



News from

Red Hen Press

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## The Alphabet Conspiracy

Poems by

Rita Mae Reese

*The Alphabet Conspiracy* takes its name from a 1950's-era school filmstrip. With a cast that includes patron saints for country girls and criminals, a Revolutionary War hero, the Wolfman, a sin-eater, John Wayne, and Johnny Cash, these poems swagger and sulk through an educational film turned film noir, replete with femme fatales in love. Mark Doty noted that the title poem (published in *The Sycamore Review*) "artfully addresses itself to the way children are taught to enter—and then [become] trapped by—a world constructed of language." Rita Mae Reese digs beneath the surface of dictionary entries to uncover their secrets and to discover some of her own. *The Alphabet Conspiracy* is about the ways in which language itself can function as a plot, keeping us estranged from ourselves, but also about the way it can be used as a tool for recovering our truest selves.

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*The Alphabet Conspiracy*

Poems by Rita Mae Reese

ISBN: 978-0-9800407-3-9

7 x 9; Tradepaper

80 pages

Price: US \$17.95

Released

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Biographical note:

**Rita Mae Reese** has received a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award, a Stegner fellowship, and a Discovery"/*The Nation* award. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in journals and anthologies including *The Normal School*, *Imaginative Writing*, *From Where You Dream*, *Blackbird*, *New England Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Nation*. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin with her family.

**Praise for *The Alphabet Conspiracy*:**

"In *The Alphabet Conspiracy*, Rita Mae Reese speaks with an extraordinary voice that is strong, sly, and almost startlingly intelligent. Here indeed is a master poet at work, deftly and persuasively ranging across cultural references that extend from Babylon to West Virginia, from movie theaters to madhouses, from ghost words to words that form phrases of heartbreaking beauty likely to leave readers breathless. Life and death are in these pages, childhood and love and movie monsters and the very mystery of existence. This is a remarkable collection of poems that will go on whispering in your ear long past the moment you turn the last page."

—Eleanor Lerman, author of *Our Post-Soviet History Unfolds*



**More Praise for *The Alphabet Conspiracy***



“Rita Mae Reese’s *Alphabet Conspiracy* is a passionate declaration of love for the world in all its sublimity, terror, and nuttiness. A brother dies horribly, and Rita Hayworth wakes up not a movie star but simply a woman. Miners breathe in coal dust, and brides speed down country roads. All their stories are told in a clear and tender voice, from the litany of patron saints that begins this book to the conjuring of the righteous dead that ends it. Biblical in her embrace, Rita Mae Reese gives witness to what it is to be a woman living in her place in time. It is a beautiful collection.”

—Barbara Hamby, author of *All-Night Lingo Tango*

“To read this book is to read Whitman again, only it’s a hundred and fifty years later, and he’s a young woman this time. *The Alphabet Conspiracy* throbs with the lifeblood of democracy: all people are the same here, and all times, too. I love Rita Mae Reese for the sweetness of her lines, the calm optimism of her spirit.”

—David Kirby, author and Professor of English, Florida State University

**“Intercession”**

There are patron saints for archives and Arkansas and advertisers.  
Against dying alone.

For backward children, boxers and boys’ choirs.  
For birds and breastfeeding.

For cancer patients, pastry chefs and good confessions.  
For country girls and criminals.  
Against cold.

For dancers, the recently dead and dentists.  
Against sudden death.

For engineers, exiles and evil spirits.  
Against eating disorders and enemy plots.  
Against earaches and earthquakes.

For fathers and fugitives and forgotten causes and Florida.  
Against frenzy.





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