

“What is a more quintessentially American story than an alien spacecraft crashing in the New Mexico desert in 1947? Rane Arroyo takes this story and writes a history not only of the event but of our country. There are cowboys, Indians, mayors, generals, J. Edgar Hoover—all in a painting of post-war paranoia and euphoria. Arroyo is half Norman Rockwell half Jackson Pollack, sketching photographically while splashing like a wild man. The reds of his small town nobodies merge with the blues of his own movieland dreams and the blacks and whites of what really happened. Or did it? Is Truth really Beauty? What can we know except this country is almost too weird to believe, but we open our eyes every day, and believe we must. *The Roswell Poems* is Americana at its most beautiful and bizarre.”

BARBARA HAMBY, author of *Delirium* and *Babel*

“‘The 20th Century is full of footnotes,’ writes Rane Arroyo. In *The Roswell Poems*, the footnotes for Roswell, New Mexico, 1947, are written in couplets, in sonnets, in lyrical dramatic monologues, chatroom IMs, and imaginary film trailers. What happened in Roswell takes on 21st Century political significance in Arroyo’s newest and most accomplished work, and reminds us that ‘logic/ (is) a dreamer with holes in its pockets’ and that ‘mystery is/ one of the names that God wears.’”

KATHY FAGAN, author of *The Charm* and *MOVING & ST RAGE*

“Rane Arroyo’s *The Roswell Poems* with sly brilliance create a ‘memory foil’ of poetry that pivots on a cowboy rancher discovering crash debris in the New Mexico desert. Arroyo dives down into that wreck and with his dream elegance of words, music, and psychological probing, exposes all the offbeat complexity of a land whose first peoples already knew about alien invasions. This book is a tour de force, interweaving individual stories with history, present time and future, with the mythic exerting its paradoxical truths and possibilities through it all. *The Roswell Poems* are America, right up to 9/11 and beyond. To read this book is to be abducted in heart-shaking and beautiful ways by Rane Arroyo’s vision-craft.”

SUSAN DEER CLOUD, recipient of the 2007 NEA Literature Fellowship and author of *The Last Ceremony*

THE ROSWELL POEMS

OTHER BOOKS BY RANE ARROYO

Columbus's Orphan (1993)

The Singing Shark (1996)

Pale Ramón (1998)

Home Movies of Narcissus (2002)

The Portable Famine (2005)

How to Name a Hurricane: Stories (2005)

The Buried Sea: New & Selected Poems (2008)

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Cover Image: iStockPhoto
Cover Design: Andrew Craft
USA ISBN-13: 978-1-60226-001-6
USA ISBN-10: 1-60226-001-X
Printed in the United States of America
First Edition: 2008

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arroyo, Rane.
The Roswell poems / Rane Arroyo.-- 1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographic references.
ISBN-13: 978-1-60226-001-6 (pbk)
ISBN-10: 1-60226-001-X (pbk)
1. Unidentified flying objects--Poetry. 2. Unidentified flying objects--Sightings and encounters--New Mexico--Roswell--Poetry. [I. Roswell (N.M.)--Poetry.] I. Title.
PS3551.R722R67 2008
811'.54--dc22

2007051388

P 1 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Y 14 13 12 11 10 09 08

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Roswell Poems have been read and commented upon by readers, other poets and poetry audiences over many years. I was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award for 2007, an award that allowed me to complete this book.

While many historical figures are evoked in this work, I don't make any claims to represent these individuals faithfully; this is a work of fiction/poetry.

I thank the many online guardians and skeptics of the Roswell Incident who've taught me much about passion. Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore's *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* informed this project in its 5th year.

None of these poems were published individually for I wanted them to be read together. Many thanks to WordFarm for supporting my vision as an artist, especially Marci Johnson.

To Glenn and the girls.

To the carriers of light in these dark days.

*To my students who know I praise and
envy them for their bright futures.*

*To Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, Agatha Christie
and the other storytellers of my youth.*

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*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

INTRODUCTION

On July 1947, a cowboy rancher named Mac Brazel found crash debris from an airplane, weather balloon or a UFO in the desert. This chance discovery transformed the quiet town of Roswell, New Mexico into ground zero for theories of government conspiracies, space alien sightings, and science vs. religion debates. This sequence offers poetic constructions around a powerful mythic moment in contemporary culture and maps how an initial event moves far from its genesis. There was another nearby crash that was reported to have alien bodies. Soon in the mix were: possible illegal Nazis, government men, the Cold War warriors and Americans with spiritual crises. This work merges several timelines that offer various interpretation of “events,” for contradictions define this “incident.” The Roswell story/stories offer a new kind of mystery play in which everyone gets to participate—as believers, critics, or spectacle devotees. Something important happened in that obscure town, something happened that is still with us in the 21st century—but what?

BEFORE THE HOOPLA: 1946

Sleepy Roswell, New Mexico
isn't blooming with tourists yet.

Skies, and not waves, break
against a shifting landscape.

The town echoes of cowboy
boots and coyote alarm clocks:

English, Spanish and rattlesnake
hymns don't burden the miles.

A week's sweat work is rewarded
with illuminated beers in dull bars.

Roswell doesn't suspect that it's
to be the New World Bethlehem.

Its innocence will be pilfered, but
for now, trucks stir dust as they

race nowhere and arrive there.
Winds steal footprints and prayers.

UFOS OVER AMERICA

Radars read space and low clouds
on blurry screens for it's the bold
age of science. Why then is logic
a dreamer with holes in its pockets?
Above Roswell, White Sands and
Alamogordo, objects pause before
hurrying off into the great black
that surrounds this blued Earth.
UFOs complicate our alphabets
as newspapers brag of raw crashes.
The Wright Brothers taught us that
flight is our evolutionary future.



The young mock the unknown that
hasn't known them yet. (Mystery is
one of the names that God wears.)
Post-war skies are full of wonders
and winking signs as America,
despite its homespun Christianity,
can't explain away all sky traffic.
Weather balloons do look like
skulls when they linger in profound
heights, but what is it that, though
wingless, won't yield to gravity?
Invasion is not the boy-next-door.



There's a crash in Circleville, Ohio—

when did the Earth get mysterious?
There are photos of silver wreckage,
an elephant after tusks have been
pulled out. Soon, grinning soldiers
are featured in impure newspapers.
The young mock the unknown as if
being jaded is a talent, a need.
The exposé is a choreographed
spectator sport, a modern mirror in
which we see ourselves as mortals
long abandoned by wide-eyed angels.

OUTSIDE OF THE CITY LIGHTS

A crash becomes The Crash.
Hard roars are still heard

as far sounds, singing wounds.
The suddenness of it, the dream

seeking a dreamer, the hasty
splitting of the atom and Adam,

Heaven stuttering like a storm,
New Mexico aging without warning.

EYEWITNESSES

MR. AND MRS. DAN WILMONT:

There was an oval shape in the night,
a lump of coal on fire but not burning.

WILLIAM WOODY:

My father and I watched
a light with a red tail—a comet?
Satan's trail in one's stare?
It went Northwest, killed the compass.

MOTHER SUPERIOR MARY BERNADETTE:

We were changing shifts at
St. Mary's Hospital when
from the third floor windows
facing mountains, a fire grabbed
the horizon and nearly broke
its neck. I know that miracles
need holy approval from the See,
but I was the one who was there
doing the seeing—but I must have
blinked for all became black.

SISTER CAPISTRANO:

It was an undressed object in flames,
a threat to common sense: it was
a far roundness like a button falling
from the Virgin's dress, only
not that and more like a torch
seeking the shape of a human hand.

OTHER EYEWITNESSES:

The others stay quiet, cached in
their real fear of being mocked.
Some confess to priests that they
saw Satan smoking in the dark.
Some build bunkers against beasts
no longer abstract or far away.

ANONYMOUS (NURSING HOME STORY, 1995):

We were in his truckbed, naked,
lovers refusing to be zero. It was 1947,
the year of the matador. We were there,
laughing in the desert. Then glass
stars exploded, then a slow-motion
apocalypse that made us stop kissing.
It was a time when secrets thrived:
like us, the U.S., and the universe.
We leaned against each other and
glorified being human. Invasions,
evasions, visions. We made Heaven
crash! Yes, we were that beautiful.

MAC BRAZEL:

I heard a bookish bomb dropped from
an angel's slippery hands: BOOM!
A tune culled from the Alpha's tremors.

MAC BRAZEL TALKS TO THE POET,
MAN-TO-MAN

A ranch manager like me shouldn't
become an American Ulysses, Buddha
in shit-kicking boots, or John Wayne's
stunt double. Sometimes I wake up
from yelling at the younger me as I close
my eyes to imagine the poised world.
A protagonist should be ageless and not
wear the weather of lost days on his
or her face. Anything can happen here
with or without God's permission.
Poet, don't turn me into Sisyphus and
make me saddle the sun again and again.