



PUBLISHING NEW WOMEN POETS SINCE 1997

SPEAKING WITH/SPEAKING FROM:  
Perugia Press Poets Discuss Linguistic Diversity

AWP 2022

#### EVENT DESCRIPTION:

What community and cultural languages define your work as a writer? Five Perugia poets guide a discussion investigating the challenges of language acquisition and loss, how terms are used as weapons of exclusion in military and civilian spaces, the reclamation and affirmation of mother tongues, and ways of speaking from and for the environment. Explore how linguistic experience intersects with craft in this conversation featuring women poets from one press who represent myriad places and voices.

#### FEATURED POETS:

Lynne Thompson (*Beg No Pardon*, Perugia, 2007), Ida Stewart (*Gloss*, Perugia, 2011), Abby E. Murray (*Hail and Farewell*, Perugia, 2019), Jacqueline Balderrama (*Now in Color*, Perugia, 2020), and Rebecca Pelky (*Through a Red Place*, Perugia, 2021).

#### BOOK COVERS & SAMPLE POEMS FOLLOW:



# Beg No Pardon

LYNNE THOMPSON

Perugia Press, 2007

## To Blackness

As it happens, I have never tired of blackness—its Marcus Garvey,  
*Raisin in the Sun*, Tuskegee airmen. Its Strivers Row and liver lips;

its Dred Scott, Freedman's Bureau, Scott Joplin. Some say black is  
swarthy, gloomy, fiendish, but we all spring from the tribes—

Ashanti, Boba, Fulani, Wolof—their cowrie shells and krobo beads  
sewn into our fading fabric. I don't know much about my native blackness;

my daddy he say *Igbo*, the only word he can give me, but it's the only word  
I need to get the old folks to remembering that in Igbo *ututu* is morning,

*abali* is night, and in any mirror my *ibu*—my face—is always black.

Lynne Thompson  
from *Beg No Pardon*

## How I Learned Where We Came From

When she wants him for the late meal, she calls  
*supper soon, Kingstown-man, curried goat, sticky wicket*

and he responds, testy, *not yet ready, Bequia-woman,*  
*Anglican church, basket with no handles.*

We children, we laugh, run for the hills  
and the tall sweet-grasses, listen for the lilt

of frangipani tantie. She call *come in now*  
*pigeon peas, mangoes, poor man's orchids—*

then we run for true, and supper is all  
cassava root, callaloo, very little sugar cane

and we're in it all at once: choirsong above  
Mt. Pleasant, Port Elizabeth, harp of Paget Farm

till Father, he way *no*, defends his slipped-on wishes  
for Soufrière, Sans Souci, Wallilabou Bay

and so on into the evening, calypso and steel drums,  
a little Rasta and Bob Marley for us young'uns

until, finally, we are no longer black ironwood—  
wood that will not float.

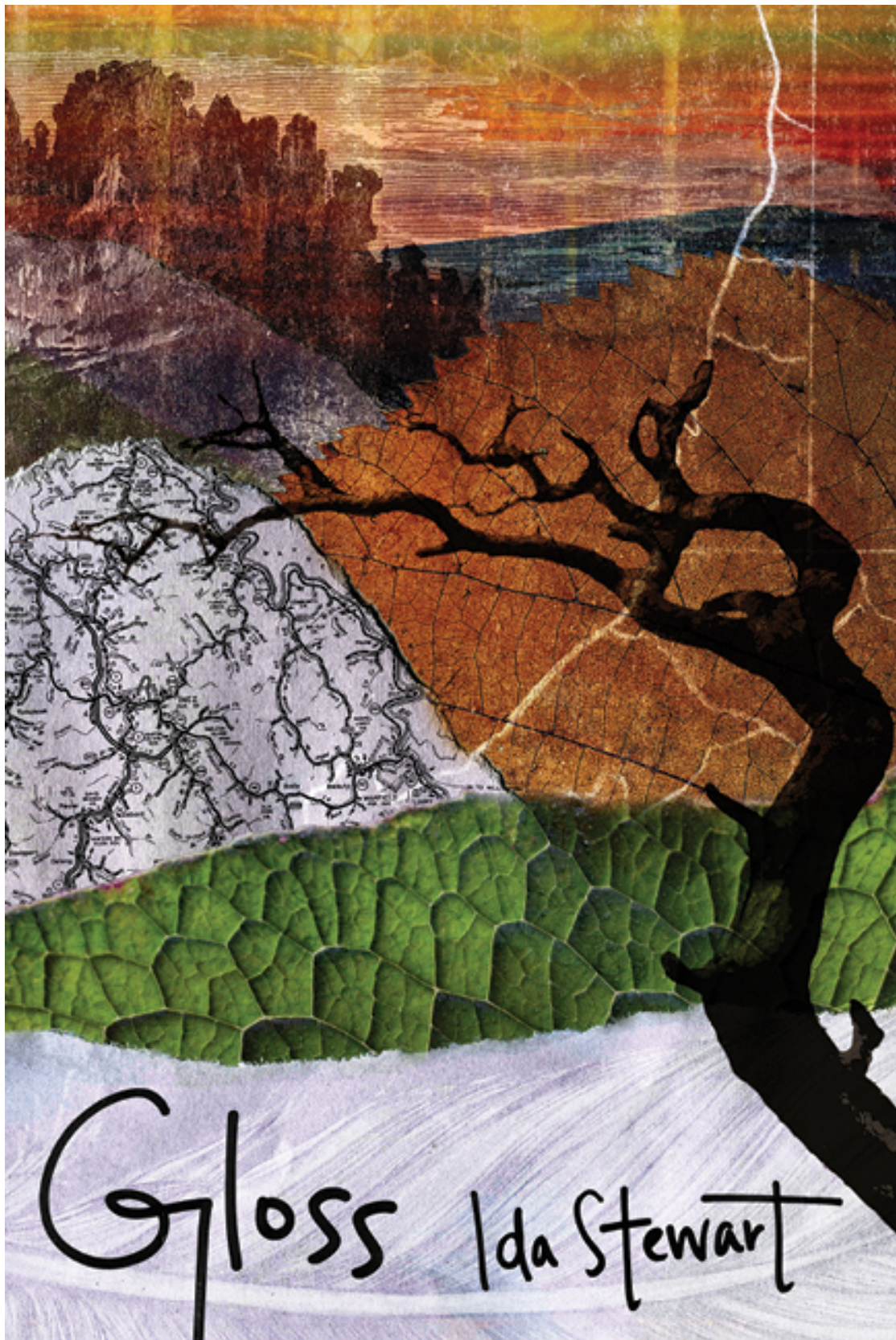
Lynne Thompson  
from *Beg No Pardon*

## Song for Two Immigrants

I thought I knew you. To me, you were the Grenadines, the Anglican Church, and a cricket match every Sunday, and every Sunday, you were Fort Charlotte, the Vincy Mas, and blue tide pools. You were Arawaks sailing into Kingston Harbor. You were English and French patois, rainforests, regatta and a Congo snake, whelk, *rotis*, lobster and rum.

Yet, here you are in a yellowing photograph, in the Mojave or Death Valley, CA, looking like deserters from an American war: her, every bit the boy, hair slicked, leather jacket cinched at her throat, her tiny foot on the running board of a black '37 Ford coupe — and you, looking nothing less than the black Clyde Barrow, flicking the butt of your Lucky Strike, checking out your boys at play in the dirt wearing short pants and high-tops — everyone looking for all the world as if the Caribbean was a dream, a far yesterday away, and it was, and it's clear I did not know you.

Lynne Thompson  
from *Beg No Pardon*



Perugia Press, 2011

## Appellation

I ground myself in the sound,

channeling the fabled brave,  
his ear to the earth hearing hooves  
like heartbeats, then vanishing into the forest

as a note in a chord with nature—  
    like music or fog rising  
from warm soil.

Where does the self originate,  
and do I hear only what I want to hear?  
I've got the river just so

in my mind, a fine muddy line  
between a real river and a satin ribbon

to worry  
between fingers, to tie in my hair.

The river says run off, run off, and gush.  
And the houses on the hill, just so, say shush  
brick shush—

    windows dusky as apple skin.  
Indeterminacy is the ground

I'm hearing, tasting  
for meaning or echoes or slant-rhymes,  
    for root flavor:

the Appalachian appellation.  
Redundancies inside redundancies,  
the land gives the name.

Hear territory in its pronunciation,

the fine wavering line.  
And I'm still talking sound

surrounding  
your body before it settles  
    in the *ear* of heart,  
before the heart translates it into some language  
like nature, like the steeps steeping.

I've got a ribbon trailing from one hand.  
I've got the houses on the hillside  
like apples, like pats on a belly, like accents.

An accent is a sound your body lives in,  
lives on.

    The bird takes a dirt bath  
and feels more like herself. The river moves in her banks,  
makes herself a river, makes the earth a gorge.

Ida Stewart  
from *Gloss*

## Glossary: Ex- Words

### *ex-plain*

Means fancy;  
having learned to talk with airs;

saying you was no longer,  
having been, you were, worried  
about the hurting in the wording, the whirring:

I was. You were, were, were.

### *ex-fancy*

Devoid of guilt; plain;  
in a way, like infancy.

### *ex-bort*

Does not mean feel better or divorce yourself  
from having been stricken, struck, or trucked away and burned;  
to make a point;  
see *extort*, the whole fruity confection up-bellied.

### *ex-a-mine*

Is torn between filling in and tearing some more.  
(And, what to tear apart? People tearing up, torn limb from limb  
from branch, the family river limping along in these parts?)

The I am from the iamb I was?  
Or the little flammable inflammatory pieces I owned?)

### *ex-alt*

I ode you, all.  
(And in doing so, do I own or reclaim myself?)

*ex-position*

Mess it up, pulpify the apples, fire the hierarchy,  
destroy the understory,  
change your mind, and goodness don't explain  
where you are coming from  
or tell me you was a good boy once.

*xoxo*

Little wordless song;  
embracing shorthand;  
we still are, you and I;  
we weren't were'd—whee!

Ida Stewart  
from *Gloss*

The mountaintop with a quiver of arrows in her voice

Feel the last tensile  
instant, the release—

I boulder out a song        *I am all motion I am*  
like a flat tire junked

into the river:  
dead aim wail.

What are motions but for going  
through, I think. Think

of the granny women  
burying the babies they got borned,

their graveyard gospel  
flat as unmarked stones

marking hilltop graves.  
Think of your little grandmother,

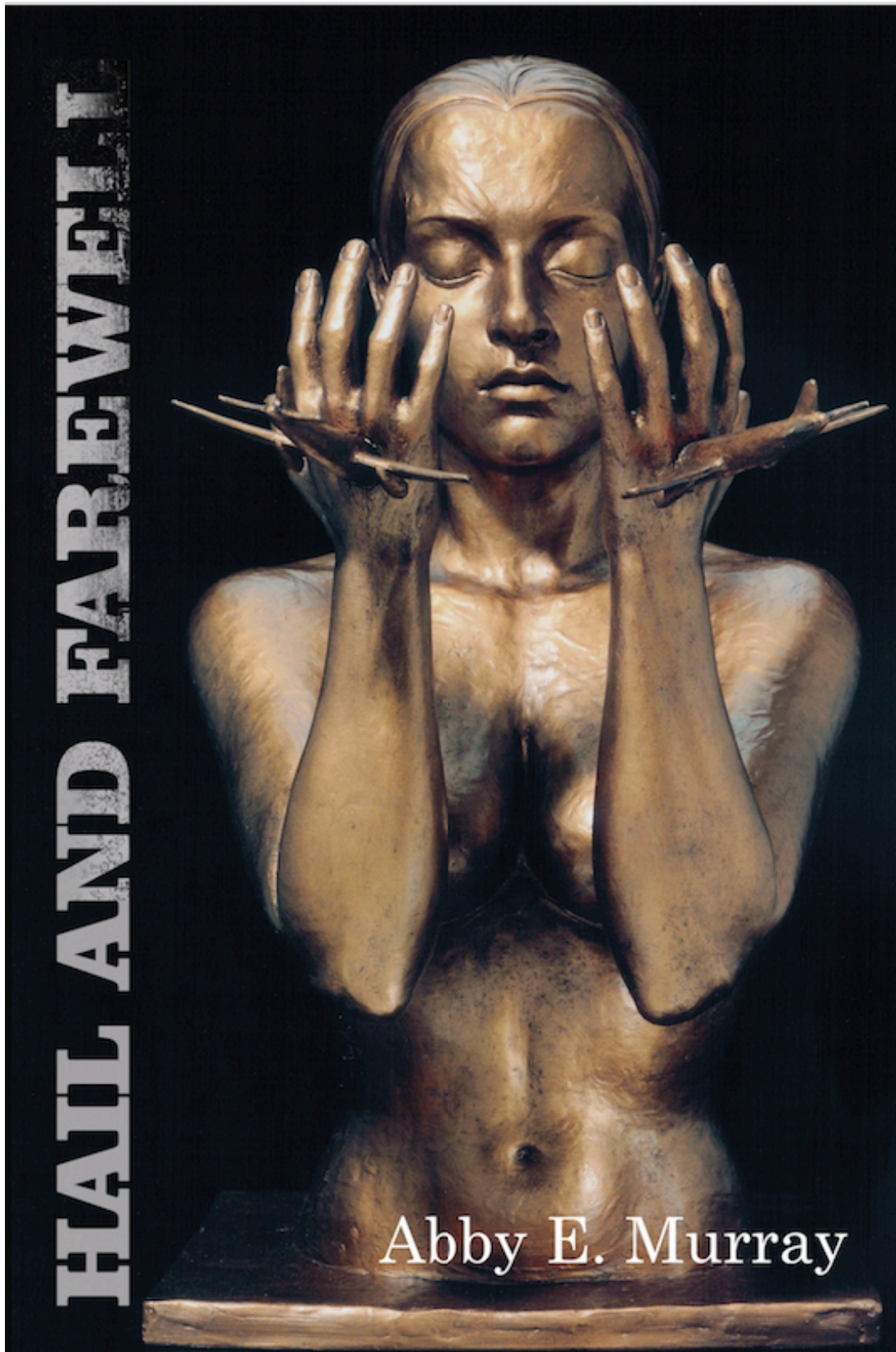
her voice in the last years.        *Corners,*  
*corners, corners,* all she could say,

all the years like walls  
closing in—*corners, corners*—

save the day  
you lined up dominoes

just to knock them down  
and she said *Oh!*

Ida Stewart  
from *Gloss*



Perugia Press, 2019

## Lunch at the War College

We pull into the parking lot  
at your next duty station,  
the War College hunched like an old goat  
in the crust of its own island.  
A seagull drops to the asphalt  
beside our car with a crab in its mouth,  
smashes it against the curb  
and digs in through the belly.

Nice girls don't ask  
where you've brought them  
and they don't believe in omens.  
I ask how war is taught  
at the college level and you say  
it's not that simple.

Nice girls don't bring up  
Ranger School graduation at parties,  
how one lieutenant got tangled  
on the zip-line and had to hang there  
until the ceremony was over,  
rifle strapped to his ribcage  
and gum in his mouth.

Nice girls don't ask  
if they're real knives or rubber  
when you wrestle your brothers  
with blades in a mock battle  
while your parents and wives  
watch in their church clothes.  
None of us think  
*this is what it will look like*  
*the moment our boy is killed.*

We fattened you up for war,  
let the army pick you up  
like a turkey in winter, upside down,  
let it drag you into the barn.

Nice girls promise  
not to ask questions  
when you return from the desert,  
they promise to hold the cat  
all the way from New York to Newport.

Nice girls ask  
if we are lost when a deserted lot  
looks nothing like the O Club,  
nice girls ignore the scavenging birds.  
They don't say *give me the map*,  
they don't say *I'll find us*.

When we arrived at the War College  
I snatched the map from your hands  
and the seagull outside the car took off,  
heavy with lunch,  
the crab still waving one pincer  
as if to say it wasn't hurt, wasn't dying.

Abby E. Murray  
from *Hail and Farewell*

## Memorial Day

Hello stranger, dear neighbor,  
brave soldier, hey buddy,  
I want you to know we're glad  
you ate the goat meat  
half-cooked over burning paper,  
that you handed out jawbreakers,  
that you researched the body  
and all its invisible hinges:  
the hair that melts and bones  
that flavor the blood like soup,  
thank you, we mean it,  
for feeding one stray dog  
but not the other,  
for eating beef stew from a bag  
and cocoa beverage powder  
on your anniversary,  
on Christmas,  
thanks for drowning the mice  
together in the same bucket,  
for finding Sergeant Garcia first,  
for bringing Connor home  
and running the memorial race,  
for dropping that rose  
into the ground in Pennsylvania,  
for wearing your blues,  
you sure look sharp, you look good,  
you wouldn't know you're a soldier,  
you're such a normal guy,  
thanks for trusting the interpreter,  
for saying *woah, woah, woah*  
and giving money to the sheikh,  
thanks for giving your heavy knife  
to the Afghan colonel as a gift,  
for waiting to hear if the city fell,  
thanks for going abroad, overseas,  
into the sandbox, hell and back,  
Godknowswhere and no-man's-land,  
we can only imagine the PTSD,  
the hopelessness, the sedatives, the sweats,

we're so happy you made it,  
you survived, you came back,  
not a dent in the fender,  
this beer's for you, buddy, sir,  
kiddo, without you  
I wouldn't be free to drink it.

Abby E. Murray  
from *Hail and Farewell*

## A Note from Your Friendly Poetry Instructor

You think you can't write about a mud puddle? YOU CAN WRITE ABOUT A MUD PUDDLE. Whattaya think you can't write about that puddle for? Huh? You think people gonna say some shit? Gonna call your poem trash? Gonna call *you* trash? Say old water lying in the dirt is too boring for a poem? WELL THEN HOW COME YOU CAN SEE A BRIGHT YELLOW DAFFODIL SHINING ALONE ACROSS ITS CALM-ASS SURFACE LIKE A NEW PLANET RIGHT THERE IN THE DIRT? HUH? HOW COME? IT'S A GODDAMN MOMENT, THAT'S WHY. IT'S A REMINDER OF HOW SMALL WE ALL ARE BUT ALSO HOW LARGE AND IT'S 100% YOURS TO REMEMBER SO I SAY YOU *CAN* WRITE IT. When have you *ever* written a poem and somebody said it was trash? Even *thought* about it being trash? Huh? Whattaya mean they have? WELL FUCK THEM! YOU THINK THOSE PIECES OF SHIT ARE OUT DOING THE HARD WORK MAKING POEMS WHEN THEY'RE TOO BUSY BLABBING ABOUT YOURS? NO! YOU TELL THEM TO SEE ME FOR A GODDAMN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT OR SHUT THE FUCK UP. You write that poem about the mud puddle AND your tiny big luminous daffodil self and you share it anyplace you please because nobody's gonna say shit unless they say IT'S A GODDAMN WONDER YOU WROTE IT AND YOU KNOW WHY? BECAUSE IT'S TRUE, THAT'S WHY.

Abby E. Murray  
published in *Rattle* (forthcoming)

# NOW IN COLOR



Perugia Press, 2020

**esperanza** [ES-pear-AHN-sah] noun (f) :

Migration is written on this green heartache  
of home, once its own discovery of water—  
the Aztecs' Metztlixcitlco meaning  
*place in the center of the moon.*

Some are used to hopes being where they've been.  
But singing one octave is Kansas to Oz. For a while,

my father didn't know that the movie changed  
to Technicolor since the family TV was black and white.

Jacqueline Balderrama  
from *Now in Color*

## Valentine to the Disappeared

Dearest, the hum of a hundred years  
finds you in the divided flesh of an orange  
tracing you back to northern Chihuahua.

Once-wealthy ancestors are now  
a caricature of large heads and long legs. They say,  
*Even on horses, their feet drag on the ground.*

After the Revolution, you belonged  
to fruit-pickers, grocers, motel owners.  
Now there's a judge, a professor, less Chihuahua.

Some of us have forgotten how to speak with those dead,  
which means, a boy made to feel ashamed in his learning  
the language will not learn. He cannot teach his daughters.

Now the feeling returns in me for not knowing the words.  
I am told half of you means *bucket* (balde),  
and the other means *branch* (rama): water for grafted trees.

I call you *little name* because you turn invisible  
in new mouths, have been spoken by so many  
you can't be heard anymore.

*Little name*, as myself, I've always been ready  
to send you away like a nutshell boat  
weighted down by a pebble into dry streambeds.

It is like that with anything built  
to be given.

Jacqueline Balderrama  
from *Now in Color*

Fragmented Apology, 2006

—after California Senate Bill 670, enacting the “Apology Act  
for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program”

When the knocking comes / county agents are on the porch  
telling “Mexicans” / *You should go in two weeks*  
*Here are the tickets / Here’s your destination*

In raids / hundreds at La Placita Park / detained  
for papers / vans idling in the peripheries  
while their children at school / wait

And threats / for some families / are real enough  
to leave / How can this be called / *voluntary*  
As a heartbreak / As a life packed and thrown across the hills

Who knew and said nothing / and still  
says nothing / Who went turning off the house lights  
because no one was / home

Imagine the people in the train car / the girl whispering  
the moon is following her  
to the make-believe town / become real / become

vacant looks on her parents’ eyes / In reflection  
a little oasis of nothing / and you / lucky to know  
someone / or not / Some can speak the language

or can’t / one woman must paint her belonging  
until there’s a bridge / and in the distance  
a steeple

Jacqueline Balderrama  
from *Now in Color*

# THROUGH *a* RED PLACE



Rebecca Pelky

Perugia Press, 2021

Wômôsum  
~*Ibtôgat muskamôn*

Nunáwô nahak  
pipinacucôhqôkanuk. Nuputawô nahak  
pupiqáwôkanuk. Awán na

sqá? Cahsuwak quniqák  
apuwak wukupáy? Cahshinsh punitôkansh  
suhkuhanum? Cáqansh manotásh

nákum mus ayakumun? Nám  
piwáhcuks upihsháwônsh. Wáhtôw  
másqák sipo. Wahakáh náwáw

pipinacucôhqôkanuk. Putawáw wahakáh iwát,  
*Katavi-kunômôyi*  
*mucimi.*

Love Me  
~ *A found poem*

I see myself  
in the mirror. I hear myself  
in the music. Who is that

woman? How many deer are there  
in her forest? How many knives  
can she throw? What baskets

will she paint? She sees that  
the flowers are little. She knows  
the river is red. She sees herself

in the mirror. She hears herself say,  
*You are going to love me*  
*forever.*

Rebecca Pelky  
from *Through a Red Place*

## Sonnet for the Mohegan Language

Without an adjective there is no blue  
for bird or sky or water, which is not  
to say a colorless world. See the hue  
just there of a bird being red as it  
builds a nest of twigs and bits of wire  
(being gray or being rusty). There is room,  
like Cricket laughing himself into fire,  
for a bird to blacken sometime soon.  
The nest as well, might find its niche  
being small and happy while it waits  
for eggs and then a family to stretch  
the edge for love and size, to make it great.  
The Mohegan world isn't static, but flows  
prismatic; each of us moves in rainbows.

Rebecca Pelky  
from *Through a Red Place*

Redacted

Here's what I remember:

Red flowers, beds

in squares. Yellow. Sepia

stone paths. Hard

light of day. Everything

in primaries. Tulips taller

from the dirt side. This

is just a memory in the overexposed glare

of some lost context. It makes me uncomfortable,

the water too far off for sound.

This is where the doors open.

This is the ground and the thirteenth floor. No smell,

no thick pollen on my tongue,

no brush of petals. No touching.

This is where I go. This

is where I go back to.

Squinting into a color wheel.

If there were bees and buzzing, they've withered

into the gravel verges. The plane of horizon

tilts and yellow tulips flip,

a thousand balloons drifting.

Rebecca Pelky

from *Through a Red Place*