN: 979-8987763605

Review by Gary Davis

Breathes there a person with soul so dead that never to themselves has said, I wonder who will share my bed? Who are we when first we feel love, and with that, or despite it, whom do we become?

The feminine love that famously dare not speak its name continues to spawn volumes of poetry, if not overtly sumptuous and sapphic, at least lyrical and, in this slim volume, exceptionally thoughtful and well-crafted. With 52 brief poems of awakening, yearning

and realization, in her “Late Epistle” Anne Myles guides us through her personal journey into the nooks and crannies of homoerotic love.

The slim volume from Headmistress Press flows easily through three sections corresponding to the author’s childhood, early adulthood, and maturity, what she sees as stages in the growth of human affection. It starts with the beautiful lines of “Bane,” which begins “Even as a girl” feeling a subtle ache and ends casting out lines on emptiness. And emptiness there is, the inner tumult of adolescent yearning to express a myriad of inchoate realizations. Childhood is “held and safe” but also private and alone, “the weed smell of emotions left unspoken” in “the catch and release version of life.” In haunting portraits we meet her mother and father, each significantly, fatally handicapped in their own way, as well as her childhood housekeeper and even her Uncle Eddie, “the unmarried one, who went in and out of psych wards.” The tight cadences of “Ferryville” close out the first section as the young Myles begins a journey west, her parents dead and her future unmoored, “wondering what kind of woman I was and what my flourishing was meant to be.”

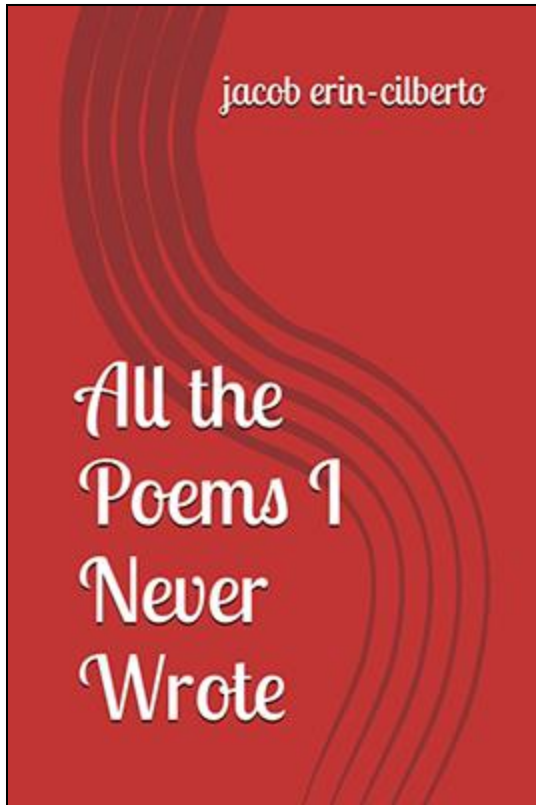
We find out, as she falls in and out of love, makes a career in literature, and (in her own words) explores her personal journey from silence to expression. There is

nothing voluptuous or hedonistic in the narrative, no breathless upheavals or quivering thighs. The wonderful lyric poignancy of “Fever” calls for a “faceless vast beloved to behold me now” in her adulthood, and the carefully crafted “Late Epistle” delights with its strong, sometimes obscure images: the “covenant of dark grace, the long tap root to what I couldn’t say.” That short poem, addressed to her therapist, serves as the emotional center of the volume.

So by the end we come to a kind of awareness more than a certain knowledge, a vague sensibility rather than a passionate refrain. The volume that begins with imagery of something unknown and portentous ends with the insistent song of a mature woman who knows herself and accepts that person, revealing in the strong imagery of the elegiac “I am Waiting,” the person who, in her words, is waiting to learn to conjugate the language of desire. To her credit she does not hesitate to show herself ignorant of how to do precisely that, saying “There is a formlessness past rules...So vast, a world of blue.” Indeed.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:** Gary Davis is the author of the poetry collection, *SPF60*, and the novel, *Butterfly*. He lives in California.

Published February 1, 2024



## All the Poems I Never Wrote by jacob erin-cilberto

36 Poems ~ 48 Pages

Price: \$15.00

Publisher: Praying Mantis Press

ISBN: 9798854073288

To Order: Amazon.com

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

In a humble inscription on cover 4 of jacob erin-cilberto's latest collection, the poet states his case for *All the Poems I Never Wrote*:

“Writing isn't always an occupation, nor a hobby, but it is breathing.”

It is as if these poems had been incubating in erin-cilberto's heart until their bones were strong enough for the page. Indeed, my goal is to show the strength, power, and rich diversity of a mature writer whose work truly is his *breath of life*.

In several poems erin-cilberto breathes the rarified air of notable poets. He does so in “Frost is Shuddering over This.” Here he comments on trends in contemporary life that would have astonished, if not appalled, the erstwhile poet:

the train's speeding past  
a flying Amtrak  
sparks ignite  
along the path  
as innocent trees watch in fear

their friends suddenly consumed  
they whisper final prayers

even God is so puzzled by this  
a cigarette tossed by a fleeing human  
and more Armageddon  
is inhaled

The poem concludes with a rueful commentary on smoking, don't miss this one! Other examples such as "I hear John Lennon singing in the background," recall Jesus, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and George Carlin, all in the same poem. It is erin-cilberto's approach to "how" these figures influenced our lives and times that is so fascinating. As I gave these poems time to marinate their rewards increased.

I feel an affinity with nearly every poem. This is because, I too, share in erin-cilberto's generation. I'm with him in the turbulent 60s, where Vietnam dominated daily headlines and Lyndon Johnson's *Great Society* made its way through Congress. Where college dorms without AC were hot in summer and papers flew off study desks courtesy of late summer's hot breath. In "1968 to Fast Forward" the poet recalls the black light poster in his college dorm room:

enough said,  
when the lights switch off  
and love turns on  
moonful arrow  
shot through the blinds  
slanting breezy night embrace

softly the skin glows  
like a black light poster  
in an old college dorm room  
reefer scent still hiding in the shadows

maybe I am just remembering  
maybe it is happening now  
I wonder if it is really the same moon  
as ago in time,  
or perhaps just an errant switch.

This collection is about memories. I find myself awash in memories. These memories are the "breath" of life as they animate my poems. I sense the same for erin-cilberto. Several poems are about the art of poetry. These relate to the poet's reason for writing . . . "not an occupation or hobby but *breathing*." "a gardener's dream" is a well-crafted metaphor:

don't flower me with false petals  
scrape the thorns off your poems  
and stay in a sincere garden

or the water will be turned off

the tears fake  
the roses will vacate the heart

there will be no pretty  
no hushed whispers of love  
don't flower me with false petals

I need not your shriveled blooms  
to decay in my memory  
press them into your own book

let your poems fossilize themselves  
into a gift of humility  
into an impression of truth

maybe that is your only capability  
with you less-than-green thumb  
and your colorless pen.

If I were teaching a course in writing, I would include this poem in my syllabus. Other syllabus-worthy poems include "Extra Napkins," which uses, "meanings that have an aroma / like coffee / just poured / on the page // to make a poem," and "Mother," which begins:

you were a sonnet  
in strict meter,  
some beautiful imagery mixed  
with comfortable notions of rhyme  
because that won't stray from the truth.

*All the Poems I Never Wrote* is a valuable collection for one simple reason. Jacob erin-cilberto's is faithful to the first rule of poetry: *Tell the truth*. Poetry, as truth, helps us live our lives. Poetry challenges the values that we hold. A good poem may cause the reader to rethink the way he or she has been living. In dark times poetry offers its readers a sense of hope and purpose.

In "subliminal message" I envision the poet imbibing the sweet breath of life and truth only poetry can give:

in the park  
hands peek into pockets  
he watches the children play

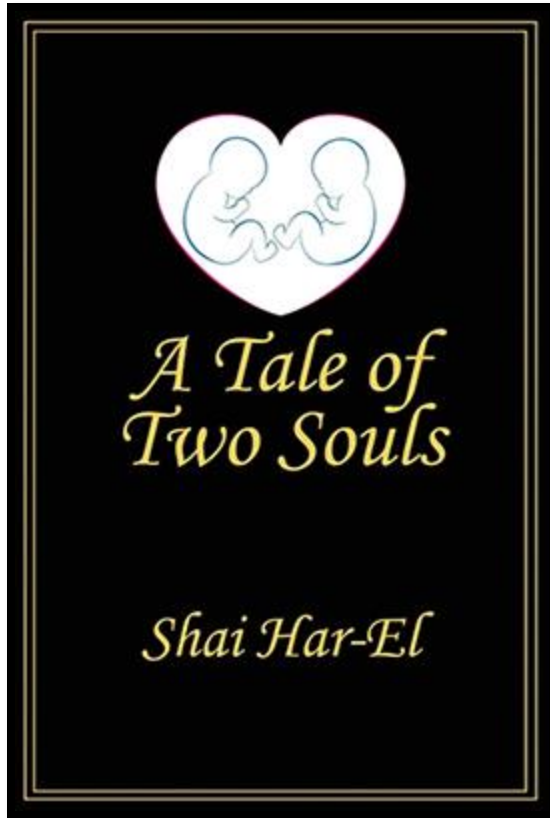


Out of this careful watching, I have come to understand why, for Jacob erin-cilberto:

“Writing isn’t always an occupation, nor a hobby, but it is *breathing*.”

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. *This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.*

Published February 1, 2024



## **A Tale of Two Souls** by Shai Har-El

A Single Long Narrative Poem ~ 27  
 Illustrations and Pictures ~ 58 Pages  
 Price: \$15.00 (paperback)  
 Publisher: Grants Pass, OR: Homestead  
 Lighthouse Press (2022)  
 ISBN: 978-1-950475-21-6  
 To Order: Amazon.com

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

About life on this earth the indomitable Robert Frost has said, “I can sum up everything I know about life in three words . . . *It goes on.*”

I do not know if Shai Har-El has read this quote by Frost or not. What I sense, however, is that this poet is

responding to the constant renewing of life, no matter what life throws in his path. *A Tale of Two Souls* is the story, written in verse, by a bereaved grandfather, (the author himself) whose life-journey requires him to face the tragic stillbirth of his granddaughter, Maayan. Maayan has a twin named Eden who survives.

Shai (pronounced “Shy”) weaves a tender tale of two lives. Both lives carry within them immense value. What do we do when life surprises us? What do we do when the heart breaks into a thousand pieces? How do we cope? How do we find a path forward through the swamp of grief and loss.

*A Tale of Two Souls* is a visual and poetic triumph which responds to these questions. Shai’s technique features beautiful photos of nature juxtaposed by poems written as a story. The pictures remind readers that the visual world presents itself as evidence that God is in his creation. The poems develop God as loving two sisters physically and spiritually within the womb. Shai sees “connection” as important in the here and now as well as beyond.

*Cover Imagery*

The cover conveys a powerful message: Light framed by darkness. The two babies enclosed within the heart, shine within the darkness. The gold-embossed border and type draw the mind to spiritual wholeness.

### *Style & Design*

Each page of verse is graced by two hearts intertwined. One heart is slightly bolder than the other. This contrast sends an imaginative message when linked, in the reader's mind, with its accompanying poem.

### *Two Key Names*

One of the twins is named *Maayan*, which can be either feminine or masculine and means "spring of water." The other baby is *Eden*. Both names are significant within Jewish tradition and are important symbols for Shai. Shai sees God at work everywhere in life. *A Tale of Two Souls* looks for and finds purpose amid life's setbacks.

The following quote from Psalm 127:3-5, offers highlights Shai's source of hope:

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
offspring a reward from Him.  
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior  
are the children of one's youth.  
Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

As Shai deals with loss considering the text's importance, his narrative provides light toward recovery while moving the reader gently forward.

As mentioned above, the poems are written in broken prose as a unified story. Dedicated to his eleven grandchildren, Shai writes at a level easily understood by youth and at the same time, compelling for adult readers.

Initially, the poet lays a foundation based on the Hebrew tradition of life in the Garden:

It was an ordinary day in the Garden of Eden.  
Archangels engaged in their usual tasks  
in God's palace, while souls  
enjoyed eternal rest in the surrounding Garden,  
taking shelter in its divine splendor.

"Go to the Garden of Eden," said God

to Archangel Michael, “and bring me a soul.”  
 As he crossed the main gate into the Garden,  
 the Archangel encountered two souls  
 playing by the *Maayan*,  
 so called the central fountain in Hebrew.

As the narrative progresses, a fantasy-like charm develops in which Shai’s use of key names takes centerstage. Eden and Maayan become life-like symbols that God is present in the events (especially the tragic ones) we meet in life.

### *Key Themes*

For Shai, *Mission and Purpose* stand out. A positive thinker and motivator by instinct and profession, this poet refuses to succumb to darkness. His delightful narrative breathes the fresh air of heavenly dialogue:

“What’s your name?” the Archangel asked  
 the first soul that came to greet him.  
 “My name is where you are,” laughed the first soul.  
 “And what’s your name?” turned the Archangel  
 to the second soul. “Also my name is where  
 you are,” smiled the second soul.

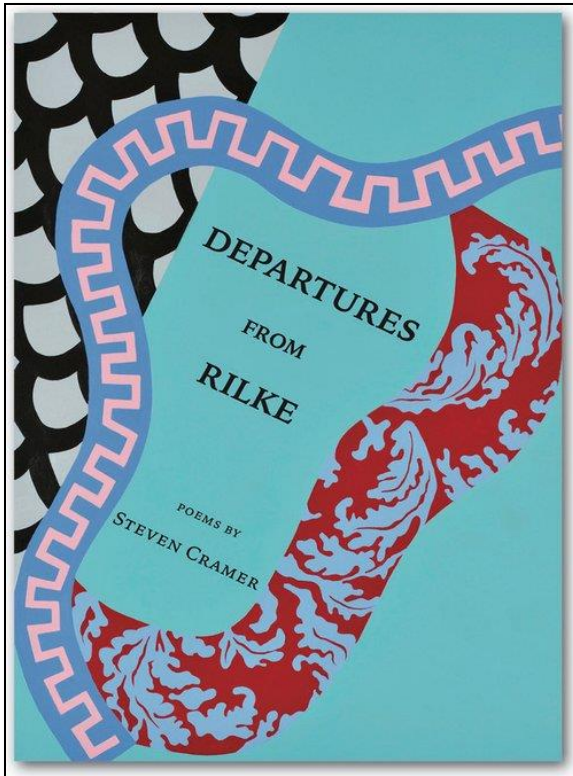
The Archangel refused to accept their evasive answers.  
 “So, you both carry the same name?”  
 “Noooo!” giggled the two soulmates.  
 “I am Eden,” announced the first one. “And I am Maayan,  
 the fountain that feeds the giant rivers of Eden,” said the second.  
 “I thought Archangels were good with riddles.

Out of such delightful dialogues, *A Tale of Two Souls* weaves a message of love and redemption that will stand the test of time.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER** - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal.

This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Review posted February 1, 2024



## Departures from Rilke

By Steven Cramer

Arrowsmith Press, 2023

ISBN # - 979-8987924129

Pages - 88

Review by Dan Carey

“Notice how they each do the same thing / differently, as if the years between them / made separate spots of time in one room”; this opening stanza from “Sisters” illustrates the achievement of Steven Cramer’s seventh full-length collection, *Departures from Rilke*, where he explores the ground between translation and original poem. Each piece evolves from one of Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s (1875-

1929) *New Poems*, and *New Poems: The Other Part* (published in the German language in 1907 and 1908), but aren’t considered translations as much as responses to, or agreements between, multiple translations.

In the “Afterword,” Cramer describes two differences between his renderings and Rilke’s poems: “each stanza had to shed a line’s worth of wordage,” though he “cheats on occasion—and, wherever possible, active verbs had to do the work of those adjectives and adverbs so profuse in Englished Rilke.” In Rilke’s poem “The Panther,” Stanley Appelbaum translates the first line of the second stanza as “The soft the supple step and sturdy pace”; Cramer begins with present-tense action in the first line: “Pacing in his cage, his eyes tire, beholding.”

Cramer proves his keen sense of the *Dinggedichte* poetic form, developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an object-poem or thing-poem, about something universally important. “The Duck,” “Blue Hydrangea,” and “The Panther” all use their title object to convey moods around death, rebirth, and isolation. In “The Last Evening,” a young soldier’s helmet becomes emblematic of existence on the brink of war: “his helmet glowered like a strange black skull.”

Rilke’s *New Poems* marks a shift in his work from Romantic to Modernist/Imagist. Cramer emphasizes color in such visual poems as “Blue Hydrangea”: “the greenish leaves look dull / as clots of dried paint”; “a blue hint of joy / we’d miss without those grayish remains of green.” When “a child’s jeans” are “washed so many times, / the blue fabric pales,” the speaker rhetorically

asks, “what’s briefer than a child’s life?” This shift in intensity, from casually washed jeans to questions regarding time’s passing, is typical of Modernism.

“The Crowd” reads as companion to Ezra Pound’s Modernist/Imagist classic, “In a Station of the Metro.” In Pound’s poem, the speaker becomes fascinated by associating people at a train station to petals hanging off a “wet, black bough.” In Cramer’s departure, the crowd is in awe with Chance in the “dead center” of their “audience”:

Chance then tightens, loosens, and tightens  
tighter, the far brought near, the near closer;

gives mouth-to-mouth to a drunk sleeping off  
a bender; weeds out a dog; mislays short people  
behind these petals on their wet black bough;

then plucks a pair of toddlers from the margins.

Though these events aren’t directly affiliated, they occur in sequence, creating the “Total effect” that calls Pound’s epic associative moment to mind. Cramer’s crowd speaks to something larger than itself: Chance’s indelible ability to draw people’s attention when good and bad things happen.

Cramer flexes his abilities in syntax throughout this moving, observant collection. Well-formed sentences are riddled throughout, like in “Streetwalker”: “The urban sunlight turns my hair gold.” In “Portrait of My Mother”: “The way she lifts and stations / her chin, as for a portrait, needs / a syntax exact to that stillness.” These departures need Cramer’s “exact” delicacy to convey such images, just as the speaker’s mother needs proper description to capture how her face rests for her portrait.

He presents readers with a modern, precise, compact Rilke; every stanza, with a few variations, has been shortened one line from its original. This book is accessible to readers as both a substantial entry point into Rilke’s catalogue, and an example of the power and pleasure of a master of poetry at work—in this case, two. We are fortunate as readers to trust in a poet as accomplished as Steven Cramer to open the door to Rilke for us. His *Departures from* bring us closer to Rilke.

Cramer’s *Departures from Rilke* accomplishes what every great collection of translations does, and more—because the poet asserts his own voice more than a classic translation, the opportunity arises for his unique style to break through. Cramer makes Rilke’s essential and groundbreaking work his own. Readers can enjoy this book as Steven Cramer’s poetry, without even considering Rilke; but

what makes this book profound and admirable is the uncanny sense that Rilke presides in the background of every poem, nodding permission to cherish these departures as a fresh product. For that, we have Steven Cramer to thank.

About the Reviewer: Dan Carey's poetry has appeared in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *DropOut Literary Journal*, *The Red Letters*, and *Suspended Magazine*. He lives near Harvard Square and works as a teacher and a manuscript consultant, as well as Social Media Manager for Grid Books/Off the Grid Press.

Posted January 1, 2024



## Quarantine Highway

by Millicent Borges Accardi

70 Poems ~ 93 pages

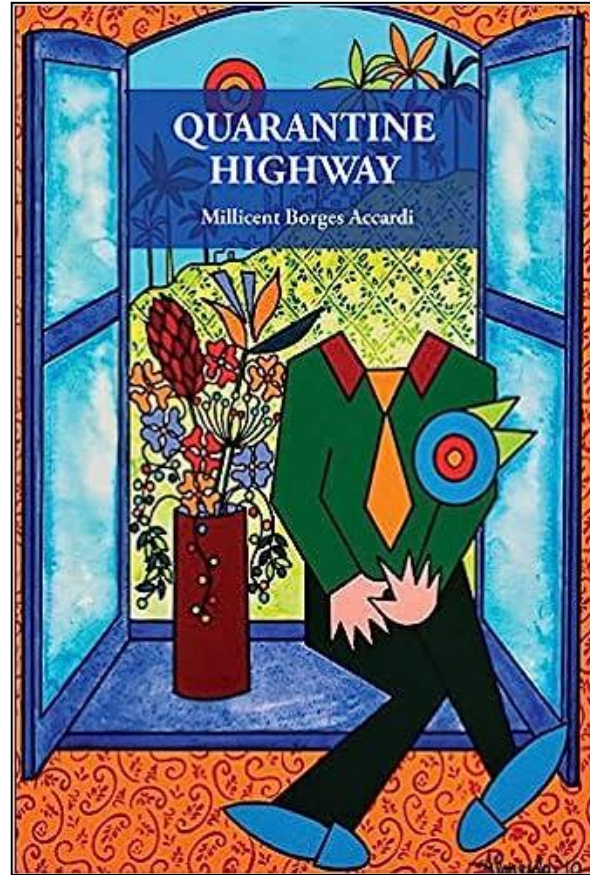
Price: \$16.00

Cover Art by Ralph Almeida

Publisher: Flower Song Press

ISBN: 978-1-953447-35-7

Review by *Michael Escoubas*



[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/195344735X/ref=dbs\\_a\\_def\\_rwt\\_bibl\\_vppi\\_i8](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/195344735X/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_bibl_vppi_i8)

<https://www.flowersongpress.com/store-j9IRp/p/pre-order-quarantine-highway-by-millicent-borges-accardi>

I was immediately struck by the title of Millicent Borges Accardi's fifth collection, *Quarantine Highway*. It suggests an interesting duality: full-stop on one hand, unlimited access on the other. In a book about the recently concluded pandemic, the title itself captures the essence.

I believe it will be at least a decade, maybe more, before a definitive history of the Covid-19 Pandemic will be written. In the meantime, it is the province of poets to guide folks through the conundrum of an era still impacting our nation's collective consciousness.

For a time it seemed we were living in a land (indeed in a world) not our own, navigating or trying to navigate life. It was a sea of uncertainty inhabiting two worlds. One voice commanded, "Stay in;" another screamed, "Get out," or "Let

me out”! My goal in this review is to showcase this poet’s unrelenting quest to capture this tension.

“We’ll Come Down Close Behind,” epitomizes Accardi’s title. I share it in full:

And such and we have  
 and we need and we want  
 and we have and if it happens,  
 we couldn’t leave, and there is not a  
 never in the universe except now.  
 And but and and and for and if  
 Our place to live, it is a song  
 let it run peacefully into  
 the coda or the second chorus  
 where the refrain takes over.  
 And such and such and the homeless,  
 And prisons, and why can’t I  
 leave my home without a mask.  
 We’d come down close behind  
 in the middle of a crowd, as if we  
 mattered and as if things were  
 normal rather than a new normal,  
 which is odious. Then, then and then  
 and could. Once, existence was on  
 full speed, catching rumors,  
 and touching faces and going outside.

Let me assure readers that the repetitions employed by Accardi are not typographical errors. Rather, they are part of her strategy to reach into the heart of her subject. It is like reaching into the trash because something that isn’t trash is buried there . . . she wants to find it, needs to grasp an elusive something emerging with it firmly in hand.

Note line 6. I count 5 repetitions of the word “and,” which is a coordinating conjunction. Conjunctions link related phrases and ideas in a way that makes sense. Why would Accardi use the term as she does? I encourage thoughtful readers to ponder.

Even Accardi’s titles illustrate her strategy; they tend to be a little off-center, like the world of her subject. Titles selected at random: “Side by Side in Fragile,” “For Truth would be from a Line,” “As Among Grotesque Trees,” “Differently, the Way Everything is Wrong,” and “I Told My Friend to Rub her Lice Against my

Hair.” These are merely instances cited to show that *Quarantine Highway* is possibly the most unique Pandemic collection to hit the market *EVER!*

This excerpt from “In Oblivion,” illustrates (as do many others) how we felt:

It is as if the world’s engines  
have ground to a frozen metal in the middle of  
the midst inside a clutter clutch

of busy confusion and everyone  
has been cast off, from the  
blissful-working-gears we used  
to down shift into.

The poem goes on to illustrate how . . .

We are ambiguous, a lost  
part of speech, left behind.

Something my wife and I felt during this period was that of being cocooned like caterpillars. We imagined ourselves emerging as something more than before. “In Later Time,” is about a similar sense of darkness or half-darkness, a kind of swampy murkiness. “There was / violence in the air, and I kept asking / myself what is another word for suffuse?” This poem captures a certain labyrinthine feel common during the pandemic. Try as we might the maze *seemed* to keep on winning.

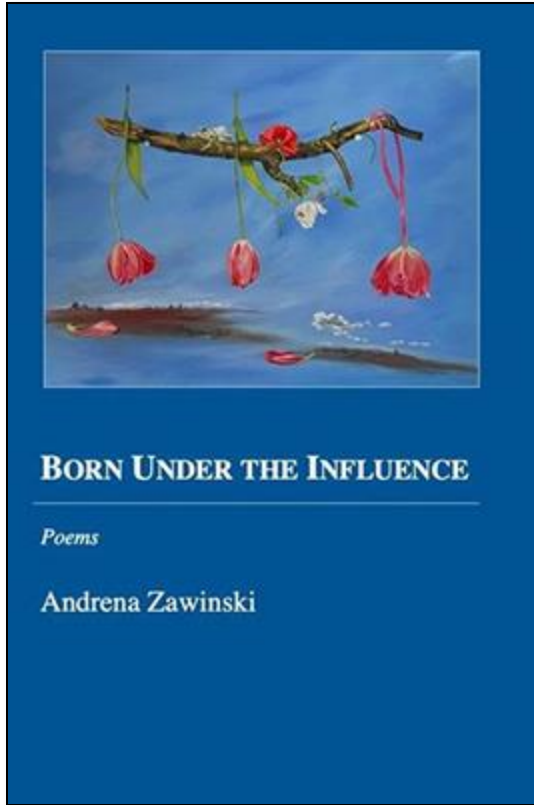
While it *seemed* to be winning, in truth, it lost. Emerging, as a nation, from the cocoon alluded to above, it is my conviction that the caterpillar has become a butterfly. Are challenges latent in the aftermath? Of course, but my take from Accardi’s bold new collection is one of hope. Accardi faces the hard reality of Covid-19. In poems that say what few others are bold enough to say, *Quarantine Highway*, inspires me to appreciate the good life offers. A literal quarantine may not be the worst quarantine. Do we not quarantine ourselves by the choices we make to cede our lives to evil?

Because of this poet, your reviewer is more determined than ever to live life to the full.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal.

This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Review posted January 1, 2024



## **Born Under the Influence** by Andrena Zawinski

75 Poems ~ 130 pages

Price: \$20.00

Publisher: Word Poetry

ISBN: 9781625494160

To Order: For a signed copy and a lovely handmade bookmark order direct from the author:

[andrena.zawinski@att.net](mailto:andrena.zawinski@att.net)

or from Amazon.com

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

Andrena Zawinski opens her latest collection, *Born Under the Influence*, with a telling quotation by the late Adrienne Rich:

*The words are maps.*

*I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail . . .*

The quote from Rich is telling because of the questions inherent in it: *What influences? How are words maps? What damages and what treasures do we speak of here?* Exploring these is your reviewer's goal.

Adrienne Rich herself was an inveterate champion of women's issues. Both in her life and through her poetry. Yet, in my reading of Rich, I sense a mind and heart filled with pathos for people, for their circumstances, and for the pursuit of change through patient, intelligent work over time.

I perceive this quality in Andrena Zawinski as well. This assertion is supported by the way she has constructed her book. Organized under three sections, each is introduced by an informative epigram. The epigrams tip the reader off as to the poet's direction within each segment.

### *Structure by Epigram*

- I. . . . *this is how I like to construct myself,  
my image the image of any woman . . .*

- II. . . . *embracing each other,*  
*trying to hold the world together . . .*
- III. . . . *we tumble notes to the light and wind,*  
*dip and land, our song our banner . . .*

By flipping back between epigram and individual poems, the author's poetic narrative took on an inherent power, a shape, reflecting Rich's "word-mapping" referenced above.

### *Exhibits*

Below, the poet struggles, a bit out-of-focus, in her quest to "construct" herself. Satisfactory images do not come easily:

#### **Self-portrait, out of focus**

at Hotel Le Saint-Yves, Le Tréport, Normandy

*I was far outside the frame, beyond the pale,*  
*lost in the margins, smudged.*—Maggie Anderson

Legs spread beneath a garden party of a dress,  
 at the armoire's mirror I tap the shutter button  
 for a self-portrait. You doze off inside wide wings  
 of sleep, our Bordeaux, baguette, Boursin  
 on the bowed windowsill, sky freckled with late light.

Here other women once waved white kerchiefs  
 at soldiers leaving alabaster shores of Normandy  
 for places far from here where we have dug in  
 to listen to the roll of surf, terns all whoop and wail.

In this snapshot, this is how I like to construct myself,  
 my image the image of any woman in a hotel room  
 watching wind skip along the emptied beach, listening  
 for the last milk train coming in on a whistle and grind.

Self-portrait caught where craggy cliffs of the Atlantic  
 hunch over the channel and coast, the flash of camera

reflected back in a blur, where I wrap myself inside  
the fluff and frill of hotel bedclothes, drift off with you,  
undisturbed, embraced by the long arms of dream.

Within this poem and others I sense the need for dependable role models. Trustworthy men and women who provide nurture at the most vulnerable and formative moments in life.

Moving into Section II, the poet expresses her debt to her “sister” along the road to self-definition . . . the incomparable Adrienne Rich:

**She, the one you call sister**

Centó for Adrienne Rich

Wear the weight of equinoctial evening,  
autumn torture the old signs—

a cracked wall in the garden,  
all night eating the heart out.

Underneath my lid another eye has opened.  
She is the one you call sister.

Night life. Letters, journals, bourbon,  
the stars will come out over and over—

a clear night if the mind were clear,  
you there with your gazing eyes,

a dark woman, head bent, listening for something  
at the oak table under the ceiling fan.

This woman the heart of the matter,  
little as I knew you I know you.

The I you know isn't me you said.  
It's not new this condition, just for awhile.

A “Centó” uses lines from another author's work. The specific poetic sources contained here are referenced in the back of the book. Clearly, Adrienne Rich becomes, an anchor, Zawinski's “true north” in a world where waves are apt to



toss her. Just as dependable role models are at a premium, Rich is the poet's life-rudder.

In Section III, the poet's emotional teeth grind into the anomalies of life. The work has been trending, all along, in this direction. "Roses at the Coal Drifts," reveal winter's bleak conditions:

Once winter settled across mine patch fields  
everyone shivered inside weatherboarded flats,  
huddled into each other like house wrens under eaves.

The poem goes on to describe how women were used by men who like to "tipple and gamble and get rowdy." They literally became "house wrens under eaves."

Zawinski's concerns transcend women's issues. Her notes *tumble into the light and wind*, forceful in their range of subjects. Exhibiting a global perspective, her interests extend to the world of the steelworker, those "Cowboys of the clouds," the poor, the disadvantaged, boys without fathers, immigrants, even the Feminist movement gets into the action in "What a Doll."

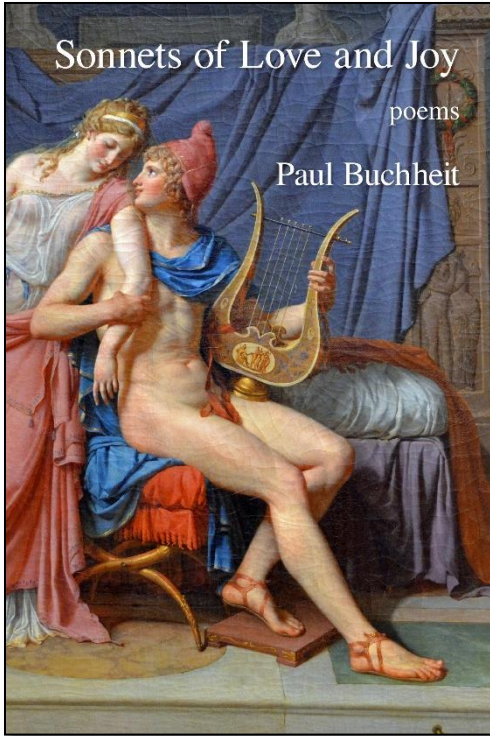
In all I counted over a dozen poetry forms . . . all used effectively to show that words have power, words are "maps" that help us face the "damage" that was done, and most importantly, see the "treasures" that prevail.

*Born Under the Influence*, is a gem that triumphs in the present moment and beyond.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal.

This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Review posted January 1, 2024



## Sonnets of Love and Joy: poems by Paul Buchheit

Kelsay Books, 2023

107 pages

ISBN#: 978-1639803637

Review by Judy Cummings

Paul Buchheit has authored books, poems, progressive essays, and scientific journal articles including: the historical novel *1871: Rivers of Fire* (2021) a work of fiction, *Alice's Adventures* (2022) poetry, and *Disposable Americans* (2017) a non-fiction work. While Paul has written in many genres, his most recent book of poetry, *Sonnets of Love and Joy*, (August 2023 by Kelsay Books) allows him to interpret the realities of people, places and

events in an intimate way. Organized into sections of love and joy, these include: the Love of Another, Love of You, and the Joys of Family, Friends, Children, and the Natural World. This collection of intelligent, thoughtful sonnets, exhibits a command of language rarely seen in this age.

Paul, who is an avid reader and lover of the Shakespearean sonnet, uses the 14-line traditional English format for the most part throughout this book. Imaginative and personal, his reflections are based on his relationships with loved ones: mother, son, daughter, grandfather, sweethearts, siblings, and friends. A second section, inspired by his walks on the land surrounding his cabin, speak of joys found in the natural world. Each sonnet relies upon an expansive vocabulary, intricately woven into the traditional sonnet rhyme/rhythm scheme with effective use of alliteration, assonance, allusion, and enjambment.

Beyond his skill as a wordsmith, Paul's exquisite use of imagery, transports the reader from scene to scene. While there are many beautiful sonnets in this collection, my personal favorite is the one devoted to Paul's grandfather entitled *Oldest Friend*. This sonnet stands out in that there are no classical allusions and the vocabulary, while less ornate, suits the subject perfectly.

It begins: "I breathe away the aging pine and crumbling walls where gramps and I would while away the dusk regaled by peeper frogs and peppy calls of whip-poor-wills beneath the woodsy musk that hovered in the gloom."

Any student of poetry must marvel at the intentional skill with which Paul arranges the sounds of vowels and consonants within these lines. The poem continues “ I see his face like drought on furrowed earth, tobacco stains on a checkered shirt, a coarse guffaw...” Once again, this musicality mesmerizes, but additionally these lines provide visual imagery. As he continues to describe this “gruff and grizzled man,” he ends with the touching couplet, “Beside his rocking chair, I sit and stare, at fading skies, at nights we used to share.”

These lines selected from this singular sonnet provide a glimpse of the careful workmanship demonstrated throughout this collection. Additionally, photographs and paintings are sensitively paired with each sonnet. Each was carefully chosen by the author as was the cover painting, *The Love of Paris and Helen*, by Jacques-Louis David, 1788. In conclusion, *Sonnets of Love and Joy* by Paul Buchheit is a compact book, delicately crafted with sweeping vocabulary and thoughtful allusions. It may be read in one sitting but is best savored over time. That which Paul Buchheit has fashioned here honors the true definition of the Greek word “poiema” from which the words 'poem' and 'poetry' are derived. Any lover of this art form would be wise to purchase a copy to add to their collection.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:** Judy Cummings, former resident of Evanston, currently resides in Northern Illinois where she tutors online. She has taught all grades K-high school and directed a literacy center for refugee families. She is a member of the Rockford Writers' Guild, the Illinois Poetry Society, and a frequent contributor to [Storied Stuff](#).

Review posted January 1, 2024



## **Rejection to Acceptance: 57 Poems That Finally Made It** by Patricia Williams

57 Poems ~ 145 pages  
 Price: \$23.00  
 Publisher: Kelsay Books  
 ISBN: 978-1-63980-321-7  
 To Order: Kelsay Books &  
 Amazon.com

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

The would-be poet, “Oh, how awful I feel. My 5<sup>th</sup> submission to a journal has been rejected!” Patricia Williams, “GET OVER IT!”

What a way to begin a review. But this is exactly the right way to segue into reality for poets. In *Rejection to*

*Acceptance: 57 Poems That Finally Made It*, poet Patricia Williams does not coddle her audience. Rejection is a part of life. So is success. This poet is about winning. She is determined, smart, and talented. Over the course of about 10 years, rejections came in abundance. *Rejection to Acceptance* is about one poet’s journey from failure to success . . . consistent success.

### *Topics of Special Interest*

In this behind-the-scenes look at how publishing works, Williams presents snapshots in areas such as *Inspiration, Submitting and Rewriting*, handling *Rejection*, how publishing houses *Weed Out* work they don’t want, and more. The more writers know, the easier it is to navigate its often-turbulent waters.

Among the most helpful aspects of the book is the author’s extended treatment of things publishers consider when evaluating a potential acceptance. Understanding the inner-workings of publishing, places writers “in-the-action.” Trepidation eases, confidence grows. I spent extra time in another helpful section . . . *Defining Success.*

*Structure*

The work is organized into five parts which, when taken in aggregate, showcase the poet's wide range of interests as well as her unique writing style. These are: Part I, Going Places: Here, There & Everywhere; Part II, Of Things Social: Principles & Opinions; Part III, Nature: Trees, the Sky, some Fur & some Feathers; Part IV, Humor: Not only Light verse, but also Ironic, Satirical; and Part V, Home & Neighborhood: Coming & Going.

### *Means & Plan*

Williams has tightly structured each entry according to her title. Included in these richly detailed commentaries:

- The once-rejected poem printed out in full
- Inspirational genesis
- Number of rejections
- Path/steps in the journey toward acceptance
- Interactions with her poetry coach (another good idea)
- Comments/critiques of appreciation once in publication.

### *Means and Plans Applied*

#### **Sketches Along the Yangtze**

##### I. Solitude

Nothing but the moon attends ten thousand peaks along the river. Forlorn wanderers in the gorges weep for home when the gibbon's cry echoes. Only in this place can a traveler hear sound so mournful.

##### II. Myth

The gorges run deep and long, sunlight rarely penetrates green-clad pinnacles shrouded in a curtain of rain. Here, an Immortal loved a mortal king, invaded his dreams as a cloud at dawn and rain at sunset. Clouds and rain have since begotten a symphony of longing.

##### III. Renewal

Ahead are the twelve peaks of Wu Gorge, a bleak and frothy, dark place. The aura heavy, somber, desolate – waves churn, roar, rush to the sky. Over the frontier pass, wind and clouds sink to the waiting earth where million-year ancestries

embrace ancient terrain.

The mighty Yangtze crashes, carves its way to the sea.

**A three-day trip on the Yangtze River** in China inspired “Sketches Along the Yangtze,” written in 2013 when I first began to write poetry.

The melancholy cry of the gibbon heard in the Yangtze River gorges symbolizes the sadness of travelers far from home. The phrase “clouds and rain” is a traditional Chinese euphemistic expression believed to have originated in myths about *Goddess Peak* along the Yangtze River. It alludes to having sex. Sexual references were barred in China, so the Chinese worked around the restrictions by inventing indirect language to talk about it.

Six journals declined the poem. One editor commented, “*we enjoyed Sketches Along the Yangtze. Please feel free to submit again.*” A second editor wrote: “*we enjoyed your poems, particularly ‘Sketches Along the Yangtze’, however, we are going to pass on inclusion. We very much look forward to reading more from you in the future.*”

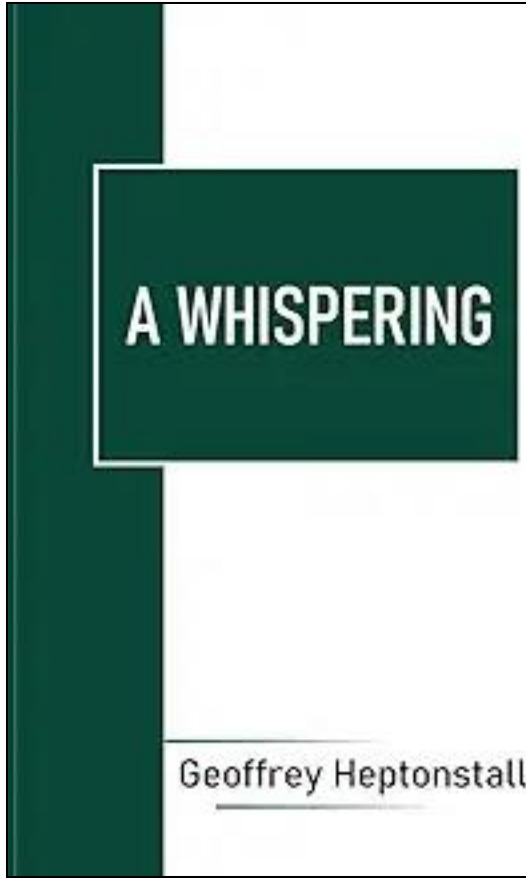
I eventually learned to do a better job of matching poem styles to publication venues. These editors were telling me that my work was good, just not suited to their current publication.

*Lost Tower Publications* in the UK accepted “Sketches” for their anthology, *Journeys Along the Silk Road* in 2015. It featured writing inspired by China’s ancient trade routes. “Sketches” is also published in my 2017 chapbook, *The Port Side of Shadows* (Finishing Line Press).

I found *Rejection to Acceptance* immediately enjoyable. Its practical helps and applications to one’s own writing become, icing-on-the-cake, as it were.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. *This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.*

Review posted January 1, 2024



## **A Whispering** by Geoffrey Heptonstall

52 Poems ~ 72 pages

Price: \$15.00

Publisher: CYBERWIT

ISBN: 978-8.1-8253-673-9

To Order: Amazon, Barnes and Noble or  
[info@cyberwit.net](mailto:info@cyberwit.net)

Reviewed by *Michael Escoubas*

Geoffrey Heptonstall's new collection, *A Whispering* accomplishes more than a mere whisper. It is a "shoutout" to excellent contemporary poetry. As I immersed myself in Heptonstall's work, another poet came to mind: Wallace Stevens. In one of the seminal poems of the last century, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," (page 380, *The Collected Poems*), Stevens cites three hallmarks of poetry: "It Must be

Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure." By "Abstract" Stevens means that poetry must challenge the mind, by "Change," he means that poetry must live in the world as it is, and by "Pleasure," he means that poetry can and must capture the "joy" of language. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that Heptonstall "writes" like Stevens. I *am* suggesting that his poetry "trends" toward abstraction, change and pleasure.

Heptonstall has organized his work into five sections: 1. Down to Earth (9 poems), 2. On Sacred Ground (10 poems), 3. Living in the World (14 poems), 4. Homeward Bound (7 poems), and 5. Whispers (12 poems).

In poems such as "Down to Earth," "An Opening Flower," and "Earth is Ours," the poet's feet stand on solid ground. His poems resonate with love, with respect for the planet on which he dwells. His poetry does not "coddle" the reader. His earthiness challenged my mind. For example, "An Opening Flower" begins:

In demeanor frivolous.  
The strategy was surely natural,  
no more acquiescence to a myth

but an accomplished style displayed,  
 articulating the hour that comes,  
 a history of artifice,  
 exemplary, elegiac and eloquent  
 when many things are beginning  
 with a harvest of gilded whispers.

Heptonstall has a way of clothing the “ordinary” with “extraordinary” style. The title word *Whispers* is salt and peppered throughout the collection. I had fun connecting “whispered” bridges.

Using the poet’s five divisions as a convenient outline, I found smooth transitions. The poet moves with ease from *terra firma* into sacred intimations of faith and mystery. Consider this excerpt from “Hope Street”:

Yet stranger than we suppose,  
 the stars shine on the night sea.  
 Somewhere in the city  
 they shiver in the shadow of God.  
 See those mendicant men,  
 alert as attendant lords,  
 waiting for the world to turn.  
 At six o’clock sounds the hour  
 for the solitary optimist  
 who walks the moon in search of her.

I appreciate how Heptonstall blends features of the natural world with man’s inner experiences. Nature, through the power of the imagination, mirrors the way we live. I sense an affinity with Stevens, whose poetry explores this theme.

*Change* comes into play in Section 3, “Living in the World.” Heptonstall is alive in *this* world. His poetry reflects reality. See “Fragments,” offered here in full:

The care that will repair them  
 may never be broken  
 within this handmade world.  
 In the earthenware hollow,  
 a resounding echo of ocean.  
 The fragments lie in the dust  
 where they fell in slow descent.

In time the line of cutting fades.  
 but skin shall hide the bone again.



The wound must leave a scar  
by a moment's misfortune.

The jar that held cool water  
rests on the ledge with pride.

The poems in this section gently move the reader toward the ending couplet of "Harvest: "After the harvest comes the feasting. / After that, her tenderness."

Harvest tenderness flows seamlessly into Section 4, "Homeward Bound." Like many of us, Heptonstall repairs to family memories, experiences which shaped him. One poem is about, "The house they built became my parents' life." Another poem "Tending the Vines," recalls a time "When shadows crossed the sunlit lawns." Other poems feature seasons ripe with times, "When shadows crossed the sunlit lawns." Change, uncertainty, even suffering find their rightful place in the solace and pleasure of memories captured poetically.

Heptonstall concludes his collection with "Whispers," 12 poems that place the capsheaf on the stack. In this set the poet includes references to Paul Verlaine, Charlie Chaplin, Dan Leno (a Vaudeville contemporary of Chaplin), Samuel Becket, Alfred Hitchcock, and the mythical figure Icarus. This inventive and original poet has touched me where . . .

We sing our lives in a fragile world,  
learning the words that will survive us.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 22-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. *This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.* Review posted January 1, 2024.