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Elizabeth J. Coleman's  
**MEGA-GALAXIES**  
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## **ELIZABETH J. COLEMAN'S MEGA-GALAXIES**

considers both the vastness and intimacy of what surrounds us, from our communities to the larger natural world.

**WINNER OF THE ADRIFT CHAPBOOK PRIZE  
GUEST JUDGED BY MATTHEW OLZMANN**

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Elizabeth J. Coleman** is a poet, guitarist, and attorney. Elizabeth is the editor of *Here: Poems for the Planet* (*Copper Canyon Press*, 2019) (featuring a foreword from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and an activist guide by the Union of Concerned Scientists.) She is the author of two poetry collections: *Proof* (*Spuyten Duyvil Press* 2012), a University of Wisconsin Press prizes finalist, and *The Fifth Generation* (*Spuyten Duyvil Press*, 2016), as well as three chapbooks. Elizabeth translated into French the sonnet collection, *Pythagoras in Love/Pythagore, Amoureux* (*Folded Word Press*, 2016). Her poems appear in, among others, *32 Poems*, *Baltimore Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Berkeley Literary Review*, *Cider Press Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Rattle*, and in numerous anthologies. The grandmother of four, Elizabeth lives with her husband in New York City.



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# ADVANCE PRAISE

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"From a street-corner bodega to the Serengeti Plain to the 'bell-jazz of our galaxy,' these poems find meaning in all spaces. I appreciated these poems for their steady voice, precision, and how they often quietly wrestle with big questions of the human spirit. Chapbooks might be 'small' by definition, but this collection feels rich and expansive; the contents of *Mega-Galaxies* push us toward something vast and infinite."

**– MATTHEW OLZMANN,  
AUTHOR OF CONSTELLATION ROUTE**

"'I, who am made of an exploding star, / remember chicken paprikash with my grandfather / long ago when this was a Hungarian neighborhood,'" begins one poem by Elizabeth J. Coleman, remarkably linking the cosmos, history and personal experience in three lines. Coleman takes us through many worlds, often counterpointing scientific fact and metaphor, the macro and micro visions of her world, which is itself global. It is a world also defined by temporal counterpoints: "crickets that sang with the dinosaurs / still sing with us," she writes. These poems, with their expansive vision so essential for our fragmented and chaotic world, remind us, with Rovelli, "what matters is not how things are, but rather how they interact."

**– RICHARD JACKSON,  
AUTHOR OF FOOTPRINTS & THE HEART AS FRAMED**

"Elizabeth J. Coleman's *Mega-Galaxies* invites us to look outward at the mysteries and possibilities of our world and beyond yet, why do I find myself constantly looking inward? Perceptive, curious, and brimming with surprising insight, Elizabeth J. Coleman's poetry reminds us that beauty and wonder—if we truly want them—are within our reach."

**– RIGOBERTO GONZALEZ,  
AUTHOR OF TO THE BOY WHO WAS NIGHT**

"With tenderness and earned wisdom, Elizabeth Coleman's poems are both intimate—'I...look down at you lying there, lanky body...too tall for your hospital gown'—and expansive, gifting us galaxies within and without, real and imagined. What moves as well is the quiet of these poems, this poet's way of seeing deeply, without hurry. *Mega-Galaxies* is alive with wonder."

**– ANNE MARIE MACARI,  
AUTHOR OF AMERIGUN**

"'I heard the bell-like jazz/of our galaxy' Elizabeth J. Coleman writes in her transcendent poem 'Waiting,' a line that resonates with two great strengths of her unique poetry. Coleman finds the deepest of images in the scientific facts of vast galaxies and our 'tiny blue planet,' and arranges them with an inspired musical brilliance, ingeniously syncopated, and ever more surprising and revelatory. Read these luminescent poems and you will feel your membership in the universe as never before."

**– LEE SLONIMSKY,  
AUTHOR OF PYTHAGORAS IN LOVE**

"Eloquent and incisive, Elizabeth J. Coleman's poems in *Mega-Galaxies* embrace the inscrutability of the celestial while pondering the meaning of existence. At the same time, they relish earthly observations and celebrate the small pleasures of life 'on our tiny blue planet / floating in the vastness.' I found it delightful and thought-provoking to read this collection."

**– LUCILLE LANG DAY,  
AUTHOR OF THE COSMOS AND ME**

# LETTER TO THE READER

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**DEAR READER,**

*Mega-Galaxies* brings together my love of community—from family and friends to strangers in a subway car and on the street—and of our tender and vulnerable planet.

This morning my granddaughter and I walked out the front door of our apartment building, turned right on Broadway, and ran into a couple on the street. The man was carrying a beautiful large American shorthair cat that looked cozy and happy in his arms. When I asked if they were headed to the vet, the man explained someone had opened a car door and dropped the cat on the street. They were indeed taking this orange green-eyed cat to the vet to get it checked out and were then going to bring him home. Maybe (I'm guessing probably) the cat and the man will end up in a poem.

This event made me think of the words of the secular Buddhist philosopher Stephen Batchelor, "How extraordinary it is to be here at all." How extraordinary it was to turn the corner just as these smiling people were walking by. In *Mega-Galaxies*, I try to tell of that kind of amazement and gratitude: to have been born, to have had so much love in my life, and to have the chance to tell about it.

Poetry lets us communicate the ineffable, sacred nature of our internal experience. It was through a poem I discovered a way to convey the tenderness of the enormous elephants we encountered in Tanzania, the gleaming salps, one-half inch long, I saw on a beach in Cape Cod, a man named Denis in Sardinia, a yoga teacher who kneeled beside me at water's edge. To me, writing (or reading) poetry is intimate and personal, just like painting a picture or sketching, or playing an acoustic guitar, or sculpting with our hands. It is something humanly made. It is the human being touching the strings, the human being holding the brush. I've learned there can be a kind of joy even in writing about painful experiences. In saying the unsayable. Poetry is a sort of prayer.

After studying poetry locally and receiving an MFA, after publishing two poetry collections, an eco-poetry anthology, and a number of chapbooks, now, in my seventies, I have written *Mega-Galaxies*, in which I've come the closest to saying all that I've longed to say, while respecting the boundaries of those who have accompanied me on my journey so far.

It brings me great joy to share this book with you.

**SINCERELY,  
ELIZABETH J. COLEMAN**

**NIGHTLY MIGRATION**

At night, a trillion creatures,  
larvae and invertebrates the size  
of a human fingernail, rise

from one thousand feet below  
the surface of the sea, eat,  
return before sunrise to lightless deep.

My father made my mother  
promise not to paint her fingernails  
red. He agreed not to go to a single

baseball game, she never to the opera.  
Her wedding dress blue, knee length,  
demure, innocent, yet sly, as if

only for the man with the Clark Gable  
moustache at that intimate wedding table.  
The inch-long larval lionfish

spreads an invisible fan on either side  
with points of light at the end of each fin,  
iridescent, luminous, blue.

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**THIS IS FOR**

the gorillas who groom their dead,  
the elephants who mourn theirs,  
the octopuses with their three brains  
and many disguises,

the pigeons who can count,  
the salps gleaming yesterday  
on Crane Beach  
—a thousand miniature pearls—

that is to say: all my fellow creatures  
on our tiny blue planet  
floating in the vastness