

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

AWP Poets: Francesca Bell, Michelle Bitting & Alexis Rhone Fancher

Alexis Rhone Fancher · Thursday, March 31st, 2016

AWP (The Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference & Book Fair) runs from March 30th through April 2nd, 2016. For the first time it will be held in Los Angeles! Thousands of writers and publishers will invade DTLA. It promises to be four days to remember. There will be readings and performances held in venues throughout the city. *Cultural Weekly's* intrepid Poetry Editor, ALEXIS RHONE FANCHER, will be reading in Venice, alongside poetry luminaries: DORIANNE LAUX, JOSEPH MILLAR, RICHARD GARCIA, CYNTHIA ATKINS, FRANCESCA BELL, MICHELLE BITTING, DAVID TOMAS MARTINEZ, and special guest poet, J. SCOTT BROWNLEE. Over the next 3 weeks, *Cultural Weekly* will be featuring their poems.

Mark Your Calendar, and join them at **Beyond Baroque in Venice on Thursday, March 31st at 8pm** for this Once-In-A-Lifetime Event! **This reading is OPEN TO THE PUBLIC! and Sponsored By CULTURAL WEEKLY.**

SEE YOU THERE!

Francesca Bell's poems appear in many journals, including *B O D Y Literature*, *New Ohio Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *River Styx*, *Spillway*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Zone 3*. Her work has been nominated eight times for the Pushcart Prize, and she won the 2014 Neil Postman Award for Metaphor from *Rattle*. Her translations from Arabic, with Noor Nader Al Abed, appear in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Circumference | Poetry in Translation*, and *Laghoo*. The manuscript for her first book has been a semi-finalist for the Philip Levine Prize and the Brittingham Prize, and a finalist for the Poetry Foundation's Emily Dickinson Award, the May Swenson Poetry Award, and Carnegie Mellon's open submission period. She is the Event Coordinator for the Marin Poetry Center.



Photo by Roger Minkow

With a Little Education

This is what became of the homely high school boy
with the fine hands and big brain: he ended up sliding
his fingers all day into the vaginas of other men's wives.
Expensive women who book six months ahead

to take off their clothes for him. He keeps them
 waiting under a harsh light and thin sheet
 before delivering their silver-spoon babies and bad news,
 before roving his skilled hands over all the cheerful flesh
 once so firmly out of his reach. They send him flowers
 and page him after hours, confiding
 when their sex lives are painful or dry up entirely.
 He coaches them to remind their deal-making,
 deposition-taking husbands of the grave
 importance of foreplay. He touches their sleeves
 as they leave with what could only be mistaken
 for tenderness, and smiles, knowing they wonder
 what he does with his hands at night. How different
 his landscape looks now: his stool a rolling throne,
 the world he has mastered spread glorious before him.
 If only he had known, when he was pimpled
 and pained, that even the hearts of the beautiful burn
 in the third trimester, and that age bursts in,
 without mercy, on everyone, even those girls
 as effervescent and confusing as champagne.
 If only he'd known how easy it would be,
 with a little education, to wake each morning
 to a string of women, naked in his offices
 and ready just for him.

Francesca Bell
 (First appeared in *Rattle*)

Michelle Bitting has work published in *The American Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Narrative*, *diode*, the *Paris-American*, *L.A. Weekly*, *Linebreak* and others. Poems have appeared on *Poetry Daily* and as the *Weekly Feature* on *Verse Daily*. Her book *Good Friday Kiss* won the DeNovo First Book Award and *Notes to the Beloved* received a starred Kirkus Review. A new title *The Couple Who Fell to Earth* is due out in 2016 from C & R Press. Michelle has taught poetry in the U.C.L.A. Extension Writer's Program, at Twin Towers prison with a grant from *Poets & Writers Magazine* and is an active California Poet in the Schools. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Pacific University, Oregon and is completing a PhD in Mythological Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute. Visit her at: www.michellebitting.com



Photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher

How Like Marriage is the Season of Flowers

Because I'd forgotten
 I'd shoved that wrinkled bulb
 into a slit of dubious soil last winter,
 just as I'd lost sight of it
 buried under a decade of rust and oil

in the garage we haven't cleaned
 since the summer our daughter
 was born. Some seasons prove
 more hazardous than others
 and one wind-thrashed night,
 I groped for a stray cigarette
 from the grime atop
 the busted refrigerator we use to store
 light bulbs and toilet paper,
 slipped my fingers into a filthy halo
 of booster seats
 and nursing pillows,
 formula bottles and plastic bathing tub
 and pulled out a crumpled baggie
 of bulbs. Now the garden gnome
 winks through a lattice cross
 of immaculate light,
 so smug in his weird cone hat
 and Santa coat, his bed
 of broad conceptions: stigma and stamen,
 the once frozen loam
 having cracked like an egg,
 the stone exterior unrolled,
 the barracks collapsed
 and out slithered this serpent
 of a single red bloom
 like a prisoner climbing the roof
 of the impossible panopticon
 and lighting a match to herself,
 becomes a flag of fire
 in the moon's glowing lake. Goodnight!
 Death had not dominion, after all. If Christ rose
 no one really knows
 how he managed to wade through
 all that festering, flying from tomb
 to feathered clouds, do they? Beauty needs no apology.
 We could never explain
 the crumbling citadel transformed
 to Easter morning goody
 basket—blue lace and tangerine
 jelly beans, nor the scary bunny
 heads my husband and I sometimes wore,
 spitting bitter carrots
 into the whites of each other's eyes.
 The garden is a Chagall
 guarded by worms
 in the vaults of subterranean ruins. The horses,
 delirious from so long

in the desert of no water,
 their mouths turn to mines
 of glittering salt and make pictures.
 A woman wakes and sees
 a girl wandering the yard,
 remembers hiding treasure once
 and pretending to find it
 as if for the first time, as if
 pulling a bouquet from
 the barrel of a hat, from slugs
 and dirt, the miserable bottom:
 your darkest places imaginable.

Michelle Bitting

Alexis Rhone Fancher's poem, "when I turned fourteen, my mother's sister took me to lunch and said:" was chosen by Edward Hirsch for inclusion in *The Best American Poetry of 2016*. She is the author of *How I Lost My Virginity To Michael Cohen and other heart stab poems*, (Sybaritic Press, 2014), and *State of Grace: The Joshua Elegies*, (KYSO Flash Press, 2015). Find her poems in *Rattle*, *The MacGuffin*, *Slipstream*, *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles*, *Chiron Review*, *Quaint*, *Hobart*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Blotterature* and elsewhere. Her photographs have been published world-wide. She's infamous for her Lit Crawl LA performances at Romantix, a NoHo sex shop. Since 2013 she's been nominated for seven Pushcart Prizes and four Best of The Net awards. In her other life, Alexis is poetry editor of *Cultural Weekly*, where she also publishes a monthly photo essay, *The Poet's Eye*. Find her at alexisrhonefancher.com



Self Portrait

(Menage a Trois) TONIGHT I DREAM OF MY FIRST TRUE LOVE

"Trembling, like Paris, on the brink of an obscure and formidable
 revolution." —Victor Hugo

It feels like a competition. I lay between the two of them, sweltering, like Paris in August. Gene's lanky six foot four inches hangs off the foot of the bed, Brett's dancer-body liquid, compact, is curled into mine, his hard need pressed against my thigh. I'm not sure how I ended up here, in love with a man who wants me to fuck his best friend while he watches. Now the three of us crowd in my too-small bed. I stare at a black and white photo of Montmartre on the ceiling. Brett trembles like needle to the pole. Van Morrison's on the radio, having sex in the green grass with the brown-eyed girl. The ceiling fan rotates counterclockwise, but we're all sweating. I should have moved the beds together when my roommate moved out, but it's too late, now Gene's spread my thighs, and pinned his best friend against the wall, and now he says nothing while Brett watches him slam into me. I need him to scream *I love you!* again and again like he did before. But Gene's eyes are locked with Brett's. I see what I'm not meant to see; I am disposable, nothing more than a deep hole. A hot rain pelts the bedroom window. Gene pours into me like runoff. His tears look like raindrops on glass. I turn his face so he can see what he

is losing. I want him to watch his best friend as he arches his dancer's back and
comes in my mouth, his spasms an arabesque. I pull back my hair and dip my head,
trembling, like Paris, on the brink of an obscure and formidable revolution.

Alexis Rhone Fancher
(First published in *Hobart*)

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