

## A Review of Grace Ocasio's *Hollerin from This Shack*

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It's high time that Grace Ocasio's voice is finding its way into print. Having seen her read and perform her poetry over many years, I had looked forward to her first book. And an incredible chapbook this is—*Hollerin from This Shack*—breathtaking in its power to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually. There is an excitement even in the title—a title that signals pain, anger, frustration, fear. So much, already, in just four words!

The poems measure up to such an electric title in their sense of immediacy, their urgency! Each poem has its own special energy—snapping like that engine in “Little Brown Girl:”

*The child I gawked at in the picture is me.  
I was five when I saw her face  
in a '69 world yearbook.*

*With brown eyes and stringy black hair, arm  
in a sling, she  
had on a dress like a curtain. If I could hear her voice it would be  
like a needle scratching like a record.*

*She stared at me from the picture, pointed and asked,  
“What are you doing in the South Bronx, in a  
warm, cozy apartment?”*

*She made my engine snap.  
I put the yearbook away  
but whenever her face appears I spring out of sleep,  
slide myself into the corner, face the window,  
and cry out to the sky.*

*I mean I holler at that sky.*

One of Ocasio's most dramatic poems is one in which she summons (and urges the reader to do the same) Dostoevsky's Fyodor Pavlovitch into her living room to ask him why “he raped that idiot girl.” Ocasio, at first, has him speak rather nonchalantly, thereby underscoring the disgust she feels. As the reader, I cringe and read on. She doesn't hold back but pushes the poem, one of her major strengths as a writer. And then she pulls back, her “mind spreading wide