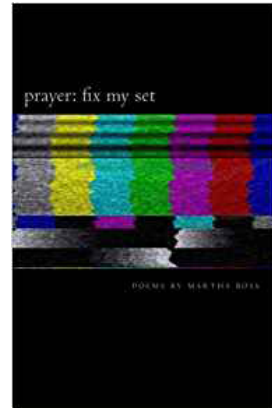


## Wilderness House Literary Review 12/3

**Prayer: fix my set**  
**Oddball Publishing**  
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**44 pages**  
**Poems by Martha Boss**



*Review by Lo Galluccio*

The new book of poems by Martha Boss, recently released by Oddball Magazine Publishing, is truly a genius treat to read. Martha's thinking and her pen are tightly bound so that you feel as though the ink on the page is her very own blood. But these are not poems inked in dry salty blood – their effect is more like cherry juice or a Manhattan cocktail. Martha seems loaded with brilliant insights about her own process of creating and the world around her. She eschews capital letters and uses an ampersand instead of "and." Her book begins with this Whitmanesque declaration:

*"i celebrate my pen.  
keeper of protest & riot."  
And later in the poem she writes:  
"my pen, desperate avatar  
Of truth, translating  
Crammed passion."*

Boss, a regular at Stone Soup on Monday nights, writes in free verse, her stanzas no set length and without rhyme schemes. Her own logic about things is jazz enough. In the title poem: Prayer: fix my set, she engages in a monologue to the Maker, in which she begs him to get the remote working and turn on the TV. This is quite entertaining until, at the end, she issues one more request:

*"so  
Where are you from. Anyway, God?  
Give me a sign.  
I'm praying.  
I'm guessin' radioshack, please.  
Can you fix my set?" p 8*

I love the idea that God is at radio-shack, hanging with the other employees in a uniform.

*Poems about the movie, "The Ten Commandments,"  
"hmm ...now I'm thinking with my pen."  
Ends with "did God give the order to have Jesus killed?  
Wassup with these guys?"*

In a confessional poem about her own process she writes that she starts by drawing the sky every day and birds.

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*"I draw every day. Every day I draw  
the sky. It's usually indigo blue. It usually gets me past a bad memory. ...&  
birds. I draw  
birds." P 12*

In the playful poem "Cookie Man" Boss coyly feeds a flock of birds  
some fig newtons...identifying with the birds as they

*"peck at one & then another & another like they're seeing if they all taste the  
same  
and they're not sure what it is" p 26*

She notes from the box that they were made in Mexico which prompts  
Boss to finish the poem in Spanish:

*"hay chica. esta la fantasma del galeta-hombre./el cookie-man esta viviendo  
en el arbol  
y ahora we know eso es que pasa a los fig newtons." P 27*

*Roughly translated, the cookie man is living in the tree and now we know  
that is what is happening with the fig newtons.*

In "I walk by the river of everything" Boss takes on a musing stance  
toward probably the Charles River in Cambridge –

*"along the reedy banks/of high bio research/I am a single digit/wrapped tight  
in wool  
some other/Ireland river. In a lyrical declarative voice she then sings: in  
spring we will  
float/ our boats/the river of everything/will flow with experiment...and the  
waste of  
ideas/have given it new data./the river moving the mystery/the unknowable  
genome/in  
the undertow."p 34*

All the poems in this collection are good and riveting. In her plain-spo-  
ken eccentricity Martha Boss brings her own vision and life to the poetry  
she writes. There is a staccato feel to these pieces but then sometimes a  
well-spring of aria that extends the lines. It feels home-made and well  
spun, like plain funny and fantastic clothes you want to try on again and  
again. From the aluminum space suit to the cotton dress – all the birds she  
invokes—draws us into her mind's resonance of language. I highly recom-  
mend checking out prayer: fix my set out.