

Hypotheticals
Leigh Kotsilidis
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In *Hypotheticals*, the scientific method breaks down into a scattering of hypothetical circumstances. Leigh Kotsilidis' debut poetry collection delves into the reimagining of knowledge and personhood, questioning, on an elemental scale, the configuration of the world. A variety of formal and free verse poems, *Hypotheticals* takes a hard yet lyrical look at the creatures and objects that inhabit our planet, inviting the reader in to experience these strange and surprising sensations.

Divided into four sections, *Hypotheticals* follows its own four-section trajectory of Evidence, Variables, Falsifications, and Conclusions. This ordering provides the feeling of a progressing scientific report rather than a book of poems, but takes these underlying principles and explodes them open with rich, figurative language. In "Darwin's Family Tree," the speaker explores the ever-shifting landscape of evolution, claiming

How to classify –
when new species pop up like finch,

when there is no stasis,
when every platypus, squid

and moose turns
to mulch.

Through the human desire to impose order upon what appears to be an constantly changing world, these poems already begin to disassemble themselves, unable to pinpoint "the point where mouse / turns vole, where the distinctions are not arbitrary," where the poem begins.

By the third section, Falsifications, each poem takes new approaches to language, playing with word choice, sound, and sense. The phonic interactions in the sonnet "Wetherspoons" force together a mish-mash of transitioning "w" sounds, creating a sense of sonic pleasure yet cognitive confusion: "With a wily wink she sinks her teeth in, / weeds you out, well-wrought from the whacked. In no time flat, she has you warbling." This experimentation continues in "Flukes," as the speaker examines how metaphors function, even commenting on the writing process itself as an odd *ars poetica*. The poem continues with the first fragmented metaphor:

With catfish, let's blot the moon.
Chew clouds through.
Shake hummingbirds from seaweed.
Tenderize broods.

Let's never go back. Only revise.

This juxtaposition of images of the natural world in fragments allows a fresh perspective on how, perhaps, these ecological systems function in (or out of) context to the human condition.

While many poems use natural imagery against natural imagery, much also dwells the human body. In the foreboding “Nervous System,” the speaker addresses a you against natural phenomenon, saying “lightning / unbundles too soon, / an onslaught of moon / scathes down the spine” to bring the reader to dwell on human mortality with “You think, / there are other omens to show you / you are dying.” This relation to the natural occurrence and the human mind ties our own reliance and depending on what we consider natural signs of death and decay.

Kotsilidis’ work brings a humbling sense of the human place within the world, but also demonstrates how imaginatively wrought language can infuse a sense of wonder and play within the human perspective. Presented in fragments yet inextricably tied together, *Hypotheticals* combines scientific and poetic inquiry to startling effect.