

ery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction for *At-Risk*, and the Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Fiction for *Now We Will Be Happy*. In a literary culture that privileges the novel, Gautier has emerged as a champion of the short story. She is, arguably, one of the more prolific American short-story writers of our moment, and *The Loss of All Lost Things* is an important and necessary book—a reminder of all the pain and beauty that exists at the margins of our lived experiences.

James Lenfestey, editor. *If Bees Are Few: A Hive of Bee Poems*. University of Minnesota Press.

REVIEW BY JEREMY CALDWELL

*If Bees Are Few* is an anthology spanning 2,500 years “from Sappho to Sherman Alexie,” as its cover copy suggests. Edited by James Lenfestey, it is as eclectic in its selection as it is vast in its time frame. The book takes its title from Emily Dickinson, who was herself fascinated with bees, and comes as a poignant reminder that bee populations are dwindling, hives are collapsing, and the effects may be devastating if bees indeed become few.

In the first poem, Sherman Alexie candidly lays out the dangerous consequence from the eyes of the beekeeper: “The bees are gone. / We need new bees / Or we are fucked.” Bees have captivated the popular imagination in recent years, thanks to a plethora of documentaries and the work of grassroots organizations like the Honeybee Conservancy. Following a decade’s sharp decline in bee populations—nearly a third of all bee colonies in the United States—this book is a call to bring the bee into the literary world and into our broader consciousness. As Lenfestey notes in the introduction, “poets do what we can, in our reverie, our observation, our listening, our metaphors, our occasional beekeeping, our outrage, our grief, to keep the sweetness and sting of these poetic companions alive.”

This flexibility and malleability of the image of bees lends itself well to the anthology’s range. As Bill McKibben writes in the foreword, bees are a metaphor “for so many things.” The book brings awareness, but it does so with range and depth. The variety of poets mirrors our interactions with bees as well as the roles they play in our lives. Some poems are principally about bees, such as Thomas R. Smith’s, “The Queen in Winter,” a solemn ode to the bumblebee queen’s lonely journey through the winter months. But an equal number of poems see bees as simply part of the scenery, the everyday workings of life, an inseparable, if not particularly visible, part of our houses, our gardens, the words we write, and, as Rumi points out, even to our own bodies:

We are bees,  
and our body is a honeycomb.  
We made  
the body, cell by cell we made it.

These poems tackle the complexity of the human-bee relationship, from our enjoyment of the sweet aroma of amber-hued honey to possible rage after encountering the unlucky end of a bee and its sting, as does Diane Lockward:

And tomorrow may you rest on my table  
as I peruse the paper. May you shake  
beneath the scarred face of a serial killer.  
May you be crushed by the morning news.

The buzzing never stops, as poets from Rumi to Emerson and Issa to Whitman deliver their odes and rants in this anthology, which is marked to donate a portion of the proceeds from sales to the University of Minnesota’s Bee Lab, in hopes of heading off the regret Lucille Clifton captures in “earth”:

what was called tree  
it bore varicolored  
leaves children bees  
all this used to be a  
place once all this  
was a nice place once

Christine Stewart-Núñez. *Untrussed*. The University of New Mexico Press.

REVIEW BY PATRICK HICKS

One of the great delights of Christine Stewart-Núñez’s *Untrussed*, part of the Mary Burritt Christiansen Poetry Series, is the sheer variety of styles that she deploys, in poems that are personal, lyrical, formal, and ekphrastic. Their settings, too, are wide-reaching and global, which is suitable given the title of the collection. These poems are about letting go, of undoing, of setting free. It is therefore not a surprise to turn the page and find ourselves on the Platte River one minute, in the baking heat of Phoenix the next, and then in India, Russia, or Turkey.

Author of several poetry collections, including *Snow, Salt, Honey* (Red Dragonfly Press), *Keeping Them Alive* (WordTech Editions), and *Postcard on Parchment* (ABZ Press), Stewart-Núñez has seen her nonfiction listed as a *Best American Essays* notable, and her piece about parenting a child with Landau-Kleffner Syndrome won the *Lindenwood Review*’s 2014 Lyric Essay Contest. Stewart-Núñez’s poetry has appeared in a number of prominent literary journals, and she teaches creative writing at South Dakota State University. Her latest collection, *Untrussed*, features poems originally published in such journals as *Atlanta Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, to name a few.

The untrussing of her latest collection is not just of a poet coming to terms

with a failed marriage and the hopes attached to a new love, but also an untrussing of memory and place. Stewart-Núñez displays an uncanny ability for perception, and she moves with easy grace between formal structures and free verse. She writes in cross rhyme on one page and in a villanelle a few pages later. In between them she squeezes several lyric poems. For example, "A Palette of Turns," examines in heart-breaking free verse the moment a husband announces he no longer wishes to be married. Stewart-Núñez writes, "I soaked up the scene: his saunter/ down the dirt path/ basket in hand;/ the kid on his shoulders giggling/ [...] I saw only what I wanted to see." What follows is painful, honest, and true: "That night when he said divorce/ out loud, I knew his heart had already,/ long ago, made the turn" (39). This poem is immediately followed by "Abecedarian to Unbind," which turns that traditional form on its head, moving from Z to A as if Stewart-Núñez is unspooling the moments that made up that first marriage. The dialogue between "A Palette of Turns" and "Abecedarian to Unbind" is unforgettable, not least of which for these final lines: "forget the full circle unless / end means beginning. I release / dusk's hot promises. Seek / clarity; you're no longer my / breath. May these lines / ax, split, divide, annul. Amen."

A number of ekphrastic poems also appear dotted throughout the collection, as Stewart-Núñez opens dialogue with several paintings that range from contemporary works of visual art to illuminated manuscripts housed in the British Library. For example, she writes of Walter de Milemete's art from the early 1300s, which depicts women hurling posies and blossoms at an unseen attacker. In "Women Defending Castle with Bow and Crossbow," Stewart-Núñez muses, "Some interpret/ this as a woman's greatest weapon/ is love. But once a heart's deployed/ to battle, one can't call it back to bed" (48). In describing a centuries-old view of women, she subtly asks if much has changed. That is, if love is weaponized to defend the hearth, what affect does it have on the heart? These pieces offer a subtle reminder that the poet is reacting to a world around her that readers cannot fully access. An argument could be made that all poetry—all literary art—is a form of ekphrasis.

The power of *Untrussed*, though, isn't just found in Stewart-Núñez's craft skills and ability to manipulate forms. It also emerges in her ability to illuminate seemingly throwaway moments. In "Polish Lessons" we see a speaker struggling to learn that language as "rollicking vowels / lasso my tongue and open up my mouth." Later, "Fifth of July" asks questions about how two lovers can maintain the spark of their relationship beyond the initial heat and burn of their beginning. The final poem, "For Elizabeth, Who Loved to Square Dance" is full of wry defiance as it imagines what a feisty grandmother—who also slipped off her wedding ring—might say to an unbound single woman. The answer is a fitting ending to an exceptionally strong collection.

The most arresting poems in the collection are those about Wonder Woman. The five sections of this collection each begin with a musing on this superhero doing mundane daily chores. These musings fit nicely with the overall themes of

*Untrussed* because they nod to the superhuman strength often needed to carry on. We find such titles as "Wonder Woman Ponders the Kiss," "Wonder Woman Relaxes," "Wonderful Woman Does Dream Dirty," and the truly delightful "Wonder Woman Shops at the A&P." Here, the daily chore of shopping becomes a hunt for anything that will "satisfy her radiant-orange/ appetite" and, as she walks around the store with her boots clicking on the tiles, she fills her cart with all that will fill her up: "orange pekoe, tangerines,/ a sack of yams, apricots rolling/about, chunks of cheddar/ and colby, peaches, peppers/ the color of koi" (55). Through the playful imagery of a shopping list, the poem delights in hunger and its imminent satisfaction.

In *Untrussed*, Christine Stewart-Núñez has created poems that spark off each other and offer hope for new love amid the grinding darkness. She has written a collection that is both illuminating and full of great emotional depth.