



So Much Synth

Brenda Shaughnessy

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"Shaughnessy's particular genius . . . is utterly poetic, but essayistic in scope."—*The New Yorker*

"Brenda Shaughnessy's work is a good place to start for any passionate woman feeling daunted by poetry."
—*Cosmopolitan*

"Shaughnessy's voice is smart, sexy, self-aware, hip . . . consistently wry, and ever savvy."—*Harvard Review*

Subversions of idiom and cliché punctuate Shaughnessy's fourth collection as she approaches middle age and revisits the memories, romances, and music of adolescence. *So Much Synth* is a brave and ferocious collection composed of equal parts femininity, pain, pleasure, and synthesizer. While Shaughnessy tenderly winces at her youthful excesses, we humbly catch glimpses of our own.

From "Never Ever":

*Late is a synonym for dead which is a euphemism
for ever. Ever is a double-edged word,*

*at once itself and its own opposite: always
and always some other time.*

*In the category of cleave, then. To cut and to cling to,
somewhat mournfully...*

Brenda Shaughnessy was born in Okinawa, Japan and grew up in Southern California. She is the author of three books of poetry, including *Human Dark with Sugar*, winner of the James Laughlin Award and finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Our Andromeda*, which was a *New York Times Book Review* "100 Notable Books of 2013." She is an assistant professor of English at Rutgers University, Newark, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

So Much Synth Details

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Author : Brenda Shaughnessy

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From Reader Review So Much Synth for online ebook

Amie Whitemore says

I dreamt I read this book and so then I had to check it out from the library. It was wonderful, urgent, smart, provocative. Highly recommend reading it in your dreams as well as real life.

Elizabeth says

As heard on The New Yorker Radio Hour: <http://feeds.wnyc.org/~r/newyorkerrad...>

Jennifer AW says

A little too clever and self-aware for me at times to declare it a GREAT read, but it is certainly good. Worth a look. And probably (note to self) worth going back and looking (i.e. reading) again at some point.

Kylie says

I think the only reason I didn't enjoy this collection as much as I wanted to was because the stakes weren't so high. A lot of the poetry I love is a punch to the face, and this is...something else. It's very different from what I'm used to. Hands down, the best parts were about the poet's experiences in "the dyke loft" onward through her experiences during adolescence. Those were the most gripping, the ones I got lost in. Shaughnessy has this one line at the very beginning of the collection, though, that was my favorite from the whole work: "the past is so horribly fast."

...

"When I am really feeling, / I get very tired, I fall asleep.."

"There is no color but what's already / inside the eye."

"There is no body without life. / There is no mind without body. / There is no without."
-*McQueen Is Dead. Long Live McQueen.*

"Not even ink makes / the best ink; wine / better spreads a stain / and the mouth is / already wet - the better to contain a fire / or catch a fish / or tell a story sharpening / the point of the last / meal..."
-*Artisinal*

"If I were fourteen again, I wouldn't be in this situation now, / trying to write without a pen. Isn't blood a woman's ink?"

"During the 700 days I began to understand / that when love happened, I'd become real."

-Is There Something I Should Know?

Jennifer says

I suspect some of *So Much Synth* might appeal most to readers of a certain age or to people with a certain (questionable, perhaps) fondness for music from the early 80s. Fortunately, I fall right into the overlap of that Venn diagram.

"A Mix Tape: 'Don't You (Forget About Me)'" captures exactly the labor, hope, and doubt that went into the making and giving of those handmade compilations: "Mix tape: private language, lost art, / first book, cri de coeur, X-ray, diary. / An exquisitely direct and sweet / misunderstanding." And the long and essayistic "Is There Something I Should Know?" gets right so much about girlhood, puberty, and what women lose in the process of becoming women. (And yes, the title's a nod to Duran Duran. Have fun getting rid of that earworm.)

How do these poems work on me? "They run like a stocking / down the leg of the mind." What truth did the book offer me about vision and fascination? "It was never going / to be a masterpiece, we know that, / but it does hold fast whatever art is in us, / that thing that blooms like failure and is."

Aran says

Dense, super-poems packed with sound. Interspersed with some that remind me of Berryman's *Love & Fame* in which the poet lapses into the demotic, describes adolescent goings-on as if to you in a corner at a party where you're both drunk and confessing.

Leah Horlick says

Mixed-race poet Brenda Sahguhnessy telling it like it is about puberty and the horrors of growing up feminine. Yes.

Zoe says

Brenda Shaughnessy has a great style and a strong voice. She knows how to use language. I admire her writing.

Caroline says

3.5 stars

Another very earnest collection... seems to be the unintentional theme for my poetry reading this fall. I didn't always like the conversational tone of the poems, but there were many poignant moments that redeemed them for me. For once, though, I liked a long poem! "Is There Something I Should Know?" covers a lot of ground (the overarching theme being girlhood) effortlessly, and I kind of feel like I want to print it out now to have ready for my niece to read in a year or two, since she is quickly approaching her "700 days." On another note, the music references didn't always work for me in a literal sense, but the spirit of them did. "Living Will," one of the early poems, was a perfect encapsulation of my struggle with this collection as a whole: there were so many knock-out lines that then felt cheapened by some of the more obvious (dare I say indulgent) wordplay. Taken all together, I guess it was a mixed bag for me, but definitely an enjoyable collection and well worth a read, particularly for anyone who has ever been an obsessive fan of music.

Kate Mildew says

I love Brenda Shaughnessy and this book has a lot of indulgence, but she pulls it off. I disliked the two mixtape poems and I think the collection would be stronger without them. A really enjoyable read that stays cohesive while the poems change from visually rich and more opaque, to deeply nostalgic diary style poems. A joy to read!

Jesi Brubaker says

Best poem : Is There Something I Should Know. Everyone needs to read this poem!

Matthew says

If Shaughnessy's 'Interior with Sudden Joy' collection did not exist, I probably would have given this one five stars instead of four. The poems are personal without alienating. Shaughnessy's love of words and sounds is at its strongest in years. A perfect collection!

Sarah says

I generally can't stand the 80's as a theme or genre, but that is more of a personal preference. Shaughnessy's diction is from a distant galaxy.

Nat says

So Much Synth first caught my eye back in April with its dynamic last line of the introducing poem titled, **I Have a Time Machine**: "*the past is so horribly fast.*" I hurried on to request it from the publisher (Copper Canyon Press); and was beyond ecstatic and grateful when my copy finally arrived in my hands at the start of this month.

Subversions of idiom and cliché punctuate Shaughnessy's fourth collection as she approaches middle age and revisits the memories, romances, and music of adolescence. *So Much Synth* is a brave and ferocious collection composed of equal parts femininity, pain, pleasure, and synthesizer. While Shaughnessy tenderly winces at her youthful excesses, we humbly catch glimpses of our own.

Though I caught myself feeling a bit over-my-head with some poems at the start, the pace and momentum returned with the piece "**Is There Something I Should Know?**," which at a whopping 30 pages never lost me for even one sentence. It succeeds immensely in capturing numerous themes of adolescence over the course of time, including periods ("blood and mess and cramps and hormones"), Judy Blume, books, angst, anxiety, catcalling, body-image and more.

On that note, I think it's best now if I let the words and pieces speak for themselves with these quote excerpts:

"Adolescence is all absolutes: if bad, one must be the very worst to avoid being mistaken for average."

"I'd hide and lose and seek and find myself in every page: laughing, rereading and then re-rereading out loud, disbelieving the details till my system could absorb them like the nutrients they were."

*"I'm not even sure anything happened to me.
Or to whom everything happened."*

And the fact that I read "*Oh god, is there any music as good as what you heard at fourteen?*" the day I rediscovered this emo band I used to listen to at exactly that age was astronomical for me. [gets war flashbacks from the emo days]?

I think it goes without saying that **So Much Synth** was not only beautiful and raw but "real and aware of pain." And I'm eager to continue on with Shaughnessy's past and future works.

ARC kindly provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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Chris Roberts says

Dream deep
water walked across Jesus
startled, I awakened
still in my pajamas
I kicked open the front door
a briar patch

one protracted ouch!
I journeyed up to the undulating road
threw out my thumb
and deposited myself into a rainbow ice cream truck
it left me off at the marshland
met with with Edgar Allan Poe and Dracula
we smoked hash in an upside down cathedral
nearby was a lunatic asylum
Ward C, doors deadbolt locked
twilight it began
the barbarous females
roared maternally
impaled on spiked fences.

Chris Roberts