



Mercies in the American Desert

Poems

BENJAMIN LANDRY

Reflecting on the Salem witch trials, Puritan minister Cotton Mather cautioned his flock against the moral temptations of the unknown wild, located in what he termed an “American desert.” Today, more than three hundred years later, we understand that our troubles have their origins not in some ambiguous beyond; rather, they are of our own making.

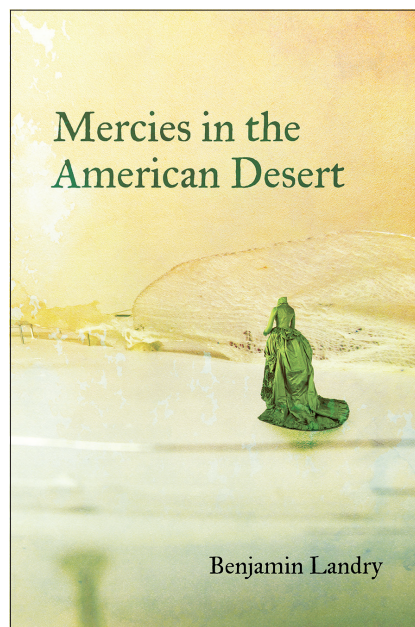
Benjamin Landry’s *Mercies in the American Desert* attempts a clear-eyed reckoning with the people and the nation we have become: a land assailed by gun violence, police brutality, and state-sanctioned racism. This vivid collection considers a range of bodies encompassing the geographic, the personal, and the political. It locates solace in movement, sound, and observation, as when Pina Bausch heron-dances down a traffic median or when the expansive form of a surfacing manta ray teaches us how to breathe again.

Incorporating short bursts of prose poem alongside longer meditations, and working in both alliterative and narrative modes, *Mercies in the American Desert* conjures a redemptive wilderness for our time.

BENJAMIN LANDRY is the author of *Particle and Wave*, shortlisted for the Believer Poetry Award, and *Burn Lyrics*. His poems have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *American Poetry Review*, *Tin House*, and elsewhere. He is visiting assistant professor of creative writing in poetry at SUNY–Potsdam.

Parkland

It is June, and not everyone
graduates. Not everyone
tears off their gowns.
Not everyone races
into the hot mouth
of the night in a borrowed car.
Tonight, there is no curfew,
but not everyone laughs
and throws popcorn
through the movie before
sneaking into a doubleheader.
Not everyone goes
to the all-night diner.
Not everyone passes out,
blissed, on the drive home
next to the one they love,
for now, while the city
runs in a loop by their window.
Not everyone wakes
to the first pale flush
of morning on the houses
of their neighborhood.



MARCH 2021

88 pages, 6 x 9

978-0-8071-7311-4

Paperback \$18.95, ebook available

LSU Press Paperback Original

Poetry

PRAISE FOR *MERCIES IN THE AMERICAN DESERT*:

“With acute attention to the rights and rites of the non-human world, Landry explores and refines the notion of accountability in sharply insightful yet openly compassionate poems. How love can work within, between, and among us to constantly enlarge the meaning of us is a central question that drives the work, and he trains that question with invariable accuracy equally on the shreds left behind by human error and on the surprising persistence of the varied lifeforms that thrive among them.”

—Cole Swensen, author of *Gravesend*

“These are perfectly gorgeous poems. They are everything that real poetry is and should be: all truth, beauty, shining intelligence, medicine and mystery and heart-stopping surprises. This is the work of a genuinely gifted poet at the height of his powers. A beautiful gathering. Just beautiful.”

—Lorna Goodison, author of *Supplying Salt and Light*

“Benjamin Landry is not afraid of reality, because reality affords him the great possibility to make poems of linguistic intimacy. *Mercies in the American Desert* quietly celebrates how perception gathers itself into tissues of connection, ‘trusting the way to reveal itself/out of the barked periphery,’ and we are the lucky recipients of his merciful, lucid gifts.”

—Ann Lauterbach, author of *Spell*

“Benjamin Landry’s *Mercies in the American Desert* engages seriously with the bewilderment of the present moment—its speakers can see something, everything, has gone wrong with America and being American, but they cannot adapt, because the wrong outstrips compensatory adaptation. These are poems of the actual marathon rather than the imagined victory; these are poems of rare honesty, rare integrity.”

—Shane McCrae, author of *The Gilded Auction Block*

“The speaker of these thoughtful, accomplished poems raises complex moral questions, bears witness. The most haunting poems detail human diminution: ‘It used to come naturally; now, we wait to have a human feeling.’ Mercies like beauty and love appear only to disappear, and the American desire for transcendence remains, but in tatters. Poems we need to read again and again.”

—Martha Ronk, author of *Silences*