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Asterisms

Erica N. Kenick

Florida International University, erica.kenick@gmail.com

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

ASTERISMS

A poetry collection in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Erica Nicole Kenick

2015

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Erica Nicole Kenick, and entitled Asterisms, having been approved in respect to style and content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Vernon Dickson

Denise Duhamel

Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

Date of Defense: February 24, 2015

The thesis of Erica Nicole Kenick is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean Lakshmi Reddi
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

ASTERISMS

by

Erica Nicole Kenick

Florida International University, 2015

Miami, Florida

Professor Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

ASTERISMS is a collection of lyric poetry that seeks to express a sense of awe for the natural world by exploring themes of science, art, and the self. By combining physics and metaphysics, scientific terminology and musings on love, ASTERISMS argues that these seemingly-disparate fields of knowledge can harmonize in unexpected ways.

In its style, the collection draws from the works of Dorianne Laux, Pablo Neruda, and Annie Dillard. Most of the poems are written in free-version and are tied together by images of astronomy and wilderness, both modern and prehistoric. Poems about classical music appear as interludes meant to complement others concerned with science and technology, as music too has its own invented language.

Like asterisms - ancient inventions meant to personalize the expansive mystery of the night sky - this collection seeks to admire, if not completely understand, our place in the natural world and cosmos beyond.

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Ars Poetica

From the sea floor
where the pressure is so great
that most things break, I call them.
Half-tamed, sometimes they rise
clean as helium balloons,
but more often they choose to cling
to the comfortable murk
that has no words but is closer
to the core of things.

Because they are so fresh and unspangled,
it's easy to forget the ones I do manage
to conjure surfaceward are miracles.
I tuck them away and drive them home
where they're drenched in sage smoke,
spiked with adamite crystal,
a handful of lotus plumule
meant to anoint and protect,
but mostly for the comfort of ritual.

I kneel on the dock

letting each wicker hull hover
before surrendering them to the current
that forever forks or tracks backwards,
unmappable, to the one thing
that saturates and is masterful,
that catalyzes star birth
and sparrow migration,
and for eons has promised
the gracile possibility
of deliverance.

Psalm

after George Oppen

In the small light of morning,
When the tropic heat hurried
To rebuild itself, we paddled

Bayward thru
Mangroves whose innumerable
Slender roots only feigned delicacy
As they sipped at the brackish canal.

Among the islets
Of the bay, a gray slice of fin. Then again,
Nearer to us: the sleek curve of the dolphin's
Head and an alien exhalation.

We extended our oars
More carefully not wanting to offend when
The thing surfaced and dipped under closer still,
Bulleting toward unseen sleepy fish.

This was the thrill —

To be there and trusted as witnesses,
Or regarded as irrelevant and therefore
Equal: all of us small nouns in the bay.

Ode to the First Rain

The first rain
was the last rain
that did not bear
the guilt
of inconveniencing
beings.

Glittering and necessary,
the liquid curtain
that was not quite drinkable
cast itself into puddle,
pool, then sea
concealing
within its god-broth
magic tricks,
other firsts
on the newborn,
doughy planet
where nothing
could yet applaud
or record them.