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James Bourey reviews *Falling* By Pilar Graham, Stubborn Mule Press

[*Falling*](#)

[By Pilar Graham](#)

[Stubborn Mule Press – 2025](#)

Devil's Elbow, MO

Having never encountered the first name “Pilar” I looked it up and learned it is of Spanish origin and comes from “Maria del Pilar” which means Mary of the Pillar. This was a title given to the Virgin Mary after her appearance – an apparition seen by St. John the Apostle – on a pillar in Zaragoza, Spain. And so was born the honorific name Pilar, denoting strength and steadfastness.

Ms. Graham's collection of lyrical, beautifully structured, and often mysterious poems is always strong. However, it is not always steadfast in its adherence to easy interpretation. This is a book that examines existential questions with ever open eyes. It wanders into mysticism. It looks for an understanding of grief and love that goes far beyond the basic emotional responses. A reader expecting quick poetic resolutions after a surprising turn somewhere down the page will be disappointed. This is a collection that needs meditative attention and some time. And the careful reader will find that the use of valuable time will not be at all wasted.

The opening poem in Section I, “2020 – 2022”, describes the initial reaction of the narrator to the death of both parents in a short period of time. Each poem is reactive, a response to the details of loss. The narrator is faced with the business of dying, the resolution of the artifacts of a life (or lives). Each poem is unconventionally structured and demands some close attention. Some of the poems look like lists but on closer examination the reader finds a narrative line.

Section II moves to a different stratum in the hard ground of grief. There is a note of being uprooted, of a search without a resolution. For this reader this section has some of the most engaging poems. Every piece starts with lines that intrigue: “Remember to still hold us with your fiery hands./ Here, walls press out; you can find us upright now...” start *On the Third Day: Flower Series*. “This is our atmosphere/ lusty inversions found/ in earth bound bodies,...” is the opening stanza of *Sky-Stone*. “Catch me/ by the tree stump/ with my hand outstretched now/ against the five rings of growth...” lead us into the pages of the titular poem *Falling*. With the narrator we explore the ethereal and the tangible, the spiritual and the more visceral images and emotions. References range from Ecclesiastes to Tom T. Hall to the Song of Solomon.

And finally, in Section III, there comes an epiphany of sorts. Perhaps it's more of a growth episode, as the narrator embraces – in a way – the inevitability of loss. “Falling” is the recurrent theme. But dread disappears. In this section other subjects get attention. We're no longer on a journey that is exclusively dealing with loss. Loss is here too, but it doesn't seem to be an obsession now.

Ms. Graham is a fine poet. She brings a great deal of music to her lines. She is also a master at crafting an image from just a few words. And she is gifted in her ability to make the very intangible, spiritual, mystical elements of life seem as real as trees and rocks and water. This collection could be valuable to anyone on the journey through grief and loss. And aren't we all, at one time or another, struggling on that path? There is much beauty in this volume, much wisdom, and an admirable poetic sensibility. You'd do well to check this one out.

James Bourey is a poet from the northern edge of the Adirondacks. He is the author of two full collections, *Out There and Back Again (2023)* and *The Distance Between Us (2020)* both published by Cold River Press. He has also written a collaborative with Linda Blaskey, *Season of Harvest* (2022 Pond Road Press) and a collaboration with poets Jack Mackey, Isabelle Bohls, and Linda Blaskey called *Our Various Selves* (2025 Cold River Press). His first book was *Silence, Interrupted*, from Broadkill River Press in 2015. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies. Currently jim is the organizer of poetry events at DAC in Malone. He can often be found reading aloud in dimly lit rooms. Jim lives in Dickinson with his wife Linda, who has provided photographs for many of Jim's projects.



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In orchids, he multiplied the room until the balcony broke open. Four floors underground, he grafted the apartment to compose a deep poem. Each depth has its own darkness— until he found one private e

