

Becoming Judas

Poetry by Nicelle Davis
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Nicelle Davis



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POETRY BY

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The second collection by Nicelle Davis, *Becoming Judas*, is an “elemental bible-diary-manifesto,” that weaves together Mormonism, Mamaism, Manson, Lennon, Kabbalah, and the lost Gospel of Judas into an ecstatic, searing meditation on raw religion. Nicelle Davis is a poet with an eye towards the spiritual. Loosely based on Davis’s upbringing in the back-room of a record store in Mormonville, Utah, this unexpected fusion becomes a “spontaneous combustion” of matter turning into energy. In these poems we encounter Jesus, Judas, YouTube, Joseph Smith, Hollywood, the Knights of Templar, Missouri, Utah, a prostitute, turnips, libraries, and God. Spirituality and faith eventually become, like Mallarmé’s “Dice Thrown,” a game of chance: “I know only chance. My feet will / won’t hit ground.” Instead of choosing a faith based in the material world, which becomes a roll of the dice, Davis embraces the non-material of a pure energy: *Let there be light.*

Praise for *Becoming Judas*

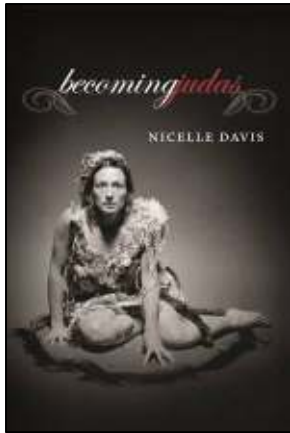
“Nicelle Davis weaves—as one of her religio-sacred-cosmos ‘spiders’ pokes—the elemental, mother-daughter, Judas-Jesus-Lennon substances, meta-histories and neo-gospels devouring us as we disintegrate and are reborn to love this grand body-bible-book.

Hold this, if you can—devouring mind at work, singing razor-writer of stanza-line fractal syncopations into photo, interview, letter incantations; as Anne Waldman has said of her poetic conduction, ‘a new-beyond-gender fecund horizon.’ A new elemental bible-diary-manifesto, yes, and also a musical score of the spider-woman who writes in prayer ‘octaves.’ You hear voices—angels, demons, Azrael and Manson, Jesus and Judas, daughter and granddaughter—masks, sheafs, harmonies, and dissonances that few can hear, decipher, or re-magnetize through the ethers and ‘star compounds’ once our skins are stripped and hanging from the ancient suffering trees. Wait: there is Doo Wop down the highway as we careen with Nicelle’s genius magic in this grand, magnificent, luminous creation-braided-fleshspirit word book. You have to caress and then let all unravel. A cosmic whip. A mesmerizing opus, prize-winner, yes, all the way.”

—Juan Felipe Herrera

Biographical Note

Originally from Utah, **Nicelle Davis** now resides in Lancaster, California, with her son, J.J. *Becoming Judas* is her second book. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The New York Quarterly*, *PANK*, *SLAB Magazine*, *Two Review*, and others. She teaches at Antelope Valley College, and is the assistant managing editor of *The Los Angeles Review* and an assistant poetry editor for *Connotation Press*.



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More Praise for *Becoming Judas*

“I wasn’t ready to be swallowed / by the fire of another,” writes Nicelle Davis in the title poem of her stunning collection, *Becoming Judas*. And yet, she is, in these poems, swallowed over and over—by grief, by betrayal, by faith and its loss, by music, by love. In turn, she swallows all of these whole, and more. These poems are smart, jazzy, and ecstatic, and they encompass everything: our ‘homemade religion,’ Mormonism, the lost Gospel of Judas, Charles Manson, motherhood and daughterhood, the music of John Lennon, the deep mysteries of bees. *Becoming Judas* is a gorgeous, fast-moving, exhilarating collection from an extraordinarily talented young poet.”

—Katharine Coles

“*Becoming Judas* is an evocative, traumatic gathering of poems—fractured reflections and imploding laments, ghost-psalms, odes and unuttered prayers, along with a disclaimer in verse, bits of a real interview, and apocryphal email. It’s a book about homage and homemade religion, Joseph Smith and John Lennon, about kisses and cages and coins and the end of the world, when it comes, as the end of love. A gorgeous exorcism, finally, this is, as well as a series of doors, each opening onto another, each looking back and beyond, vertiginously outward and in.”

—Kirk Nessel

“...it is the kind of book that continues to call out to the reader from the shelf, to be opened again and again. And that is the best kind of book.”

—Mark Kerstetter

“Davis’ book does not wallow in masochism or confessionalism. Instead, *Becoming Judas* comes across as an homage to a time when rock and roll and religion did not seem anathema...”

—Brenda Mann Hammack, *Glint Literary Journal*

“...Ms. Davis subjects the stuff of culture, history, and religion to the recombinant power of the imagination and seems to argue that these disciplines make use of the same tools...*Becoming Judas* is a challenging book, but it rewards our efforts as readers with a brief look into a tremendously inventive and energetic mind.”

—Robbie Nester, *New York Journal of Books*

From *Becoming Judas*

The Woman Who Cut Judas Down

had lost her son. This body strung
from a branch could be anyone—
even hers. She climbed the tree
to chew through the rope
and bring down the stopped
heart that had grown within her.

On the ground she gathered him to her—
whole self shaking as a baptism
worked its way out from in her
words beyond human articulation—
fever and a cry mistaken for pain.