



Poetry book review:
Night, When You Visit Me

Description

A review of Tamara Nazywalskyj's new book of poetry published by Cactus Press

By Paul Serralheiro

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The 17 poems that make up this recently launched first book by **Tamara Nazywalskyj** give readers a glimpse into the mind of the young Montreal poet and her sensitivity to life events as well as her delight in language.



Tamara Nazywalskyj with her new book

Publishing early in one's career was, when I was a young poet, discouraged by my then teacher **Michael Harris**, who had himself published two books in his early 20s which he later looked down on with some embarrassment as immature.

The other extreme would be waiting until your talent ripens, but by then, some of the freshness of youthful writing of the kind we find here would be lost, and the poet's talent perhaps thwarted in the process. But ***Night, When You Visit Me*** is surprisingly mature work, with a confident tone and an impressive range of stylistic and formal features.

It should be noted before moving on to specifics of the collection that Ms. Nazywalskyj was a student of mine about 10 years ago in an **Introduction to Poetry** class at **Dawson College**. Early on, her passion for the art was clear, as was her aliveness to the subtleties and playfulness of the art of verbal self-expression. It is not surprising that Ms. Nazywalskyj has made poetry one of her central pursuits.

The poems' themes include the horrors of the void that all poets must confront (*Sunday at the Bottom of Belief, On 2nd Avenue, Q&A W/J, Growing Pains, Zero-gravity Recliner*), as well as the simple, mundane elements of daily life that provide an occasion for the poet's reflection on their significance, not without a touching sense of humour:

here comes sunday brunch and I romanticize the whole thing stretching it like bubble gum out of my mouth and around my finger until I realize the worst part about sunday is it's over at dusk
(*Across the Crops*)



...you think that hitting yourself in the chest
will reboot your system like old people hitting
the side of TVs or people hitting the side of old TVs
(*When it Hits*)

While the poet's craft is about studying language and shaping it into a new and unique object called a poem, the art part is in the poet's mind: the correspondences that the poet observes and the comment the poem makes on the nuances of life are sources of nourishment for readers who go to poetry not just for an aesthetic experience (although that's always nice) but for a connection to a separate consciousness that helps make sense of the world and turns the difficulties of living into something beautiful.

Tamara's strength as a poet, at least as evidenced by this chapbook sampling of a much longer manuscript, is her tone, which is high in ironic content, in the ancient Greek Eiron sense of the word, and the apparent naïveté belies a deeper power of understanding than the words seem to convey.

A final observation I would make is about Ms. Nazywalskyj's playfulness with form. While there are no poems here that are strictly formal in any traditional sense, there is, throughout, a clear awareness of the plasticity of language, the poet's primary material, which in this poet's case includes the French we are surrounded by in Montreal, and the dialectics of religion.

Coeur déchiré within me
it's my new sewing project. Pêcheur
in this life, la pêcheuse in the small town,
everyone knows my secrets.
(*Zero-gravity Recliner*)

pray to the
moon to turn me
into a vampire

and say to the
lord, forget me
(*Forget Me*)

The dynamics and tension of line and paragraph, sentence, phrases, words... and spaces on the page... even small details like punctuation and the absence (or not) of caps, all seem to be part of Ms. Nazywalskyj's field of awareness. A good example of how the tension of line and paragraph are at work appears in *Heavy Grocery Bags* a poem about the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, two years ago. The poem is basically two paragraphs, but within that, the lines and phrases bristle with the energy of common speech, heightened by the poet's awareness of their power:

nature screams from her mountains: *die you mother fuckers!* and god roars, or they both high five each other, honestly it's too soon to tell. prayers rise and sing from mouths. will non-believers begin to whisper from the dry throat of a sorry humanity.
(*Heavy Grocery Bags*)

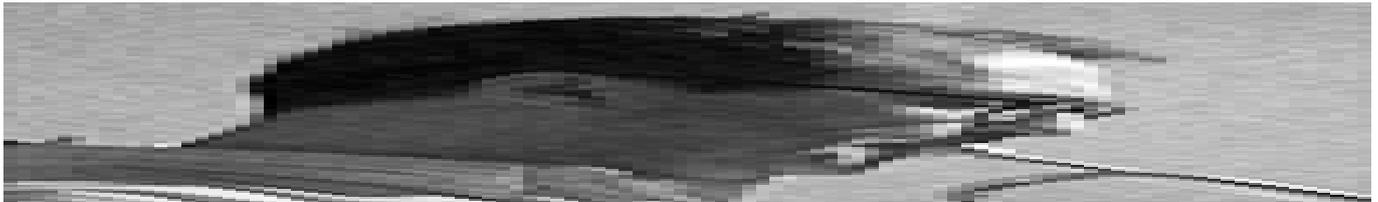


Feature image: Tamara Nazywalskyj at the launch of her book at La Marche à Côté on Sunday, April 17
Images: courtesy of Tamara Nazywalskyj

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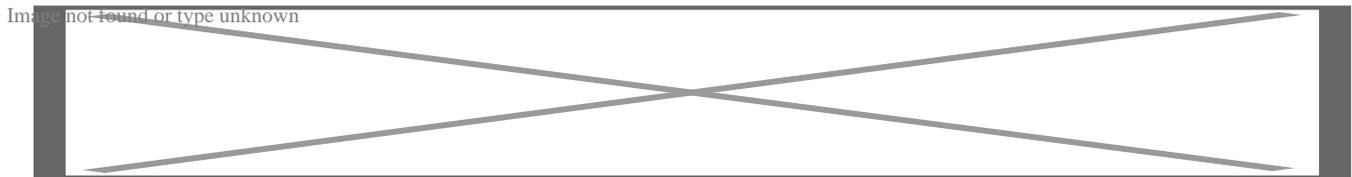
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Montréal writer and musician **Paul Serralheiro** performs regularly in jazz and blues ensembles on guitar and trumpet and has published widely in periodicals. His poetry has appeared in the anthology **Memória: An Anthology of Portuguese Canadian Writers** and in a collection called **Engines**.

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