

Unbecoming By Suzette Bishop
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Reviewed by Sarah Stern

In Suzette Bishop's *Unbecoming*, the reader is reminded of this: "how thin the border is between health/ and illness." In her profoundly moving and deeply felt chapbook, Bishop makes art from her life with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS).

By braiding her own experiences of the disease, the often-negligent medical research and treatment options, and the fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty*, Bishop gives us poems that ponder the body and what it can and can't do in the midst of what she calls "slowsand." There is rage here, but hope to. "Sleeping Beauty dreams of swinging in a hammock."

The placement of text and sharp line breaks heighten the limitations imposed by ME/CFS, activities that so many take for granted. As in the section titled Phase 2.

No baking No driving on highways, No pacing while lecturing, No walking at the park, No cleaning No cooking, No one over,

Physical

Disruptions

Bleed.

If only you could see energy flowing down the couch where I'm stuck or bent at the kitchen counter, leaning against the wall. If I drew, I'd draw that invisible energy waterfaling out of ME. Identities are called into question, chronic sorrow, more loss of material possessions:

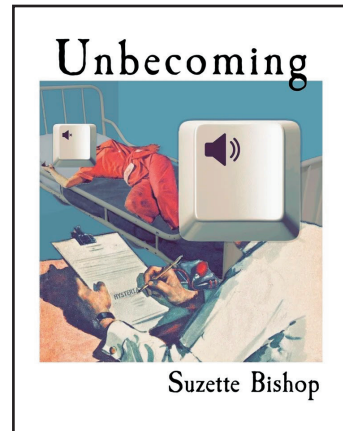
*I can't ride a bike, so it's gone,
my horseback-riding gear hung by the door, unused but still smells of horse,
clothes that are too small, too young, too constricting, donated or sold,
books I'll never get to that stay on the shelves; I can't part with them.*

The physical space on the page between the last four lines of the quoted text mirrors the losses of the poet. As readers, that white space allows us to feel it too.

Unbecoming should be required reading for not only the poetry community but for those in the medical industrial complex. Here is a testament to what it is to suffer, to be misunderstood, to be questioned even by those who are near and dear and can't understand what is happening.

"the evil fairy appeared in the door,/ disappeared through the door./
The End: life as they knew it (or imagined it)."

This is a brave collection and a necessary one. Read it.



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Sarah Stern is the author of *Dear Letters in the Red Box, We Have Been Lucky in the Midst of Misfortune, But Today Is Different, and Another Word for Love*. More at www.sarahstern.me.