

Dark Pool Party by Hannah Black

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Dark Pool Party by Hannah Black
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91 pages – [Dominica](#) & [Arcadia Missa](#)

I am eating at a vegetarian restaurant called Vegetarian Restaurant. The food is not good, but my hands are dirty, and I am alive, reading *Dark Pool Party* by Hannah Black at a muted red picnic table yet unwarmed by early sun. “O girl or boy,” she writes, “life force in you, if you think you can take something from me I am flattered, and you can have it.”

Dark Pool Party features seven texts that blur the lines of fiction, nonfiction, cultural criticism, critique, and poetry. Many of the pieces enact a reedy line of space between the author and the character/s, noticeable immediately in “Celebrity Death Match,” about an unloving/unloved person searching for connection. The distinguisher is that the quote unquote *real names* of characters (friends, lovers) have been replaced with celebrity names like Rihanna, Justin Bieber, and Usher.

We know from context clues that the characters do not signify actual celebrities but distance the author from autobiography, a productive and constant manifestation in *Dark Pool Party*. Sitting there in that mostly sunny day, propelled by the force of Black’s work, I was splayed by the isolation and separation, from both the speaker and the speaker from the characters, this speaker who enacts the wall between her and the characters by denying the reader a chance to completely penetrate that Otherness through narrative:

I tried to be in love with Usher and so far it didn’t work out and now I am trying maybe to fall in love with Rihanna but I already know it won’t work out. I composed several sentences of an email to Usher in my head: We are not good for each other. I wanted to fall in love with you. You activate my tenderness. I want to look after you. I was moved by your strange combination of strength and weakness until I saw you were only a man.

I think of a book called *Heroines* by Kate Zambreno, a text I adore, and

suddenly also of its total whiteness and its mostly-straightness. *Heroines*: a writer's guide on how to be part woman (part girl) with an affinity for melancholy, living in the shadow-stain of man. Zambreno and Black share the anxiety that a woman writing narrative means readers assume it's pure experience, unadorned with craft or artistic license. Zambreno explores ripping *what really happened* from the writing, and she thinks of that strategy as a gendered, male act. She believes *what really happened* is the feminine of the poem, a drama that men like Eliot and Pound wanted to stifle, delete. The male act: to posit that *what really happened* is bad writing.

Clipped of the superfluous *what really happened*, an image or concept resonates. It's stark. It enacts. The question, confusion: is the hand that deletes what's true from the text invisible, male? In conversation with *Heroines*, *Dark Pool Party* recognizes race, not just gender, as a factor in the author-genre anxiety: "God is not an autobiography, but nor is race or gender, though they threaten at all times to become the full extent of one," Black writes. Riffing off the notion that a marginalized identity is only capable of autobiographical narrative, Black's answer to Zambreno's supposition is that it's not the writer or the writing that's the problem, but rather how the text is read.

In *Dark Pool Party's* "Atlantis," we understand that Atlantis is a cover for a specific place or generalized experience based on the "absolute truth" of the author's experience. Black gives us that sticky, delicious window into "her life," but also throws it in our face. She uses the tool of the canon to exploit the tool of the canon and to critique it, legitimizing a large body of work by people who struggle to write work that looks in some way like their life. In this way, Black's book teaches us how to read narrative written with an intersectional lens, and her aesthetic of dealing with the slippery space between truth and fabrication is one of the pleasures of this book.

The narrator, speaker, consumable woman, moves through the book, acting and repulsed by her own actions: "We ate trash for breakfast, squeezing ketchup sachets onto strips of American bacon, the perfectly round egg, both of which signified: the unimaginable suffering of animals." *Dark Pool Party* conflates woman and meat, men and farm animals, hamburger meat and the suffering of marginalized bodies. Humans eat for survival but also to fill the vacuous hole of past experience that manifests in the physical as shudder. Humans are imperfect animals, rooting around in modernity, looking sometimes to be ethical, intelligent, or mindful, in a time and place where no perfect action, art, or critique exists. "Perhaps critique is over and this is unexpectedly the era of joy, but I am still luxuriating in the interesting feeling of shame," Black writes. *Dark Pool Party* is part critique, part shame, all sentence richness, a poetry of force, a book thick with ideas and essential cringes of yore.



Ally Harris lives in Portland, OR, where she teaches humanities classes at a culinary school, edits poetry for [Heavy Feather Review](#), and hosts a reading series called [submission](#). She has two chapbooks of poems, [Her Twin Was After Me](#) (Slim Princess Holdings) and [Floor Baby](#) (dancing girl press).