

INTRODUCING THE *SRPR* ILLINOIS POET:
REBECCA MORGAN FRANK



Photo by Brian McConkey

Rebecca Morgan Frank is the author of *Oh You Robot Saints!*, one of the New York Public Library's Best Books of 2021; *Sometimes We're All Living in a Foreign Country*; *The Spokes of Venus*; and *Little Murders Everywhere*, shortlisted for the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Her poems have appeared such places as the *New Yorker*, *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Kenyon Review*, *Southern Review*, *Poetry Ireland*, and the Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day, and her collaborations with composers have been performed and exhibited across the country. She is the recipient of such honors as a Meier Achievement Award, the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay di Castagnola Award, a Mississippi Arts Commission Fellowship, and the Richard S. and the Julia Louise Reynolds Fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. She holds an MFA from Emerson College and a doctorate from the University of Cincinnati and has taught at institutions across the country. Co-founder and editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Memorious*, Frank serves on the board of the National Book Critics Circle and reviews poetry for the Poetry Foundation's Harriet Books.

from Junkyard Temples

The monarchy in *Allium* lives in a castle
of silver and gold, coins stacked
and caulked into towers shimmering in the glare.

There is no money left for food or bricks,
so the people build their houses of corn,
and eat their way through the walls.

The libraries are constructed out of books
themselves: encyclopedias and dictionaries
stack into foundations, novels form walls.

Slim volumes of poetry border the windows.
It takes three librarians and a construction crew
to discharge any of the collection.

In schools built from old shoes, children
read heels and look into soles, just to
study the lives of those who once walked.

The local Inn often collapses in the rain,
leaving travelers to fight their way out of soaked
pillows and sheets, the very walls they were sleeping against.
The rusted coils of the roof always remain upright.

In some cities, no one buries the dead.

Balsaminaceae, for example, houses the immortal,
the sick who stubbornly refuse to die.

With bodies shipped from hospitals of thousands
of other lands, and visas granted only to the patients
who will never have a visitor, the city walls are sealed.

Beds are given only to those who feel
they never lived their lives. It must be proven,
this failure of their dreams.

When the beds are filled on one floor,
a new floor is built overhead. And another,
and another: tall towers of the unwanted,
tall towers of the unfulfilled.

In the depths of *Typha*, the deer are not afraid.

They meet in the center of town at large salt bars,
eyeing the does that wander in from out of town.

Dogs race through the streets, pausing only to nip
at the ankles of those who fail to yield right-of-way.

Only cats sleep on beds, and each house must have
at least one queen.

Bears live in all garages, and cars are banished
to the barren hills on the outskirts.

All leftover food is placed on the finest china, served to pigeons.
Mice always have the first taste.

Corpses, on open beds, are offered to the vultures.

Listen—

it is the rhythm
of the people of *Cucurbita*.

They are beating

out the morning news
on a tall drum of oil, trying

to drown out the din,

idling engines and an orchestra
of sirens.

Some kick aside the drums,

and have returned
to semaphore,

waving flags across the office,

the kitchen table,
the bed.

All of the children carry

either a drum
or a flag.

Dandelions took over the dark city of *Taraxacum*,
thus giving it its name. Once a city of pavement,
the inhabitants were afraid of dirt, the invasion
of the world beyond their city walls.
Concrete filled every crack that would expose them.

One day a young girl found a chip in her basement floor.
The smell of soil crept in, and filled her with longing.
She returned every day to breathe it in,
until a sprout of green,
and then a yellow dandelion, appeared.

It was the first of many, and within a month,
all the girls were harvesting them in the corners
of the schoolyard, the back of the stairs.
Lovers were caught sneaking blossoms
through the alleys at night.

Soon the floors of all the houses were covered.
Gardens bloomed everywhere behind closed doors.

Where the dilapidated shacks of *Composita* stand,
there was once a great fortress, untouchable.

The walls, wide as six-lane highways
and held by beams forged from the greatest steel,

were built so high that birds complained
of the circuitous route to their in-laws on the other side.

Guards marched along the lip of the walls, squinting across
the plains through telescopes of glass.

Scouts flew on the backs of eagles and reported all movements.
The city was invincible.

Until Death walked through the open front gate, leaving
it swinging on its hinges.

All that was left standing: these small shacks,
rising up in the night, sheltering the grieving.