

A Flower In Her Heart: An Interview With Writer Jane Alberdeston

Part one of a two-part interview:

Jane Alberdeston Coralin is a Puerto Rican poet whose work has been published in literary magazines and poetry anthologies throughout the U.S. and Canada. An alumna of Cave Canem, a writers organization for poets of African descent, Jane has performed her work in arts events and mentored writer s workshops in schools throughout the East Coast. Her poetry collections, *Waters of My Thirst* and *The AfroTaina Dreams*, are still in circulation. She is currently working on a poetry manuscript called *Songs of a Daughter s Make Believe*. She just completed her doctoral studies in English at Binghamton University in New York.

My blessing in knowing her is I have come in contact with poetry of heartbreaking beauty, but in addition, she is another co-author of *Sister Chicas*. Her *Taina* is self aware, whip smart and a deep dreamer, just like Jane herself.

Describe your odyssey in becoming a writer. How does Latin and female identity influence your work? What would you say are your major influences, both personally and in a literary sense?

It s wonderful how you begin with the word odyssey ; most of the time it s felt like I ve been on Discovery Channel s *Deadliest Catch* crab boat, rolling on the waves wishing for a full net. It s a type of wishing that happens with me too, a wishing for what I think is the right word, the best image, the loud line that will carry the story forward.

I am the cliché: the writer that started way-back, fourteen and pimply and unpopular. I had one friend, also a closet writer. We started writing Harlequinesque romances together. Lots of boys and horses. Only later, at eighteen, depressed and lonely in Long Island, far away from my mami and her Puerto Rico, did I learn to write truly, as in about my life, the things I understood and knew. And I could only get to that point through the vehicle of poetry. But I was a language novice; though I viscerally understood poetry s power, I hadn t yet grasped all the tools, the glorious avenues that poetry drives.

So, again, I floated on the waters, til I arrived in Washington DC and was warmly welcomed by the poetry community. I started reading at a dive called 15 Minutes on 15th Street NW DC. A long Amtrak train ride waited me at the end of that night, but I knew it was the only way I could get to know people and kill the shy girl within. Monday nights I was there, sipping back Sprites with lime, scratching through wrinkled sheets of poem, waiting to be called on stage. Later, I found my community at It s Your Mug, a poetry cafe in Georgetown on P Street NW in the 90s. Imagine a room so filled with people it was warm in the winter, as if a hearth were burning in the corner. But there was no fire except for the flames coming out of some of the most political and dramatic poetry in the city. And the poets got me -- they got my images, they got my song -- they appreciated my life living on the fence, on the cusp of self: Americanness, blackness and Puerto Ricanness. I didn t see myself as a prism, but as a broken thing.

This was my new story to tell; not because it was hip or cool in 1995 to be Latina in DC. This was my story to tell because I d come to a point where my Latinaness and Blackness were speaking to each other. Narratives in my family long buried were suddenly crawling their way up and out of me. I heard my grandmother in Julia de Burgos s *Rio Grande de Loiza*. Poems from Martin Espada, Marjorie Agosin, Judith Ortiz Cofer, and others were guides for me to move into the cave where the stories hide.

You were an established poet for quite a while before you started writing fiction. Is the creative process different for you when you work in different genres? How so?

Oh, I was always a fiction writer; I think I stored the fiction away for awhile, boxed it up in cardboard boxes. I was afraid. Fear s so powerful, it struck me down for awhile. The poems were easier to admit were mine. Even that took years. It took a very long time to say I was a writer, so your question throws me off the fence a bit. I kept poetry and fiction in very different camps: poetry to the far left, fiction over the hill and through the woods. I couldn t imagine their sharing space in my head at the same time. That would have meant I had grown as a writer! We can t have any of that.

Talking about fear, it was excruciating for me to imagine people would care about what I had to say. Shy for most of my life, I used poetry as the vehicle to talk. The poem would say everything I needed it to say and it would also silence what needed silencing. It s still very difficult for me to speak up, to say what I want, what I don t want or feel comfortable with. It s a constant battle for me: performing poetry became a stage where I could practice being heard. When I read a poem (mine or another s), I am amazed by how I feel as if the woman talking were from Mars or Pluto, blue with ice. So, if by established, you mean comfortable, I d have to say NO. I m never comfortable. But I m still working - there s so much I still need to learn and try. I m always oscillating between jumping off the cliff and never writing again or loving the process so much I d marry it, as my 11 year old

nephew would say.

Part of what keeps me going is the challenge: I become so enamoured of other writers works: Edwige Danticat, Lucille Clifton, ZZ Packer, Zora Neal Hurston, my fellow artists and friends. Right now I am reading Kiran Desai and it was enough to strike me dumb for a bit. I couldn't think of creating for a couple of weeks. And then... something, as usual, popped in my head, deep in it, like a blooming cereus in the desert night. And then all was/is well. I feel/felt right with the world. Stumbling this practiced way is the only way I have of staying in love with process, thickening with it.

What's coming down the pike? For the past three or so years, I've worked to meld poetry and fiction, to blur the lines. I believe muddling the genres can help you strengthen the muscles for both. For example, in my own work, my dialogue in fiction stopped being stale and my poem-spaces have grown. I tell my students to listen in elevators, on the street, in restaurants. People don't know the way they speak is poetry. I use this exercise myself, fixing my ears to this magic has helped me hone in on my own work and shape it. I listen more to people, especially children. Their sounds and word choices, image constructions are so musical and poem-perfect. Children carry in their little mouths the very best metaphors. They have an intricate relationship with the power of image. They aren't held back by what keeps us, even writers, from say what needs to be said. They aren't full of the flowery language, yet they are such glorious gardens.

What would you describe as your major themes?

Do you have enough room? My poems explored my race and nationality; they interrogated my father and his abandoning my family; they looked at migration and the grasp of one's culture over assimilation. In one of the poems I sent you, Smoke, I was dealing with the idea of my father's depression, something I had never in my youth or early adulthood even thought to explore. But being able to look back with twenty-thirty sight, I can deconstruct my memories, see my father staring out a lot, having several afternoon drinks till he fell to sleep at night, bark at us though we'd done nothing to inspire ire. His beer-thick fog of unhappiness started to speak up, some fifteen years after he'd left us. It started to speak up in poems, interrupt rooms of poems, move through my writing like a bull in a porcelain shop. I could not ignore its chatter, its rumble. It's this way with most of my work, the stories too. Characters (whether in a stanza or paragraph) just won't leave me alone. The only way I have of shaking them off my back is to pay attention. Close. Jot down what the monsters say when they say it. Then I'm free. Somewhat.

Right now I'm interested in discussing womanist themes and spirituality. The women's voices tapping on my head like clockwork hammers come from the abused, stolen, disregarded. The spiritual element comes from our response, the way we use our stories to protect each other, to protect our children. I've been exploring this in my critical studies, but like everything in my life, the academic has arced into my creative work. And that has awoken memories of my Abuela's storytelling. Or maybe the stories are the reason behind my academic studies? We all have talking memories; if not from an Abuela, then an Abuelo, or a Tia or Uncle or a Madrina sitting the kitchen, the porch, the stoop, or garden. Have you read Judith Ortiz Cofer's memoir *Silent Dancing*? When I read it, I was convinced she was talking about my Abuela Juanita. I could have leaned in and touched my own grandmother between those pages. I don't have many pictures in my head from when I was young. I wish I'd listen more, listened closer. A lot of what's inside my throbbing cerebrum is part photo-memory, adopted copies of those yellowing Kodak snapshots. One is clear: I was twelve and on my first period and it was my grandmother, sitting queen-like in the dining room, telling me how to stay away from boys. All that story wrapped up in her own carefully detailed narrative and the threads of a Bible story, full of suspense and worry, a story to scare the adventure out of a girl. I can see her now, her honey-glow skin, gold rimmed glasses, a black woman with a roman nose - the only thing she had left of her mother who died roasting coffee beans in a ramshackle house in Anasco, Puerto Rico.

Though for the past two years I fought against the confessional or personal narrative in my poems and looked at the universal, I have learned from the literary great Audre Lorde that those dichotomies come together beautifully in the end. I don't fight the onslaught anymore. And there is an onslaught: I have the good fortune to have my mother with me; she, the last repository of all the lost tales, and I are working to piece my grandparents stories together. Why? I want my nephew to have this history, a history which has been part of my construction and is part of his.

Is there a particular spiritual practice that informs your work? If so, can you share its importance?

I don't generally speak about my spiritual choices, but I will say that my writing is a spiritual process. Years ago, in Mexico City, I became friends with a devotee of a Hindu guru named Satya Sai Baba. My friend made annual pilgrimages to Calcutta and then returned from her retreats full of stories. Her eyes would glass over as she talked about lingams and divine ash and the Ganges sitting behind her in the sun like a forever ribbon of silvery skin. Her breath even smelled of incense, her hands at her heart as she spoke. She was contagious. I could not go to India but I had India in her. And felt God in that exchange. This is to say that I do my best to find God in everything and that I attempt to take, not only into my work, but into my everyday.

It's not so easy; I fail often, so I meditate. I have always been struck by how the creative experience is so closely related to meditation. If I am doing it right and am immersed soulfully in the act of creating, whether it be a drawing, a poem, or a story, I lose the busy, noisy, encumbered world around me. It is as if the walls fall away. And yet, I also become full of the world: the world that suffers, that is joyous, that breathes and dies. I feel open to energies not readily available in the hustle of a normal day. I am raw and vulnerable, but not vulnerable to danger, but open to love, immeasurable. I struggle to maintain that level of meditation when I write, even when I am uninspired. Inspiration is everywhere. I remind my students of this, while reminding myself.

I feel most animal when I write or draw. It is not art at that moment, not full of the pretense and arrogance that divides the creation from the world. In that moment, there's something metal in my mouth and I am full of air, as if I were a helium balloon. That is the texture of the experience. It is harder to explain the emotion behind it. Can I say I feel connected to the Divine?

In the Spotlight Blogcritic of the Day Jill Hart Politics

Joel S. Hirschhorn Wants a Constitutional Convention, Realist - Ann Coulter's McCarthy Moment Desicritics

Atlantean on CIA, Indian Communists, and Media Silence Books

Lisa Alvarado Talks with Writer Jane Alberdeston Coralin, pt 1, Simon Barrett Interviews Damien Lewis About His New Cobra Gold, Heather Ames Calls Gail Godwin's Queen of the Underworld, A Gem, Mel Odom Reads Neil Gaiman/Michael Reaves Comic For Kids, Bonnie Pleasantly Surprised By Rant: The Oral History of Buster Casey by Chuck Palahniuk, Sterfish - Roger Ebert Explains Why Your Movie Sucks Online Media Cultist
Eric Berlin - MySpace Waning? TV

Heloise - Larry King Picks Paris Hilton Over Michael Moore and On the Lot, Patrick Calls HBO's John From Cincinnati "The best show on TV", Mark Yawitz - Casting Call: American Idol Season 7 Survivor 16, writnkitten - The Kill Point, Temple Stark - Painkiller Jane "Portraits of Lauren Gray", Diane Kristine - Ben Silverman and Chuck Lorre Look to TV's Future Culture

Baritone Thinks About God, and Lance Armstrong's Nuts, Theater Review: Jon Sobel on The Hunt for Treasure, NYC, Sal Marinello - Chris Benoit Is a Murderer Film

Iloz Zoc on 1408: "Never has room service been this bad, or this much fun", Matt Paprocki Enjoys New Lucy Film Collection on DVD, General Disdain - Steve Carell Not Happening in Evan Almighty Music

Duke de Mondo Calls Touchers' The Underwater Fascist, Crusty but Enchanting, Robin Kavanaugh Talks with Piano Man Jon McLaughlin, Larry Sakin on Ascendant Jazz Singer Sara Gazarek Confessions of a Fanboy

Josh Hathaway - Revved About June Releases, Ryan Adams Gaming

Mobile Game Review: Matt Paprocki Plays God of War, Betrayal, Xbox 360 Review: Flatout, Ultimate Carnage Sci/Tech

Daryl D on the iPhone AT&T Reveals iPlans Tastes

LX.TV Checks Out Beer + Skee-ball in NYC GlossLip

Dawn Olsen - John Stamos Peculiar Downunder Sports

Victor Lana on the Barry Bonds Conundrum BC Audio/Video Goodie Bag

Anna Creech - S.E.L.F., Rihanna, Joe Satriani, Adam Franklin

Larry King Kicks Moore To the Curb To Interview Paris WiiWare Service Long Overdue, But Certainly Welcome iHype Part II: AT&T Reveals iPlans Chris Benoit Is A Murderer TV Yearns to Let You Choose Your Own Adventure Did Angelina Jolie's Off-Screen Behavior Tank A Mighty Heart? Aftermath Of The Chris Benoit Tragedy Chris Benoit: From Triumph To Tragedy The Best Home Improvement Shows Chicago Bears Jettison Their Tank, Whatever He Was Filled With

On The Complete Cartoons of The New Yorker by Craig: LOL Victor I came across this web page looking for someone else who liked that line So far you... On Book Review: Rant: The Oral History of Buster Casey by Chuck Palahniuk by Mat Brewster: Very interesting. I think I was like you in that I saw a good author in Chuck, but after awhile his... On Book Review: Merging With Monsters, Interview with the Author Joseph E. Green by celissa van : i think if my man and my bestfriend slept together come to me as a complete shock!!!! i wouldn't wan... On An Interview With Damien Lewis About Cobra Gold by Gordon Hauptfleisch: Great interview, Simon--thanks. On Book Review: Johnny Got His Gun by Dalton Trumbo by mike: man this book is amazing..the simple thought about being trapped in ones own mind with no way to omm...

About the Author

From blogcritics.org:

A Magic Eye image is a three dimensional image hidden within a two dimensional pattern. This type of graphic is sometimes called.

Maxi Aids Big Eyes Magic Focus Magnifying Makeup Mirror 5x 5x acrylic lens is easy to clean Prescription quality 12 inch gooseneck allows.

Magic face, magic eyes, magic shot, magic season. Posted 6 months ago. stunning. and those eyes your right when you say their full of magic.

Magic the gathering, trading card, magic the gathering card, magic card, price guide, mtg, yugioh, yugioh card, yugioh game, mtg news, magic online.

Save money! Personal Care comparison shopping information at mySimon. Compare prices, key features and find the best prices.
A couple of years ago, while perusing old scientific papers, Nicolay Nick Tsarevsky stumbled upon a seemingly irrelevant.
Alternative eye care site with detailed nutritional protocols and prevention to help preserve.
An interesting website by Philip Rheinschild Jr. about the principles, operation and other aspects of magic eyes can be found here.

Source: <http://www.productsherbal.com>