Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

ATTENDANCE: December

Rachel & Rocío · Wednesday, January 18th, 2017

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Attendance is documentary poetry by Rocío Carlos and Rachel McLeod Kaminer, who are collaborating on a book length manuscript for the duration of one year.

> As we stand in relation to plants and animals—and one another—we are not exempt, but alive as creatures in and of the world. Taking attendance, and attending, alters* our writing, bodies; places—city, land, wilderness; times—past, present, future…
>
> *fucks up / fucks with / plant sex

Previous: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November

Rocío

Notes

December

Here it comes. The kitchen/the village.

The first day on a Thursday. Dark so early/lose count of lights. Mountains/Pasadena/ocean/hillside. This wilderness, I tell you (tell who?).

A long sit, the long fade. Make me lavender, you said to her. Make me the color of the wilderness, of the cold dark.

The garden of red light, the cold and polar bear shirt. You named the names and people politely heard you do it. And after? No one remembers but there are pictures to prove it.

On the porch, the chill in your knees. Your ankle. A hawk so early, in place of your crows.

Oh ankle, oh scar, oh birthmark.

(early leaves were quick to fall *but last leaves hang on*)

A morning: the line of a back/ the breathing. A valley of enemies.

The dig and drag. A clay soil choking the bay laurels/the bay laurel roots choking the hundred-year-old clay pipes. A hollow in the jungle, like a sink hole. Like the earth just swallowed somebody. Maybe a bratty kid. The workers make a great noise for many hours. Finches watch from dead branches.

Office hours- a meta attendance? Got to downtown, stop for tacos. Sit at Tony's while you wait for Reina's. Ask for the elder (she is on vacation). Eat so much. Forget why Thursday you don't go outside at all.

Friday: the dark in the morning/ slow to leave.

Anticipate the long day sea side but not by the sea. Outside the wind whips at the path. We clambered up the narrow staircase with glasses of champagne or prosecco or whatever and waffles. We reclined in chairs. The sun made us laugh. We walked the corgi and the eye wandered to plants easy for stealing. You are always just stealing.

And after- to pourhaus. Our awful conversations, the flight of wines. Flight. As if we could escape. The scowl of you wants to punish, but you have no punishment to give.

The north pole is so far away, but Ruben and Alex live nearby. A sad sister (this is not my life/it's just a fond farewell to a friend).

The quiet city, you drive past even pilgrims. Even pilgrims and their brass bands, their children in linens and braids, they don't make a sound. Was it Hill or Alameda; did you turn your face left or right to catch her song, to say her name in the tongue your mother kept hidden in plain sight. Here are five questions, on a slip of paper in your hand: Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the folds of my mantle? In the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else you need?

Mother my muse/imagine her turning to you and saying she has decided something. How firm her small fists. On the twelfth day (your mother gives to you).

When Traci asks about November, you remember.

Whittier: transport large sacks of succulents. Work the damp soil. How nicely they take. How quickly you work. How good the soil. Dark, good soil. The lynx so happy he races around.

Late to mother's feet. Ya llegué madre. Tarde, pero ya vine. Little banners wave, make shadows on her face. Instrucciones: go to the third stall on the left. Pass under the petticoats of communion gowns. The lace catches strands of your hair. Reach your torso over the glass case of precious wares, the life-size Christ child with synthetic eyelashes. His plump hands and fluted fingers. Weeks later, standing at the barre with your arm overhead, you will make your hands this way. This is the kind of deliverance you seek.

You come home with a new clay somerio and copal beads, and a new rebozo. You cover and

uncover yourself in the mirror, looking for traces of your women-folk. Here, her eyes. Here, her nose. How they scurried home under black thundering clouds as the fat drops of water fell. How they ran at first light to a sweetheart, to a road, to a compass pointing north.

And solstice. And fire. Men's voice (our brothers, at the mouth of a wilderness). And then a lit hearth and a full home. This is correct. Mother bathes her family in smoke. Mother leads the family through the paths in the dark, crushing the citrus leaf, the lavender flower.

And the hangover the next day. It has not stopped raining since. You are summoned to Tony's on seventh. You do math in glasses of whiskey, you dance and sing and play with the beads around your neck. Black and blue pictures tell you how it went. Black and white pictured show you yourselves.

In the wet night, only small lights register. When you were small, you didn't know you couldn't see. You liked the hazy cluster of colored pearls you saw out of the car window. It was beautiful.

An eve: in the morning, loading up the car to head for the border, your father looks at you and says "don't drink so much."

Instrucciones: drive east. Snow so close. Sleep so much. And then cross into Baja California. You cross that river, the egrets stalking/their fancy walk.

The roads are all mud, deep wells where others crossed before you. You sink up to your ankles. The ground is kissing you as you walk, is making kissing sounds. The rooms you stay in are cold, but at least no spiders this time.

Botas de siete leguas. All those years ago, the old dragon would laugh at your scuffed boots. And he laughed with you too. You were clever and valuable. He rolled up his pant leg to show you his twin birthmark. Only we two, little dragon. You were proud of your mean look, the scowl line that divided your forehead since you looked in a mirror.

(remember on the drive, there was a tree, in Indio- the curious bird in the curious tree)

An aunt, a spotted dog. The last of Maura's bougainvillea. Eldest and youngest in the crumbling home of the dead grandmother. Your mother is everything to them now. They speak gently to her. They touch her hands. The haruspex/augur in her bed, small as a lily. Her birds set free, given away or eaten. "Rocío siempre tan discreta" she says to your sister. She asks after her familiar and you fetch him by looking out the window. "tonch(i), men, men," you coax, in a language no one knows. He hears her voice in your voice; this is comforting (to you). She handed you the knife once. She turned hens inside out to show you the spring's approach once. Once, the one you call alpha in this house bid you help bathe the haruspex/augur. Care for the temple, priestess. Be in service of creation, priestess. Be the handmaiden of this place, of this living light.

You were silent in the bath, lifting her hair and pouring warm water. You let alpha cluck and chatter to her. Alpha said to you: how many times did she heal our bodies. How many times did she comfort our sorrows.

Somewhere, the children shriek in delight of candy, and fire. Remember those glorious nights of making fires unsupervised. (it was only a movie/ I was so young then).

Your breath hangs in front of you as tea leaves. Never minimize the luxury of a hot shower.

How dark the desert.

And the lights in the west. You take off your glasses to see what you saw, to remember yourself.

The gaping hole in the coffee table in the middle of the living room in the middle of the house in the middle of 60th street in the middle of a map that no one ever drew.

Except, your body is a map. The gaping hole is in your belly. The absence. That vacancy. Your mother's nativity scene without the infant because she doesn't remember where she put it. Perhaps you have just misplaced your children, priestess?

It's fine. It's fine. She is happy. Not just okay, but happy. Everything is wonderful.

There is a party. A baby is held. Poinsettias in decorative mylar, bright as the red light. In the rain, you watched a tribe assemble. You miss them, the absent. You take attendance of your beloved. When the rain clears, everyone will be present.

Indoor plants die in over-watered pots, but there is so much to drink. A clock ticks, the hour strikes. Mouths reach, mouths open. The first word of the year is silent, is made.

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Poems

A pearl, a harbor.

Once, *shown the pomegranate/the chambers*,
The haruspex proclaims (almost a mother).
To who was she speaking?
Broken-hearted (as pomegranates or
blackberries or split birds) at her responsibility
she separates fascia from muscle and gristle.
Little priestess/ take this knife. In this house
you have never been eldest. But here comes death,
priestess (tuck us in your cheek for later priestess).
how pomegranates smash at thresholds/
how wet you get at the idea.

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Nochebuena

Little daughter (of)
envoys in ships in sashes
what the word
indigenous is (we didn't have
that word we didn't need it)

false flower in that petals
are leaves in other colors
that kind of red/ for lovers
for passions come too soon
(happy birthday; here comes resurrection)
In twelve hours (how dark, the desert,
The night you scurried north).

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Pilgrim, again

We just missed each other
Late late or was it early early.
What colors are in words like
Amanecer, madrugada, the insides of shells
of your young thighs.
Young skywalker, I am not as young as your others
But find this temple and wash your weary mind here
(small blooms, crushed the long night of fire, flare)
In the canopies of old magnolias, doves feign sleep.
You, you come for the fire-making. You stay for the wilderness.

*****

Rachel

Notes

1 December Hawks again today, one redtailed pink gliding up the current stirring that air mass [that comes down the mountain from the San Gabriels and down the hill/bluff by JPL] in and over the Hahamong'na. And one, flying into the high end of La Tuna Canyon, not a redtail I don't think. A Cooper's, maybe, wanting to be high like that; a sharpshinned wouldn't want to be so far out of the canopy. There *is* canopy there, pooling in the steep tiny canyon washes all up and down the larger La Tuna Canyon topography. Also pigeons in a flutter of light white and light gray, east of Lincoln. Southbound on the 267 I see them spin tailfeathers up.

2 December …the fuck am I thinking, these days, headed up to the roof for a quick drink? It's good to see him last night but fuck me I could not get still. For the life of me, vibrating out of my skins. The birds were on their way to bed… The forecast for the foothill high plain said, wind. And wind it was. Windy the *alta dena*. A high hummingbird in the tree that loses leaves and gets the red clusters that look like blossoms but might be *which lover are you jack of diamonds?* might be a different cluster of leaves. No hawks in sight, in my sight anyway, and gusting pushes of wind, slow and strong and again hasty and blowing so soft. Monice's book on my MIND! A crow stroking quick wing; wind; a set of parrots, wind; a passle? line up? of pigeons on the *sunday morning at the diner hollywood trembles on the verge of tears* on the lip of the parking deck overlooking the park. Scared still, the money, the nightmare.

December spreads out like Scout on the wooden floor: pancake batter. I finish edits for Monice's book and think about the letter I'll write her. Rocío reads at PRB and I see how she stands and speaks; did it take me a long time to hear the inflections when she reads aloud? Going on seven years. How differently I know her body and voice now. What kind of mammal witch am I writing with, to and fro?

7 December Glowing sky on the way room, warm on the near empty bus, cool on the roof with the bamboo starlings, first quarter moon. Me and Rocío.

9 December THE OWL *before* twilight powerful flies from over the arroyo near the rose bowl, towards the dam and the watershed. Lands *you you needed me* lands at the top of a longneedled pine, giant.

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Ravens, pigeons, hawks. (Parrots.) Small human creature bodies at school. So many 5150s. I know the brain is jellyfish, I know it, I can feel it and each nerve is a tendril of the organism [being].There is grey matter in our fingertips. (What other animals does this apply to?) In scar tissue, trauma tissue, how traumatized brains light up in scans; how do our brain tendrils look, trauma all lit up? (Fingers slammed in the car door.)

We plan on fire for solstice.

Attending is bleeding out of me. This is the year I notice how strangely I attend—hyperfocused or not at all. It's not the environmental scanning I used to do, sitting with my eyes on the exits, back to the wall. Setting up my tarp with a specific relationship to the feeling of a site's topography and to sightlines towards each of my students. Not only that. It's a soupy drift. My friends *please just look me in my face* friends notice. Even in public space, times of un-focus while I walk in the world with my body, though our posture habits are still a clear fuckoff. (How white? is the privilege to slacken, even slightly, the constant assessment of threat and vulnerability.) The sharp incursions of men startle me but there's a new anger that shimmers first and burns later.

Rocío and I have wandered out into the world and a shared interiority. We begin to walk back into the rooms of flora and fauna, we begin to shift our connectedness.

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18 December Bird o'clock, alone, not.

20 December Solstice Attendance, right-right. The cats. Our humans come. Jen brings E and gives him her skin. Afterwards me and Rocío clean up and sit with Ana around the fire I spread to coal bed so it starts to cool down. *and you swimming up tide or just tuning in radio stations* For some reason I think about Theandrew's birthday, ten days away. No I know the reason, it's the fire, so many nights at FP with his face, playing music off his phone by the fire *I left my love in a field* by the fire

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There are many hibernations in December and I'm not sure they count as hummingbird torpor. There are not very many bird o'clocks in avoiding. *you're given me a million reasons about a*

million reasons I bow down and pray I try to make the worst feel better lord show me the way to cut through all this worn out leather I wonder why it's only now I'm writing in my family and our attendance.

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25 December Walk by the French Broad River, sun gone down, brown and grey rivaling a desert palette subtlety. With Julia and L. Mom comes home and puts on the Staples Sisters. Dances.

26 December, Feast of St. Stephens: Walk down along by Hominy Creek, bigger than I remember, off of Sulpher Springs Road. With Julia and Mom.

28 December Walk down by the river again, this time with Mom. The sun hasn't quite gone behind the ridge when we get there but it's biting cold. The animals are hidden out of my sensing range, except a thrush bird.

29 December I have the car and take it up to the Tennessee line. There's a raven and it flies off. I spend time looking at the paper wasp nest in the redbud tree. From up there you can see how the Black Mountain Range falls from NW to E.

30 December Julia gets a flat tire on the way to Chattanooga. She sends fotos of articles in the Clay County newspaper about the "famously bizarre Possum Drop" [for NYE] in Brasstown. There's another article about an elderly woman over in Cherokee, something about how the county didn't realize she had died; it's titled, "Check the Obits." Check the obits—my grandmother's form of attending these days.

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I go down by the river and watch the train again. I take my mom when she has to work and listen to the 5am bluegrass show on the way back. I am from here more than anywhere else I am. I just turn into timespace goop and I don't know how to feel like a person when we're all this close together. I don't write and barely read.

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3 January Our walk up the Blue Ridge Parkway takes us by Rattlesnake Lodge ("remember that summer we hiked there and there was that baby rattler on the trail, and Janet would not leave that spot, she was determined to guard us all") and two of the tunnels built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the view over Bull Creek Valley where a white settler named Joseph Rice killed "the last buffalo seen in this locality" in 1799 *do you remember I feel that you remember you choose not to remember I think it is the know it is the bad bad blood* in 1799. Later I think of friends growing up out on Riceville Road and wonder at how the bloodletters divided up the lands and named them. Mom and I only startle once, a big noise in the brush down the north slope below us. We halt. We wait… Another sound doesn't come.

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Poems

Family Attendance

5 a picture of the new puppy at Hannah's job

6 Sarah send me a foto of their cat Percy come in from the rain, wrapped entirely up in a pink towel

8 a picture of a Hannah with a different dog at her job

9 a foto of Ruth's bunny, Bullwinkle. Later I will learn what is a prey animal, what it means to pick up a rabbit from above or pull it out from under a hiding place. Prey animals are wired differently, I learn

10 a party, I go at all because I said I'd meet N and N. I talk all night to G. (Later I forget we went home together.) I think about touch, and how people keep dogs, and how Zoë writes

11 Sarah sends a picture of their black cat Oskar perched on the trash can, trying to get in on the action in the kitchen. And one of Oskar playing in the washer and dryer. I accept these now

12 Sarah send an image of a piece of paper with "Time of death 8:05" written on it, right when she goes on shift in the MICU. Another picture of a bunny hiding on a bookshelf, Ruth's other one, Rocky. Julia lives there now so I resign myself

14 A picture of Percy sprawled on Sarah and Peter's couch. Another picture of the new puppy at Hannah's job. There are like six dogs at her office now, even with the fotos it's hard to be exact

16 Ali's. We go through pictures of her as a little girl creature. She's waiting for her little creature to come—one more month.

17 Sarah is a bridesmaid for K's winter wedding. She send a LOT of fotos of K's white Westie dog. "Guys. All my dreams have come true. I'm in a hotel with Wendell."

18 My mom is going through some of Sarah's random stuff stored in the H's garage basement. Julia is making her. She sends fotos of fotos: a drawing of a cat that little kid Sarah made, I think from an art class when we still lived in Black Mountain. I think I understand people and their animals but I probably don't. It's been more than 15 years since Katie died. Is that real? The pictures sent of Sarah and M playing dress up don't make me cry but how is it possible that I have to do the math to remember it would have been the year before her mom was murdered

19 More fotos from storage: a nativity drawn "12/17/97 by Julia + Sarah." The sheep are talking to each other and one of them yells at the other to be quiet. It's a direct quote from our dad, if you substitute "trying to get some peace and quiet" for "trying to listen to the angels"

23 "Poor Oskar has conjunctivitis" foto. If I tallied every cat picture this year, between Sarah and Rocío… how do I attend to that? I never feel like I give the desired response. Pets are weird because they die differently than people. Maybe

24 In transit, a picture of Sarah and Percy getting ready for bed; a picture of Oskar sniffing a trapped roach

28 Amber shows me the cartoon portrait [her daughter] S drew of Lola, the cat who left her last

year. Animals go off to die, that’s what we learned growing up

29 More cat pictures

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6 January, Feast of Epiphany

Hiking La Tuna Canyon with Rocío. I love that we keep our quiet together. The three ravens playing the air at the ridge right above us. Us, stopped at a switchback turn exposed to the sun, looking out towards the San Fernando Valley and, to our north, the mountains. The last raven and its feathers, for that moment the only sound, the only movement. The dryoiled black pinion feathers sealed against fraying, scraping lightly across one another, flexing over a pulsing of muscle and ligature and blooded-ness. On the way down, the splayed whitebone sycamore.

The datura drowned in the green *breaking into unbelievable breath*.

And always finally pigeons, who mean when they appear: That when humans nurture and then cast out, there is a trace. Pigeon palomas, doves, spirits, dirty with grit. Still here, how long, maybe as long as we are here.

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