

SUEDE MANTIS / SOFT RAGE ≤ ≥ BLACK SUN LIT

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SOFT RAGE

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Swaying between command and curiosity, acquiescence and destruction, distance and proximity, Jennifer Soong's *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* proffers tenderness that teeters on the precipice of loss. Premised on this peril is not a paralyzing grief but a generative poiesis of "cruel desperation," in which poetry pronounces itself in contrasts and conditionals, had beens and renunciations. Like a tongue that tans flesh, like passion that's made pliable by the pulsing and glistening of language, *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* is the negotiated labor of a process rather than a product, raising interior operations to the surface while presenting an antithesis to mimetic construction. Neo-romantic and post-pastoral, the poems in Soong's second collection reinvigorate lyric possibility.

"As I try to make way through, but ultimately fall—or slide—down the ruins of empire toward what feels like a fast-approaching yet ever more uncertain end, I am finding myself in increasing, practical need of books like Jennifer Soong's *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage*. With its acid love balladry, affirmational pessimism, and percipient, angular grief, it slows, it is slowing me, down, sharpening my faculties, reintegrating my mind into and, even better, out of itself." —Brandon Shimoda, author of *The Desert*

"In *The Words of Selves*, Denise Riley writes that the 'self-describing "I" produces an unease which can't be mollified by any theory of its constructed nature,' and this seems to be the problem that is at the center of Jennifer Soong's engaging second collection. Beginning with a renunciation and then building upon a foundation of dazzling lyric and uncanny koans, *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* practices a ranging formal hunger in an environment where the speaker calmly declares 'the object of my life faces the objection of my world.' Soong's poems recall Riley's exquisite verses, certainly, but they also recall the assured, autonomous density of Lissa Wolsak's work, in that their language surprises and baffles, drives into pastoral ecstasy and bleak ecstasy. 'The solar pulses beat brilliantly through the trees,' but to 'learn to write it terribly,' we must remember that there is 'no destruction without self- / no destruction without self- / difficulties.' There is a gulf between abolition of self and explosion of self, and Soong's vivid poetry is suspended above that chasm, hovering as if by obscenity or miracle or both." —Ted Rees, author of *Dog Day Economy*

"A series of lyric refractions which wrangle a self and the experience of the world into language, Jennifer Soong's *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* engages with poetry's incorrigible taste for plurality, its mutations and re-productions. By turns arch, expansive, and direct, and negotiating the footwork of pronouns, *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* works toward the extraordinary understanding that love's poetics might resolve themselves purely as an undoing, a study of unraveled ends, as effacements in the direction of paradise." —Imogen Cassels, author of *Chesapeake*

JENNIFER SOONG is the author of the full-length collections and chapbooks *Near, At* (Futurepoem, 2019), *When I Ask My Friend* (bound with Daniel Owen's *Points of Amperture*, DoubleCross Press, 2021), and, most recently, *Contempt* (SPAM Zine & Press, 2021). Born in New Jersey, she holds degrees from Harvard and Princeton. She currently lives and teaches at Oxford.

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Literature/Poetry
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