Poet disassembles previous books to create entirely new collection

PITTSBURGH—Lynn Emanuel’s fifth poetry collection, The Nerve of It: Poems New and Selected, is not merely “an anthology of greatest hits,” she said. “I have disassembled each of my previous books in order to reassemble my poems in an entirely new way.” Emanuel has adventurously constructed The Nerve of It by forcing themes and obsessions, images and subjects from all of her books to intersect and crisscross, in essence composing a wholly new book.

Emanuel’s previous books include Hotel Fiesta; The Dig; Then, Suddenly—; and Noose and Hook.

In The Nerve of It, Emanuel ignores chronology, unlike nearly every other volume of “new and selected” poems. She places new poems beside old, mixes middle and early poems with recent work, liberating all her poems from the restraints of their particular histories, both aesthetic and autobiographical.

Whether writing in the comedic drag of the cartoon strip, or investigating the Mobius strip relationship between reader and writer, or exposing the humor and hurt that accompany visitations from Frank O’Hara and Gertrude Stein, The Nerve of It both stings and pleases with its wit and vivacity. It breaks through, in ways that are bold, sexy, haunting and wry, the die-hard opposition of new and old, personal narrative and linguistic play, sincerity and irony, misery and hilarity.

“Lynn Emanuel’s riveting volume of selected poems is ordered as the story of a life, but the emphasis belongs on story; this poet is possessed by the inescapable elision, invention and revision that telling entails,” stated Mark Doty. "Memory like a bolt of silk/ In a tailor's arms/ Can be made into anything," she writes, and her riddling, elusive, sexy poems pull the reader through memory mirrored and revealed, told by a narrator who slips in and out of her own skin, delivering, time after time, the truth of ardor, sorrow, and bewilderment, in poems that pulse with sheer wild nerve.”

Emanuel’s work has been featured in the Pushcart Prize Anthology and Best American Poetry numerous times and is included in The Oxford Book of American Poetry. She has been a judge for the National Book Awards and has taught at the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, The Warren Wilson Program in Creative Writing, and the Bennington College Low Residency MFA program. Emanuel is the recipient of two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, The National Poetry Series Award, the Eric Matthieu King Award from The Academy of American Poets, and, most recently, a fellowship from the Ranieri Foundation. Emanuel resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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