

Review by Nina MacLaughlin, *Boston Globe* Correspondent

Three Hands None

by Denise Bergman

Survivor story

Massachusetts poet Denise Bergman's new book, "Three Hands None" (Black Lawrence Press), is a searing series of poems about the harrowing assault she endured at knifepoint by a stranger in her own home, in her own bed. The tautness of the language propels the reader along; the experience of reading the book is like rushing across a tightrope to race across before you fall into the ravine below. Sections alternate between visceral and detached, and explore the way her body no longer felt like her own in the afterwards. "No one inhabited my skin," she writes. Much of the poem she writes in third person, but in one of its most devastating sections, she writes of instead using the word "my": "My mouth my neck I must say that word: my . . . my is the distance the knife traveled to slash the kernel of her being into pieces." In another affecting section, she repeats the words "I don't care" regarding her attacker's background: "do I care if his father left town his uncle pulled him into the woods. no. what is beaten out of the boy what is forced into the beaten-down boy so what. I don't care." This is a tense and potent collection on assault and aftermath.