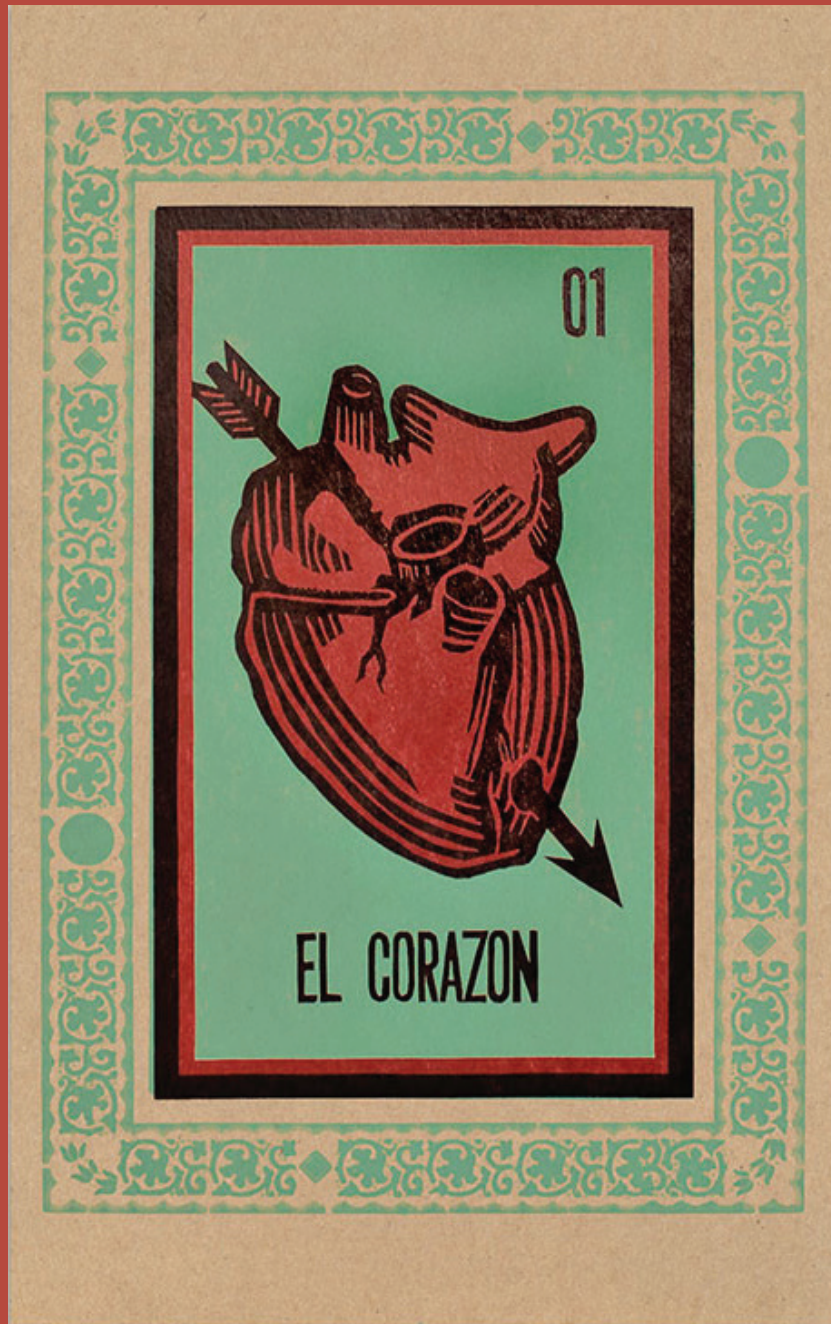


Gemini Ink Mentorship Reading



Meg Day • Rodney Gomez • Tom Pyun • Josefina Longoria • Ingrid Taylor

Mentors

Connie Voisine • Amanda Ward

Working with Connie Voisine at this particular time in my personal & professional life has been a godsend. She is, without question, one of the best readers I've ever encountered & the smallest suggestions from months ago continue to act as a compass even now. I am grateful for her generosity & her commitment to curiosity, for her camaraderie & her ability to see the poet as a whole person. I'm lucky to still be learning from her in so many ways.

If You're Staying, I'll Stay Too

Maybe it's easier, having been named
after someone: nobody
expects that you'll rule the underworld
or judge the dead, but
they call you Pluto anyway. Planet, too.
I know a girl like you
who used to be a thing she isn't anymore
but hasn't changed at all.
Whose orbit didn't circle straight—whose
size & distance never quite
seemed right—but no one cared til now.
I was a woman once:
rounded by my own gravity, cat-called
into hades by men who
could not see this gem of a hard rock
was not made magnetic
for the likes of them. *Hey little mama—*
don't take it so hard.
So we are frigid. So we stay relegated
out here with our kin.

I'll wear my fade tight & my tie loose
if you play your radio loud.
They say we're known only in comparison
to that which surrounds
us, so I'd guess they'll hear our signal soon.
I was a woman once,
but that's not the farthest thing from the sun
another universe might've
let me be: another universe might've let us be.

This poem first appeared in *The South Carolina Review*, 2017.

Meg Day is the 2015-2016 recipient of the Amy Lowell Poetry Travelling Scholarship, a 2013 recipient of an NEA Fellowship in Poetry, and the author of *Last Psalm at Sea Level* (Barrow Street 2014). Day teaches at Franklin & Marshall College and lives in Lancaster, PA. www.megday.com

The mentoring experience has been a spark plug in my creative life. Connie's direction has led me to rediscover areas of poetry I'd forgotten. She put my work in contexts I hadn't considered and forced me to maneuver myself into new imaginative space. The experience was exciting and refreshing.

Excerpt from **Epoché in the Southern Counties**

I think that is provocative in the extreme when I see the Mexican flag waved in the face of an American presidential candidate. Those demonstrators do not accept that California is California. They think it's part of Mexico.—Stuart Varney

ω

you are neither the wave
the wave is not in you

the intimation of the wave
is not the wave

across the ocean
a boot descends
on a shore

and conveys the wave

it was possible
to prepare for the wave
having no sense of the wave

they failed

no idea of trample
no sense of cracked
saucers, the catastrophe

of mismatched furniture

the wave is the wave
the realization of the wave
is the wave

what is left: no wave

ω

When a wave undergoes reflection, it remains within the medium and merely reverses its direction of travel.

ω

The ocean appeared on a night with no headlights. The coast I knew since childhood uprooted. The wave a pair of hands snatching cloth from a kitchen table. I was asleep when it entered the bay, its morions glistening. Who had opened the door? Who had forgotten to secure the window? Who had neglected to build a wall? My brother screamed and I stuffed him and the instruments into a metal tub and scrambled. They turned us away at the checkpoint to the other country. Have you ever tried passing for people who don't know anything more than what their fathers have said? We tried to explain and they lifted their shirts to reveal pistols, whips, and various laws. We took the back way and discovered an old man who offered to give us the only food he had, but it resembled the terrible things we had seen in the wave, and we turned it away. In an abandoned park a lady sat on a swing that complained like a bathing revolver. She mistook us for magicians. I was afraid to show her how few miracles we possessed. It was a wandering country, a stunted country. It was a country with an open maw but no words. We settled there. In a green house on blocks so the wind could comb under its shirt. Far from the sea. Far from the judgement of waters, or the kind of hands that knead dough until it disappears.

“Epoché in the Southern Counties” was originally published in *The Spectacle*, Issue 3

Rodney Gomez is a member of the Macondo Writers' Workshop and the proud son of migrant farmworkers. His first full-length collection, *Citizens of the Mausoleum*, is forthcoming from Sundress Publications. His chapbooks include *Mouth Filled with Night* (Northwestern University Press), *Spine* (Newfound), and *A Short Tablature of Loss* (Seven Kitchens Press). His poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Blackbird*, *Pleiades*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Barrow Street*, *Diode*, *Puerto del Sol*, and other journals. His honors include the Drinking Gourd Chapbook Prize, the RHINO Editors' Prize, the Gloria Anzaldúa Poetry Prize, the Rane Arroyo Prize, and residencies from BOAAT Press and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. He earned a BA from Yale and an MFA from the University of Texas Pan American. He works at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

This was the third time I tried to get mentorship and finally won. Working with a professional writer made me understand the daily discipline required to get the work done. Amanda's feedback was honest, direct and practical.

Work-in-Progress

When we sit in the metro we are boxed up, pretending not to be. We protect our private space, avoiding each other's eyes and touch. We are absent, either remembering or planning. That man hides his glance behind a newspaper, the woman covers her ears with headphones. We are isolated waiting for the next stop. The blurry grey wall goes by. There's publicity to read. Life is somewhere else, a Polynesian beach, not here. A man plays a tune and begs for coins. We are subterranean beings, trapped together briefly each one in our own time.

Josefina Longoria was born in Mexico City, the youngest of five. She moved to Monterrey as a six-year-old and studied at an all-girl Catholic School through ninth grade. She finished high school in a boarding school in New York. For her college education, she went back to Monterrey and majored in journalism. She was a journalist for twenty years and is now transitioning into becoming a writer. She's lived in many cities, including Paris, Los Angeles, and Nuevo Laredo. She currently resides in San Antonio.

Amanda Ward taught me to trust my voice. Right before the start of the mentorship, I had a consultation with a Pulitzer-nominated novelist who told me my voice read too “young.” My work suffered as a result, as I tried to sound more polished and mature. Amanda confirmed that my work had lost its vibrancy and encouraged me to return to my true voice.

About **The Beginning of Our End**

The novel tells the story of two men, Wynn and Jared, from each of their perspectives in alternating chapters. The book opens with them meeting in Boston in their early twenties. Ten years into their relationship, they decide to have a child via gestational surrogacy. At the airport before they are to fly to Cambodia to meet their pregnant surrogate, Wynn breaks up with Jared. The split puts both men on disparate life paths: Wynn pursues his passion for hip-hop dance, despite his age and lack of training, while Jared grapples with the prospect of being a single parent.

Excerpt from **The Beginning of Our End**

After standing in the corner near the entrance for a few minutes, Jared was bored. If he were going to stay longer, he would need a prop. He walked over to the bar and asked if they served O’Douls or some other non-alcoholic beer.

The muscled bartender rolled his eyes. “I think we have some in the basement,” he said.

Jared settled on a seltzer with bitters. The bartender didn’t even bother charging him.

While he sipped his drink, he watched the disco ball reflect shards of light onto the parquet tiles. The DJ played an R&B number that sampled the opening song to a daytime soap opera that his mother used to watch until it was canceled. A few people trickled onto the empty dance floor. Jared’s eyes gravitated towards a pretty, young black woman with corkscrew curls that fell to her shoulders standing in the center of the dance floor as if it were a stage. She swayed unselfconsciously to the beat of the music. When the chorus came on, the woman lip-synched along, “no more pain, no more pain, no draah-maa, no more drama in my life, no one’s gonna make me hurt again.” During this performance, she pointed to an Asian guy standing in the far corner. She curled her finger at him miming for him to join her. The young man shook his head before she ran over to him and pulled him by the wrists. Right away, Jared could tell they were good dancers. With slow movements, they undulated their hips, nodded their heads, and rolled their torsos. By the second chorus, the pair’s slim arms floated up above their heads as they each did their own turns and spins. Soon they began to mimic some of each other’s moves before mirroring each other entirely. By the song’s bridge, they were dancing in sync, making Jared wonder if they’d planned this ahead of time. He continued to watch the woman, honing in on the joyful expression on her lovely, round

face. However, by the song's finale, Jared's attention turned to the man whose chiseled face was stony—a counterpoint to his dance partner's enthusiastic expression. His dancing was explosive, each movement a burst of energy, and although he was compact, he devoured the empty space around him. The arcs of his motion were so wide it was as if his limbs were not attached to his lean frame. Jared wondered what it would feel like to be so uninhibited and free.

Tom Pyun is an essayist and novelist living in San Francisco, California. Before his Gemini Ink mentorship, he completed a residency at Vermont Studio Center and a fellowship with VONA/Voices. His work has appeared in the *Rumpus*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, and *Reed* and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Best of the Net award. An excerpt of his novel-in-progress about international gay surrogacy/adoption was recently published in *Joyland Magazine*.

This experience with Amanda Ward was highly rewarding and memorable. It was wonderful to work with an author who was so understanding and down-to-earth, and who really cared about improving my writing. Amanda and I talked a lot about balancing demanding work schedules and managing stress, and one of the most important lessons I learned from this mentorship was how to approach my creative writing as a profession rather than a hobby. I also learned valuable lessons about how to structure a novel, and Amanda's recommendation to have an overarching theme that encapsulates the main character's motivation did wonders to keep me on track while writing chapters of my novel.

Excerpt from **Illumination**

Marisol stood in the commuter line, awaiting her car. She had missed her usual silent car. Under the overhang, strangers pressed in on her, sucking breath from her lips in an ever-tightening ring of perfume and sweat. Heat pulsed in visible waves off concrete, and Marisol smelled the chemical tang of hot metal. Automatic cars hummed as they slid up to the sidewalk, swallowed their passengers, and whirred away. Next to her, a woman in a gray suit pecked at a handheld screen. Blips and whirs of a popular game erupted. Another man guffawed, his face shrouded by VR glasses. People talked into screens, wristbands, handheld devices, or for those with implants, into the open air.

Her head vibrated from a dozen conversations punctuated by endless chimes and beeps. Though her car would arrive soon, she threaded through the crowd until she reached the edge of the overhang. Beyond, the network of highways feeding the Greater Phoenix area twined through concrete monoliths. Advertisements, some multiple stories high, projected on the sides of buildings, displaying images of happy families gathered around the latest food delivery product or gaming system. Some of the more artsy buildings displayed flowers or fountains cascading down their sides.

The clamor faded as Marisol stepped out from the shade, lifting her bare face to a hazy yellow sky. Her skin flushed in the stinging UV light. She spread her fingers, soaking heat into her bones, and she listened.

Her wristband beeped a warning as seconds of exposure ticked by. Sweat beaded on her upper lip and forehead. She licked her lips, tasting salt and molten steel. The pitchy whine of traffic echoed off concrete dividers, punctuated by the twang of birdlike drones winging through the sky. Beneath that, nothing. No calls of birds, no quivering of insects. As if the solid complex stretching to the horizon had buried their sounds deep in the earth.

Her wristband's beeping swelled to a furious pitch. Sweat stung her eyes as she retreated to the shade. Several people stared at her, and when she moved back into line, the crowd shrank from her like a snake retracting its coils.

Ingrid Taylor is a veterinarian who left the high stress world of emergency medicine to work full time for animal rights. She enjoys creating dark fantasy and science fiction stories, often featuring animals. Her works have appeared in *Pantheon Magazine*, *Petite Hound Press*, *Helen: A Literary Magazine*, and *Red Rock Review*. She is the recipient of a 2016 Gemini Ink Mentorship in prose, and is currently completing her first year of an MFA program at Pacific University. Ingrid is working on a science fiction novel set in the Southwest.

THE GEMINI INK MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The Gemini Ink Mentorship program is a unique opportunity for writers at any stage of their career to receive sustained guidance on a work in progress by working closely with a nationally recognized author, free of charge. Open to both poets and prose writers from all 50 states, this program provides the flexibility to create a work environment specifically tailored to one's writing needs. Over a period of six months, mentees work through three drafts of their project and receive detailed, attentive feedback from their mentor, closing out their project with a public reading at Gemini Ink's downtown space in San Antonio. Designed for individuals with busy lives who are eager to learn from a professional writer and to receive new sources of creative know-how and inspiration, this program is an exciting opportunity for writers to take the next step in their creative lives. Each year two poets or two prose writers are selected to work with an acclaimed contemporary author. Find out more about this mentorship and upcoming deadlines at: geminiink.org/writing-mentorships

THE MENTORS

Amanda Ward was born in New York City and received her MFA from the University of Montana in 1998. The following year, she published her first novel, *Sleep Toward Heaven*, which won the Violet Crown Book Award and was optioned for a film by Sandra Bullock. Her subsequent novels, *How to be Lost*, *Forgive Me*, *Close Your Eyes* and *The Same Sky* have gained her national readership. *Close Your Eyes* was named a Kirkus Best Book of 2011 and won the Elle Magazine Fiction Book of the Year. *The Same Sky* was a People Magazine Book of the Week, and the Dallas Morning News wrote: "Ward has written a novel that brilliantly attaches us to broader perspectives." Ward's most recent novel, *The Nearness of You* (Ballantine Books 2017), is already receiving rave reviews and has been described as having "edgy eloquence, ingenious plotting, and relationships that are never, not for a single paragraph, simple or predictable"—*New York Times* bestselling author Marisa de los Santos.

Connie Voisine grew up in Maine, earned a BA in American studies from Yale University, an MFA from the University of California, Irvine, and a PhD from the University of Utah. Her first collection, *Cathedral of the North*, won the Association of Writers & Writing Programs Award Series in Poetry, and her second, *Rare High Meadow of Which I Might Dream*, was a Los Angeles Times Book Award finalist. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *the New Yorker*, and elsewhere. Her third book, *Calle Florista*, was just released from University of Chicago Press. Voisine is an associate professor of English at New Mexico State University and teaches at the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.