

***Luna.* Jane Joritz-Nakagawa. Isobar Press, 2024. 94 pp.**

**Reviewed by Suzanne Kamata
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Luna, the latest book by prolific poet and GALE member Jane Joritz-Nakagawa, is not an easy read. As in her previous collections, she challenges readers to make meaning of unusually juxtaposed words and phrases without benefit of epigrams or titles. What is, exactly, “a psalm of melted clouds” (p. 7)? Or a “senile furoshiki” (p. 8)? A “demoralized hat” (p. 62)? Words and images spark interest and accrue, creating an atmosphere—a vibe, if you will—of horror touched with sardonic humor, of a passion for social justice mixed with an appreciation of the beauty of the world.

And then there is the subject matter.

Joritz-Nakagawa has always taken a strong interest in political issues including topics such as homelessness, environmental destruction, war, and cruelty to animals, and these also appear in her new book. In addition, she writes about personal trauma. While her previous collection, *Plan B*. (Isobar Press, 2020), addressed her diagnosis of cancer, *Luna* is more about survival, albeit in a body much altered by various surgeries:

these days there

is a cold draft

between my legs and

a large lump

of tissue where

my anus and

rectum used

to be this

is a serenade
to my post cancer
body in part (p. 32)

Only a few lines later, however, the poem takes a more lyrical turn with mention of “melodies of winds/and trees” (p. 32). While Joritz-Nakagawa celebrates being alive, she does not shy away from grief or regret, does not pretend to be happy and grateful all the time:

i have a body
i accept and reject
on different days

a failure to the disability
community
and body positivity (p. 22)

Violence against the female body is a persistent theme. Frank descriptions of her own physical state—her mutilated genitals, the two stomata through which her body excretes waste—are presented alongside scenes of wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan. Gloria Steinem, Audre Lorde, and Breonna Taylor are mentioned. Far from falling into perpetual self-pity, the poet still longs to engage:

i want to march with BLM
but I live in a tiny hamlet filled with elderly japanese who
have dementia (p. 43)

Throughout, Joritz-Nakagawa employs a variety of forms, such as couplets, haiku, prose poems, and concrete poetry. Some of the final poems even include words written in katakana, the Japanese syllabary for words borrowed from foreign languages, which remain untranslated, such as “the タスク is to find fungible stress” (p. 85). A little extra effort is required for those who don’t read Japanese, but maybe in this day and age, all you really need is a phone app.

Over twelve full-length collections and two chapbooks, as well as in the editing of an anthology, Joritz-Nakagawa has been steadfast and uncompromising in her vision. *Luna* is a bold book, at times brutal in its honesty, and well-worth reading multiple times.

Suzanne Kamata’s most recent books include the short story collection *River of Dolls and Other Stories* (Penguin Random House SEA, 2024), the novel *Cinnamon Beach* (Wyatt-Mackenzie Publishing, 2024) and *Waiting* (Kelsay Books, 2023), a story in poems. Her research interests include gender in education, disability-related issues, and literature in language teaching.