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For more information contact:
Meredith Nini at (773) 702-0279
mnini@uchicago.edu



Dialect of Distant Harbors

Dipika Mukherjee

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This poetry collection explores themes of home, grieving, and kinship.

With wonder, empathy, and even rage, *Dialect of Distant Harbors* summons a shared humanity to examine issues of illness and family. Dipika Mukherjee's poems redefine belonging and migration in a misogynistic and racist world. "A grievous vastness to this world," she writes, "beyond human experience."

As the world recovers from a global pandemic and the failure of modern government, these poems are incantations to our connections to the human family—whether in Asia, Europe, or the United States. *Dialect of Distant Harbors* focuses on what is most resilient in ourselves and our communities.

"Mukherjee's latest poetry collection is a penetrating, intercontinental, and reflective sheaf of poems on aging, illness, faith, and family written in a keen diasporic music. Mukherjee is skilled in various poetic forms. Her vision is clear and her sensory awareness of the stuff of human experience is stunning. As she says, 'sometimes the third eye is a camera, / sometimes a fist to the heart.'"—Maya Marshall, author of *All the Blood Involved in Love*

"Lush, fierce, and tender, these poems sing of family and childhood, love and loss, while grappling with cultural identity, migration, womanhood, and race. If, as Czeslaw Milosz says, language is the only homeland, then to read this book is to rediscover that beloved yet elusive soil."—Angela Narciso Torres, author of *What Happens Is Neither, Blood Orange, and To the Bone*

Dipika Mukherjee is the author of two novels, *Shambala Junction* and *Ode to Broken Things*, and a short story collection, *Rules of Desire*. She has published two books of poetry, *The Palimpsest of Exile* and *The Third Glass of Wine*. She teaches at the Graham School at the University of Chicago, as well as StoryStudio Chicago.

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Additional praise for *Dialect of Distant Harbors*

“Whether writing ghazals or haibuns or unpacking the brutality of recent historical events, Mukherjee’s collection is a hybridic journey of translations, storytelling, reportage, lyrical unfoldings, and acts of witness. Language and lineage take center stage as the palimpsest of memory, history, and utterance is explored. Though steeped in elegies for the dead, Mukherjee’s book is also praise-filled and empowering as she guides us through a detailed terrain of muslin petticoats, Weird Al, Calcutta heat, and ‘black diamonds under bare feet,’ as well as the rich odors of smeared chutney, woodsmoke, and ink. By the end, I feel Mukherjee’s ‘benediction / in the prickle of my scalp.’”—Simone Muench, author of *Orange Crush* and *Wolf Centos*

“Among contemporary poetry exploring the complicated subject of ‘where I’m from,’ Mukherjee’s work stands out in these frank, fast-moving, and musical poems. She takes us into worlds of food, fragrance, and ‘goddesses,’ as well as ‘women / who bury infant girls in the ground, into / milk vats to drink until they drown.’ Her poems reside in Chicago, Calcutta, Delhi, and Door County, Wisconsin, as intimate as they are political. A woman relaxes on a downtown sidewalk enjoying an impromptu concert by a street musician, and a mother arriving at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport is panicked when her nine-year-old son is led away for an inspection of his ‘foreign passport.’ A poem takes its epigraph from the widely publicized gang-rape and murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi in imagining a communal shawl, ‘stained,’ by physical evidence and memory, worn by all women who experience sexual violence. As a poet with a doctorate in Sociolinguistics, Mukherjee enjoys and honors languages, occasionally mixing in Bengali, her ‘chalice of magic.’ She has a well-tuned ear and feel for form, knowing when to write in tight, alliterative lines, when to swing across the page, and when to write in the prose of a haibun. Reading this book is a sensory pleasure, musically and visually.”—Debra Bruce, author of *Survivors’ Picnic*, *What Wind Will Do*, and *Sudden Hunger*