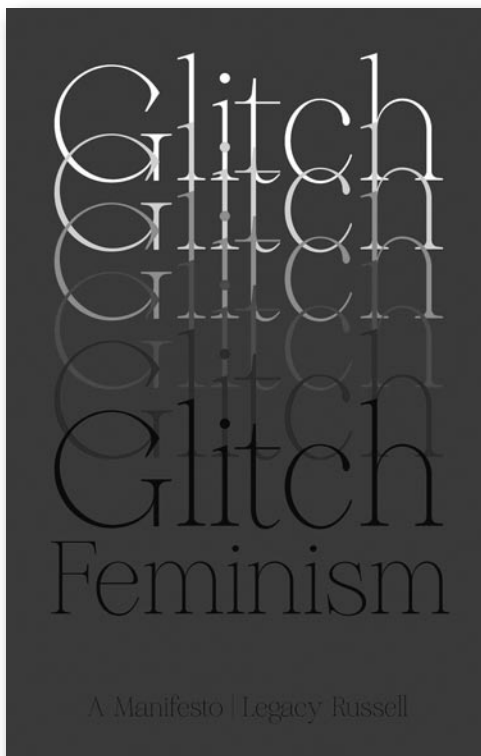


symbolic are the realms in which the glitches Russell discusses seem to make themselves most felt. As Russell argues compellingly from her own experience of digital life, the separation between the digital world and the analog one is increasingly fictive, particularly when it comes to how we experience the space they occupy in our lives. "On the Internet," Russell reminds us, "we go to the bank, we pay our student loans, we speak to our friends, we read news and learn about the world."

Still, as a reader I found myself constantly tempted to consider how glitch feminism might materialize. The digital world offers us the potential to disrupt and explode expansively, to resist and refuse being concretized in all the various binarizing and polarizing ways that the technologies of our culture systematically do. Over time, certainly, digital experience has the potential to create cultural change that shapes our analog lives: meeting and developing connections with potential romantic partners online is now so commonplace that there are TV ads for Match.com, for example, whereas when I was an Internet newbie merely meeting up with someone you knew from online for a meatspace cup of coffee was considered bizarre and possibly dangerous. (In Internet years, I am slightly older than Julian



Dibble's 1993 "A Rape in Cyberspace.") But the transition from digital reality to the analog realm,

particularly with regard to things that glitch accustomed systems, suffers from significant lag. It is slow, and inevitably much is lost in translation, simplified, dumbed down to fit the limitations of the known. Is glitch feminism, then, limited to the digital? What does it mean for its feminist relevance if it is, given everything we know about the limitations of sex, gender, race, class, etc. on digital participation?

Russell does not tell us. The constant transformation of ongoing glitching is where she sets her sights, a sense of the self as cosmically unbounded and thus repudiating as oppressive the limitations of all technological structure. If I, or any other reader of *Glitch Feminism*, want the bread of a less fantastical praxis, we will be disappointed: Russell is serving roses. But they are wild, shape-shifting roses, outrageously lush and wondrous, and it is certainly worth taking a moment to find out what yet-unimagined visions we might have if we stop for a moment to smell them. 🌹

**Hanne Blank** is the author of numerous books including *Fat* (Bloomsbury, 2020) and *Straight: The Surprisingly Short History of Heterosexuality* (Beacon Press, 2014). She is on the faculty of Denison University.

## Creature Discomforts

*Crushing It*

By Jennifer Knox

Port Townsend, WA; Copper Canyon Press, 2020, 96 pp., \$16.00, paperback

Reviewed by Natalia Conte



Jennifer Knox's inventive fifth collection, *Crushing It*, earned its title after a visit to a cheeky therapist's office. The poet recalls this appointment in a comedic essay on her website, revealing to the reader that, after almost twenty years of living with misdiagnoses, the doctor finally tested her for ADHD. After catching the doctor's eye while fumbling the first question, Knox thought: "not crushing it." This kind of self-deprecating, dry humor, combined with Knox's wide-ranging imagination makes *Crushing It* difficult to put down. Knox writes about history and the future, aging, and the natural world, but does so like a friend recounting a scandalous night over brunch in a way that is both intimate and elusive. In reference to Knox, poet Patricia Smith once mused, "I cannot imagine what the inside of her head must be like, all tango and blaring and pinball, locked in its relentless churn."

From the very first imagistic pleasure—a prehistoric conifer tree breaking through an icy lake, reaching a startling height, then falling as swiftly as it rose—Knox's new collection brims with surprise. This surprise is not limited to natural wonders, though there are plenty of creatures at which to wonder. The most rewarding surprise is the way in which humans are destined to surprise themselves. Knox's verse—full of tenderness and restraint as well as outlandish, dark humor—shows us that we humans are capable of both immense cruelty and immense kindness.

Perhaps the most heartbreaking instances of tenderness occur in Knox's poems about her late dog, Abby, who lived most of her life in a cage and was rescued in her later adulthood. The poem "Joy" begins with, perhaps, the perfect sentence to summarize the pet: "Abby hates car rides." Knox cultivates cross-species empathy without allowing the work to become too sentimental or saccharine,



Lisa Horvitz

Jennifer Knox

and here she does this by refusing to smooth over the more imperfect details of her animal companion: she admits that Abby's limbs "flail like drumsticks," and she has only one tooth left in her muzzle, but these details are moments of endearment; dog love is something messy. As Abby's heart stops, the speaker muses that Abby lived a difficult life. In a moment of great kindness, the veterinarian pets the dying pup and whispers that, in the end, she found love.

These poems are not confined by any particular time period or even the bounds of our reality, yet they feel deeply interconnected in spite of their diversity. Truthfully, no subject matter with Knox seems to be off limits: a tragic history detailing the earliest instance of Guinea Pigs as house pets can later inform a poem about gluttonously eating animal brain matter in the parlor. A well positioned question such as "Fences: do you see them / or through them," posed at the beginning of "The New IQ Test," can incite the reader to ask the same of windows and mirrors later in the collection. What parts do we choose to see, and where do the boundaries of self truly begin?

Knox feels comfortable exploring speculative space too. She contemplates what a "White People Day" would entail, a group of individuals all coming to the fairgrounds to be "individual together!," then pivots to imagine herself as the President of the United States. Her imaginative capabilities are formal as well: in one poem where she details how to manage adult ADHD, she lets the form dissolve from a careful series of numbers to chaotic lettering. She appears acutely aware of her mind's idiosyncrasies, aware of the impression her poems and her autobiographical speaker make: sometimes, this impression entails breaking a few beer bottles or inserting her own separate thoughts within parentheses independent from the universe of the poem. Other times, it entails an in-depth internal analysis of where poetry lives while asking for nitrous at the dentist office.


Many of Knox's poems in this collection consider the experience of growing older, a process perhaps even more poignant for those who are particularly young at heart. These transformations,

to the author, seem deeply surprising and sudden, and, in many ways, the reader is surprised too. Knox writes with zeal about a Black Sabbath cover band, a woman munching on her own lipstick, and the feeling that she would live forever "on the bones other animals pass up." That vulture-like image is so precise that, once we reach the poem titled "Old Women Talking About Death," we are jarred back into the reality that the physical body will inevitably break down over time. Death is ever present in these pages. From a John Doe's body found inside the back of an old-school television to a drawer full of drivers licenses (trophies of The Golden State killer), Knox faces life and its sometimes gruesome and unexpected end.

**C**rushing It, crafted with careful juxtapositions and a lack of pretense, entertains with dark sarcasm and a dry wit and hones in on particular moments where humans are at their most vulnerable. At their bare roots, these poems focus a very close lens on humanity, and that lens is not always flattering. So often in this work, animals, and more broadly, the natural world, represent both something to be conquered in order to assert dominance, and also something deeply threatening to early human existence. In "Every Man a King," Jack London seems to glow with opulence from his "diamond-encrusted abalone-shell / binoculars" to his terraced vineyard. Yet, there lurks a feeling of creature-fear that reminds the reader that, despite this exaggeration of opulence, death is never far away. This positioning of man against nature is once again explored in "Irwin Allen vs. Lion Tamer." While the poem begins by detailing all the endless ways nature could end a human life, it pivots back to a larger theme that can inform many of Knox's natural world poems: "death doesn't live in a thing / you can kill with a gun."

Despite the front cover design for *Crushing It*—which incorporates a Larassa Kabel drawing of a horse, just barely suspended, bucking wide-mouthed with its tail perfectly spiraled to fit on the page—there are no horses in Knox's collection.

These poems contain a plethora of creatures, from possums to raccoons to bumblebees, but there are no horses. In the beginning, this choice felt perplexing to me. Why this horse on the cover? In a statement given to Copper Canyon ahead of the book's release, Knox stated she only began to fully understand the work comprising this collection after viewing Larassa Kabel's sketch series *Any Minute Now*. Playing with both suspension and movement, these sketches of horses simultaneously feel surreal and hyper realistic, much like Knox's own work, which shifts between historically inspired stories and imaginative spaces. Some of the horses in Kabel's series are pictured with their hooves skyward, falling. Others look calm, others aggravated. One seems to face the onlooker as if it's ready for a showdown. It shows the physical signs of preparation: head lowered, hooves sprawled, teeth clenched and eyes narrowed. In these drawings we see powerful, graceful animals in vulnerable, almost awkward positions.

Knox's work fits so cleanly together, despite the diversity of subject matter, in part because of a unifying sensibility: these poems place humans in deeply vulnerable positions, like a horse with its back towards the ground, falling from an unforeseen height. This lens through which Knox views humanity can feel precarious, but the subjects are treated in such a way that their dignity is never questioned. These horses are in much different forms than we are used to—a long stretch from elegant grazing or riding along a beaten track—yet, as with Knox's poems, there's something transfixing about the surprise of them, something which makes it very difficult to look away. 

Natalia Conte is an MFA candidate for Poetry at North Carolina State University. She has been previously published in *So to Speak Magazine*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and others. She is an assistant poetry editor at *Narrative Magazine* and resides in Raleigh with her tiny black cat Zen. You can find more of her work at [nataliaconte.com](http://nataliaconte.com)

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