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***An Anthology of Rain: Poems***

**New Book by Acclaimed Poet Phillis Levin**

New York, NY—When she was a child, before she even knew how to read, Phillis Levin drew images on her father’s graph paper, which he used in his design work as a mechanical and electronics engineer at Bell Labs in New York City and later at ITT in New Jersey. “What are these drawings?” he asked. “Poems,” she replied.

As an adult, when Phillis asked her father for his definition of an excellent design, he replied without skipping a beat, “Minimum number of lines, maximum ramifications.” And Phillis said, “Well, that sounds like the most succinct definition of a poem I’ve ever heard.”

In Phillis Levin’s sixth collection, the poet triumphs with an exquisite collection of 38 new poems. *An Anthology of Rain* (Barrow Street Press, April 15, 2025) epitomizes her own dedication to economy of language, “maximum ramifications.”

Levin’s imaginative power, her metaphysical temperament and deft observations of the natural world, have earned her top honors such as the Poetry Society of America’s Norma Farber First Book Award for *Temples & Fields* (University of Georgia Press, 1988). *Mr. Memory & Other Poems* (Penguin, 2016), a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, received accolades from Tom Sleigh, Elizabeth Spires, and Gerald Stern. Her other books have been praised by some of the literary world’s most respected titans, including James Merrill, Jean Valentine, Patricia Hampl, Richard Howard, Rosanna Warren, Edward Hirsch, Martha Nussbaum, and Vijay Seshadri.

She says, “Somehow in my imagination, I conflated design—creating something new—with poetry and with flight. Because I probably knew in the back of my mind about paper airplanes.” She grew up steeped in the language of science and aeronautics, noting that even as a toddler she wanted to fly. Her father took her to Teterboro Airport, and she still has a picture of herself, at two years old, standing on the wing of a plane. She wanted to travel everywhere, “to be a citizen of the world.”

In that conflation of design and poetry and flight comes another ramification of Levin’s work: disorienting to reorient. The ordinary action of a rivulet of rain on a windowpane leads the reader to reinterpret the entire flow of perspective. A waterdrop reappears in “Orb,” glistening on her father’s hair, a “globe of light” that captivated her as a newborn. A street shimmering with water from a Delft washerwoman’s bucket reveals another perspective, impelling the speaker to wonder “…or did I misread you / Completely? Could you be a girl / In the dress of a woman, caught / By her father, Johannes Vermeer, / Unlatching a window / To find one of his children at play?”

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Play is abundant in this lyrical collection, though often just under the surface there are thornier implications, as in two friends parrying with roses in Italy in “Duel of Roses” or, in “Theorems of Reason,” “How good to see them / Ready already to make trouble, / Bounce against the wall of each belief…”

Levin is adroit in stop-time perception, drawn to the masters (Vermeer, Moroni, Giacometti), enthralled by nature and the mysteries of science, with an “abiding interest in microbes.” As she closes a rural “Evening Walk,” where not much is as it seems, “Looking chastens us.”

At times philosophical, at times seemingly content to observe, Levin deploys half-rhymes, the breath, and the pleasure of full-on rhymes that dance with the subject of the poem to lure the reader with her mastery of rhythms. In “Blueprint,” she envisions the poem she wants to build as needing “a vestibule / Inviting all who wish to be bidden / Welcome” and offering:

Horses, of course there will be horses

Gathering in darkness

Under those stars in a field of grass

Extending far enough for an eye to grasp

Bounty uncontainable.

The poems in this new book have been published in *The Atlantic*, *Kenyon Review*, *The New Criterion*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *Plume*, *Poetry*, Poem-a-Day (Academy of American Poets), and *The Yale Review*; others are forthcoming in *The Common*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Great River Review, and Raritan*.

Of the poet’s responsibility, Levin says, “You have to assume that your reader can enter the stream, midstream maybe, and be with you.” Regarding the title poem, she says, “‘An Anthology of Rain’ goes back to my early childhood behavior where I spent a lot of time studying, and I think many children do this, just looking at the way raindrops behave on a window. It’s not that I thought they were individual characters, but they exhibited behaviors I was fascinated by. And I do believe a lot of people experience this as children, because movement is life. If a balloon bounces around in the sky, most people will look at it. We’re attracted to motion. We know the balloon is not alive, that it’s being moved by a current of air, but there’s something about movement: *animus,* mind, animation, consciousness, spirit—qualities of a moving thing. And life is what we associate with things that are animate, even when that thing isn’t alive.”

*An Anthology of Rain: Poems* by Phillis Levin

Barrow Street Press

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