

# National Poetry Month Featured Poet: Kelly Boyker Guillemette

written by Entropy | April 15, 2014



We're continuing with our [National Poetry Month](#) daily poet interviews, and today, man are we excited to have the wonderful Kelly Boyker Guillemette. Stay tuned all month for more featured poets.

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## **1) Do you think poetry is still important, relevant, and vibrant in today's culture?**

I think poetry is vibrant in today's culture but oftentimes wonder who is actually reading it. Yes, I know as a poet I should not be saying this, but I fear it is true. Poetry has such a bad connotation to lay people who associate it with the poetry we were forced to memorize and analyze in high school or college. Those experiences have left a bitter taste in many a memory. I believe and hope that at the very least, other poets are reading other poets' poetry. I get really excited about the part of the world of poetry comprised of the newer voices, and by new, I do not necessarily mean young. Poets who are writing what I consider to be persona poems, the word equivalent to pop-surrealism, filled with language which makes you reel in wonder and perhaps see something in a new angle. There is brilliant poetry being written which I believe non-poets or non-writers would really appreciate, if we can only reach that audience.

## **2) What makes you want to write poetry?**

I believe that for writers, it is not a case of wanting, but a case of compulsion.

I have been writing since I was a young child, not just poetry but short stories as well. I wrote two entire novels when I was in middle school. Both were about doors. One was a novel about there being a door in the back of our paint cabinet in the furnace room of our basement, which lead to hell.

The other was about a door that leads to another dimension. I have been obsessed with other dimensions all of my life. Poetry is in itself an exploration of other dimensions. Dimensions, which include inhabiting and channeling other creatures, objects and people. Another thing that draws me to writing is my attraction to the marginalized, which includes animals, children and people on the fringes of society.

## **3) Tell us about one poet who has greatly influenced you as a writer and thinker.**

That's such a tough question because there have been different writers at different times in my life who have influenced me. Plus, many novelists have greatly influenced my poetry and writing life. When I first began writing

poetry as a child it was a mixture of Edgar Allen Poe, the annotated version of Bram Stoker's Dracula, the annotated version of Mother Goose and e.e. cummings. The annotated part is key because you learn the nitty gritty dark facts behind the writing, early Chuck Palahniuk style writing, if you will. As most know, Ring Around the Rosie is actually about the bubonic plague. I could not get enough of those sorts of dark details as a child and loved to write about them. I am a huge fan of horror, magical realism, dystopia and outsiders. Books such as Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole, and everything by George Orwell, Stephen King, Phillip K. Dick, Clive Barker and Shirley Jackson.

Of course, poetry-wise, I went through my Plath and Sexton stages, but in the end, the writer who has most influenced me is Margaret Atwood. Her poetry is brilliant and mostly persona-driven. Margaret Atwood's poetry and later writing strikes me to my core; her poetry is persona and of course, novels are persona. She writes believable dystopias. The Handmaid's Tale is brutal and filled with cultural insights regarding gender disparity while the world of The MaddAddam Trilogy feels scary and plausible with genetic tampering gone rampant.

As far as her poetry goes, her two sets of collected works are the most tattered books on my bookshelf. One of my favorite poems of all time is a prose poem by Atwood. It is called "Marrying the Hangman". It is a persona poem based on the following history:

In the 18th Century Quebec the only way for someone under the sentence of death to escape hanging was, for a man, to become a hangman, or, for a woman, to marry one. Francoise Laurent, sentenced to hang for stealing, persuaded Jean Corolere, in the next cell, to apply for the vacant post of executioner, and also to marry her.

The poem is chilling and goes back and forth between their conversations through their cells. What I also admire about Atwood is her ability to cross from poetry into fiction while retaining the poetic standards of highly distilled language.

#### **4) Tell us about one lesser-known poet who you'd like more people to know about.**

A lesser-known but certainly discovered poet is Rebecca Loudon. She has published many books and her poetry is heartbreaking and all persona. Again, what I am saying is the poetry I admire is really just short stories distilled down to their very essence. Loudon channels her characters in a disturbingly admiral manner. She wrote an entire book of poems/letters channeling Amelia Earhart one week when she was at home sick with a high fever. The poems themselves are feverish and otherworldly. She is currently working on a large Henry Darger project, which takes her to many dark places and the poetry she creates is profound and frightening. Full Disclosure: She was also my poet-mentor for many years.

#### **5) How do you feel about poetry in the age of social media?**

I believe poetry and writing in social media is a huge asset to the arts. I have met so many amazing writers through social media that I would not have been aware of otherwise. The world has opened up. I remember in times before the profusion of internet journals, saving up spare cash just to go to the local independent bookstore and buy as many journals and chapbooks as I could afford. That was the only way you could be exposed to new writers. My favorite journal, which folded, was called Story. It was all stories, as the name would suggest, unbelievably wonderful writing. At any rate, now it is possible to go online and discover many new voices. Indeed, almost an unlimited amount, depending on how much free time you have to poke around.

**6) Share with us one of your recent poems and tell us a little bit about its context.**

What follows is my take on the Persephone abduction myth, who is said to have been abducted by Hades to the underworld, against her will. The story is traditionally referred to as "The Rape of Persephone". She is abducted while picking flowers in a field and is now a goddess associated with nature.

Hades abducts her to the underworld. Demeter, her mother, searches the world with torches and allows nothing to grow while Persephone is missing. Eventually, Zeus, the sun god, says enough is enough and orders Hades to return Persephone to the earth. Hades allows her to leave but tricks her first into eating pomegranate seeds. Having eaten the fruit of the underworld, she must return to him each winter.

In my poem, Persephone is empowered and seeks Hades out. It is not a rape poem but a poem of ill-fated love. It is not Pomegranate seeds but Huckleberry seeds (which are a deep purple), which he feeds her. The poem is of love reciprocated – it is her will not his and there is no rape. It is a terrible scarring love that cannot be denied. My poem features the backs of milk cartons instead of torches, and rather than flowers and fields blooming when she returns, the fields burn in flames because she despairs from his absence.

*He Was Only a Symptom of Her Hunger\**

I. The Descent

As a virgin shaped from a secondary bone  
whose lips were sewn together by a protective mother,  
her numbness became a strange inconsolable beast  
that paced and panted in the corner of her bedroom.

She was lured  
by freeway overpass signs,

highway ditches, dome lights,  
pale hills and ruined shorelines,  
hitchhiked her way to the edge of a barren field.

Her absence burned recklessly in her mother's womb  
who went house to house,  
knocking, knocking:

Have you seen my daughter?

Called every hospital within three states  
searched alleys, wells and abandoned factories.

Eventually the daughter's face appeared on milk cartons,  
children gripped their cereal spoons  
and stared anxiously into the depths of her disappearance.

At the mouth of a coalmine, God stood  
and she, so starved for sensation  
took his hand and was led downwards,  
through tunnels braced with rotten timbers  
small brown mice chattering in the corners  
and in those moments the lacing on her lips  
dissolved, and she hungered.

It was not pomegranate seeds,  
but huckleberries  
she had to stretch her neck out  
as he laid the fruit upon her tongue  
one by one  
staining her mouth,

furring her throat.

She could hear the baying hounds far above,  
later the whuffing of cadaver dogs.

Time rotated on a hinge.

Her love for him was as one wound to another  
healed wrong  
a disfigurement  
they both wore on their faces  
as warning.

II.           Exiting the Submerged City

The ground gave birth to her,  
first her head crowning,  
then shoulders, breasts, stomach, hips,  
pelvis, legs and finally feet.

She walked away from his realm  
and entered the world in grief  
her departure an exit wound  
or an unswallowed pill.

There were enchantments and other lessons  
all rushing at her in a stream,  
nothing seemed as it should  
shadows cast as slackened muscles  
poppies bloomed in her footsteps.

As conjoined twins, separated,  
she held his loss  
between clenched teeth

and finally understood

the loneliness he taught her with his body.

Behind her, the fields burned orange,

red, then black.

**\*First appeared in Arsenic Lobster**

✘ Kelly Boyker's work has appeared in many places, including but not limited to, [PANK], Arsenic Lobster, Aperçus Quarterly, Prick of the Spindle, Sein Und Werden and Opium Magazine. Her work has been Pushcart nominated and won the Richard Hugo House "Power of Place Annual Inquiry" one year. She was recently nominated to Best New Poets 2014 by Arsenic Lobster Poetry Journal. She was honored to participate in the Fainting Couch Idioglossia collaborative anthology from Blood Pudding Press in 2013. Her book, Zoonosis, just came out from Hyacinth Girl Press. She has a chapbook forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press if she can ever get that pesky manuscript finished. When she is not at her mortgage paying job she acts as the poetry editor of Menacing Hedge. [www.menacinghedge.com](http://www.menacinghedge.com). She lives in Seattle with four cats: Miso, Kitty, Hogan and Dickens, one dog: Sagan and her wonderful husband, Gio.