

A person is seen from behind, completely encased in a dense, chaotic mass of crumpled plastic bags and debris. They are standing on a rocky, elevated position, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape under a sunset sky. The plastic is in various shades of grey, white, and black, creating a textured, almost sculptural form. The background shows rolling hills and a distant town or city, all bathed in the soft, golden light of dusk.

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Book\*hug Press  
Toronto 2024

FIRST EDITION

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Medium : poems / Johanna Skibsrud.

Names: Skibsrud, Johanna, 1980– author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230481434 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230481477

ISBN 9781771668736 (softcover)

ISBN 9781771668743 (EPUB)

ISBN 9781771668750 (PDF)

Classification: LCC PS8587.K46 M43 2024 | DDC C811/.54—dc23

The production of this book was made possible through the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Book\*hug Press also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Book Fund.



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## **THE SYBIL SPEAKS**

A voice is an opening, nothing more. A hesitation between breath and word, idea and form.

A hesitation that seizes, that takes hold. As the flickering of a flame, a sudden gust of wind, a brief embrace.

They come. For centuries, they've come. In the name of peace, of war, of love, and of bitterest revenge. I've been entreated.

For centuries, heeded and ignored, flattered and defiled, scolded and praised. I've been approached at every hour, from every angle, and by every manner of men — of whom

I will say only this: There has been very little shame.

And yet, still, they come slowly, are careful not to look  
me in the eye, and know enough to whisper as they beg for  
directions to the entrance of hell.

And yet, still, they need a door. A madwoman. A way of  
marking the distance between

my voice and theirs. Between language that speaks and  
the sound

wind makes as it whistles through cracks in hollowed  
stone. Between what exists — what *is* — and what...

*War! Fierce War! I say.*

*I see the Tiber, the Euphrates,  
the Yangtze, the Nile —*

*I see the Mekong, the Volga,  
the Gila, and the Mississippi River all  
running with blood!*

Go ahead: Call it something. Give it a name.

That which glides like a wave that never breaks, or a  
horizon that can never be drawn.

That which has no point of view; cannot therefore be  
entered, let alone exited; let alone measured or claimed.

Still, they feed me on bulls from the field, razed corn, and  
the blood of their own daughters, and sons.

Still, they need a door. An entrance, and permission to enter. An exit, and the idea of return.

They need a finger to point with — and rage. They need a body, and a hole in that body. They need to hear the wind whip through my open jaw.

Look! You, here!

Lingering at the chipped rock  
of the open door.  
Afraid, like all the others.

Listen to the wind! And to the voices outside. To animals in heat, gulls in flight, children laughing, or being born.

Smell the stench of meat on the altar. Of wood burning.  
Of the dampness of grass after heavy rain.

Feel the pang of hunger, and the first tremors of love.

Taste salt and bread, fear and longing; blood. Water. Wine.

I cannot reveal anymore. I can only address you.

You, who have come. Like all the others have come.

A mystic from the fourteenth century, Laleshwari, or Lal Ded —“grandmother”—wrote short imagistic vatsuns, or vakhs—a word deriving from the Sanskrit, “Vachan,” which means simply “voice,” or “speech.” Through her verses, Laleshwari celebrated the possibilities of non-dualistic language and thinking in an effort to break down perceived boundaries between selfhood and the Divine.

## **I STOOD BEFORE MYSELF AND REACHED OUT**

I stood before myself and reached out to know myself  
but each time my fingers closed around something or  
someone else.

My skin was thin, but nevertheless it proved a barrier;  
I could bring nothing closer.

No matter how hard I pressed, the thing I pressed against  
pressed back.

Everything looked back at me with the face of another.

I felt hunted, alone — perhaps inexistent.

As brittle and wayward as a leaf, I blew and blew in little  
circles inside myself, until at last I came to rest at my  
own feet, unrecognizable.



So that it was only by chance that I picked myself up as if I was another.

By chance I closed my fist around myself and turned to dust in my hand.

SAMPLE

The daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, Cassandra, was favoured by Apollo and promised the power of prophecy in return for complying with his desires. In Aeschylus's version of the story, Cassandra accepts Apollo's proposal, then refuses to submit. In punishment, Apollo curses her, promising that though she'll still have the prophetic gifts he promised, she'll go unrecognized for them and never be believed. Unheeded, Cassandra would go on to accurately predict the fall of Troy, the death of Agamemnon, and her own demise.