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a magazine of words and culture



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Poetry / Writers in Residence

Why Poetry Matters: a Discussion With Logen Cure, December's Poet in Residence

Dec 28, 2015 •

No Comments

Editor's note: It was a stormy, November night in Seattle the evening Logen Cure and I were scheduled to talk via Google. Not fifteen minutes before our appointment, my power and internet was absconded by the wind. She graciously agreed to talk via cellphone with me recording on my dying laptop, scribbling notes next to a bulging, psychedelic-patterned candle—truly an interview for the ages. The thing was, talking to Logen didn't feel like a technology-botched apology on my end, it felt like sitting down with an old friend—three parts wisdom and one part giggles. I've excerpted the meat of our conversation here on why poetry matters. It does for so many reasons—more than cellphone minutes or dying laptops can contain—and hers reflections are worth every waxy moment. We cap her Residency here at Easy Street with her breathtaking piece, "Laws." —Camille Griep

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Hatchlings

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I loved Katie Williams's debut novel so much that I read it twice —Jason Sheehan for NPR

Why poetry matters is kind of an interesting question. I wonder if other art forms get asked this question because it does seem to come up for poets in particular. Does painting matter? Sculpture? No one's asking if music matters.

But to dive into the discussion, Brendan Constantine's [Easy Street's October Poet in Residence] point about the persistence of poetry is a good one. Poetry's a thing that all cultures do all the time—where there's language there's poetry. That's a key to our argument. We can't seem to quit.

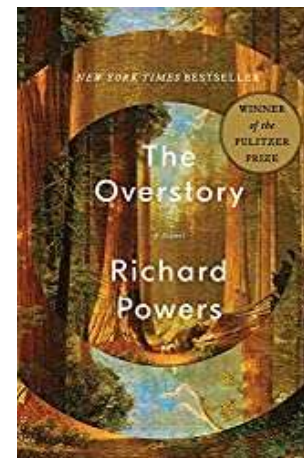
Words have power. *Poets use an everyday thing to do something extraordinary.* Everybody gets up and talks all day. The way you talk and the types of words you use are reflective of what you think people need to feel. Take toddlers: They're pissed off all the time because they have all these feelings but they don't have words, so all of it boils over. I think poetry is the most distilled form of the power of words. And words are undeniably powerful—they're how we get everything accomplished.

Poetry can have a social mission. It can use its power to affect change. Poetry can do a lot of things, but that's one of the most important. Back in September, I was part of "Banned Poetry" reading event organized by a group called Pandora's Box. A bunch of Dallas/Fort Worth poets got together and we read things that had been banned somewhere. Some of it was expected stuff like Ginsberg's "Howl." The people who put it together researched several examples of people who right now—today—are being persecuted for their work. You know intellectually that's happening, that the world is that way, but it was really different to hear it, to have those poems read in front of me with the context like "this person has been in solitary confinement for years for writing this poem."

Poets use an everyday thing to do something extraordinary.

So does poetry matter in a big picture way? Absolutely. More than ever with the things that are happening around the world and all the identity politics that are making change.

A novel about trees by NBA winner Richard Powers



Soars up through the canopy of American literature —Ron Charles, Washington Post

The true story of a wilderness girl turned socialite

This is especially true of confessional poetry. A lot of what makes people better humans is a greater understanding and having a big enough imagination to consider someone else's experience. Poetry invites you to imagine unlike anything else. Confessional poetry is a part of that—inviting people into your suffering. It has the ability to function beyond the individual speaker and individual reader, if it's done right. It's hard to do, to speak to experience in such a way that it's universal.

I think most people have at least one poem that they like, even if they're people who say they don't *get* poetry. If you press them, they can name a poem or remember one that made an impression. Certain phrases stick with you. The ability to make someone remember is another indication that poetry is a powerful form.

Poems have this extra layer of physicality that makes them all the more powerful. Poems are music, having an oral and aural experience that adds a whole new layer. You don't necessarily have that with other types of writing. You can keep a poem in your mind or in your pocket. You can carry it with you.

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Laws

by Logen Cure

1. A body at rest tends to stay at rest; a body in motion tends to stay in motion.

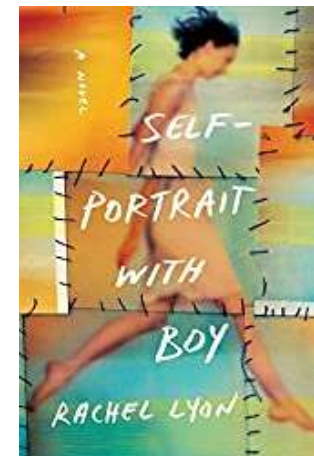
Your sigh steamed in the frigid morning,
the sky was the same color as the parking lot
and you had a physics test to study for.

You liked school better this early.
The quiet gave way to your footfalls,
the equations you murmured like psalms.
The library waited for you.



Concise, thoughtful, and well-researched —Kirkus Reviews

**A provocative debut
about the emotional price
of success**



Beautifully imagined and flawlessly executed —
Joyce Carol Oates

2. Acceleration is proportional to the magnitude of the imposed force.

You saw the truck take the corner,
rattle down the street as you stepped
onto the crosswalk. It slowed as it approached.

You regarded the driver, a blond boy you'd known
since middle school. You were square in front
of his hood ornament when his eyes narrowed
and you knew—

Dyke! he yelled over the engine's sudden roar
as the truck surged forward—

you dodged, barely—

your physics book slapped
pavement, fluttered open.

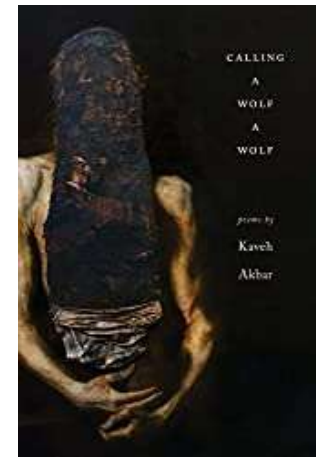
3. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

His rumbling laughter receded.
You picked up your book. You found
the library empty.

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[Logen Cure](#) is a poet and teacher. She is the author of three chapbooks: *Still* (Finishing Line Press 2015), *Letters to Petrarch* (Unicorn Press 2015), and *In Keeping* (Unicorn Press 2008). Her work also appears in *Word Riot*, *Radar Poetry*, *IndieFeed: Performance Poetry*, *The Boiler*, and elsewhere. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from the

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through the collection that
keeps the reader going —*
Library Journal (starred
review)

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Pound**



University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She lives in Texas with her wife.

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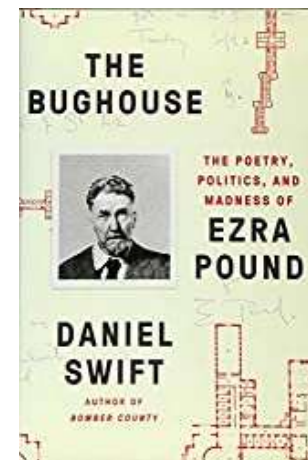
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