FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Forth A Raven
Christina Davis
Alice James Books
978-1-882295-57-9
(May 31, 2006)

In the tradition of Louise Gluck's lyric narratives and religious and near-religious imagery, these poems are stark, lean, and fresh. In them, the poet considers longing and desire, language and death. She begins with the raven and the dove set forth by Noah to report on the status of the flood. While the dove returned, the raven never did. Finally, Davis reports back for the raven, asking what is the status of humanity? For what do we long? What language do we have to name it?

Though this is Davis's first book of poems, she is well and widely published. Currently the associate director of NYU's MFA program and employed with the Poetry Society of America, she edited *Illuminations: Great Writers on Writing*. Her book of poems offers its own set of illuminations. Her images are learned and original; she writes in "Urban Hymn," "why some things are / only as they are falling." Clearly, she references rain, but with an awareness that the metaphor broadens easily to address man, to include the Christian Fall and other early archetypal stories.

In "The Raven's Book," a dying wife, writing to her missing husband, muses, "If you are alive / you are looking at the moon // and I can trace the isosceles of our seeing." Her use of "isosceles" is typical of the kind of smart, multi-layered image of which she is capable, as is her reference in "Last Words" to the process of watching a loved one die as "the inverted journeywork." Her style of expression is so exact as to be breathtaking, and she does it without the self-conscious irony so present in poetry today. She writes without winking quotations around the stories of her poems. In taking her poems seriously, she offers depth, language to which one might return; stories and understanding that nurture rather than cleverly baffle.

Like Gluck before her, she raises rhetorical questions: "Does anyone ask to return as herself again?" and makes statements that feel complex and true: "You learn the past tense of *have*, which is *hunger*." The whole volume hinges on the idea that to live is to hunger. While the book chronicles desire, language, communication, death and spirituality, it also represents Alice James Books's unerring eye for poets who can control the lyric narrative and make it new.

These poems are quiet and smart and absolutely worth reading and re-reading. They edify and delight every time.

Camille-Yvette Welsch