

Rebecca Cuthbert on Ben Marcus; David S. Wills on Casey Rae;
Siân Roberts on Timmy Waldron; Barbara Henning on Rae Armantrout

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In Focus:

#MeToo

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Christine Hume,
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and
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Our Worries: A #MeToo Narrative

Janice Lee

CAREEN

Grace Shuyi Liew

Noemi Press

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Make a ghost of your poise.

It is a wonder that the fleshed-out female body is both so ghostly and alive. The script that has written itself over this sedimentary stack of skin and bones is that of time, is that of wear, is that of climactic change. I often sit quietly to study the ghosts that surround me, but of course those opaque forms that find themselves present before me, that of course is not the whole story. How far back do we go?

Inside you is a mother wounded from the death of her mother.

Inside her is a mother who never recovered from the birth of her children.

The traumas are not all mine. But what we inherit, we pass on. The wounds cannot always be seen, are often forgotten but somehow felt. I think

about the concept of *han* and how this speaks to more than just the presence of a historical trauma. It manages to weave together the presence of an unresolved corporeal history and the impossibility of articulation or expression in relation to questions of experience, loss, shame, guilt. Sometimes, one

We inevitably learn how to survive from our mothers, not only from them, but through them, by surviving daughterhood, by surviving their tests, by persisting.

can feel guilty for being alive. Sometimes, one can feel guilty for having merely survived.

We learn bodily ire from our mothers—how to run out of our own flesh—

My mother claimed that her psoriasis started the day after I was born. *I used to have beautiful legs, she would say. Now they are destroyed. This is the price of motherhood.* I learned to hate my body from my mother. She would make me walk around the house with stacks of books on my head. *Good for your posture, she would say. You've got to walk straight, with your shoulders back. Show that*

you're a confident woman, but not too confident. She would make me walk straight lines, pointing at painted white lines on the asphalt and instructing me to put one foot forward, then the next. As I tried to correct my duck-footed gait, I could hear: *Keep your feet straight. No man is going to want a duck for a wife.* My mother also instructed me to pinch my nose when I was idle. Asian girls sometimes have pig noses, she had told me, and to insure that I would mature with a small, narrow nose rather than a wide, fat one, I would constantly pinch my nose with my fingers, as if I had a nosebleed.

I was taught bowing all the way toward those walks in evenings:

I never knew how benign standing upright was, until I did it one day.

We inevitably learn how to survive from our mothers, not only *from* them, but *through* them, by *surviving* daughterhood, by *surviving* their tests, by *persisting*.

Carefree is one form of amnesia.

As a child I admired those outgoing, carefree white girls. I didn't understand my shyness,

Lee continued on next page

my worries, my constant anxieties. What was wrong with me? Why couldn't I just be confident like those other girls? I was so shy I was afraid to raise my hand during class to ask for permission to go to the bathroom, would risk peeing my pants, would always have a sweatshirt on hand to tie around my waist to cover the urine stains, and walk home crying and ashamed. The constant worrying must come from my mother, I thought. My mother, who was tall and beautiful, had constantly reminded me that I had only inherited the worst traits from my parents: my mother's wide feet and my father's thick legs. Little did I know how right I really was, how closely linked to survival these feelings of perpetual discomfort were, how necessary, how torturous, how cruel.

At what age do we talk to our children about when to fuck, why to take changes, and how to outlive love? Who encoded the planned obsolescence of an emotion?

What my mother taught me about sex was to avoid it at all costs. *Men are all wolves*, she would say. *The world is dark and dirty, and these are the things you must do to survive*. And so all of my physical experiences with my first boyfriends were awkward, fumbling around with fingers under elastic bands, the desire constantly there but never able to go all the way, the desire always swallowed up by shame and embarrassment, not just from the fear of what my mother would say if she found out, but the fear too of what *he* would think, constantly aware of my lack of experience and knowledge, more afraid that I would be *doing it wrong*, that I would get labeled as a *slut*, or worse, as a *prude*.

it's true / there is no such thing as an uncontainable wound, only events that have asked to go off the historical record

I was raped at midnight on my eighteenth birthday. He was two years older than me. This felt like a privilege, to be *wanted* by someone older. He wanted to take me to a romantic and secluded place. *It's your birthday*, he said, *I want to make it special*. The romantic place was the office where he worked. It smelled musty and of spilled beer. I already had an idea of what he wanted. I already had the fear

of what he might try to do. *I will figure a way out of it*, I thought to myself. *It won't happen to me*. I convinced myself not to worry, told myself that it would be okay. When he took out his penis, it looked strange and foreign but non-threatening. He told me it was ok to touch it. I didn't want to touch it. He repeated, *it's ok to touch it*. I didn't want to touch it. He took my hand and directed me on what to do. *Touch it like this*, he said. He continued to kiss me. I liked being kissed, but that was all I wanted to do. His penis was in my hand, and yet I still felt like this would end. *It won't happen to me*, I thought. *I will figure a way out of it*. He was kissing me in the right ways, and then he took off my pants. I let him, because I had made out with other boys before, and I thought, we are taking off some of our clothes, and we are just making out. *It's ok*, I thought. *I will figure out a way to tell him to stop*. *We are just making out*. *It will be okay*. He took off my underwear too, and I knew I should be concerned. But I didn't know how to say no. I didn't want this to happen, but I was also afraid that he wouldn't like me anymore. I was eighteen, and the

I think about how I bear this now, how I am constantly wanting, how we fear being called selfish, fear losing control, fear becoming useless, fear becoming old.

prospect of an older boy being angry or upset at me, of what he might say to others, this scared me more than what might happen. Those are the priorities of a teenager. Those are the real fears a girl has. I felt like my reputation was at stake. Who I was, was at stake. I was thinking about all of these things while it was all happening. There were too many things to think about, and it was happening too fast.

I can't be loud when Asian porn is still a consumer category, milk-white skin like a reverse oil spill I survey the situation. Accident, or pillaging? Asian women headlining all these forward-thinking genres, artificially intelligent but lonely & fixated at stimulation. Our assigned database of gloom always comes true. Our worries nothing but sincere.

I didn't know what the words were that I wanted to say. I didn't have access to any of the right words. I didn't know how to make it stop. I shook my head and tried to wriggle away. I tried to mouth no because my body's unwillingness was invisible to him. He kept insisting. *It's okay*, he kept repeating with his mouth, holding down my body, no longer so gently. *No*, I kept repeating with my body. *No. It's okay*, he said again as he slid his penis inside of me. *I should get home*, I said out loud. *You're a woman now*, he said. *It'll only be a few minutes. Don't worry. It's okay.*

When I grow up I want a fantasy. I reenact rape fairytales with white lovers, all of whom insist on hating Trump while they fuck me

I think about the burdens my mother carried for the good of all of us. I think about how her own



happiness stopped being a priority, and then the identity she bore was as *mother*, as *burdened*, as *I don't want anything, just your happiness*. I think about how I bear this now, how I am constantly wanting, how we fear being called selfish, fear losing control, fear becoming useless, fear becoming old.

I was taught the relief of being wrong: When translation fails, the displaced easily become worthless beings.

After my mother died, part of me felt relief. Maybe I can move past the cycle, I thought. Maybe I can finally move forward.

To assimilate is to have regressed past the point of inhumanity.

Surveying the scene, heavy, there is a large lake, beyond the reach of wind.

And the stones, the bones of the landscape, heavy, the mouth of the beyond, wind and a voice, heavy.

The voice is heavy and emerging from the lake is a feeling of belief that tugs, is heavy, is considerably blue, and the golden light from the sun calms the spirits, and a howling mouth bares its teeth to the wind, and my bones are heavy but radiant, and though I am crying, I can breathe in the happiness of the wind, the gratitude of heavy belief, and as I once intended, I set forward, and as I breathe, I feel my bones relax, and what I had accused myself of is no longer a burden, just the blue of tomorrow and today and today and again, today.

Thank you, Grace Shuyi Liew, for your words and inspiration.

Janice Lee is the author of KEROTAKIS (2010), Daughter (2011), Damnation (2013), Reconsolidation (2015), and The Sky Isn't Blue (2016). She writes about the filmic long take, slowness, interspecies communication, the apocalypse, and asks the question, how do we hold space open while maintaining intimacy? She is Founder & Executive Editor of Entropy, Co-Publisher at Civil Coping Mechanisms, Contributing Editor at Fanzine, and Co-Founder of The Accomplices. She is an Assistant Professor of Fiction at Portland State University.

Editor's Note:

The passages in italics in this essay are from Grace Shuyi Liew's Careen. Lee describes her use of Liew's work in this essay as writing through/in response to it.

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