

LITMUS PRESS

“Whatever doesn’t stick to your body is a word”: Plays from Litmus Press and O Books



Cold Heaven, Camille Roy

Drama, O Books, 1993

\$10 USD ISBN 978-1-882022-15-1, 89pp

Dead Youth, or, The Leaks, Joyelle McSweeney

Drama, Litmus Press, 2014

\$15 USD ISBN 978-1-933959-24-5, 90pp

Non-Sequitur, Khadijah Queen

Drama, Litmus Press, 2015

\$15 USD ISBN 978-1-933959-29-0, 86pp

Distributed by Small Press Distribution

ph. 800.869.7553 (Toll-free within the US)

www.spdbooks.org

Supplementary Materials

Biographical Notes

Camille Roy is a San Francisco-based writer and performer of fiction, poetry, and plays. Her books include *Sherwood Forest* (Futurepoem, 2011), *Cheap Speech* (Leroy, 2002), *Craquer*, (Second Story Books, 2002), *Swarm* (Black Star Series, 1998), *The Rosy Medallions* (Kelsey St Press, 1995) and *Cold Heaven* (O Books, 1993). She co-edited *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative* (CoachHouse, 2005; reissued, 2010). Roy has taught creative writing in multiple genres and forms at several institutions, most recently at San Francisco State University.

Joyelle McSweeney writes in many genres and has published eight books of poetry, prose, plays and essays. With Johannes Göransson, she edits Action Books, a press for international writing, which has published such authors as Raúl Zurita, Kim Hyesoon, Aase Berg, Hiromi Ito, Don Mee Choi, Abraham Smith, Lara Glenum, and Lucas de Lima, among many others. She teaches at the University of Notre Dame and lives in South Bend, Indiana and on the Internet.

Khadijah Queen is the author of *Conduit* (Black Goat/Akashic Books 2008), *Black Peculiar* (2011, winner of the 2010 Noemi Press book award); and *Fearful Beloved* (Argos Books 2015). Her chapbooks are *Exercises in Painting* (Bloof Books 2016), *I'm So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* (Sibling Rivalry 2013), *No Isla Encanta* (2007) and *bloodroot* (2015), both from dancing girl press. She has held residency fellowships from Cave Canem, Squaw Valley Community of Writers and the Norman Mailer Center in Provincetown. Since 2008, she has curated the annual reading series *Courting Risk*, which focuses particularly on women and LGBTIQ writers working in multiple genres.

Short Descriptions

Cold Heaven is a collection of two plays that navigate gender, sexuality, relationships, and death. "Developing the piece in rehearsal was like driving into a hallucination that was clearly mine, and not mine." - Camille Roy

Praise for *Cold Heaven*

"not a play but an exploding poem by a bright new writer from the West Coast."
- Eileen Myles

Dead Youth, or, The Leaks is a farce set on a hijacked containership on its way to Magnetic Island, Julian Assange attempts to "reboot" a troupe of DEAD YOUTH—teenagers from all over the globe who have died in violent circumstances from sweatshop labor to environmental poisoning to war—but must grapple with two other would-be hijackers: a young Somali pirate and a female Antoine de St-Exupery.

Praise for *Dead Youth, or, The Leaks*

"*Dead Youth, or, the Leaks*, is the shocking gaze upon the most beautiful and obscene gesture that is survival itself. This work takes as truth the statement that violence is such stuff as dreams are made of, that genocide can be converted to a legible surface, that oppression can be exhalation, that knowledge can be devastation, that violence can be humanistic and natural, staggering, immersive. In other words, *Dead Youth* is a farce, perhaps, but built on the exploitation and death and misery that becomes charisma and complication and sacredness. Heavy, yet easy to consume for its beautiful and profound images, indigestible, yet productive and rapacious in the indigestion that it produces. This is a work like none other. Let the destruction of the world become the rhythm of your life."

- Janice Lee

Non-Sequitur is a play that forefronts the importance of spaces that can hold dissonant, diverse bodies in the world today. Voices collide and yet still hold together.

Praise for *Non-Sequitur*

"Prodigiously populated theater energized by a rotating cast of intense who dis, who dat and whosoever: 40% Discount, Morning Stubble, Habitual Justifier, the Charlie Horse Optimist, among others, who if we don't know by name we know them by their catastrophes and desperate hopes. Comedy and calamity spin briskly in the mix, trading lines in duets, trios and quartets. Attention, attention. This is the back of your mind, emerging full blown from a swallowed dream. Here."

—Erica Hunt

Reviews

“...a play built on the ignored or revised histories of its characters, and its loyalty to history is as strong as our shaky remembrances and popular media retellings of it,” says Travis A Sharp in *Entropy*.

<https://entropymag.org/dead-youth-or-the-leaks-by-joyelle-mcsweeney/>

“What has mothered us?” asks Allison Donohue on *The Volta Blog*

<https://thevoltablog.wordpress.com/2015/10/21/review-dead-youth-or-the-leaks-by-joyelle-mcsweeney/>

Los Angeles Review of Books Considers the Plays of Joyelle McSweeney

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2016/02/los-angeles-review-of-books-considers-the-plays-of-joyelle-mcsweeney>

“...a cutting rearrangement of stereotypes surrounding desire, identity politics, and the ways in which perception mediates relationships,” says Nina Puro on *Non-Sequitur* in *Weird Sister*

<http://weird-sister.com/2015/12/18/5182/>

Links

The Relationship

<http://www.therelationship.org>

Non-Sequitur Excerpt on Vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/154443227>

Captain Phillips

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535109/>

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt5686132/>

Interview with Camille Roy on *Jacket2*

<https://jacket2.org/interviews/suspense-not-telling>

Relevant News

Chelsea Manning: Wikileaks source and her turbulent life

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-11874276>

Chelsea Manning leaves prison

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/16/us/politics/chelsea-manning-leaves-prison.html?_r=0

The Man Who Spilled The Secrets : Julian Assange

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/02/the-guardian-201102>

Somali Pirate Asks Forgiveness, Sentenced To Nearly 34 Years in Prison

<http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/somali-pirate-muse-sentenced-34-years/story?id=12930166>

A Grounded Soul: Saint-Exupery in New York

<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/30/books/a-grounded-soul-saint-exupery-in-new-york.html?pagewanted=all>

Henrietta Lacks

<http://www.lacksfamily.net>

On Microaggressions and Women

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/119429-15-microaggressions-women-face-on-a-daily-basis-because-they-all-add-up-to-an-unequal>

On Lesbian Literature

<http://gem.greenwood.com/wse/wsePrint.jsp?id=id395>

On Performativity - Poetic Plays - The Inherent Entangling of All Genres

Excerpts from:

How Phenomena Appear to Unfold - Leslie Scalapino

Potes & Poets, 1989 / Litmus Press, 2011

Leslie Scalapino (1944-2010) is the author of thirty books of poetry, prose, inter-genre fiction, plays, and essays. She taught writing for nearly 25 years at various institutions around the country and was the publisher of O Books, which she founded in 1986.

How Phenomena Appear to Unfold is a collection of thirty-one essays and twelve poetic pieces. Expanded from the first edition from Potes & Poets in 1989, this version includes twenty-three new essays and seven additional poetic pieces.

These excerpts provide brief insights into Scalapino's view of the poem-play as a form. For further insight, refer to the book itself.

"Many of my poetic works have the purpose of the writing 'seeing as altering oneself and altering negative social formation – as such, tracking of being and the instant of occurrence.' 'Being' as simultaneous with/as 'the instant of occurrence' create each. The future creates the past."

(pg. 5)

"... the poem-play leg, itself a performance within a performance, is intended as an action of the text."

(pg. 6)

"Rather than the poem-play describing or dramatizing these events, its language-motions are imitations of the flow, juxtaposition and minute movements of the film and the world events happening at once."

(pg. 7)

"Narrative of all times at once has a relation to writing as all-over space without beginning or end, as seen in Japanese horizontal scrolls and unfolding illustrated books."

(pg. 9)

Writing Exercises

- Stage a reading or act out a poetic scene that you write on your own. Have it be in conversation with one of the plays you read.
- Choose a scene from each of the plays and stage and act it out.
- Choose another scene, or the same from before, and change up the stage directions. What effect does this have on the story, the dialogue, the poetics in the scene, and the plays as a whole?
- Take lines throughout all three books and collage them into a poem. Turn the poem into a scene to be acted out.
- Research other poems or plays that parallel some or all three books, and write three or four pages about how they relate, what they say about contemporary literature, and how they can inform readers about modern issues.

Discussion Questions

- How do characters and narrative place the plays within a contemporary context?
- What do poetics add to dialogue? Detract? Speak specifically toward formal techniques.
- What are some vessels for movement throughout the plays? Compare to other texts and/or common writing techniques..
- The subject of death recurs throughout many of these plays. How does each playwright think of death? Is it its own character? Are their ideas of death new or historical?
- Go back through and take note of the stage directions throughout the plays. How does the interpretation of these elements affect the play as a whole? How do they shift mood and story? How many ways can a single direction be interpreted?
- Many of these plays have characters in the form of an emotion or object. How is this different than a traditional character? Is it? What purpose does this serve in the context of the contemporary?
- In *Non-Sequitur*, short scenes with many different, dissonant voices replace a traditional method of several recurring characters. Along with the topics that the voices speak toward, how do you think this method deconstructs and/or builds upon life and events in the modern age?

- Write two quick scenes using sparse setting and characters that are either objects or emotions of characters. These scenes should showcase a grasp of narrative and one's ability to employ comparison and contrast.
- In Camille Roy's *Bye-Bye Brunhilde*, the character TECHNIQUE says, "Whatever doesn't stick to your body is a word." What do you think this means in regards to writing dialogue, writing a poem, living life? Can you think of another piece of literature that "doesn't stick to your body"?
- Roy's plays critique the social norm and common structures of relationships. What are some sentiments that might still echo about today's norms or structures since their publication in 1993? How have the sentiments changed at all?

