*King of Pain,* by Christine Kanownik rev. by Sienna Ruiz

Monk Books

*King of Pain* is Christine Kanownik’s debut book of poetry, published by Monk Books in January 2016. Kanownik is the co-founder of *Electric Pumas*, a multimedia art space for women, and, in 2010, she received her MFA in poetry from the New School. Her first chapbook is called *We are Now Beginning to Act Wildly* and was published in 2010 by Diez press.

The poems in *King of Pain* have dark tones that are juxtaposed with the use of beautiful imagery. Kanownik’s poems are the opposite of what you would think to be a self-help guide. Although she talks about emotional topics such as self-hatred, sex, vulnerability, and difficulties in life, the rocky occasions of the poems include sarcastic remarks on her own twisted thoughts. A line that shows this best is in “NUDN.” In this poem, she seems to be talking about purposefully being unfair to someone she was involved with. This poem seems to be made for this person, speaking to the person conversationally. The speaker says, “if it makes you feel any better / this day has just been an avalanche / of disappointment” – as if this will somehow compensate for the wrongdoing that’s been done. Perhaps the best part of this poem is how casually Kanownik ends it: “*come on /* I’ll buy you a cheeseburger.*”* The ending seems to be mocking both of them and the situation they’re in, and is a great example of King of Pain’s overall tone: intense with a hint of snide.

Although Kanownik’s poems are intricately formed and created with a purpose, the form is not that of traditional poetry. This is a good thing. The dismal self-awareness in the poems is blunt but elegant, so the poems feel real and intimate and all the more painful for it. Like when a friend has a secret to tell you and you are anticipating what it could be: Kanownik is that friend. The poem “There is Ketchup in My Hair” ends with the text emoji for a sad face, “:(.” Her use of contemporary elements is effective because it helps to pull in younger readers.

Repetition is important in *King of Pain*. In “I would have told you how fascinated I am by everything if that were true,” Kanownik constantly repeats the d-alliteration:

*I search through the Compendium of My Slobbering Misfortunes; -dead*

*-dead end*

*-dead party*

*-death*

*-debt*

*-dehydration*

*-dejection*

*-deletion*

*-dental surgery*

*-depression*

*-derailment*

*-derangement*

*-dereliction*

*-desertion*

*-desire*

You finish reading the poem out of breath and exhausted.

*King of Pain* reminds me of the novel, *SO SAD TODAY* by Melissa Broder. Broder’s book is an essay regarding her mental health issues and sex addictions; in it, she conversationally discusses how even though she is struggling, she somewhat enjoys her own misery and addictions so and doesn’t do much to change it. Both books are great insights into the ups and downs of life. Another similar text is Neal Brennan’s *3 mic* comedy movie on Netflix; like *King of Pain*, it is addressing serious topics in a humorous way. In all three texts, certainly in *King of Pain*, the use of sarcasm makes the darker topics easier to take in. *King of Pain* takes on difficult and depressing things, but in an appealing, contemporary, and intriguing way.