ARCHIVE THEFT

the PARIS REVIEW *RE-*INTERVIEWS

curated by KRYSTAL LANGUELL

featuring
LATASHA DIGGS
R. ERICA DOYLE
KHADIJAH QUEEN
with an afterword by
CARMEN GIMÉNEZ SMITH

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ESSAY PRESS LISTENING TOUR

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As the Essay Press website re-launches, we have commissioned some of our favorite conveners of public discussions to curate conversation-based chapbooks. Overhearing such dialogues among poets, prose writers, critics and artists, we hope to re-envision how Essay can emulate and expand upon recent developments in trans-disciplinary small-press cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

—Krystal Languell

In 2011, I began interviewing women poets, using sets of questions borrowed from the *Paris Review* online archive of interviews. When I first moved to New York, I spent hours at my boring office job reading *Paris Review* interviews at random. I read an interview with William Faulkner from 1956 (by Jean Stein), in which he's asked in-depth about working in Hollywood and about specific characters from his novels. It was quite different from the contemporary interviews I was also reading—those conducted online, the two parties never meeting face-to-face, using email or GChat to really kick the exchange into an artificially frantic pace. The Internet interview, it struck me, was nothing like a conversation.

I often cite the interview with James Tate (conducted by Charles Simic) from *The Paris Review*, Summer 2006, as a crucial inspiration for pursuing my MFA. It was tremendously important to me. And so I began my series with the Faulkner and Tate interviews, which I re-conducted with Kate Schapira and Carmen Giménez Smith—not to poke fun at the originals, but to ask questions of my subjects I could not possibly know the answers to in advance. There's a bit of the defense attorney in some ordinary interviews, a predictability I wanted to dodge.

The other constraint I imposed for this series was that the interview had to take place in real time. Usually, we used Skype and I recorded with Audacity, a free audio-editing program. I wanted to do a single take with minimal editing of the transcribed text. When I interviewed Khadijah Queen, we had to do it twice because I made a computer error and lost our original conversation. It had been serendipitously on-point, about her parents and jazz music. I had to let that set of questions go—there was no way to have spontaneous conversation in a second take.

If certain questions didn't seem fruitful (or funny), I permitted myself as interlocutor to skip them. The poet did not receive any information about the source of her questions until after the interview was over, so there was no opportunity for preparation. For her part, the interview subject was free to "pass" on any question that stumped her. When the interviews were published

online, at *Coldfront* or in *The Conversant*, I wrapped things up by asking what the poet was reading/writing/publishing at that moment, to give her a chance to plug her current projects. In this present version those addendum questions have mostly been redacted, since the content is no longer timely.

Wresting these questions from their original context and recycling them for my own purpose is an exercise in feminist intervention; my goal is specifically to promote the work of women poets I believe in. The purpose of an archive, in my view, is to make material available for writers and scholars to use in creating original work. Happily, I've been able to make many discoveries in the process of engaging with the *Paris Review* interview archives. I learned that LaTasha Diggs has a brother, R. Erica Doyle took a ballet class, Khadijah Queen dropped out of art school. Without the constraint of the interview form I created, I never would have known to ask.

Acknowledgments: Krystal Languell was an editor of R. Erica Doyle's *proxy* and LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs's *TwERK*, both published by Belladonna* Collaborative in April 2013. Thanks to Liz von Klemperer for transcription assistance, to Andy Fitch and *The Conversant* for publishing Erica's and Khadjiah's interviews online previously, and to Ken L. Walker for publishing earlier interviews in this series at *Coldfront*.

Interview with R. Erica Doyle

Krystal Languell: It takes us rather far to think you are *victimized* by intelligence, especially since for a half century you have been thought of as one of the keenest critical and critical-poetical intelligences in France; but doesn't this bear on something you told me about yourself and Proust—that you both got started wrong?

Erica Doyle: [*Laughing*] I don't think there's such a thing as starting wrong, there's only progression. It's kind of like Yoda.

KL: How could it have happened that you entered into this child-protégé phase? Did you have some roots in the arts, in your family for example?

ED: [*Laughing*] I actually did. As a child I did produce a lot of art. I created a lot of things. My mother was a classically trained opera singer. She'd hoped to pursue that professionally, but my father did not approve of that as a profession and thought it would be exposing her to all kinds of wayward people and unsavory situations. He discouraged her and probably denied

her the right to do that. He was pretty controlling. But he loved to sing as well. When my mother was younger, she was involved in the Negro Theater up in Harlem with Harry Belafonte and some other people, and my father may have done some things with them as well.

My parents were born in the 1920s and so they came of age in the '40s in the big-band era, and they used to dance. They were these amazing jitterbug dancers and my mother had poodle skirts. They both loved to sing and dance. My father also liked to draw, and as children we thought his drawings were horrible.

My family is from Trinidad, and at the time there was a different function for art. It was a daily thing and everyone participated in it. Everyone had these same posters of the Caribbean on their walls, so I was surrounded by those kinds of artistic products that weren't considered highbrow.

But I had an aunt who married into our family. She was African-American and from North Carolina. I remember her being exotic, and in the '70s she was into the Black Arts Movement and she'd have these salons (in Queens, mind you), and she'd dress up and it was very Afrocentric and proud of black culture. I remember going to these salons, and it being this fuffy, exotic

thing. She was the only person in my family who did that.

KL: Do you think the loss of your father in your first year bears on your accomplishment?

ED: Well, I lost my father in my first year of…some other part of my life. It was my second year working as a paralegal at a law firm. What was the question?

KL: If it bears on your accomplishment.

ED: I was at AWP this past week and I was listening to a memoir panel. I was really there because Jeannette Winterson was on the panel, but there was an agent there who was giving people very practical advice about writing. And she said if you're nervous about writing about people, just wait until they die. And then you can just do it after they're dead. What's the rush, right? So write what you like and you can share it after they're dead.

I had two fathers and a mother. Not to sound ghoulish or unappreciative of my parents' lives, but there is something very liberating about not having parents, especially for me. I was raised very traditionally to respect and honor my parents, not to question them, and to obey them. So my parents' deaths have freed

me in a lot of ways to write what I like. Not that it's not sad that they died, but the only people whose opinions I cared about are dead, so, here we go.

KL: What happened in those days after you were launched?

ED: I've had so many launchings!

KL: We're about to have a couple more, too!

ED: Those heady days of those launchings.

I was launched in 1992 when I escaped my life at Georgetown University and ventured out into the gay community. I snuck into a panel about coming out in communities of color, which I had found in a newspaper someone gave me to wrap dishes in. That was one of the first launchings.

And again when I started collaborating. I did a collaboration with the composer Joshua Fried, and that launched me into learning about myself and about another field of composition—from someone who is an expert experimenter and innovator. And another time I was launched was in collaboration with visual artist Torkwase Dyson, with different minds around similar concepts.

And the launching of this book is another! I'm in the middle of it. Part of it is keeping the wisdom of my friend Ronaldo Wilson, and this was passed to him by Meena Alexander, which is to really savor and enjoy your first book. Not to rush ahead to other projects. To enjoy something that will never happen again.

It's been printed. I walk around with it. People have bought it. I saw it in a bookstore. I'm focused on sitting with the reality of the book existing, which was something I had given up on by the time I read for you in Hot Texts, the summer of 2011. Then you solicited the manuscript a few months later.

I had let go of that. So it still seems very unreal. I'm floating, post-launch.

KL: How old were you then?

ED: I was so many ages, all these launchings!

For this most recent launching I'm 44, and at the first launching I was 22. So isn't that fortuitous? Serendipitous? Curious.

KL: But the ballet wasn't presented then?

ED: You know, it's all been a sort of dance. [*Laughing*]

I took a ballet class once. I'm always working to develop my mind. I was diagnosed with ADHD and my mind craves constant stimulation. So I've taken sign language and technology courses, and a graphic-novel class. When I got the Astraea Lesbian Writers Fund grant, I thought, *How am I going to continue to develop myself artistically? I'm gonna take ballet.*

As I grew up people had made fun of me for being such a bad dancer. I was a fine soca dancer. But I couldn't do any of the American dances. When I was growing up, it was the cabbage patch and the smurf. I was very shy.

So I thought, *I'm gonna take ballet because it's so constrained, and they're going to tell me exactly what to do. And if that happens, I'll do it.* And that's a little part of how I enter a work, by putting a constraint on it as a place of safety for me.

KL: Picasso?

ED: Dalí.

KL: Aren't you really positing a kind of passion of anti-conformism?

ED: I am positing a passion of passion.

I was just at AWP, and that's great because it's not related to my daily work life at all. I work at a job that is quite removed from writing. In terms of things in this country that are under siege, my other profession is under siege too. But it was great to be at this conference talking about ideas.

I heard a lot of statements about things. And that's what non-conformity makes me think about. I'm interested in a developmental conversation, a conversation about process (versus presentation). So I think the question asks about a presentational stance, and I'm more interested in an exploratory…

KL: Do you think this liberty can go too far?

ED: No.

People have a sense of liberty that's wound up in ego, which is really about fear. The only reason it feels like it's gone too far is that people are using what they call "liberty" to defend themselves against things they are deathly afraid of, which are usually within themselves.

The idea of cognitive dissonance, how people have it and disengage—instead of sitting with it and inquiring,

Why am I having this and how can I respond from a place that is not reactive? Am I exercising my liberty in a way that is really about exorcizing some fear that I think I have?

KL: Who would you name as fundamental to this conversion?

ED: My dog. Just kidding. [*Laughing*]

My grandmother after she got to be a certain age stopped having dogs, which reminds me of novels about vampires where it's very sad for vampires to connect with mortals because they die so early. Another author I love, Joan Slonczewski, has a series of novels where certain humans have life spans of thousands of years, and they have a very difficult time connecting with people whose lives don't last that long.

But in terms of conversion, that makes me think of Flannery O'Connor, you know *Everything that Rises Must Converge*. Everything in existence is responsible for it.

KL: If you had to name the chief architect of this revolt?

ED: It's pretty universally accepted in human cultures that all minds are one mind and all beings are one

being—that there is no chief architect. We're caught up in a series of currents, this ebullience, this flow, and when there is a concentration we have some kind of transition. So we are all the architects.

KL: Some moments ago, you spoke of this "other." I think we would do well to try to pin down what you mean by that. Picasso has spoken of it—said it is the real doer of his creation—and you have during our earlier talks. How would you define it?

ED: The book is called *proxy* and that is a manifestation of a kind of otherness. I see it in some respects as an avatar, in both ancient and contemporary terms. I think that the other of course is really a projection of the self, but also the other is, as I was saying before, a referent for a larger organism. We have cells in our brains that enable us to pick up what other people seem to be thinking. Mirror neurons. We're looking at other people and things are happening in our brains regardless of what's happening to us consciously. Other is others but others are us.

KL: Do you mean the unconscious creates?

ED: Yes.

It's different for different artists, but for me it's always been an unconscious process. I don't start out thinking, *This is what the project is going to be*. In fact, when I've done that what I've created has been horrible. There's literally a part of my brain where I can feel good work coming from, almost like a small seizure, and maybe it is some electrical thing happening in there, a moment when everything comes together. I've been assembling along the way, and it gets packaged. Usually in words.

KL: Simply, how do you manage such things as names of characters?

ED: In this newest book the characters have no names. It depends on the project. I have a novel that takes place in fictionalized Trinidad. I've spent time there. On TV on Sundays they have condolence messages for people who have died during the week. It goes on for a really long time. And so I would read that and get character names that way. Other times, names have just dropped into my head.

For example, the novel's main character's name is Fortune. I was at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown a few summers ago. I was on my porch and wrote in my notebook "Two doors down lives Fortune." I wasn't sure if fortune was an abstract thing, and then I realized it was a person and who it was.

KL: What about the mechanism of translation? I think you once wrote in German.

ED: Strangely enough, I did try to translate a Rilke poem from German without using a dictionary. This was a very crazy assignment given to me by David Lehman, who was my professor at The New School. I did this translation. I just kind of made it up. I loved Rilke. I tried to choose a language I knew nothing about. I don't know what I was thinking, but I thought, *Oh, Rilke, it must be about life*. It turned out later the poem was about death. So translation is a very tricky thing.

KL: Well, what is this question of the necessity of obstacle?

ED: I don't know about the necessity of obstacle. But it certainly does happen. And then you deal with it and there's a learning that comes from it or not. You can submit to obstacles and give up, but if you have that compulsion to create as an artist there's no such thing—in the face of something that is really true to your being, you just can't help but do that thing.

There's no such thing as an obstacle. There's a pause, maybe.

KL: What I have read of your poetry in English does you no justice whatever.

ED: [*Laughing*]

KL: Do you keep a sort of abstract potential reader or viewer in mind when you work?

ED: No. Twenty-two years ago I was concerned with the reader after I was done writing. Very concerned. I was continually disappointed. People who I thought would be The Reader would say things like *I don't get that* or *That doesn't sound realistic* or *Why is your writing always so depressing*?

Then I decided it was OK to not make sense to people. And when I was younger I had a stereotypical idea of who would be receptive to my work. I figured it would be someone like me. I wrote things that I wanted to see. I, mistakenly caught up in the essentialist notions of our deranged U.S. culture, thought that person would look like me.

Until I did a reading at the Corcoran Gallery in D.C., and it was a patron event, and one of my friends pulled me in. She liked my work. I thought it wasn't my crowd. But so I read. And at the very end of it, a little old very, very, very white lady with gray hair and a little wool hat

came up to me and said, *I really loved that last poem so much. It was so beautiful.* And I was so touched. Because I never thought an old white lady would be interested in my work. So, from there, I decided I wasn't going to think about audience anymore.

I was talking to Ronaldo Wilson about this yesterday, the preoccupation with the kind of work you produce, controlling who it's landing on or for. We talked about what matters being how you are able to structure conversations about your work. That's different. Expansive, meaningful, transgressive, provocative, vulnerable. That's really what's important—furthering the conversation.

KL: Can you say something about inspiration?

ED: [*Long pause*]

[*Long hum*]

KL: Are there any artificial helps—stimulants or drugs?

ED: You know what? Prescription only. I'm pretty straight-edge.

KL: Do you recommend then to writers that they read nothing serious at all?

ED: I recommend to writers that they read everything. Not just things that are serious, not just things they think are smart. It's important to follow a pleasure, even ones that your neuroses might lead you to believe are guilty pleasures. It's important to follow the pleasure in reading.

Interview with Khadijah Queen

Krystal Languell: Was being a prodigy important to you?

Khadijah Queen: I think it was more important to my parents. I learned to read when I was three years old. I was supposed to have skipped from the first to the third grade but I didn't want to, for a lot of reasons, and I think they had to let me develop at my own pace.

KL: What was your daily routine like in those days?

KQ: When I was three or when I was in the first grade?

KL: That's up to you.

KQ: I'm gonna say first grade because I don't remember much from being three, besides reading and crying and playing with my sisters. I would get up and have breakfast and my mother usually made something hot like Malt-O-Meal (I don't know if anybody remembers Malt-O-Meal), and some toast and juice or some milk.

Then we would walk to school together, my younger sister and I; she's a year younger. Then we would be in school and then we would play after school. Then we would have our baths and go to bed after we ate dinner.

KL: Do you think of yourself as a genre writer?

KQ: No, not at all. I think I'm anti-genre, though I respect the demarcation lines to some degree. I enjoy the subversiveness of playing with the boundaries of genre.

KL: When did you decide that sex was important to your work?

KQ: I don't think I ever decided that. [*Laughing*] I didn't decide that. But I'll decide it right now. For the next book.

KL: Do you still feel that tug between the urge to put something into language and the urge to fend off writing?

KQ: A few of my writer friends and I talk about existential crises pretty regularly. We get sick of writing and feel we have to do something else, anything but writing. I'm coming off a period like that where I wasn't

writing for a couple of months, and this month I'm doing poem-a-day.

But what interferes with the instinct to write is sometimes the business of writing. Sometimes it can be tainted to some degree and one has to get back to the purity of the actual creation of the thing.

KL: In your writing, you seem fascinated with cities and the contact they provide. Where does that come from?

KQ: I wouldn't say that I'm fascinated with cities so much, but I am interested in cities. That might come from moving around a lot. I went to 16 different schools and so place has always been a thing that I struggled to define and had to sort of make within my own self in terms of a home. But I am interested in the way that cities, that place influences people.

KL: But you were already serious about writing?

KQ: The first day I learned how to write.

KL: That's something else you read when you were 13. How did it affect you?

KQ: It affected me deeply.

I turned away from everything I knew previously.

KL: Did college not excite you in the same way? Why did you drop out?

KQ: I dropped out of art school because I wasn't having any fun, number one. It felt like a prison. Creativity was a thing to be boxed up and marketed. It just wasn't a nice place to be. It was creativity by force and concentrated on production and not necessarily exploration, while I developed the idea that you should just make stuff. The idea that you should make stuff for purposes of packaging yourself and limiting yourself to one thing that is marketable made me drop out.

KL: What would they [teachers] have said?

KQ: They might have said that I was whiny or I had too much other stuff going on, or that I was lazy. But they would be all the way wrong. One did say, *Clearly, Khadijah reads*.

KL: And that was it?

KQ: It was a lot more, but I would like it to be mysterious.

KL: You've said you don't do research…

KQ: No, I didn't say that.

KL: What is the role of research in your work?

KQ: I think in my first book especially research was important. It was the catalyst for some of the poems. I was really interested in pre-Colonial Mexico, and I was studying the Spanish language as well as the history of women and resistance, and coming to terms with the things that were going on with the Katrina situation and a long-distance relationship I was in—it was this convergence of research and present-time. I'm very interested in that idea, and I continue to do that in my writing.

KL: Was it fun to write?

KQ: Sometimes.

KL: You have described previously a moment of transition. Has that transition continued?

KQ: I think there are cycles and there are always transitions between those cycles. So I wouldn't say continuous but intermittent.

KL: Did you intentionally want to make something the reader can only speculate about rather than be certain of?

KQ: Totally.

KL: How do you mean?

KQ: Sometimes it's interesting to see what different people will come up with. I'm indirectly influenced by jazz because my parents made me listen to it. Both of them. My mom was a singer and my dad played the drums, so they…it was a very musical family, although I didn't really like jazz so much when I was a kid growing up. It could be interpreted in many different ways, and even if you didn't want to listen, it affected you—whether that's negative or positive or remains-to-be-seen. But I think the idea of creating something that can be individualized is fun. It's nerd-fun for me.

KL: Do you revise every day?

KQ: Not really, but often.

KL: Is it a difficult regimen?

KQ: To write every day? Yes. It's a constant challenge to make the time to write. I try to do it every morning, but

I recently started working full-time after working part-time for years. I'm struggling to get up that extra-hour early and just put it down. So it's hard.

KL: Does your teaching get in the way of your writing?

KQ: No, because I'm not teaching. I work from home as an editor for a finance company and I have a son. It works out. I don't have to put him in after-school care or anything like that. I'm there for him when he gets home from school and that's important to me.

Interview with LaTasha Diggs

Krystal Languell: Have you matured as a writer?

LaTasha Diggs: I believe in some ways I have, in some ways I have not. When I look at my work from 15 years ago, I think there's definitely a vast difference with how I use language, my interest in language and how I look at structure. Then again, I still feel that there's a lot more that I can improve upon, and a lot of that has to do with my vocabulary of poetry. There's still a lot of maturity to be…"maturity" is such a silly word. I mean, do poets ever mature? What is maturity? What does maturity mean to the creative person? There's some degree of immaturity necessary to take place for the work to even grow. I'm also thinking about De La Soul. When you listen to one of their recent albums, you know a common comment would be like *This is a mature album.* These are grown men. They're no longer boys, so the content, the subject matter, is mature, because they're older now. I am older but there's more growing up I have to do with regards to my work.

KL: Better how?

LD: Better how? Better blues, you mean more money more money more money more problems? Better. Better.

KL: Your first publication was a collaborative play, which you wrote in high school. What interested you about drama?

LD: I attended a specialized art high school. All of the drama majors were in the basement along with the instrumental majors. The visual artists and dancers were on the sixth and seventh floors. What intrigued me about drama then was how much of an asshole most drama majors were—to the point where they would have hissy fits about any other major besides themselves being in their little basement. One year I actually auditioned to be a drama major and I read a monologue from *The Fantasticks*. Of course I didn't get accepted (because I didn't know anything about being a drama queen, much less about acting) and so yeah, my monologue from *The Fantasticks* was pretty bad. As a writer, OK, maybe I cannot act it out or I am unable to perform it, but somehow I do through words. I find a persona or a sound and that activates the drama. I become animated. So the drama's there, in the animation.

KL: Had your childhood been innocent?

LD: My childhood had been a bunch of things. It had been innocent. It had been juvenile. It had been traumatic. It had been confusing.

KL: Was your writing encouraged at home?

LD: No. I didn't see myself as a writer then. I saw myself as a visual artist. I drew and painted. And I also saw myself as a musician. I played clarinet and then violin and had made it to second violin in a borough-wide orchestra. So I had hopes of becoming a visual artist and/or a violinist. Yet for some reason, it was not your typical "When I grow up, I want to be…" situation.

KL: It sounds like fun was a part of your early writing.

LD: Um, fun. Oh, it was incredibly fun writing about policemen and discrimination and racism and alcohol addiction. Yeah, it was great fun. Happy happy, joy joy!

KL: Do you feel burdened by an obligation to entertain?

LD: Can Jimi Hendrix light his guitar…can Jimi Hendrix basically light up his guitar on stage? Wait—repeat the question.

KL: Do you feel burdened by an obligation to entertain?

LD: Everybody entertains.

KL: How did you feel about that?

LD: I felt that could be tiresome if it's happening too much.

KL: When did you begin to think of yourself as a writer?

LD: 1994.

KL: Was there a similar quality to your reading?

LD: I was reading a lot of music reviews and articles on hip-hop music then. So my writing had to do a lot more with writing for music magazines and less about poetry. When I did begin to write poems, which were more or less spoken-word pieces, they were within that same vein. They were either critiquing something within hip-hop culture or something within the black and Latino community. And they had a lot of rhyme.

KL: Do you recall any pieces in particular?

LD: I had a poem entitled "Hip Hop Is All About Clothes." There was another "poem" which folks who knew me then considered the LaTasha Diggs classic: "Fist of the White Lotus." It was named after a movie

called *Fist of the White Lotus*, and had to do with mashing up various martial-arts styles, sex positions from a '70s velvet poster and Hong Kong martial-arts movies that would air on channel five Saturday mornings. There was another piece called "Fear of Chocolate," which had to do with colorism.

KL: There are several fashion articles in the archive.

LD: Fashion. Yeah and none of them have to do with big girls. Anytime you see a lovely full-size woman featured in a magazine, it is a makeover. One of my dreams is to start an online shopping site for women who are approximately a size 16.

KL: A bad time?

LD: A bad time. [*Pause*] Yeah, I got dumped back in '91 and fled to Jamaica. I lived there for three months.

KL: What had happened?

LD: I got dumped. [*Laughing*]

KL: What about your brother?

LD: My brother has always been supportive of me from a distance. We keep in close contact but, as far as communication, he has his own life. I have my life. I haven't seen much of him these years and I've been thinking about him a lot. I'm wondering how his kids are doing. Yeah, I'm feeling that I need him back in my life right now. I just need to track him down. I need some big brother love.

KL: Is that obsession with appearances still a concern to you?

LD: When my adult acne is in full, you know, display, yes.

KL: How did you accomplish it?

LD: Makeup. [*Laughing*] Foundation. Zinc. Ayurvedic soap.

KL: A mask is a way to display truth rather than to conceal it.

LD: The mask can convey a lot of things. The mask can convey very warped ideas as to what beauty is or what makes a person better than another person. A mask can present you as intelligent, as of a different social class. Masks often are the very things that get people in the positions that they are in. All of us wear several

masks during the day depending on how we are dealt with. It's like language.

KL: The development of the American writer today typically takes place within creative-writing programs. Did you consider that route?

LD: I did. Been there. Done that. Next.

KL: Did you devise another program for yourself? Did you go to readings?

LD: I attended a graduate program in California. I attended some readings. But in order to keep myself somewhat sane during my studies, I took a number of dance and silkscreen workshops at the Mission Cultural Center.

KL: What books were you reading in those years?

LD: I was reading Harryette Mullen, Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, Denise Levertov, Robert Hayden, Nathanial Mackey, Kimiko Hahn, Robert Duncan, Kathleen Fraser, Lorenzo Thomas, Alice Notley, Cecilia Vicuña, Audre Lorde, Kamau Brathwaite, Mark Nowak, Anne Carson and Mei-mei Berssenbrugge.

KL: Yeah?

LD: Yeah. Gertrude Stein, W. G. Sebald, Erica Hunt, June Jordan, Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka…lots of writers from El Boom—a lot, which I guess is pretty normal for graduate school, yes?

KL: What do you mean by overwritten?

LD: Slam poetry. [*Laughing*]

KL: You said you were writing eight hours a day.

LD: And now I'm writing, at this moment, eight hours a week.

KL: Even when things weren't working?

LD: Yeah, because I write postcards to myself.

KL: I'm struck by the number of dream sequences.

LD: Oh, there are plenty of dream sequences. Dreaming is the same as animation, you know.

KL: How did you compose the book?

LD: With very poor reading glasses and an editor or two or three. [*Laughing*] That's how I composed the book, but I also argue that the book is collaboration.

My book essentially is the culmination of a 15-year period. Fifteen years of work that was pulled out of the crate, dusted off with a Swiffer, and then sifted through. I know the amount of work I invested in whittling down the manuscript, but I acknowledge the other sets of eyes that read it, gave suggestions and triple checked for errors. That's collaboration.

KL: When did you meet?

LD: I met my first love at a punk show on Bleeker and Broadway. It was in a little club in a basement, and my friend Izzy and his band were performing, and Ryan (who was the front man for Izzy's band) had brought along two friends from Long Island. One of them was a Filipino named Eric and the other was this cat named Israel. We instantly started dating. We met, we got intense and then he dumped me. [*Laughing*] He dumped me. He joined another band, thought he was going to be a rock star but got kicked out of the band. Then he was re-invited to go with the band on tour. He was kicked out of the band again. The last I saw him he was some crazy Christian fanatic. He was looking like a straight-up stalker. So dumping me was a very good thing. Rejection is god's protection.

KL: Was this your first friendship with another writer?

LD: He was a guitar player.

KL: I know.

LD: I know, but that's all I'm saying. [*Laughing*]

KL: OK.

LD: He couldn't write shit. He tried to be a rapper, but he was pretty lame at rapping too.

KL: And what difference did this make?

LD: It didn't make any difference then because I was in love with him, but in hindsight it was like, *Nah.* He was pretty OK.

KL: When did you first come across DeLillo?

LD: [*Laughing*] Next.

KL: What did you find so attractive about him?

LD: Oh, his really strong political stance with regards to the island of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican political prisoners from the U.S., his consistency in presenting a historical narrative of Puerto Rico in his artwork. I was really attracted to that. I find that an important quality.

KL: Do you mean the sound too?

LD: The sound? Well yeah…if you think about some of his more sculptural works. There is a sonic quality to them. He uses previously recorded music and video in one of his well-known sculptures. He designed a custom-made piragua (shaved icee cart) with rims and a sound system, similar to how one may "pimp" out an automobile. Or it could just be the sound that comes up when you look at more of his two-dimensional work and you have to imagine sonically what these characters in these paintings are activating.

KL: And when did you discover Pynchon?

LD: When did I discover pinching? When my little sister wanted to fight with me over a fork.

KL: [*Laughing*] Not pinching, Pynchon, like *Gravity's Rainbow*. What else did that rascal write? But I'm gonna stick with your first answer.

LD: [*Laughing*] I still have that fork. Maybe it's time to let it go or to finally release it to her.

KL: And that infection did not last to your later work?

LD: I'm waiting for it to appear. I'm waiting for the moment that it wants to be written about. I would say that right now I still haven't the balls to write about it. I haven't wanted to enter the subject. It is painful.

KL: When had you become interested in earthquakes?

LD: When I was sitting in the studio during my MFA and the room shook. Following that was a couple of years later in New York. I was sitting at my desk in my studio in my fifth-floor apartment and there's something to be said about earthquakes and the gods. We need to listen to the gods more. There's plenty of scientific stuff to explain why earthquakes do what they do and why they occur. But honestly, the gods are pretty pissed with us so it's their way of saying to us, *Hey there, you little bitches—you're fucking up big time.*

KL: And it went smoothly after that?

LD: No of course not. Nothing goes smoothly. Arguments are arguments. If it were to go smoothly I think sex would be more involved. Tension never gets relief. [*Laughing*] Does anyone ever have angry sex? Seriously? There are moments of distance, and weird encounters—eyes nervously wanting to roll and teeth wanting to be sucked and imagination running wild wanting to astral project and bitch slap somebody. No, it never goes smoothly.

KL: Just one page?

LD: Yes, just one page. That is the goal. To write work for however long I can maintain it. I love flash-fiction pieces no longer than one page. Some no longer than 150 words. But the goal is one page. What needs to be said needs to happen in one page—that's it.

KL: Despite the silence, music often features in your books.

LD: As I mentioned earlier, I was a music journalist for a couple of years. I was also a dancer for a couple of years. I fronted as a lead vocalist for a band that was not my band. I still occasionally get employed as a vocalist and electronic artist. So music is not only something that I enjoy and love, but also a major portion of my livelihood. I am surrounded by it all the time. It is my joy. It is my love. It generates and promotes the creativity. My writing is informed by music.

KL: And you did take a year off?

LD: Yup. I took a year off. I quit that job at the bookstore as soon as I received my first grant from NYFA. I also got a scholarship to attend Naropa's summer writing program. I told the owners of the bookstore that I was going to take a month's leave, and I never came back. I stretched that NYFA money, paid the rent, purchased my first official adult bed.

KL: And yet it doesn't seem that novelty is all that important to you anymore.

LD: It never has.

KL: Is the response of critics important to you?

LD: It's important to me only so much as to read and hear what people are pulling from the work that I may not notice. I think it is interesting how many different interpretations of one body of work can be revealed. While there might be some overlap and similarities with obvious things, like language play, it's fascinating how some critics focus solely on the language play and less on the narrative within the work. Or some notice the subject of the female body and some do not. They may not encounter the mother-daughter relationship that's a common thread throughout the book. There are pieces that have to do with what family is, what family represents. But not every critic sees that. So I think it matters in some ways. However, I do not want to be concerned with getting critics' approval. But I am learning a lot about the layers of theory that are used to examine the work. I like that.

KL: What are people missing or overlooking in your work?

LD: Loneliness. The desire for connection. The desire to dance with other folks from other places. To have a dancer partner. The desire to love. The struggle with finding love. The frustration in only being able to communicate these desires and joys and wants and needs through a collage of words and tongues (because it's best understood that way, rather than in English).

KL: Cool. I'd like to also ask you about what you're working on now. What happened with the Kehinde Wiley poems? Is that catalogue out?

LD: No, it hasn't come out. The exhibition is in February of 2015. The museum will publish two of five I wrote. The other three have appeared in *The Atlas Review*, *Birds of Lace* and one other journal that is escaping me right now.

Afterword: Theft As Reformation

—Carmen Giménez Smith

Founded in 1953, *The Paris Review* features work by emerging literary superstars and established ones too. The journal's well-known "Writers at Work" interview series is considered by some the holy grail of literary counsel. Writers from T. S. Eliot to Herta Müller have revealed their private stories and philosophies about writing to *The Paris Review*'s interlocutors. Unfortunately, like so many other literary portals, women are poorly represented, and writers of color fare even worse. This archive's inventory isn't even worth enumerating; a quick scan suggests an international canon that is suspiciously well-heeled and white and lauded.

The patriarchal literary tradition of guildmaster and apprentice is at the center of a "Writers at Work"

interview's conceit, and until now the terms under which *The Paris Review*'s gatekeepers define mastery or excellence have rarely been interrogated. *Archive Theft*, the new conceptual work by Krystal Languell, is a compelling critique of this masculinist literary polity. The innovative women of color she "interviews" redefine or resist its questions. By occupying preceding interviews they perform a violence against previous exclusions. *Archive Theft* is therefore a deterritorialization, and a fine example of Languell's commitment to feminist agitation.

The associative questions provoke the subjects (R. Erica Doyle, Khadijah Queen and LaTasha Diggs) to delve into their histories and describe coming to writing—narratives vital to reforming a canon. In response to an ambiguous statement about masks, for instance, Diggs replies:

> The mask can convey a lot of things. The mask can convey very warped ideas as to what beauty is or what makes a person better than another person. A mask can present you as intelligent, as of a different social class. Masks often are the very things that get people in the positions that they are in. All of us wear several masks during the day depending on how we are dealt with. It's like language.

In her powerful collage-essay "The Pink Guitar" Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes her intention in writing as a "desire to change the authority relations to the text and possibly to language." Although Languell's self is cloaked by arch inquiry in this book, her fierce and insistent intent to raze problematic institutions is its engine. At the same time, doyle, Queen and Diggs are three of the most compelling poets writing today, which is why *Archive Theft* is such a vital project.

Author Bios

R. ERICA DOYLE

R. Erica Doyle was born in Brooklyn to Trinidadian immigrant parents, and has lived in Washington, D.C., Farmington, Connecticut and La Marsa, Tunisia. Her work has been anthologized in *Best American Poetry*; *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Gay and Lesbian Writing from the Antilles*; *Gumbo: A Celebration of African American Writing*; *Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam*; *Gathering Ground: A Reader Celebrating Cave Canem's First Decade* and *Voices Rising: Celebrating 20 Years of Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Writing*.

CARMEN GIMÉNEZ SMITH

Carmen Giménez Smith is the author of a memoir and four poetry collections (including *Milk and Filth*, finalist for the 2013 NBCC award in poetry). A CantoMundo Fellow, she now teaches in the creative-writing programs at New Mexico State University, while serving as the editor-in-chief of *Puerto del Sol* and the publisher of Noemi Press.

LATASHA N. NEVADA DIGGS

LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, writer, vocalist and sound artist, is the author of *TwERK* (a collection of poems, songs and myths) and the co-founder and co-editor of Coon Bidness, *yoYO* and *SO4*. Her performances have been featured at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center. As a curator and director, she has staged events at BAM Café, Lincoln Center Out of Doors and El Museo del Barrio. She lives in Harlem.

KRYSTAL LANGUELL

Krystal Languell was born in South Bend, Indiana. She is the author of the books *Call the Catastrophists* and *Gray Market* (forthcoming from Coconut Books), and the chapbooks *Last Song* (dancing girl press) and *Be a Dead Girl* (Argos Books). In early 2014, *Fashion Blast Quarter* was published as a poetry pamphlet by Flying Object. A core member of the Belladonna* Collaborative, she also edits the journal *Bone Bouquet*. She is a 2014–2015 Lower Manhattan Cultural Council workspace resident.

KHADIJAH QUEEN

photo credit: Thomas Sayers Ellis

Khadijah Queen is the author of *Conduit*, *Black Peculiar* and the digital chapbook *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* (Sibling Rivalry). A Cave Canem alum, she is the winner of the 2014 Leslie Scalapino Award for Innovative Women Performance Writers.

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