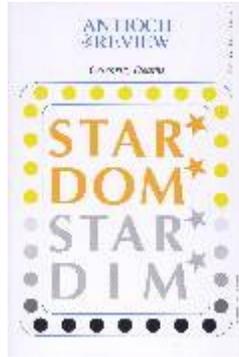


# The Antioch Review

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**Boy**

**by Patrick Phillips**

The University of Georgia Press

60 pp., \$16.95

Phillips's second collection records the inspiration of new fatherhood, set against a vision of the world as a dangerous amoral place. "How reckless it seems. / How naïve: / to love a thing / so fragile and so weak," Phillips writes of his newborn ("Our Situation"). In *Boy*, threats to this fragility abound. For example, "Revelation" describes the accidental immolation of a childhood friend. Phillips recalls glancing up at "the perfect sky / still perfect as he burned," observing the concurrence of beauty and loss central to this vision of the world. Phillips's own childhood also echoes in his experience of his son, as present and past – fatherhood and childhood – collapse into each other. Moving toward his son's perspective, Phillips imagines his house as the place "where soon we will / have lived so long ago" ("Kitchen"). Reading to his son, Phillips remains "the bright bow shining a little brighter / every time his father looks" ("A History of Twilight"). It makes sense that this collection envisions heaven as an idealized blending of past and present. "It will be the past," Phillips pronounces. "And it will last forever" ("Heaven"). The poems of *Boy* are economical, direct, and use conversational language to create immediate impact – often of surprisingly lyrical beauty. In "Ars Poetica," Phillips compares his project to that of a violinist aboard the Titanic, playing as the tragedy unfolds: the song, "not a message, not a hope." And one can imagine, in the absence of the son, how that simile might apply – how the book's darkness might overwhelm. But given this assertion of a pained world, it is surprising that Phillips offers such a smooth, accessible utterance. Despite its depth and intelligence, this collection of twenty-six short poems reads very quickly. Some will wish it not release its grip quite so easily.

—Benjamin S. Grossberg