

Leva, Joanne.* *Eve Heads Back*. Kelsay Books, 2021

By Liz Chang

Eve Heads Back (2021) is Joanne Leva's sophisticated follow-up to *Eve Would Know* (2017, also from Kelsay Books). Leva's first book introduced us to a New World Eve whose modern, reaching sense of self-discovery is woefully out of step with Biblical Times. Leva's Eve has a wry sense of humor about it all that pulls us through the third person omniscient narration of her many misadventures. *Eve Heads Back* builds upon the best aspects of the earlier book's voice and tone. (The entire collection begins with the jocular poem "God Walks Into a Bar," and takes us on a wild ride from there.)

This Eve is still self-reflective and sharp, but she no longer seems surprised as she assesses her situation. The title of this collection could be the main character doubling back, asking herself, "if I knew then what I know now..." in so many different contexts. Yes, we as readers find ourselves back in the Garden of Eden. However, there's a deepening to the experience that comes through in this second book. Most of the poems are recounted by an outside (dare I write, "god-like perspective"?) narrator seeing into Eve's innermost heart in the moment that she is experiencing these situations. In so many ways, this lends a cinematic quality to Leva's poems: we are the camera, standing behind Eve's shoulder, then glancing at her face and reading her micro-emotions as she processes all that has come before her, and everything that will come before her soon enough.

The organization of the book parallels the trajectory of this character: we begin in "In the Garden," and build steam through "Interlude: The Garden Still with Us," "The Expulsion: Revisited," "Interlude: Meditation on Loss," "Cain and Abel: A Home Movie," "Interlude: Daughters" and "As in the Beginning, So in the End." The interlude sections are of particular note, as they pull the curtain back on Leva's sharpened and astute poetic narrator. The "I" in these poems is fearless as she recounts abuse and still loves ferociously, and we see the fount of Eve's powerfully exploratory spirit.

There are so many poems worth highlighting in this collection, but Leva's painterly way with words come through in "A Wonderful Beautiful Blank," "Eden Imagined and Exotic," and "On Pruning Fruit Trees," three poems about, fittingly, gardening. In the first poem, Eve "breaks/ground,/calls for corn/and tomatoes/from the loose/...sweet-/smelling earth." (lines 6-12). These lines call to mind the stillness amidst frenetic strokes (the pairing of both, active and quiet, in an intentional contradiction) of Van Gogh's *Haybales*. Just like for Van Gogh, the momentary pastoral calm cries out to us against the backdrop of other types of suffering in his life.

But Eve is a powerfully female presence. As other Biblical characters tiptoe in (early on, as senders or receivers of sales-y and snort-out-loud-hilarious emails), the collection's cinematic scope widens to encompass the other male members of her family. Adam even gets his own voiced poem in a note that he leaves for caretakers of pet hamsters while the family is away (in section three, "Expulsion, Revisited")! Still, Eve's small victories as in "Abel Learns to Say *Yes*" are continuously eclipsed by our foreknowledge of how this movie will end, which Leva artfully

dances toward and away from within the second half of this book, as she ends that poem with the lines: "...[Eve] observes something/slowly swallows her." (lines 9-10). After all of it, "Eve Takes the Job" and lives out her days "...not because she aspires/to a career, but she wants to get/as far as she can/from housekeeping." (lines 2-5). This Eve is playful, sensuous, and well worth the time you will spend with her in this second deep dive from Joanne Leva.

****Joanne Leva founded the Montgomery County Poet Laureates Program.***