



Night of the Hawk

Lauren Martin

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A work of primordial feminine beauty, Night of the Hawk is a poetic pleasure.

Sarah Lawrence graduate Lauren Martin's *Night of the Hawk* is an expansive book of poetry. Reading this panoramic collection is like flying, circling the earth, and diving down often to examine a place, predicament, or feeling. Included are poems rooted in Martin's Yorubic practice of shamanism, her struggle with chronic illness, and coming to terms with her father's death.

Written across a period of multiple years before being submitted for publication, and traveling from Nigeria to New York City, from a moth's wing to a nation's mourning, these pleasure-filled poems are spare, elegant, and unrhymed:

*Night of the black hawk
And the still bird
And the silvery moon
You lyami keep
Calling to me*

In Yorubic tradition, lyami refers to "the great mothers, primordial femininity; witches, essential to the spirit realm," as Martin explains in her poetry key in the front of the book. Here and elsewhere, mystical references abound: there are verses about seeing dead people, and some poems read like correspondence from departed souls.

The powerful poem "The Waiting Tree" mourns the kidnapping of Nigerian Chibok schoolgirls in 2014—and it is not just humans who mourn:

*White birds
Fly upriver
Landing on the
Big tree, synchronistic*

Short, smooth, and musical lines abound, as do masterful metaphors, as in "Of Times Travelled":

*That curiosity
Should unfold
Like fresh linen
Spread for a dinner party*

Organized in a linear fashion, the entries exhibit humor and bite—and sometimes biting humor—along with a range of other emotions. Trustworthiness is established, and wisdom feels pervasive. Even when the entries tackle complex issues like climate change, losing a parent, aging, and infirmity, they are delivered with surety—as with the US-based "Sad Song for a Nation," written in December 2016, which intones:

*And then you remember
God sees all
And the birds are still singing
Joyous at the absolute
Hour of survival*

Neither divided into sections nor organized in a linear fashion, *Night of the Hawk* is prone to eschewing expected devices as well. It soars where it wants to, taking those who are willing along for its time-traveling, transcendental ride. Indeed, it seems as though the spirit of Iyami infuses the work the most.

The poetry collection *Night of the Hawk* is a balm to readers—the work of a gifted poet with an original voice whose poems are delivered with primordial feminine beauty.

DEBORAH TOBOLA (April 18, 2024)

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