

## Archive of Book Reviews published

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## ***Diorama*** **by Sandra Marchetti**

Steven F. Austin University Press, 2025

80 pages

ISBN: 978 -1-62549-473-3

Review by Marie Asner

Sandra Marchetti is a prolific writer. In her previous poetry collection, “Aisle 228,” she takes the word “baseball” and gives all connected with the sport, new meaning. For this, she won The Twin Bill Book Award Prize for Best Baseball Poetry Book of the Year. Previous poetry publications by Marchetti have been “Confluence” from Sundress Publications and “Sight Lines” from Speaking of Marvels Press. Sandra Marchetti has an MFA in Creative Writing from George Mason University. She is now the Assistant Director of Academic Support at Harper College.



Just what is a definition of the word “diorama?” Usually, it is a model of something, such as a room, and, also, can be a replica of something else. Closer words of definition can be icon or picture. In Sandra Marchetti’s short poems, the words are. just enough to form a concept. The book is divided into three sections, and in Section One, “Semblance” begins using the word “diorama”, “...a couple playing catch slides from view, still the diorama assembles...” In “Married Pairs, a short poem, the author tells of being under the El with snow, “...when the flakes came, I knew I could do nothing to hold you.”

In Section Two, we have mountains and “Seven Sisters” and “...a stand of pines divined on their side.” In “Imagination,” the writer describes fishing with someone, “I listen to your fishing story and wonder, does anyone cook the catch anymore?” The teachings of a mother shine in “Mother,” and “I carry your nerves....as sparks in my pocket.”

In Section Three, “Heirloom” places the reader in a garden, with mature plants and hands in the soil, “...morning gold leaves now skirt the balcony...” One of my favorites is “Breath” and describing being alone in a library listening to air in the vents and the quietness of it all. If you are adapt with a kitchen knife, “Mise en Place” details the cutting of a fruit into small sections. “Birthday” is a pleasant time, not going to the Blue Grotto, but relaxing at a beach and “the boatman was a bus driver.” To whet the reader’s

appetite, is “County Donuts” and “Sugar caked on my lips slips through the air like crystal ice...” For a loved one, there is “Of Late”, describing an aging husband “his lashes flick as I preen the gray at his temples.”

Each poem in Sandra Marchetti’s collection gives the reader just enough words to form an idea in the mind, such as ...” morning gold leaves now skirt the balcony...” and the reader begins to think of the times they have seen this on their balcony and not noticed the beauty in color. The ideas flow down the page and the relaxing reader thinks of times in their lives, something was similar to this, whether it be traveling or food preparation or seasons of sea and sand or snow and the big city. You want to finish the poem with, “I remember when...” The descriptive words come suddenly, such as “I fixed my goggles to see yellow angels escape me...” Each page in “Diorama” is a pocket of memory in the poetry of Sandra Marchetti.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:** Marie Asner balances a life of being a poet, freelance writer, book reviewer and entertainment reviewer. Marie is a member of the Missouri and Illinois State Poetry Societies, The Rockford Writers Guild and The Kansas Authors Club.

Posted July 1, 2025

## ***The Flight from Meaning*** by Steven Haven

Slant Books, 2025

102 pages

ISBN: 979-1639821853

Review by jacob erin-cilberto

This book is a very interesting poetic exploration into feelings of war, feelings of post-war, of rich versus poor and the rich becoming the poor. This is poetry that gives us a solar-plexus punch and knocks us out of the ring of metaphor taking our bruises with us, but in a very exhilarating way.

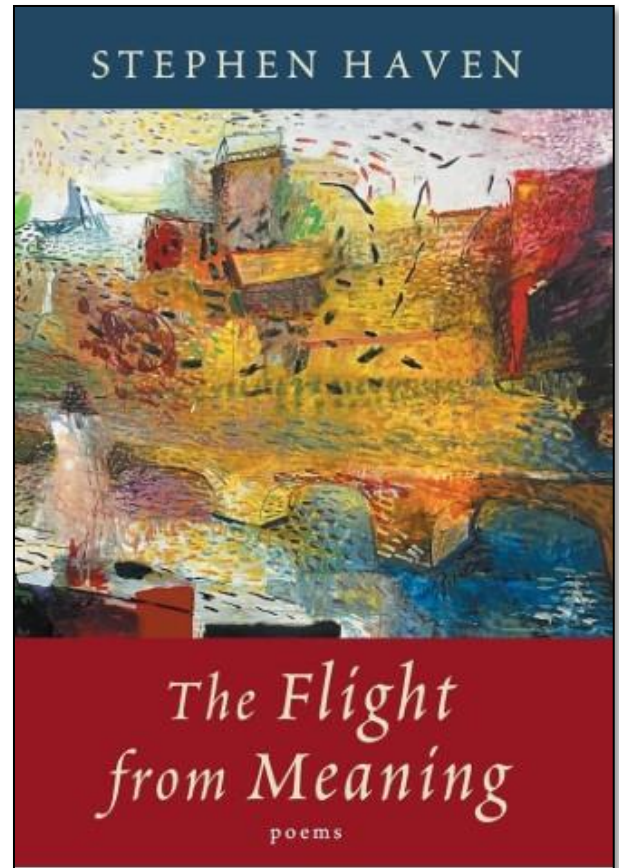
The first poem, titled “Rope Tied To A Song: April 30,1975,” speaks of the Vietnam War ending. The speaker shares, “My father, my mother have gone/ to gather their old friends/ .../ American Flags/ Renounce the colors of Love. / Somewhere in Saigon/ there is singing, there is a monk who does not immolate/ Himself in the streets. / The killing still goes on.”

Stephen consistently speaks of how “The war goes on” and being “many miles from that place, and yet I feel it/ as a kind of home.” The war still goes on for many who were in Vietnam or other wars. The shrapnel echoes never really leave those who served.

Harven’s very insightful and interesting “Three Short Poems” seem to evoke reference to the long-ago past before humans existed, to the past of our country when humans did not act humanely to those who were on this land way before we arrived, a future, with a holiday “that welcomes the New Year/ Full of things that have never been...”

In “Wheelbarrow,” which at first look at the title conjures up a recollection of William Carlos Williams’ “Red Wheelbarrow,” creating both a farm scene and a reminder of how this useful tool can be abandoned with disuse. But his poem jars us out of that notion with the first line, “Thin parched pterodactyl/ Tucked wings extended backwards/ stoops at a drainage ditch/ in Ashland, Ohio.” Dinosaurs quenching thirst in modern day.

Then, in “Upstate New York Hymn,” he talks of “spring-drunk Chuctanunda/ Its bright dye in that slow gravitas, / the Mohawk’s resurrected dark?” Maybe this is a reminder of our dark past and how we mistreated Native Americans who were here way before we



were. But “everything new/ already old, waking to their new names/ And forms, even in the shapes they had before.” In other words, history never seems to teach us, does it? “The killing goes on. Yes, the killing goes on.

In “Walden” the poet writes, “Whatever Walden is to me---we swam there two Julys---/ I hope to skirt that never-ending trope, / Drowning like a pilgrim in that pond.” A baptism in death of sorts. We cannot escape aging; we cannot escape ourselves, nor the past mistakes of ourselves, our generation or the generations that came before.

The speaker says:

“Nowhere fast, he finds the mind  
Slung in a parenthesis of Sky, as if his head  
Were helmeted by the entire stratosphere.”

This poet, Stephen Haven, fires a stratosphere of images so immense, they reach across many galaxies, but unfortunately for the subject of this particular poem, the images leave “him nowhere, leave him fast.”

Haven is a deeply philosophical poet whose words question existence, why it is, why it was and whether it will extend into the future. Or, will we find ourselves left with:

“The promise of a door, two dinner plates,  
two lit candles  
an old dying dog”

and just a lot of questions as to what really is “The Flight from Meaning” and why we cannot get close to finding that meaning that eludes every day.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: jacob erin-cilberto is author of 25 books of poetry, his most recent being *A Journeyman's Poems*. He teaches at John Logan College and conducts workshops at Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

Posted July 1, 2025

## ***Two Emilys: Poems*** **by Andrea Potos**

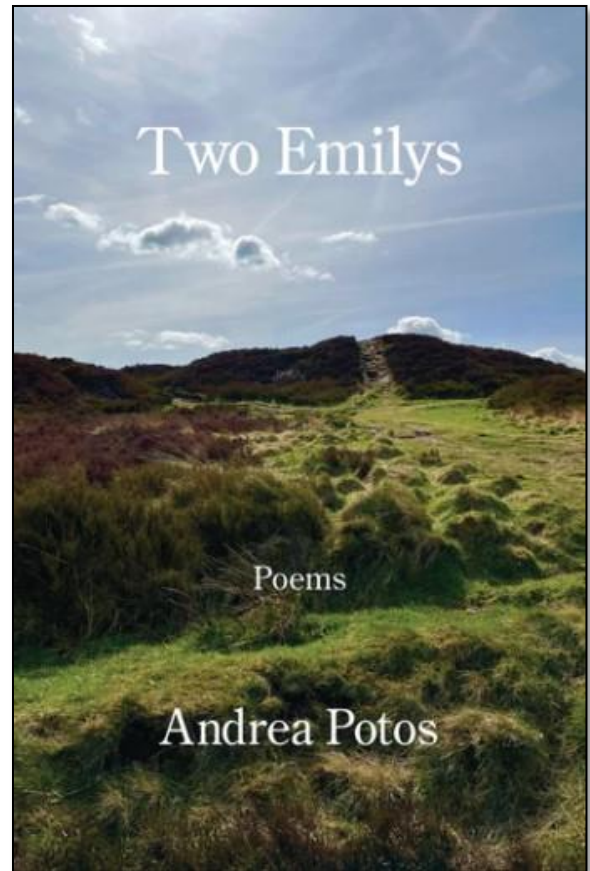
Kelsay Books, 2025

48 Pages

ISBN #: 978-1639806874

Review by Michael Escoubas

Among the yet-to-be-fulfilled items on my bucket list is a visit to Emily Dickinson's (1830-1886) homestead in Amherst, MA. This mysterious genius has fascinated me for decades. On the other hand, I know little about Dickinson's counterpart, British poet Emily Brontë (1818-1848). Reading *Two Emily's*, Andrea Potos's latest collection, has been both an education as well as an inspiration. My goal in this review is two-fold: (1) to compare two incomparable poets; and (2) to highlight Andrea's facility to bring the two Emily's back to life on the poetic page.



Andrea dedicates her collection:

*For all the Women poets.*

This is appropriate to history. Dickinson published a mere handful of poems, less than ten. Brontë published under the pseudonym *Ellis Bell*. Both women labored within an atmosphere adverse to promoting women in the arts.

The book is designed to point and counterpoint each Emily. That is, the poems appear on facing pages as if the three poets are conversing. It is as if Potos knows each Emily well enough to write for both. Potos's own style merges out of intimate discourse with her subjects.

"Speaking of Poetry," serves as an umbrella poem:

She said there's a clarity in each word,  
like the chandelier  
that hung in your dining room as a child—  
stars of blue-white and yellow-gold,  
even purple and magenta could be found  
sparkling on all the walls;  
each piece of the chandelier—  
a teardrop whole and dipped in light—  
you could see your whole life through it.

Most of the poems are brief; they fit on one page and are designed to channel each Emily as stylistically appropriate. Two examples:

A Stone from Emily Brontë

On the high Yorkshire moor  
I found it, dark spotted blue and blazed  
with stars and twilight.  
One wind-lashed mile away  
from her parsonage home,  
I bent down to keep it—  
dreamed her gaze my own.

Answering poem:

Upon Waking  
*after ED*

I'll tell you how the day began—  
  
one dream strand at a time—  
  
pictures sifted in gold-burgundy  
  
the messages, lie keys, were lost



If I listen carefully, using my imagination, I am close to all three poets in my spirit. These brief poems invite me into their minds, into their lives.

I do not know if Andrea has visited the Brontë home in England but two poems, “Walking the Moor in Spring,” and “Brontëan Morning,” make me wonder . . . both poems invite readers to share in picturesque countryside walks “alongside tall, bent grasses and gorse, / browned by heather and stones and crags.” We hear “The loudest crows / cawing over the tops of the oaks / call me to autumn already / and though my back is the window, . . . I feel the gorse / grazing my ankles as I go.”

I also appreciate the historical perspective offered about each poet. In an age of presumed religiosity, Dickinson was not always in tune with conventional thinking as demonstrated by “Emily Dickinson Stays Home When Ralph Waldo Emerson Visits Her Brother’s House:

Let there be no argument  
from the grass between  
my brother’s house and mine.  
No need to touch flesh—

like the Word, he must glow.  
Hadn’t we met in that place  
where Dream is born—

I remember—Soul sparks  
erupted—I felt  
my own ignite—  
in my ear—*the Mountains straight reply.*

“To Emily Brontë” is Andrea’s letter to Brontë reimagining her eleven-year-old self “sunk in the red velveteen / chair and the Fox Bay Theater.” There she is absorbed by scenes from *Wuthering Heights*. Scenes depicting Yorkshire moors, Heathcliff’s sea-green eyes, pathos of love and loss that captured the poetry protégé’s blooming imagination.



Other titles not to overlook include, “To the College Girl Who Sold *The Life of Emily Dickinson*,” “A Reading in Emily’s House,” “The Last Unread Poems of Charlotte Brontë, March 2022,” and “When Any Word Came Near Emily Dickinson’s Name.” These poems and more (indeed every poem makes the list) but space is limited.

I close with “Some Advice from Emily,” to which the other Emily would happily signature as worthy advice:

Keep words  
brief, bound-tight

think of that quick-startle—  
fingertip on stovetop—

that one breath, throat-caught  
seconds before the reveal.

Ah yes, that “quick-startle,” is a phrase aptly suited to Andrea Potos’s stellar collection. No poem disappointed this review . . . five stars + for this book, underpriced at \$17.00.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 23-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Posted July 1, 2025

***Nothing Louche or Bohemian***  
**By Tina Cole & Michael W. Thomas**

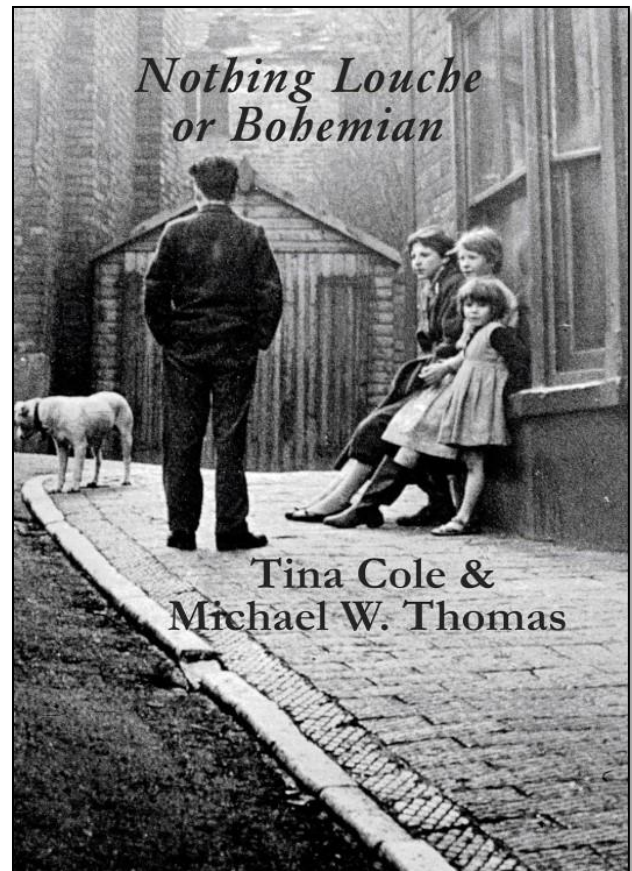
Black Pear Press, 2025

41 pages

ISBN #: 978-1-9169010-27-0

Review by Marie Asner

Poets Tina Cole and Michael W. Thomas live in Great Britain and have written a group of poems rich in memory and given to the reader as a glimpse of the past. Memories linger in the background of the mind, and a fondness for certain moments is always there. Tina Cole has published pamphlets including “What it Was.” She conducts workshops for adults and children and has an M.A. in creative writing from Manchester Metropolitan University. Michael W. Thomas has published “A Time for Such a Word,” and “Sing Ho! Stout Cortez: Novella and Stories,” both from Black Pear Press. His work has appeared in *The Antigoniish Review* (Canada), *Dream Catcher Etchings* (Australia) and *Magazine Six* (USA).



Memories are related to people or things or places. Using language and descriptions that may bring something to mind are here to read. The first poem in the collection is by Tina Cole called “Open the Box” which is an invitation to open, read and reflect on what box you may have. This one was found on the top shelf of a closet and the reader may say, “Oh, yes, we have one, too.” Driving past a now deserted country road in “Unmapped” brings on a memory of country roads that lead to fishing ponds or a relative’s farm with a litter of pups to play with. Tina Cole takes the reader on a journey to “Mrs. MacIntyre” a teacher, in a poem of two verses, the second verse of which is reversed in form. “Piano Teacher” “*your hands arching and lithe, rain cold fingers tinkering a crazy ragtime.*” In the “The Art of Knitting” - “*Knitting kept her old heart warm, wrapped in rabbit wool she knew the art of casting off the pull of memories.*”

Michael W. Thomas, writes of his father “Dad in a Morning—December 1962” and his father, an electrician, going to work at Christmas time “*and valleys of wire need his sparky magic to keep all on the pulse.*” Then, also, this memory of the past, “*I still have his “Electrical Yearbook...Unfussy as the Book of Common Prayer.”*” An ode to a man who helped keep a town running with power. However, there is another power in the

household, a mother who is also a Nurse-on-Call, and at the beckon of a ringing phone. The father works with machinery while the mother works with life. In “Pity Phones” there comes, not an ordinary call for help, but a child’s trauma.

The style of the authors complement each other, going from one sentiment to another, and allowing the reader time to think through what just happened. Some poems are written in stanza form while another is all italics. The variety recalls memories from long ago, a person from long ago, an incident one has seen and can’t forget, a house that once was home, a special toy or a nighttime view of an airplane overhead among the silver stars. Only this on clear nights before fog rolls in. All are here within the grasp of writing.

Tina Cole writes about a favorite toy in “Heirloom.” *“Taffy, a Chad Valley original in toffee mohair fully jointed with pad paws.”* However, there can be another viewpoint of nostalgia toward a deceased pet, *“I buried the dog in his basket with its bowl.”* But this comes with a twist. There is always something special to remember and Tina Cole has “Intoxication” with *“It’s all in the way you look at things, in the way one’s hand reaches out for beauty.”*

When you leave a place, you have memories of certain parts of that place, especially a live-in house, but do you really know what else remembers? Michael W. Thomas tells us in “Cats Fed” *“Outside, I turn for one last look at the house.... birthdays, the heaping wakefulness of Christmas, the sandcastle dreams.... somewhere in there they begin, the little songs a house sings to itself.”* There is the classmate, a grade school girl named “Jacqueline Burnett” and important because of a birthday. Seeing life on a different plane is “Somersault” and *“Slowly I somersault through autumn; the air is close but soft.”*

“Nothing Louche or Bohemian” is a poetry collection of memories to share. A book of the past that reflects life as it was then, calm and moving at a slower pace. From people to places to occupations, there is a continuity that flows with words from one page to another and one person to another. Time moves at its own pace here, one memory after another and will remind the reader of their own special memories.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Marie Asner balances a life of being a poet, freelance writer, book reviewer and entertainment reviewer. Marie is a member of the Missouri and Illinois State Poetry Societies, The Rockford Writers Guild and The Kansas Authors Club.

Posted July 1, 2025

## ***The Beast Inside: Collected Poems*** by Bill Cushing

Southern Arizona Press, 2025

Edited by Paul Gilliland

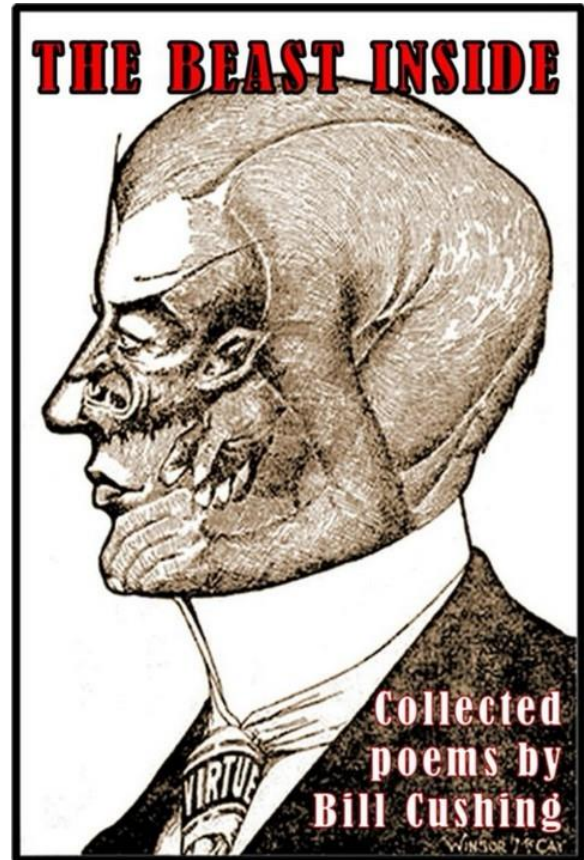
103 Pages

ISBN # 978-1-960038-58-6

Review by Diane L. Redleaf

Bill Cushing's poetry intrigued me from the moment I read his first line. His name was hidden from me, it turned out, because I first encountered a Bill Cushing poem when I served as a Highland Park Poetry contest judge in the "Ode to a Geographic Place" category this year. I chose his poem as the winner in contest's largest category—the adult non-residents of Highland Park.

When I saw his newest book, *The Beast Inside*, on the Highland Park Poetry's list of new collections waiting for a review, I volunteered, excited to read more poems by this intriguing poet. What better reason is there for doing a review?



It turns out my choice of his poem *Adios Puertorriqueños* as the contest winner was no fluke: Cushing has published widely; the 77-poem new volume includes poems previously published in 37 different journals (several of these journals published multiple Cushing poems). One can only marvel at his extensive writing credits. Cushing is a prolific writer in multiple genres, with four previously published books of poetry, two works of creative non-fiction, and a book of short stories to his credits.

*Adios Puertorriqueños* remains one of my favorites in the embarrassment of riches in his new collection. In typical (though not exclusive) Cushing style, the poem is short, pithy, and intellectually intriguing. His cheeky, slight or not-to-so slight political skewering and insight uses artful and exact turns of phrase, formal rigor, a touch of rhyme, and it ends with a razor-sharp and simultaneously witty punch in the gut.

This ten-line, two quatrain stanza poem begins, "The enigma of a plebiscite: commonwealth or state." Anyone with modicum of political savvy or pretense, mixed with a touch of affection for Spanish (and most of us poets fall into this camp, don't we?) immediately will get curious as to why the "enigma" he posits means "adios." He condenses the explanation perfectly in what follows, "embracing statehood would ablate"

(who wouldn't admire just a verb choice placed so perfectly in a line) "cultural roots which would take flight." And to this rich alliteration he adds the rhyming last line in the stanza, "Such a vote would act as last rites." In Cushing's hand, powerful politic positions and powerful poetry roll seamlessly into one.

The second stanza shows, rather than tells, what such loss of those roots portends: "The people will lose, inevitably, the indigenous soul of *Taino*." When Cushing writes this, I feel the power the word *Taino* holds, even though that word hadn't been in my vocabulary before. Great poems often do that for us—they push us into the world to learn about other people, their histories, their cultures, their sustaining identities.

The last three lines build to Cushing's final punch, exactly the sort of kick in the gut I often aim for in my own poems (but don't necessarily achieve so well):

and then *isla del encanto*  
becomes another Disney.  
Just ask Hawaii.

The last line rolls the poem into a much bigger critical narrative. The condemnation is sly, and true to Ode form, it addresses the subject geographic place as if it's a person being brought into the conversation. The message, of course, is that Hawaii knows better now; we would be saying "adios" to Puerto Rico's cultural heritage in the statehood vote.

I would hope not. I'm still not sure, after learning Cushing's point of view in the poem, that I agree entirely that Puerto Rican statehood should be rejected. But boy do I need to take the concern seriously, don't I? In one very short poem, Cushing has upended my slacktivist views on Puerto Rican independence question and reminded me of the suppression of Hawaiian history and culture to boot.

What Cushing has done here in 10 short lines is to open a powerful conversation. And he does that again and again throughout the book.

Perhaps I enjoy Cushing's poetry on a visceral level because he taps strong emotions in tandem with his use of poetic tools for thoughtful discursive ends. If I didn't find the questions he is asking interesting in and of themselves, perhaps his poetry would not be quite as thoroughly engaging as it is. But throughout the collection, Cushing raises important personal, philosophical, moral and political questions. He challenges at the same time as he entertains and describes his world and his wide-ranging memories and encounters. He is also adept on quotidian topics, and some of his best poems in the collection are about characters and relationships. He is nothing if not versatile.

The book also shows Cushing is a master of incongruity. The first line of the very first poem, "At Mrs. Gannett's," gives of his off-kilter sensibility: "In a tidy house cluttered

with kindness,” it continues to recount how Mrs. Gannet “delighted us with stories of her childhood in Omaha,” (Omaha, you say? How delightful one wonders, as you ask yourself if Cushing is teasing you), and then you learn that she “preferred candles, disdained lightbulbs. This made her invulnerable to the ’65 blackout.” Cushing portrays an intriguing individual indeed, in this and in several other poems in the collection.

*The Beast Inside* shows Cushing’s mastery of poetic forms, too, as divergent as the haiku, haibun, cinquain, imayo, senryu, and the sonnet. The book is full of the personal as well as the political. The book moves from the section entitled “Reminiscent Self” (my favorite set because of the rich subjects he dives into); the “Formal Self” where craft and wide formal variation are on florid display, to the “Dream State Self” with dark, nightmarish and ghoulish imaginings that reveal the beast his title promises.

The arc of this ambitious book does not bend toward justice, however, for the book ending in an epic battle of “reason,” which “infuses calm” to “try and restrain the “brute residing in the brain” (which is not where we usually put the Brute’s residence, is it?). Cushing is telling us something about ourselves that we may not want to know.

In Cushing’s conception, the language of poetry itself is a tool in reason’s attempt at virtue, but it doesn’t necessarily win out against the “beast inside.” Nor is it clear that Cushing sides with reason in every battle, but with a passionate form of reason that wants nothing more than to humanize the questions that trouble his active mind.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Diane L. Redleaf is a lawyer, non-profit leader, child and family policy advocate, legal educator, mentor, mediator, wife, mother, and grandmother from Oak Park, Illinois. She is the author of *Odes to the States: Poems Inspired by the 50 States and the District of Columbia* as well as *What Can Be Held Briefly*.

Posted August 1, 2025



***Words for My Mother***  
by Monica K. Allen

Independently published, 2025

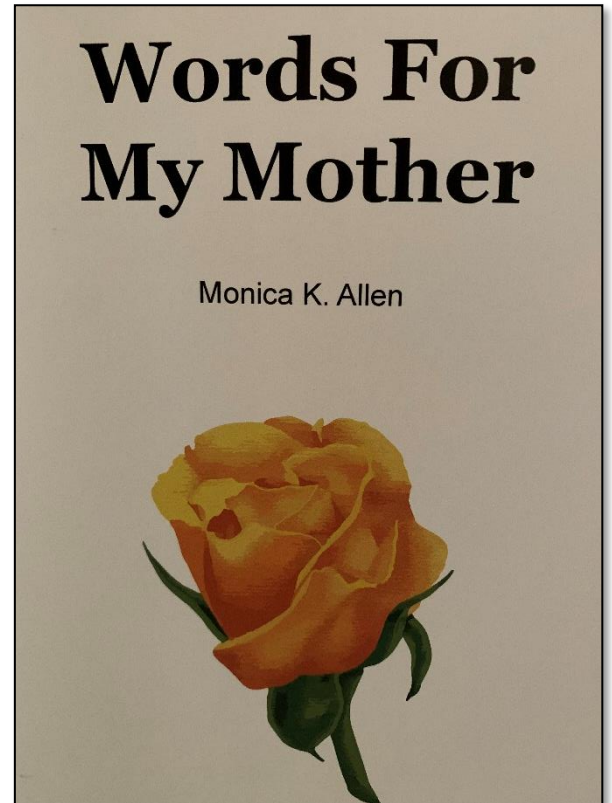
39 pages

ISBN # 979-8-9921627-0-7

Review by Michael Escoubas

Monica Allen dedicates her debut poetry collection to her late mother Kathleen Lou Sloan. Allen says, she “taught me so much, but not everything.” This amazingly candid description displays an important trait for poets: The ability to step back from her subject and be real about its truth.

Of the more than two hundred poetry books I have read and reviewed, this chapbook stands out to me for its vivid portrayal of love through suffering. Allen writes without pretense, no big show-off words that few can understand. *Words for My Mother* depicts “love-in-action.”



*Background*

This collection grows out of Kathleen’s diagnosis of *Dermatillomania*, a mental health condition where the patient compulsively picks at her skin. Complicating this was the Covid-19 Pandemic with its plethora of dark days, death, and unparalleled disruptions of life. Allen’s poems chronicle their mutual love beginning with Kathleen’s illness and moving through health-stages to the end.

*Love that Knows No Barriers*

Allen leads with a word of thanks to caregivers: “Haiku for My Disabled Mother”:

The highest of highs  
Bipolar one disorder  
The lowest of lows

Unsaid feelings, masked,  
until the illness took hold  
of body and mind



Too many years passed  
before the diagnosis  
was properly made

Mom's care: medicines,  
hospital stays, ETC,  
therapy hours

"Thanks!" to caregivers,  
family, and friends, who helped-  
you kept her alive

Two features stand out to me: One: "Unsaid feelings masked," and two: "Until the illness took hold of body and mind." I sense, reading between the lines, a realization, long delayed, that it is now time to be "real" and come to grips with truth and love. The stage is now set; everything is in place for a daughter's words for her mother.

There is a slow but steady progression in the poems that follow. "Untitled 1999," uses flowers metaphorically to describe Kathleen's emergence from "Sheltered, rare, and undiscovered / Nasty weeds covered her for years / she nearly withered away . . . Roots expand in the new garden / Soon she will be a most beautiful flower." Another poem, "My mom, the treasurer keeper," portrays a mother who, despite her personal suffering, had time to create fun experiences for her daughter. A pocket in her mother's bathrobe often became the focus of celebration, in little-girl treasures such as paper clips found, or candy or small toys.

I offer "Ode to My Mother's Dermatillomania" as a kind of summary of care Kathleen's condition demanded and Monica's sensitive love:

The daughter  
The trusted one

This role  
Never sought

Her, always honest  
Showing holes

Me, researching reasons  
Providing wound care

More time together

Visiting doctors

Unconscious craters  
Brought us closer

Cellulitis cases  
Multiple medicines

MRSA cells  
Powered guest room

Other difficulties accumulated  
Support required

Difficult move  
Mutually planned

Assisted living apartment  
Daily skin checks

DuoDERM patches  
Provided protection

Loving each other  
12 miles apart

As Kathleen's symptoms worsen, Monica's love and attention increases. Covid-19 is a third major player in this poignant human drama. I admit to tears as Monica's poems detail those little things that occupy her presence as her mother's decline defines itself. "The Last Tissue," says a lot, "Tonight, there is one, one last tissue. I don't want / to use it. For how long can I let the box / collect dust on the bookshelf?"

For all of us who have grieved with a loved one during their "long goodbye," *Words for My Mother*, by Monica Allen is a must read. Whatever had gone before matters little as the end draws near. Please reflect on, "Always Connected":

Our time here  
overlapped for  
41 years

Together

We

loved  
taught  
helped  
listened to  
each other

Like no one else could

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 23-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Posted August 1, 2025

## ***Dining on Salt: Four Seasons of Septets*** by Wayne Lee

Cornerstone Press, 2025

138 pages

ISBN #: 978-1-960329-85-1

Review by Michael Escoubas

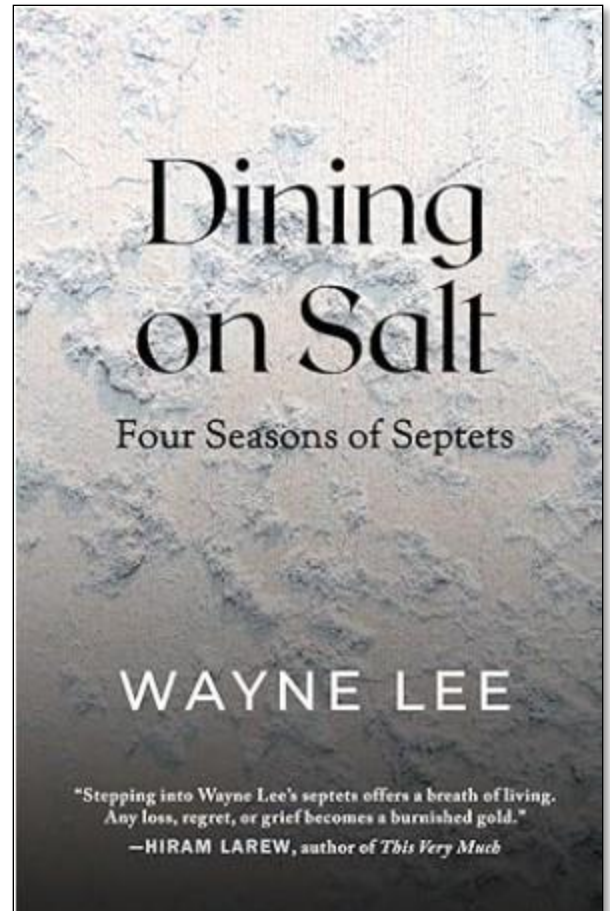
When I review poetry books I tend to court a touch of “friendly skepticism.” I hold off “signing on” with the book. However, Wayne Lee’s *Dining on Salt: Four Seasons of Septets*, “had me from hello,” to borrow a line from the movie, *Jerry Maguire*. Two reasons merged for me: First, Lee demonstrates how instrumental poetry was, and continues to be, in coping with the loss of his dear wife Alice. Second, I received an education about the poetry form “septet.”

I was transfixed reading Lee’s “Preface: Four Seasons of Septets.” This important background summary traces the author’s discovery of the septet form as well as the rigorous self-imposed discipline Lee put himself through to become proficient in it. (I dare say that the poet himself would deny my assertion of proficiency.) The Preface also provides important context about “why” a collection consisting entirely of poems no longer than seven lines. Exhausted after twenty years of serving as caregiver for his disabled wife, her death by suicide was a further emotional/psychological blow waiting backstage to further test his mettle. To quote the poet himself:

*... my writing practice has always been a way for me to process life experiences, so in the end I was grateful for my self-imposed discipline. The limitations of the seven-line forms forced me to crystallize my thoughts and feelings and helped me digest them in bite-sized bits, rather than choking on the enormity of it all.*

I have noticed this before: it is as if poetry becomes a spiritual dimension of the grieving person’s life. Poetry takes over as a *life-giving, life-saving force*. Without poetry the grieving person himself might perish.

*Dining on Salt* is organized under four headings: I. That Sounding Sense, II. This One Sock, III. White than the Palest Skin, and IV. Gestures of Preservations. One may regard these divisions in more than one way as to “seasons.” The natural transformations of



planet earth, and/or the seasons of Wayne Lee's experiences as Alice's caregiver. The enigmatic title selections suggest the latter rather than the former.

From *Sounding Sense*, I think two poems set the stage for the sections that follow:

### **What a Wonderful World**

I hold your waist as you transfer from wheelchair  
to toilet seat, pull down your wet pullup  
and pajama bottom, replace them  
with a dry diaper and clean cotton pants.

We stand like that for one sweet moment,  
your forehead pressed against my chest,  
swaying to that first slow dance in the park.

This poem and the next begin a progression of seasons in their poignant love expressions. I visualize the emotions, the play of memory flowing through the poet. This is intimacy; this is commitment; this is love.

### **Reading to My Wife**

Will you read to me? she asks  
when she can't sleep. Will you read  
from *Peter Rabbit* or *Winnie the Pooh*?

So I sit by her bed rail and narrate again  
the tales she knows so well, until the meds  
kick in, until she closes her eyes,  
clutching her favorite bear.

In this poem, Alice can still communicate. She asks for things Wayne can still deliver. And deliver he does aptly show the grace of long-suffering.

Alice succumbs in the next section: *This One Sock*.

### **Sunlight: A Shanzi**

—for Alice Rose Lee (1952-2018)

My wife takes her  
life and an angel  
suddenly appears.

I kiss her, then  
 she too flies off.  
 Blinding sunlight,  
 then the darkest night.

The grace of long-suffering finds its end, but the end is only the beginning. Even though Wayne has suffered he defers to his wife as the true sufferer. At this point, the title poem comes into play:

### **Dining on Salt: A Whitney**

No dinner,  
 again. Empty  
 heart, empty  
 belly. Dining  
 on salt, on  
 all that is left  
 after the sea has dried up.

The “Whitney” is one among dozens of septet variations employed by Lee. His own dark night commences—Wayne “needs” poetry, now as never before to get him through. This poem holds nothing back, yet the poet is under control with how he expresses his grief. Could there be a more effective image than . . .

“after the sea has dried up.”

After his salt diet, Wayne visualizes a whole range of delectable things:

### **Root Soup**

I have this hunger for rootstocks, for rutabagas  
 and Yukon Gold potatoes, for unpeeled carrots, turnips,  
 parsnips, for the fruits of the earth that ripen slowly  
 in the autumn sun, for sweet onion, plump garlic,  
 skin-on delicata squash. And for the kiss of seasoning,  
 for sea salt, rosemary, peppercorns, lemon thyme.  
 I have this need for what lies beneath.

Thus, the third season “Whiter than the Palest Skin” begins with things “beneath” the ground. There is savory richness, robust coloration and sweet aromas. I sense the power of poetry coming powerfully into play, but in a new way. “Windowpane” is an example of this “new” way:

Ice on the pond  
thin as a windowpane.

Some grief must be drowned  
in small words and soft sounds.

Koi slow themselves down in winter,  
grow so cold they eat no food at all.

Clouds float below my feet.

Note the simple, relaxed ambience. Grief is not managing the poet. The poet is subsumed in the near limitless power of words to slowly transform his life.

This book has had a transforming effect on my life. I too have witnessed seasons of grief. What Wayne Lee has achieved will stand the test of time and will be living light to many who grieve.

In addition, Lee offers additional information about the septet form:

**Appendix A:** A Brief History of the Septet

**Appendix B:** A Compendium of Seven-Line Forms

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 23-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Posted August 1, 2025



***On a Clear Night, I Can Hear My Body Sing***  
**by Jeannie E. Roberts**

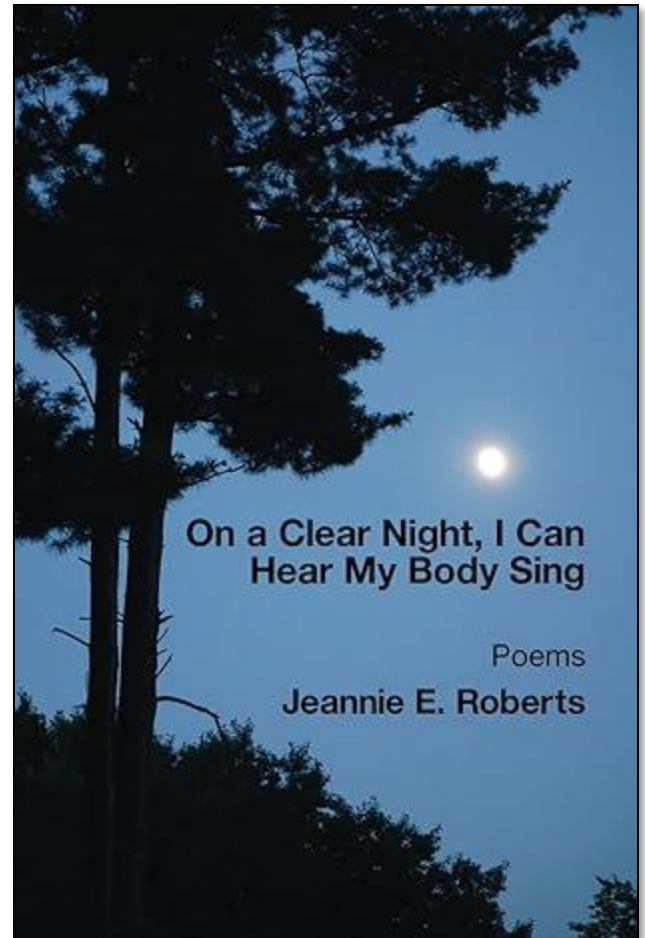
Kelsay Books, 2025

86 pages

ISBN #: 978-1639806867

Review by Michael Escoubas

*On a Clear Night, I Can Hear My Body Sing*, Jeannie Roberts' bold new collection, recalls two titles by two famous poets: Wallace Stevens' "A Clear Day and No Memories," and Walt Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric." Although Robert's collection is titled *On a Clear Night*, both Stevens and Roberts seek clarity and insight into the meaning of life. Admittedly, they set about doing this in diverse ways. The similarity between Whitman and Roberts lies in their explorations of the human body both in its parts and in the whole.



Roberts' epigram prepares her audience:

*I think about my body  
 and how on a clear night, I can hear her voice  
 as I rejoice in another hour, another day  
 another remembrance to behold*

Her well-chosen saying coordinates nicely with the collection's layout and design: I. The Animal Body (16), The Familial Body (15), and The Human Body (12). Each division contributes to the whole in its own way.

Roberts' lead poem "Seeing Life for What It Is," inspired me toward first steps on a meaningful journey. Her eye for elevating the ordinary is a trait I have noticed in her other works. In the instant poem, the setting is winter. A gander leads his mate between icy shapes near the shore. For most eyes, this scene is merely mundane, happening all the time, right? Not for Roberts—this pair of geese is a study in "luminosity"—this is music, this is a world of crystal and sun—a fluid essence that visualizes life itself. She is asking, "Where are we in life if we fail to sense *life* happening in the *ordinary*?"

Her titles intrigue me, haunt me, compel me to read on. Roberts is a “discovery” poet. “How Can We Know a Life Unless We’ve Lived It,” personifies a lake as life-source. The lake water *quivers, trembles, and flutters*. Here poems are active; letters and lines *launch, dance, and ripple*, on and off the page. The lake’s life becomes synonymous with Roberts’ creative life.

Another absorbing title, “Inheritance and the Practice of Catch and Release,” opens Section II, The Familial Body. Joy of life is discovered when she compares our life experiences to something easily observed in nature: *What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly*. I appreciated the dark humor in this poem, an apt illustration of the imagination’s range.

Various poems highlight the poet’s debt to her Swedish immigrant grandparents as well as to her parents. Poems such as “Potatoes, Prayers, and Sunfish at Dusk,” “The Distaff, the Spindle, and a Cradle Full of Purkinje Fibers,” among others, describe her debt to her ancestors. She describes their craft skills, their common sense, their love for the land and the environment. These poems took my heart hostage with their homespun humanity. Robert’s poetic range is further illustrated through traditional forms such as the Villanelle, and the Sestina. Several examples of each are sprinkled throughout the work. “When the Forced Adoption Goes Array or Does It? is a villanelle about an unsavory character who earns the telling line, *Parasites flourish like wood ticks seize skin*. Don’t miss this one.

“Holding Space with Bookmarks,” is a work of the heart that honors her Dad’s love of John Keats:

As my hand touched the page,  
I focused on the lines. In a poetic instant there we were,  
Dad and I—

*Where falling stars dart their artillery forth,  
And eagles struggle with the buffeting north  
My heart of heavy meteor-stone knew,  
Felt too, I was not fearful, nor alone*

The Human Body, Section III, opens with a goodbye wave to winter: “You Know What to Do,” generates unfettered joy. Roberts’ poetry is instinctive about how people feel. She captures things felt, articulating what we all feel but fail to notice, much less put into words.

“Take a Seat,” offers a life-perspective introduced by a quintet from Rumi:

*This being human is a guest house.*

*Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.  
—The Guest House, Rumi*

Roberts' development of Rumi's lines is well worth the effort . . . this one's a gem.

The spare poem "Human" for me is like a capsheaf atop a shock of wheat:

See that blade of grass  
as it glows in the early light  
its green tip barely visible  
  
Do you see it?  
  
After the glacial months  
it pushes through the darkness  
surrenders to emergence  
  
and  
  
so  
  
can  
  
you

I sensed layers of meaning in this poem and in poems throughout the collection. Roberts' poetry truly sings a melody in concert with her epigram:

*I think about my body  
and how on a clear night, I can hear her voice  
as I rejoice in another hour, another day  
another remembrance to behold*

*On a Clear Night, I Can Hear My Body Sing*, is a fountain of memories full and overflowing.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 23-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.  
Published August 1, 2025

## ***The Language of Cancer* by Caroline Johnson**

Kelsay Books, 2025

136 pages

ISBN: 978-1639807420

Review by jacob erin-cilberto

As I opened this book, I was expecting a journey that was just filled with pain and sadness, fear and trepidation, a very scary look at an angry disease eating away at body, mind and heart. Instead, I got a book of poems full of fighting spirit and fortitude that demands admiration.

In “Moon Dance,” she relates that it is:

More than a half a century  
of looking at moons, my throat aches  
to spell out the letters on my breath---  
c-a-n-c-e-r---to pilot then into a muddy  
ravine and walk away. But I cannot.

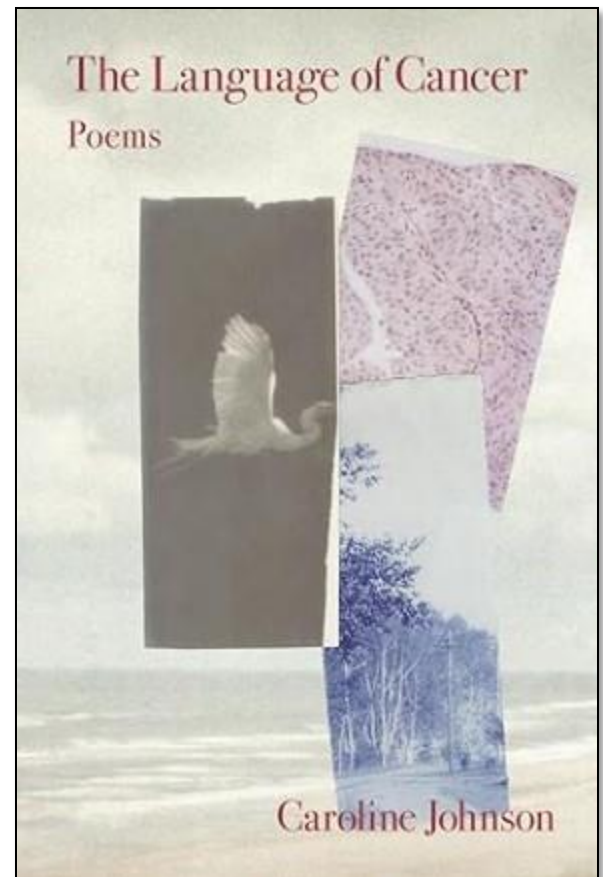
She engages us with clever metaphor, showing her poetic prowess even when dealing with such a severe situation.

Like the moon, my tumor is a foreign  
country. I study its dead landscape,  
attempt to move my mind to a safe  
space, allow it to dance until darkness  
disappears into the rich night light.

She will not succumb to the disease in a darkened night but rather celebrate in recovery as she dances till the darkness disappears.

We love our pets; they are family. I had a cat that died of cancer about seven years back. I relate to her poem, “The Last Toy.” She speaks about her Persian cat dying of lymphoma.

I wonder if her port will feel like mine  
My breast cancer, her lymphoma  
is something we experience together.”



My cat had cancer, I had triple bypass surgery. We reflected each other. She was family, “til it’s time to let her go.” Cancer affects more than the individual: it affects family as well. They all suffer with us, no matter what the catastrophic medical issue. They are with us.

In “Bears,” she uses metaphor in likening Bears to fears.

hidden, black  
appearing when we  
least expect them---  
our dark fears,  
hungry carnivores  
that devour  
reason.

In “Echocardiogram” she writes about the technician and how,

My mother’s heart did not stop on her deathbed

For minutes. (I remembered mine was stopped for 90 minutes during my heart surgery)

I don’t tell him that it has taken me  
all my life to face fear...  
I lean towards him and try to say the right thing.

So, what is the Right Thing? When we are sicker than ever thought possible, are we still trying to be correct and proper in our exchanges with others? Why? Don’t we have the right to be angry? To slam others against the wall with our “dealing with cancer or heart issues or any debilitating disease” language?

In “Cancer Part II,” she personifies cancer much like William Blake did in his poem “The Sick Rose.” Blake talks of cancer or some deadly disease like it is a cankerworm destroying a rose, he uses the metaphors “the howling storm” and how “does thy life destroy.”

Caroline writes:

but he was a charmer, not cruel but he  
Destroyed half my body while it was  
Blooming. I winked at the sky, but it was dead.

And finally, in “Sonography of a Survivor” she purports, “that which doesn’t murder you, makes you grow.” You survive the cankerworm; you can still bloom.

And later in the poem she writes about her twin scars:

one sits of radiated skin,  
The other a semi-frown, matches  
Both laced in stitches. If they could talk  
They'd form a community of gangsters,  
barroom bouncers who have fought off  
infection and disease.  
*I have to do this. I have no choice.*

I had to have the triple bypass, no choice.  
Reading this poetry book gave me a new perspective on what I went through.  
I saw reflections that made sense. I thank Caroline Johnson for writing it.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: jacob erin-cilberto is author of 25 books of poetry, his most recent being *A Journeyman's Poems*. He teaches at John Logan College and conducts workshops at Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

Posted September 1, 2025 - *Editor Note: Highland Park Poetry was deeply saddened to learn of Caroline Johnson's passing on October 1, 2025. Our hearts go out to her family and friends coping with this loss.*

## ***Simultaneous States*** by Beatriz Fitzgerald Fernandez

XPRESS Chapbooks, Bainbridge Island Press, 2025

34 pages

<https://bainbridgeisland.press/products/simultaneous-states>

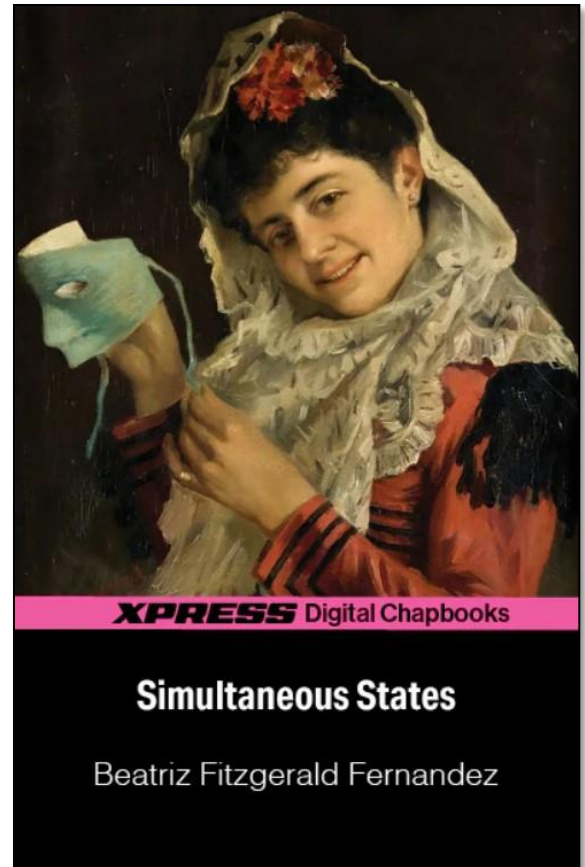
Review by Cynthia T. Hahn

*Simultaneous States* (XPRESS Chapbooks, Bainbridge Island Press, 2025, 34 pp.), the third chapbook of published poems by Beatriz Fitzgerald Fernandez, locates and navigates from two vantage points in every poem—whether present and past, woman and mother, mother and child, Puerto Rican or Other, terrestrial or of the stars. This writer juxtaposes colonizer and colonized, the animate and the machine ("the factories fed our families", "Uni-Mates", p. 24), tide and stillness, death and survival. These parallel states or alternating poetic perspectives, push the reader to imagine and envision another side of events described. Every page is weighed twice; the invitation here is to inhabit another's realm, to explore its contours, to decipher its significance.

The educational space often cited via college and school references becomes a lens; the student becomes the teacher, the mother loses the school-age son, order is called into question. The one who is supposed to return, disappears. Loss is expressed as a state of waiting for the moment before to return, and is akin to forgetfulness ("her last memory of her last son/slipping like sand through a sieve", "The Wave," p. 4), a scarring underscored by reference to the ocean's movement, an arrival of the wave without full erasure, over the sandy beach of time ("I wore white once and waited for my life to return from the sea—", "The Time Tourist", p. 11).

Likewise, a classroom mockery of "restless natives" turns into an embraced sense of "native" self, free to drum, dance and "declare our unrequited love out loud" ("Native", p. 3). From Ponce de Leon ("another man who never found what he came searching for", p. 6), to Christopher Columbus, the referencing of "natives" brings forth the idea of "native" as a positive connection to place, and also displaces the self within the historical reality of those who came before, and were wiped out by contact with the invading colonizers.

The book's title itself resonates with Puerto Rico's ambiguous dual political status, self-governed but not sovereign. As a U.S. born Puerto Rican/Peruvian bilingual university librarian in Florida, Fernandez takes a perspective that also moves beyond the Puerto Rican island, and passes



commentary on colonization more broadly. Woody Guthrie's refrain, "This land was made for you and me" takes a new turn here, as Fernandez recounts history as a kind of lyric, "Before it was your land, it was mine.../Before it was our land, it was theirs.../Before it was their land, it was no one's.../Before, I believed we could own a land.../Before it was my land, now it is yours—I surrender my claim—beyond your borders, all the sun-stars of the universe are mine." ("Your Land, My Land", p. 26). The poet's way out of an irreconcilable history is to look to a greater state of being, to move beyond borders, and thus into a space of hope.

These 16 poems, loosely tethered to the primary placing of one thing upon another over the course of a life, is readily accessible through the idea of historical journey ("Traveller's Bones"), rich with culturally-located and broader meanings. In a poignant plea for peace, General Lee's horse, upon surrender to Grant, survives Lee by a year, while his "stall door remains open for eternity/ to let his spirit roam free—free forever from the cannon fire,/free from the burden of one man's weight—and of all men's wars." (p. 25).

Fernandez, through a series of specific narrative elements, coupled with more universal desires, leaves the reader with the impression of having lived both there and here, both then and now, in a heady interplay of repeatedly widening circles of co-existence. The waves of poetry, exhibit the same kind of familiar structure and distanced elements, including a poem in English, also translated into Spanish ("The Time Tourist"/"El Turista del Tiempo", pp. 10-13), that pave the way for the reader to insert herself, whether of Latino/a extraction or outside that sphere, "...like a time traveler who packs years in her bags/like souvenirs, can arrive, leave and come back, unchained."

The strength of this small chapbook in semi-structured free verse, is its renewed vigor on each page, to connect with the reader and bring them quickly into an intimate and yet not completely knowable space. The teacher who assigns her class to write about "something terrible," aligned with a perspective of knowing trauma, is juxtaposed with the blank face of a child who cannot think of a tragedy to write ("Can anyone's life, however short, be so devoid of pain?", "The Best Teacher, p. 18). In a few words poetically aligned, we are there, and still remain here, and we can appreciate these "simultaneous states" of being that only strong poetry may cultivate. For more on this writer's work, see: [www.beasbooks.blogspot.com](http://www.beasbooks.blogspot.com).

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Cynthia T. Hahn has authored two volumes of poetry, *Outside-In-Side-Out* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), and *Coïncidence(s)* (alfAbarre Press, Paris, 2014). Cynthia is a Professor of French at Lake Forest College, Illinois, teaching creative writing and translation since 1990. Her personal sanctuary is her Japanese garden.

Posted September 1, 2025



## ***Sadie, Queen of the Swollen Nose Saloon***

**by Martina Reisz Newberry**

Alien Buddha Press, 2025

105 pages

ISBN#: 9798314163315

Review by Ann Malaspina

California poet Martina Reisz Newberry celebrates resilience, empathy and the city of Los Angeles in a dark and dazzling new collection, wonderfully titled *Sadie, Queen of the Swollen Nose Saloon*. Her lead character is an ageless LA survivor named Sadie, who hates war and owns a red felt hat with jewels and feathers that she hasn't worn yet. While grappling with loneliness and regret, she still reaches for malt balls and delights in the lights on the Pacific.

Who is Sadie? As Newberry says in a Facebook post introducing her heroine, "Sadie is here! Invite her over. She's unique, good trouble, a day or night you won't forget, an Acacia Tree, a used book, an alien, a citizen, a dragon." One thing's certain: Sadie can't be denied. By turns selfish and generous, wise and terrified, she will get under your skin and not let go.

Through Sadie's forthright lens, Newberry examines a world torn by fires, protests, war, and struggle. She tackles tangled subjects from failed diets and housework to poverty and self-hatred. No matter how terribly Sadie's thoughts spiral, her heart beats hard. For (almost) every cry of anguish, when indifference could be an easy refuge, Sadie finds a counterweight: a snappy reply, a snatch of music, a blueberry scone.

The poems are often framed as conversations between the poet and Sadie. In "Take Orpheus..." the two argue over darkness and light. "I told her that clarity was ok with me/ I have no appetite for the dark/ unless there is a bright moon..." the poet says. To which, Sadie replies,

"I'm not talking about light,  
... I'm talking about  
the way fear and anger tear  
the masks off of all things



and we see, too clearly—  
 way too clearly—  
 that evil has arrived to unseat  
 the God in us.”

Sadie seems very alone, but she wasn’t always. Past lovers still provoke her. Watching swans on a lake, she recalls one. “We floated, dipped, flew only a little,” she writes in “Sadie Tells the Story of her Lost Love to her Lost Love,” but the lover was already to “exorcise” her. Sadie is quick to put a pin in the poet’s romantic illusions, too. In “Kites,” the poet tells Sadie of a sweet moment:

“There was salt on your tongue and in my hair. I thought  
 if immortality was offered to me at that moment, I would take it.”

Sadie quickly responds. “My girl,” she tells the poet, “You were invisible all along and you never knew it.” Instead, the cure is in the moment at hand. Feeling the wind in the palms. Giving an unhoused man some food. “Search for life in those things that have no bones. / Search for color hiding the darkness,” she advises in “Sadie’s Tips On How Not To Be Anxious.” It’s the view outside the window, not in ourselves, that will save us.

It’s no surprise Sadie has trouble sleeping. When she does, her dreams bring no relief. In “Time of Lies,” Sadie says that “her 3 a.m demons/ are in-person lies come to haunt her.” After lamenting the nightmares, she “brushes her hair, scowls at the mirror,/ pulls a silly face.” Classic Sadie. Refusing to give in to despair, she isn’t done figuring out herself, or the world.

Sometimes, Sadie’s apartment is empty, and the poet goes looking for her. In “The Wind Followed,” she’s searched for Sadie for months. One day she finds her in an alley. “I’ve been walking these streets/ wondering the wonderful,” Sadie tells her, unconcerned. Sadie muses whether the dandelions growing in the concrete cracks are “god-fierce or so fragile that the/ sidewalk takes pity.” In nature, Sadie finds peace and comfort.

At first, I tried to distinguish between Sadie and the poet but soon gave up. The two switch roles, exchange secrets, and recall each other’s memories. Sometimes, one asks the big questions. Sometimes, the other. The pronouns – I or she – interchange, but the empathy never falters. The world may be cruel and heartless, but in conversation and friendship, captured so well by Newberry, we will find solace. “Sadie is the only one to whom/ I pour out my heart,” the poet writes in “Sadie at the Café,” though, she has “little patience for my sorrows.”

Newberry’s poems have appeared in literary magazines such as *Roanoke Review*, *Braided Way* and *Mortar Magazine*, as well as in anthologies. Her many previous collections include *Beyond Temples*, *Glyphs*, and *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, from

Deerbrook Editions. She has held residencies at Yaddo Colony for the Arts, Djerassi Colony for the Arts, and Anderson Center for Disciplinary Arts.

Sadie's voice will whisper in your ear long after you close the book. And, if you venture out into a hot Los Angeles night, with the hills burning to the north, you may find Sadie doing the same. In "Fires Burning North," Sadie is standing, in slippers stained with purple flowers, under an Acacia tree, her hair "tangled in the wind."

"Bits of paper blew around

somewhere a bottle broke

and brakes squealed.

One of the street lights flickered.

It was that kind of night."

Under siege, but still awe-struck, we are all Sadie.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Ann Malaspina writes children's books and poems in her 100-year-old house in northern New Jersey. Her YA verse novel "Ghost Runner" (West 44 Books), about a dog named Apollo, a girl who runs cross-country, and her brother's ghost who won't let go came out in 2025.

Posted September 1, 2025

## ***A Swale A Sort of Swaddle*** **by Abby Walthausen**

Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2025

89 pages

ISBN: 978-1-963908-61-9

Review by Michael Escoubas

In the early years of our marriage our doctors informed my wife and me that we would never have children by normal means. Accepting their pronouncement, we adopted two wonderful sons. However, after twenty years of marriage and, in our mid-forties . . . guess what . . . a lovely daughter was born. She is now thirty-five with her own burgeoning family. While the above story is by no means unusual, it certainly was a sea-change for us. The surprise of pregnancy was no easy road to travel given the assumptions noted.

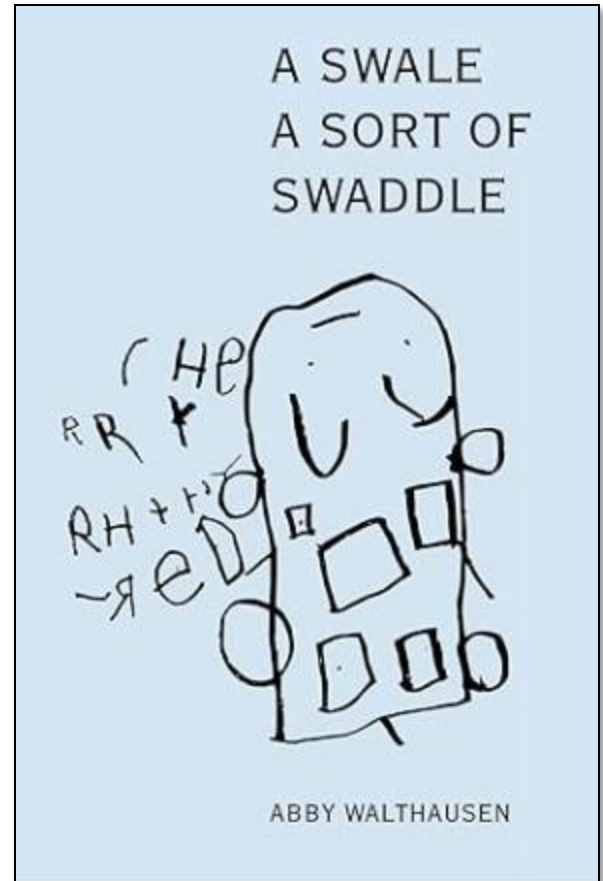
I returned to those distant years as I contemplated my review of Abby Walthausen's intriguing collection, *A Swale a Sort of Swaddle*. Within these poems I hear notes of ambivalence, along with a touch of darkness as well as uncertainty about the reality of motherhood and her experiences within it. I also sense a singular commitment to family life as well as an ongoing maturation process.

The collection's cover image is a drawing made by Abby's son aged three. In Abby's words, "It depicts a "magical, anthropomorphic car he imagined and named cherry red. The words were an early attempt to write *cherry red*, the boy's name for the car." I had previously inquired about the cover's design:

*The main reason I included the text and image is because the two side-by-side represent to me this leap from pictograph to letter, literal to abstract expression as vehicles for the imagination.*

Indeed, movement within the "literal" and the "abstract" is a prominent feature of the whole.

### ***Definitions from the Title***



“Swale” is a low-lying or depressed and often wet stretch of land, more commonly known as a bog.

“Swaddle” means to wrap someone, especially a baby, tightly in a blanket or in pieces of cloth. Swaddling gives the child a sense of comfort and security.

Source: Webster’s online Dictionary.

Over the years my wife and I have noticed both the “swale” effect; and the “swaddling” effect. This poet speaks to that which is real in life and does so with her own unique originality.

### ***Organization and Themes***

*A Swale a Kind of Swaddle* is organized in four divisions: 1) Once Around, 14; 2) Vines and Bines, 15; 3) Vessels for Weaning With, 6; 4) Re-Homing, 16.

In her endorsement of *Swale*, writer Kim Young notes that Walhausen’s interests span “motherhood, religion, domesticity, displacement, and the natural world with dark humor and sonic virtuosity.”

Each section opens with the words: In this Reliquary. A reliquary, for Abby, is a manila envelope in which treasured memories are stored. Here is the first one:

#### *Reliquary #1*

*In this manila pocket I have placed*

*sand caked together with zinc  
from your first visit to the beach*

*clipped nails, a cowlick hardened  
clipped hair, a crescent limp*

*and the meteor your navel brought,  
a little oxblood stone.*

*Shocking, all this sloughing, so soon —  
though when we stand still  
we see these tidbits shed  
to honor growth.*

I am moved by the poet's studied devotion to life processes such as "growth." Each item has a reason for being included. From the same section the poem "Flyby" captures Abby's heart:

Life is long but can be thicker when I try  
I am happy, but can only live one strand at a time.

Pluto's huge valentine showed us no life  
and since still water is still poor viewing,  
we watched The Wrong Man, Hitchcock's plainest,  
hoping to find an unseen eddy there.

Old quips get lost in the dishwater  
of one long and glowing noir.  
Westerns too dissolve their crackling filaments  
and constellations shed their nets and names.

But now night and day are the same frontier,  
chaperoned by light as dim as dimmest screen,  
ragbag now presents a roll, a kick, a muscle, a curl.

And someday, maybe a word.

This just new! Life's labor  
to sift and save a few.

I looked forward to entering each new section to learn exactly what items made that section's "Reliquary." I wasn't disappointed. Abby Walthausen is a fresh, energetic force in the world of letters. Her approach is borrowed from no one. *A Swale a Kind of Swaddle*, gets five stars from this reviewer . . . this is a collection that lives up to Kim Young's observation of *sonic virtuosity*.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER - Michael Escoubas is Senior Editor, Contributing Poet, and Staff Book Reviewer for Quill and Parchment, a 23-year-old literary and cultural arts online journal. This review is republished with kind permission from Quill and Parchment.

Review posted September 1, 2025.