

PATHOS · HUMOR · HISTORY · CREATIVE NON-FICTION

CALLAHAN COUNTY

## STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

## Poetry Media Service

## WHO NEEDS TO HEAR A QUAGGA'S VOICE?

Poet Sarah Lindsay tells us what we didn't know we were missing.

By Daisy Fried

Poetry Media Services

Twigs & Knucklebones, by Sarah Lindsay. Copper Canyon Press. \$15.00.

Twigs & Knucklebones is a rare thing in poetry—a very good read. Fans of Sarah Lindsay's previous books, National Book Award finalist Primate Behavior (1997) and Mount Clutter (2002), will find here what they found there, only more so: freaks of nature and freakish nature, far-flung and underexplored places, things scientific and sci-fi, real things that seem invented, imaginary things that seem real. Orchids that grow underground. The introduction of starlings to America. Cities of the dead. Life on Jupiter's moon.

Lindsay's poems are as narrative as poems can get—they tell elaborate stories—but aren't at all confessional. Lindsay uses the word "I" to refer to herself or a poet-speaker in very few poems. Her voice in Twigs & Knucklebones is omniscient yet intimate, superliterate and flawlessly graceful, like a really good lecturer who knows how to entertain an audience while speaking on complex subject matters. In a sense these are "research and development" poems: one suspects Lindsay reads an article, for example, about a species of extinct zebra, then writes "Elegy for the Quagga." But the R&D never overwhelms insight or music. "Krakatau split with a blinding noise," writes Lindsay of the volcanic island's 1883 explosion. "Fifteen days before, in its cage in Amsterdam, / the last known member of Equus quagga, / the southernmost subspecies of zebra, died." A little later, "Who needs to hear a quagga's voice?"

The poet does, and by the end of the poem, so does the reader—and can't. It feels like a kind of wound:

Even if, when it sank to its irreplaceable knees,  
when its unique throat closed behind a sigh,  
no dust rose to redden a whole year's sunsets,  
no one unwittingly busy

two thousand miles away jumped at the sound,  
no ashes rained on ships in the merciless sea.

This isn't your standard alas-the-endangered-owl poem, trying too hard to pull the heartstrings. The very name of Lindsay's extinct beast is alien, and comical enough to have built-in resistance to simplistic resolutions. Also: "no dust . . . no one . . . no ashes." No apocalypse. The Krakatau imagery has plenty of resonance with atom bomb tests. The world didn't end with the extinction of the quagga—or the invention of the bomb. But Lindsay's poem gets at that secret worry that we're waiting for the other shoe to drop. "Elegy for the Quagga" is about our own inevitable extinction, individually and as a species, and our sense—terrible, freeing—that maybe, after all, we don't matter.

What does matter? The lightheartedly doomy Lindsay is obsessed by this question. The book's middle section, long enough to stand on its own as a slim volume, is a series of poems titled "The Kingdom of Nab," an ancient and vanished civilization that Lindsay invents out of whole cloth. Nab is fertile ground for Lindsay's recurring theme, the ephemeral nature of all things, including great empires. Sometimes too recurring, maybe. But as delivered by the capable, unsentimental, secular-seeming Lindsay, the poems feel political: if you write about a vanished civilization, even an invented one, you're writing allegory about contemporary power and empire.

No poem in Twigs & Knucklebones is a bad one, and virtually all are remarkable for their sheer interestingness. Lindsay's delight in imaginary and unknown worlds, her compulsion to write exactly what she doesn't know, removes her poems completely from the tired confessional anecdotalism of so much narrative poetry. But the I-less Lindsay needs to find some other way to make her poems perform as poems rather than as (invented) encyclopedia entries or nature feature articles beautifully written in medium-length lines. A few poems suffer from excessive good-idea-ism, by which I mean that the motivating idea is too visible, as in "The Museum of Damaged Art: Audio Guide."

But Lindsay's best poems are those that allow for some readerly identification beyond the spectator sport of Lindsay's ingenuity. In the sci-fi poem "Valhalla Burn Unit on the Moon Callisto," maimed patients on Jupiter's satellite "come / and linger in the courtyard, / with its soothing views of a thoroughly fireproof world," and doctors are "qualified for this post by the loss / of an irreplaceable love; / they aren't homesick for an Earth they could ever go back to." There's a post-apocalyptic feel here, but no explanation of the nature of the apocalypse. Instead, the poet makes the impersonal account achingly personal:

No atmosphere. That's why the sky is black  
all day, which does tend to bother the nurses,  
the aides, the kitchen staff, the housekeeping crew,  
all of whom are encouraged to miss their planet,  
and when they cry, are to do so hunched  
over sterile vials meant to preserve  
the healing proteins found in common tears.

Guggenheim Fellow Daisy Fried lives in Philadelphia; her latest book, My Brother Is Getting Arrested Again, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. This article originally appeared in Poetry magazine. Distributed by the Poetry Foundation. Read more about Sarah Lindsay, and her poetry, at poetryfoundation.org.

© 2009 by Daisy Fried. All rights reserved.

Submissions sought to:

Star

P.O. Box 29  
Eastland, TX 76448

email: [thebairdspotlight@att.net](mailto:thebairdspotlight@att.net)

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or libelable material.



Sunset Photo by Patrick Ready

## Rhymes To Use Wisely:

Mnemonic

Chronic

Stereophonic

Conic

Macaronic

Philharmonic



## Little Thistle

Purple was your flower and thorny were your spines

I never thought that you were happy there  
Although I've looked all over, here is where I find  
Drink in the sweetness of your fragrance rare.

Has a lost love caused your hiding my thorny friend

For your shyness will make you so forlorn  
Your beauty is far better than it's ever been  
Eternal is the beauty in you born.

You are but a thistle found alongside the trail  
With a few to see your beauty or attest  
To how you have shown beauty in every detail  
And offered to the world your very best.

Listen little thistle, no witness I can see  
There's none to see the battles you have known  
And when I look around, there's only you and me  
Seeing sweetness in seeds that you have sown.

- Weldon L. Smith  
Eastland, Texas

## American Life In Poetry

Column 218

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

American literature is rich with poems about the passage of time, and the inevitability of change, and how these affect us. Here is a poem by Kevin Griffith, who lives in Ohio, in which the years accelerate by their passing.

## Hurry

We stop at the dry cleaners and the grocery store  
and the gas station and the green market and  
Hurry up honey, I say, hurry,  
as she runs along two or three steps behind me  
her blue jacket unzipped and her socks rolled down.

Where do I want her to hurry to? To her grave?  
To mine? Where one day she might stand all grown?  
Today, when all the errands are finally done, I say to her,  
Honey I'm sorry I keep saying Hurry--  
you walk ahead of me. You be the mother.

And, Hurry up, she says, over her shoulder, looking  
back at me, laughing. Hurry up now darling, she says,  
hurry, hurry, taking the house keys from my hands.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation ([www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org)), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Poem copyright (c)2008 by Marie Howe, and reprinted from "When She Named Fire," ed., Andrea Hollander Budy, Autumn House Press, 2009. First published in "The Kingdom of the Ordinary" by Marie Howe, W.W. Norton, 2008. Used by permission of Marie Howe and the publisher. Introduction copyright (c)2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

## Words You Can Use:

Palprebra: This may be odd to you but it is a word for the eyelid.

Quotient: When a person speaks of a number, the person can use this word to denote a number, or the relationship of a number.

Rivose: If hues of color occur together in an irregular or unordered fashion, this word describes them, but a rainbow is sort of ordered, is it not, so you shouldn't use this for that.

Sessile: To be conjoined to a base missing a stalk is what this describes, but you could ask then, how is it attached?

Terricolous: Something that lives on ground or in the ground, is described by this word.

## Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor  
Eastland/Callahan County  
Newspapers  
P. O. Box 29  
Eastland, TX 76448  
email: [thebairdspotlight@att.net](mailto:thebairdspotlight@att.net)  
Fax: 254-629-2092