

Juliet Cook

“A more appealing idea to me these days is starting a piece at a place that’s not a definitive beginning and ending a piece at a place that’s not a definitive end, so it’s more like a piece of a larger whole or a continuation of a larger theme – or a misshapen appendage of a larger body.”

Juliet Cook discusses her writing and publishing with **Kane X. Faucher**.



Juliet Cook’s poetry has appeared in *Diode*, *Diagram*, *Octopus*, *Robot Melon*, *SIR!*, *WOMB* and many other fine online and print sources. She is the editor of *Blood Pudding Press*. She is the author of numerous quirky little chapbooks, most recently including ‘*Planchette*’ (*Blood Pudding Press*), ‘*Gingerbread Girl*’ (*Trainwreck Press*) and *MONDO CRAMPO* (coming soon from the *dusie kollektiv 3*). Her first full-length poetry collection, ‘*Horrific Confection*’ was recently published by *BlazeVOX*. For more Juliet information, please feel free to visit her website at www.JulietCook.weebly.com.



Kane X. Faucher currently lives and works in London, Ontario. His activities span academic and creative enterprises, most notably in writing, continental theory, visual art, and music. He currently holds two degrees in philosophy and is working toward his doctorate in Theory and Criticism at the University of Western Ontario.

Kane X. Faucher is an FIMS/MIT Instructor; a freelance writer for *Scene Magazine*; co-editor of *The Raging Face*; co-editor of *The Drill Press*; and serves on the Editorial Board of *Mad Hatter’s Review*. He is the author of *Urdoxa* (2004) *Codex Obscura* (2005) *Fort & Da* (2006), *Calqueform*, *Astrozoica*, *De Incunabliad* (2007) and *Jonkil Dies, The Vicious Circulation of Dr Catastrophe* (2008).

Kane X. Faucher: At the risk of opening here with more of an assessment of your writing practice rather than to dip directly into questions, what immediately strikes me is the surreptitious quirky tone of your poetry. It reminds me of “that weird girl” we all knew as children, the one who would taunt the boys with cryptic messages and invite them to see a dead raccoon you found by the river. Of course, that quirk-style among children, displaying an actual precociousness and more lateral kind of thinking, matures into that kind of edgy surrealism that is exotic, oblique in its perception of the world, playfully scuffing all the brass of bourgeois modes of writing. Of course, in *Gingerbread Girl*, there are these visceral moments of such eccentricity just as there are moments of reflective seriousness. Could you say something about both the tone and the delivery of your writing?

Juliet Cook: My poetry is my realm in which to express the non-linear way my psyche seems to be arranged and to express whatever I want to express without worrying what other people think about it, without caring if it offends people or grosses them out or befuddles them or whatever. I am not purposely trying to be cryptic, but if it comes across that way, okay. I do not write with an audience in mind or with any agenda of accessibility; I write for myself. Which is not to say I’m spewing forth self-therapeutic rough drafts; I invest care and precision into the crafting of my poetic material – but I am crafting it into odd little art objects or tainted confections that work for me (if they appeal to other readers, too, then I’m pleased about that, but I can’t be focused upon that when I’m writing) – and oftentimes what appeals to me is a tainted soufflé of obliquity and viscosity.

I tend to fancy unusual juxtapositions. I tend to concentrate on pussycentric subject matter. I tend to view my poetry as feminist in its own way, but I can't control how others interpret it. Some have described it as 'rancid' or 'lurid' or 'over the top' and those descriptions don't bother me. I do sometimes worry, though, that the more visceral bits may emit a first impression of rawness that might make people think the work is half-baked, which is not the case. I am very precise about my word choices from sound to connotation and beyond. I like my work to be disconcerting in a provocative way, not in a careless way.

I think it's interesting that 'Gingerbread Girl' brought to mind 'that weird GIRL' as opposed to WOMAN, because I am a woman, not a child, yet my poetic persona sometimes seems to express itself in more girlish terms. Maybe this is indicative of some sort of strange stiltedness. Indeed, I don't feel very mature and I sometimes get overly hung up on thinking about what might constitute being a 'real' adult or a 'real' woman. For some reason, I don't feel a like real woman, which doesn't even make much sense, as if there is one blueprint for real womanhood – or one cookie cutter, if you will. I guess in my head there is a cookie cutter mold that I am both trying to fit into AND trying to creep out of – and 'Gingerbread Girl' is situated in the realm of that conflicted resistance. If I could grow some new appendages like a misshapen tail or tentacles, then I wouldn't fit into the mold. Maybe my poems are like appendages in this way.

KXF: Beyond the (cr)edibility factor inherent in the title of your Trainwreck Press chapbook, I am wildly interested in how your poetry seems to indirectly embrace what Derrida says: "abstract notions are always sensory figures." At the point of sale or the choice of subject, there is always a kind of selective process at the exclusion of all others. This may be carried forth into that domain where we (im)pose the persona, where the masks wear the actors (Nietzsche), and the very possibility of selecting one persona or many personae operates like a clearing. I am thinking here, dimly, of Heidegger's notion of *Lichtung*, where what is cleared and illumined actually covers over all other possibilities. Not that this isn't subject to change, to its mutations, variable intensities and oscillating vectors that may reinscribe the poet as "type" and "persona". This tension you highlight here about the mold you are simultaneously trying to fit into and break out of is of vital import – since it says some-

thing about being both "inside" and "outside", and this is another clandestine tangent that operates especially well as an undecidable in "Gingerbread Girl". The traditional nomenclature of "women" and "girl", "adult" and "child" are shown not to be binary opposites as if points on a line, but a durable continuum that shifts across and swaps its constituent parts. The "rigor mortis" of assigned identity takes on the character of a "rigor vita". It is this mounted resistance against the label-making machinery of discourse that seems to allow for the embrace of such intentionally reductionist adjectives like "rancid" and "lurid", which only portray one facet of that misshapen crystal of interpretive perspective. However, can poetry be considered in itself as inherently single-gendered, or can it cross those illusory bipartisan lines, become a kind of "meat-genderizer" that churns out the great chunk of heterogeneity? So, my question, after this rather stammering palaver: how do you "pose" the sensory in your work, and is the work forced to conform to your authorial cookie cutter – and, if so, upon "baking", can those "flopped" cookies of your poetry that have overrun your cutters be the impetus of challenging how the poems are "baked" the following time?

JC: If one is both "inside" and "outside", then where does one belong and in which realm should one focus upon residing? I often feel 'in between' things, like I don't neatly fit in anywhere, like I am some kind of misfit. This feeling certainly finds its way into my poetry.

Your mention of "not...as if points on a line, but a durable continuum that shifts across and swaps its constituent parts" has some relevance to my writing process. It seems that people tend to think of progress in terms of a line with clearly delineated points along the way, but my idea of progress or process is not linear in that way. It is more circular and accretionary – and I think such rhythms translate themselves into my poetry – which contains a lot of repetition, including thematic repetition. Oftentimes, I am comfortable with my kind of rhythm, but sometimes it makes me feel rather like I am trapped or stuck or chasing my own tail or writing the same poem over & over, in different incarnations. If my continuum is durable, how do I know that durability is not just another variety of dysfunction that I've developed? I am certainly interested in fluidity when it comes to gender and identity, but my poetry may be too repetitive, too sol-

ipsistic, and maybe even too tied to its own breed of dysfunction to truly transcend boundaries. It creates its own obsessive boundaries, in a way. Still, I find it somewhat freeing to release those boundaries out of my head and place them elsewhere.

In answer to your question is the work forced to conform to my authorial cookie cutter, my answer is no. An initial impulse will catalyze a poem and I'll take it from there. It's rarely a narrative impulse or a concrete idea; it's more of a tonal impulse or a tentative schematic. Those few times when I do start to write a poem with a more definitive idea in mind, the poem will usually shift and mutate during the writing process until it more closely aligns with my usual themes. However, this is not a matter of me forcing the subject matter into the parameters of such themes, at least not consciously. Those are just the warped directions the batter wants to flow into — or out of, if you will. If I WAS using some kind of cookie cutter, I think almost ALL the poems would overrun it — and almost all the poems would leak out of the doll injection mold, too. Perhaps this is part of why I've gotten away from writing longer poems in the last few years — because all that content started to seem too unruly, too unmanageable — and even though I don't feel the need to knead my content into clear cut shapes, I also don't want a big doughy mass of mixed metaphors.

KXF: I am of the mind that there is a wondrously lubricious aspect to “in-betweenness”, something that breaks from the metaphysical laziness of being “placed” in any categorical framework. Embracing the astonishing arbitrariness of the nomadic way of being/writing where meaning is something internally derived, self-constructed, a series of aleatory points, a cavalcade of multiplicities that are unmitigatedly generated. So, to the solipsism and the notion of boundaries, we could actually see these as celebratory in their way. I am reminded here of an interesting notion that poet Asher Ghaffar wrote in his latest poetry collection where borders and frontiers are in an inverse proportional relation. A frontier bespeaks of an unchained, non-fenced, and open expanse, while a border (here we may read “boundary”) is an imposed limitation upon an open domain. This idea is nuanced rather well by Deleuze and Guattari when they speak of smooth versus striated space. But what I find all the more interesting is this tension you seem to suggest between allowing poetry to overflow its boundaries whilst also keeping some measure of containment

to avoid producing a chaotic rhapsody. One would wonder — or at least I would wonder — what would happen if you chose as an experiment (if this hasn't already been done) the task of entirely liberating the productive mode...letting metaphors become monstrous and mutative beyond all sense of recognition. Of course, the very idea of “misfit” presupposes fitted terrain, the schematism that we either culturally inherit or unconsciously follow. But I have a rather abruptly different question in mind here: what of the long poem? Do you feel that a demand for immediacy has made the long poem an endangered species? Has a more fragmented and juddering state of readership attention forced us to produce in a more fragmentary way? Does a current deficit in sustained reading attention in tandem with constant technologically-induced distraction also affected (y)our writing practice? Are we capable of writing AT rather than TO length, against the imposed (or felt) demands of an audience more inclined to rapid-fire click across the internet? Could this phenomenon of fearing the unruly in longer poetic sequences actually be a creature derivative of our media involvement and expectations?

JC: This comment/question seems to deal with how both internal and external stimulus may affect one's writing. I quite the like the idea of meaning as something internally derived; I have always felt more attuned to and interested in inner landscapes (my own and others') versus external landscapes — and as far as external landscapes are concerned, my interiorizing of them tends to involve a certain degree of selective memory, shifty filtering, and strange morphology so that the content better suits my own purposes and/or perspective. I tend to be much more absentminded about details that don't interest me (for example, I have a terrible sense of direction, at least in part because I am so inwardly focused) and more oddly obsessive about details that do. I also have a predilection for taking content out of context and inserting it into MY context. Along those lines, I enjoy fragments. You make a valid point about technologically-induced distractions and the possible impact upon our attention spans — and I can't speak in regards to a collective attention span, but I don't feel that my own attention span suffers from any kind of deficit disorder when it comes to reading or writing poetry. I still read poetry slowly and savoringly and I still write poetry with a sustained focus — and both activities sometimes even provoke an almost trance-like feel-

ing. One respect in which my current writing process differs from my past writing process is that it is now easier for me to access the creative part of my mind, even in the midst of distractions. Oftentimes, I can dip into and out of my creative mind at will; whereas in the past, I had to be alone in a quiet room in order to write and even a small interruption could very well ruin my flow and the process often felt almost excruciatingly painstaking and it took me a very long time to write/revise a poem and to shape it to my satisfaction – and there were substantive differences between rough draft and finished draft and many incarnations in between. These days my writing process flows more quickly and more easily. I don't think it's because I'm dealing with easier content per se. I think it's because my consistent devotion to my writing practice for many years finally paid off and now the poetry comes out more naturally and does not need to be forced to such an extent.

I previously mentioned sometimes feeling as if I am writing a different incarnation of the same poem over & over again. Perhaps another way to look at it is that I am writing one long poem and just chopping it up here & there. I used to have a bit of a problem with the ends of my poems sounding too zinger-ish, almost as if I was trying to sum the thing up. A more appealing idea to me these days is starting a piece at a place that's not a definitive beginning and ending a piece at a place that's not a definitive end, so it's more like a piece of a larger whole or a continuation of a larger theme – or a misshapen appendage of a larger body. Maybe it's being offered up like multiple courses of a meal that build upon and complement and intersect with each other. Maybe it's not smoothly palatable enough to be offered up all at once, but when it's offered up more like taste tests, then it's easier to slide down readers' gullets and into their stomachs, where it can have a little time to digest before they are subjected to the next course.

Not that I'm trying to make poetry consumption easy. I don't like vanilla snack pack pudding poetry. I like blood pudding poetry. But few people are going to desire to be faced with a huge vat of blood pudding all at once and that includes me. If I ate a whole vat of blood pudding in one sitting, I'd probably be vomiting by the end.

Here's another unusual but apt comparison. To me, certain styles of poetry can have a similar intensity to

pornography. Well, let's say someone gave me all the monthly issues of their year-long subscription to a certain porno magazine and I flipped through all twelve of them, one right after the other. I'd probably start out feeling titillated, provoked, and maybe even aroused – by the end, I'd probably feel somewhat desensitized by all that pussy.

KXF: What you describe – this “vignette-ism” where the heads and tails of beginnings and endings “fall off”, so to speak, as well as the selective (interior/exterior) landscaping – reminds me a great deal of photography. Shutter speed and cropping the shot, the whole nut. It is also a means of trotting out the finery of “gleek” and “Augenblick”. The versatility – either learned or forced by circumstance – of the creative will is a widely unplumbed domain, and certainly one that you have elaborated quite succinctly. We can also concur with the “too much blood pudding” at one go and the risk of desensitization. To that end, have you heard of the tongue in cheek “Issue 1” that came out this autumn? My questions and associations are beginning to multiply like so many hydra heads at this point, so let me get back on the rails...Tell us hungry readers about Blood Pudding Press, its origins, its directions, its details, its “mode d'emploi” rather than just its *modus operandi*.

JC: I did hear about “Issue 1”¹ and had a gander. I thought it amusing, but it must have taken rather ridiculously long to pull that project together.

Blood Pudding Press came into being in October 2006 because I wanted to publish ‘The Laura Poems’, my own series of poems based on Laura Palmer from the Lynchian land Twin Peaks, in chapbook format. For some reason, the idea of self-publishing had seemed overly daunting to me for a while (maybe I'm just a late bloomer); I didn't feel that confident that I had the knowledge or resources to do it right; but I really wanted those poems to be collected into a little book rather than published individually and I also wanted it to be published sooner rather than later. I did have an idea that I would like to publish other writers through Blood Pudding Press, too, but first I wanted to use my own work as a guinea pig. I got some helpful formatting pointers from Kristy Bowen, the editor of Dancing Girl Press and then it was a matter of trial & error and developing personal preferences related to formatting, printing, designing, bind-

ing, etc...and ever since that first chapbook, I've been fine-tuning.

Blood Pudding Press focuses on poetry and 'artsy little misfit offerings'. Most of the chapbooks are ribbon-bound with hand-designed flourishes. Some of the covers are designed by me; some are designed by artists that I like. I have published ten chapbooks so far – three of my own poetry collections, two limited-edition collaborations, two poetry collections by other poets, one miscellaneous project, and two multi-writer projects that are like chapbook-sized one-off literary magazines starring the work of approximately 30 poets.

I'm more interested in writing than in editing, but I think it's important to give back to the literary community in one way or another – and one of my ways is to publish some other writers in delectable little gift-like tomes. The Blood Pudding Press aesthetic is oozylicious, but not entirely raw. Visceral in an oblique kind of way. Creepy yummy. Alien witchy. Sexy. Non-academic avant garde.

Blood Pudding Press is about creation not production. I do sell the various Blood Pudding Press entities in an etsy shop (www.BloodPuddingPress.etsy.com), but that's not to make money; it's just to recoup some of my costs so that I can hopefully continue to publish more. The publishing and the promoting is a lot of work for an operation that remains so small scale and obscure-seeming, but I am pleased with and proud of what I've published and the aesthetic I am cultivating through the press.

Currently, I am accepting submissions for two new Blood Pudding projects. Another multi-writer project

to be published in March, for which I'll be considering submissions through January 25th – AND Blood Pudding Press's very first chapbook CONTEST, for which I'll be considering submissions through the end of February and hope to publish one winner in spring '09 and another in summer '09. So far, though, I have not received a single manuscript submission for the contest, which is making me feel unpopular and forlorn. Guidelines for both the multi-writer project and the chapbook contest are posted on the Blood Pudding Press blog at www.bloodyooze.blogspot.com, as well as the Blood Pudding Press section of my website at www.JulietCook.weebly.com.

Blood Pudding Press is also an adoring fan of chapbook swaps and other art trades, plus I am always willing to send out review copies of any of the available publications.

(note: Gingerbread Girl is a modified and truncated version of Juliet Cook's first full-length book, 'Horrific Confection', which was recently published by BlazeVOX and is available as a free ebook.)

1. 'Issue 1' is a controversial anthology, purportedly containing the work of hundreds of modernist and postmodernist writers, published in pdf format on the For Godot website:

(<http://www.forgodot.com/2008/10/issue-1-release-announcement.html>).

The poems, however, were all manufactured by the compilers. Some poets were incensed that their names were used and attached to work that was not theirs. Others took it as a joke. Others viewed it as an absurdist artistic statement.