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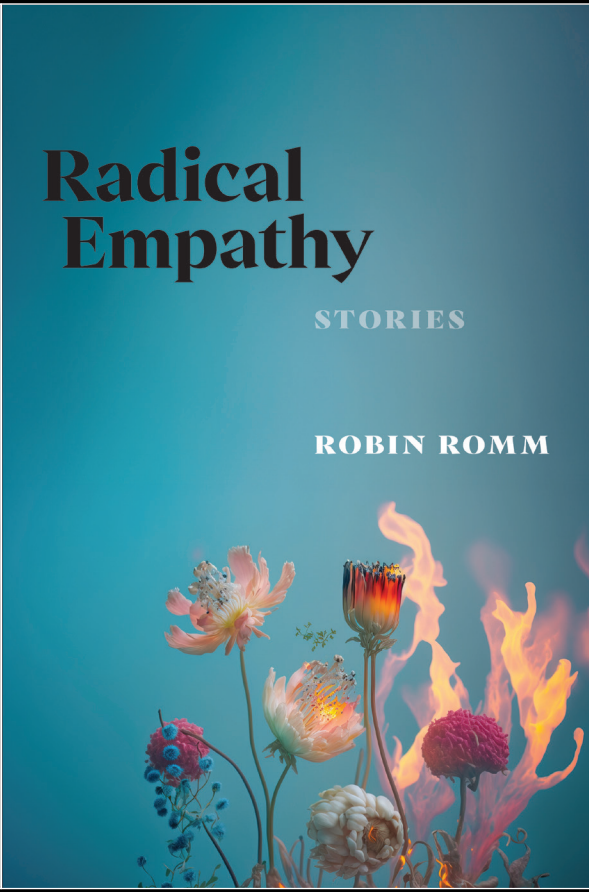


FALL 2024
FICTION & POETRY
RECENTLY PUBLISHED & NOTEWORTHY

from Marital Problems

I can only tell you what's going on in the marriages of other people; I'm not sure what's going on in my own. It's Saturday, and our "morning alone time" has come to a close. We spent it all out here, looking for the binocular case. Maybe my marriage is like a beautiful weather vane on a regal barn, its edges soft, its tin turning turquoise and black. It used to spin beautifully, but the center's grown rusty. Maybe that's a dumb metaphor. That metaphor requires me to extend it, to say that these alone hours are the WD-40 we need. Maybe we're less weather vane and more tomato plant and this whole thing is fertilizer, or maybe we're just aging and sometimes I notice that my eyes are more revealed, the skin around them thin like that of a tomatillo. A hardness comes through places that used to be supple, and when Victor reaches for me in bed, it only feels like habit, the way we reach for our toothbrushes, and because I'm not a toothbrush, I turn away. I want to circumvent this fate, though I don't have the body for bustiers or the energy for finding politically acceptable, palatable, not completely obnoxious porn.

photo by Janan Markee



In this new collection of short stories that Ben Fountain declares "all marvels," Robin Romm (author of *The Mercy Papers*) revels in the mess behind the slick veneer of modern life. A financially-strapped college student sells her sought after "Ivy League eggs" to a movie star, then wrestles with her feelings as the child grows up in the public eye. A long-married wife in the midst of a bungled kitchen remodel imagines the excitement of her neighbor's unstable erotic life. Isolated by quarantine, a young widow contends with a talking daffodil that panders to her in therapy-speak. Disquieting, original and strangely reassuring, these ten new stories make quick work of the easy truths and thoughtless salvos that keep us from seeing the wildness of our irreducible lives.

Robin Romm

Radical Empathy

Robin Romm is the author of two short story collections, *The Mother Garden*, and *Radical Empathy*; a chapbook of stories, *The Tilt*; as well as a memoir, *The Mercy Papers* (a New York Times Notable Book). She also compiled and edited the essay collection, *Double Bind: Women on Ambition*. She's been awarded an O'Henry Prize in short fiction, and was a finalist for the Pen USA prize for her first collection. Her journalism and nonfiction writing have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *Wired*, *O Magazine*, *Parents*, and *Slate*. She lives in Portland, Oregon, with her partner, the writer Don Waters, and their two spitfire daughters.

ISBN: 978-1-961897-18-2 eISBN: 978-1-961897-19-9
\$19.95 | Paper
6 x 9 | 192 pages
Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Fiction

Winner of the O'Henry Prize for Short Stories

The stories in *Radical Empathy* throb and thrum with the heartbeat of life as it is lived at its truest, most deeply moving level. Romm's prose is so exquisite it induces goosebumps. Absolutely haunting.
—Eileen Pollack

What terrific stories these are. I kept admiring—in every single one—the rare, sheer power of imagination that takes the familiar and half-known to the rugged territory of the dazzling. I learned from these.
—Joan Silber

The ten stories—all marvels—in Robin Romm's *Radical Empathy* establish once and for all that she's a master of the short story. In switchblade-wicked prose, Romm conjures the realities of love, marriage, parenthood, and work so vividly that they bust the bounds of what passes for safely "normal." A beautiful, brilliant, devastating collection.
—Ben Fountain

Rara Avis

A falcon, one of millions raised
for sacrifice. An X-ray

reveals the bird, un-tombed,
wrapped in linen, wings pressed

the length of its ghostly body.
Force-fed mice, sparrows, it couldn't

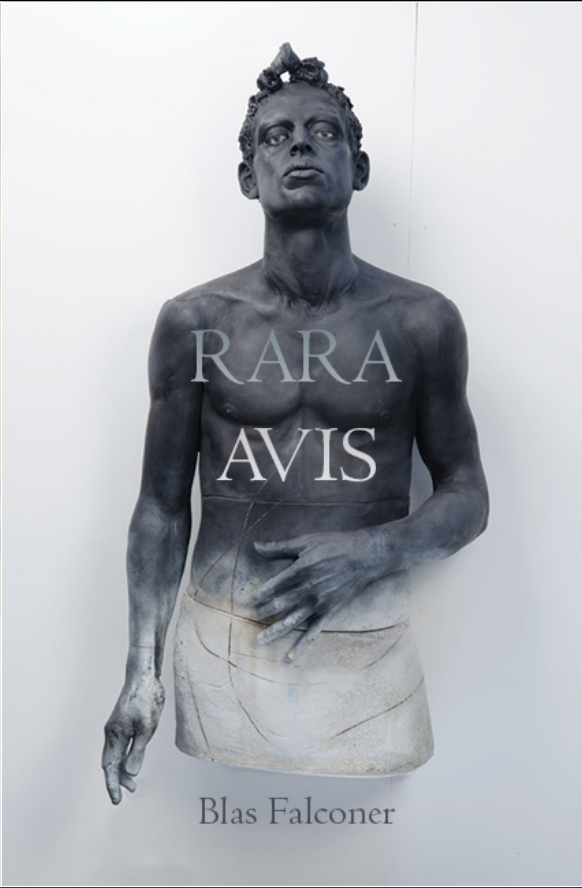
expel the bones, the claws,
and died having eaten too much,

the stomach packed: feather and
fur, tail descending the throat.

One of many bred to brave
the dark with its king, beyond

appetite, nothing left
to crave, thus, heavenly, saved.

photo by Emily Petrie



Regally bearing its Latin title, *Rara Avis* captures in sparse, moving verse both the splendor and the loneliness of what it means to be exceptional—a rarified specimen, a strange bird. A son, a husband, and now a father, seasoned poet Blas Falconer explores the relationships among men—between peers, lovers, parents and children—to consider and question existing models of authority and power. Falconer's lucid but feeling gaze reveals social complexities with searing and graceful imagery, asking what it means to live outside the heteronormative experience while existing as a man, simultaneously a casualty and a participant in the project of masculinity.

These poems carefully delineate the casual cruelties of queer youth and the beautiful and bitter revelations of adulthood. The wisdom propelling *Rara Avis* is the knowledge that we are each of us that rare bird; we share our singularity. Everyone has a pancreas, but only one organ matters when Falconer learns his father is afflicted. Alchemized by love, one thing, unlike any other, becomes all things. "All day, everything, / no matter how / small, makes me // think of it ... The bee / crawling in / blossoms // scattered on / the glass/tabletop. The sound of // a pitcher fill- / ing slowly / with water."

Blas Falconer

Blas Falconer is the author of *Forgive the Body This Failure*, *The Foundling Wheel*, and *A Question of Gravity and Light* as well as the coeditor of two anthologies, *Mentor and Muse: Essays from Poets to Poets* and *The Other Latin@: Writing Against a Singular Identity*. The recipient of a poetry fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award from *Poets & Writers*, he teaches in San Diego State University's MFA program and is the editor in chief at *Poetry International Online*.

Rara Avis

ISBN: 978-1-961897-02-1 eISBN: 978-1-961897-03-8

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 80 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

In these exquisite and musical poems, Falconer seeks answers to the abiding question of who we are and what could have been. Beautiful meditations on fatherhood, the complications of our pasts, and the urgent present reach to us with outstretched arms. In poem after poem, we feel the light touch of a hand on our backs reminding us that we must slowly rise and greet what lies ahead, though the music of the past beckons us to linger. Falconer's tender and wise poems are gentle reminders that we move forward because we are called to those we love. We move forward because we see in the periphery, the past still holds us in its care.

—Oliver de la Paz

Blas Falconer could teach a master class on lyric subtext. *Rara Avis*'s precise, wrenching poems are all about the layering of what is said and unsaid; the strata that form of wound, scar, skin. "When I look / in the rearview, he turns toward peaks // in the distance," observes a speaker of his newly sullen son, "and when I ask him / to explain, shaking his head, he sighs as if // it isn't worth the trouble." Falconer's handling of boyhood, fathering, love, and masculinity in these pages is startling in its revelations and deeply necessary in its grief. I'll be thinking about this collection for years to come.

—Sandra Beasley

from laramie

when i was young / my parents
drove us through laramie /

and as a child / i knew not one / smear of history /
least of all / a faggot's / but in the car / dad cut

the sound / of a cd skipping / until /
just the three of us / me / my mom

and him / all quiet / a blur of town /
a ghost / or a gasp / framed by window /

faggot in the blood / faggot in the field /
i didn't know / the middle of nowhere

is also a place / people live / and die in /
but i've been there / intimately /

miraculously / am grown / perhaps in
the only time / i can be / a gust / if that /

or / anywhere i choose / just barely.



Spencer Williams

Spencer Williams is a trans writer from Chula Vista, California. She is the author of the chapbook *Alien Pink* (The Atlas Review, 2017) and her work has been featured in *Literary Hub*, *Indiewire*, and *Polygon*, among others. She received her MFA in creative writing from Rutgers University-Newark, and is currently a PhD student in poetics at SUNY, Buffalo.

TRANZ

ISBN: 978-1-961897-16-8 eISBN: 978-1-961897-17-5

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 128 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

Spencer Williams' *TRANZ* manages to balance paeans of trans body euphoria while holding mother and sister hunger in the other quivering hand. The vulnerability of the teenage speaker who longs to "learn / kelly clarkson songs on bass" becomes your vulnerability. The persistent side-eye to god becomes your side-eye to god. Here, Williams makes a case for an apocalyptic trans sensibility, as spiny as it is transcendent. It's an invitation to a world the speaker knows, where even at the end there's still time to say "hello. / hello."

—Cyrée Jarelle Johnson

In her debut collection, *TRANZ*, Spencer Williams writes equally riotous and vulnerable poems, penning a love letter to trans people and their audacity to exist in a world that constantly endangers them structurally and individually. Her blistering lyrics and acerbic wit never flatten her subjects but rather file normative hypocrisy to reveal unspoken truths. Williams observes, "i am not dangerous until i'm made in the mouth / of someone who fears me," and remembers receiving apologies whose "guilty resonance burns / like a wet willy from god." She articulates a vast landscape of physical and ideological violence against trans people by illuminating this fundamental paradox: "i can't fear u less until u fear me less—." And yet the radical poetics of *TRANZ* is a celebratory self-becoming. Because of Williams' subversive genius and lyrical grace, every indictment is also a declaration of triumph, a reminder that the ever-dynamic trans community continues to thrive despite, not through, its opposition to an antagonistic cultural discourse. In every place, in every time, trans people are enduring. Extant. "on the milk carton. on the public access / television. everywhere i go i am there so brutally."

The Unfolding

I let a boy lick my paper skin because he told me I was pretty.
I let a man undress me because he wouldn't stop kissing me.
I left my body at a party, and then I left it again.
A secret: sadness has no sound. Like how
at 5:00 a.m. I awoke in the back of a cab somewhere
in Brooklyn, the driver watching me.

I learned to love with nobody watching.
In my carpeted room, I was small. While outside,
tall trees blocked out a blinding sun. God moves
in the laying on of hands—a child shivers in a church,
her body wet with water. Then someone holds her, warms her,
blesses her. I miss Raleigh in the winter,

I miss Ohio when it rains. In college, I would drive out
past the fields, down the empty highways, two lanes flagged
with fences, cows ambling, sun setting, sky growing pink.
A secret: I let a man undress me because he wouldn't stop
kissing me, and though I found him to be beautiful, my mind moved
to light shifting among trees, fields unfolding.

photo by Beowulf Sheehan



The energies animating *Saints of Little Faith*, Megan Pinto's electrifying debut in poetry, are a forceful quiet, a loud stillness, the caesura between a lightning strike and the sound of thunder. Everywhere, the speaker sees the numinous power of language, the incipience of things to come, even a kind of catastrophic grace in desolation and destruction — as if within the terrain of her own obsession, she recognizes the familiar, ever-changing seasons. Fierce and intimate, this poet's meditative transformations engage with South Asian experiences of addiction, domestic violence, and mental illness, refusing to ignore narratives treated as unspeakable and overlooked by the English canon. Mapping the collision of abuse, psychosis, and rage, Pinto sees beyond them, buoyed by an inscrutable but abiding faith in the holiness of life itself, in a cold God nevertheless capable of gentleness. Once, “desire was an arrow, but now desire / is the field.” Pinto presides over this expanse, deciding, “I have three choices: to drift through life / anesthetized, to soften. . .” In that unspoken “or,” the merciful lacuna of that ellipsis, reside the lyrical mystery and medicine that feed this astonishing collection and strengthen resolve, both ours and the speaker's: “The lake looks frozen, but it is not.”

Megan Pinto

Megan Pinto's poetry has appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Ploughshares*, *Guernica*, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Warren Wilson and has received support from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, Poets & Writers, and The Peace Studio. She lives in New York City.

Saints of Little Faith

ISBN: 978-1-961897-14-4 eISBN: 978-1-961897-15-1

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 112 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

In *Saints of Little Faith* by Megan Pinto, these are beautifully rendered ruminative and thoughtful coming-of-age poems populated with people, such as the speaker's ill father and past lovers, miniature narratives, and small fragments that pass by and become a line, as if the reader is on a train at twilight. These are poems of longing and growing at once. Perhaps in these poems, longing and growing are the same thing, or at least in the same hemisphere. These are both poems and holes, where the speaker's language attempts to fill the void with its painful music, as in the poem “Tunneling,” where the speaker is *blanketed* by language, while *it softened all wailing into song*.

—Victoria Chang

In these sharply resonant poems, Megan Pinto writes with grace and precision about self-discovery, grief, desire, and existential yearning. Each poem is finely crafted by a poet of incredible skill and vast expanses of feeling. *I thought my sorrow could transform me*, Pinto writes. I have no doubt it will transform readers of this outstanding collection as well.

—Matthew Olzmann

The Men in My Family Disappeared

behind horsefly-laden air & escaped the truth of the hearse.
We shot baskets in our black suits

before the funeral, the gospel was in the rumble of the missed shot
shivering off the backboard,

the soft moan of the free throws that fell
perfectly between the pursed lips of the rim.

Our laughter painted the dark-tinged sea between us, channeled
out from some urn inside the thicket of our organs.

I can't say if any of us knew where the body goes exactly
once it sifts through the salted colony of the skin, but I know

in the South, we sacred all we can to stay living, holy what is ours
before some rabid hand wrestles it away.

photo by Ian Riley Photography



Christian J. Collier



In Christian J. Collier's debut poetry collection, *Greater Ghost*, this extraordinary Black Southern poet precisely stitches the sutures of grief and gratitude together over our wounds. These pages move between elegies for private hauntings and public ones, the visceral bereavement of a miscarriage alongside the murder of a family member and the specter of police brutality. With a profound awareness of literary tradition, Collier enters into the American canon and dialogues with Black Southern noir—a poem like “Beloved,” whose title expresses not only a genuine tenderness in its term of endearment but invokes Morrison, contextualizes this book within the legacy of racial injustice in the U.S., presenting again the prolific losses and disproportionate Black mortality across time, and yet remembers the resilience of love and transformative possibility of self-actualization from inside tragedy.

Christian J. Collier

Christian J. Collier is a Black, Southern writer, arts organizer, and teaching artist who resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He is the author of *Greater Ghost* (Four Way Books, 2024) and the chapbook *The Gleaming of the Blade*, the 2021 Editors' Selection from Bull City Press. His works have appeared in *December*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *North American Review*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. A 2015 Loft Spoken Word Immersion Fellow, he is also the winner of the 2022 Porch Prize in Poetry and the 2020 ProForma Contest from *Grist Journal*. More about him and his work can be found at www.christianjcollier.com

Greater Ghost

ISBN: 978-1-961897-10-6 eISBN: 978-1-961897-11-3

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 88 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

Christian J. Collier's evocative poetry collection, *Greater Ghost*, invites readers on a journey that touches upon themes of faith, hope, and the search for meaning. In “Sauna,” he describes breath as a temporary beast, “a frightened deer sometimes sprinting / away & out of view” to underscore the transient nature of life, and our constant quest for sustenance and survival. With poignant and vivid imagery, Collier captures fleeting moments of happiness and shadows that often lurk behind them. He writes, “Loss is the language living pours between our teeth. / In a way, we are what sits between two broken bones.” This body as a vessel underscores the tension between the internal self and external forces. Don't wait. Dive into a world where every poem is a discovery. Christian J. Collier's poems are tender and haunting.

—Ruben Quesada

from *For the Suburban Dead*

Doctor, your bag is being carried
through the doorways you just left.

I was a patient once. Now I have traded
pallor for a tan. And yet my friends
lie blue-lipped in cold basements,

scratching at the other side of rest
with startled eyes and children's hands.
Father, Mother, you know that

I have nothing to confess. How
then can I hope to be forgiven?
Scabs. Burnt spoons. Gnawed leather

belts. Hospital tubes. Hospital
gowns. Hospital beds. Doctor,
turn back. One of us lives.

photo by Biruté Ona Black



Indirect Light

poems



Malachi Black

Reliving the overdoses of beloved friends, Malachi Black closes this book's opening poem with a resuscitating command: "Doctor, / turn back. One of us lives." *Indirect Light* is a testament to and apology for this assertion of vitality, each eponymous poem an elegy dedicated to one of Black's dearly departed. Though this book mourns an irretrievable past, it wages war against amnesia, refusing to let death erase the vibrancy of their lives. These poems preserve "the breath we left beside us on the train tracks," "the watery inscriptions of nearby dogwood branches / dipped in shade," "our bookbags' mouths / pouting open on our laps," "our street-scabbed bodies / briefly tinselled in the sun."

Insofar as this collection returns to friends and kin to honor them by the indirect light of memory, it also seeks to memorialize the author's personal experience of adolescence and addiction amidst the opioid epidemic. It is a lament for all that's lost and a paean to the near misses and the just enough: a dim glow you can see by, a cup of coffee passed during NA, a prayer during detox to "be // as empty / as the sky" if floating means survival.

Malachi Black

Indirect Light

Malachi Black is also the author of *Storm Toward Morning* (Copper Canyon Press, 2014), a finalist for the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber First Book Award and a selection for the PSA's New American Poets Series (chosen by Ilya Kaminsky). Black's poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Believer*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Poetry*, among other journals, and in a number of anthologies, including *Before the Door of God: An Anthology of Devotional Poetry* (Yale UP, 2013), *The Poet's Quest for God* (Eyewear Publishing [U.K.], 2016), and *In the Tempered Dark: Contemporary Poets Transcending Elegy* (Black Lawrence, 2023). Black's work has been supported by fellowships and awards from the Amy Clampitt House, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, Emory University, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Hawthornden Castle, MacDowell, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Poetry Foundation (a 2009 Ruth Lilly Fellowship), the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and Yaddo. Black's poems have several times been set to music and have been featured in exhibitions both in the U.S. and abroad, including recent and forthcoming translations into French, Dutch, Croatian, Slovenian, and Lithuanian. Black teaches at the University of San Diego and lives in California.

ISBN: 978-1-961897-12-0 eISBN: 978-1-961897-13-7

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 112 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

In *Indirect Light*, Malachi Black strikes a precarious balance between reminiscences of times past—many of them elegiac; it is a death-heavy book—and a strong poet's resistance to nostalgia. And he navigates that balance deftly throughout. What Black knows, what he seems to have always known, is that the successful lyric poem is anti-nostalgic, because nostalgia embalms, whereas the lyric poem, even the lyric poem about the dead beloved, sings lifeward. This is a book of great, life-making lyricism. Every word of *Indirect Light* sings.

—Shane McCrae

Reading Malachi Black's *Indirect Light* feels like being on the receiving end of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* shot through a many-prismed lens, as the intensity of the collection's longing reaches toward many persons, its grieving a flowering out. But Black's work here is not one of lyrical despondency. Rather, it is ingeniously narrative, providing intimate and tactile views into a generation—one in which the speaker of these poems finds himself lost, having lost those he loved. Reader, read hard into this book's center. Its narrative angle is complex, as are the poems' disparate formal ambitions. Is it not the purpose of the elegy to bring back our dead? Do we not long for their cruelly exciting company? Black's much-anticipated second book is a significant contribution to the ongoing tradition of the elegiac form.

—Cate Marvin

from *Raccoons*

... I hadn't thought of it in years, not even after I saw another raccoon, high-stepping the coyote fence midday with a limp vole overhanging its mouth. Such a singular sight, I had to tell you, and blurted it out as soon as I saw you, a piece of domestic gossip like the first crocus or noisy neighbors:

common property, like so much in marriage—a small business, a friend called it, down to the cooked books. Only later, after I spotted the raccoon sauntering through a line in one of your poems . . . only after the pressure cooker of my displeasure caused you to recast your raccoon and vole as skunk and mole,

did I flash on the one I'd seen decades before: its lack of furtiveness, the air it had of being within its rights, the way it took its time to retrace its steps to turn the water off.

—Or did it amble on and let the water run?

No copyright protects idle talk, you might have said, or: The imaginarium of marriage knows no bounds.

Carol Moldaw is the author of six previous books of poetry: *Beauty Refracted* (Four Way Books, 2018); *So Late, So Soon: New and Selected Poems* (Etruscan Press, 2010); *The Lightning Field*, 2002 winner of the FIELD Poetry Prize (Oberlin College Press, 2003); *Through the Window* (La Alameda Press, 2001), also translated into Turkish and published in a bilingual edition in Istanbul (Iyi Seyler, 1998); *Chalkmarks on Stone* (La Alameda Press, 1998); and *Taken from the River* (Alef Books, 1993). She is also the author of a novella, *The Widening* (Etruscan Press, 2008). She has received a Merwin Conservancy Artist Residency, a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship, a Lannan Foundation Residency Fellowship, and a Pushcart Prize. Her poems, essays, and reviews have appeared widely in such journals as *The American Poetry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*, as well as many anthologies, including *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry* and *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Along with Turkish, her poems have been translated into Chinese, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. A volume of her selected poems, translated into Chinese, is forthcoming from Guangxi Normal University Press in Beijing in 2025. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Carol Moldaw



photo by Genevieve Hanson



Go Figure

ISBN: 978-1-961897-04-5 eISBN: 978-1-961897-05-2

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 88 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

Carol Moldaw's poems are equally cerebral and sensuous, candid and inquisitive. She has perfected a warm tone that invites you to keep coming back just to be in her intelligent company. I felt less alone while reading her on marriage; on being (and having) a muse; on memory and aging; on loving landscapes and wildlife. Citing Elizabeth Bishop's propensity 'to double-check, / to verify (or correct) her notion / about which way a goat's eye slits run, / across or up and down,' Moldaw places herself appositely in that poetic lineage of meticulous observation, subtly tinted feeling. *Go Figure* is a wonderful book.

—Ange Mlinko

Go Figure is the work of a deeply intelligent poet with a physical grasp on language. Everything Moldaw's eye falls on takes on a beautiful, biting clarity. Her straightforward lines demonstrate both lyric intensity and tonal sensitivity: a fierce capacity for finding the emotional heart of things. There is a voice in this voice. You want to follow this mind at work wherever it turns. Poems about art and the making of art populate this collection, but overall, *Go Figure* is grounded in the textures of human relationship and the truths of a closely observed life. Small occurrences, clear sentences. And underneath, immense depths.

—Jenny George

Lucky

Dusk in the rift-valley now, saffroning.
Wild horses

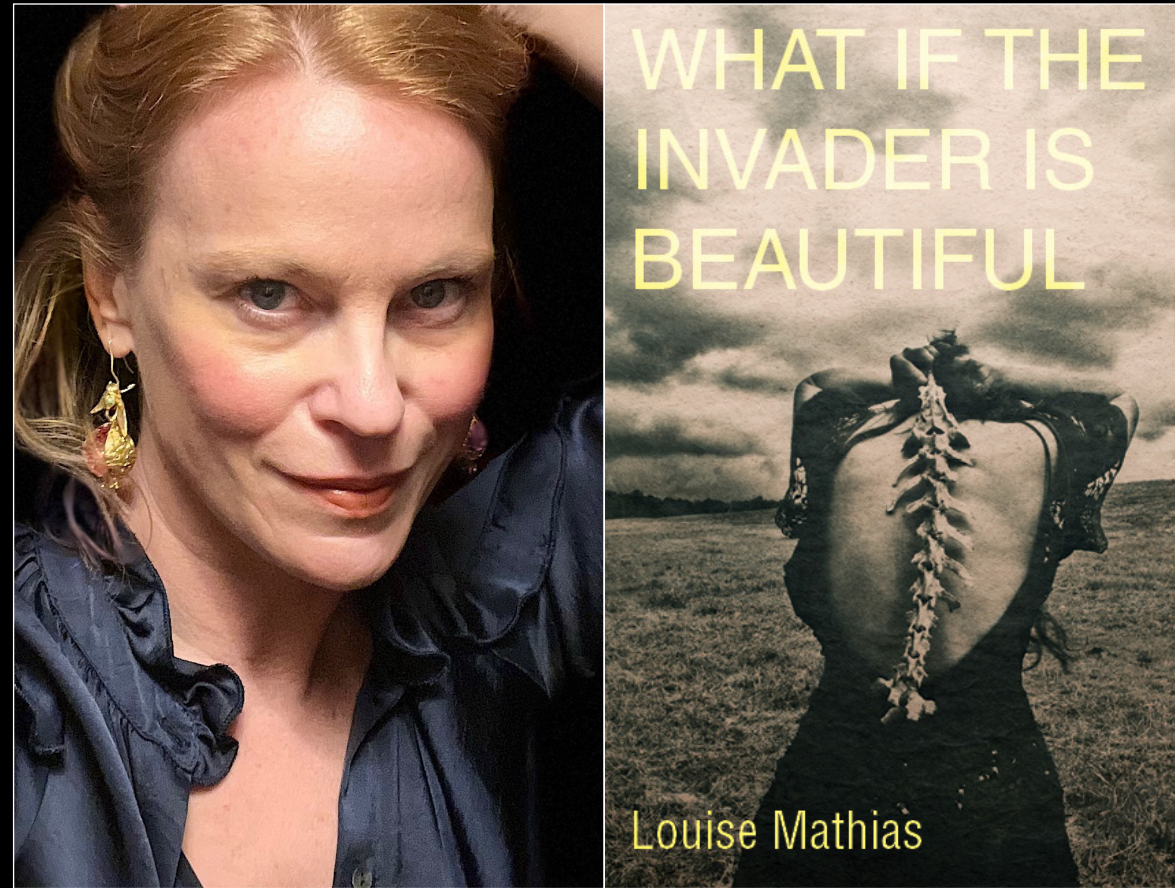
reduced to spindle
skeletal trees—

The chestnut one barely an existence.

In the grimly lit adobe,
Amargosa

he holds me
like a storm-charm.

This is not
what I thought I would be.



What if the Invader is Beautiful explores the ineffable yet primal connections between outer and inner landscapes—the impact that the natural world has on the psychological terrain of our interior lives. Through compressed, musical, and often deeply mysterious language, the poems enact the extreme outer limits of emotional experience. Often set in equally extreme natural settings, the poems ride the knife edge between beauty and terror—exploring concepts of the sublime, the spiritual power of the elements, the redemptive beauty of flora and fauna, and the psychological freedom of wide-open spaces—and illuminate how deepening our connection to these elements is ultimately what will save us from our human afflictions of separation, isolation, and fear.

Louise Mathias

What if the Invader Is Beautiful

Louise Mathias was born in Bedford, England, and grew up in England and Los Angeles. She is the author of two full-length collections of poetry, *Lark Apprentice* (Winner of the New Issues Poetry Prize) and *The Traps* (Four Way Books), as well as a chapbook, *Above All Else, the Trembling Resembles a Forest*, which won the Burnside Review Chapbook Contest. For the past fifteen years, she has resided in Joshua Tree, California.

ISBN: 978-1-961897-08-3 eISBN: 978-1-961897-09-0

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 72 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

The exquisite and wholly original poems in Louise Mathias's *What if the Invader is Beautiful* lead the reader through the violence and sorrow of what it is to be human. Through the Americana of motels and truck stops, the Southern California landscape of desert and ruin, its barren landscape glittering with the beauty and detritus of ghost flowers, lupine, lilies, ponies and "some kind of sister poppy." Indeed, these poems wrestle with the question of what it is to be human. In "Fathoms," the poem's speaker is the recipient of a "once-husband's" command to "Act like a human," as if they had somehow slid beneath the level of human, down to that of animal. Which is to say, the poems also ask what it is to be reduced to animal. The poems, submerged as they are in flora and fauna and the wondrous presence of animals, show us also what it might mean to return to our original second nature—nature, itself. We are all animals. Or, as Mayakovsky writes, "We are all of us horses, to some extent!" What makes us human is that we are also animal. It is when we make an attempt at bridging the two that human freedom is found, as Mathias writes in "Larrea." "Moved the jackrabbit / from the road, laid her under / a bush. Land of little / shade, we do what we can."

—Cynthia Cruz

Mountain Latchkey, 1983

Hellbent for the Blue Ridge Parkway
She never told anyone she was going,
Never claimed to be in their number,
Where mystery was a pair of glasses
Thickening on a creek's wrecked bank.

Are we, half of us asks, fooling ourselves?
As the decades sink knotted as snakes
Fastened in a canvas sack. Needlework
Of sunlight would not slip through these
Polaroids guardian angels under- or

Overexposed. Newspaper clippings give
No new evidence, creased, unsealed,
Something that looks like her face
On the edge of the frame, always leaving.
But in this one: at an Airstream's drop down,

Moonscape (our best guess) stretched all
Directions, she watches us, willfully,
Out of the veil of the flashbulb,
Bomber jacket, her Dostoyevsky
Bangs, all of her cards on the table.

Originally from Marshall County, W.Va., Jacob Strautmann is a recipient of the Massachusetts Poetry Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. His poems have appeared in *Nixes Mate*, *Sequestrum*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *On the Seawall*, and elsewhere. He lives in Greater Boston with his partner Valerie Duff and their two children.

photo by Valerie Duff



New Vrindaban lives in the disputed territory between the past and present, between the idealistic hopes and complicated reality of creating a better world. An electrifying collision of uniquely Appalachian cultural forces, the formal division of poems into “Side One” and “Side Two” pay homage to the concept albums of 1970s garage rock, while the book’s title alludes to the intentional Hare Krishna community in West Virginia founded in the same era.

Jacob Strautmann’s latest collection builds an extraordinary temple on the compromised ground—it houses the compressed narratives of varied characters, monumentalizes the beautiful illusions of failed ideas, and remembers the irretrievable innocent love of youth. The music of *New Vrindaban* is both a ballad of survivor’s guilt and the raucous soundtrack of a record party among friends. It is the “black swift-moving waters,” “the bright clouds unmoored in the wind.”

Jacob Strautmann

New Vrindaban

ISBN: 978-1-961897-06-9 eISBN: 978-1-961897-07-6

\$17.95 | Paper

6 x 9 | 86 pages

Pub Date: September 15, 2024 | Poetry

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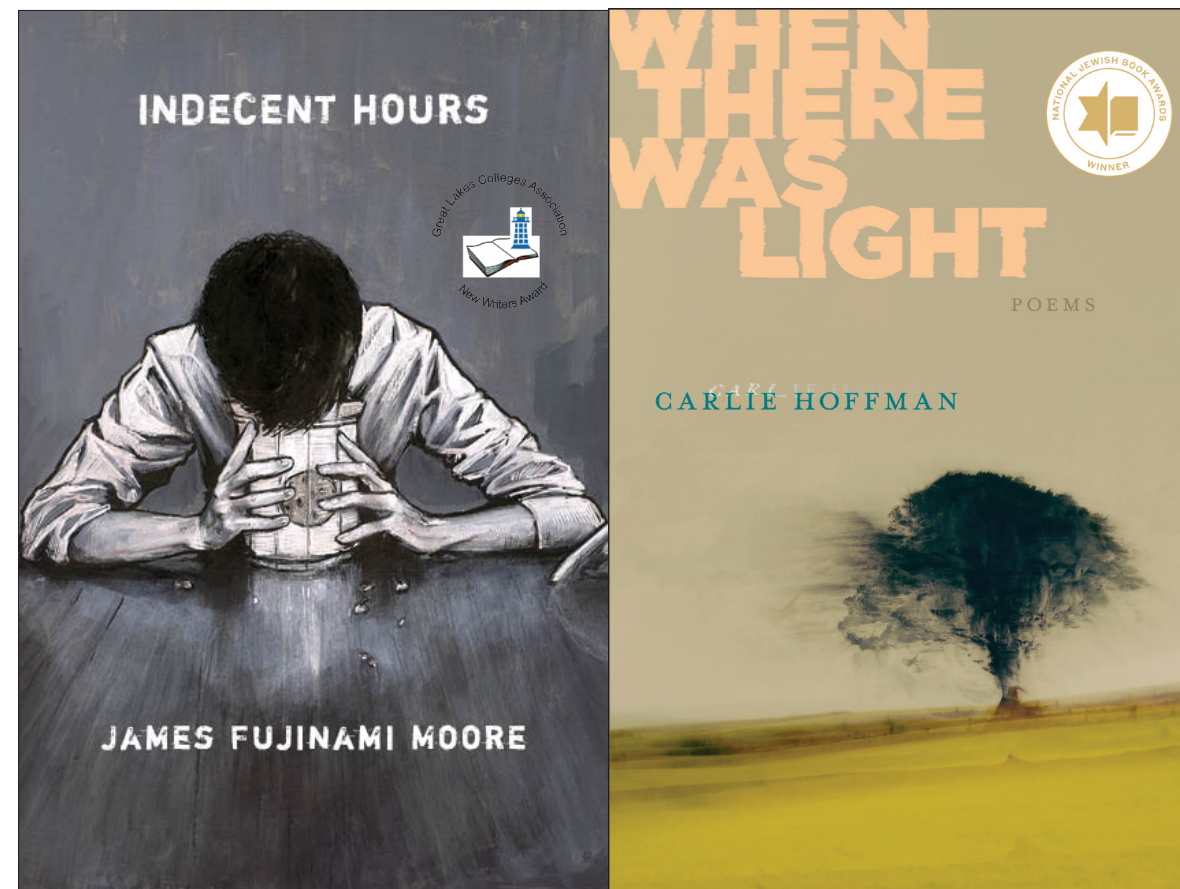
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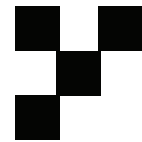
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This catalogue and the publication of our books were made possible by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

We are grateful for the public funds we receive from the New York State Council on the Arts.

We wish to thank the individuals and private foundations who support Four Way Books.

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