

An Interview with Carla Trujillo by Jordan Messier

JM: What made you choose the novel as your vehicle for a discussion of social justice?

CT: I grew up surrounded by injustice on every level: in my own home, at school, my neighborhood, my country. I noticed this, and it intrigued me. Being a very curious child, I began wondering how this worked. Perhaps on some level, in my adult life and in my art, I'm trying to figure out and undo some of the injustice I witnessed as a child.

JM: Do you feel there are certain conflicts unique to the coming-out experience of Chicana lesbians, as compared to those of Euro-American culture?

CT: For many people, coming out is hard because our society teaches hatred so readily and pervasively that fear and self-hatred have to be unlearned to simply accept who you are. Once this is done, then the person has to consider telling their families, co-workers, friends, and so on.

Since I can only speak for myself, coming out to my family was difficult due to the pervasive homophobia they possessed at the time, and to the greater fear of losing them if I did tell them. This, coupled with the church's views of us, makes it even more scary. I have a large extended family, and the Catholic Church is as much a part of my culture as is being Chicana. This situation is not unique to just Chicanos/as, of course, but for many Chicanos/as, strong familial bonds are pervasive and the fear of rejection seems to be a common theme. And people *do* get disowned or rejected by their families when they come out. Luckily, I've also seen people welcomed back. Maybe love does conquer hate.

continued on pg 3

The White Tunnels that Lead to the Sea

Heaven
means nothing
to the elderly poor.

Nor do the rays that make possible
a woman's beautiful hair
mean anything to them.

In silence
they return to their past
illuminated by shadows
of broken bottles, and they don't
forget
that their wounds
have stained spring's tunic purple.

The young people
who love them
and who fight
to give them back
their dignity of offended gods
belong
to the highest class
of society.

—Roberto Sosa

from *The Return of the River*
translated by Jo Anne Engelbert
ISBN 1-880684-80-2 / \$16.95

Books For Good Causes

In these times of severe funding cutbacks, a number of authors have donated books to support nonprofit activities. Curbstone Press wishes to thank Pete Seeger and Paul Dubois Jacobs for donating 60 autographed copies of *Pete Seeger's Storytelling Book* to support our publishing activities (available while they last for \$50). Connecticut poets Gabrielle Zane and Alexander Taylor have each donated the proceeds of signed limited editions of new chapbooks to support the Windham Area Poetry Project. Zane's chapbook, *Being Your Eyes* (100 copies), and Taylor's *Clear Water* (300 copies) are available for \$10 each.

To support literacy programs on the impoverished island of Triolet, Connecticut State Poet Laureate Marilyn Nelson and graphic artist Stephen Arnold have donated their chapbook *Triolets for Triolet* in a signed limited edition of 300 numbered copies. *Triolets for Triolet* is available from Curbstone Press for \$25.

Curbstone authors have often worked with the Press to support other nonprofits. Royalties from *The Other Side of Heaven*, an anthology edited by Wayne Karlin, et. al., are donated each year to the children's hospital in Hue, Vietnam. Royalties from Ilan Stavans' anthology *Prospero's Mirror* are donated to PEN to aid translators. John Coyne's anthology *Living on the Edge* helps support the work of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers newsletter. We wish to thank these writers for their generosity and sense of community.

To order a signed copy of: *Triolets for Triolet*, *Being Your Eyes*, *Clear Water*, or *Pete Seeger's Storytelling Book*, call Curbstone Press 860-423-5110 or email bob@curbstone.org. The other books are available at your local bookstore.



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From the Publishers' Desk

As we write this (March 10, 2003), the country is on the brink of war, US government officials insult our traditional allies, hundreds of thousands of people protest in the streets, and poets across the nations are holding readings for peace. Funds for arts and human services are drastically cut. A little boy on a children's show comments, "It seems as if the world has gone mad." As if to prove his point, police in Albany, New York, arrest a man for wearing a "Peace" T-shirt. In our own little microcosm of Willimantic, a hardy band of peace advocates brave the cold weather each week by the Frog Bridge, and a Poets Against the War reading packed the West Avenue Community Center.

We are reminded of Ivan Malinovski's line, "You have to live your life as if there is a future and a hope."

And we know that the kind of cultural work that Curbstone and other independent publishers do is now more important than ever. Paul Krugman, in his eloquent op-ed in the *New York Times* on March 7th, "Let Them Hate as Long as They Fear," noted that "Last week *The Economist* quotes an American diplomat who warned that if Mexico didn't vote for a US resolution it could 'stir up feelings' against Mexicans in the United States. He compared the situation to that of Japanese-Americans who were interned in 1941, and wondered whether Mexico 'wants to stir the fires of jingoism during a war.'" We hope that books like Marnie Mueller's *The Climate of the Country* will help make readers impervious to such attempts to generate hatred.

Right now, we have books in preparation from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Vietnam, as well as books by US authors who grapple with such problems as racism, homophobia, and poverty. We believe these works of poetry and fiction can make a difference—can increase understanding and tolerance, will make us think more about the human consequences of our actions.

Curbstone, like many nonprofits, is faced with the need to do more with fewer resources. If you want to help, please consider making a donation, or purchasing some of the books dedicated to fundraising that are listed in this issue, or by suggesting to your school or public librarian Curbstone titles that they should order.

We deeply appreciate your interest in Curbstone books and your support.

Sincerely,

Judith Ayer Doyle and Alexander Taylor
Co-Directors

MISSION AT THE HELM:

Curbstone Press, a 501(c)(3) arts and education organization, was founded in 1975 in Willimantic, Connecticut. Throughout its history, the Press's Board and Co-Directors have nurtured Curbstone's focus on creative literature that invites readers to examine social issues, encourages a deeper understanding between cultures, and reflects a commitment to promoting human rights. Curbstone's mission weaves together two interdependent programs: 1) publishing creative literature that illuminates the issues of our time, and 2) bringing writers into US communities to promote literacy, knowledge about many cultures, respect for human rights, and appreciation of good literature, among people of all ages.

Trujillo Interview (cont. from page 1)

JM: There seem to be implied and direct criticisms of the Catholic Church in your work—for example, the gay love affair of Father Chacón, and Corin asking why “thou shalt not beat thy children” was not a commandment.



Carla Trujillo (photo © Tee Corinne)

What was the impetus for these observations?

CT: It's pretty hard to go to church when you're being told who you are is wrong. The Catholic Church has a strong doctrine with often draconian points of view. Rebellion and hypocrisy become pervasive when one attempts to live one's life as positively as possible. Corin's statement is indicative of her personality, and a kid's view of the Ten Commandments which

doesn't see anything in them honoring or protecting children. As for Father Chacón, he's just human. The fact that he happens to be a priest, and gay, and in love with a man is his own personal conflict.

JM: What provoked you to write such a confident and hopeful protagonist (Marcía) in a situation of horrendous domestic violence?

CT: Marci possesses hope because maybe she doesn't think she has anything else. Yet she is truly a fighter, and astute, and funny. I created Marci to illustrate that kids find different ways to deal with difficult situations. This just happens to be her way.

JM: Huck Finn seems to be a literary ancestor of Marci in their shared existential spirituality and good will juxtaposed in a generally immoral society. Did this character have a role in the formation of Marci? Do you see similarities?

CT: I'm laughing right now (a lot) about the Huck Finn question, as I have to admit that I didn't read that novel until last year (and I've been working on this novel for about five years). Another character who is similar in a way is Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (at least in the tonality of how Harper Lee created her character), but I just read that book in June.

So to answer the question, no these characters did not have a role for me in developing Marci's character. I do definitely see some similarities to both characters, but Marci's voice came to me out of the blue. The first paragraph came to me in one fell swoop. Perhaps her voice was an accumulation of the experiences of many children, and her spirit and her sense of humor and perspective carried itself through the book from that beginning.

It's always interesting to me how writers develop characters out of difficult places. I had a professor in college, Emmy Werner, who studied children who were resilient despite hateful conditions. She found that there were often kids in families who achieved great things and retained wonderful spirits despite overt hardship. Marci is one of these kinds of kids. Since Marci was taught to think that

God would give her a better life, she went that route at first, but had to realize that she alone would have to figure out how to deal with all the challenges around her. God wasn't going to get rid of her father, or change her mother, or turn her into a boy. So something else had to happen, and that was Marci's own change of consciousness, coupled, of course, with the rebellion that occurs in all these situations when norms are challenged.

JM: Why did you choose to set this story with a backdrop of the war in Vietnam?

CT: Our country and our consciousness as a people were in a place of turmoil then, which was akin to what Marci was going through. I also wanted to illustrate the conflict involved when families proudly sent their children off to serve their country, only to see so many return home dead, either literally or spiritually. Additionally, it was important to me to convey how many poor people and people of color were disproportionately sent there.

JM: What motivated you to dedicate the book to “those who couldn't get away?” Did you intend for this dedication to be applied exclusively to situations of domestic violence?

CT: Even though many changes have occurred over the years regarding child protective legislation, there are still countless children who are killed, beaten, or emotionally tortured by their parents or caretakers. Domestic violence is the underside of human nature people hate acknowledging. I wanted to speak openly about this, and dedicate this book to those children.

Jordan Messier is a senior at the University of Connecticut where she is majoring in anthropology with a minor in women's studies and another in Spanish. Ms. Messier was an intern with Curbstone Press in the summer of 2002. She is currently studying abroad in the Dominican Republic.



Winner of the 2003 Mármol Prize for Latina/o First Fiction, runner-up for the Astraea Lesbian Writers Fund Award, and Honorable Mention for the Writers at Work competition, *What Night Brings* is the unforgettable story of an eleven year old girl's struggle to find and maintain her identity despite a perilous home life, an incomprehensible Church, and a largely indifferent world. Sandra Cisneros calls it “heartbreaking yet hilarious.” And Dorothy Allison says “I've been waiting for a long time for this one...and it was worth the wait.”

\$15.95 Pa, ISBN: 1-880684-94-2, 242 pp, NOVEL

Co-Directors Receive Award for Lifetime Achievement

On December 8, 2002, at the Hartford City Hall, the Connecticut Center for the Book presented Curbstone's Co-Directors, Judith Ayer Doyle and Alexander Taylor, with the Lifetime Achievement Award for Service to the Literary Community. This was the first year that this award was presented.

In presenting the award, Mary J. Etter commented:

For 27 years, Curbstone Press, a nonprofit literary arts organization in Willimantic, CT, have devoted heads, hearts, and souls to promoting voices that might not otherwise have been heard—particularly Latin American and Vietnamese writers, Vietnam War veterans, and others whose works and thoughts find no support in their homelands. Curbstone's nurturing—through publications, author appearances, outreach projects such as the Windham Area Poetry Project, teacher workshops, and electronic forums—has resulted in continued enrichment of multicultural literature, created new opportunities for intercultural understanding, and identified Connecticut's literary climate as one hospitable to the thinking of a diverse populace.

Curbstone Press has published over 170 literary titles to date. Its mission is to publish literature that promotes human rights and intercultural understanding, and to bring writers into the community—especially to underserved public schools—to promote literacy and creative writing. Among the nationally and internationally known authors Curbstone has brought into Connecticut schools in the past few years are Jack Agüeros, Claribel Alegría, Arturo Arias, Ernesto Cardenal, Martín Espada, Lorraine López, Devorah Major, Marnie Mueller, Luis Ridríguez, Roberto Sosa, and Daisy Zamora.



Over 100 people gathered at the West Avenue Community center in Willimantic, CT on February 12 to hear readings by "Poets Against the War."

The Year of Latino Publishing

The Association of American Publishers has declared 2003 to be "The Year of Publishing for Latinos" and has created a "Publishing for Latinos Task Force" which will utilize several strategies to promote and foster appreciation of Latino literature. Latino titles will be showcased in a special area at BookExpo America 2003, the Association of American Publisher's Annual Meeting for Smaller and Independent Publishers will feature panel discussions on publishing for this market, and the task force will sponsor a seminar on the topic in November of 2003. Well-known translator Liliana Valenzuela has donated her services as the project's official translator, and Adriana López, editor of *Críticas* magazine, will serve as the initiative's spokesperson.

Café Review Seeking Submissions

The Café Review is seeking submissions of politically and/or culturally vital poetry and artwork. *The Café Review* is a quarterly journal that has previously published works by authors Martín Espada, Gale Jackson, Susan Sherman, Jack Hirschman, Virgil Suarez, Juan Gelman, and Efraín Bartolomé. *TCR's* Fall 2003 edition will be a special bilingual issue devoted to works in translation. For more information, visit their website at www.thecafereview.com. Please send submissions to *The Café Review* c/o Yes Books, 589 Congress Street, Portland, ME 04101

Recommended From Other Presses

Albanza: New and Selected Poems 1982-2002 by Martín Espada (Norton) • *Separate Escapes: poems* by Corrine Clegg Hales (The Ashland Poetry Press) • *Giving Their Word: Conversations with Contemporary Poets* by Steven Ratiner (University of Massachusetts Press) • *Festival of the Bones/ El Festival de las Calaveras: The Little Bitty Book for the Day of the Dead* by Luis San Vicente (Cinco Puntos Press) • *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* by Gioconda Belli (Knopf) • *Sweet Jesus: Poems About the Ultimate Icon*, edited by Nick Carbó and Denise Duhamel (anthology press) • *IRAQ Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, edited by Anthony Arnove (South End Press) • *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (City Lights Books) • *Pete Seeger's Storytelling Book* by Pete Seeger & Paul Dubois Jacobs (Harcourt, Inc.) • *Casanova in Bohemia* by Andrei Codrescu (The Free Press) • *Couldn't Keep it to Myself: Testimonies From Our Imprisoned Sisters* by Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institute (Regan Books) • *250 Poems: A Portable Anthology*, edited by Peter Schakel and Jack Ridl (Bedford / St. Martin's) • *Last Man Out: The Story of the Springhill Mine Disaster* by Melissa Fay Greene (Harcourt, Inc.) • *Law & Justice in Everyday Life* by Andy Thibault (TNT Publishing)

Curbstone INK Online

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To receive occasional alerts via email of Curbstone author readings and other literary events in your area, send your email address and zip code to: cplist@curbstone.org. Your email address will not be used for advertising purposes or shared with other organizations or individuals.

Wayne Karlin will give the opening lecture in the 2003 Books & Ideas lecture series sponsored by the Paul Peck Humanities Institute at Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland. The series was inaugurated in 2001 with an opening lecture by Ira Berlin. Judith Gaines, a professor of reading and ESL at Montgomery College and coordinator of the Books & Ideas series, commented: "I have just started *The Wished-for Country* and already I feel compelled to write to you about Books and Ideas, a series of literary events at Montgomery College. The substantial quality of your work is something we want Montgomery College students to experience firsthand."

The Wished-for Country (Curbstone Press, 2002) is a historical novel set in colonial Maryland. The novel examines the period from the perspective of African slaves, indentured servants, Native Americans, and other under-represented voices. Karlin's most recent effort, *Love After War: Contemporary Fiction From Vietnam*, coedited with Ho Anh Thai, will be available from Curbstone Press later this year.

George Evans and Daisy Zamora have been invited to read at the prestigious Cuirt International Festival of Literature in Galway, Ireland, the third week of April. The Cuirt Festival, in its 18th year, is the largest and most important of its kind in

Europe. Evans and Zamora will also read in other parts of Ireland, England and France. Daisy Zamora is one of Nicaragua's best-known contemporary poets. Her most recent book, *The Violent Foam* (Curbstone Press, 2002), is a bilingual collection of new and selected poems translated by George Evans. George Evans' 2002 collection of poems *The New World*, was nominated in February for the annual Bay Area Book Reviewers Award. He is also a translator for the newly released collection of poems by Huu Thinh, *The Time Tree* (Curbstone Press, 2003), which he co-translated with Nguyen Qui Duc.

To order any of these titles, or to learn more about Daisy Zamora, George Evans, Wayne Karlin, or other Curbstone authors, visit our website, www.curbstone.org, or call (860) 423-5110.

***Casting Off* by Claribel Alegria, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden**
 "Poems expressing what it means to grow old and the difficulties of 'casting off' become splendid reflective testimonials to a belief in the redemptive capacities of courage and love. What results is a stark, grief-filled landscape at once personal and universal."—*Library Journal*

***What Night Brings* by Carla Trujillo**

"This novel could be a tragedy, but it isn't. The protagonist is wise, loving, feisty, funny, and completely authentic in her quest for love and self-knowledge."—*Library Journal*

"*What Night Brings* is delightful while at the same time a very rough journey through a few years of Marci's life. Trujillo works a kind of literary magic and is already being compared to Harper Lee and Dorothy Allison."

—*Out Front Colorado*

***Brown Glass Windows* by devorah major**
 "The difficulties of the entire clan—matriarch Lucille, Dawa's husband Ruben, her stoic and proper sister Elise—deepen. But with writing this powerful, the reader can't help but empathize and root for a coming-together."

—*The Dallas Morning News*

***The Return of the River* by Roberto Sosa, translated by Jo Anne Engelbert**

"Sosa's work is world class, and this broad-ranging and boldly translated volume will no doubt serve as the definitive collection of his work in English."—*The Ruminator Review*

***The Violent Foam* by Daisy Zamora, translated by George Evans**

"Her new poems, beautifully translated

by the poet George Evans, continue her lyrical, clear-sighted vision of the world with humor and gentle irony."—*National Hispanic News*

***Six Vietnamese Poets* edited by Kevin Bowen and Nguyen Ba Chung**

"There is a compelling optimism and profound sense of the future inspiring all six of these poets and if you read their poems on a London bus or in a Glasgow park, perhaps you begin to understand them more, with ordinary people and their world in continuous motion around you."—*The Morning Star*

***Open Gate: An Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry* edited and translated by Boadiba, Jack Hirschman, and Paul Laraque**

"Often the greatest poetry has been born of passion in those who have nothing left to lose. For all the insult and suffering, these verses dazzle with love of life...With *Open Gate* in hand, one is tempted to say that news of the death of responsible American publishing may be premature."—*The Los Angeles Times*

Asking

I ask the earth: How does earth live with earth?
 —We honor each other.

I ask water: How does water live with water?
 —We fill each other up.

I ask the grass: How does grass live with grass?
 —We weave into one another
 creating horizons.

I ask man: How does man live with man?

I ask man: How does man live with man?

I ask man: How does man live with man?

—Huu Thinh

from *The Time Tree*

translated by

George Evans and Nguyen Qui Duc

ISBN 1-880684-69-1 / 15.95 pa

Curbstone Press, 2003

Outreach in the Community

Curbstone Press outreach programs have provided cultural enrichment to our own Windham community for over 20 years. In 2002, Curbstone arranged 60 events in the community, including author-conducted writing workshops at Windham Middle School, Windham High School, and other area schools such as E. O. Smith and Killingly High School; a "Poetry in the Park" reading series; readings at six Connecticut universities and colleges; an annual poetry contest, and a poetry festival.

The Windham Area Poetry Festival and the festival poetry competition (a collaboration with the Town of Windham and the Windham Public Schools) have also been successful in widening the audience for literature and promoting literacy. Curbstone has also collaborated with a number of other organizations, including the Windham Textile and History Museum, the Windham Area Arts Collaborative, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, and the Center for Learning in Retirement where the Press sponsors a course in "Reading, Writing, and Enjoying Poetry" each year.

Our major focus, however, is on the public schools. Students have shown great enthusiasm for sharing their poems and stories with visiting authors and other students. The workshops in Spanish have been particularly exciting for Latinos whose first language is Spanish, because they are more confident when articulating their ideas in their native tongue. Over 90% of the teachers surveyed felt "strongly" or "very strongly" that Curbstone's author programs enriched the curriculum and increased student motivation. One Windham High School teacher described the author visits as "magical." Tom Barry, Chair of the English Department at Windham High School, noted that Curbstone Press was instrumental in helping the school achieve its goal of diversity in the curriculum. A number of Curbstone books are now part of the permanent curriculum at Windham High and other Connecticut public schools.

Greater Hartford Programs

For over five years now, Curbstone has developed programs in Hartford, mainly in the public schools, and primarily at Weaver High School, the flagship school for author workshops. In 2002, Curbstone arranged 18 events in the Hartford area: five at Weaver, and others at Conard, Hall, St. Brigid's, and E.C. Goodwin Technical. Authors also appeared at the Theater for the Performing Arts, Real Artways, and the Caribbean Literary Festival sponsored by the Hartford Public Library.

Curbstone is developing new relationships as fast as its resources

permit. One exciting new venue is the Immaculate Conception Homeless Shelter in Hartford. Pat Fahy wrote us about Ron Casanova's visit there on March 4, 2003:



Naomi Ayala conducts a writing workshop with Windham High School students.

"How wonderful it was to have Ron with us today. He is a delight and brings such hope. Thank you so much for bringing him to us. He made the day for a lot of people. I hope the energy he got going with the men at the shelter snowballs into something we can't even imagine. Muchas gracias.

P.S. We also loved having Prof. Gómez and Sofia with us [filming the event]. Lots of good things happening out there in Willimantic. Bravo."

The response to the author workshops in all schools has been equally enthusiastic. We asked teachers to evaluate Curbstone's educational outreach program. Their comments are more eloquent than any summary we could make:

"[The program] gives our students the opportunity to continue and enhance the writing done in class. The teacher has the opportunity to connect the book discussed with



Claribel Alegría signs books for Windham High students

current topics presented in class and provide a cultural component that is needed for our bilingual students." • "The most important feature for me personally was reading the comments on the [students'] evaluation forms; students truly were impacted by meeting a published author." • "Students are able to see the direct connection between the history of a nation and the need of its people to express their particular role in that history." • "I have incorporated the work of *all* of the visiting authors into the English curriculum." • "I enjoy meeting

the poets and authors as well, but the most important aspect of the programs is that it uniquely enriches the curriculum."

Ironically, the general public and many members of boards of education look upon the arts as a "frill," whereas in fact they are central to learning. This is not a matter of opinion; the research is in (see the National Endowment for the Arts website for a very informative report, *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*). We have seen with our own eyes how effective these programs are in creating excitement about learning, in stimulating wider reading, in increasing reading and writing skills, and in developing poise and self-confidence in students, as well as encouraging them to widen their educational and occupational horizons.

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT!!! (2002 donors)

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