

Nostalgia For a World Where We Can Live

Poems by Monica Berlin

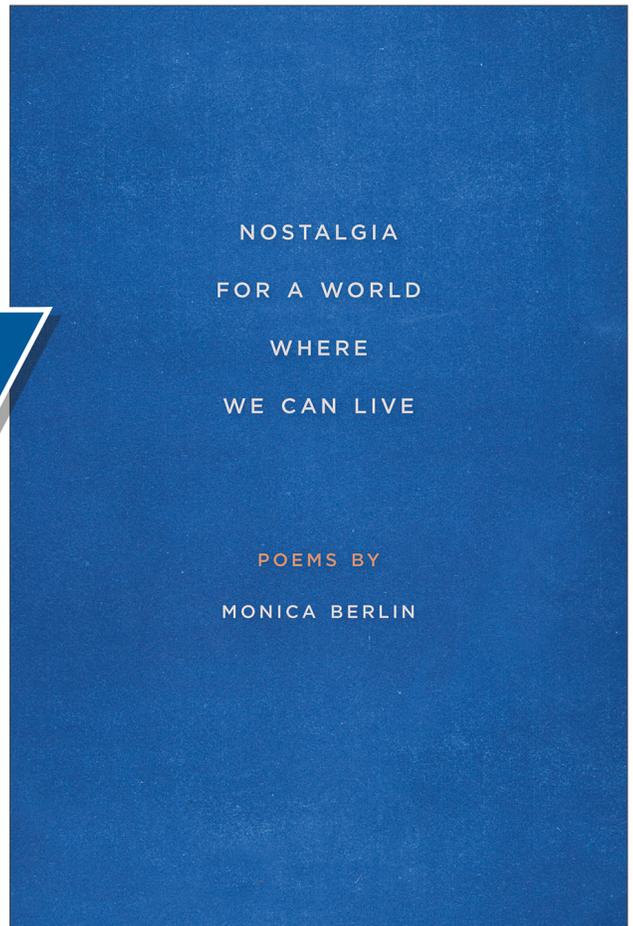
“To read *Nostalgia for a World Where We Can Live* is to reexamine the world we know through adversity and loss instead of a pair of eyes—everything is more intricate, everything is that much more concentrated and unbelievable in the memoried spaces of these precise, elegant poems. Nostalgia suggests longing, but these poems create new, unexplored experiences from what we understand of memory’s bigger insistences: tributaries of recollections and gestures that remind us that where we are now is almost as important as where we’ve been. In these poems, every tiny detail is part of the larger circumstance of human need. Each remembrance spins like a song from a lost record while Berlin lets us hear everything—the immaculate static, the rippling grooves of want, and the unavoidable fulfillment that follows.”—**Adrian Matejka**, author of *Map to the Stars* and *The Big Smoke*

Poems of resilience and intimacy in uncertain times

Monica Berlin’s *Nostalgia for a World Where We Can Live* resides at the turbulent confluence of relentless news cycles and the repeated rending of our interior lives. In Berlin’s poetry sorrow makes its own landscape—solitary, intimate, forward-looking. Whether we attempt to traverse it or choose bypass, her poems show us where we live, how we carry on.

These poems notice the day in the wind, the night tucked up to the train tracks, and a slipping-in of yesterday, memory-laden, alongside the promise of a more hopeful tomorrow. Here is the Midwest, vibrant and relic, in the ongoing years of collapse and recovery. Here the constant companionship of weather lays claim to its own field of vision. Here, too, devastation: what’s left after. Berlin reminds us we are at the mercy of rivers, oceans, earth, wind, rain, blizzard, drought, and each other. “Maybe what I mean / to say is that I’ve come to see all the names we might / recognize destruction by,” Berlin’s speaker discovers. “We might / sometimes, stupidly, call it *love*.”

On her familiar prairie of lyricism and tumult, beauty and ruin, Berlin’s poems insist, plead, and seek to reassure. In a collection both mournful and urgent, both a “little book of days” and a song, this poet meditates on loss, wonder, and always the consolations of language.



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Monica Berlin is a professor of English at Knox College in Illinois. She is the coauthor, with Beth Marzoni, of *No Shape Bends the River So Long*, winner of the 2013 New Measure Poetry Prize. Her poems have appeared in many journals, including *Kenyon Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Colorado Review*, *The Journal*, *Ecotone*, and *Diagram*.

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STAY MOUTHED THROUGH

half sleep a decade

of mornings until even
that left, the door

slamming behind in wind
that also goes then comes again

as everything does
these days—revolving

door, boomerang,
ricochet, backfire.

Until it meant *put off*, until
it meant *defer*, until suspended

wide-awake, finally thought
leave. Years before aloud could

imagine all those rooms
going & going on

emptied out, gone. Years
should've taught well enough

there's always a departure, someone
left, someone leaving, a mess

to untangle, no words
left to ask, no need to answer.

BECAUSE ALL DAY THE SKY HELD BACK

what it wanted most to say, & just now, couldn't
keep its tongue, hailed down. Now

the windows & gutters, & sopping,
even the siding trembling, my mouth

turned metallic, & how the unsaid bites
through the softer parts of any hour

& tastes like disappointment,
everything undone & puddling

under the eaves where nothing stays
secret when we stand there long enough.

I'd like to say I've heard it all before, Sky,
but tonight's different, the kind of revision

almost unrecognizable, somehow. That hail
against the roofline begins to sound out

every word I could never utter aloud,
that *no matter*, that I've been done talking

for a long stretch, all that, while it keeps
repeating & repeating.