

*Hemming Flames* by Patricia Colleen Murphy, Utah State University Press, 2016, 80p, cloth \$19.95 • Patricia Colleen Murphy's first full-length collection of poetry, *Hemming Flames*, is equally brazen and stunning. *Hemming Flames* was awarded the May Swenson Poetry Award by Stephen Dunn. Like Elizabeth Bishop's work, the poems travel the globe, while never fully vacating home, and like Nick Flynn's work, the ghost of a smoking mother haunts the speaker and pages, and all the while Sylvia Plath rests quietly in the background. Each poem is an indictment that stands on its own lyrical fortitude.

If this collection were to have a sister album, it would be *The Sunset Tree* by the Mountain Goats because both chronicle families fractured by abuse and addiction. More precisely, they are mosaics where the past and present are separated by the victim's torn veil, whose burden it is to bear the past in the present. Moments such as a rite of biological passage become inextricably linked with growing old or a parent's death. The poem "Scrotum And Bone" opens with the line: "You learned to masturbate while I learned / to menstruate," and ends with, "There we were. / And the next day we were old."

Prose poems, sometimes in letter form, from the father and mother emerge in the second half of the collection. These poems don't seek to exonerate the parents but to confirm they created a "throw-things house," and eventually their hate loomed "so much they couldn't bear their / cars sitting arms-distance apart in the garage." The word "asylum" is used ten times in the collection, and mostly in reference to the mother writing from a mental asylum; however, "asylum" also comes to mean a safe mental space created to hide from the dangers of the physical world. In the poem, "My Mittelschmerz," the elusive safe space provides shelter to the speaker: "And all that time I begged to not know. / So busy in the suburbs, growing / into my growing-into coat," until she can grow into the antidote of adulthood.

## Synecdoche

BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

RACHEL MORGAN



To label these poems as confessional is to misunderstand their design. These poems burn in a place that is always recovering from trauma, hemming a painful memory to a surreal image that reimagines a world where all survivors are always learning how to extinguish fires they did not start. Read *Hemming Flames* once for its barefaced beauty, and read it again to hear its scar song.

*What The Night Numbered* by Bradford Tice, Trio House Press, 2015, 109p, paper \$16.00 • *What The Night Numbered* is Bradford Tice's second collection of poetry, and is the winner of the 2014 Trio Award. History and myth are adorned in sequins and glitter to resurrect Stonewall Inn in 1969. Tice twists an epitome of a cisgendered heterosexual couple by using Cupid and Psyche as characters who witness and participate in the Stonewall riots. However, Tice's Cupid and Psyche are not the familiar characters from the Greek myth. His Cupid and Psyche are nonbinary; in the poem "Psyche Returns from the Underworld," Psyche encounters a curious girl playing hopscotch: "Are you

a boy / or a girl? She asked. Honey, I said, / touching her face, I am both."

Cupid and Psyche are accompanied by a tribe of drag queens: Zazu, Gin Phizzy, Bambi, and others who narrate poems or appear throughout the collection. During a time when it was illegal to appear in New York City, "wearing more than three pieces / gender inappropriate / attire," Zazu is a guide to the carnal: "how every zipper begs to come / down, every button a wink. / Every thread has within it the start / of a tear." So many of the poems in this collection exist in the space between lust and legality, private and public.

Just as gender is easily transcended between Cupid and Psyche, so is narrative perspective. The poem, "Cupid in Sheep's Clothing" is a dramatic monologue from the point of view of an undercover police officer who participated in the Stonewall raid, and "Cupid in Black Spandex" is narrated by a Stonewall doorman who blackmailed the patrons. Cupid becomes his own tormentor.

Toward the end of the collection, history of the riots emerges and the language becomes more urgent: "their pistols gripped like loved ones. / Looking around, we were birds singing, / pulling our plumage for arrows." While much of the book is retelling the Stonewall histories there is also a Whitmanesque celebration of sexuality. Instead of Whitman's "you," Tice uses "we," not only for the troupe of Stonewall protesters but to include everyone fighting for equality in contemporary LGBT battles.

This book came to me just weeks after the massacre at Pulse in Orlando, which made lines like, "Grief / is the thickest of greases," and "The veils have been pulled / from our faces, and we are / using them as shields" seem prophetic. *What The Night Numbered* is not simply a retelling of history or even a warning that history repeats itself. Rather, the poems become an anthem, pushing us through troublesome times, reminding us that "Sometimes / you have to name where it hurts" and in that naming, may we be surrounded by love. □