around the feathers ...the bird has been *shot*. Thenremove the innards. This makes the process much easier for the finer feathers are <del>almost</del> like human hairs around the skin...."

However, many of the recipes seem like filler and are neither lyrical nor engaging.

As already mentioned, the best sections of the book with the most consistently engaging poems are "Friends" and "The Moon and Her Friends." Many of the poems in "Friends" are playful, like the first poem in that section, "Doe," which begins:

I am learning to hide the hairs of this language by losing [an] other. I give you words in all my skins moistened, tanned, stained stamped leather patent or pleather..."

"Elegy for a Stuffed Duck," which begins with a tribute to the parts of a feather, is a playful and witty riff on birds. It is one of the strongest poems in the collection, beginning with:

O Calamus! Let us follow the birds to paradise in the wild range... turn our backs from the earned science of con artist structures and vehicle cement to the call of faraway climes.

It continues in strong form in the fourth stanza:

Oh mallards, O ring necks, O wood ducks! We survey snivel for a closer listen to your clarinet sighs, aim to silence your swank saxophone quack..."

Also in the "Friends" section, "Nesting with the Sparrow" is another strong poem. It evokes the narrator's connection to that bird at a visceral level:

In the long-ago shadows of our past I was beneath your ribs, eating foliage ...I was the gorge between your legs, waiting for the collide of water and womb: ...I long to return to you.... enter the dark world of your Mouth—broken beaked, beaten, breathing.

On page 60 is "Whale Revenge" with "lapping, shiny smooth skin, a rubbery roof—...shouts//hooved sounds,/wailing water-wish/from whalebones." It is among the most evocative poems in the book.

As a writer long based in Asia, I found the first of the two poems set there gave in to cliché and predictable tropes of China. In the first stanza of "Red Colossus after Sylvia Plath" there are "Tiger prowls" ... "Piggrunts", and a "Monkey-King," "All of it hushed by great lotus lips and a /monk's moon." The following poem, "Who Dares to Encounter the Dragonfly of Binhai," is more original in both its setting and the questions it asks: "...you continue to seek out/weeping willows for a gentle hook into the sway of breeze" the narrator observes, then asks, "Have you circled yourself enough today?"

In the final section of the book, "The Moon and Her Friends", we meet a vulnerable and engaging narrator in "Moon Madness" who takes "moon-shaped medicine.../ to make more serotonin for moonwhite." More poems like this and those which play with language and association and fewer recipes would have made *Flesh* a stronger collection of poetry, but there is much to enjoy within its pages.

Kate Rogers' poetry has been shortlisted for the 2018 Vancouver Tagore Society Contest and the 2017 Montreal International Poetry Prize. Kate has poetry forthcoming in Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century; Algebra of Owls, and Catherines, the Great (Oolichan). Kate has taught Literature in the Language Classroom, EAP, and Cultural and Media Studies for community colleges and universities in Canada and Asia for twenty-eight years. She currently teaches creative writing to refugee women and domestic helpers in Hong Kong for the Poetry Festival Foundation, a coalition made up of Baptist University, Chinese University, and Cha: An Asian Literary Journal. Kate Rogers' latest poetry collection is Out of Place (Quattro-Aeolus House, Toronto. 2017).

## A SEASON AMONG PSYCHICS

Elizabeth Greene Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2018.

## REVIEWED BY KATE ROGERS

In its first sentence, the novel *A Season Among Psychics* entices the reader with empathy, wit, and anticipation: "When I was fifty and thought my life was over, I let my best friend, Claire, persuade me to attend a psychic fair."

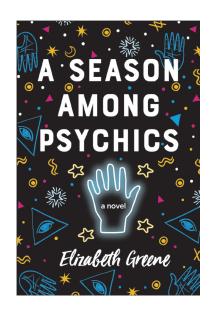
Elizabeth Greene's dedication at the beginning of the book also drew me in: "For the teachers," it states. If any group of professionals deserves such recognition, teachers at all levels do. We give so much. And as Queens University literature professor and novelist Elizabeth Greene would know, teaching is as much of a vocation as writing is.

Greene's narrator, Judith, feels stuck. Judith teaches her university classes and slogs through grading while enduring a loneliness as routine as winter: "February slushed along...."

Judith also cares for her autistic son Davy alone, supervising his homework and piano lessons. She worries about Davy passing his exams and about his future.

After a difficult marriage breakdown and divorce from her son's controlling father, Judith needs something to heal her life. Her discontent opens the door to the encounter with a psychic. Judith's best friend Claire persuades her to attend the psychic fair because Claire wants to find a man and hopes a psychic can advise her about her future. Judith is both resistant and intrigued. At the fair they meet a psychic healer called Rosetta.

Fifteen dollars, three questions and an "African bone throw" with psychic Rosetta later, Judith is unsettled and struggling. She swings like one of the psychic's pendulums between scepticism and yearning. Judith is a writer and hopes for some encouraging insights into the future of her writing, but Rosetta gives Judith advice she finds completely impractical—to quit her job so she can devote herself to writing. In spite of her doubts about the value of the psychic reading, Judith also asks Rosetta about her son Davy. She "holds him in her head" for the psychic. Rosetta predicts Davy will see more of his father, who may be awkward. Then Judith surprises herself with a third and final question about love. Judith hasn't heard from the voice coach she met at the writers' colony whom she hoped would return her



interest. Yet she feels him reaching out to her in his mind. She is told she will see him again.

When I began reading *A Season Among Psychics* I was a sceptic, just like the narrator Judith. After an additional session with Rosetta about her unsatisfactory job and work environment Judith does not feel particularly healed: "...all my feelings about my job were now flying around like wasps."

However, Judith overcomes her own scepticism about psychic healing enough that she visits Rosetta at home for another session, this time, "repatterning" of her reactions, energy blocks and expectations. She feels better for a while after having her energies realigned. Judith decides to do a thousand-dollar course with Rosetta to learn how to be a "Results Facilitator" and become a healer herself to earn more money to help with her mortgage, and hopefully heal herself along the way. However, Judith's road to self-healing remains full of switchbacks shrouded in mist. Self-doubt tails her.

In Chapter 3, entitled "I am the Ice Woman," Judith reflects on her expectations of life:

the things I'd thought would support me, my marriage and

my job, seemed to have dissolved out from under me.

I still believed in teaching, but I'd never been an orthodox teacher, and I was afraid I was dreadful at it. At the same time, teaching means you're responsible for your students' inner life and growth, and I couldn't change simply to be like everyone else. I couldn't say to my colleagues, I went into this because I thought literature was the most wonderful thing in the world and I wanted to help students see that. [...] Teaching is an obscure job, but I felt the weight of its responsibility even more than when I'd started.

Much of the novel consists of Judith's inner dialogues. They read very authentically and again and again, sparked my empathy,

I knew that life often brought you to places you didn't expect. I didn't expect my late forties to be such a slog, a seemingly never-ending process of putting one foot in front of another without having much to show for it.

As Judith struggled with her life and her scepticism about healing it through psychic practice, I didn't mind accompanying her on her journey. Her vulnerability, humour, and generosity make Judith a compelling character. I wanted to see where she was going in her life and became invested in her victories.

After Judith commits to the course with Rosetta on learning to become a psychic healer, scepticism returns. Rosetta holds the sessions at her posh apartment and is always beautifully dressed. She obviously earns a good living as a psychic, yet she encourages her students to give "repatterning" sessions for free. Judith thinks to herself,

She certainly hadn't for me. And I thought... (the) course was pretty pricey. If I kept giving healing sessions away, I'd never get the money back, let alone make any. ...But then I thought of Danile, the blind basket-weaver in Crackpot, who gives his first thirteen baskets away, to the despair of his wife, because 'when you have a gift you give it.' And I certainly hadn't charged my eleven-year-old-neighbour, Evelyn, a slender, serious girl who tended to cling to her mother and didn't laugh much. I wouldn't have charged her even if it hadn't been practice. What I'd learned: repatterning was like teaching. You had someone's inner being in your hands, and you had to be careful of it. You could do a lot of damage.

Through her struggles with scepticism and self-doubt, Judith discovers that her "unorthodox" approach to teaching helps to make her a compassionate and effective healer. She begins to heal herself and heals her son too, even as he struggles with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. A lot of other things happen to Judith on her road to healing. I hope you will find out for yourself where Judith ends up. I highly recommend *A Season Among Psychics* by Elizabeth Greene. It will be an engrossing winter read!

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## **ILONA MARTONFI**

## Holzkiste (Wooden Crate)

Your mother packed the Bavarian chalk mountains, rubble of the bombed Messerschmitt airport.

Your mother packed the fourth grade teacher. Your mother packed your sexual abuse. Your mother packed children's clothes. Your mother packed a green comb. She didn't pack your coloured marbles. She didn't pack your red polka dot ribbons. Your mother packed the tablecloth she embroidered she brought with her from Budapest. The pinewood crate that stood upstairs in the corridor of the old airport factory hangar, Halle # 7 leaded-glass windows blasted, a Rumpelkammer upstairs your parents' bedroom: you lit the fire in the iron stove kindling and paper and coal. In a bölcső—a cradle, you rocked your little brother to

sleep burlap covered Strohsack —straw mattress, the bedbugs.

Your mother packed your first Catechism book, Beichtkind. She didn't pack your cotton school apron. She packed the crate: shipped it by train to Bremerhaven. Book of *Grimm's Fairytales*, porcelain doll with blue glass eyes. Your mother packed your schoolbag, your black leather ankle boots handmade by your Magyar great-uncle, Kovács Ferenc.

The crate bare, unpainted wood, covered with big, white block letters. When your parents, three sisters and brother József, and you, finally left Germany for Montréal, Canada, October 1954, you were allowed to bring what would fit into two crates. One for the family belongings. A second crate for father's chocolatier factory machinery and utensils.

He couldn't afford to buy them. So your apa, father, and a friend got together and built the crates. They found a hammer and a saw and nails and some metal stripping. They didn't get the wood from the walls of the factory hangar. Refugee town Neutraubling, after the war, families settling in the rubble of the abandoned Luftwaffe airport, a former subcamp of Flossenbürg. And this place had brick walls of lime washed stucco. If you wanted a crate, you could just build one, and that's what your apa did. Caritasverband, a charity organization, paid the family's seven boat tickets.

Grandmother Mariska had to stay in Bavaria. "Grandmother will join us," apa promised. "As soon as I can guarantee for her."

*Ilona Martonfi has published three poetry books*, Blue Poppy (2009), Black Grass (2012) and The Snow Kimono (2015). *Forthcoming are* Salt Bride (2019) and The Tempest (2020).