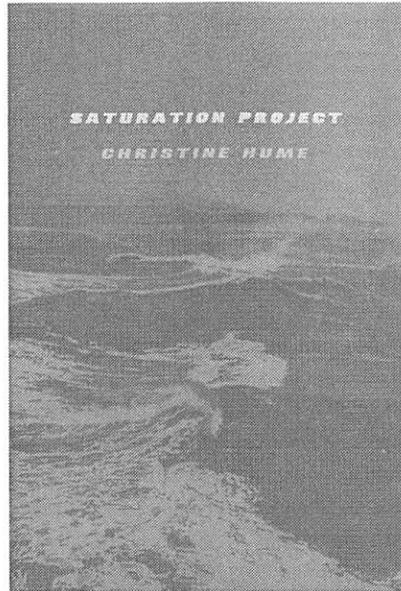


SATURATION PROJECT

Christine Hume
Solid Objects (\$22)

The central section of Christine Hume's *Saturation Project*, a phenomenological exploration of dysfluency entitled "Hum," takes up the burden of the book: a poet against a contemporary form of nihilism: "Perhaps the more literate we become, the less likely we are to hear the world speaking to us. Instead of other species, the dead, god, the earth's core or atmosphere, we nowadays tend to hear ourselves." In paragraphs offset by a HHHUUUUUMMMMM that bleeds off the page on either side, the speaker of these hybrid texts (mélanges of maxim, factoid, mythopoeia, autobiography, and reportage) addresses us with "a creepy normalcy, an unsettling mix of menace and humor" that approaches the ambitions of an essay via the technology of a prose poem. In a universe that's not anthropocentric, if people don't perceive anything except themselves, it might not matter, but maybe it does. When you



walk the line of ambivalence, you make certain statements, pose certain questions.

The "dark, lanky teenage girl" with "a girl's feral nature" who endured body horror and dyslexia in Hume's recent book *A Different Shade for Each Person Reading the Story* (Pank Books, 2020) craved words because she couldn't use them. The tormented teen of that book was the author, a mother raising her child while still wearing a mask of anguish. Hume returns to questions of relationality she asked then in "Ventifacts," the final section of *Saturation Project*, a disquisi-

tion on cliffs sculpted by wind. She wonders, "Or am I enabling her to develop the wisdom of not believing everything she thinks?" By contrast, in "Atalanta," the opening section, a meditation on the mythic heroine, the torment of *A Different Shade* dissolves into a metafictional gloom, where the woman and the girl wander lost through their own tale. "My daughter enters the story alone, looking for me," Hume writes, "as I mistake shadows for her mother." This theme is most satisfying where it's tensest, making "Ventifacts" less compelling by comparison.

A pun on the author's last name, one also invoked in the poem "Um, Um..." from Hume's earlier book *Shot* (Counterpath Press, 2010), "Hum" sticks in the memory. "The subliminal suggestion of electricity buzzing all around us" is also "the sound of a human becoming a machine"—in other words, "a sound that Americans can't hear," because it produces "a surrogate sound, forming an autonomous comfort loop," which causes people to experience "an anxiety between suspense and predestination." The hum motif comes and goes among the author's works, as an image of the (non)human. The metaphor suggests that if you listen, you'll hear something else, when you hear yourself. "Chasing the hum," Hume writes, as if to guide or warn us, "is like chasing a ghost." That pursuit is the future.

—Erik Noonan