

Blue in the owl-annotated woods past town
At dawn, deer pick their way to drink.

Through a consideration of this landscape and its inhabitants, Pelizzon discovers, “We’re all / Compressing into coal.” But despite the suffering that Appalachia has borne, there is the hope of renewal here. Pelizzon addresses the Monongahela River itself (in a way that is not inconsistent with Ovidian explorations elsewhere in this collection) in the lines,

But you may school us yet in metamorphoses, for all
Your northward-flowing length, where once Flegrean toxic
Waters flamed, your banks this summer blaze green” (95).

Metamorphosis is the only constant. The poet finds her way to possible origins and constructs eschatologies by attempting to better understand such transformations.

As we follow these rivers of narrative to their sources, the experience of reading Pelizzon’s poems becomes like travel across an unfamiliar landscape. Through travel, we confront mysteries—or sometimes, enact the alienation that we feel even as we hope, eventually, to return. In *Whose Flesh Is Flame, Whose Bone Is Time*, even ekphrastic poetry is an opportunity to travel away from the self and the known world. Pelizzon received an Amy Lowell Poetry Traveling Scholarship, and travel seems to have inspired many of the poems in this collection. Ultimately, as we navigate these rivers and their tributaries, the water sometimes catches fire when too laden with experience and suffering. Then, the poet’s potential for empathy gives rise to dazzling imagery. But *Whose Flesh Is Flame, Whose Bone Is Time* also suggests that poisoned rivers can run clean again.

—Carol Quinn

Jehanne Dubrow and Lindsay Lusby, eds. *The Book of Scented Things: 100 Contemporary Poems about Perfume*. Washington House Press, 2014.

When describing that most ephemeral and ineffable of senses—scent—we resort to comparison, to simile and metaphor, to try to define what a smell smells *like*. Poets, perhaps, are in the best position to address this sense. Therefore, I was intrigued by the premise of this anthology, which seeks to capture scent in poetry: 100 poets each were paired with a

vial of perfume. Well, 99—the collection’s first poem, “On His Reluctance to Contribute to *The Book of Scented Things*” by Amit Majmudar, is about no scent and begins “All attars are unutterable/.../ What use is ekphrasis if/ The canvas isn’t even bare/ Isn’t even there.” The poets’ responses are collected and numbered like Chanel’s line of fragrances, No 1—100.

The poets included in this anthology, who represent many of today’s most talented mid-career poets, take a variety of approaches. Most respond directly to the scent itself via description or reaction (both positive and negative), with many inducing Proustian madeleine-moments, like Lisa D. Chávez’s “Afternoon Ghosts”: “Scent of sea and oranges; a day decades past/ rushes back.” One notable variation of this approach is a self-portrait as the scent itself, like Jericho Brown’s “American Masculinity”: “Say implosion before/ I explode. My spice/ Prominent when you/ Pull the pin where spiky/ Pepper and cinnamon/ Intertwine.” A few subvert the project entirely through linguistic or metaliterary play, as in the Walker and Wilkinson examples quoted below, or in the opening intertextual lines of co-editor Lindsay Lusby’s “Elegy with Osage-Orange”: “This mockery smashed open/ is surely not grief.”

But the title of this anthology is *The Book of Scented Things* (emphasis mine), and is therefore not just about the scent itself as an isolated stimulant, but also about the things scented, things marked with scent in such a way that they imbue each other with their personalities: or, as Jason Schneiderman puts it, “I have to// recognize it as you, the way the scent/ has mingled with your chemistry.” Co-editor Jehanne Dubrow describes this effect powerfully in her extended villanelle on her husband’s lingering scent in “The Long Deployment,” as does Mathias Svalina: “Nicolle writes *those girls with the BO that smells like cumin and its so intoxicating and sex i am so jealous of them...* When I’m not home my dog pulls my shirts from the laundry basket & makes a nest of them.” Sandy Longhorn traces her father’s infidelity through a sequence of smells in “Too Simple a Reason”: “The other woman wore perfume/ peppered with citrus peel and zest/...// ...You’d only just/ kissed Mother on a bare cheek,/ her skin rinsed with the scent// of Dial soap...//...// ...All winter secrets gathered/ just beneath our skin, cheeks and lips/ chapped raw by a frigid, unscented wind.” Juliana Gray invents a character and a world evoked by a smell, a vanilla-scented speaker who tells us “One skinny boy/ followed my trail...//...//The skinny boys/ are all called Hansel, and they fatten up just fine.”

The trail Dubrow and Lusby lead us through is verdant and varied. There are quatrains and prose poems, verse free and blank. There’s so much loveliness here that it’s a bit overwhelming, like spending too much time at the perfume counter and suffering olfactory overload.

But, also like a perfume counter, after a deep whiff of coffee beans to clear my nose-palate (do noses have palates?) I find myself returning to re-sample my favorites, discovering new notes as the poems unfold in my senses. Cody Walker's "Pure Oud By Kilian" frames an online disagreement between rival perfume reviewers via his witty wordplay: "Dude! An oud feud! /.../...cast your vote: / Transmeta/ or (rad name) Diamondflame./... / Holy Selassie! I emerge from the oud/ feud/ renewed." Jane Satterfield's lush descriptions and sound work are just as sharp and fresh as the scent she evokes in "Menthe Fraîche": "One whiff's a stand of oak, burled/ & verdigrised by rain/.../ scent a taser to the brain. *Green thought/ in a green shade*, the snap of sheets/ in summer wind, stolen kisses, a mossy/ wall, the dank waters of the Grand/ Canal & coinage of some other realm." But perhaps the most dazzling poem of the collection is a brief, unassuming little 11-line gem titled "Redolent," in which the letters of the scent Rose Water & Vanilla are shuffled and reshuffled, as though Caki Wilkinson's speaker hopes to decipher the woman wearing it through her linguistic permutations. Here are the first five lines:

She wore Rose Water & Vanilla.
She wore an era's vow, all rite,
all anther & sorrow. A wise Eve,
a variant, she wore eros well
or was ethereal in love's war.

My only disappointment with this anthology is that the pages are not scratch and sniff.

—Heidi Czerwiec

Maureen Seaton. *Fibonacci Batman: New & Selected Poems*. Carnegie Mellon, 2013.

1. Is it a book? Yes.

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2. Award-winning poet and writer Maureen Seaton is at it again.

3. This volume of poetry spans two decades and seven previous poetry collections while introducing eight new poems. The poems as a whole move through collage, image, and form(ula), adopting math into our alphabet-