

Archive of Book Reviews published

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The Last Wild Place: Poems by Peter Serchuk

WordTech Editions, 2025

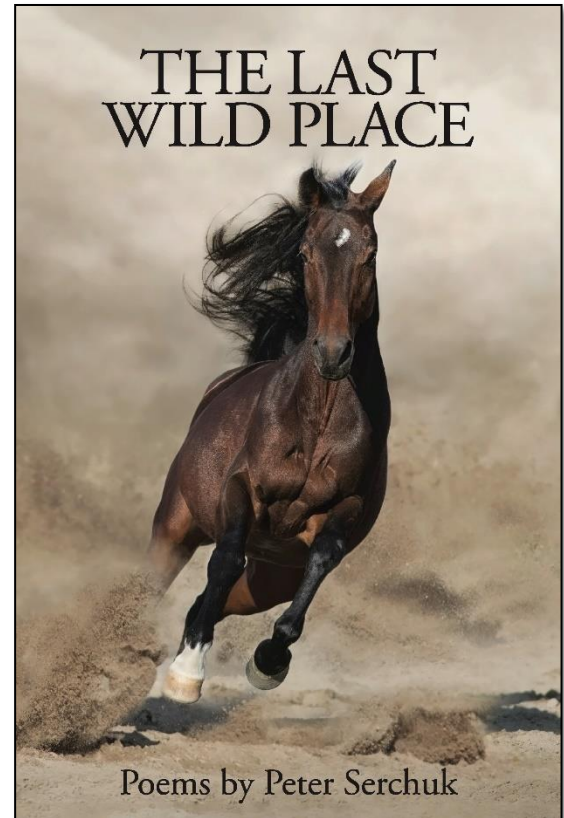
80 pages

Price: \$19.95

ISBN: 978 -1-62549-473-3

Review by Marie Asner

The beautiful cover design on "The Last Wild Place" is by artist Pieter de Koninck. It is of a galloping horse, which is part of the western poems in this collection by Peter Serchuk. The poems are written from a free perspective and observation of minute details. It is toward the end of the poem collection that we read about a horse in "Horse," with a comfortable home and "been loved from the moment his hooves hit ground." However, at the end of the poem the writer wonders "...which of us is sleeping standing up, which heart truly dreams of a field without a fence." "The Last Wild Place" has the writer hearing far off the sound of hooves of Appaloosa, Paint and Morgan.



Peter Serchuk's poems are divided into sections, giving various views of places the author has traveled, including having complaining shirts in a closet. "The Saddest Polar Bear in China" in a Guangzhou mall could turn out to be a reincarnation of someone. Back to the United States with "The View from North Dakota" and "...it takes all summer to thaw us out." Barcelona and "...suddenly out on your own limb," with a warm climate not for everyone. On the home front, an adventure told by one's father in "My Father Knew People" and "...with a handshake he could separate the thieves from the saints."

The intensity of death is shown in detail in "Murder at the Indianapolis Zoo" and then what happens. There is "At the Tule Elk Reserve" encounter while hiking and the winner in this gazing match? "Chasing my Potential" and who will win this race? At a desert, the small species prevail and "the black widow combs her web while the elf owl sleeps with one eye open."

"Her" is a wonderful description of a female softball pitcher, who with her precise eyes, wins all the time. "Kicked her leg, cocked her arm all with a loving sigh ...as I watched her final pitch sail by." Teachers can come with any subject, and this one is about "Principles of Welding" with the grade being passing or not, and the teacher's remark, "...keep the fire hot."

The poignant “Dead Bird on the Porch” and what to do next. Intensity of a fire storm burning homes is told in “Fire Chasers” and the reaction of spectators, “ashamed to be spellbound by the misery of others.” “Lucky” is my favorite in this Serchuk collection and the poignant “...which piece of the moon still shines on you, which angels haven’t jumped ship yet.”

The last poems in this book are tongue-in-cheek about life. “End-of-Life Opportunities” are comments a pastor could make in preparation for a funeral. “The Cemetery Called Hollywood Forever” has sly wit as to what happens at the end of a rather poor acting career. Then, there is, toward the end of the poetry collection, “Joe’s Daughter” about a possible marriage to a wild Norwegian girl, “...sweet like cherry wine...” when the person writing is “...bitter grinds of yesterday’s coffee.” What could become of this duo?

Peter Serchuk poems are a glance at life. Some a sideways glance, and others, a study in what is going on. No matter what part of the world, there is still a deep observation of life that brings the reader into the play of things. Like peering over one’s shoulder while the artist paints. Here, it is looking at words unfolding in front of you. From polar bears to wild horses to elks to owls, there are wild creatures here and humans to explore. A microcosm of words that circles the globe.

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 April 1, 2025 - *Editor Note: Highland Park Poetry was deeply saddened to learn of Peter Serchuk's passing on April 11, 2025. Our hearts go out to his family and friends coping with this sudden loss.*

An Altar of Tides **by Peter Ludwin**

Trail to Table Press, 2025

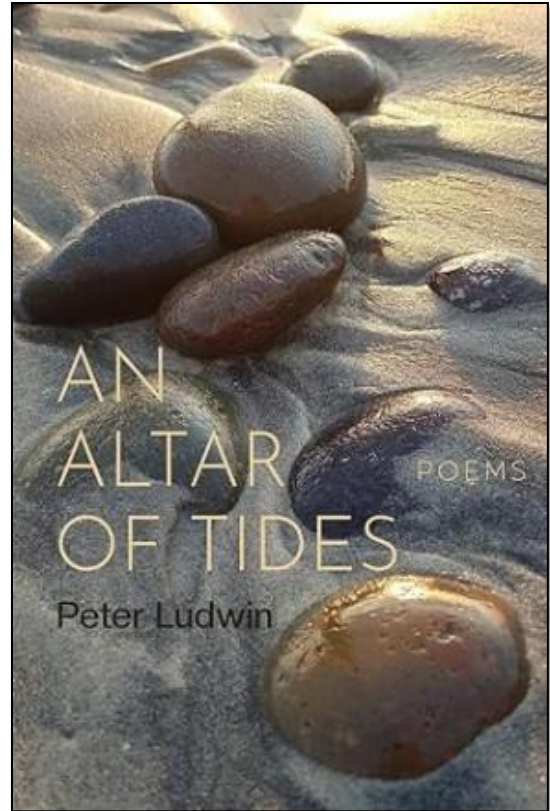
73 Poems ~ 111 pages

ISBN: 979-8-218-44698-7

\$20

Review by Michael Escoubas

Upon my initial reading of Peter Ludwin's *An Altar of Tides*, I opined that this is "just one more" book about the natural world. I've reviewed my share of them. As I donned my literary outdoor gear, laced up ankle high insulated footwear, I realized that I am nothing more than an amateur when it comes to substantive natural world poetry. Peter Ludwin is on a mission; Peter Ludwin has an agenda. This is a poet animated by love for his Pacific Northwest environs. He is concerned about its future. While Ludwin's interests lay primarily with contemporary challenges to the environment, this skilled poet possesses an enviable range of subjects which bear the weight of truly perceptive poetics.



About the Title

In my youthful religious training, I learned that "altars" are sacred places. Deities have fellowship with the faithful at altars. Sacrifices, promises, and obeisance coalesce around them. "Tides" are natural phenomena which indicate the consistent rhythms of planet earth. Informed people, such as Peter Ludwin, make it their business to pay attention to the environment based on science, and may I say it . . . a sense of the sacred being insulted or at least compromised by the actions of people.

Arrangement & Design

The author has arranged his collection under five headings: The Fastening Wood (16), Wind in the Rigging (15), Mirage of the Snowshoe Hare (18), Hay on the Dream Floor (13), and Longing Buried in Stone (11). The headings are fascinating; they are poems in themselves. I invite readers to thoughtfully contemplate linkages between Ludwin's divisions and the poems collected within each.

Themes Extrapolated

“A Reckoning” illustrates my premise that both the sacred and the secular animate Ludwin’s poetry. Also, its tensions. A Forest Service employee’s remark is the chosen epigram: *God put those trees here for us to use!* Of course He did, but at what cost? Within the space of eight tercets, Ludwin describes “a massive fir whose bark, / a text to rival Moses’ tablets, speaks its own moral law.” Somehow, this noble testimony to life, longevity, and wisdom has escaped the “saw’s unholy appetite.” Some compromise must be reached between balance sheets and the noble fir which has “taken this tree hundreds of years to tell its story.”

If birds could talk (some folks think they do) would they sound like the protagonists of “Medicine Crow”? “Mimicking men / on their porches, the birds argue among themselves. / *It was better before they came*, one says. // *Then it was just the sun slanting through cedar.* / That is the Indian crow. No, says another, / *it’s much better now. Who leaves more garbage / for us to scavenge than these people?*” The poem continues recalling a struggle between human and natural forces that has long existed but is now exacerbated.

“Testing Ground” is about a 14-year-old boy on a charter boat out to sea for salmon. Ludwin has a way of plumbing the emotional depths of his characters. In this instance the boy has mixed feelings . . .

I watched the captain bait my gear,
club a fish someone else had caught. It flopped
on the slippery deck, then lay still,

a thin red streak trickling from its mouth.
Riveted by the event, the blood that seconds
before had propelled it to the lure, I trod
the line that separates life from violent death,
grasped at some means to keep the fish.

However, the second an 18-pound coho strikes his lure, another type of struggle occurs within the young man’s psyche. Yes, through the exhilaration of the fight, he had what he wanted. But the last two lines have me scratching my head: “The fish, yes, and the dolphins off the bow. / And something more, something more.” What is that “something” more all about? The best poets give you something to think about. Peter Ludwin does exactly that.

An Altar of Tides is a collection of wide-ranging subject-matter. It is historically accurate and informative. Ludwin is an expert in detail, a skilled poetic craftsman who is energized by the good he can accomplish through the instrument of poetry. Having met

Peter Ludwin through his work, I will never again think in cavalier terms about our magnificent environment.

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 April 1, 2025

Faith Lost and Found **by Jim Hanson**

Cyberwit.net, 2025

145 Pages

ISBN #: 978-9363547681

Review by jacob erin-cilberto

Jim Hanson writes of Faith Lost and Found. Sometimes we cannot corral faith. We may lose it before we are sure what it is. As Robert Creeley penned, "Position is where you put it." Jim writes in his poem "Places":

"in places of blunt destiny
lived out to be conforming fate
when a born baby cried too late"

Fate often comes too late and sometimes faith comes too late as well. We may be born into it but not understand exactly what it is or why we have it until much later in life. Faith can be like the prodigal child. In "Train Never Came," he writes:

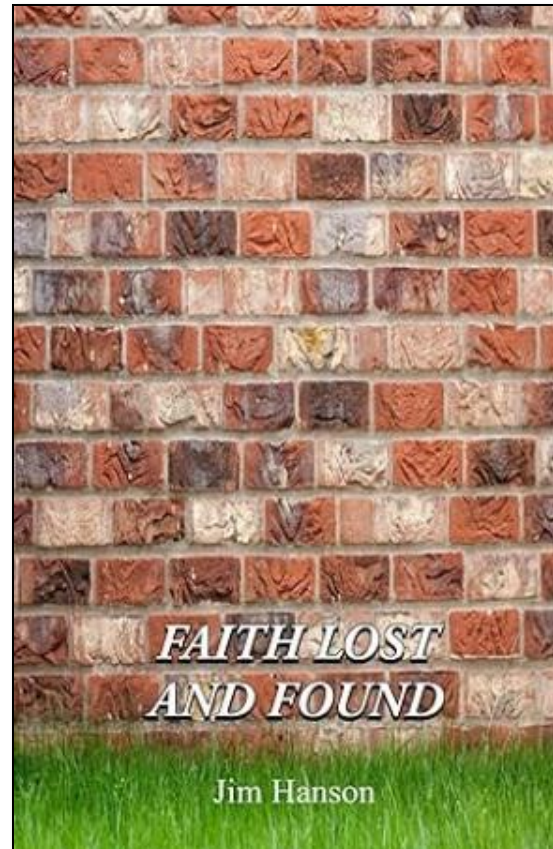
"Each morning at the station
he sat silent on a bench
looking down tracks more narrow
down tracks on worn wooden ties"

I feel here that Hanson may be talking about looking for a faith that has worn down and now he is "looking down the line of light/ showing land of promise/ forgetting tracks and stations/ were abandoned years ago." As a reader who was raised Catholic, I get this. Somehow that train of faith wore down those tracks for me and left me at the station in a confused state with no ticket.

In "Santayana's Realms" he discloses how:

---the atheist died
after ten years in his bedroom
at a Rome convent where
nuns wept and prayed for his soul."

My nuns also wept and prayed for my penmanship to improve. We believe or we don't. No one else's prayers can get us to the finish line. We must run our own race at our own



pace when it comes to faith. I once had an overnight discussion with an atheist. It turned out a draw. I could not sway him and he could not sway me. Jim, in another poem addresses the idea of faith in this way:

“Whether to be or not to be
In a world of no clear meaning.”

I am 75 years old and still am unsure about faith. But Jim Hanson’s *Faith Lost And Found* shows me I am not alone and this book gave me much to ponder, much with which to identify and as he relates in “Star Walk”:

“I asked,
from where he comes
to where he goes.
He replied,
From star stuff he comes
and dark matter he goes.”
“I asked,
if he were a god or avatar
He replied,
A soul with common sense
Of cosmic providence---”

So the question remains as to why we have faith, why we lose it and why we may find it again. Does common sense tell us there is a God or does it tell us there is not? This poetic journey with Jim Hanson surely shed some light on that question.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: jacob erin-cilberto is author of 18 books of poetry, his most recent being *Fishing for Intellectual Meteors*. He teaches at John Logan College and conducts workshops at Heartland Writers Guild, Southern Illinois Writers Guild and Union County Writers Guild.

Posted April 1, 2025

Train of Thought: Poems **By Scott Water**

Kelsay Books, 2025

50 pages

\$17

ISBN #: 978-1639807017

Review by Michael Minassian

Scott Waters new collection of poems *Train of Thought* is a meditative ride through the passing landscape, everyday places, and the people that inhabit them. Scott uses the metaphor of a journey to call attention to the world and our place within it. Full of keen observations, humor, and compassion, these are poems to savor again and again.

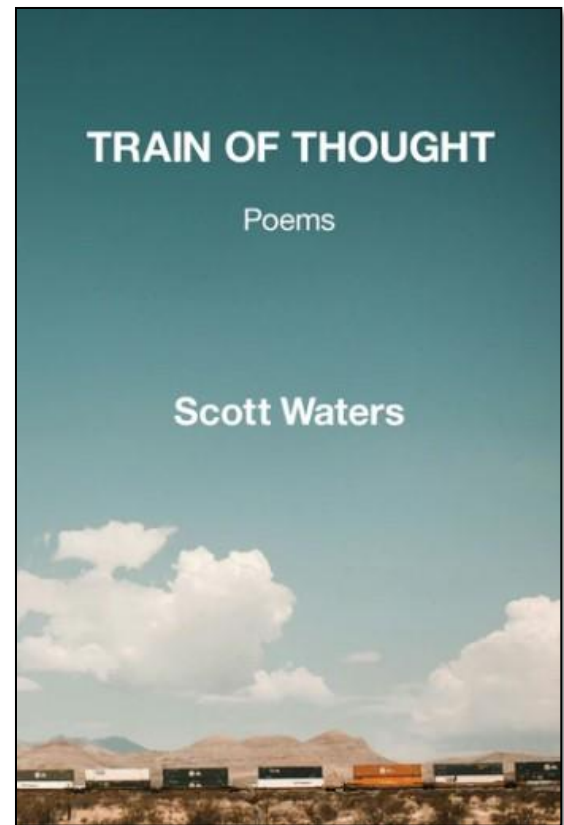
His attention to the small details also makes this such a pleasurable trip. That and his empathy for the wounded souls around us, whether it is a child, a grey bearded man staggering through a train, or a mother with varicose veins hanging laundry. All are treated with respect and affection.

With an occasional stop along the way, the poems take you on a train ride of wonder and discovery. At the outset we are carried along to observe and share in the poet's discerning eye. "When I Took This Job" - the first poem in the collection - grabbed my attention and pulled me in to share in the journey:

"I didn't bank on green dragon hills
sliding on their bellies
toward the Central Valley
breathing poppy flames in spring"

Scott is able to turn the smallest moments into a crescendo of epiphanies. The images pile up: "streaks of rain", "hills stand like horses", "a grey beard/blown like kindling," – cinematic in their vividness. Startling metaphors strung together like train tracks and the occasional use of rhyme, artfully placed and spare, heighten the impact.

The poems show us an individual in awe of his own place in the world, conscious of the vastness of the universe. In the poem "Small," we stand alongside the speaker as he gazes in the mirror. What he sees in his reflection may not be the same picture he has in his head, but it is an honest appraisal, a part of the natural world, good or bad, sublime or



ordinary. No matter, a glance out the window, a bird in flight, an overhead conversation on the train:

“It won’t take much by then –

a spray of white petals
against your windshield

the chatter on the crowded train –

to teach you
just how small

you really are.”

Scott often points out these details, no matter how insignificant they may seem, reminding us to pay attention as in “About the Floor.” After describing the beauty and grandeur of the outside scenery “butterscotch glow” and “beams as thick as battering rams” the poem concludes with a focus not the passing beauty but on “The filthy/train/floor.”

In the poem “Mumbly Old Men” he tells a story with sly humor,

“You kids may not believe it
but there was a time when people held
the New York Times in ink-stained hands.”

reminding us that the actual world resides not the digital universe, but in the physical realm we can touch, feel, sense, hear and smell. Scott ends the poem by turning it back on his own generation:

“the way we laughed at our own
fathers and grandfathers.”

The last poem in the collection “I took a train to Fresno” gives us cinematic images of the beauty of the passing scenery: windmills and orchards, mountains and marshes,

“criss-crossed white swords
of irrigation spray doing wet battle
scattered droplets winking like diamonds
on the hilt of noon...

contrasted with other scenes of malls and rusty trucks.

“the distracted sky still gazed on
and so did I”

The speaker can't look away, wanting to take it all in, as I did as I read the poems in this fine collection. Join the train ride. You'll be glad you did.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, and *A Matter of Timing* as well as a chapbook, *Jack Pays a Visit*, are all available on Amazon. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>

Posted April 1, 2025

Laughing in Yiddish: Poetry by Jamie Wendt

Broadstone Books, 2025

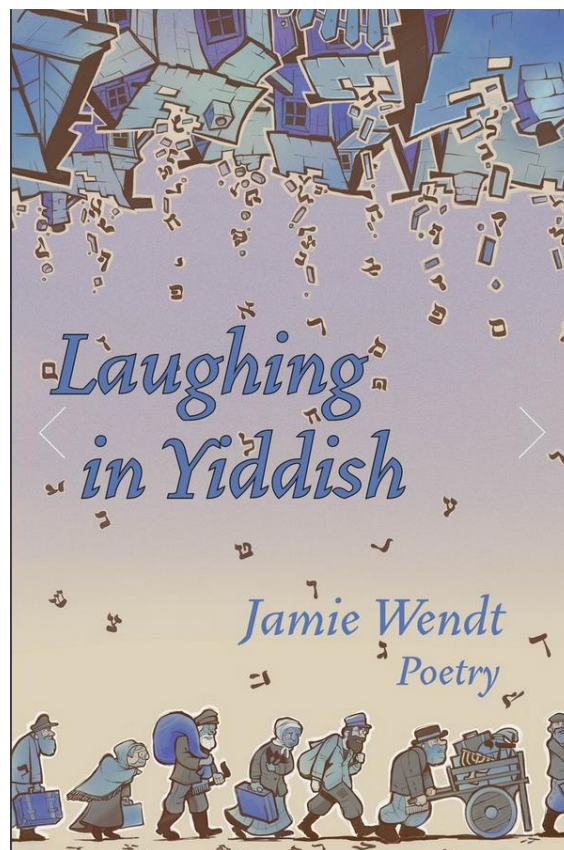
85 Pages

ISBN # 978-1-956782-96-7

\$25

Review by Lois Baer Barr

Laughing in Yiddish is no laughing matter. It is a survival skill developed over centuries of exclusion, expulsion, and pogroms. Jamie Wendt's book explores Eastern European Jewish DNA and creates a cultural map of wandering, through a deep dive into her personal history as well as the history of Jewish immigrants in Chicago. Her ancestors immigrated to America from Russia in the 19th century and then to Chicago just before the turn of the century. Historic landmarks, such as Maxwell Street, New York's Glass Castle, Babi Yar, and Kishinev, leave deep impressions on the poet's sense of a collective past. Many of the poems derive from her research into S. Ansky's ethnographic study of shtetl life containing photographs by Solomon Iudovin. The other major sources are oral history of her own family and the artwork of an important but lesser-known Chicago artist Todros Geller.



The three opening poems invoke the Ushpizin, who must be invited and honored in the sukkah, the booth Jews build for the harvest festival of Sukkoth. Celebrating with her children, the poet introduces her forebears, sweet ghosts who join Abraham and Sarah, the traditional guests of the holiday. But her message is stark. "Ash is in your bones," (3) she tells her children. The next two poems invoke matriarchs. Although it is traditional to invite Sarah, who is included with Abraham for the first night, Wendt writes instead about Yoheved, Moses's mother. In this persona poem, Yoheved vows to save her first born son from Pharoah's cruel decree.

I will always be waiting within the sand
city, my breath among the reeds,
weaving the wind with a lullaby
that will save my son.

Next the poet invokes her great grandmother Sadelle Freeman in another persona poem set in Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1941. Her grandmother had gone to find a cure for her rheumatism. She found herself an outsider, she didn't fit in with the white Christian society or the black society.

The fourth poem is a persona poem in which Odessa-born artist Todros Geller speaks of his estrangement. "Goats Evade Demands and Chains" is an ekphrastic poem treating a woodcut from a 1930 book, *Land to Land*.

A master of many forms, Wendt includes pantoums, ghazals, a triolet, a prose poem, and many ekphrastic poems. "Colossal Music," for example, is based on a Chagall painting of a fiddler. She uses the ghazal in "Ner Tamid" (Everlasting Light) to weave work of the ghetto with the work of the woodcut artist Todros. In this poem poet and artist honor the skill of the shoemaker by casting his work as holy and eternal.

Persona poems predominate. The Eisenhower Expressway speaks in two poems. It's hard to pick a favorite in this fine collection, but I have read and reread "The Eisenhower Expressway Speaks, 1951." While both poems deal with the destruction of neighborhoods and the upheaval created by the building of the expressway, there is also a touch of whimsy. The construction site becomes a playground for boys in "After summer storms/I turn into a brown river." (48) But as always there is darkness which here becomes macabre. After the removal of a cemetery, another rain leaves bones for the boys to gather like dogs in a game of fetch.

Wendt's light touch allows us to read about miscarriages, ghosts, dead butterflies, a son born with low expectations for survival. Other poems deal with pogroms in Kishniev and Kuziai Forest Lithuania. These tragic events are redeemed by their beauty. The imagery is striking and original as she points out how history repeats itself.

AFTER READING BIALIK'S "IN THE CITY OF SLAUGHTER"

In Israel and Gaza, homes and houses of worship cave in
like a woman huddled over her pregnant belly.
Screams of sliced pain stretch the length
of a photograph where people climb skeletons

of buildings. ...

When I agreed to review this book, I expected to find the broad Yiddish humor of the Catskills or Second Avenue, but instead I found Jewish rituals, the Kaddish prayer (in Aramaic), the Yiddish culture of the shtetl and the work of master poets like Chaim Nachman Bialik. I found only one Yiddish word in the text. Maxwell Street is called a kesselgarden. More often Wendt uses Hebrew words instead of Yiddish. For example, she writes about the Golem, which in Hebrew means embryo or unfinished work and not the Yiddish word golem (a lump of clay).

Although laughter is mentioned two or three times in the book, other emotions prevail. Love of family, fear of loss, joy of celebration, such as lighting Havdalah candles to separate the holiness of the Sabbath from the “mundane” weekday world. There is empathy in “Sadelle Freeman, 1941.” In this persona poem, her grandmother expresses sadness about the Black women of Hot Springs Arkansas

who couldn't share the baths with me,
couldn't cool the blisters on their feet,
their melodies strong and beautiful,
healing more than water.

Finally, there is pride in the story of how her family name Pretcovitz became Freeman at Ellis Island. In “Interview with Papa: ‘Freeman,’” as the legend goes, her great grandfather yelled, “I am a free man.” (34)

While I often find the use of archival photos too generic on Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s “Finding Your Roots,” in Wendt’s work, Iudovin’s photography is examined with the careful lens of the poet. As her poem, “Light and Dark,” suggests, chiaroscuro and antithesis are a central structural element of this saga of joy and sorrow. Wendt has connected past and present in a rich and imaginative collection of poems. “Above the Valley” is the last poem in the collection. In this poem, the poet keeps a vigil at her father’s deathbed. Here she reiterates the aesthetic and emotional goal of her work: the faithful rendering of her family’s history. Let’s give her the last word.

There was once a wound bigger than the humid sky.
And you were there, holding back the cracking clouds.
I will keep you. Let me tell you a story.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Lois Baer Barr studied Yiddish with Dr. Khane-Faygl (Anita) Turteltaub of blessed memory. She was co-executive producer of the documentary *Isa Kremer: The People’s Diva* 2000. Her recent novel, *The Tailor’s Daughter*, recounts the coming of age of her mother, whose parents immigrated from Bialystok to Louisville in 1920. www.loisbaerbarr.com

Posted May 1, 2025

Thanks for Stopping By **by Miriam Sagan**

Blue Edge Books, 2025

85 pages

ISBN # 979-8-9854357-3-3

\$16

Review by Marie Asner

Miriam Sagan has written over thirty books of poetry, memoir and fiction, including “Anybody Home?” and “On the Mercy Me Planet.” Her poetry was set to music for the Santa Fe Women’s Chorus, and incised on stoneware for haiku pathways, among other honors.

The poems in “Thanks for Stopping By” are not titled.

“Thanks for Stopping By” takes the reader through several avenues of Sagan’s life, and a short passage at the end of the book, explains what the thread is that holds the poems together. Miriam Sagan was diagnosed with a rare cancer and undergoing treatment which tells the reader, in non-medical terms, what to expect. The poems are fragments of thought. The person is on a table receiving treatment, as “the lettuce has finally bolted, gone to seed, it’s August, the lump in my left breast takes another diurnal turn around the sun.”

There are also poems about observations by the poet, love, for example, “we set out to dream the same dream,” or “peace that lasts as long as a screen door takes to slam.” When a husband dies, “...of how Bodhisattvas behave, memory, a watered-down kind of hope.”

There are three poems about a woman named Nadezdha who lives in a part of the world where there is war, and she is trying to survive. “Her name is Hope,” and she writes poetry with notebooks given to her, “Nadezdha hides the poems in the soup pot as the secret police bang on the door,” and “in the apartment blocks, the neighbors on each stairwell banded together.”

For the reader who is undergoing chemotherapy or knows of someone who is, the poems let you know what to expect on those long hours through treatment, drip by drip, sigh by



sigh. Men are increasingly being included in having breast cancer, so the long hours can mean both male and female who see what the edge of pain is like. The poem about seeing a pregnant woman walking a dog is short, but makes a poignant point in “I also harbor something that is growing inside me that I can’t deliver.”

A nurse takes the writer’s coat and won’t give it back, “I’m sorry.... I haven’t had a vacation at all since last month.” My favorite is toward the end of the book about Marcus Aurelius and his comment, “what you cannot have, you cannot lose.” The poet is getting radiation treatment and “, a lymph node gone rogue.....unable to keep the barbarians from my gate.”

Miriam Sagan poems show what it is like to undergo medical treatment and feel helpless. Strength comes from thinking of places that have been visited, people you have met and all to keep one from knowing that the treatment is either going to cure or fail. Such is life and this particular situation is brought to the forefront in the Miriam Sagan poems. Wisps of thought that go through the mind to endure and heal. "Life is not as easy as crossing a field, and crossing a field isn't that easy."

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Marie Asner balances a life of being a poet, freelance writer, book reviewer and entertainment reviewer. Marie is one of the film critics on the Rotten Tomatoes website and IMDB (International Movie Data Base). The Kansas Arts Commission selected her for a grant on poems of Amelia Earhart and to be part of Kansas Arts On Tour. Marie Asner has been published on PBS.org, been a Pushcart Poetry Award nominee.

Posted May 1, 2025

A Journeyman's Poems
by jacob erin-cilberto

Praying Mantis Press, 2025

44 pages

ISBN #: 9798309065400

Review by Patricia E. DeJong

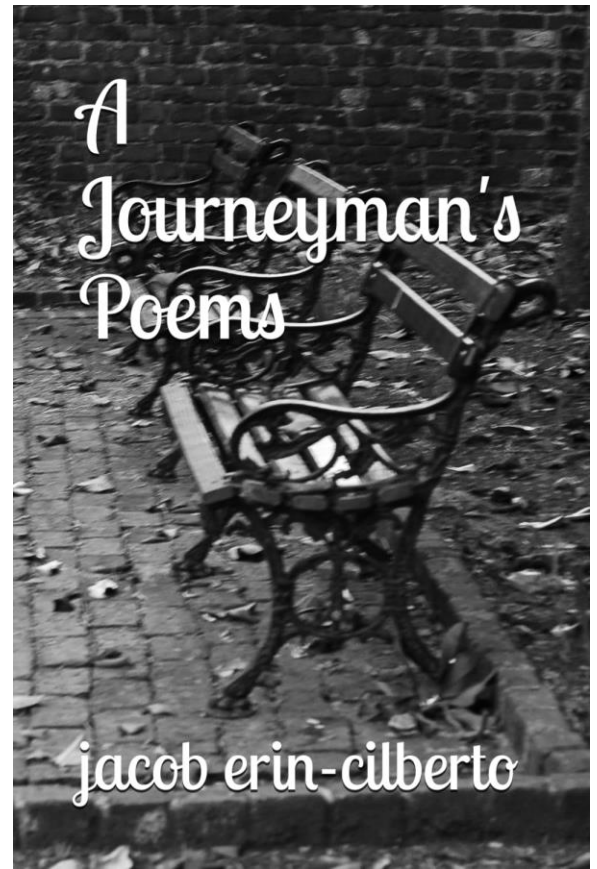
As an avid fan, it is a joy to read another collection of poems from jacob erin-cilberto.

I am always astounded by what seems to be easily called upon metaphors, Senryu's and Haiku's when I know they are anything but. His writing is uniquely his own even the presentation of his work is unique with lower case letters as with his name which I view as simply humble. Why bother with capital letters and punctuation when the words speak for themselves and give the reader a range of which to conclude at the end. There is much to be gained by his work in wisdom, variety, and entertainment and one can only sigh with a bit of envy for his gift for writing poetry.

This collection is wonderfully introspective and suited to the times. You can see how his journey reflects his view of the world, people, relationships, politics, and nature. He writes short and powerful poems that always leave one contemplating the meaning in relation to one's own life and views. I was particularly taken by his poem, "a guitar string found after the bombing", (note the lower case even in the title). If I could write out the full poem for you I would because every line is amazingly good, and the message is profound. I can share with you these exceptional lines...

...teachers preach
 but the genius
 will teach
 others to mimic
 graphic equations

and pretend the sum of all the pretense
 will shatter war and poverty
 and suicide...



...who is as blind
 as the teacher
 and as genius
 as the one who wrote songs
 just before the music
 heard itself silenced.

Another poem, “The Color of the Pages” stood out for me. First thing I noticed was the capital letters in the title and after reading the poem my conclusion was that it was done so out of respect. Of course this is just my choicy opinion, but it was a noticeable and notable observation to this reader and perhaps after reading the full poem yourself you might give some thought as to why the author did so when he is known for his lower-case lettering and absence of punctuation. Here are a few lines to help with that thought...

...We had to take Black American Writers as a course
 and when I read these authors
 I pondered why they weren’t just included with the White writers
 all merited the same values we put to any classic author.

in the middle of the week, a White author would lecture us
 on these Black writers as if he knew
 what it was like to be them...

He goes on with his thought and disappointment and a conclusion with just a hint of anger over the education we receive, or the lack of, that can manipulate one’s view. I dare say, the world and the country being what it is right now, this poem really spoke to me.

Of course not all the poetry in his collection are so “heavy”, some are lighthearted as with Senryu #344 that speaks to those rare and exceptional friendships.

Boardwalk blues child
 born of friends with benefits
 she glistens pure gold

I know you will really enjoy this collection as much as I do. And I will end with a thank you to jacob erin-cilberto for his contribution to the art of poetry and to my collection.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: Patricia E. DeJong is the Author of *From this Side of the Picture Window* and *As the Ink Dries*. She is a married, retired Registered Nurse from Machesney Park in Northern Illinois.

Posted May 1, 2025

Lovin Me Always
by Crystal L. Goss

Page Publishing, 2023
 56 Poems ~ 60 pages
 Price: \$15
 ISBN #: 979-8889608806
 Review by Michael Escoubas

After fifty-five years of marriage, I have much to learn about the art of love. It is with grace and humility that Crystal L. Goss offers solid thinking about love. Her debut collection shares fresh insights that this reviewer appreciates. While I am reluctant, as a reviewer, to simply “sign-on” (no questions asked) with a writer’s point of view, Goss, writes from her heart with no pretense and no hidden social agenda.

Engaging Titles

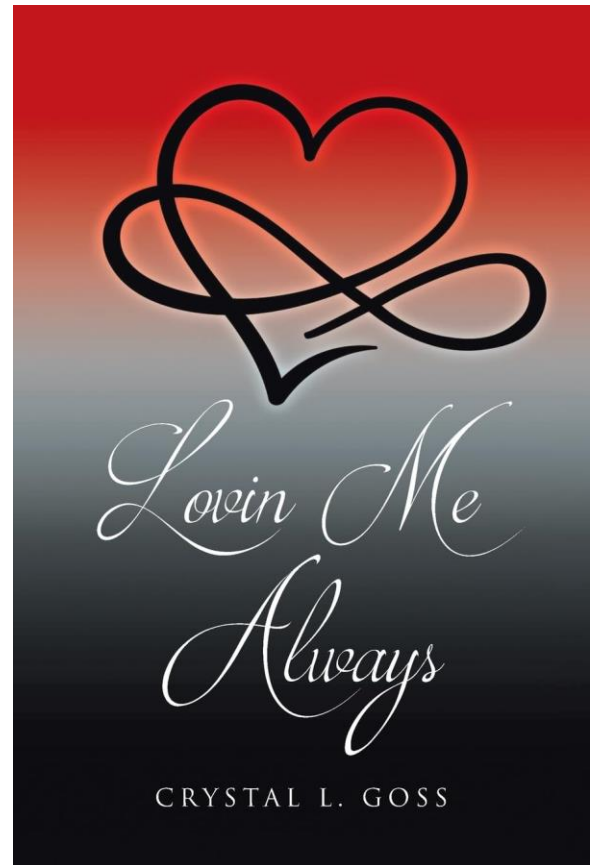
I pre-read my review collections by perusing their titles. Goss is good with titles. When I read titles such as “All I Ask,” “Are You Too Busy,” “Do You Know How to Love,” “How Things Seem,” “Validation,” “What I Feel,” and “Why Change,” I recall, over the decades, these same questions/themes arising between Trudy and me. They are common to most couples and yet remain as fresh as if they have never been asked before.

Style

Goss writes in a very loose free verse style. I would name it *prose poetry* as distinguished from formal or classical verse. She writes as much as one speaking in normal conversation over coffee with a friend. She uses internal rhyme effectively and her work bears witness to music-like cadences that kept me focused on the page. Here is an excerpt from “The First Time”:

The First Time ever I saw your face, I knew I was in the right place. The first time, you held me close, you held me tight. I knew then everything would be alright, I could feel your heart beat, your soul seep, from your body to mine, even though it’s just between you and I, we are going to be just fine.

Note both internal rhyme and alliteration, “I could feel your / heart beat, your soul seep, from your body to mine, . . . we are going to be just fine.”



Highlights

Excerpt from “That First Kiss”:

That first kiss was like heaven to my lips, I knew you had me the moment you started, oh then how my lips parted, wanting more, and more of you, wanting to feel your whole body against mine, What the Hell, have I just lost my mind?

Even today, in our fifth decade of marriage, Trudy and I often recall that moment when both of our worlds changed forever.

As we drew ever closer to getting married, our thoughts coincided with this excerpt from “A Better Life”:

When you make her life better, She'll feel like the sun and the moon came
together and made love to each other

Your love and your desire to change things for her makes her want to love
you forever. She'll think about the pleasure of it all, just makes her want it
all. She'll take her share of you and do what It do, Love you!

While such idealism is worthy of applause, Goss also knows that, over time, two people in love grown ever-deeper, ever-more-mature in their respect for each other. This comes out in this excerpt from “A New Us”:

It's now a New Year, a New You, a New Me, a New Us, and this is where I choose to be, loving you until my heart explodes and my mind goes numb, I just look at you and can feel the love, A Love that shows just how much you want and desire a New Us.

We steal away the moments to share, this is where we show how much we really care, this is where we put all the love that have to the test, we show as much as we can bear and we show all of our best, not to just each other do we love on, but one another we tell how want a New Us.

Lovin Me Always has much to commend it to contemporary literature on the subject. I have a feeling, unconfirmed, that Crystal Goss and her husband are well acquainted this famous Bible text on love:

When I was a child,
I talked like a child,
I thought like a child,
I reasoned like a child.

When we grew up,
We put the ways of childhood behind us.

And now these three remain:
faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

First Corinthians 13.11 & 13

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 May 1, 2025

A Yellowed Notebook
by Beth SKMorris

unispeech, 2025

95 pages

ISBN: 979-8218569662

Review by jacob erin-cilberto

Many of us preserve a litany of memories of our fathers. A very select few can put that litany into an array of intense poems paying homage to whom we consider a great man. This collection of poetry by Beth SKMorris is a brilliant mesh of her own works combined with illustrations of her father's life in snippets of his poetry, snapshots of his baseball cards, war memorabilia and other scraps collected which show her father actually was in life and who he was in her perspective.

She writes, “My father was a whistler---/ pop songs, operatic arias, all four movements of Beethoven’s Fifth.” In this poem, she also shares, “listening to Nat King Cole on our portable./ lathered in baby oil, faces tilted to the sun, / my sister smoking her purloined Pall Malls.” These lines are most interesting given they present the combined voices of a father and daughter, much like the duets put together by Natalie Cole to display what would have been had she and her father gotten to sing duets.

I related to the sister smoking Pall Malls. The unfiltered cigarettes much like the unfiltered life her father led. And I remember how I “purloined my father’s Salems to sneak a puff here and there in secret.

In “How to Get Attention From a Father Who Works Three Jobs,” we are reminded of how it was back when fathers garnered the label of “Absentee Father” because they were so busy providing for us, they had little time to nurture us. One of this poet’s ploys to get attention states:

“hide his favorite Fanny Farmer
Chocolates before he gets home: under
towels in the linen closet, inside mother’s
hat boxes, the laundry hamper---
laugh at his frustration, fruitless search
for the box, the midnight treasure

hunt you send him on
again and again---”

(I used to find places to hide my dad’s wrench in his tool closet---drove him crazy.)

On one page, Beth includes this blurb about her father:

David G. Kaplan
(December 26, 1977)
“Besides being a practicing furrier,
he was for many years Chairman
of the Fur Department at the High
School of Fashion Industries...”
Fur Age Weekly

SKMorris further shares her admiration for this man. She departs from the emotional attachment to be objective, showing us his greatness as a businessman.

In “At the Factory,” Beth writes of her father’s “Surgeon-like precision, searched/ for imperfections: uneven stitching.” He not only restitched imperfections of her life but also his own imperfections.

“repaired his own body
With wedges that would
Sustain him into old age.”

Again, as a reader I am relating to her words. My dad stitched together a strong life, even with imperfections---he restitched mine as well as his own and lived to be almost 98. In “Because” she writes:

“The code blue alarm sounded,
I stepped out into the hallway,
the nurses ran
to his bedside,
the Doctor wept---
my father was gone----”

Many wept when my father died in the dementia unit. Those who only knew him there not as I had throughout his and my life.

But what Beth gives us in this “Yellowed Notebook” are pages of a beautiful kinship in which a daughter shows great respect and admiration, and of course, Love, for a father who did as most fathers do, the best they can.

It is hard to read this poetry book without finding ourselves immersed in memory and love for our own fathers.

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 June 1, 2025

Gatherings: Poems **by Dan Fitzgerald**

Kelsay Books, 2025

46 pages

ISBN#: 978-1639806973

Price: \$17

Review by Michael Escoubas

No less a luminary than John Keats had this to say about why poets write poetry:

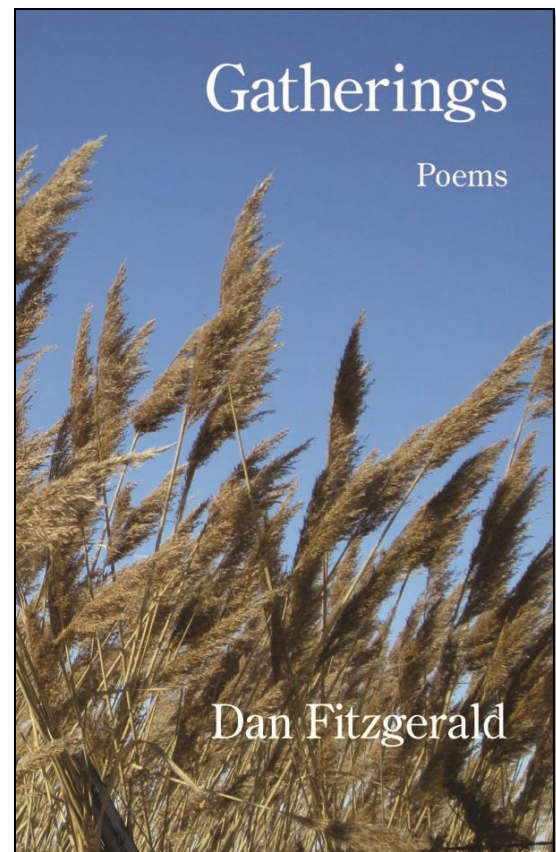
*Poetry should strike the reader as a wording of his
own highest thoughts, and appear
almost as a remembrance.*

Keats observation resonated as I took a deep dive into *Gatherings*, Dan Fitzgerald's latest collection. What stood out to me was Fitzgerald's love of life, his commitment to looking for and finding beauty and spiritual sustenance on planet earth. Moreover, *Gatherings* is "plural," which suggests a variety of gatherings the poet intends to explore.

Fitzgerald leads with "A Collection of Things." This poem features common things "gathered" within his home: pictures on the wall, "Picked up over the years, / some cared for with love, / some hung to fill a spot." Each picture has a story to tell, holds a special place in the poet's life. They hang by the same things I have in my own home: screws, nails, wires, strings . . . a kind of life-definition . . . we're "a collection of things."

Considering Keats' axiom that thoughts appear "almost as a remembrance," "Never Getting Done," highlights Fitzgerald's delightful use of irony:

I can't believe how much time
I waste in a day:
distracted by birds at a fountain,
waylaid by a book found
idle on a table,
ambushed by clouds proud



to be in the sky.
There was that time
when half a day was lost
just talking to an old friend.
And all that time down by the river,
just listening, watching, pondering
how many ways water flows over stones.
It is no wonder I never
get anything done.

This poem refreshes me; it takes me back to my youth, when I held my head under a deep-well pump on 95-degree days in July. Wasting time? Let's *waste* more time with such poetry.

"Campfire Smoke Rises," highlights Fitzgerald's facility with sound and outdoorsy ambiance: "Campfire smoke rises like incense / as the crackling prayers of flames / burn the stacked wood to ash." The poem continues with brushstrokes that paint "Stars that blink in the night through milky clouds," and "fire flares in the dark." The campfire becomes a kind of "sacrament" as voices "mix with the rising smoke." The whole poem becomes a mystical experience within the space of a mere seventeen lines.

"Helping Out," is a gathering of light sources; a varying of senses, shadows, a buffer against that which might otherwise take us down. Here is an excerpt:

I light a candle
from time to time.
There are all kinds scattered
around my rooms:
small votives, three inch pillars,
tapers long and short.

The poet subtlety marries his penchant for candles to practical experiences that define his life:

The one burning now, I lit
this morning when I got out of bed.
This day felt like it needed

a little help to move on its way.

His very surroundings become “gatherings” around which life coalesces. Fitzgerald captures another example of this in “Childhood Picture Gifts.” The poet discovers a long-lost envelope of pictures drawn during his childhood. They had been “resting” in a drawer as if waiting to be rediscovered . . . a blessing deferred.

I return to Keats’ axiom as the poet reflects on what “The Years,” have meant:

*Poetry should strike the reader as a wording of his
own highest thoughts, and appear
almost as a remembrance.*

They sit together,
the years,
talking among themselves,
telling old stories,
the occasional old lie.
New things come to them
as the days add up,
making one more year
to join the group.
They seem happy enough,
Even though some have seen
rough times.
Content in a way,
Though a little weary
that there are so many of them now.
I don’t know what to say
to them anymore.
They have heard so much
from me already.
So mostly, I just listen
letting them talk.
They seem pretty good
at telling me what I need
to know.

I am confident that John Keats would agree. *Gatherings* is 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 June 1, 2025

Night Music: Poems
by B. J. Buckley

Finishing Line Press, 2024

82 pages

ISBN#: 979-8888388136

Price: \$22.99

Review by Michael Escoubas

B.J. Buckley's *Night Music* features Buckley's responses to three influential artists: Japanese painter, Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), composer Fryderyk Franciszek Chopin (1810-1849), and Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). All three lived as unequaled practitioners in their respective fields: painter, composer, and poet.

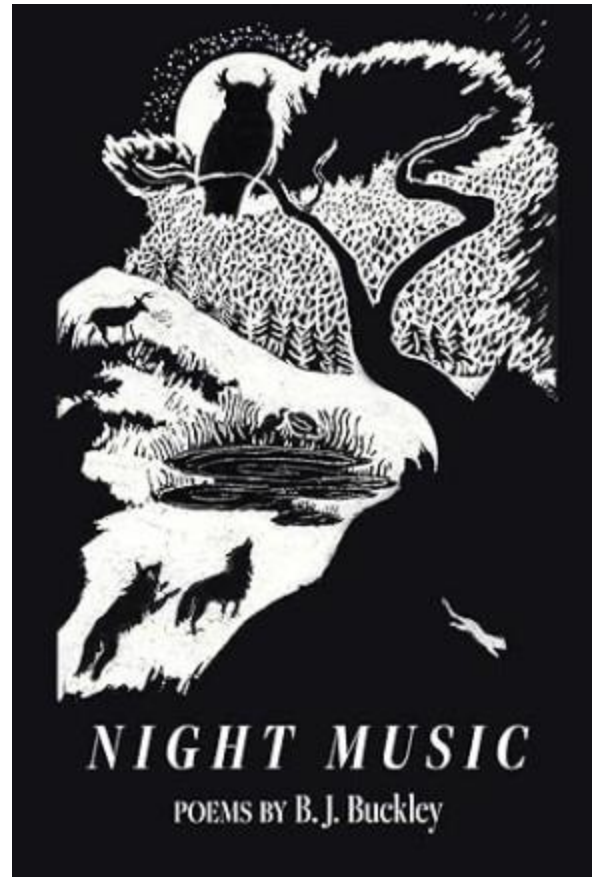
In casual conversations with the poet, I learned that the poems in *Night Music* took years of focused study to complete. In depth research into the lives of her subjects along with immersion into their artistic techniques has yielded a superior collection.

Buckley dedicates *Night Music* to cover artist Dawn Senior-Trask, her lifelong friend, no doubt because their minds and creative values share the same rarified air. Buckley also quotes an important saying by Leonardo da Vinci in her dedication:

*Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt,
 and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.*

This famous insight serves as a guiding principle for Buckley, a principle she implements consistently into her compositions.

Night Music is organized into three divisions: "Hiroshige's Mistress," "Playing the Nocturnes," and "Love and Sorrow." The poems in each division embrace da Vinci's maxim.



Here's an example from "Full Moon, Late September," in which the poet studies red:

Stillness, empty of
all motion, upon which float
rafts of fallen leaves. ‘
Vermilion, scarlet, crimson,
burgundy, rust, carnelian—

I visualize the early autumn moon revealing color nuances, the stillness itself, a kind of caesura, blends into Buckley's title as a significant musical component.

"Hiroshige's Mistress: Her Pillow Book" is the lead poem in a section comprised of seven love poems. "Pillow Book" features twenty-seven poems written as extended haiku. Typically, each poem consists of five lines or less. They are gorgeously erotic:

The moon is drunk on
the sweet wine of my body—
Why, your empty glass?
Every maple, flaming pyre—
if leaves were tears—wind, crying.

Or this:

Open blossoms, rain-
filled, overflowing—scattered
on the damp earth, their
petals, red, each one a flame—

Across my floor, dropped garments.

One senses Chopin's "mood" music in "Playing the Nocturnes." The poet has invested time in Chopin's compositions. She listened to their melodies as they played on the strings of her heart. Each poem bears the title of the dominant key in which Chopin composed the piece: #1 in *B-flat minor*, #2 in *E-flat major*, #3 in *B major*, etc. Buckley has written a poem for each of Chopin's twenty-one nocturnes. Here is #5 in *F-sharp major*:

The birds, so quiet all day
in the deep cold
break their hunger—
last gathering—
sparrows,
finches,
nuthatches in pairs
mining crevices
of bark.
And ravens, the black uncles, sorrowing
in the stripped carcass
of a deer.
Red-tail hawk. A stillness
with wings.

I was totally mesmerized when I heard several of these pieces played by pianist Arthur Rubinstein. Buckley spent an entire year relearning how to play the piano, listening to Rubenstein and other classical artists play these masterpieces.

By my count Buckley's poems feature dozens of hooved animals, fowls, fishes, felines, and trees and grasses of every description. In all three sections, Buckley skillfully weaves natural-world beauty and mystery into the warp and woof of her compositions.

Section three "Love and Sorrow," focuses on Pablo Neruda's love poems. Written at the virile age of nineteen, Neruda's work is a rich mine of sensory material. Here Buckley's use of poetic tools rises to the surface "The Wind is Washing the Leaves," is reproduced below in full:

The wind is washing the leaves and hanging them to dry
on the slenderest twigs, the thinnest branches, the wind

is laundering the old clothes worn by willow and cottonwood,
so ragged, so yellow, torn and spattered insect wing, burned

by early frosts. If I had a shirt with a frayed collar a small
stain, loose button hanging by a blue thread like a tiny

moon suspended from a pocket, I could let the wind
take it up in her hands, I could let the air's clean body

pretend, for awhile, that it loved me, though we both
were so poor, and dressed in rags.

You may have noticed that this poem consists of two extended sentences. The lines are paced and nurtured as one in love might let thoughts and words “wash out” with the wind.

Patterning her poems after Neruda, using free form with lineage varying from ten-syllables to fourteen, Buckley “lets herself go,” like a blues musician following the music wherever it leads. I wonder what notes the poet was hearing when she wrote:

Any part of you would be enough, enough for me—
the softness of your hair scattered across my pillow.

Pick up a copy of *Night Music* and be immersed in the sights, sounds, and mysteries of love. You may well decide to compose your own “night music.”

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 June 1, 2025

***Traveling Through Time:
Collected Poems*
by William Marr**

Independently Published by Allan Harris,
2025

953 Poems, 452 pages, 1956 - 2025

Price: Free downloadable link

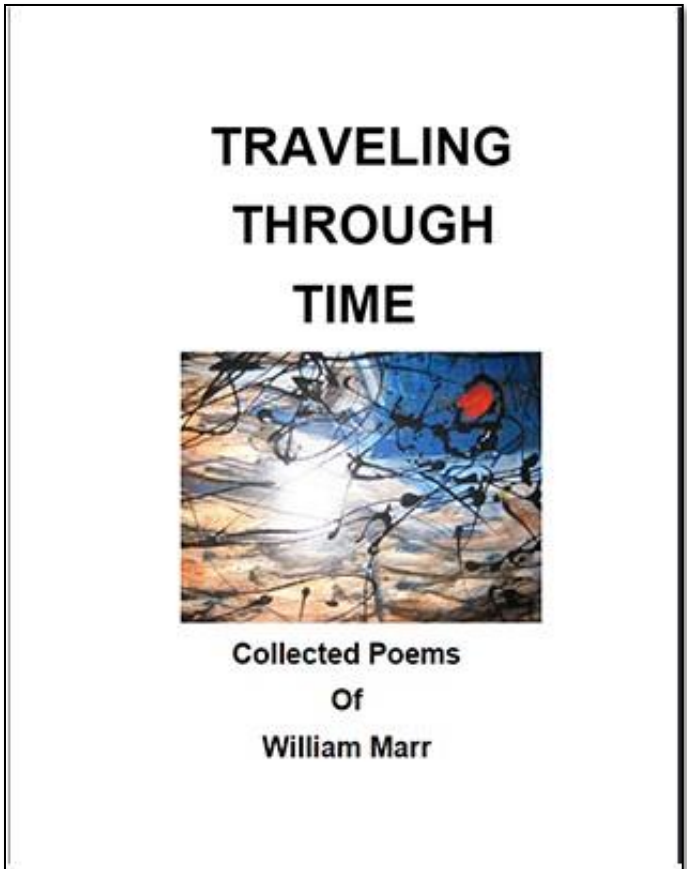
ISBN: None since it is a .pdf file online

To Access: Go to

<https://alharris.com/william-marr/traveling.pdf>

Review by Michael Escoubas

Now in his eighth decade, William Marr has published over 30 poetry books. A bilingualist, his poetry collections include translations in Chinese, English, bilingual translations in Chinese and English, as well as translations in French, Italian, and one Korean translation. *Traveling Through Time: Collected Poems* is a gift. It is a gift, not because it is “free,” but because its artistic craftsmanship has stood the test of time.



Poet Philip Larkin in his poem entitled “Days” had this to say about time:

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Indeed, Bill Marr understands “days.” He understands “time.” *Traveling Through Time* begins in 1956. Awareness of time is a thread woven throughout the work beginning with his 1956 poem “At the Mountainside”:

I met a little boy at a mountainside
who was quick to laugh and cry

tears had hardly rolled down his cheeks
when a sweet smile bloomed at the corner of his mouth

there was nothing purer than his sparkling tears
nothing more beautiful than his angelic face
I understood the intention of the Creator
and was moved by the child's innocence

I stared at him with a deep feeling
warmth flooded my heart
tears of gratitude welled up in my eyes
when I looked again he was gone

In this epiphany, Marr treats his reader to a visionary ideal in human form. This “purity” of sparkling tears and “angelic” face cannot be captured and held as one's own. The poet is delighted to have been granted this foretaste of glory, a glimpse he happily shares.

In “Harbor” (1957) Marr combines personification, contrast, and irony to convey the “chilling” feeling, captured by a moment in time, when a beloved child departs to go his own way:

1
the harbor was asleep
when the fog moved in
a strange beast in her nightmare
licked her with its wet tongue
she woke to find the world
weeping

2
watching helplessly the departure
of a roaming son
she wondered why
she had to be a southern port
that never freezes

I remember well the Go-Go dance craze of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Marr uses it here in a subtle commentary on life and on the Vietnam war:

Go-Go Dancing

Shedding shedding shedding
 your arms her hair my loneliness
 Restless heels are red and swollen
 the journey of life is long and without end

Desperate are the besieged souls
 sallying forth at every beat of the war drums
 and the horns are stretching their long necks
 calling you calling you calling you
 a string of ominous names

Darling
 Why are you shivering?

By way of subjects, William Marr's poetry knows, no limits. His poems are about family, faith, war, love, hate, animals, the natural world, politics, the environment, current events, and more. Humor, satire, irony, personification, alliteration, enjambment, and surprise endings, are just a few of his tools. His poems are cryptic. This is characteristic of Asian poets who think and write in pictures. A word of caution: Marr does not *coddle* his readers. He expects "us" to "do our part" by reading his poems slowly and thoughtfully. As I prepared to write my review, I was rewarded manyfold by doing this.

"Watching Snow from the Window," reminds me of Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." Marr, like Stevens, is less concerned about the obvious subject of his poem than about the life-perspectives embedded within it:

1
 black men's
 white teeth
 no longer showing
 good tempers

2

a piece of snow on the branch
suddenly falls
when the bird with a frozen song
flies away

3

as the footprints in the snow
get deeper and deeper
they become harder and harder
to comprehend

4

Falling on the feverish face of
a homesick boy
the snow melts and turns into
a warm tropical shower

5

coldness makes us independent
we carefully hold our breath
as long as the sun won't show its face
we are certain to have a white Christmas

6

in the wind
the trembling hands of a withered tree
open upward
the dormant seeds in the cracked soil
are ready to sprout

7

A sudden toll
of the steeple bell
shakes down
the snow from the Cross

Marr's poems contain "layered" meanings. That is, they are open to a range of interpretations and life-applications. For example, "At the Concert" (1970) can be interpreted both literally as well as figuratively: "thick and heavy / music rains down / like a net // choked on surging waves / in its flight / a panicky soul / bursts out / an earth-shattering cough."

Well known for his animal poems, Marr (from 1981) delighted me with poems about: goats, tigers, bald eagles, a rooster, dogs, ducks, cats, horses, snakes, dragons, a caged lion and more. "The Goat," channels the poet's crusty grand-father:

standing erect on a cliff
was my stern
grandfather

in a dark night
they woke me up from my dream
and took the acrophobic me to him
asking me to touch his whiskers
with my sweaty palm
and to jump over the black

generation gap

In a mere eight lines Marr conveys a deep understanding about war:

War Arithmetic

Both sides claim
numerous enemies have been killed
Both sides declare
we've suffered no losses

Nobody understands
the arithmetic of war
Only the fallen
know the number

Throughout this amazing collection Marr demonstrates a profound sensitivity to civilization's conundrums. "The Great Wall," among Mainland China's most distinguishing features, stands out in this regard:

1
The struggle between civilization
and barbarism
must be ferocious
See this Great Wall
it twists and turns
with no end in sight

2
What valor
to climb the ragged ridge
and to look long and hard
through a self-adjusting lens
at the skeleton of the dragon
sprawling miles and miles
in the wasteland
of time

The poetry of *Traveling Through Time* is a journey which entertains, educates, and inspires the human spirit to new heights of joy.

In his heart, Bill Marr sees the good that is available to all who have the will to look for it. For me, "A Poetry Garden" strikes a timeless theme that weaves like a golden thread from beginning to end:

The poems written on earth
with your shovel
they claim
though beautiful
will wither easily

This

I know
is just their jealousy or superstition

Because on this side of the earth
my heart is responding
to your every steady and forceful pounding
And I believe
the beautiful words and wonderful music
flashing up from the rocks underneath your feet
will light up countless eyes and hearts
in dark nights

*For my Taiwanese poet friend Yang Kui, who retired in his old age to cultivate gardens alone in the deep mountains.

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