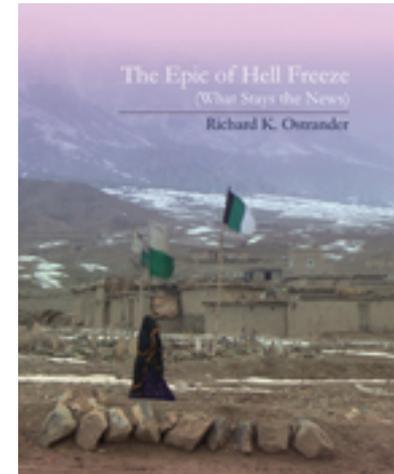


### The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News) by Richard K. Ostrander

*The Epic of Hell Freeze* is a lush crosscurrent of peculiarly fine poetry. Here poems are as playful as they are crucial, whimsical and heartbreaking in a wide drifting landscape. Moving with a purpose, language circles and embodies in a ceaseless spirit in a work of great beauty and force, of intelligence and stark humility. These poems make rites of passage actual through poems that speak a primary language. Ostrander speaks a primary language. He is inventing a world—and this beautiful book enacts a patient intelligence and exemplifies physical grace. In these lines you will hear fullness of representation, and a luminous consciousness. This is a book of desire and transcendence, obsessed by, and never afraid of, its mysteries that turns toward those mysteries with language both base and grand. Ostrander is the best kind of poet: one in love with language and life. This is a wonderful, relevant book of poetry. —Geoffrey Gatza



The poems in Richard K. Ostrander's *The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News)* shift from allusion (Andromeda, Abraham, Sisyphus) to illusion: "He walks through walls/ On the other side of silver." Ostrander's attention to "language's legerdemain" ties seemingly unrelated poems to each other like knotted scarves pulled from a magician's sleeve, using alliteration—"And a single sentence,/ Tautness of telephone lines"—as well as slant rhyme—"Flies, happy in their bottles/ Freer than fish/ that fly/ Melody or malady/ I don't know which"—and clichés twisted into new configurations—"There's a sty in the sky,/ Here's a shoulder to fry on." The poems take the reader into Bosnia and Afghanistan where "Tomorrow is the tail fin/ Of a rocket reaching down" and back to the U.S. where "Everyone turned to the sports page, feeling/ As if somehow something had been accomplished." What a journey into the world of words and war! —Beth Copeland

Richard K. Ostrander currently resides within the Carolinas and the interstitial spaces of thought and desire. On most Sunday evenings, he can be found co-hosting Java Expressions, the local open mic at the Coffee Scene in Fayetteville, NC. No more data is required other than the work herein which is more than mere biography. Though some say it is about death, it is life. It is what stays the news

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## Breaking the Knot

They stretch a rubber band  
Pull it until it snaps.  
Wonder at the resultant sting  
Believing  
    The infinite of elasticity  
For the camel's back,  
There's no straw.  
The phone call comes.  
"She can't do this anymore!"  
Straw  
    And a single sentence,  
Tautness of telephone lines  
For the contortionist his knots  
But  
    Man is muscle, tendons  
And bones  
    Bend until they break.  
But who breaks the knot,  
  
Who lifts the straw?

## **Fission**

Two entities separate irreparably  
One goes the other stays.  
The resulting shrapnel  
Is divided up evenly.  
Lawyers catalogue  
What the log periodic can't.  
No one really lives happily.  
A unified theory isn't required  
For what happens domestically.

## **Disease of Eve**

A rusty blade across the wrist  
A limbo a  
Slow pulling apart  
    Revealing veins  
Married nor single  
    Still  
Single disembodied voice  
    Sometimes cellular  
Flesh in form a strong  
    Continual craving  
To find what fits

## **Era of Our Days**

Science not sin cere  
Apollo A political  
Starving assembly  
Straight sideways is  
No way to go ahead  
At the end stand at  
Sleep but dead awake  
It's been classified tourist.  
Sentient sediment Al  
Rock & bowl under a believer  
Forgive me Ward  
For I have binged.  
And how did we end?  
I have corseted another's life.  
Thus is gleaned  
The era of our days

## Happy Jack

I was her Sancho Panza  
Carrying her quest behind her.  
The pots and pans of her past  
Clamoring to get off the trail wagon.  
She wanted one from the very start  
A Tenzing Norgay for her trip  
Up Il Purgatorio. The rifle bearer  
In the final act of William Tell.  
She never told and I survived  
The shot while she licked the wound.  
I had seen this before  
In the tarot stones of the desert  
The Happy Jack; fear death  
By monotonous desperation.  
We lived on a skillet;  
The everyday sizzle in the grease  
Of her saliva, my sweat and blood.  
This is not a love song.  
I am not an old man in a dry season.

## Son of Sisyphus

After all the circles in your inferno  
All the accusations before the docket  
The nails through the wrist  
The droughts of vinegar and arsenic  
“For the public good”  
The first stone thrown a thousand times  
In the batting cage of our home  
It was I; I was the son of Sisyphus.  
The sons of waste said so.  
It was me who kept the grass green.  
With my garden hose, I kept the lawn alive.  
I pulled the dandelions and weeds of fear  
Grown in your dark corners.  
All those weeds I could pull  
But once out they angled for those corners.  
And I always loved an angle.  
During the day I unshuttered  
The windows for the light.  
But at night in your angles  
They grew anew and I was engulfed  
My back against a thousand corners.  
I waded in weeds, my garden hose a scythe.  
I was the son of Sisyphus.  
That’s what the sons of waste said.

## Other Ways

I found the round with my name  
It was dia de los muertos  
And I was unarmed for the festival.  
Foolkiller came for my number  
But I had the bullet and would not bite.  
I didn't know all that I knew.  
In the parade I rode on the dead man's float.  
The ice cream melted in the mud.  
We weren't walking on water, ya know.  
I was asked by angels  
In the visible light for directions.  
I told them to keep an eye out  
For the prize; it had yet to give offense.  
"Better the blind who can not see the apple."  
Proof was demanded at the door.  
The information age was over.  
There were other ways of knowing.

## **Proximity**

I lost my sun glasses the other day

You were talking

There was ocean

White caps, shore, sand

Little crabs scurried into small holes

Seagulls in Zen like ennui

I was looking

At you finally

Perhaps even for the first time

I really,  
I mean I really saw you

Realization of

Nothing

In between

A guy could get lost like that

Simply disappear

Like the sea

I frankly  
found that,  
Frightening

Proximity

After all those times

It was at the beach

I reached for them

To slide them up

Reassuringly

And they were not

There at all

Where I had left them

No

Not at all

Like I wished I weren't

Like I wished

I was the sea

A gull seized a small crab in its beak,

Looked at me

As if I were its ocean,

Whitecaps,

Crustacean,

Glasses, glasses, glasses.

## **Looky Here**

A woman loves a man

So he pushes her away

He has been transparent

So long he can manage

Only opaqueness

He an apparition unto himself

She a solid he cannot grasp

She hurts the way he feels

Looky here

He walks through walls

On the other side of silver

She sees only her reflection

She wishes he was real

She could beam him up

She could just add water

But like morning mist

He burns off with the sun