

both old and new, to take readers on a journey where creatures, man, and God alike are carefully dissected and described, revealing them to be far more complex than we may have originally thought.

### Conclusion

These collections are striking in both their differences and similarities. All employ formalistic elements—meter, rhyme, metaphor—to great effect. All deal with themes of choice and with the passage of time. All include references to the LDS theology of Heavenly Mother. All are a great choice for someone looking to spend an afternoon of their wild and precious life reading thoughtfully crafted poetry that opens up new avenues for discussion.

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## A Crossing of Boundaries

Laura Stott. *The Bear's Mouth*. Spokane, WA: Lynx House Press, 2024. 85 pp. Paperback: \$18.95. ISBN: 978-0899241999.

*Reviewed by Heidi Naylor*

The first poem will break your heart. It's the shakedown start of a pilgrimage into loss and beauty that speaks in tough, physical language of the collecting—the “plucking”—of “an abandoned nest / from a red

dogwood's spindly arms" during a mother and child hike through a "slim canyon." The family has recently lost a daughter and sister. Here, the poem sets up the narrative of *The Bear's Mouth*: how to inhabit a world that is immediate in brutality and tenacious in wonder. The trick, it seems, is to find a "guide [that] shows us how to do it" (11).

Laura Stott is that tender, insistent escort.

A myth about a little girl leaving her parents and her two sisters to cross a meadow becomes a metaphor of longing for this sweet baby daughter. She falls inside a glacier . . . she runs through woods into a wild meadow . . . she crawls inside the feral bear that guards the underworld. The mother climbs in too, "past [her] own monster" (15). We as readers are left breathless.

The collection is structured in three sections—trimesters come to mind, resurrection springs to heart—each filled with sorrow for the lost little girl, but also with the dance of life that insists on moving forward, in going on. United States poet laureate Ada Limón says that "poetry is a place where both grief and grace can live," and it feels like she is speaking about Stott's own poetic voice.<sup>1</sup> In "Dance," the state health department can't find a record of the speaker's stillborn baby. "8 thousand dollars say I spent 22 hours in Labor and Delivery," this voice notes. In the next line, "bees are drinking juice from the concord grapes . . . each [grape] looks like a planet" (22). The speaker's younger little girl is stuffing September strawberries into her mouth, "her hand flat and like a star over her lips." Whales, deer, owls, fish . . . even "Monster"-y spiders get a nod of note and recognition of the "earth [they] are waiting to be born into—dream of the wings you'll eat, and kingdoms between roses" (24).

The second section belongs to the lost little girl, and the anguish at her passing is linked with other sorrows, such as those of "children

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1. Ada Limón, "A Poet's Take on Looking to Language for Radical Hope," interview by Judy Woodruff, *PBS News Hour*, Dec. 18, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/a-poets-take-on-looking-to-language-for-radical-hope>.

taken at the border,” for what was the baby’s loss but a crossing of boundaries gone terribly wrong? (49). “Soon the entire world will fit inside the brown bear’s mouth,” laments the speaker (51). She wants “more faith in the wind to send [prayers] to God” and more hope for the little “bird [their daughter is named for] . . . that dives and dives and dives” (47).

The third section’s poems about Alaska, about family life, are joyful: an outing with friends to watch the Perseid meteor shower. A little girl’s lost pink pony—“Where’s Heart? Where’s Heart?”—which turns out to be clutched “tight in her small hand.” A mama deer appears, with her “two speckled fawns . . . what luck we get to see them. What life we have to live here” (68). A birthday party features “a mandolin, a violin, a bass, a banjo, a guitar . . . [yet] from all the strings, the saddest song rises like happiness in all of us” (69). A “restless baby [is] only calmed by cold air” (81). *Pay attention*, our speaker reminds us, never discount the most ordinary of gifted moments: “There goes my first born, gliding past me at the pool with her dad in a man-made river, smiling and carrying the sun like she was born to do,” while—also—“beneath all . . . Sharks dance in the light, then disappear. There, a flash of iridescence. A fish. A silver school of them a mile long. A song yawns out of the deep” (72).

“O slobber of child kisses on a window . . . O afternoon sunlight . . . O *wild and precious life*” (83), our speaker sings. Bereft, yet not broken, she “will always try to crawl back in[to the bear]” (85). But she “can’t fit into . . . that shadow place . . . Not yet” (85). The “other sister is with us” still and somehow (75). And before their reunion, there is almost too much of a fierce, yet ordinary, beauty to endure.

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## Secret, Not Sacred

Cheryl L. Bruno, ed. *Secret Covenants: New Insights on Early Mormon Polygamy*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2024. 450 pp. Cloth: \$39.95. Ebook: \$9.99. ISBN: 978-1560854715.

*Reviewed by Joseph W. Geisner*

Cheryl Bruno's edited volume, *Secret Covenants: New Insights on Early Mormon Polygamy*, gives us an important resource about Mormonism's early implementation and practice of Joseph Smith's secret practice of polygamy. As Bruno points out in her introduction, "[She] found that the majority of people discussing the topic academically happened to be male identified. For an area that had and still has such impact on women, there is a great need for female points of view" (x). While the large majority of authors in this volume are male—despite Bruno's efforts to incorporate more chapters by women—Bruno hopes that this volume will encourage women writers to tackle this topic. I too hope that the rich variety of voices, approaches, and insights contained in this scholarly volume will inspire further research by women, as well as other scholars whose voices have historically been largely missing from this conversation.

In the first chapter, Clair Barrus shows that the 1843 polygamy revelation (now D&C 132) was not the only revelation on the subject that Joseph Smith received. Barrus provides primary (though often decades later) evidence that themes found in D&C 132 were taught privately and earlier than 1843. For example, Barrus gives a number of examples of teachings about God appointing a plural wife to a husband. These include statements to Sarah Pratt, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, and Marinda Johnson; with Nancy Rigdon being warned against taking an unappointed partner (39).