

*the GAFFER*

Poetry by Celeste Gainey  
ISBN 978-0-9890361-2-2

Binding: Tradepaper  
Size: 7 x 8; Pages: 112  
Price: US \$18.95

Pub Date: March 10, 2015



Celeste Gainey



 REDHEN PRESS

**For more information contact:**

Samantha Haney  
Marketing Associate  
samantha@redhen.org

William Chen  
Publicist  
william.chen@redhen.org

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For most, “gaffer” is one of those quirky screen credits that scrolls by quickly at the end of a movie—but who lives behind the light?

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Light is the preoccupation, vocation, and language of *the GAFFER*, the debut collection of poems by Celeste Gainey, the first woman gaffer to be admitted to the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), the preeminent craft union in the motion picture industry. These poems vividly depict the gaffer’s terrain from the set of Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver*, to Sidney Lumet’s *Dog Day Afternoon* and *The Wiz*, to a lighting session with Lucille Ball. In these poems is the quest for identity and synchronicity within the imagined and experimental realm of light and cinema, and the immutable physical world where notions of gender, sex, desire, and ambition are prescribed *a priori*. *the GAFFER* deconstructs the idea of outsider as pioneer—then runs with it.

### Praise for *the GAFFER*

“In bursts of language, these poems tell the story of a girl who wants to grow up to be a man who grows up to be a gaffer, lighting the set of every movie you’ve ever loved. They swagger. They sashay. They strut like a queer teenager trying on her first pair of men’s Levis and liking what she sees in the mirror: a human being in love with the ‘brute arc light’ of the world. I raise a toast of solidarity to the feminine power and presence of *the GAFFER*. Gainey’s voice knows how to fill a room.”

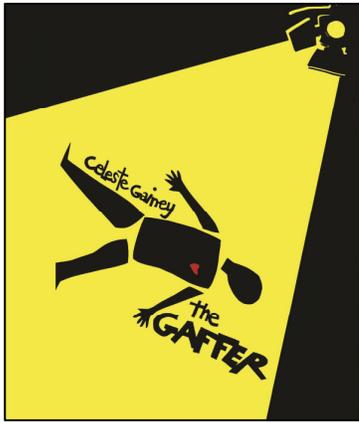
— Dorianne Laux

“Celeste Gainey’s astonishing debut, *the GAFFER*, is a book about light: how it finds us, changes us, and shapes who we are and how we see. It’s also a book about the body—sexual, other—‘looking for combustion.’ In Gainey’s world, ‘gaffer’ and ‘poet’ are interchangeable: her poems light the world at perfect angles, even our ‘little failures,’ and cast back to us our own lives: radiantly refigured, radically changed.”

— Aaron Smith

### Biographical Note

Celeste Gainey is the author of the chapbook *In the land of speculation & seismography* (Seven Kitchens Press, 2011), runner-up for the 2010 Robin Becker Prize. Born and raised in Southern California, she has spent over thirty-five years working with light.



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**More Praise for *the GAFFER***

“*the GAFFER* breathes poems of obsession, the relentless pursuit of an idea, and *presence*. We hear the compelling lexicon of light: ‘baby legs,’ ‘horsecock,’ ‘inkie,’ ‘brute arc’—and a voice arises: ‘there are dwellings made of future’. In this stunning collection by Celeste Gainey, we realize we are *in* future—in the world of horizontal air, where the gaffer travels East to West: St. Mark’s Place to Sunset Boulevard and back. Inside this movement, the body combusts into an original song of gender, desire, and place: alleys and canyons of ignition, *blazing*.”

—Jan Beatty

**From *the GAFFER***

**my dearest lover,**

Greetings from Bikini Atoll. Boy, is it hot here!  
And, oddly, not a speck of sun. Wish I were with you

in the snowy northeast. You’d never believe  
the sights—these clouds! Wow! Big as giant

mushrooms! The sand, scorched & smoky,  
too hot to walk on, unless you’re an aspiring yogi,

which, as you know, I am not!  
The skin-flayed natives are kind & quiet—

too quiet, even for me. They rarely speak,  
but draw strange pictographs in the angry

sand with long sticks that catch fire & combust  
to ash before they can finish whatever

it is they have to say. The silence is like none  
I’ve ever heard. Just the faintest crackle-

crackle of burning sand & flesh, and always  
a low whoosh-whoosh, the kind of sound I recall

the x-ray machine making at the Mayo Clinic,  
its long shadow passing over, exposing the dead in me.

Ridiculous, isn’t it, how full of sound silence can be, even out here, lost in the  
Pacific,

a speck at the flaming end of things—  
I wish I could hear your voice.