



A Cloud of Unusual Size and Shape: Meditations on Ruin and Redemption

By Matt Donovan

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A Cloud of Unusual Size and Shape is about the flawless connections between antiquity and the present, personal experience to historical events, architecture to art installation to literature. The redemptive power of beauty hovers over this spectacular work, reminding us that darkness and light make an inextricable pattern over our lives and form the delicate balance of what ultimately makes life worthwhile, what gives meaning to the sorrow and joy of being human.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Matt Donovan’s essays are haunted, searching, lyrical, and above all dogged in their ability to conjoin personal history with public history, whether he is investigating the ruins of Pompeii, the Trinity bomb site, or his grandparents’ ghostly home movies. His voice is erudite but intimate, and his self-reckonings and troubled reflections almost invariably give way to a bracing sense of wonder. ‘Memory,’ wrote the ever-canny Walter Benjamin, ‘is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theatre.’ Matt Donovan understands this metaphor in a manner that is shared by only a precious few of his contemporaries, and his book is a dazzling performance.” — David Wojahn, author of *World Tree*

“*In A Cloud of Unusual Size and Shape*, Matt Donovan spins his obsessions—Pompeii, the Pantheon, Raphael’s Transfiguration—into storytelling gold. Donovan’s distinctive vision, gorgeous prose, and curious mind combine brilliantly. A pleasure to read, from start to finish.” — Dinty W. Moore, author of *Between Panic and Desire*

“There’s no contemporary essayist who can touch Matt Donovan for his companionableness, his easy and immense erudition, and his refreshing skepticism about what Randall Jarrell once called ‘the monumental certainties that go perpetually by, perpetually on time.’ In our time, the certainties Donovan rebels against are our aversion to facts, our cultural laxness in proclaiming Sensibility King/Queen, and our gargantuan self-regard that wants to see profundity in watching a rhinoceros push a pea from one end of its cage to the other. But never does Donovan scold or rant or turn village explainer. Instead, with self-deprecating modesty and humor, Donovan walks the walk as well as talking the talk. He is devoted to facts, skeptical of himself and his desires, and deeply in love with the contradictory ways that history and personal experience shape each other. His meditations on the atomic bomb, on Pompeii and the Pantheon in Rome, are unparalleled for their speculative reach and grasp of physical detail.” — Tom Sleigh

“Matt Donovan masterfully reveals how art elevates what is ruined and captures what is absent. These meditations, which collapse time and geography, bring into poignant relief the nature of the untamable mind and our complexly vexed humanity. At its heart, the book is an homage to the impenetrable mystery of the sacred.” — Kathleen Graber, author of *The Eternal City*

About the Author

Matt Donovan is the author of the book of poems *Vellum* (Houghton Mifflin/Mariner, 2007), which won the 2006 Bakeless Prize in Poetry as well as the 2008 Larry Levis Reading Prize from Virginia Commonwealth University. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Poetry*, and his nonfiction has appeared in journals such as *AGNI*, *Blackbird*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Threepenny Review*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

Donovan is the recipient of a Rome Prize in Literature, a Whiting Award, a Pushcart Prize, a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Breadloaf Fellowship in poetry, and a Lannan Writing Residency Fellowship. His work has been acclaimed in *The New Yorker*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*.

Matt Donovan received his MA from Lancaster University and his MFA from New York University where he attended as a New York Times Fellow. He is currently co-chair of the Creative Writing and Literature Department at Santa Fe University of Art and Design.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deborah Mele:

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