

(Note: This review originally appeared in Rhythm & Bone Magazine, which is now closed. Here is a copy of the review.)

Review of *The Uncertainty of Light: Poems by Alana Saltz*

By Kerry Kijewski

"Apparently, there's
a theory of infinity
where the same events repeat
again and again, indefinitely.

A big bang—
hot matter collides.
Life is born on this planet then dies."
—Alana Saltz

From the first poem, the cracking of a shell, Alana Saltz's words go on to splinter apart a story of life, love, and living, chronically, with illness and pain.

"My insides are cooked,
but somehow I'm still raw."

With her words, describing herself as a hard-boiled egg, *The Uncertainty of Light* is both raw and real.

It begins with her early years--from slides, toys, stickers, and suckers given by the doctors. At one point, she imagines herself as a child's colored construction paper, another in her life as bright, crisply white, a pair of silly scissors standing by.

"Or maybe we are cardboard
puzzle pieces snapped together.
From a distance, I can see the big picture,
but the breaks still show."

Anyone who remembers the children's educational cartoon featuring Ms. Frizzle and her wide-eyed bus load of students, *The Magic School Bus*, will find a familiar feeling retrieved.

"Watch organs lighting up a little too bright.
Red blood cells drifting lonely
like they've lost their best friends..."

Explain to the children that these are things
that make me hurt
but not enough for anyone to see."

She supposes her body is the one they traveled through, learning about sickness and disease and how mysterious and amazing the body truly is. Or, for some like her, where unanswered questions and fear live, looking for the faith to get through life, and the hope that is born and dies over and over throughout the years as constant companions.

Flashing back and forth between recollections of a childhood where riding a bike is interspersed with the early illness and facing a world of medical tests and professionals, searching for answers have lead her right here, to this book of poems.

“There's no end to the path.
The trees won't stop.

Counting inhales
and exhales.
There's a rhythm
I can't locate
in my
chest
or my footsteps.”

Wrapped in the trees, in blankets, in another person, and in “a chlorinated sea.” Memories of family, finding real and lasting love, and a relation to nature are themes in this debut poetry chapbook by writer and disability activist Alana Saltz. This is one woman's relationship to pain and how her chronic illnesses have gone on in relation to those she loves and has loved all while fighting the ongoing companionship of illness and the pressure that puts one's body.

“You're a weightlifter buried in dumbbells.”

From swinging and reaching through treetops, the pulling out of screaming mandrakes, and a stuffed dog made and cared for with love, Saltz lists forests and stuffed animals in her bio and both appear within this collection. As she writes about her grandmother, her mother, her ex, and her love, the dealing with illness in herself and in others carries on throughout.

“Poking at tender spots, each one jerks
sharpness, leaves echoing stings behind.”

These poems will be highly relatable and comforting to many a reader in the chronic illness community. For those who live with chronic pain, sections of this book immediately connect. Those who don't may find understanding of such pain in a new way.

Published by Blanket Sea Press, which Saltz started, where she also has a literary journal for writers and artists living with chronic illness and/or disability, *The Uncertainty of Light* makes a splash into a sea full of varied experience, using poetry to help her share her story and find meaning through the rough patches of a life fought hard for.

This poetry chapbook is moving and magic, from beginning to end, as she reminds herself and her readers of the importance of taking a breath, smelling the roses, lilies, and sunflowers, lavender and peppermint, and feeling the softness of flower petals and sand. *The Uncertainty of Light* is full of small moments and bigger questions and a reminder to feel life and seek joy amongst the deep-rooted harder parts and places.

“We take photos in front of the Sequoias to remind us of how silly and small we are, how short our bodies and lives are in comparison. We play in the snow, leaving footprints in the sparkling frost, leaving behind our marks together.”

Starting with the image of an egg, ending with the imprint of a kiss, this is the perfect book to carry around and take it out to read a poem in those moments when poetry is most needed.

Kerry is a writer, blogger, and disability advocate. She loves travel and podcasts and audio storytelling on top of her love of the written word. She lives in Ontario, Canada, with her literary dog and cat: Dobby and Lumos. You can find her on Twitter @KKHerheadache.