

Grand & Arsenal (Iowa Poetry Prize)

Kerri Webster

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From the intersection of public and private fear, Kerri Webster's award-winning collection speaks of anxiety and awe, vanishings and reappearances. A city both rises and falls; worlds are simultaneously spoken into being and torn down by words. "This is how time sounds," Webster writes; this is the hum and click of bodies "desirous of believing we're all vehicle, every wet atom of us," even as the saved seeds root in the fallen brickwork and the artifacts pile up: wisdom teeth, hummingbird skulls, plumb bobs, icons, antlers, incandescent bulbs.

Grand & Arsenal begins "Bless me I am not myself," but it is not long before the probability of being blessed is revealed to be as remote as the concept of a whole self. Thus begins the book's defining struggle, enacted by a multitude of voices which move from rush to stumble and back again—meanwhile using all the tools we as a culture use to hold fear at arm's length.

We hear a familiar irony, as in "On a trip West, porn in the hotel room. I can take or leave it. The climax that puts me in the seats? World's end." We hear humor, as in "I believed in . . . / . . . a certain apocalypse not so much foretold as crafted / by large-brained monkeys." We hear understatement, as in "knowing it does not matter / in the grand—she would say scheme, I would say / mishap—." Most importantly, though, these poems allow for the fleeting triumph of an undefended voice, which appears often to emerge tentatively from a sort of exhausted collapse.



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