



Cage of Bone

Irena Praitis

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Authentic and natural, the poetry collection Cage of Bone engages the discomfort of confronting every part of one's story.

In Irena Praitis's poetry collection *Cage of Bone*, the human body is a container for haunting tragedies and tenderness.

The book issues a demand to the heart: "Remember your body / build for it a cage of bone." It also notes that the heart "escapes everywhere," setting up three sections of poems that expose overt and covert stories long buried, and that emerge with loud thoughts to declare to those who are ready to listen.

The poems are consistent in form, with each following a similar organization. Thematic elements are assembled within titles, which are either formed as questions or serve as the first lines of the poems. The strophes that follow are attempted responses; occasional epigraphs introduce an additional layer of complexity, permitting a third party into the speaker's sphere.

After a quote from BBC's *Planet Earth*—"The populations of other seabirds are declining while the white pelican population is growing"—the poem "Late Capitalism" asserts:

*The pelicans
step back, watching
power grow
in their young
their populations booming
as they feed their children
the children
of others.*

Each poem represents an individual narrative; as a collective, their natural kinship is undoubtable. "One Day Out Running, My Animal" translates the speaker's self-preservation during an assault into lyrical duality: "My animal / gingerly rises to her feet [...] / watching the intruder / running away, [...] / from me who now / can't keep running." The image of the "animal" reappears in sections II and III, with its last mention appearing in "Caging the Wrong Animal." This motif, not to be perceived as an alter ego but rather an existing part of the self, grounds the text; its recurrence becomes an index for the body's potent changes over time.

The book is also overhung with a focus on human and natural cycles, suggesting that there are changes to be endured, invited or not. That makes the cover art—an image of browning leaves—ever so relevant. Praitis situates unpopular conversations as central in poems like "Conception" and "The Uncycling of My Menstrual Cycle," giving a loud voice to stories that some consider to be "just rants, mumblings, broken punctuations."

Despite some simple titles that lead to a feeling of flatness on the surface, most of the poems possess striking verses

and visual formats. And though most are longer than a page, their language remains compendious thanks to the book's staccato rhythms and candid meanings. Throughout, there's an appropriate balance between the concrete and the abstract, allowing for new interpretations to transpire with each read.

The poetry collection *Cage of Bone* is full of close, clear observations of life as well as fiery lines and a daring spirit. It asks keen questions that guarantee a reintroduction to what lies beneath life's surfaces.

BROOKE SHANNON (November 13, 2023)

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