

*Heather Humphrey, continued*

the father is the only glimpse we can have of him. The poem ends with this powerful line of recognition and acceptance, “I am without you” leaving us feeling the absence just as deeply as the speaker.

Peppered throughout the collection are glimpses of the poet’s experiences leading a group of students on a semester abroad. His keen observations of the way he relates to the students adds an unexpected layer of interest to the collection. In “The Tall Blue-Eyed Kid from Long Island,” Tuon addresses this student’s discomfort at being so completely different from the Vietnamese people they are surrounded by. Tuon chooses to recognize the similarities between himself and this student despite their differences in ethnicity, “And how do I, / his professor, advise him / when the only way / I can order food is by pointing / at the menu and smiling.”

The connective tissue that binds this collection together are the poems describing the way the poet misses his wife and daughter during his travels and remembers ways they made memories when together. It is in these poems that the imagery and language becomes lyrical, lovely, and filled with beautiful images. In “My Daughter Sleeps Tonight,” Tuon describes watching his infant daughter sleep. He says, “Suddenly a cry comes / from her upturned lips, her right hand turns / to a fist like she’s leading a revolution.” In “Song for Stella,” the speaker plays the guitar and sings while his wife is pregnant so their daughter “will recognize our sounds.” And in the postscript poem “Stranger,” we get this heartbreaking image of how his daughter doesn’t recognize him after he’s been away. Tuon leaves us satisfied with the last several lines though, he writes:

She burrowed her face on her mother’s  
breasts and cried muffled cries.  
The next morning I took out  
my guitar, strummed the C and A  
minor chords, then she stopped crying,  
watched my playing, and smiled.

And with that, like Tuon, we are home.

*Jen DeGregorio*

**Dante Di Stefano and María Alvarez, eds.**

**MISREPRESENTED PEOPLE: POETIC RESPONSES TO TRUMP’S AMERICA**  
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In her classic *The Life of Poetry*, Muriel Rukeyser wrote: “If there were no poetry on any day in the world, poetry would be invented that day. For there would be an intolerable

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hunger.” Would it be an exaggeration to say that there was no poetry on Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2016? Would it be an exaggeration to say that poetry was invented that day? Born out of an intolerable hunger for kindness, for openness, for an America that, even if it did exist only in dreams, died the moment Donald Trump was elected to the Presidency? In the last year, we’ve seen Trump transform his divisive campaign rhetoric into terrifying policies: attempted Muslim bans, mass deportations, barring trans people from the military, removing the United States from international agreements to combat climate change, and much more.

*Misrepresented People: Poetic Responses to Trump’s America*, which is dedicated to Rukeyser and other progressive poets who have died, offers a lyric response to the hatred emanating from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue like malodorous gas. Drawing from the work of dozens of poets diverse in every sense of the word — hailing from different races, religions, classes, genders, walks of life, and stages of poetic career — *Misrepresented People* also puts its money where its mouth is: All proceeds from the collection will be donated to the National Immigration Law Center. Organized alphabetically by last name, with each writer contributing one to five poems, the anthology is a no-nonsense encyclopedia of some of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’s most powerful poetic voices. Kaveh Akbar, Natalie Diaz, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, Dana Levin, Gregory Pardlo, Alberto Ríos, sam sax, Patricia Smith, Javier Zamora, and many others register their rage, grief, and protest against not only Trump himself but the troubling cultural climate that ushered him into national politics.

Many of the poems in this collection are time stamped, serving as historic souvenirs from Election Day 2016 and its surreal aftermath. In “Elegy,” dated Nov. 9, 2016, Eloisa Amezcua reveals her fear and pessimism: “I woke up wanting / to have children / less than I wanted / them when I went / to bed.” Yet she can’t help but find humor in our predicament, the absurdity that our President is an ex-reality TV star who appeared on the cover of *Playboy*: “I want to laugh / until my womb / falls out,” Amezcua writes. If this is levity, it is short-lived: “I know now / how this world / can turn a body / into an urn.” Amezcua reminds us that particular bodies — especially non-white bodies — face greater danger after Trump’s election, which was championed by Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and other white supremacists. In Chaun Ballard’s “Pantom on the Presidential Election (from Saudi Arabia),” an American teacher in Jeddah watches in disbelief as Trump pulls ahead of Clinton in the polls. “My wife tells me everyone is offering condolences. / I want to say I don’t get the joke. / I want to ask: *Who died?*” In “Inauguration Day, 2017,” Nickole Brown registers her pain as the “same obscene / grief” she recalls on the day she and a friend had to bury a beloved horse: “Know how she was forced to stay calm / so the horse would not die / afraid.” Maria Gillan, in “The Day After the Election,” becomes “one of the old Italian ladies at funerals, / the ones who tore at their hair, / the ones who threw themselves into the coffins.”

The work of other poets critique Trump sidewise, tying his emergence to the nation’s longer history of racism and violence. In “For Which It Stands,” Gregory Pardlo writes, “Who wants a speckled / drape that folds as easy over smirch as fallen soldier? / This is rhetorical. Like, ‘What to the Negro / is the fourth of July?’ A flag should be stitched with a fuse.” Poems from Patricia Smith juxtapose the desperation of immigrants who came through Ellis Island in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the contemporary desperation of black bodies contending with the threat of police brutality. In “Practice Standing Unleashed and Clean,” Smith writes “All

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I can be is here, stretched / between solace and surrender, terrified of the dusty mark / that identifies me as poison in every one of the wrong ways. / I could perish here on the edge of everything.” In “that’s my,” Smith’s subjects do perish, and she gives voice to the grieving parents who cannot fathom the wrongful deaths of their children: “that’s my son shot to look thuggish that’s my daughter shot to look more animal shot as kill shot as prey.” This plague of police shootings also gets treatment from Cortney Lamar Charleston in “Feeling Fucked Up,” in which he comments incredulously on the fact that murderous police officers rarely receive punishment: “they caught them / bastards on tape planting the Taser next to a body / handcuffed to its own color to lifelessness itself motherfucker.”

Government violence enters the lives of individuals as well here, trickling down to intimate relationships. Natalie Diaz writes of the erotic love that tries to make space for itself in the midst of unending war: “Until then, we touch our bodies like wounds— / the belled bruises fingers ring / against the skin are another way to bloom. / The war never ended and somehow begins again.” Dante Di Stefano, one of the anthology’s editors, traces domestic violence — “my mother / remains locked in the basement, a barbell- / shaped bruise throbbled tuberos under her blouse” — to national pathology: “Here in America, trauma and rage / dovetail, become birthright, counterclaim us.” Other poems spit the President’s own violent words back at him, reminding him that the racist characterizations of his campaign are false, such as those he voiced against Mexicans. Amezcua starkly chants: “my father is not a rapist / or a drug trafficker or a criminal or a killer or a rapist / or a drug trafficker or a criminal or a killer or a rapist / or a drug trafficker or a criminal or a killer or a rapist or a criminal or a killer or a rapist / or a drug trafficker or a criminal or a killer or a rapist.”

This is a must-read collection, one that offers not only a defiant answer to the Trump administration but a context to help understand — and find our way through — this troubling political moment. With its breadth of subject matter and contributors, it’s a reminder that America is a multivalent, multivocal landscape that, if it has to go down, will go down singing.

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