

## Delta of Cassiopeia

**Ted Morrissey**

Twelve Winters Press (Jan 27, 2023)

Hardcover \$36.99 (310pp)

978-1-73319-499-0

*Delta of Cassiopeia is a bright literary collection whose poetry and prose pieces function like stars in a career-spanning constellation.*

With subjects variously quotidian and mythological, Ted Morrissey's satisfying literary collection *Delta of Cassiopeia* gathers poetry and prose selections from across forty years of writing into a single, accomplished volume.

The book's narratives and sonnets all attend to human nature, exercising great care in their pleasurable, memorable language. Its "Laertes Sonnet Sequence," written to honor Morrissey's late father, references the father of the lost adventurer Odysseus; its images of sails, ships, trips, and pilgrims amplify its sense of yearning for an impossible reunion. Though made up of fourteen lines, these narrative sonnets do not adhere to the poetic form beyond this; they are arranged in boxed forms, as though trying to organize the complexities of the father-son relationship at their core. Their language is figurative, spare, and striking: cancer colonizes Morrissey's father's body, for example, "like a crusading religion." Elsewhere, the experience of reading is described as sacred, and the father is said to have inspired his son to become "a spinner of spells as well as the spellbound soul."

The book's introduction is sizable, and its professions of respect for its readers are made self-evident throughout the text. The collected stories are imaginative and metaphorical, inviting lingering. In one, a widow who's anxious to follow her husband to the grave is "a commuter who'd missed her train but was determined to catch the next." In another, a mother who's reluctant to leave her room keeps track of her surroundings with "uncanny arachnid precision." Their settings are developed in sensory terms, with images of the weather, seasons, and sounds. Their lines sometimes achieve poetic sonic resonance, as when light is said to fall on a lawn in "yellow parallelograms."

Some of the stories are contemplative; others are suspenseful; still others are fantastical. Many are prone to surprises, but the book also attends to recognizable settings and emotional self-assessments. And the book as a whole does an excellent job of holding the visible and invisible worlds in tension. The sonnets are tender as they consider a father's death and legacy, and in stories like "The Cold Dark March to Winter," suspense is generated when three girls who are rehearsing their roles in *Macbeth* become obsessed with reciting the witches' hypnotic lines, perhaps summoning a supernatural presence.

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MICHELE SHARPE (May 7, 2023)

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