

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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***New Title from Poet Sarah Stern:  
But Today Is Different***



In *But Today Is Different*, Sarah Stern's first full-length collection of poems, she explores the themes of loss, desire, the erotic, getting older in a youth-obsessed culture, and finding the mystical in the ordinary. Several poems are shaped by conversations between an enduring voice and a mortal one that asks questions. The answers are in the shared spaces of wonder about the knowable and unknowable. With wisdom, humor, and humility, Stern brings the reader to a new place of deep feeling.

*Word for Love*. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications, recently in *The American Dream*, *The Best of Ducts.org*, *Epiphany*, *Freefall*, and *Verse Daily*. She is a four-time winner of the Bronx Council on the Arts' Poetry Award. She graduated from Barnard College and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She lives in New York City and is a senior associate at the EastWest Institute.

Visit her at [www.sarahstern.me](http://www.sarahstern.me).

**Sarah Stern** is the author of *Another*



***But Today Is Different:***

by [Sarah Stern](http://www.sarahstern.me)

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## Interview with Author Sarah Stern

### **When did you first start writing poetry?**

I started writing when I was 12 years old. I had to contribute something literary to my elementary school yearbook, and my mother suggested that I write a poem. So we wrote one together, and I've continued to write since then.

### **Does your mother figure large in your work?**

Yes, I am a poet because of her. Her life experiences span the traumatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. She barely escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 and came to New York City as a 16-year-old with basically just the clothes on her back. She spoke of wanting to lose her accent and become an American. She was a wonderful story teller. She was so happy to be an American, to have survived, to have lived, at least in part, the American Dream. Her stories and her will to survive and go on are at the center of so many of my poems. *But Today Is Different* is in her memory.

### **How about the rest of your family?**

I grew up in a family of 7 children. I was the youngest and only girl. Growing up with 6 older brothers shaped my experiences as a woman in ways that I'm only realizing now. I wore pants under my dresses way before it was fashionable! Many of my poems touch on what it means to be a woman, to feel safe, to find one's voice, to feel confident, to explore desire—all of which are still as relevant today as they've ever been.

### **What is the most difficult thing about writing poetry?**

There are many difficult things! But perhaps the most is the self doubt—the nagging question of “Is what I’m experiencing valid?” This question goes back to the idea of being a woman—and women’s experiences. I think all artists struggle with this, but perhaps women, in particular, have more difficulty in believing in themselves and taking the time for themselves to sing it to the world. The great poet, Galway Kinnell just died, and he puts it perfectly, as to the role of the poet and why it is so difficult. The *New York Times* obituary quotes him as saying: “Through it all, he held that it was the job of poets to bear witness. ‘To me,’ he said, ‘poetry is somebody standing up, so to speak, and saying, with as little concealment as possible, what it is for him or her to be on earth at this moment.’”

### **New York figures large in your work. Can you speak about that?**

Yes, for me, New York is a living poem. I feel lucky to be able to live and work here. It's not an easy place, but I feel it's one with endless possibilities. It is continually evolving—terrific energy. Just when you think you can't take its in-your-face toughness any more, someone appears out of no where and holds the door for you. It's really a magical place. My poem “The Mannequin at Grand Central Station” tries to capture that energy.

### **Your poems also touch on the Great Recession that we're slowly coming out of? Is that right?**

Yes, my poem, “CV; On Looking for a Job” is one of those poems. I experienced it firsthand, as so many Americans did. It was a critical moment in our nation's history and had a profound effect on the way we see ourselves. People react very strongly to this poem. It hits home.

## Poems from *But Today Is Different*

### Electricity

In the back of the small cab in India  
our knees touched.  
I wanted to ask you,  
Do you feel it? And you'd say what?

I'd answer—that attraction—  
that spark that my mother  
warned me about, *Don't ever pull  
out a plug from the wall with wet hands.*

But I did it anyway,  
and there it was  
a flash and then a zap  
right through me. I lived.

And here we live too—  
the beautiful children  
peer in on us,  
the man with 1½ arms

bangs on our window. I'm sorry.  
I'm sorry that I can't make  
this world right.  
He looks back at me and moves on

as I feel the electricity again  
in Old Delhi, the chickens  
in cages squawking, heaps of orange flowers.  
The black goat with blue eyes

in the car next to us  
takes it all in, even those knees next to mine  
and my groin, how peculiar and selfish  
we are with our desires.

## Poems from *But Today Is Different* cont.

### Tongue/Fire/Eclipse/Groove

I want to make love  
to you my breasts against yours  
my tongue in you hard.

I want you to come  
so that I hear it loud  
in my mouth gone mad.

Tell me how this goes  
This shift first snow today snow  
White stars burning.

\*\*

Dark horse stands in the corral  
White fence, frozen earth.

She is circling and staring off in the distance  
Her mane soft coal.

You've entered me like fire  
I'm black and blue waiting for you.

\*\*\*

I knew then at 3 a.m.  
Out on the terrace 23 degrees  
I shouted it at the moon  
Copper/yellow/egg  
An iota of nothingness in my winter coat  
And my son's basketball sneakers,  
I looked up, the stars shining  
With a light that pierced/changed me  
My voice echoed over the park and Henry Hudson  
I was standing in the night air  
Shouting for all time  
*I love you* to no one—to you.

\*\*\*\*

Why does food taste so good  
when I'm with you

I keep everything from when  
we're together—even the stubs—

as though they were the hours  
we were together

I don't erase your message  
Your voice for the listening

Caught wave  
Tell me when this will end

## Poems from *But Today Is Different* cont.

Or is this what it will be  
You and me

Sick with aching sweet  
Nothing a kind of smooth want

You are the water  
I the stone

You're beginning to leave  
A contour, a groove

On me  
Feel it.

## Poems from *But Today Is Different* cont.

### Red

She said *a country is always a woman.*

Why?

*Blood and dirt in the wounds.*

Do they ever heal?

*No, but the borders change like our bellies.*

*See how the lines have switched*

*recently around the navel*

*how they swerve out*

*now that you've got a history.*

\*

Mother said when her father came to America  
the only job he could find was cleaning toilets

in the Washington Heights Loews movie theater.  
She saw *Gone with the Wind* for free.

When it was over he said in Schwäbisch,  
“Don’t you want to see it again?”

She said no, once was enough. She wanted  
to go home, get on with becoming a citizen

paint her nails red.

She loved the fire escape

how it zee-d to the ground  
reminding her of a way out.

## Poems from *But Today Is Different* cont.

### Parts Suspended

Sweet death—

    lend me some wire,  
wood and blue paint so that I can hover

with her tonight

    as you make your way  
around my mother, her body

now angular as

    a Calder mobile  
her clavicle;

a ship's mast, a look out

    to that far off country.  
*Panic sets in*, she says,

*in REXINGEN the fields are the same.*

*My father made mistakes.*  
*We should have left earlier.*

## Praise for *But Today Is Different*

“Sarah Stern has written an utterly frank, headlong, passionate, and deeply engendered book of a woman in mid-life. She writes out of her own longings, her devotions as a daughter and a mother, her fiery supplications. *But Today Is Different* may be printed with ink, but it was written with fire.”

—Edward Hirsch, author of *A Poet's Glossary* and *Gabriel*

“Sarah Stern’s first collection of poems, *But Today Is Different*, is a marvel. Wise, compassionate, erotic, plain-spoken, studded with wonderful moments—a black goat with blue eyes, an aging mother’s clavicle ‘like a Calder mobile,’ an iconic lipstick stain on a coffee cup—Stern’s vision puts a shine on the ordinary (a trip to Macy’s, a scraped knee) and gives it back to us as something wondrous and new. A new voice, in which readers will hear echoes of Philip Levine and Grace Paley . . . and a real achievement.”

—Cynthia Zarin, author of *The Ada Poems* and *An Enlarged Heart: A Personal History*

