**Book review**

**BEAST IN THE APARTMENT BY TONY BARNSTONE**  
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Tony Barnstone's *Beast in the Apartment* is a book of poetry in which both time and space "pass like breath" ("The Burried Buddha"). This collection of spiritual thought and movement carries the reader through narrative and poetic prose with each poem, which all "rub against each other to see what might spark" ("Newton's First Law of Motion"). Successfully so, the collection's individual poems work together to point at the "beast [...] in the dark apartment" ("Beast in the Apartment") or, more abruptly speaking, the monsters in one's own head.

Barnstone, this master of sonnets and writer of formal poetry, claims to have starting writing this collection with, as he wrote in an email, "formal poems [...] that retain internal rhyme and rhythm," but the project evolved to become a "meditation of casualty" through content and form. Thus, his defiance of formal poetry resulted in a wonderfully jolting final collection of sonnets and free verse. The collection radiates casualty and self-reflection, with its quick-passing moments in time and its personal, conflicted characterization of the narrator. He successfully uses the external and internal sense of time to question and make sense of the natural world.

The collection unfolds in five sections, each one encompassing its own individual aspects of time and space. All of the poems are free verse or sonnet form and hang on the left margin, but range in different verb tenses and points of view. Each section includes one pair of partner poems; these complement or oppose each other.

The first section, "The Burried Buddha," portrays internal chaos and the "black hands" ("20 Watts") of a writer but also the hands of a human being, the "wooden Buddha on [the speaker's] desk" ("Newton's First Law of Motion") tauntingly and humorously judging their human-natured temptations and pleasures. The speaker's humanist outlook on the past is represented through moments of the surreal and the narrator's grasping for believing in something.

The second section, "All Fall Down," is the most abstract but maintains the element of time and relativism. It is filled with meditations of death, misfortune, and the internal self and is the most chaotic in content. Yet this section also contains the most sonnets, presenting the pushing and pulling of the individual's relationship with nature, in poems such as "Die."

In "A Watch From Istanbul," the third section of the book, all the poems use the image of a watch, while expressing elements of time and history. In the poem "Signature," for example, the narrator describes the watch as a "gold heart belonging to another age," as if the watch is a living, breathing reminder of time itself.

"Rota Fortuna," the fourth section of the book, carries the reader through association and relationship of both creatures and human beings. The partner poems "What He Said" and "What She said," for example, present a small point in time in which two people meet, but both characters' thoughts sabotage themselves, deeming that "we are all lost." This section shifts the reader to the conclusion, to the last section "Beast in the Apartment."

The last section, from which the book's title is drawn, is the most internally dark and gratifying finish to a memorable body of work. It is full of harsh realism, with the "fifty year old man in a lion suit" ("Beast in the Apartment") and "fingers whisk[ing] the air [for] something what's there – and something that is not" ("Vermont Ghost Song").
Tony Barnstone's collection rests on gentle morbidity and time-keeping sorrows yet exudes energy and contingency. The reader is frequently reminded that, even in the darkest ways, we are connected with humans and nature, as if we are all joined as one as the "planet [is] breathing" ("The Empty Apartment").