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Strange Borderlands



Synopsis

Strange Borderlands, Ben Berman's first full-length collection, counterpoises insights with uncertainties while chronicling the poet's immersion in a new culture. In compelling metrical, free verse and prose poems, Berman provides a vivid narrative of exotic adventures, especially his Peace Corps service in Zimbabwe—the people, the land, and his “struggling with the blurred lines of where things end” on his return home. This distinctive collection can go from humorous to heartbreaking, and is spellbinding from start to finish—a rare achievement.

PRAISE FOR STRANGE BORDERLANDS: Ben Berman's wonderful first book, Strange Borderlands, is a masterful study in the power and limits of empathy, of respect for difference in tension with the urgent need for common ground. Beyond his formal and stylistic range, linguistic flexibility, eye for detail, irrepressible wit and powerful feeling, what's most impressive about this terrific book is Berman's inclusive generous spirit, the deadly serious imaginative play he exercises in every line of every poem. This is a book to cherish.

—Alan Shapiro These are poems that weigh, consider, and restore some flesh-and-blood meaning to the experience of multiculturalism, a word so overused it is often flattened out to a platitude or piety. But not in this book.

—Fred Marchant (from the “Foreword”) Ben Berman's lyric poems set in Zimbabwe dig deep into the casual and the casualty of daily life: the hammer striking the sheep's head, the sustenance that follows; disciplinary beatings that students, giggly and protesting, could count and count on to fade. Unassuming but wise, compassionate yet wildly, unpredictably funny at times, Berman delivers to us escalating hardships that somehow elevated us toward the sacred; the pathetic harvest and sweetness that comes from the least likely of places. This least likely of places is where Berman thrives, calling on closely observed facts to chronicle the perimeters of tenderness and cruelty. I believe every word in this collection. This is an unforgettable debut by a powerful and humble voice.

—Dzvinia Orlowsky Ben Berman's marvelous first book, Strange Borderlands, chronicles in startling and unforgettable poems his sojourn in Zimbabwe and his immersion in a culture that both embraces and exiles him, attracts and reproaches, changing him forever. Using a variety of poetic approaches—rhymed couplets, prose paragraphs, sonnets, free verse—he gives us a multi-tonal description of landscapes that are as elusive as they

are inviting, as unfamiliar to most of us as they are intuitively recognizable. This is a compelling poetry of "strange borderlands where distance and intimacy collide."

Gregory Djanikian ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ben Berman grew up in Maine, served in the Peace Corps in Zimbabwe and currently lives in the Boston area with his wife and daughter. He has received the Erika Mumford Prize from the New England Poetry Club and Artist Fellowships from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and Somerville Arts Council. *Strange Borderlands* is his first full-length collection.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Reflective in nature, these poems use form--from slant-rhyming couplets to prose poems--to limn the tensions of readjustment, and mine memory for stories that keep the author rooted to a place that will forever and never be his. Throughout the collection, Berman's images sear the brain with their often-perplexing otherness, while his openness to new cultures and peoples help readers understand how beautiful the world's strangeness can be. This is a must-have book for readers of poetry." Publishers Weekly Starred Review

"Ben Berman's riveting first poetry collection, *Strange Borderlands*... poignantly conveys an insistent and nettlesome remembering, a half-wild entertaining of meaning, along with an unsettled understanding that there might not be any."

Jan Worth-Nelson, Peace Corps Writers

"In this collection of poems inspired by his experiences in Zimbabwe as a Peace Corps volunteer, Ben Berman manages to capture the ephemeral quality of cultural collisions. Sometimes humorous, sometimes soul wrenching, these poems explore the

edges of difference with a wry and tender voice." World Literature Today "What I admire most about these poems, beyond their intense imagery and the tensions constructed between dark and light, is the clear love and respect this poet demonstrates for his subject matter. There is a human scale to each poem that helps the reader walk the trails of this landscape however unfamiliar they may have been until that moment." Miriam O'Neal, Ragazine "Laughter is everywhere in the people and in the humor unearthed even from the misery many of these poems describe--it becomes a language of its own...The misjudgments and gaffes that result in the constant battering of Berman in Zimbabwe end up creating a surety, a line of communication, a bulwark against all that threatened to collapse." Valerie Duff-Strautmann, Salamander Magazine

Ben Berman is the author of *Strange Borderlands* (Able Muse Press), which won the 2014 Peace Corps Writers Award for Best Poetry Book and was a finalist for the Massachusetts Book Award. He has received awards from the New England Poetry Club and fellowships from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and Somerville Arts Council. He is the Co-Poetry Editor at Solstice Literary Journal and he teaches in the Boston area where he lives with his wife and two daughters. You can visit him at ben-berman.com

"*Strange Borderlands* is the best book of poetry I have ever read. Ben Berman's poetry is deeply moving, raw, funny, engaging, sad, and insightful. *Strange Borderlands* touches upon a variety of life issues through one man's journey as a peace corps volunteer in a completely foreign land to him. I'm sure Ben's experiences in Zimbabwe have completely changed his life, and I am thankful for his vulnerability in sharing his beautiful poetry with the world. Amazing writing. I highly recommend this book to all. Everyone should read it.

Beautifully written, will be watching for more written by this author!

If you have it, you don't need it. If you need it, you don't have it. If you have it, you need more of it. If you have more of it, you don't need less of it. You need it, to get it. And you certainly need it, to get more of it. But if you don't already have any of it to begin with, you can't any of it to get started, which means you really have no idea how to get it in the first place, do you? You can share it...sure...you can even stockpile it if you'd like, but you can't fake it. Wanting it, needing it, wishing for it.....the point is...if you've never had any of it...ever....people just seem to know. *Strange Borderlands* - you have

to have it!

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