



Poems Recall Legacy of the Salem Power Plant

In July 2014, a group of local poets entered the high-security Salem power plant to give a reading commemorating the closing of the high-polluting, landmark facility with its coal-burning furnaces and towering smokestacks. A new chapbook, *Salem Power: Poems from the 2014 Improbable Places Poetry Tour*, presents 15 poems from the historic reading, selected by the tour's leader and founder, Colleen Michaels, Director of the Writing Studio at Montserrat College of Art, Beverly.

Demolition of the 63-year-old structure began soon after, replaced by the current Footprint Power facility, a cleaner, more efficient energy producer. Tagged as one of the Massachusetts "filthy five" coal-burning polluters, the old power plant lives on in memory and imagination, and the poets focus on the vital benefits and the deadly harms, on the generations of dedicated workers, and on a clean-energy future.

The anthology includes poems by J.D. Scrimgeour, chair of the English Department at Salem State University (SSU); January Gill O'Neil, SSU associate professor and board chair of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs; and Michaels, who likens the old plant to "a noisy aunt... / who wore stovepipe pants well" and "danced with every mayor."

In a pulsing variety of styles, formats, and lengths, the poems—likened to a "castaway's bottle notes" by contributor Mary Ann Honaker—touch on wind power, the nature of grids, environmental damage, childhood memories, the 2003 New York City blackout, the transforming work of artists and writers, and more. All of the of the poets continued to thrive in their careers, publishing books, contributing to journals, and participating in public readings. The Improbable Places Poetry Tour, now in its 14th year, celebrates local sites by bringing vibrant contemporary poetry to interact with local communities.

Three of the chapbook contributors have passed away in the nine years since the reading: social activist and publisher Blaine Hebbel; screenwriter Mickey Coburn; and journalist Melissa J. Varnavas, whose poem, “Forgotten,” draws on interviews with employees of the plant for the *Beverly Citizen*. Hebbel’s poem, “Footprints,” expresses hope that the new “Salem Harbor Station [will become] / a model for our nation.”

Susanna Brougham, Margaret Eckman, Elizabeth Hart, Crystal Condakes Karlberg, Dawn Paul, Bill Sherman, Emma Siemasko, and Cindy Veach round out the list of accomplished poets with work in the chapbook anthology. The 15 poems in *Salem Power* address a historic transition and are a part of local literary history.

Salem Power: Poems from the 2014 Improbable Places Poetry Tour is the fifth title in the Derby Wharf Light Box chapbook series, modeled after the legendary City Lights Poetry Series published by renowned poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The booklets measure a compact 4-3/4 by 6-1/4 inches. To order a copy of the 40-page *Salem Power*—\$10 postage paid—and to learn more about the other titles in the series, visit the Derby Wharf Light Box website, www.derbywharflightbox.com.

###



For more information, contact: Javy Awan, Derby Wharf Light Box, javy.awan@gmail.com, 571-296-8687.