

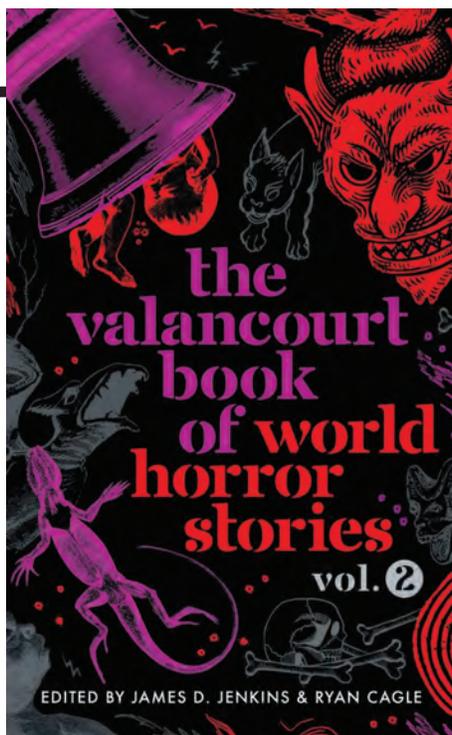
FEATURED REVIEW

in these poems may bear some surprises for readers who only know Islam from what the most Islamophobic agents of American empire would have us believe.

For me, though, I encountered the best surprises in poems like Reza Baraheni's "Daf," which plays with the form and sounds of the *daf*, a tambourine-like drum. Stephen Watts's co-translation with the author struck me as itself untranslatable, the words melting into one another and reemerging transformed: "Now night will never sense silence again / and after these circles of turbulence / I'll not sleep for a geology of un-numberable years / Here night swells on rim edges of drums and bells— / the daf's white moon." The impossibly poetic English of the translation sent me to the internet to discover what was going on in the Persian. There, I encountered several easily found videos of Baraheni performing the original poem and was amazed to hear just how closely the English follows the Persian in structure and form, even with all the inventiveness in translation. But you don't need any knowledge of Persian to appreciate the sound qualities of Baraheni's performance. Give it a listen and, if you enjoy that, you can continue on, as I did, to videos of musician Mohsen Namjoo performing the same poem. Namjoo breathes his own life into Baraheni's words, pounding the words' rhythms off his tongue and lips at breakneck speed while an orchestra carries the tune. It's a performance well worth discovering and easy enough to find.

In the end, it's that encounter with the unexpected that makes poetry endure. If there is a thread running throughout all the poems in *Essential Voices*, which is to say throughout all poetry, it is their pursuit of a discovery through language. Poetry gives voice to those essences that lie beyond whatever distinctions we might draw between self and other. Or rather, poetry is the voice of discovery and self-discovery. After the passports have expired and the flags faded into obscure relics of some forgotten identarian past, it is only the voice, to quote the eternal Forough Farrokhzad, that remains.

Samad Alavi
University of Oslo



The Valancourt Book of World Horror Stories: Volume 2

Ed. James D. Jenkins & Ryan Cagle

Richmond, Virginia. Valancourt.

2022. 328 pages.

I DESCRIBED VALANCOURT founders James Jenkins and Ryan Cagle's first volume of *The Valancourt Book of World Horror Stories* as "a grand guignol of horrific oddities from across the world" (*WLT*, Winter 2021). The anticipated second volume is the afterparty everyone wanted and more, featuring a broader range of global horror traditions than the first volume, hailing from twenty countries and originally published in sixteen languages.

As before, the second volume features a variety of horror genres, from the gross-out body horror of Zhang Yueran's "Whitebone Harp" (China), the folk horror of Konstantinos Kellis's "Firstborn" (Greece), the Kafkaesque philosophizing of Wojciech Gunia's "The War" (Poland), to the freakery of Steinar Bragi's "The Bell" (Iceland), and so on. The diversity of stories is truly global, especially when paired with the larger francophone and hispanophone contingents of the previous volume; stories hail in equal parts from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, and one story each comes from Africa and the Caribbean. I would certainly like to

see more in future volumes from South and Southeast Asia, as well as from the nations of the Black diaspora and the Arab world.

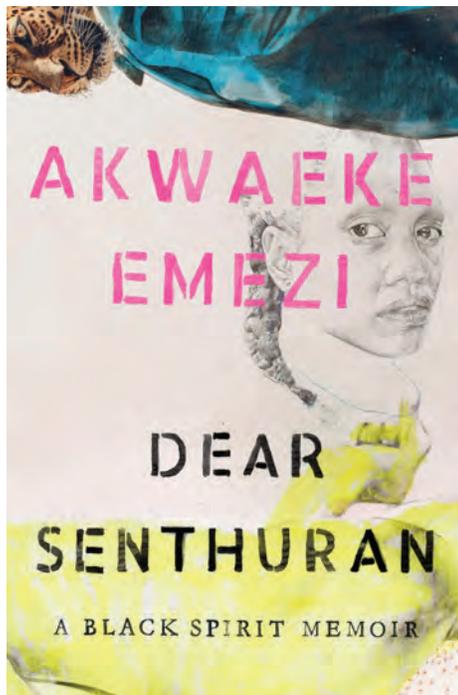
Outstanding stories include Yavor Tsanev's "The Recording of the Will" (Bulgaria), which opens the collection, and allegorizes the evil of bureaucracy in people's everyday lives; Val Votrin's "The Regensburg Festival" (Russia), about a choir director who learns to teach gargoyles to sing; Indrek Hargla's "The Grain Dryer of Tammöküla" (Estonia), a folk horror tale about the destruction of traditional pagan beliefs and their detrimental incorporation into modern life; and Gary Victor's "Lucky Night" (Haiti), a voodoo folktale wrapped up in a story about political corruption. Some of the wilder stories that leave you thinking "what did I just read?" include Steinar Bragi's "The Bell" (Iceland) and Stephan Friedman's "The Pallid Eidolon" (Israel), neither of which I'll describe so you can experience them yourself.

The sheer range of the second volume impresses and delivers on exactly what a volume of this kind promises: the opportunity to explore and discover what people are doing with horror outside the anglophone world, in countries many anglophone readers might not have guessed had horror traditions, some dating back hundreds of years. While not every story is a glittering gem of literary craft, and some are frankly odd choices for a collection of stories representing the "best" voices of world horror traditions (I think especially of the awfully derivative "The Ant" by Maltese author Anton Grasso), the collection nonetheless serves as an impressive library for future discovery, a mark of hope that we might get more someday, whether from Valancourt (yes, please!) or from other publishers excited by Valancourt's accomplishments. Indeed, already Valancourt has teased their upcoming volume of horror stories translated from endangered languages with Viola Cadruvi's "The Runner," a short fable of eco-horror originally published in the endangered Swiss Romansh language.

I eagerly await future terrors of the Valancourt kind and salute the work Jenkins

and Cagle have done to widen our experience of horror in the anglophone world.

Sean Guynes
Michigan State University



Akwaeke Emezi
Dear Senthuran:
A Black Spirit Memoir
New York: Riverhead Books.
2021. 232 pages.

DEAR SENTHURAN IS Akwaeke Emezi's first memoir in their prolific and growing catalog. Emezi's "black spirit memoir" is about their existence as an *ogbanje*, the liminal state between the fleshly and spirit worlds, which is just one example of in-betweenness or even otherworldliness explored in the memoir. Its epistolary chapters allow Emezi to investigate numerous discrete topics that fall under the larger theme of identity: gender, creativity, nationality, success, illness, family, and attraction, to name only a few. Each letter written to a specific person creates a space for memory to connect with Emezi's ideas on the topic at hand (e.g., "Masks," "Home," "Grief").

In this work, Emezi bares their many souls to the reader, just as they have done with other protagonists—the only differ-

ence is in this text Emezi is the protagonist, though they intimate several times that *Freshwater* (2018) found much of its foundation in Emezi's life. Readers learn how dangerous the first novel's success was to Emezi. The descriptions of their attempts to die by suicide are vivid and upsetting in all the ways a memoir should be. Embodied tension—both having to do with gender and with being an *ogbanje*—first is a liability to Emezi, but eventually they show through the memoir how they continue to work toward affirming all their identities.

For example, in their letter to Eugene on mutilation, Emezi describes disgust with their uterus and the desire to expunge it from their body. Finding a doctor that would perform gender-affirming medical interventions proves to be challenging, and when Emezi finds one, the doctor complains of spending too much time with them because of their "in-between thing." The essay, like many of them, ends with a reclamation of self in the face of a human world that does not allow for the space someone like Emezi requires to survive, much less thrive. Emezi sees "mutilation as a shift from wrongness to alignment, and of scars as a form of adornment that celebrates this shift," a sentiment that encompasses the memoir in its entirety. Emezi shows their scars over and over, how they came to be and how they almost destroy Emezi. Yet, in the end, the memoir shows Emezi's continued commitment to aligning with all their truths in face of a world in which "humans are so loud in how they press down, in how they enforce their realities."

Colleen Lutz Clemens
Kutztown University

Clemence Heard
Tragic City
Tallahassee: Anhinga Press.
2021. 128 pages.

CLEMENCE HEARD PRESENTS a timely yet timeless collection in *Tragic City*, consisting of poems that artfully push against a singular interpretation of America's historical legacies. The general inspiration

for the poetry is clear: a race massacre in 1921 Tulsa, Oklahoma, its contexts, and the complicated legacy of racist municipal ordinances and legislative policies, fear, resilience, urban renewal, gentrification, and eventual atonement born from that event. Yet, while guided by these realities, Heard's work is not constricted by them. *Tragic City* is filled with keen observations on relationships, human experience, and that which binds people together, whether by chance or force. There are sprinkles of contemporary pop-culture references, striking odes to communities outside Oklahoma (e.g., Memphis and New Orleans), and an intimate self-reflection on how we make sense of it all, once we truly realize what "it" is.

The collection is filled with power and heft, beginning with the breathtaking first poem, "Commentary." The author turns a relatively commonplace item of clothing (the "distressed tee") into a powerful symbol of pain, fear, anxiety, and, well, distress, when worn on the Black male body. Heard melds fashion-show commentary with the description of the daily movements of the subject whose attempts to remain alive remain perilous in an American police state. Heard writes, "Its ragged / look has made it

