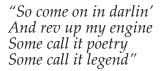
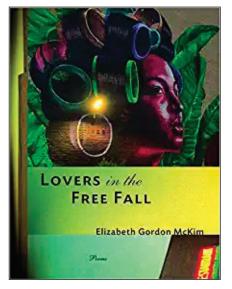
### Lovers in the Free Fall by Elizabeth Gordon McKim Leapfrog Press, Freedonia, NY, 2020

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





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 poeman 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'.

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'struth. 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 nordominates 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 slappedslapped down'.

Like her wanderers, her range is wide, not only in subject matter, butalso 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 standstill a heron situated and observant follows lost light into land's end translates autumn air into silence stands poised while

wanton and wild

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 dancerly movement on the page is McKim's transfer of motionfrom 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 upside/ the head from waterbed, ..... 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

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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