

**Lovers in the Free Fall**  
by Elizabeth Gordon McKim  
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review by Karen Klein

They don't call Elizabeth McKim, aka e/liz, the Jazz Poet of Lynn for nothing. The 3 R's she so skillfully employs aren't the 'reading, 'riting, and 'rithmatic' we learned in grade school. Hers are rhyme, repetition, rhythm. Listen to them as in HEY DANGER she insouciantly calls "Come on in/We're waitin' for this dance to begin...." repeating her invitation

*"So come on in darlin'  
And rev up my engine  
Some call it poetry  
Some call it legend"*

It's poetry, the vernacular diction of 'rev' mixed with the unexpected formality of 'legend' with its slant rhyme 'engine'. In The show down is soon is a dance of her embodied voice, urgent and strong, as she rollicks

*The hour is late  
The music is blue  
The rhythm is fate*

The deceptive simplicity of the short lines lets the craft in her repetition and rhyme, the music in her assonance seduce us and our bodies move with hers because in her jazz poetry the insistent 'rhythm is fate'.

McKim is fascinated with the way words fit together, hide inside each other, create sound variations and echoes. Consider just this section of the poem MOTION/COMMOTION

*I like to mosey  
You like to mill*

*You like to rumble  
I like to spill*

*I like to gallivant  
You like to gamble*

*I like to sally forth  
You like to ramble*

Her use of words like 'mosey', 'gallivant', 'sally forth' gives the poem an old-fashioned ambience. The back and forth of 'You' and 'I' has a playful, rocking rhythm. Triplets like 'rumble', 'gamble', 'ramble', change only one vowel or one initial consonant out of three; again word play. But the prize goes to 'sally' hiding in 'gallivant'.



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The book's title, *Lovers in the Free Fall*, indicates two large, interconnected areas. The Free Fall could be everywhere we are, where we roam, boundless, unexpected happenings, destinations, endless possibilities. Many of McKim's poems are about movement with images of roads, highways, cars, trains, freeways, their subject matter less playful, their lines longer, their shape sometimes formal as in the sestina REFUGEES. These poems about migrants, refugees, point to desperate situations and, no matter when initially written, are relevant to current issues. Some of the wanderers are persons from McKim's life experience, like Dave who wants to get out of cold, wintry Lynn and head for Flagstaff. But then Odysseus, as seen by his long-suffering wife Penelope who sings the blues, shows up, as do other mythic characters whose travels land them in places they didn't want to be--Icarus, Persephone.

McKim presents dire situations and does not shrink from misery's truth. While honest about suffering, fear, loss, unfulfilled longings, her mantra, as presented in her DEDICATION, is 'No despair/no despair/ no despair'. Human misery neither obliterates nor dominates her acceptance of life's yo-yo fullness. She's one of the lovers in the free fall; like them she has 'slapped down and wised up/Wised up slapped down'.

Like her wanderers, her range is wide, not only in subject matter, but also in her poetic craft. From the oral tradition, she chants, sings a ballad; from European formal patterns, creates a sestina; from her own musicality performs jazz. Consider the pulse, lineation, eccentric word choice of the opening lines of CALL

*You can call me cormorant  
And I will call you stranger  
You can call me consonant  
And I will call you danger*

Contrast it with the shaped arc, the deliberately irregular length and placement of lines on the page, the imagery drawn consistently and narratively from nature in her contemporary lyric STAND STILL

*Coming to a stand-  
still  
a heron  
situated  
and observant  
follows  
lost light  
into land's end  
translates autumn air  
into silence  
stands  
poised  
while*

*wanton and wild*

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*golden rod suddenly nods  
harbor seals  
disappear and dip*

*gulls  
veer  
sails  
billow*

*tossed in the hollow*

*heron  
in the shallows  
holds  
onto  
a one legged*

*stand still*

The dancery movement on the page is McKim's transfer of motion from the rhythm of sound to pictorially shaped image. We can feel the heron's leg as a rod holding the center of the poem from top to bottom. Her title might be a private pun, a tease to her jazz poems, or her need to do that.

As the poet is in the free fall with all of us, so she is also one of the lovers. She speaks most often 'in the numinous luminous name of love' Sometimes she speaks from 'these blazing discs of memory' of her parents, her sisters, of those gone from life, but never from her memory, and of those still in her life and precious.

Some of her love poems present an intensity of intimacy, her language simple, direct and so strong we can feel it in our own bodies. From 'the cusp/ of loving' in WATCH

*I watch you  
from up-  
side/ the head  
from water-  
bed, .....*  
*.....  
from when you look at me  
from when I look at you*

from LETTER

*I want to know the sound of your steps  
In the city where you survive  
I want to know how you breathe*

from WHEN WE LOVE

*We love strongly*

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*We come as guests  
And we don't know when to leave*

*and, finally, from the beginning and the ending of IF I ASK  
If I ask you to come home  
Will you? .....  
.....I will go  
Anywhere you are going.*

Wherever you go, take Lovers in the Free Fall with you.

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