

Garren, Christine
AMONG THE MONARCHS
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Ms. Garren, who received her M.F.A. from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, has published an earlier volume of poetry, also in the University of Chicago Press Phoenix Poets series. Hers is a clear and unique voice, a rarity among university-sanctioned poets. Her work is direct, sparse without being sere, and forceful without being obnoxious. While there may be little to distinguish the free verse style of these short poems from their prose counterparts — prose poems, that is — in terms of rhythm and meter, she has a good ear. Garren may have set a record in how much can be conveyed in a limited space. She accomplishes what most writers in prose or verse find so difficult to do: draw their images, present their impressions, tell their story, and then get the hell out of the way. Garren has a perfect sense of when it's time to go home. Lurking within, as well as between, the lines of these tight poems are evocations of place and mood, and the suggestion that a story is unfolding. Whether what takes place is actual or imagined makes no difference because the true event is the burst of insight that transpires between poet and reader. One of the delightful aspects of these poems is the hungry pack of associations she gleefully unleashes, and then deftly reins in. In the piece entitled "Sulfur," she evokes the stillness of a summer evening by mentioning first the "crickets in the black air," and then describing her mother, in the next room, lighting a cigarette. "I hear her draw the match across the book." And by then, of course, one can even *smell* sulfur.

These are dense poems, not thick. The only wasted space is in the margins.