



# MOSTLY HUMAN

POEMS BY SHEILA SQUILLANTE

WINNER OF THE WICKED WOMAN BOOK PRIZE

Awarded in 2020 by BrickHouse Books,  
Maryland's oldest continuously operating small press.

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# Sheila is...

AN ENGAGING  
READER, EDITOR &  
EDUCATOR OF 20+  
YEARS AVAILABLE FOR  
READINGS, CLASS  
VISITS, BOOK CLUBS &  
OTHER ENGAGEMENTS.



SUPER GOOD AT THIS WHOLE ZOOM THING  
& ALSO WILLING TO APPEAR F2F WITH SOCIAL  
DISTANCING PROTOCOLS IN PLACE.

MOSTLY HUMAN will appeal to Gen-X girls who lived  
through it then, and Gen-Z girls who are living it  
now, & anyone who ever longed to escape.

Teenage angst. Ugh.

(Also, aliens.)

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--For Immediate Release--

# MOSTLY HUMAN

poems by  
SHEILA SQUILLANTE

*These poems are crafted as a spacecraft and brave enough to  
“hip-check the charming abyss.”*

—**Diane Seuss**, author of *Four-Legged Girl and Still Life  
with Two Dead Peacocks and a Girl*

*This book is scary beautiful.*

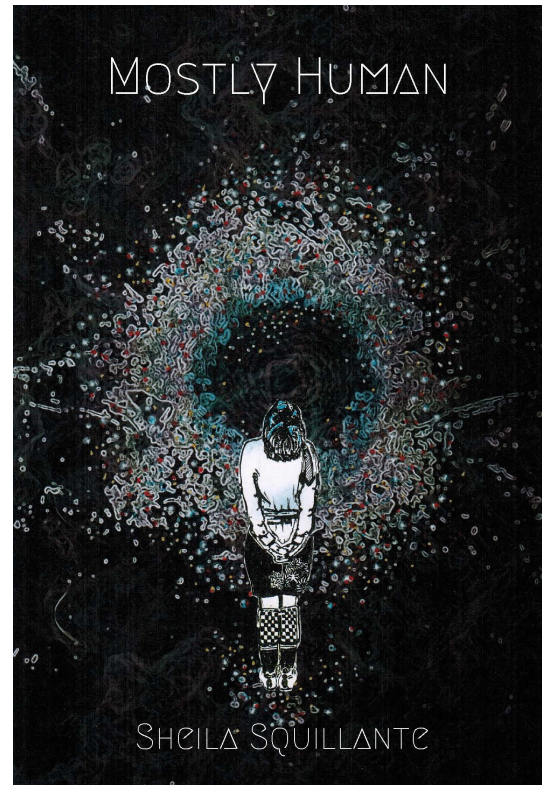
—**W. Todd Kaneko**, author of *The Dead Wrestler  
Elegies and This is How the Bone Sings*

*Round Baby is the Gen X offspring of the Eraserhead baby and  
Love’s Baby Soft, herald of the darkly absurd late 20th century.*

—**Heidi Czerwiec**, author of *Conjoining and Fluid States*

MOSTLY HUMAN follows a character called Round Baby, who is mostly human, most of the time, through her childhood and adolescence in the 1970s and 80s. Told episodically and chronologically, the poems explore themes of teenage anxiety, body image, family and peer relationships, all while alien forces hover & whisper nearby. A Fabulist/Feminist coming of age story, "Mostly Human" time-travels back through the pop culture of the time, revisiting sites like Shaun Cassidy, Skylab, Mount Saint Helens, Chernobyl, 80's hair metal, Cold War television, the Challenger Disaster, Halley's comet and more.

SHEILA SQUILLANTE is the author of the poetry collection, BEAUTIFUL NERVE and three chapbooks of poetry. Her second collection, MOSTLY HUMAN, has won the 2020 Wicked Woman Book Prize from BrickHouse Books and will be published in October, 2020. She is also co-author of the writing craft book, "Writing the Personal: Getting Your Stories Onto the Page." She directs the MFA program in creative writing at Chatham University, where she is Executive Editor for The Fourth River, a journal of nature and place-based writing. She lives in Pittsburgh with her family.



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## Round Baby Lives!




# 10 Sample Poems

digital copy available upon request

## Round Baby Hangs on No Matter How

Twice your life ago, sat a Round Baby  
on the porch of a small yellow house  
near the broken side of the Poconos.  
Fat stumps of leg poking out from under  
the walker, toes gripping purchase  
on the urethaned wood of the deck.  
Grandparents somewhere,  
parents, presumably, too. In the picture,  
Baby holds a nubby orange ball. It looks  
like a planet. It looks like a tumor. She chews  
on it and pulls futilely at the foam. Manual  
dexterity comes later. But Baby can already grip  
Grandfather's cigar. Origin stories called her  
strong. Said she'd  
hang on no matter  
how hard he pulled it away.


(Under the deck,  
slick flagstone  
and moss. Earthworms  
and salamanders  
glinting,  
like stars in  
the dark woods.)





## Round Baby Pivots & Bursts

The gym floor's slick  
and nobody's watching so  
Baby twirls in sweater tights,  
gathering static with every  
twist. A scrawling  
proclamation, gyroscopic  
chaos, hot and faster, around  
she goes and when she stops  
the whole gym glows  
like an ember. Baby pivots  
and bursts from her uniform skirt,  
blue plaid sparks spray as she spins  
like a pencil, ground down  
and sharpened to a beautiful, brutal  
point.





## Round Baby Turns up the Record Player

Don't borrow trouble,  
Baby. Nobody knows  
what's swirling  
inside your dirty  
mind. Mother thinks  
she reads signs inscribed  
on your thighs—purpled  
stretch marks she mistakes  
for backtalk, bold blood.  
She's wrong about you.  
When she comes to the shut  
door of your room, pretend  
you're not in there, slicking  
your lips to that boy. Say,  
Simulating earth worm dissection,  
or  
Listening to Twisted Sister.

Stay hungry, Baby.

Turn up the record player  
and let her believe you.

She will--  
for a little while.





## Round Baby Reaches toward Interstitial Space

At Easter time, there is a lengthening. The light  
over the earth grows longer. The hyacinth stalks


grow taller until purple and pink nubs rupture.  
Baby lengthens, too. Legs and arms and neck.

She feels herself reaching toward interstitial  
space. Her head, though, is still a ball.

The kitchen smells of sulfur and vinegar.  
Her stained fingers thrum Formica

tabletop. Eggs at least have a shallow end.  
Something to interrupt the worry. But balls

roll forever, endless, in every direction.  
You have to chase them into the street.





## Round Baby's All Body

Bouncing Baby, strong-  
gripped girl,  
whirring, twirling, swallow,  
and grow. Billow  
and bound and bleed.

Eat.


Swim under  
the ocean and out  
of the way. Hide  
in your closet. Stay. Open  
the bathroom door.

Smudge your blood so  
Mother can see.  
Bend toward vortex.  
Bruise your shins,  
arms, flailing or pumping

like pistons. Baby  
you're a fat little furnace,  
a flesh engine  
burning with syntax and symbols,  
humming and stomach,

bursting hips  
with plush lips  
with wishes  
and watching  
and worry,

with will.





## First Transmission

*In 1977, a speaker calling themselves "Vrillon" created a broadcast interruption to a transmitter of the UK's Independent Broadcasting Authority. They delivered a warning for Earth citizens to remove their weapons of evil and learn to live together in peace.*

Baby is the disaster  
which threatens  
your world,

and the voice  
of the weapons

within you.





## Round Baby Runs Away

At the end of the block,  
there's a bus stop,  
no, a lamp post,  
no, a mouse hole.


Baby, Baby, where  
are you planning to go?

Stuff your bag  
with provisions:  
Matchbox cars,  
Shaun Cassidy,  
Skylab, Funyuns. Take

the busted umbrella because  
Mother's always calling  
for rain. Roll your socks  
into tight round  
stones. When your feet

get wet, go cold,  
stretch them all the way  
up and over, bind your top  
to your bottom, keep your body  
whole and warm and going.


Run, Baby. The street  
is long and tree-less  
and the summer sun  
wants to eat you like  
a sweet, fat plum.





## Territory


I lick  
my way  
across hot  
wires, over  
slick teeth,  
wrap myself  
around tube-  
socked calves.  
The desk pressing  
into my back.  
In social studies  
class we are  
studying some war.  
Muscles tight.  
Tongue. Tongue.  
This is  
not the first  
mouth but  
I will say it  
is, later. I will  
claim it.  
The border walls collapse  
into themselves  
when not in use.  
We kiss  
like the enemies we are,  
out in the open  
without cover  
or partition.





## Round Baby Slips on Her Sexy

Baby's stuck inside a cricket cage.  
Got caught and can't get out.  
It was bound to happen, Baby,  
how you slipped on your sexy  
exoskeleton. Fun dress-up,  
such drag. All that light chirping  
from your fingertips. Be glad  
they found you out  
there. God knows where  
you thought you were going.  
Pull your swollen ovipositor  
back from the ready ground.  
Lift your leg to sing.





## Round Baby Boils the Bones

At the kitchen table,  
Baby tears at roasted chicken  
from the grocery store,  
pulling limp skin loose.  
It's mid-afternoon  
and sister's in her bedroom,  
squirming beneath a boy she blew  
at school. No sound coming  
out of there, but Baby knows.  
Fingers to greasy lips, she feeds  
herself though she's not hungry for  
once. The white meat separates

easily from the breast plate,  
slides off in one long chunk  
she can shred. In a few years,  
Sister will escape, fly through  
an open window, grabbing at  
skin as she goes. When all the flesh  
comes off the bird, Baby will boil  
the bones for soup  
and for jewelry—wishbone  
strung like a brittle pendant  
from the ripcord hanging  
loosely at her neck.

