

## GRAB BAG

BOOK SHELF // GLIMPSE // WILDLIFE // POP CULTURE // WORDS // Q&amp;A // FOOD // FUN



BOOKMONGER

## Two views of life from Bellingham

This week, let's see how two poets living in the same mid-sized town in the Pacific Northwest tackle some of life's intangibles and try to make them somewhat more effable. We'll join them in combing through the woolly tangle of love, dreams, privilege, malady, morality and moods.

MoonPath Press, which recently relocated from the Puget Sound region to Tillamook, has just published "Patriarchy Blues," by Lummi tribal member and Bellingham-based poet Rena Priest.

Dedicating this collection of poetry to the "subterranean homesick matriarchy," Priest juxtaposes safety with risk, fluidity with stability, and the stinging pink of a slapped cheek with someone who's feeling blue.

The very first poem, "Toward a Beautiful Flare of Ruin," suggests that there are no pat answers. Priest considers self-control against pursuit of one's cravings — and finds that each pathway has its perils.

As we're well into the 21st century, we might have hoped that all of that Freud-

ian hooley about the Madonna-Whore Complex could have been ditched by now, but Priest's work suggests that our society is still impacted by those archetypes.

Her poems like "Mrs." and "Faithful" nibble away at conventional expectations of marriage and the construct of the wife as a "faithful household angel."

Contemplations of desire — both succumbed to and thwarted — carry on in poems titled "Lament for the Love of Bunny," "Pink Frosted Cake" and "Desire is a Scissor" ("unraveled into a dazzle").

Meanwhile, "Billboard Dream Girl's Waking Life," "Window Dressings" and "Nail Salon" provide searing critiques of our society's most cynical commodifications of desire.

Pungent observations and skillful use of language abound in "Patriarchy Blues." But it may be one of Priest's shortest poems —

"Pruning the Wilderness" — that best crystalizes the conundrum as she sees it: "Nature makes you pay/ for wanting something easy./ The trick, you see, is/ you have to conquer your mind."

Another Bellingham poet, Rick Hermann, has self-published "Nooksack," a modest book that fits pleasingly within one's hands.

Hermann's perspectives are shaped by his gender, his generation, and his diagnosis of Parkinson's disease. Like Rena Priest, he also grapples with mind games that can bedevil one's sense of purpose and well-being.

The first section of his book, called "Good Reasons To Stay Alive," includes a journal entry from a day when he was feeling sickly and discouraged, and shows the way he wrote himself into a better frame of mind.

"Being awake to the breath we are taking or letting go of is a good practice. And not too scary, after all,"



MOONPATHPRESS.COM

Rena Priest, author of "Patriarchy Blues"

**Patriarchy Blues –  
Rena Priest  
MoonPath Press –  
66 pp - \$10**

**Nooksack – Rick  
Hermann  
94 pp - \$9.95**

NOOK  
SACKPOEMS  
& PROSE

RICK HERMANN

THEPOETRYDEPARTMENT.

WORDPRESS.COM

Other sections focus on dreams and mortality — a mix of free verse and rhyming poems — there's even a ditty about life-prolonging medical intervention.

This may be more of a grab bag than you would find in most books, but when you are your own publisher, you can do what you wish!

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [bkmonger@nwlink.com](mailto:bkmonger@nwlink.com)

he counsels himself.

Poems that follow include one on "Breathwork," another on "Night Airs" and a joyful and hilarious "Ode to Geese."

2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday

ART WALK

5:00 pm

Downtown Astoria

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June  
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## word nerd

BY RYAN HUME  
FOR COAST WEEKEND

### Hex [hɛks]

#### noun

1. a magic spell or curse that has been placed upon someone
2. obsolete. a witch
3. an extraordinary run of bad luck

verb (used with object)

1. to cast a magic spell or curse upon someone; to bewitch

#### Origin:

Hex emerges from the Pennsylvania German immigrants as *hexe* from the German verb *hexen*; the noun form is also "Hexe," and the German word means the same thing. This comes from the Middle German "hēcse."

As a verb, its roots can be traced back in use to the mid-19 century. This is unrelated to the prefix *hexa-*, which comes from the ancient Greek word for "six."

With the 50th annual Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival coming up, know that the Finnish has many words for "a hex" or "to hex," including the nouns *noita*, *taika* and *loitsu*, and the verbs *kirota* and *loitista*, while the Norwegians have *forhekse* among others.

"Miss Denmark Meisha Boettcher was crowned Miss Scandinavia 2015 on Friday. Following the coronation ceremony, she led the Torchlight Parade to the bonfire where festival-goers threw straw hexes into the fire. The

tradition symbolizes getting rid of bad luck for the year."

— Joshua Bessex, "Midsummer fun and folklore: Scandinavian Fest crowns a new queen, honors traditions," The Daily Astorian, June 22, 2015

"A hex-making event for the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival has been rescheduled for 5 tonight. It will be held at the First Congregational Church, 820 Alameda Ave."

—"Festival helpers to make hexes," The Daily Astorian, March 24, 2003