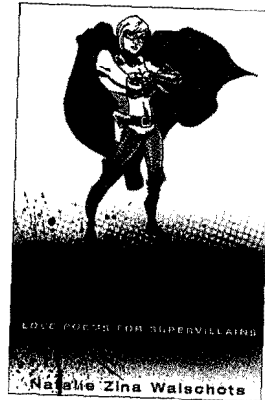


is dedicated to first books by emerging writers, this may very well be the intention.

Meghan Bell

***Doom: Love Poems for Supervillains* by Natalie Zina Walschots, Insomniac Press, 120 pages, \$16.95**

Natalie Zina Walschots's second collection of poetry, *Doom: Love Poems for Supervillains*, offers an unexpected look into the private, sensual desires of some of the most famous comic book super villains of all time. With sparse, technical language, Walschots's work pulls back the covers on long-established comic book icons to expose a range of lustful, dark, articulate, and often funny inner longings for intimacy, sex, and love.



In a poem called "Strange," a reference to the Marvel Comic of the same name, Walschots uses language in such a way that words ricochet off each other, with letters and sounds bumping and grinding from one line to the next to create a pulsating vibration of consonance and assonance:

*these tumours bulge
tumultuous straps
and sinew sewn
bone to bone saw
your cloned groaning*

Divided into five parts, *Doom* shines the linguistic flashlight on "galleries" of male villains, like Lex Luther, the Joker, and Dr. Octopus; sexy female villains such as Catwoman and Poison Ivy; and evil and isolated alternative universes like Apokolips, Latveria, and Gotham City. Each poem creates a focussed interrogation of the body, its key sensual features, and the super villain's desires or inner pleasures. In "Medusa," she writes "from the

gibbering of glabrous skin / your glory springs / so much more than mere keratin bundle." Here Walschots takes away the male comic book gaze of the super villain bombshell hair, and, later in the poem, gives Medusa space for her sensual impulses. She writes, "beneath the flesh / each bulb erupts crystal / threads of sentient tensile strength."

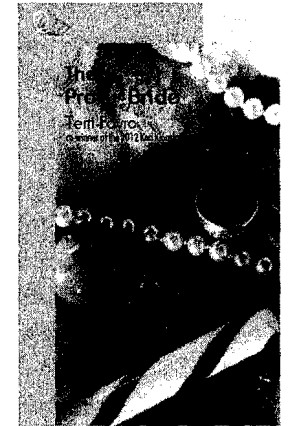
The poems in *Doom* are an impressive gathering of anthropological and linguistic comic book knowledge. As a reader without a notable comic book background, I found the poems, thanks to Walschots's rigorously researched writing, functioned well as their own poetry units. However, I'm sure a little comic book know-how would go a long way. I read Walschots's poem "Purgatory," which is a completely blank page, as a conceptual representation of a poem caught between "Hell," which is the poem prior, and the book's next section, but a quick web search suggests it may be connected to a character in the Green Lantern comic. Regardless, *Doom* is a layered and intellectually arousing work with Walschots's lush, eloquent language bringing forth a more intimate side to a long history of comic book evildoers.

Taryn Hubbard

***The Proxy Bride* by Terri Favro, Quattro Books, 123 pages, \$14.95**

Terri Favro's debut novel—co-winner of the 2012 Ken Klonsky Novella Award—is a mesmerizing, merciless character study of an immigrant community in 1960s Niagara. This intense read is replete with smuggled pornography, street gambling, rape, and exquisitely detailed moments: everything you'd want in something described by the publisher as "part fairy tale, part gritty realism."

The Proxy Bride takes place in Shipyard Corners, a neighbourhood teeming with violence, apathy, and random criminal behaviour; Favro pulls the reader into the immediate thick of it. The main character is Marcello, the only son of a gruff candy shop owner. Marcello's ticket out of the misery of Shipyard Corners is to enter into



the seminary, like a good Catholic son should, but it is soon apparent that Marcello has other, less church-like things on his mind, especially when his father's proxy bride, Ida, arrives from Italy. Marcello's love for his new step-mother is as intense as the sweltering Southern Ontario summer sun: "When Ida steps out of the Impala, Marcello hears a blast of Vivaldi's 'Summer' from *The Four Seasons* swirling inside his head and his eyes are dazzled by tiny sparks of light." Marcello sees what no one else can on page 40:

"To him, she looks like an angel—or maybe a goddess—who muddled her directions and went badly off course during her descent to Earth. To the others gathered in front of the candy store, Ida looks like a short, pale woman with blond hair scraped off her face into a tight little bun. Pretty enough, but no beauty queen."

The details in this novel are so meticulous, so absolutely delicious: small chunks of lovely visual candy are sprinkled throughout. However, Favro devotes the same amount of detail to uglier descriptions too: the entire neighbourhood is apparently blind to the casual, near constant violence dished out by some of its inhabitants to a twelve-year-old boy with the unfortunate, but telling, name of Bum Bum. Ida is the only person who treats Bum Bum with respect, causing an ethical epiphany for the reluctant almost-priest Marcello.

Favro's writing is reminiscent of Hubert Selby Jr, a master of brutal, casual crime and violence. She clearly possesses a stunning ability to mix seemingly random details with pop cultural and historical references, effectively defining a specific time and place. Watch out for Favro's future work; it certainly will be.

Carrie Schmidt

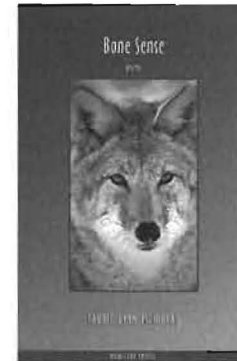
***Riot Lung* by Leah Horlick, Thistledown Press, 64 pages, \$12.95 and *Bone Sense* by Laurie Lynn Muirhead, Thistledown Press, 64 pages, \$12.95**

Thistledown is committed to publishing the first books of emerging Prairie poets, and Leah Horlick's *Riot Lung* and Laurie Lynn Muirhead's *Bone Sense* are two debut collections from their 2012 series. Both books are focussed on prairie landscapes and predominantly utilize first person

narrative in lyrical, free-verse poetry.

Riot Lung is a series of erotically charged love and coming-of-age poems that begin in childhood, then weave through adolescence and into early adulthood. The voice is consistent throughout the collection, expressing a growing awareness of queer identity and left-wing politics, explored in a series of poems about urban activism toward the end of the collection. The poems are accessible and conversational, though some are dense, full-paged, and prose-y. Elsewhere Horlick relies on pithy words to convey a single strong image.

Horlick's Saskatchewan is vivid: rife with prejudice, a place "where a cree girl couldn't buy lysol / if her clean floors depended on it," a harsh environment where the narrator is told, "foreplay is when you pull her hair first / and if it don't fall out, she don't got aids." The land itself reflects this harshness, and Horlick is at her best when she juxtaposes this with the memories of a first sexual encounter "this blush twining up my neck / some affectionate sunburn / or hint of something blossoming / where before there was only white." These lovely erotic images are the strongest aspect of the book and, when they occasionally seem overwrought, also the weakest.



While Horlick's narrator moves away from the prairies in the later pages of the book, Muirhead's volume is much narrower in focus. *Bone Sense* is singularly concerned with agrarian life in rural Saskatchewan. The poems are straightforward: free verse, imagistic, often almost totally devoid of punctuation. Muirhead places herself into the wider tradition of pastoral poetry.

Individual poems in the collection don't always stand out and the language is not always fresh, however, some images are vivid and Muirhead is adept at catching the rhythms of conversational speech and incorporating the quotidian objects of the modern farm into her writing.

Jennifer Zilm

