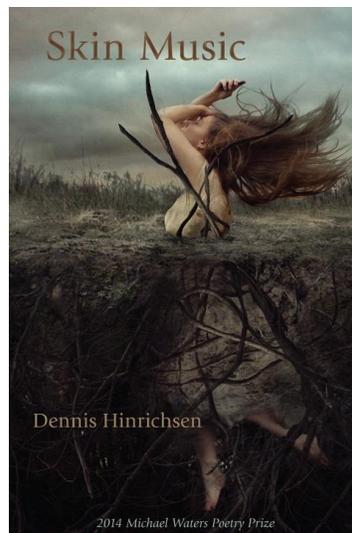


# SKIN MUSIC Reader's Guide

## Questions

1. How does the title, *Skin Music*, resonate throughout the book? Or, given that the title idea is presented in a line that describes the speaker's gaze as "part skin, part music," how does each word resonate denotatively and connotatively throughout the book? What specific poems would you say do this?
2. One key component to good book design is selecting an appropriate cover—one that catches the reader's eye but also provides an image that forecasts, more or less, the tone and content, the feel of a book. With *Skin Music*, we were fortunate to obtain a beautiful image titled *Battle at Cliffside Hill* by Brooke Shaden. How does this image connect with some of the motifs or emotions expressed in the poems? Which poems do you think present analogous situations to the one the woman on the cover is experiencing?



3. One key motif in the book is the presence of literal and figurative rivers. How do these poems connect and speak to each other? How many different uses can you find?
4. There are two literal drownings in the book—in the very first poem about Paul Celan, and then later in a poem titled "Drown." As I was putting the book together, I had some reservations about including both but decided to do so because I thought the poems spoke to each other and offered different takes on the event. Do you think I was right? In what way do you think the poems speak to each other and present a more textured read on the death by water?
5. What forms of figurative drowning occur in the book? How many variations can you find?
6. They are two key poems in the book for me. One is "Every Coral Branch Supports the Moon" which is a kind of elegy cut with description of a person's, in this case, my mother's, actual death, all wrapped up in a poem with an answer to a Zen koan as title. Do you think the poem effectively manages all those seemingly contrasting elements and finds a unifying tone for the experience?

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7. Another central poem for me is "Minotaur." It's a poem that still surprises me when I read it to an audience. It found something I didn't even know I was seeking? It is also a poem that engenders a lot of post-poetry reading conversation from the audience. What do you think I found in writing this poem? What do you think the audience is connecting with in this poem?
8. The title poem announces itself as a memoir, a creative non-fiction. It also formally connects with "Minotaur" and "Heron." Do you see a difference in the "truthiness" of these poems when compared to other poems in the book that present themselves as poetic works of imagination? Is there a difference between the two when writing poems, as I do, that come out of an autobiographic impulse? Where is the line between the two?
9. One of the hardest things to do when organizing a book is sequencing the poems, figuring out whether or not to use sections, etc. In *Skin Music*, I wanted to both use sections to create secondary focal points, but I also wanted the book to be a single gesture, that is, one long poem. Therefore, we marked the section breaks with single crosses rather than counting section 1, 2, 3, and so on. Do you think this plan worked? Does each sub-section of the book have a focal point? Do the focal points connect in way that suggests the book is one long poem?
10. Writing Exercise: Truth and Imagination in Poetry vs. Creative Non-fiction

The idea here is to take the same event and create two drafts. One that approaches the content with a creative non-fiction point of view. And another that uses poetry as the imaginative guide. What permissions does each POV grant? How does imagination operate differently? What happens to 'facts'? What gets left out in each case? Is there a difference? Is there a formal difference, that is, is prose needed to freight the CNF truth more effectively versus the line in poetry?

### Further Reading [books that have influence me]

1. *The Great Fires* by Jack Gilbert
2. *Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts* by Jorie Graham
3. *The Woman Who Died in Her Sleep* by Linda Gregerson
4. *They Feed, They Lion* by Philip Levine
5. *Shall We Gather at the River* by James Wright
6. *Journey to Love* by W.C. Williams
7. *The Poems of Catullus* (trans. Peter Whigham)
8. *The Moving Target* by W.S. Merlin
9. *The Southern Cross* and *Zone Journals* by Charles Wright
10. *Silences* by John Cage
11. Whitman / Dickinson / Eliot / Hopkins / Thomas / et alia
12. Kurosawa / Antonioni / Goddard / Tarkovsky / Buñuel / Truffaut / auteurs el alia