



LANTERNFLY

AUGUST

a new poetry collection
by Robin Gow

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In *Lanternfly August*, Robin Gow contends with the emotional geographies of home through the lens of an often-demonized species of insect.



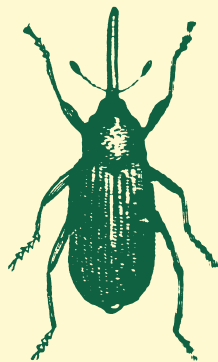
Robin Gow is a trans poet and YA/Middle Grade author from rural Pennsylvania. They are the author of several poetry collections including *Our Lady of Perpetual Degeneracy*. Gow also writes queer YA/Middle Grade novels such as *Ode to My First Car*, *A Million Quiet Revolutions*, and *Dear Mothman*. He manages community programs at Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT Community Center, building celebratory spaces for the local LGBTQ+ folks. As an autistic person, Robin feels passionate about celebrating neurodivergent folks in the queer community. They live in Allentown, Pennsylvania, with their partner, best friend, and pugs, Gertrude and Eddie.



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LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

This book began with my friend telling me I should stomp a bug on the sidewalk. We were walking on Hamilton Street in Allentown where I live. In early autumn, lanternflies congregated in flocks all along the avenues. I couldn't bring myself to do it. I saw these little colorful creatures with their red spotted wings, and I respectfully abstained from the insect stomping.

When I was alone later that day, I couldn't help but feel sympathetic towards the lanternfly. I've always had an affinity for things considered monstrous and vermin-like and I think for me that connection comes from being a queer person. In the media after all, that's very often how queer people are depicted.

In Eastern Pennsylvania lanternflies are an invasive species. Because of this, all over you'll see signs with images of the lanternfly and a call to squish, stomp, and/or destroy them. The more I thought about lanternflies the more I wanted to learn about them. I read pages and pages of scientific journals, government websites and historical research about lanternflies.

It wasn't until I started drafting the poems about lanternflies that would become Lanternfly August that I realized I was also writing about my own complicated relationship to this region where I'm from as a queer person.

I grew up in a small rural town. I spent my days playing in creeks and walking winding cornfield roads. I snuck out at night to lay with crushes in graveyards. I bought wildlife books to learn the names of snakes and moths. If I ask myself where I feel most myself, I think about a stream with an abandoned house nestled in thickets of vines.

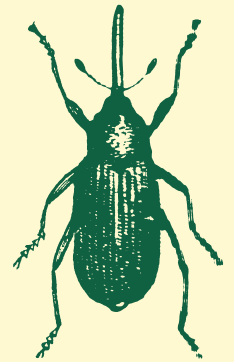
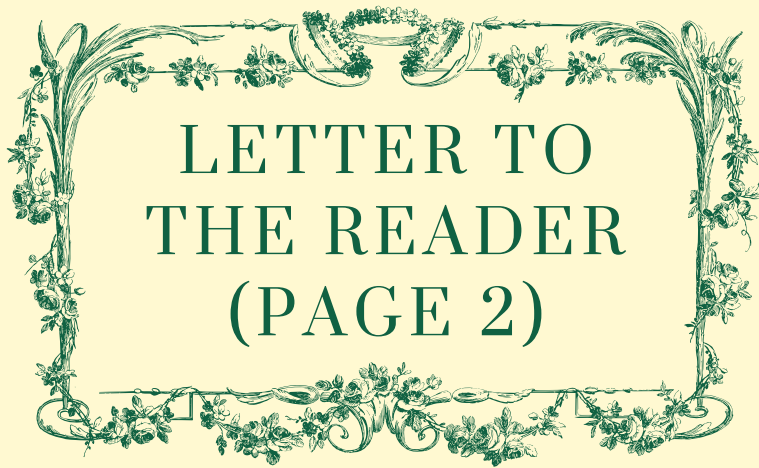
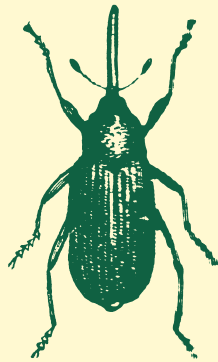
What has been difficult for me to process then is how I felt I had to leave this place to live out as a queer and trans person. Growing up, I did not see or hear about anyone who was queer and trans like me. Homophobia and transphobia were and still are strong in the town where I grew up.

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I moved away from my small town for college near Philadelphia and then graduate school in New York City.

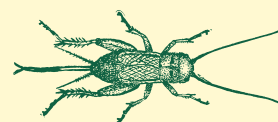
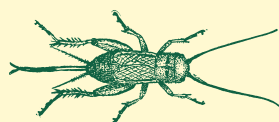
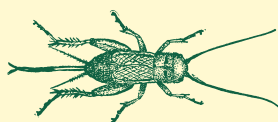
Lanternflies began to swell in numbers around the time that I moved away from my small town. For the last two years, I've been back here near where I grew up and working on reconnecting to the pieces of my young queerness I didn't fully get to experience.

The lanternflies might seem like a strange vehicle for sifting through these feelings of estrangement from one's roots and then reconnection but the more I learned about their complex and vibrant little lives the more I felt a tether to them. Their life cycles gave structure and rhythm to the cycles and changes of my own life.

Then, also, there is a common kind of rhetoric that's used against queer and trans people is that we are unnatural. I wanted to, through the lanternfly and through their presence as an invasive species ask questions about what it means to be natural and what it means to live listening to the earth around us.

I don't think I have answers to those questions, but I do think, through these poems in Lanternfly August, I have laid patterns of language I am still walking the labyrinth of. I hope you'll join me and walk in them too.

Sincerely,
Robin Gow





"In *Lanternfly August*, Robin Gow intertwines the metamorphosis of outlaws to implore, 'Will I still be beautiful without my hunger?' The formally inventive poems meditate on unheralded grace despite incremental apocalypse. By declaring, 'Will someone take a picture of me while I'm still breathing?' Gow teaches us to survive by embracing ephemerality over futurity."

- Sarah Sala, author of *The Devil's Lake*

"Robin Gow's *Lanternfly August* is a marvelous feat. Across this collection, Gow asks us to consider who or what is marked as invasive—like the lanternfly and the tree of heaven, which have the 'wrong body' or exist in the 'wrong context' and can be killed or cut down without consequence. These poems posit new pathways to identification in the face of such estrangement so that we might imagine anew what flourishing might come after ruin."

- Donika Kelly, author of *bestiary* and *The Renunciations*

"The title *Lanternfly August* describes a point in the lanternfly's life cycle when it becomes a dramatic bright red, but Robin Gow's lushly volatile, shimmering book about gender, entomology, bodily experience, and local memory shuffles its chronology backwards and forwards like dealing cards, immersing us in the midst of change. This compelling book explores ways of being inside and outside the body simultaneously ('My walls were thoraxes,' 'Gloves growing around fingers'). It meditates on violence ('Raise your foot high. Become a boy.'). It witnesses, it confides, experiments with an "I" both singular and plural, weighing metaphors of infestation with belonging."

- Trace Peterson, author of *Since I Moved In*

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EXCERPTS

CYCLE

When my daughters / arrive with
jeweled feet / red wings / hunger for
their old bodies / we will hold a silent
dinner / for previous years / Maybe I
am just my mother's re-learned gender
/ maybe I am just a skeleton my father
is making to survive / The word
"belonging" is made of cement / metal
beamed / built before the war / Is
sublimated into a cloud / Is read for a
change of scenery / doesn't trust the
process of acclimation / Has your
neighbor ever been a limb? / Mine are
spools of thread I step over and around
/ I am not a prepared animal / I am not
a precise animal / Some people are
comforted by cycles but the lanternfly
reminds me we often / have no control
over spring time / are woken like bowls
of paper by a gust of air / want nothing
more than to be / in a make-believe
world where our skin / feels real

AFTER LANTERNFLIES

No such thing as sunset. Coagulated
silhouette of the phantom animals. Cutting
out my face from a book of stencils. Their
ghosts, like tea bags in the river. Legs
bristling like eye lashes. My daughter with
her long long hair. A ceremony to dislodge
the tree from her earth—hovering above
ground. We say prayers for her assumption.
A new soul to come down and animate the
roots. All the trees have long ago become
hollow and barren. I remember what it felt
like to pluck a green leaf and hold it up to my
face. Private operas. Half-masks. We're told
that some of us our natural and others are
always waiting for the "after." After party.
Aftermath. After show. My encores were
always without sugar. Lanternflies, having
sucked the vineyard dry, asking the sun for
nectar before becoming statues.

