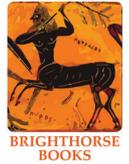




REFRAMING GENESIS:

Spotlight on Sharon Chmielarz



A work of poetry inspired by the Book of Genesis looks to explore ancient stories in new ways.

After decades of writing and publishing, Sharon Chmielarz released her latest poetry collection, *The J Horoscope*, written in the voice of one of the authors of the Book of Genesis.

Where did the inspiration for this collection come from?

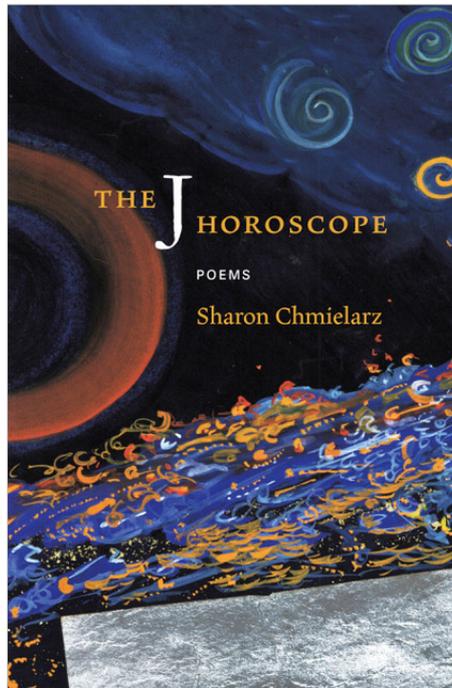
I'd read *The Book of J* by David Rosenberg and Harold Bloom and was taken by the way our early 21st-century troubles resemble calamities in circa 937 BCE history. "J" is one of the four writers of Genesis. I love her spunky style. She's called "J" for her intense interest in Yahweh's (Jahweh's) character, who appears on Earth in various guises. She is the collector of stories featuring Noah, Joseph, Jacob, Rachel, et al., and to paraphrase the comic strip *Pogo*, they is us. My poems in *The J Horoscope*, written in narratives and lyrics, imagine new versions of old archetypes in the tree of life.

Was the writing process for these poems different from that of your previous works?

My writing process is pretty blurry to me. I don't like to try to analyze it. It can happen via journal or the back of an envelope, in a comfortable chair or at a desk. At some point I transfer the handwritten to the computer so I can see and read it better. Usually it takes years to complete a manuscript, so I keep files on a kind of assembly line. When I get stuck on one, I go to another and eventually come back to the earlier poem. But I've never set out to write around a theme. However, poems collect around themes. Mine themes have been, I see in retrospect, family relationships, the daily, history, the prairie, and women's lives, from Mozart's sister to my own prairie town's pioneers. All these

inclinations sneak into *The J Horoscope*; even the prairie is present in a crown of sonnets about the expat/refugee/prettly boy Joseph and his fields.

How do you imagine readers at this moment will connect to *The J Horoscope*?



Even if they've never heard of Noah or any character in Genesis from which I spin my poems, I hope readers will recognize that the work mirrors the lives of their own colleagues, friends, and family, their attitudes, and their own stories: the mother who favors one child over another, the couple kicked out of their religious community, the sexy daughter, the badass son, the lovers. Most of all, I hope readers will connect to the work's humor, images, and thought.

What advice would you give an author who was looking to publish a poetry collection?

After you read, write, dream, and make goals, expect revision, which is my favorite part of writing, and then look for themes in your work. Does your work have a twist, a slant, a heartbeat that runs through the collection, one that stands out and might connect with a publisher's eye and ear? Read bios to see who publishes books by your favorite poets. Buy their books. Read them. Often you'll find you write on subjects they do, and their publisher might like your work, too. Remember to check out local publishing houses. Be patient and persevering. Establish some publication track record in literary journals.

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— Sharon Chmielarz

What's next for you?

If Covid-19 doesn't get in the way, I have a book coming out in spring 2021 titled *Speaking in Riddles*. Riddles are very old first poems. I think all cultures probably have a stock of them on back shelves. They're fun reading by yourself, guessing at the riddles' solutions, and even more fun with friends.