

REVIEW

REVIEW: DAYS BY SIMONE KEARNEY

written by Guest Contributor November 2, 2021



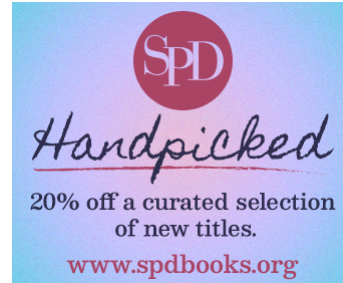
DAYS by Simone Kearney
Belladonna*, May 2021
Amazon
120 pages – poetry

Visual artist and writer Simone Kearney’s debut full length poetry collection, *DAYS*, is a tour de force in what it means to live, to write, to recollect, and then to go ahead and live some more. The collection itself, composed of 108 interlinking seven-line poems, is relentless without ever risking exhaustion, neither of subject matter nor of any astute reader. Despite the title, time – in its traditional meaning – is not marked within these pages. Instead, a generosity of words, phrases, and their varying associations unfold like a tapestry dedicated to the notion that time is, and always has been, something nonlinear, something just beyond what we can know.

Kearney, very much alive within the pages of *DAYS*, is constantly reckoning with both the quotidian and the deeply personal, sometimes with only a comma separating the two. Perhaps it is because the pedestrian and profound are not separate at all. The form the text takes reinforces this notion of oneness, encouraging the reader to see ideas as both distant and of a whole. As a result of this blurring, in *DAYS* we are all here together, and it’s tender and raw and joyous and mundane and “we’re almost shot through.”

This text comes right on time. That is to say, *DAYS* sits perfectly in the canon of the now, of an age in which time has begun to take a strange form: the age of the internet, of careerism-as-culture, of celebrity, of the ever-tightening noose of capitalism, of abnormal weather reminding us the earth is in deep crisis on a near daily basis. But still, amidst this urgency, the days remain the same as days do, as they always have done. They languor and then they speed, they are (theoretically) promised en masse, month after month, “it’s February, inert violent soft clue, scratching, horny/ dripping subdued, smoking, waiting for something to happen.”

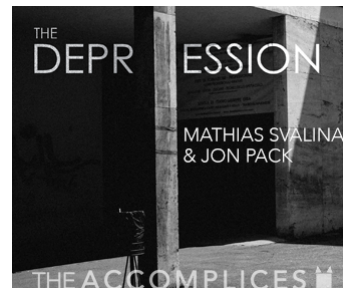
In *DAYS* we are given ideas as to what language is, what it means, what it can do and what it cannot, “you wish you could be specific.” That classic where-language-fails-us trouble is good trouble, and Kearney addresses this lack with a rigor that she makes to seem easy. She writes, “if the whole of/ language were present to me when I spoke, then I would not be able to articulate/ anything at all,” before flowing into the names of brand after brand, store after store, product after product. The spell of the inundation of consumerism is briefly broken by phrases like “spirit, desire, spirit,” and “desire, miss me” and “we will fall” and, the longest iteration of these moments of pause, “spirit desire, spirit desire, we will fall.” In this landscape of late-capitalism, of the dark banality of our lives as data mines for corporations even when attempting something so simple as a commute, Kearney shows us that language can be a way in, and also a way out, but that it can never fully reckon, “what about progress,/ I had no clue, what of desire.”



i have never wanted to kill myself but i have / always been keenly aware / that i could die any day / i have / always been sure something was trying / to kill me

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Tied into Kearney's workings on language are the ideas of memory, recollection, mementos, cognition, et al. DAYS, which functions through a written stream of consciousness executed through a chant-like sequential structure, loops without any threat of pedantry. Within the carefully curated poems, the beautiful and winding prose, we are steeped in the sameness of our individuality and of our shared consciousness. This is not an easy feat to accomplish. The past is present in these pages, as is the future. DAYS is a powerful tribute to how it feels to exist within multiple physical and psychic spaces at once in the way necessitated by the act of living itself. Reading Kearney means getting willingly and willfully fucked up on sections that read rich with emotion, like the following: "memory is that/ hill over there, sinking, your voice like graffiti on an icecap, icosahedron or truncated/ cube, in a room, this split hair lifting off the ground, 'I really like you,' like a bee stuffed/ with its stripe, bound into a ball, one can be stuffed with too much lightness until one's/ body becomes no longer body but thing, Dr. Pepper, in a diner in Wyoming, teenagers, I/ haven't washed my hair, and all the sea like expectations of beautiful longing."

In DAYS we are faced with the body, a shared thing, in new ways that avoid the modern tropes of body-oriented work. The poems focus on the body as something inevitable, as something through which we experience everything, as something that undergoes both ecstasy and suffering, something we "must use in the proper way." In a phrasing that seems most attuned to the overall experience of the body within the descriptions throughout DAYS, Kearney laments, "no logical position can account for the semantics of/ a body, its bones are tiny prisms, chunky light, imitations of knots that keep undoing./ they contain too much of what is more than their size, sudden understanding of words/ turned inside out, badly done where flesh is indicated as question, strictly speaking./ why can't you move more fluidly, why can't you be moved fluidly, my poor vehicle." The tenderness of the language, of the treatment of the body, is stark against the reminder that the body is a cage, one that we all must accept as a form of trade in order to experience living.

Throughout DAYS, there is want, love, longing and loss. There appears a series of proper names, each one pinned within an anecdote, or at the least offering up a play between the signifier and signified. Each, capitalized. Each, another life within the life that is DAYS. The work is peopled with friends, lovers, theorists, and the ever-present self. Kearney takes us along for the ride time and time again, this time with aching and reflection, "I held her hand in the rowboat, tossed our/ heads back so the sky looked underwater, more savory than honey, like a steam room/ at the Y, steam rising like a sun, we couldn't tell the difference between need/ and love, need became love and then love became need, we're hoping to cultivate/ a good type of affection." More than once a speaker in the text says, "I know exactly what you mean," and it feels at once easy and hard to believe him.

We are living alongside these phrasings, alongside Kearney, on that page, on that line, day by day by day. She speaks of bodies of water, of flowers, of sex and illness and agriculture. She speaks of time; time, a thing that stalls, stutters, speeds, slurs, stops and then loops once again. She speaks astutely of culture and art and the interpersonal, interspersing Wittgenstein and My Little Pony and Bertolucci and Dunkin'. In DAYS, Kearney is cataloguing in a way that is thrilling in its banality and admirable for its ability to waltz from theme to theme without jarring the reader, without creating even a second of dissonance. This is a work that reads both as off-the-cuff and highly curated, rich with the serpentine nature of both language and living.

The pain and beauty and dullness and conflicting nature of being alive each day that crushes into itself over and over across the pages of DAYS is to swoon for, to try to kiss through the phone, to read several times past midnight.

I'll leave you with Kearney's words, "everything is entire and slips."



Zoe Contros Kearnl is a writer and editor based in rural Vermont. She holds an MFA from Columbia University and a BA from New York University's Gallatin School. Her writing has appeared in *Hobart Pulp*, *Kenyon Review*, *Beacon Quarterly*, *Neutral Spaces Magazine*, and elsewhere.

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