

Prayer in Wind
Poetry by Eva Saulitis
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Eva Saulitis

REDHEN PRESS

For more information contact

Samantha Haney
Marketing Associate
samantha@redhen.org

William Chen
Publicist
william.chen@redhen.org

Distributed to the book trade by:
Chicago Distribution Center
(800) 621-2736
orders@press.uchicago.edu
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POETRY

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“Prayer in Wind is a hymn to life itself and all that conspires to make it meaningful.” —Elizabeth Bradfield

After a devastating diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer, biologist and poet Eva Saulitis found herself gripped by a long-buried childhood urge to pray. Finding little solace in the rote “from the fox-hole please Gods” arising unbidden in her head, she set herself the task of examining the impulse itself, waking every morning in darkness to write poems, driven on by the questions: What is prayer? What am I praying to? What am I praying for? Who is listening? Each day’s poem proposed a new and surprising answer as, over two years, she traced the questions back to her origins, her Latvian roots, her peasant grandmother, her war-haunted father, her secret-bearing mother, her childhood Catholicism, her obsession with the natural world. Moving from inward to outward, among radically different geographies (coastal Alaska, Latvia, and Hawaii) and spiritual influences (Catholicism, mysticism, Zen Buddhism) as well as forms, these biologically precise poems range widely in their search. Unexpectedly, these prayer-poems, forged out of a solitary confrontation with death, take a reader not out of, but deeper into physicality—of the body, the earth, and language itself. As Saulitis learns, what is most desired is not transcendence, but for as long as possible, “her hands thrust deep in the world.”

Praise for *Prayer in Wind*

“You showed me / a bog candle. // Nothing’s been / the same since then.’ With these simple words, Eva Saulitis shows how *true life is lived when tiny changes occur*. With her attention attuned to inner and outer landscapes, Eva writes poems that are a testament to the precarious splendor of this world.”

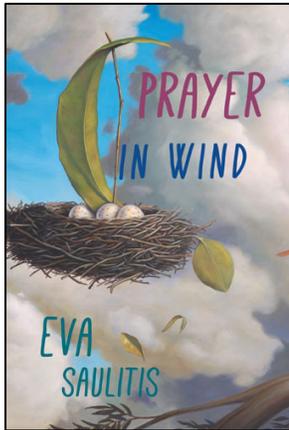
—Arthur Sze

“Eva Saulitis explores the web of connections between nature, science, longing, illness, and the continually shifting boundaries of the mind. In these poems, we navigate a course through beauty, terror, and mystery in order to reach a place for which the only maps are prayers.”

—Camille Dungy

Biographical Note

Eva Saulitis, author of four books of poetry and literary non-fiction, is a marine biologist and associate professor of creative writing in the University of Alaska Low-Residency MFA program.



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More Praise for *Prayer in Wind*

“Prayer is often an inward gesture; the self in contemplation, in quiet reflection or retreat, eyes closed and hands still. The prayer-poems of Eva Saulitis’s newest book, however, reach *out* as they reach in. They give attention to the birds, family, friends, machinery, history, skies and horizons. The fact that illness, which can be such an isolating and alienating experience, finally brings the poet into this rich, nuanced relationship with the world is both moving and inspiring. *Prayer in Wind* is a hymn to life itself and all that conspires to make it meaningful.”

—Elizabeth Bradfield

From *Prayer in Wind*

Prelude: After Recurrence

The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.

— Socrates

As a bird repeats its *dumb luck dumb luck* refrain
I sit staring at steam rising off the darkening pond
of my teacup, realizing after all these years, about him
I know nothing—name, Latin or common, habits
or patterns of migration, swagger—wing bars or color at
nape or crown, and that’s a shame, all there is to learn
of our shared habits, all I’ve let flit through the cracks, and now
there’s the matter of time. As I try to reckon it, I keep being
distracted—that bird’s incessant nattering, the day breeze flapping
wash on the line, the grinding of axles down East End Road,
afternoon light’s trill electrical along my arm skin. As the wind
stalking through the screen sets the chimes to clanging,
as my body asserts its imperatives, it’s left to only *this*,

only *you*, my fugitive, my intruder, my real—*teach me*
to pray—I mean—surrender, give over. Today came news,
abstract, unlyrical—I’m sorry—*cells positive for*—a year
or five, who can tell? This I can say with certainty:
the tea is cool, tastes of hibiscus and blackberry.

The bird is loud.