

Birds, cats, barking dogs — even if it doesn't describe exactly where we live, we all know and understand this kind of place.

But the poems are anything but ordinary. Pick up a book by Arleen Paré and you'll quickly notice that she has a style distinctly her own. In *Earle Street*, this is only more evident, with a voice that's stronger than ever.

Just as neurons in the brain leap from one to another at synapses, so do words in her poems jump from one to the next, without benefit of obvious connections. Nonetheless, the reader easily infers these joinings, as the writing — complete with gaps — is clear. It's probably easier to show than tell any more about this stylistic emblem of hers, with an excerpt from a piece called "Temporalia II":

lopsides the bedroom vaults the milky way  
sickens skews somersaults stars spews  
dwarf stars and white thins unsettles  
disputes  
spins its provenance completely unknown  
unthreading my head my feet  
falling off in one gust

wheels within wheels  
shapeless the room...

With the spaces serving as more than mere replacements for punctuation, the poem continues for another couple of short stanzas, bringing the reader along to a spinning conclusion about gravity and vertigo. Talk about 'vaulting the milky way' — that's where she takes us.

But this is not to think for a minute that the poems are all alike. Even with their shared small geography, they explore so many elements of Earle Street and its inhabitants (and habitats), it soon becomes a world unto and beyond itself. There's the neighbour who insists on keeping an overheight hedge (one that blocks the sun from her fruit trees), the man who writes unwanted letters, and of course, plenty of kids.

Paré credits one of her poetry-friends, Terry Ann Carter, with introducing her to the blended form, *haibun*, and uses it to good effect through-

out the book, writing about the long-standing Katsura trees that grow along Earle Street — their history, their palmate leaves, their sheltering canopy over the neighbourhood. She also cites the work of Peter Wohlleben, the man who's taught us to understand the nature of trees and their interdependence. His influence resonates in so many of the poems: "The tree remains, does not surrender its own vertical stance, even though its roots might be shallow....Steadfast. I ask you, how many trees does it take to keep us all sane? But you know the answer: more than exist."

But back to the brain analogy which somehow won't go away from my thoughts about this lovingly intelligent book — neurons are covered in dendrites (electrical receivers of data) which, if our eyes could see at microscopic levels, would look a little bit like trees with their branches reaching out to form new connections. It seems completely appropriate that a book with so many references to trees (and at the same time to the connective tissue of relationships) should behave in a similar manner, its roots and branches reaching to form a cohesive, remarkable whole.



## THE TRANSACTION

by Guglielmo D'Izzia

Guernica Editions, 2020; 236 pages, \$20.00

Reviewed by Gerilee McBride

The portents and omens start piling up for De Angelis, the protagonist in Guglielmo D'Izzia's debut novel *The Transaction*, the moment his train makes an unscheduled stop in the middle of nowhere Sicily during a heat wave. De Angelis has been sent to negotiate a real estate deal for his company and getting to his destination (the fictional town of Figallia) becomes a dysfunctional fiasco. It's an intriguing beginning, one that despite a few false starts — this pandemic has been nothing but lousy for my regular reading

# the Transaction



Guglielmo D'Izzia

habits — made me keep turning the pages. One thing I noticed initially however is that the writing doesn't quite have the feel of immersion in another language or country. The author presents De Angelis as a Sicilian but other than a few architectural references the character notes in his travels he could easily present as Anglo. "Hearing" De Angelis "speak" reminds me very much of Kenneth Branagh playing the character of Hercule Poirot — it's just not quite right, a bit off from centre.

We get to know De Angelis primarily from his reactions to the events around him, and if his feelings are noticeable it's only because they happen so infrequently that when he reacts, we pay attention. De Angelis is a bit naive, a bit pretentious, and a lot judgemental. Even though he is the stranger in the small town and one who has a difficult time understanding the dialect, De Angelis retains a big city snobbery when it comes to

the locals and their customs. By chapter three we start to suspect what kind of person De Angelis is when he becomes complicit (albeit unknowingly) in the solicitation of a twelve-year-old girl and does nothing to intervene or report it. He feels some discomfort (has a hard time sleeping) but continues his journey regardless. Despite De Angelis' amorality, the fact that he compulsively keeps after his goal even after encountering impediment after impediment, makes him an evocative character.

By the time De Angelis gets to Figallia the novel has turned from bureaucratic farce to a gothic nightmare with touches of noir drama. He gets bitten badly by a dog, is turned away from his lodging, and warned off his venture multiple times. In between De Angelis attempting to connect with the missing mediator Peppe, there is a drunken lost night, a soberingly hot funeral, and a mesmerising young girl that De Angelis becomes obsessed with. This part of the novel reminds me so much of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* that I expected one of the nefarious characters to be staked in the heart. Instead, whispers of a mafia-involved shooting run rampant in the small town causing the inhabitants to close ranks against the pushy outsider.

This book is a compelling read that starts as a quest narrative, becomes a missing person's case, and ends with...well, let's just say it doesn't end with Dracula crumbling to dust. The stilted telling and observances at the beginning of the story seem to even out by the end as the characters become more realized and less hyperbolic. I haven't quite come to terms with De Angelis's character, but unreliable narrators make for a more intriguing read and this one had me paying equal attention to clues and red herrings, and in the end it was up to me to choose what to believe.

