

## J. Hope Stein Book Review

by Matt Fowler

---

*Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* by J. Hope Stein, Poet Republik. 24 pp. \$15.00

### J. Hope Stein's Newest Book of Poems is an Imagistic Insight into Modern Love and Politics

It's not often that a book of poems comes along, carrying with it the ability to rattle the mind from insidious tedium, but alas J. Hope Stein's *Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* does the trick. In a society that favors economic progress over all else while simultaneously diminishing the role of human as anything other than pseudo-mechanistic means of production, Stein molds a world that blurs the lines. The first poem in the collection also titled, *Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* is a comical piece of prose that breathes spontaneity and sexuality back into the worker in the form of an office liaison. Stein titillates the reader with imagery;

*Me straddling  
your lap, your bare ass in my desk chair, shapes  
suctioning  
into each other— We would continue to make the sounds  
of  
good business. A conference call with Coca-Cola, an  
email  
to Citibank, a spreadsheet of year-over-year gross  
profits.*

Passages like these are what make Stein's newest book so engaging. She is able to mix the mundane with

the anarchic seamlessly, allowing the reader to join in on the fun. In the section of Stein's book titled *Husband Poems*, there exists an unconventional, intimate peek into the life of two lovers amid a landscape of artful imagery and tenderness. In the poem *Just Married*, Stein writes;

*Husband is food. I mean good  
or roof.*

Going on to write;

*Husband wakes me  
with licking cheeks. I make pillow  
of husband's shoulder & husband.*

Stein's images masterfully craft moments in which the familiar is paired with the strange while retaining a mood of comfortability. Her writing blends the characteristics of the depersonalized public performance with the closeness of two honeymooners. In other words, her poems are resoundingly human. The end of *Just Married* closes with a stanza that makes *Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* so endearing;

*In the earth of blankets,  
I gladden husband  
by the glow of candlelight through the sheets.  
(Where is my underwear?) The sky  
drolls sweetly to the ear,  
the purring animals in our bed.  
Light snore, the seashore at night.*

In the latter half of *Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose*, Stein shifts her biting gaze to the

political predicament with which the world is now faced in a poem titled; *DONALD J. TRUMP SUCKS THE COLD COCK OF AN ICE SCULPTURE* (as mouths congratulate each other for the century). This humorous piece doubles as a scathing critique of present day neo-fascist and world-class bumbling, talking-head, Donald J. Trump. Stein's first stanza paints an accurate portrait of his rise to power;

*The men who invented wealth.  
The men who invented how you think.  
The broadcasters. The pussy-grabbers. Cable & socket men.  
The men in charge of machinery. The men who decided what you like to eat.  
The steel men. The financiers. The patrons of the petroleum arts. Soot & crumb men.  
Con men. The dinner of the nation burning in the oven.*

The tenderness of Stein's imagery is sequestered in this piece and instead replaced with cold, calculating language that explains the truths of a current political climate. Stein's ability to cut straight into the meat of an argument is what makes this poem unceasingly relevant. Near the end of the poem Stein writes;

*Men who carry their brains in slings.  
Men who invented slavery instead of motors.*

Stein's observations are uniquely raw, they can take the form of a young otter gently nuzzling its mother, or a cold trench of skeletons in the desert as the sun sets. The juxtaposition that Stein weaves throughout *Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* is captivating from cover to cover.

*Occasionally, I remove your brain through your nose* is  
available now from Poet Republik Ltd.

[www.poetrepublik.com](http://www.poetrepublik.com)

by: Matt Fowler, Hostile Sphere Press

## Kate Luzner Book Review

---

Kate Luzner's *Invitation to a Rescue* is an incandescent collection of poems that are marinated in suffering, disappointment, and heartache. Nevertheless, despite the various failures that confront the poet, there is a shining tenacity to carry on despite all the horrors that life so callously throws at one.

Failure abounds in this gorgeous debut, whether it is a party that falls apart in "This is How You Go About Failing", or the profoundly painful experience of a romantic relationship that ends in heartbreak and separation, which is explored in many of the poems. In "Destruction", for instance, Lutzer opens with one of her most robust images of a shattered relationship: "*There are so many ways I'm going to disappoint/ you, I tell my husband before we dissolve/ like an aspirin in water, a tooth in a glass/ of Coke.*" These vivid lines sear into one's consciousness; one can almost hear the aspirin or tooth hissing in its cup as it dissolves and see the confusion and anguish on the face of the offended husband. Accordingly, one is not surprised to read by the end that the poet is "...alone as a bird out of/ its flock". Loss isn't merely confined to a ruptured romantic relationship in Lutzer's poems, however. Throughout her collection one encounters a mother who is gravely ill and bed-ridden. In "Reduced", for example, the poet writes: "My mother, a bedsore blossoming/ on her leg, calls to tell me she saw/me in a dream." Lutzer craftily places blossoming after the bedsore, which may surprise the reader since it is a verb that is associated with life and vitality and not with an odious wound that is steadily growing. Much like the above quoted lines about the aspirin and tooth, these lines strike the reader with their

ferocity and dexterity and continue to echo later when one has set the book down.

Failure and loss are also connected to an attempt to have communion with God/the divine. The poem "A Sign, A Flower" states, "I could not help but say, obsessively, 'God, let/ me be a vessel of light for you-show me how to accept/love and how to love others.'" "Near Religion", the second to last poem of *Invitation to a Rescue*, confesses, "I want/ to go towards love, to surrender/ to whatever God there is, but I'm stuck/ here, on the red sofa, the dog/ tilted in my arms." Loving, or knowing, the divine seems to be just as challenging as loving others. It is much easier to remain on the couch with one's dog than to try and love and understand the Creator of the universe.

Nonetheless, the poet refuses to surrender to these formidable failures. The title, after all, is a call for a rescue, which implies that though the shit has hit the fan, these woeful days and nights are not everlasting. In "Noise Events", Lutzner writes that, "Out of failure, the river begins." Granted, the reader is not entirely sure what the river could be, but one suspects that she is referring to a renewal, some life-giving source that is bound to flow after the various misfortunes have passed and been processed. Further, Lutzner concedes in "Near Religion" that "It's not all failure, but a lot of it is...". And finally, the last poem, which is significantly titled "In Praise of Moving On", Lutzner writes, "Tell me when the traces of you/ are gone, when it is safe to know/myself again." Who will rescue the baleful voice that haunts these poems? Perhaps Lutzner is suggesting that only we can save ourselves, once we have been through hell and are forced to delve into ourselves to see what we are composed of. Lovers, family, and even the Divine cannot erase our sorrow. Finally, Lutzner's slim volume of poetry, which should be savored, shared and

celebrated, reminds this humble reviewer of Beckett's famous words: "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go