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Resuscitating the art of Canadian poetry

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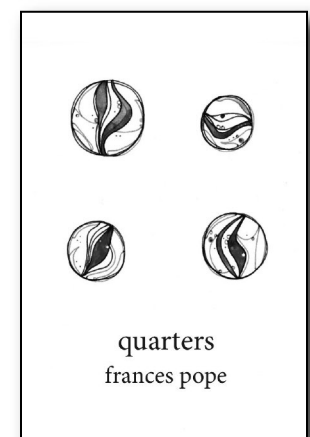
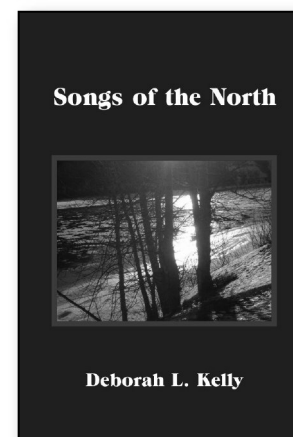
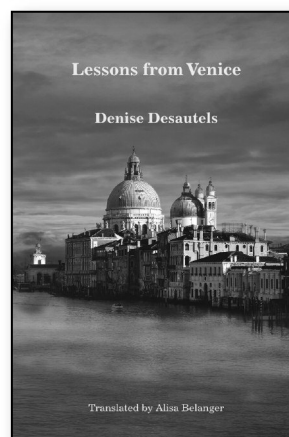
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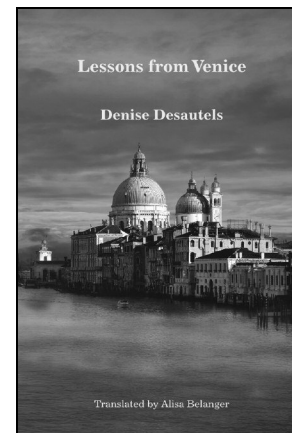
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Denise Desautels

from LESSONS FROM VENICE

translated by Alisa Belanger

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1.

March 1988.

Winter persists. The cold blasts, irritating, in the light of March.

I send the sculptor postcards from the Venice Carnival, bought on Boulevard Saint-Denis, where I speak with him about the trip and this project that slowly takes shape to write about his work. I cover the back of the images with little violet signs, almost illegible. Some reading notes, some quotations. The questions asked by the recent sculptures hold themselves quite close. Venice. For the moment, I cannot foresee the scope of my enthrallment with the masks that I will find in profusion, once there. Neither this enthrallment, nor this fascination, nor—simultaneously and yet paradoxically—this nostalgia that will be mine. I know not yet that, crossing the Piazza San Marco several times, I will each time have the impression of sliding into something fake, the impression of playing with artifice, or with being out of place or with an excess of exoticism, against my wishes, pure tension toward the truth.

As though all of the islands brought together there, refusing to be scattered or imprecise, could only occult memory and force renunciation.

In Venice, beauty is a response to mourning that doesn't exist.

2.

Improvised actress in this decor, I will take a distance that will enable me to foster the attack of offensive memories, even incite it. I will remember that I carry within me an inconsolable child that the poem sometimes illuminates. Sometimes she happens to walk beside me with the exact gaze that suits Venice, this incisive gaze that insists on piercing the world, consuming all that could harm the avowal of truth. This child only takes interest in words. She advances freely toward her fear and hopes for a bit more meaning, each day around her, a bit more thought. When she happens to find the right phrase—although always fragile, as she knows—her gaze becomes unsustainable.

3.

June 1988.

Words appear: illusion, theater, and truth. Some would say: simulacrum and blinding; others: enigma; still others: anamorphosis and clairvoyance.

Venice is a vast theater where *The Kings' Cycles* or *The Dragons' Trilogy* could be infinitely recreated. I would then insist on the change of scenery and immoderation, because moderation despairs me and serves only to polish the ruins; because moderation camouflages, occults, and obliterates all that is not on the surface. I would repeat the world in a different decor, displaced, with the avowed intention of changing it, touching its skin with a body so adroit and so obstinate that it would erode the horizon line and provoke the almost wild uplifting of bedrock.

Thus would I impede the all too perfect progress of certain words like distraction, opacity, future, the obvious, since there are only ruins, found objects, shadow carriers, to give meaning to metamorphosis.

4.

June 1988.

Giardini di Castello, Viale Trieste.

I am in a theater with a gigantic set where the objects encumber the stage. There are pavilions planted here and there in the gardens, and objects protected against too much sun, sheltered under trees or behind a building window. These man-made objects that seem grown from the Venetian soil have become works, characters, poised in wait. I am in a theater, or a museum, or an archeological site, because of the transformational power of ruins.

A scene imposes itself: the world is overpopulated and it struggles everywhere against the ruffling of bodies and desires, against the lamentations of objects stuck in the dust.

Amid the gardens, I become either an actress and a character, or, violently, an observer.

Denise Desautels was born in Montreal. She is a past vice-president of the Académie des lettres du Québec. She won the Prix de la Fondation Les Forges for *Leçons de Venise* (1990), the original French version of *Lessons from Venice*. She also won the Governor General's Award and the Prix de la revue Estuaire for *Le saut de l'ange* (1992), the Prix de la Société des écrivains canadiens and the Prix de la Société Radio-Canada for *Tombeau de Lou* (2000). In 1999 she received La Médaille Échelon vermeil, the highest honour given by the city of Paris.



5.

In Venice, the earth opens beneath my feet. The waters of the *Bacino di San Marco* or the *Canal Grande*, without a thought or a plan, insidiously infiltrate it.

In the Venetian sky, everything is an untranslatable blue, almost fake. Lower, the visions that never take flight get entangled in an ornate labyrinth where pigeons fly and circle. While the history of the world tiptoes between the monuments and often stumbles, the earth cracks, torn between vacuity, mystery, and artifice.

The obvious is always a sham.

Deborah L. Kelly

from SONGS OF THE NORTH

My Morning Prayer

I awaken each morning
to the sight of mists rising
from mountain treetops.
The quiet sound of Gaia
surrounds me as she
whispers to my heart,
“Good morning, child.”

Lingering in my bed,
as I give myself time
to fully awaken my senses,
I can smell her perfume
seeping in through my window.

In my morning prayers,
silent words of thanks
to the Creator, not just
for the blessings, but for
the gift of creating me to
be who I Am.

Humility

I was talking to a squirrel today
as he ran around the tree.
He shot away from branch to branch,
guess he was afraid of me.

It's truly a humbling experience
this country living, so close to the earth;
how spoiled we become in the city,
lost in the importance of our own worth.

The trees spring from roots eternal:
flowers, perennials, so fine, run
through the grass, shadows reflecting;
a machine I have travelled through time.

Blessings

Mornings are quiet here.
After a night of cool rains,
a gray, peaceful day awakens;
silence is broken by the pitter-
patter of furry feet above me.

*Sitting on the chair just outside
my door, clouds move lazily
across the sky; my heart
remembers a prayer of thanks
for the blessings on this new day.*

Northern Reflections

The surreal aspect of living
in the North still lingers.
Chill morning air; fresh scent
of winter coming, pleases
my senses.

*As he takes Autumn
into his loving embrace,
her coloured leaves begin
to fall, one by one, to the ground.
Old man Winter whispers to her
of his great and enduring love.*

It is his cool embrace which
soothes her into sleep; he never
wishes her to feel his harsh
touch upon the land.

*Winter embraces Autumn;
experiencing a warmth he would
otherwise never know.*

*Summer; filled with gratitude,
for without Spring, he would
not exist.*

Earth Wisdom

*Magical moon, luminescent
through ancient forest.*

People of the trees;
their sharp contrast,
undoubtedly,
enlightened thought,
vibrate on a level
humans have yet to reach.

*Not bothered by Winter's touch,
all becomes magical.*

Lights within the earth
illuminate forest child,
scribbling her earth wisdom
to mortals.

Would they could
only choose to listen
to her whisper, perhaps,
read the words she writes.

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Songs of the North



Deborah L. Kelly

Deborah L. Kelly has been writing poetry for more than 40 years. Having begun writing poetry in her teenage years, she discovered that it helped her to cope with the conditions around her during her youth. The author of four published books of poetry, both in Canada and Internationally, *Deborah* always enjoys a new challenge. An award winning poet and short story writer, she lives in the beautiful forests, edging on the Land of the Midnight Sun, in Prince George, BC. It is here Deborah spends her time writing, gardening, and breathing in the delights of her beautiful grandchildren.



Spirit of the North

As I sit here, under Northern
sky, the peace and balance
of Gaia is changing me.
She is adjusting my being
on all levels to help me live
a more complete, natural
earthy way of life; in harmony
with the seasons as they
pass in the eternal circle
of our mortal existence.

Closer to the heavens,
under wide open, vast,
blue skies by day; star-filled
midnights: Cassiopia,
Orion's Belt, Big Dipper;
the guiding Northern Star,
and so much more.

*On a completely clear night,
small parts of our Milky Way
can be seen, spread out
in all its glory through the cosmos.*

I am truly humbled by the Spirit
of the North; a great being
of wonder who has chosen
to welcome me into his home.

Frances Pope from *QUARTERS*

Quarters

I

I was a trilobite, then.
I was spare and clean.
Spoked with gaps and spaces,
I was light – a mesh of marrow, then,
the wind skewered bright like an arrow.

I was a skeleton,
I was a comb.

Nothing and nobody stopped or stuck.
Looped on the family necklace
I was otherwise unfeathered.
I lacked the threads, the sticky edge,
to tangle in a circle, in
the warm of a web. And when

the dips and wells filled up with brine,
saltiness wore away the time.

Words

A catchy clutch of syllables
of tricky, dense unrhymables.
Unapologetic
they are technical, specific.
Latin-spangled, many-angled,
winking strings of sound
you strive to fit your mouth around.

Proudly with a chain of charms
you gleam with words you've learned this March...

Of course, the zygomatic arch!
Metatarsals, intercostals,
bits you never knew were part of you
are named and labelled, graphed and tabled,
breathed into living lexicality,
spilled from the guts of the medical dictionary.
A scientifically sound soliloquy
perfect, whispering pectoriloquy.

Whisper

Nothing – nothing –
flutter and a flip between the ribs
nothing
rustle fold of pages

curtains catch a stir of air
shutter keeps a horizontal ladder
a vertebra
a stair

and when you stretch
catch
smile
up a level, flicker back flair

flutter, catch, shutter-latch,
smile
turn back
smile

words whisper to each other on the shelves
shift and settle where they will
nothing
flutter
be still.

Cerebellum

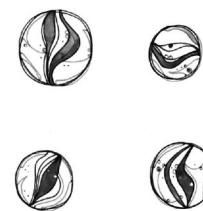
Cerebellum, branches like
a spread umbrella, arches
to a cool grey dome of sky
to a skull of cloudy white.

Like geminate fists
a pair of halves
tightly clutching a core, a cord
a delicate twist at the heart.

The lattice fan of members
silvered membrane, subtle
how the human brain
remembers
layers of sylvan history,
and lines and links are sisterly.

Sap as thick as lifeblood flows.
Here's no mystery, just safe
repose, twinkling canopy
crux of cradling elbows and
the crook of your family
tree.

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quarters
frances pope

Frances Pope is a writer and French-English translator. Originally from the UK, she has been writing poetry and taking part in open mics and readings for several years, starting in Brighton in 2009 and continuing in London, in France, and in Montreal where she has lived since 2015. Her work has appeared in *Carte Blanche*, *Asymptote*, *Québec Reads*, *L'Organe*, *UNAM's Periódico de Poesía*, and *The Cannon's Mouth*, and is forthcoming in *Phantom Drift*. Frances also draws and is learning photography, and she is currently working on a project bringing together words and illustrations.



Years

In a dusty, faded-photograph hue
with soft-curling edges, the ballet shoes
their crinkled skin like laughter lines
where toes have creased and ankles aligned
and bent like an elbow
and tapped
in
time.

And the gentle whorls where the fault-line falls
between arches and insteps and heels and balls.
Where the twisting of tendons spring-loaded a leap
into floodlight, spotlight, the hush of the hall.
Two almond-flat ovals remember the imprints
of pliés, positions, in first, second, fourth...
And the first time they rose onto block-filled toes,
oh, the strain on the newly-formed bones!
Just two slivers of silk.
Looped and lashed and twined all about
with lengths and tendrils, ribbon ropes,
through button-hole eyes either side...
Now for years upon years
they've been powdered and packed in a hat-box
side by side
like ears.

IN AEVO

Roland Le Huenen

The word poetry comes initially from the Greek verb ποιῆν (poiein) which means "to make, to create". The poet is a creator of verbal forms that reveal through an original combination of sounds, words, images and rhythm, an inner and often provocative vision of reality, the world, the society, but also of the imaginary which inhabits the soul of the writer.

Robert Frost, an American poet, once said that a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom." This statement could not be more accurate for this collection of poems by the very talented Ioana Cosma. The joy and wisdom that this young poet attains in creating and expressing her ideas and feelings are strikingly apparent; most of all the poems reveal universal truths. Somehow, as the poems unfold, subtle, unpredicted and half-perceived truths become clear. As readers, we enjoy the beautiful imagery, the rhythm, the sounds, the words, the metaphors. Yet, after reading and absorbing such revealed truth, one is left with a reality through which one becomes wiser. The poet does, indeed, have a way of "turning all the unwords into blossoming tunes" as with "The Lost Connection."

Throughout her collection *In Aevo*, there is a constant presence of timelessness: it is a sensation, it gives the feeling that all belongs to, all is part of, all comprises the whole. Hopelessness, vanity, sacrifice, regret, forgiveness, contribution, caritas, hope: all we can do is to seize the moment as in "Dancers in the Dark."

Ioana Cosma is influenced and moved by so many rich sources: musicians such as Nick Drake, Ian Curtis (Joy Division), cinema (Dancers in the Dark), poets (Robert Creeley, founder of the Projectivist poetry or Black Mountain poetry) and, of course, Pessoa, (writer, critic, poet), the mythic (Greek and Roman, Norse, Hindu, Judeo-Christian) to modern figures of suffering such as Joy Scott (Columbine massacre), literary characters such as Mahound (The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie) and Gradiva (The Woman who Walks by W. Jensen). Let Gradiva walk us in timelessness, in aevo, to a locus amoenus.

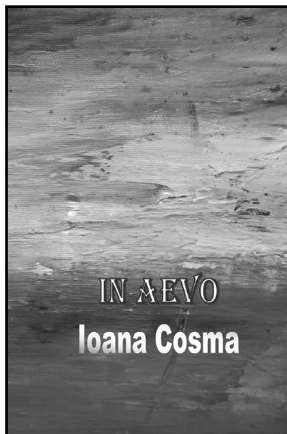
Written in free verse, Ioana Cosma's poetry has inspiring musicality and cadence which are carried by tone. The poems are adapted to the moment. They appeal to our imagination and our emotions, and through our senses, we see vividly, we hear clearly and we feel intensely. Provoked by the poetry, as readers, our emotions are awakened, our senses are heightened: this is the miracle of the poem.

Good poetry leads to a personal encounter. We all feel different, we all react differently, but we all have a common humanity.

Between love and hate,
Reason and feelings,
There lies an uncharted territory
Of complex design,
A full-fledged world of compromise.
"The Included Middle"

Ioana Cosma's poetry begins "in delight and ends in wisdom." These poems are words on wings.

Roland Le Huenen FRSC is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at University of Toronto.



In Aevo
Ioana Cosma
Silver Bow Publishing
2020
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Ioana Cosma

THE MARTA POEMS

Candice James

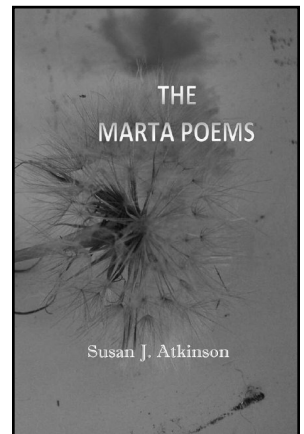
Born and raised in England, Susan J. Atkinson is both an award winning poet and award winning teacher. Her poems have been widely published in journals and anthologies in print and online. She also writes poetry and stories for children and currently lives in Ottawa, Ontario where she and her film maker husband have raised their four daughters. *The Marta Poems* is her first collection of poetry.

The Marta Poems showcases the strength of the human spirit through the story of Marta, whose life weaves from Poland to Siberia, from Rhodesia to England, and then finally to Canada. Her path is a familiar one for many who were displaced during WWII and highlights the struggles of the ordinary surviving the extraordinary. Marta's plight will be familiar with many, and as she endeavours to find a home, she becomes an unlikely spokesperson for so many unheard voices.

The elements of history provide the backdrop for Marta's story. The poems explore the complexities of a lifetime defined by hardship and intense emotion that was influenced by the invasion of Poland, World War II, refuge, displacement, and loss. Themes of sorrow and separation intertwine with the search for a better life.

This collection will find a market and readership beyond the poetry / literary community as its appeal will stretch to those also interested in history.

Candice James has recently completed 2 three year terms (2010-2016) as Poet Laureate of New Westminster, BC and has been appointed Poet Laureate Emerita of that city. She is author of twelve poetry books.

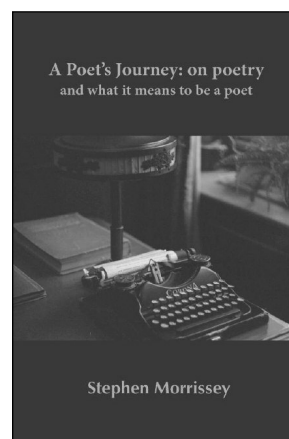


The Marta Poems
Susan J. Atkinson
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Susan J. Atkinson

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**A Poet's Journey:
On poetry
and what it means
to be a poet**

Stephen Morrissey

Writing from a poet's perspective, Morrissey discusses the influence of older poets who act as mentors; the poet friends of one's youth; poets whose books influence one's own work; and the varied experiences of life that are important to the development of the poet's writing. The art of poetry includes ideas about poetry; poetry as the voice of the human soul; visionary poetry; the purpose of experimental poetry; confessional poetry; and finding an authentic voice in poetry. The essays in this book are the culmination of a lifetime of thinking about what it means to be a poet and the art of poetry.

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SALT BRIDE

Matthew Rettino

In her latest poetry collection, *Salt Bride* (Inanna Publications, 2019), Ilona Martonfi reinvents herself by creating a narrative out of her past—one in which she has had to reinvent herself many times, as a child refugee, mother, battered wife, activist, and, finally, as a poet. Hers is a refugee's experience down to the very form and content of her lines; the search for place and home inspires her poetry, sometimes in unexpected ways. In the furtive fragments of her free verse lines, one detects a longing for impressions to stick, for a sentence to settle. But Martonfi's voice is productively restless. Danger forces the refugee on the road, but she can still appreciate the beauty in a field of flowers.

In addition to her own, personal past, Martonfi tells the histories of other people. Her opening poem describes the environmental devastation around Shinkolobwe, an abandoned Congolese village where the uranium for the atomic bombs dropped on Japan was mined. An "official nonplace" (1), Shinkolobwe is a home that has been erased. Nagaski, in her second poem, "The Fourth Panel: Ghosts," is another example. With haiku-like economy, she speaks from the voice of victim of the atomic bomb blast: "the ocean still, low winds. / 11:02 a.m. August 9, 1945 / was the day I died" (3–5). Her understatement is not a shout out against injustice but a quiet witnessing of the victim's experience.

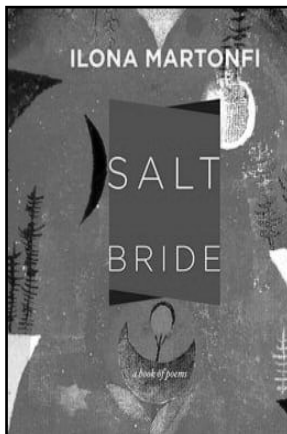
In her witness poems, she uses her sparse, imagistic style to pay witness to the Chernobyl disaster, the Babi Yar massacre, the bombing of Budapest, and the Birkenau concentration camp, among other topics. She marks the time-and-place specificity of each trauma to memorialize it; the litany of place names and times of day develop their own poetic rhythm, their own stark, metonymic effect. But she never forgets the beauty of the natural landscape, which seems at times to encode the idea of home, especially in places where all sense of home has been destroyed and remembering it has become more important than ever.

For example, "Srebrenica" tells the story of a man's brother, a victim of the Bosnian genocide. It is told from survivor's first-person viewpoint:

hands bound behind his back.
My brother is here
summer of 1995
in a mass grave in Bosnia
fourteen years old
Avdija buried without his head
gravedigger
sheep, goats
walnut trees
climbing roses
white skulls
of the mountain. (6–17)

In this description of a grave, a home for the dead, her staccato imagery has the spontaneous clarity of Japanese poetry. The natural world is never far from Martonfi's awareness; the beauty that lies by the wayside of trauma recalls the value of the lives lost.

Eventually, Martonfi turns to her own past to write about her family's experience as Hungarian refugees during and after the Second World War. In poems like "Easter Sunday," she reconstructs her earliest childhood memories. Representing herself as a "pigtailed Magyar refugee girl" (22), she tempers a sense of her innocence and naivety with her adult awareness of the secrets that her family never discussed at the time (personal interview). Fields of flowers and a new dress to wear are at the centre of this ten-year-old child's world, until she discovers the "unfound" body of her mother, who



Salt Bride
Ilona Martonfi
Inanna Publications
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2019, \$18.95



Ilona Martonfi

has attempted suicide (17). "All the time I carry with me / the odour of spring / the odour of funeral," the speaker states (5–6).

Smell is supposed to be the sense most strongly tied to memory; but what occasionally concretizes the past for Martonfi is sound. Lines of dialogue bring back the past with immediacy. Dialogue can draw up a specific childhood memory, or a memory of a fateful conversation, as in "The Vigil on Puget Sound," a lament for her late brother. Other exclamations hit. In "White Lilacs," she quotes her assertive reprimand against her abusive husband:

Lined with row houses
1215 rue Saint-André
tight knots of violence
[...]
Your four children. His fists.
"Shorty, I will divorce you!"
"I will divorce you," you said. (1–3, 38–40)

Martonfi renders the violence in the relationship explicit. Her oral assertion of agency reaches out from the poem like it does from the past; her promise to divorce is her response to her husband's fists.

In examining her own life, Martonfi writes about her own children and what it was like to live with a batterer husband. Though equating a poet with her speaker is usually problematic, Martonfi states that these poems reflect her experiences completely and that standing up against domestic violence is her life's calling (personal interview). This said, her poetry has been a vehicle for the reinvention and re-fashioning of her identity. In the prose poem "Casa dei Zetti," she furnishes a villa with a catalogue of domestic details, describing how it is "a house for art" (3), despite the presence of the violence that puts her "arms on the ceiling. Head on the wall (15)." Art is a way to recover from abuse and, in the end, to master one's past. "Every day, I reconstructed myself," she says (14), highlighting the importance of art for her recovery.

Martonfi's poetry is especially sympathetic to the plight of children. In "The Fourth Panel: Ghosts," she speaks of the "children / who will die once again" (22–23). The children who continue to suffer due to society's inability to learn from the past serve as indictments of that society. In "Girl in Dubrulle Wood," she speaks of a girl who was "snatched in a playground / in front of her mother" (16–17). In "Small River," an Inuk woman recalls her grandparents' traditional way of life, before she was taken to a Residential School—another form of kidnapping. "I was just four when taken," her speaker says (19). "Small River," like "The Fourth Panel," is respectful of the other's voice, reporting the facts of their trauma and letting the reader supply emotion.

Martonfi's own childhood as a refugee, as recalled in her poems, parallels the experiences of these children. In fact, "Funeral Prayer for Alan Kurdi" can be read as one child refugee's prayer to another: from Martonfi younger self to a boy who never made it to safety. Alan Kurdi is the Syrian refugee boy who drowned en route to the island of Kos in the Aegean Sea and whose photograph became one of the pietàs of the Syrian refugee crisis. As a former child refugee, Martonfi expresses her wish for Alan, and for all children displaced by conflict: "O little boy, Alan. / O God, give him a home" (15–17).

Given this powerful subject matter, which manages to be both personal and historical, one could risk overlooking Martonfi's less eventful, more form-based poems. But to do so would mean to overlook her experiments, which inform the aesthetics of the rest of her collection. The well-crafted word-strokes of her ekphrastic Van Gogh poems express her verbal impressionism. In addition, her Cézanne poems, contained in "Les Lauves," are a series of haiku which paint an impression of Cézanne's art studio in Aix-en-Provence: "red-tile roof stone house / chasing the ghosts of artists / mistral in blue pines" (7–9). Additionally, "Sea Urchin" echoes this form in a series of oceanic haiku with mythological overtones, hinting at the mysterious depths that lie beneath the haiku itself: a concept that can be summarized in the Japanese aesthetic of *yūgen*.

In short, these poems reiterate the aesthetic that defines the rest of the collection. Fusing the personal with the historical, and impressionism with *yūgen*, *Salt Bride* offers the reader history with personal depths.

Matthew Rettino is a speculative fiction writer who lives in the West Island of Montreal. He works as a freelance editor and leads courses at the Thomas More Institute.

LOCKED IN DIFFERENT ALPHABETS

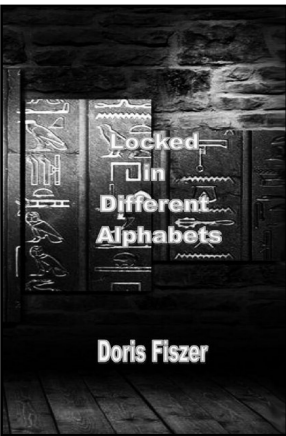
Candice James

This collection of memoir poetry will appeal to readers who have contemplated their role in the family, cared for a difficult parent, faced the loss of a loved one, experienced a problematic relationship with a sibling or parent, and perhaps grew up in a home where one or both parents were war-time survivors.

Doris Fiszer is the author of two chapbooks: *The Binders*, Tree Press and *Sasanka* (Wild Flower), Bywords Publication. She has won awards for her poetry including the 2017 John Newlove Award and Tree Press's 2016 Chapbook contest (*The Binders*). The Binders and was also shortlisted for the bpNichol Chapbook Award. Her poems have appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies in Canada and the United States.

In section one we are immediately drawn into a complex family dynamic of the author growing up with a troubled sibling, his battle with Lou Gehrig's disease and the effects his death had on the family.

The second section deals with the author's father and mother. Fiszer often uses dialogue with her father's words describing his Nazi camp experiences during World War 11, and his deep love for her mother. Fiszer illustrates her complicated relationship with her father, after her mother's death, through a series of poems that show his demanding



Locked in Different Alphabets
Doris Fiszer
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and critical nature and his difficult transition from an independent lifestyle to a long-term care facility where he died from Parkinson's disease at 89.

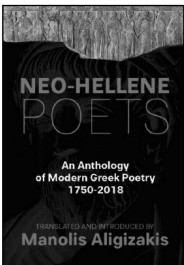
In the last section Fiszer describes her mother's life when the Warsaw Uprising began, incorporating some entries from a journal her mother kept during that time when she was in several war camps. The strong love Fiszer and her mother shared for each other is revealed in a variety of poems, many based on dreams she had and continues to have of her mother after her death.

Locked in Different Alphabets will provide comfort and spiritual inspiration to anyone who has experienced loss and is navigating the complexities of being human.



Doris Fiszer

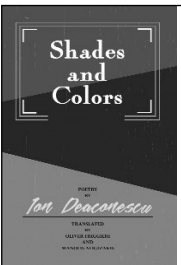
Candice James has recently completed 2 three year terms (2010-2016) as Poet Laureate of New Westminster, BC and has been appointed Poet Laureate Emerita of that city. She is author of twelve poetry books.



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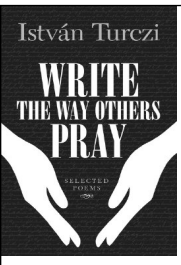
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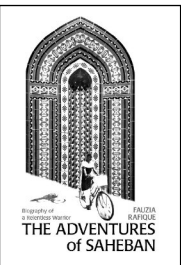
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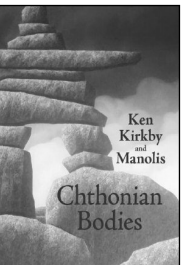
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