

Custody of the Eyes by Kimberly Burwick, Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2017, 60p, paper \$15.95 • Kimberly Burwick's fourth collection of poetry, *Custody of the Eyes*, is a concise blending of pastorals and lyrics, mourning *nino robados*, the stolen children, who were taken from their families at birth and placed with "more deserving" families during and after Francoist Spain (1939-1990). Nuns, priests, and nurses conspired to displace an estimated 300,000 infants from their birth mothers, who were told their babies died during delivery or shortly after. With such looming loss, the collection blooms with attention to flora and fauna, but most notably, the poet's experience of early motherhood, a perfect portal for the examination of the most precious of lost promises. The poem "Levi Incarnate" ends with these lines: "In the tantrum-heavy damp / you could be Spanish and I could / be your new Spanish mother, together / we could be psalm, pulse."

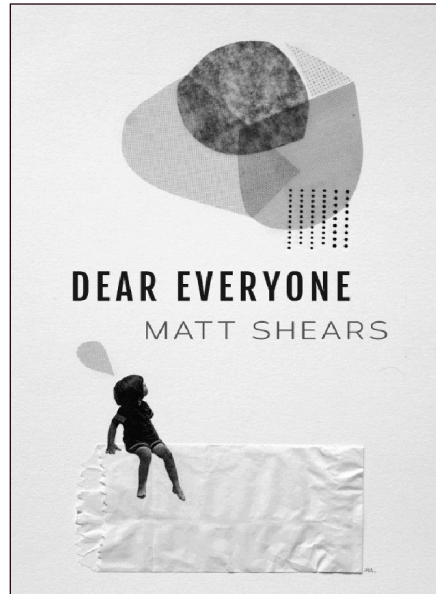
Blues and reds swirl into images. Blood from childbirth, the "red water" is mingled with the blue of a "freezer-baby," a "glacial infant," presented to calm a grieving mother, whose "womb [is] . . . a cache of flies." Burwick reminds us that death and birth, particularly for women, have always been sisters. Sometimes she uses metonymy for the moment when a mother learns the life she expected is gone: "each gray breath," and "little whisper," and other times she uses synecdoche to construct the believed-dead infant, "tiny granite lips." And it is Burwick's attention to description that creates the eloquently twisted sentences that make her trenchant poems, which are often two to four eloquent sentences long.

With history as a backdrop, Burwick is asking how we move forward after inheriting a tragedy, be it historical or personal, a very pressing question in contemporary America. The concept of *custodia oculorum* (custody of the eyes), and indeed the phrase itself, rises throughout the collection. However, it is not the monastic practice that is praised, when in fact, the Catholic Church was an active agent in the regime of Franco's stolen babies. Burwick maintains that it's "with a clearer custody of / our eyes" that we "end the long sen-

Synecdoche

BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

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tence / here." Burwick calls us to be present, to testify: "Because I saw your birth, I am responsible for all the dead." *Custody of the Eyes* is a necessary collection of verse, naming what was lost, dearer and more imperative, especially if it is never found.

Dear Everyone by Matt Shears, Brooklyn Arts Press, 2016, 198p, paper \$18 • *Dear Everyone*, Matt Shears's third poetry collection, is trill of language that reflects everything from the internet's echo chamber to catechistic religious rhetoric. In the nearly two-hundred-page collection, an Adderall urge pushes both the narrator and reader into the next clipped sentence. While the book is comprised of four sections, juxtaposition, pattern, and parallelism are combustion engines throughout the collection. In fact, it is the collection's staccato rhythm, liberal use of exclamation points, and surprising sentences that provide its verve.

In collections of poetry that employ a disarray of language, it can be challenging to see past the use of language; however, with one foot in conceptualism, and the other firmly rooted in T. S. Eliot's modern-

ism, Shears creates a narrative "I" that's just as unmoored in this modern moment as everyone feels while scrolling through updates, posts, and tweets. Borrowing from Eliot's "Prufrock", ("I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas"), Shears moves the "I" to "us," lamenting the state of our contemporary politics and economies: "I should have been / a powerbroker or pawn broker" and "I should have been a paper pusher / report finds many new positions may satisfy!"

And just as *Jane Eyre* turns to her audience ("Reader, I married him"), to redeem the past for the sake of the future, to privilege action over news, Shears also breaks the fourth wall throughout the collection with multiple statements of the eponymous, "Dear Everyone." At times these statements mimic internet click-bait articles: "Dear Everyone: / dressing for success is absolutely essential," other times they're serious: "Dear Everyone: / I want to create and to create a world with you / in these brief instants of our shared lives," to humorous: "Dear Everyone: / call me sometime?" Certainly, humor functions as a thread in the collection, and often the state of poetry serves as the cathartic clown by parodying the Mad Libs language of the internet: "Poetry is / the holy sex worker of language?"

Syntactically, the book is complex, comprised mostly of seven- to ten-word sentences, whose beginnings and ends could be arbitrary were it not for their certainty and insistence. When humor, absurdity, and seriousness are juxtaposed and given equal billing, Shears puts before us the immediate crisis of "choking on daily tragedies" and getting lost in the language of "Push-button / particular anxieties." It's then that poetry is no longer a clown, but a tool that lists cities and states where gun violence occurred, chronicles the victims of violence against black lives, and chastises the economic engine that privileges those in power, and it is exactly Shears's poetry that reclaims language from its viral use in sociopolitical spaces. *Dear Everyone* understands that in the Digital Age we are all writers and audience members, dual citizens in creating and listening. □