



# Erosion

*Jorie Graham*

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**Erosion** Jorie Graham

**From *Erosion***  
**SAN SEPOLCRO**

*Jorie Graham*

?

. . . . How clean  
the mind is,  
holy grave. It is this girl  
by Piero  
della Francesca, unbuttoning  
her blue dress,  
her mantle of weather,  
to go into  
labor. Come, we can go in.  
It is before  
the birth of god. No-one  
has risen yet  
to the museums, to the assembly  
line bodies  
and wings to the open air  
market. This is  
what the living do: go in.  
It's a long way.  
And the dress keeps opening  
from eternity  
to privacy, quickening.  
Inside, at the heart,  
is tragedy, the present moment  
forever stillborn,  
but going in, each breath  
is a button  
coming undone, something terribly  
nimble-fingered  
finding all of the stops.

**Jorie Graham** grew up in Italy and now lives in northern California. She has received grants from the Ingram-Merrill Foundation, the Bunting Institute, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial

Foundation. Her first book, *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* (Princeton, 1980), won the Great Lakes Colleges Association Award as the best first book of poems published in 1980.

## Erosion Details

Date : Published May 21st 1983 by Princeton University Press (first published January 1st 1983)

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Author : Jorie Graham

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# From Reader Review Erosion for online ebook

## Liz Scheid says

This is one of the best poetry books that I've ever read. Graham is an absolute genius.

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## Beth says

An amazing book of poetry by one of America's best poets. This is some of the toughest poetry I've ever read – tough to understand, tough to describe, tough to dissect. At the same time Graham writes in theoretical abstractions, she also writes with specific and vibrant images that can overtake you as you try to make your way through her poems. It's the kind of poetry that frustrates you when you can't understand it, but gives you a huge feeling of release and joy when you finally figure it out. This is definitely not poetry for everyone, but it's damn good poetry.

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## Jenna says

Jorie's poetry is much more sensual than I initially gave it credit for being, yet she simultaneously possesses the strongest intellectual backbone of almost any living poet, certainly any living American woman poet. The poem "Salmon" in this collection is a modern masterpiece.

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## Tom says

A slim volume of poetry (is that redundant?) that I read through and wondered about and look forward to understanding more and more.

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## Roy Kesey says

Going back to this book again after twenty year of so, I find it less powerful than I'd remembered it--the poems ask abstractions to do an awful lot of the heavy lifting. That's the overall sense this reading gave me--but there are many great oblique lines that I find I want to carry on with me. And I'll always be fond of it for having been there when I was first trying to figure out what poetry could be.

Some favored bits:

...a space through which  
you could fall,  
an echo travel,  
and meaning

--small, jeweled, deep-water--  
flash.

“In What Manner the Body is United With the Soule”

-

...Outside  
is the cashcrop, sunflowers, as far as one can see. Listen,  
the wind rattles in them,  
a loose worship  
seeking an object,  
an interruption.

“To a Friend Going Blind”

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### **Joe Millar says**

Certainly a minor masterpiece. Easy to read, unforgettably accurate--a great starter (and ender) to what poetry is capable of in the hands of a lucid, passionate world-watcher.

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### **Carole says**

One of my favorite women poets.

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### **Malea says**

There are some fantastic poems in this collection, but others that I just can't get into at all.

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### **Jaffa Kintigh says**

I remember liking this collection more when I first read it five years ago. That is not to say that I do not still really like many of the poems in this collection. It's just that I find the collection uneven. Many of the poems veer deeply abstract, and that is not where I am in my life. I enjoy where Graham's lines and images align, enriching the texture of a beautifully specific scene.

In "Wanting a Child," I feel the water when the poet writes, "How hard it is for the river here to re-enter/the sea, though it's most beautiful, of course, in the waste/of time where it's almost,/turned back. Then/it's yoked,/trussed. . . .The river/has been everywhere, imagine, dividing, discerning,/cutting deep into the parent rock,/scouring and scouring/its own bed." The images of human-manipulated waterways and fish created many of the strongest images for me. In "Reading Plato," it's the description of the man carefully creating his

own fishing lures: "Bareheaded, in a soiled/shirt,/speechless, my friend/is making//lures, his hobby. Flies/so small/he works with tweezers and/a magnifying glass./They must be/so believable//they're true-- feelers,/antennae,/quick and frantic/as something/drowning." Graham captures a similar scene in "Salmon" despite merely watching the salmon run on television: "I watched them once, at dusk, on television, run,/in our motel room half-way through/Nebraska, quick, glittering, past beauty, past/the importance of beauty,/archaic,/not even hungry, not even endangered, driving deeper and deeper/into less. They leapt up falls, ladders,/and rock, tearing and leaping, a gold river/and a blue river traveling/in opposite directions."

The best moments capture not just the image of nature, but the momentum and trajectory. They become the documentary as well as any Ansel Adams black-and-white. "Although it doesn't seem/anything's missing,/thousands of wasps/have eaten/intelligently/of these branches//and made, out of spittle/and pulp/a fine grey paper/they've bandaged/sheet after sheet/round and under and through//the branchings/until it's/a nest, a dark grey/freedom" [from "Wood Wasps in the Spanish Willow"].

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## Johannes C says

Jorie Graham has retaught me how to read poetry. I struggled a bit to get into this work, but found this lecture online helped a lot in understanding the way Graham perceives what the work of the poet is to be and how she herself reads poetry.

This book was extremely enjoyable. Attentive to all senses, I feel like this book can help one to experience life with some greater degree of intensity. It left me a little breathless sometimes.

I'm really enamoured by Graham's use of stanza breaks and the way words end up on the page I find to be quite delightful. For example:

“Finally I heard  
into music,  
that is, heard past  
the surface tension  
which is pleasure, which holds  
the self

afloat, miraculous  
waterstrider  
with no other home.  
Not that I heard  
very deep,  
but heard there was a depth,”

It's the type of poetry you can't fully appreciate by merely hearing it read aloud. She can use stanza breaks to make you feel entire dimensions from surface to depth. She can use stanza breaks (in other cases) to make you feel like you are taking a leap or encountering an interruption -- similar things to that effect. I found her poetry incredibly cinematic even before I discovered she was once a film student at NYU. As the words tumble down the page in the opening poem, I could feel myself descending down a hill, and felt this zooming motion as I neared a town in the valley. It's hard to explain. But her poetry performs work on you. It

transports you.

There's also something obliquely religious or theological about her work as well. It's immensely beautiful. Will likely return to some of her other work soon. Discovered Jorie Graham in an online lecture given by Francis Clooney and feel grateful I stumbled upon her poetry.

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## **Lou Last says**

### STILL LIFE WITH WINDOW AND FISH

Down here this morning in my white kitchen  
along the slim body  
of the light,  
the narrow body that would otherwise  
say forever  
the same thing,  
the beautiful interruptions, the things of this world, twigs  
and powerlines, eaves and ranking  
branches burn  
all over my walls.  
Even the windowpanes are rich.  
The whole world outside  
wants to come into here,  
to angle into  
the simpler shapes of rooms, to be broken and rebroken  
against the sure co-ordinates  
of walls.  
The whole world outside....  
I know it's better, whole, outside, the world—whole  
trees, whole groves—but I  
love it in here where it blurs, and nothing starts or  
ends, but all is  
waving, and colorless,  
and voiceless....  
Here is a fish-spine on the sea of my bone china  
plate. Here is a fish-spine on the sea of my hand,  
flickering, all its freight  
fallen away,  
here is the reason for motion washed  
in kitchenlight, fanning, gliding  
upstream in the smoke of twigs, the rake  
against the shed outside, the swaying birdcage  
and its missing  
tenant. If I should die  
before you do,  
you can find me anywhere

in this floral, featureless,  
indelible  
surf. We are too restless  
to inherit  
this earth.

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