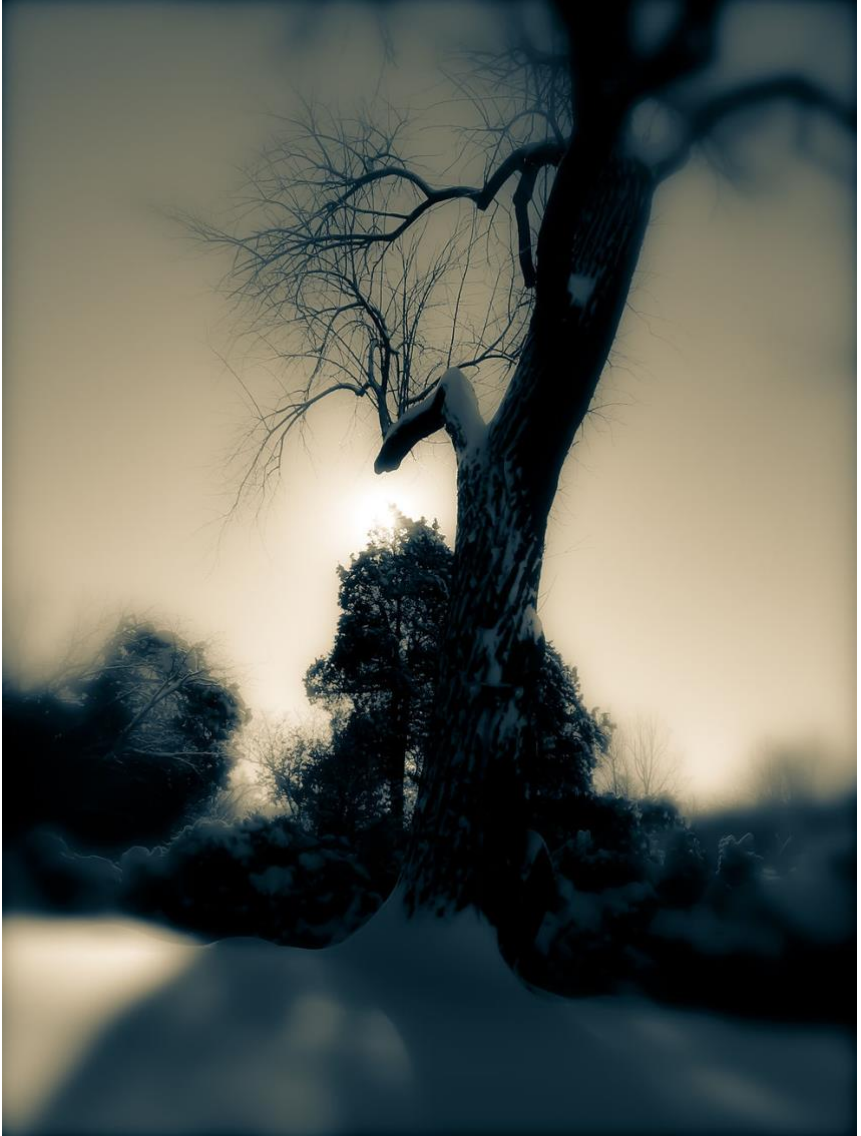


THE O:JA&L 2023 MASTERS SERIES
FLASH FICTION

FIRST IT HAPPENS,
THEN I MAKE IT UP



ROBERTA ALLEN

BUTTONHOOK PRESS

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THE 2023 O:JA&L MASTERS SERIES

FIRST IT HAPPENS,
THEN I MAKE IT UP
FLASH FICTION

ROBERTA ALLEN

INCLUDING 6 CLASSIC WORKS

AND THE ESSAY "FIRST IT HAPPENS, THEN I MAKE IT UP"

WITH AN INTERVIEW OF THE MASTER BY

ASSOCIATE EDITOR PAMELYN CASTO

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

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ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

CLASSIC WORKS

HOPE

On board the freighter, the woman sits on deck, a book in her lap. ‘How can a trip reverse the damage already done,’ she wonders. The sea, as smooth as glass, looks as hard as ice. There is no land in sight: the horizon is so clearly defined, neither a ripple nor a cloud disturb the clean divide. The ship moves—silent—somewhere near the Canary Islands she is told: still two more days before they dock in Casablanca. Below in their cabin, her husband ponders maps. In the glaring light, the woman searches for a sign, an omen that will offer a shred of hope, when suddenly a school of dolphins relieves the stillness. She clings to the image as the ship passes through a stretch of water swarming with millions of Portuguese man-of-war; her hope survives despite the creatures, whose slimy bladder-like sacs float on the surface as far as the eye can see.

...

Published in *The Traveling Woman* by Roberta Allen, *Vehicle Editions*, 1986

Published in *The New York Times Book Review: Metaphor in Midocean, Noted with Pleasure*, 1986

ON BOARD

It's 3 A.M., the Swedish ship steward politely informs the pair. "You can't go in there together!" Nevertheless, they try, swayed by a sea of champagne to swing open the sauna door. The steward blocks the entrance with his bulk, turns the man's shoulders toward a separate door. The steward understands too well: they can't get his and hers together with a hot wall between. Instead, they stagger forward, prowl through curtained cabins sleeping four: counting crumbled figures, searching—only one asleep here! They topple into the overhead bunk, giggling, groping, half clothed, heaving, humping, rolling with the sea swell, groaning, gasping, sighing, soaked, they turn, meeting the wide frightened eyes of the young boy below.

...

Published in *The Traveling Woman* by Roberta Allen, *Vehicle Editions*, 1986
Published in *Between C & D*, 1985, Nominated for a Pushcart Prize

INTIMACY

Since our leader has forbidden us to use our flashlights, I can't see, except as vague shadows, the people ahead of me marching in single file, and can't tell, in this group of strangers, if anyone else but me is veering crazily through the dunes like a drunk. I only know it's hard work picking each leg up only to sink knee-deep in sand, and that several times, I have bumped into the person in front of me, and more times than I care to admit, have lost my balance and grabbed hold of that person's arm or whatever, which is embarrassing since I have no idea, apart from his being male—his hairy arm was the giveaway—who this person is, and can only imagine that he thinks I'm a klutz. Perhaps the person behind me, who is not someone I've bumped into or grabbed hold of, is more inclined to be friendly for that reason, though he doesn't speak more than a few words of my language which forces me to listen extra hard when he tells me in the language of his country, which is neither my language nor his language, though his language is closer than mine to the one spoken here, that he is a graphic designer, and like me, on vacation in this country, which causes me, because I am listening so hard to bump into and grab hold of the person in front of me even more than before. Nevertheless, I'm having a better time now that I'm talking to this man named Tisciano, who lives in Ravenna.

With all this talking or trying to talk, and trying to understand, I hardly notice when we are past the dunes and walking on level sand until our leader tells us to stop. I haven't mentioned that our leader, who is too dictatorial for my taste, doesn't speak my language either, which is why Tisciano repeats slowly for me what she says, otherwise I might not understand that we are going to wait here to see one of the giant turtles come ashore and lay her eggs. At this point, Tisciano and I lie down on the sand which is damp. I don't know how many of the others are doing the same thing since I only see them as shadows though now that my eyes are accustomed to the darkness I see more than before, and notice for the first time since our group assembled in the pagoda on the beach, the luminous foam from the waves rolling in. Between looking at the sea and talking, or trying to talk to Tisciano, who says, for example, the word "hat" when his flies off and lands on my chest, I have almost forgotten about the turtles when our leader, turning on a red-ultraviolet light, whispers

that it's time. We follow her inland, our backs to the sea until she stops, and we fan out around her and the red beam of light which, looking eerie and pornographic in the darkness, reveals a sight more embarrassing to me than say, two guys in the group suddenly having sex with one of the girls. We see the creature from the rear, slowly and silently releasing each egg from the opening between her legs into the hole she has dug in the sand, a sight that is so intimate I am thinking to myself that I have never seen anything this intimate, though perhaps if I had had a child, which I never wanted to have in all the years when I could have had one, I might not find this sight which was at first so embarrassing, so amazing, but since I haven't had a child and am astonished by the intimacy of the scene I am witnessing, I wish I knew the words in my language, or in the language of this country, or in any language, to convey how I feel to Tisciano or to any other human being.

...

Published in *The American Voice*, 1997

THE FLY

I here's a fly in my ear. I hear it buzzing. It can't get out. It's not the only insect I hear buzzing. There are plenty of biting flies and mosquitoes in this tiny room but fortunately the others are not in my ear. The flies and mosquitoes come in through the open windows. We have to keep the windows open, otherwise we would die from the heat. I wake him up. There's a fly in my ear I tell him at 3 A.M. He turns on the flashlight, takes a pair of tweezers from a case. Carefully, he extracts the insect, shows it to me. It's bigger than I thought. He goes back to sleep. But I stay awake, thinking about this fly in my ear. What would I have done if he wasn't here? Somehow that seems to be the wrong question. I have traveled all over the world. Never before have I had a fly in my ear. Why now? If I were alone, surely this wouldn't have happened. This happened only because he is here. This romance has made my head spin. I have let myself get carried away. Maybe that fly was trying to tell me something. Maybe that fly was trying to bring me back to earth. Do I sound absurd? Did that fly mean nothing at all? Is meaning something only we add on to things?

...

Published in *NEW MICRO: Exceptionally Short Fiction*, W.W. Norton, 2019
Published in *Certain People* by Roberta Allen, Coffee House Press, 1997
Published in *Chelsea*, 1993

THE BEHEADING

We are driving through the bush in a jeep. I feel free driving through the bush, especially since I'm not driving. He's driving. The one his mother-in-law calls "The Dwarf." She doesn't call him "The Dwarf" because he's short. She calls him "The Dwarf" because his body is much too small for his head. I bet his head weighs half as much as his body though there's no way to prove that without beheading him, which is not something I'm about to do. But it would be nice and quiet in this jeep if someone here—like his wife for instance—got the urge. His wife would be most likely to behead him since she's the one he's complaining about. Everything she does, or did in the past, gives him cause for complaint. As a nurse, she probably knows the cleanest, most efficient way of beheading him, though that's probably not something they teach in nursing school. If I were a nurse and knew how to do it, I wouldn't be surprised to see his head flying over the banksia and the scrub and the stunted trees growing here in the bush. Then I could concentrate my attention on the scenery. In the distance there's a sliver of sea.

...

Published in *Certain People* by Roberta Allen, *Coffee House Press*, 1997
Published in *NEW MICRO: Exceptionally Short Fiction*, *W.W. Norton & Co.*, 2019
Published in *Chelsea*, 1992

THE WORDS

Ihe glaring light robs the sand of color. The glaring light makes her squint. She sees only brightness. Only the absence of color. The harsh light doesn't bother the man. He grew up here. To him, the light isn't harsh. What bothers the man has nothing to do with the light.

As they walk along the beach, the woman wonders why he is so distant. On the phone this morning, he sounded fine. As fine as a rich man can sound. She knows she can't expect too much from a rich man whose lover left him for a cook.

They are out of step. She tries to keep up with him. He walks as though he doesn't care if she keeps up with him or not. All he knows is that he is walking. He is walking fast. He is walking as though he has a destination. He doesn't know that he has a destination, but his feet know. Has he forgotten that he used to bring his lover to this beach?

Suddenly he stops and runs into the water. He calls out to her to join him, but she is afraid of the waves. If he were not so distant, she would ask him to hold her hand. But she can't shout across the water. She can't bridge the distance between them. She can only stand on the shore and wait. There is nothing she can hold on to here. Gulls shriek. Their white wings cut the sky. The sky is too large. The surf is too rough. Wind unsettles the sand. His head bobs up amidst angry waves. The waves collapse without warning. Africa is somewhere beyond the water. Everything is far away. Even what is up close is far away. Unreachable.

As they continue walking, the man guards himself against the woman by his side. He can feel that the woman wants to come closer. He is keeping her from coming closer.

Up ahead, a group of sunbathers are lying on the sand. On this endless stretch of empty beach, the woman can understand why the sunbathers lie together. When there are sunbathers to see, there is something to rest one's eyes upon. There is something to see besides water and sand and dunes and

sky. One can locate oneself. One can be somewhere. Without the sunbathers, everything is vague. Everything is too large. Like the overlarge sky.

The woman doesn't know the rich man's former lover is among the sunbathers lying on the sand. The man says nothing when he sees her. He keeps on walking. He turns his head the other way. Seeing his lover has made him forget he was guarding himself against the woman by his side.

Now he is guarding himself against the flood of emotions aroused by the sight of his lover. He tries not to feel. He tries to hold himself together. But he can hardly breathe he is holding himself so tight. He is holding himself so tight he can't even run into the water to let his feelings out. In the water, he can lose his memory and the feelings he can't name but he can't even run into the water. He has to get relief. He has to trust someone. He has to trust the woman by his side because she is there. He has to take the risk. It's too hard to hold everything in. He can't breathe.

The man has forgotten that only a moment ago he was guarding himself against the woman by his side. He lets himself out in words to the woman. He lets himself out a little at a time. He feels the pressure lessen as he lets the words out. "I didn't see who she was," he says. He feels his breath coming back between the words. "Nothing she said was true. I was used." The man wears a look of disgust but the rage in his voice is gone. He feels the sadness that hid behind the rage. Letting the words out let the feelings out that were stuck on the words. He can see the feelings in the light. There are so many shades of sadness.

The sky is turning colors. The light dims as they walk along the beach. He is fragile. As fragile as the dimming light.

"When I visit my old aunt down south in a nursing home," he says, "she's always so happy to see me. I make jokes and tell stories, but there's a real bond between us. When I'm with her, I feel needed, I feel loved."

The man who was so distant is letting the words out to the woman as they walk along the beach. She is relieved to hear the words. The words fill the overlarge sky. The words fill the waves like shards of shells and seaweed. She can hold on to the words.

Before he let the words out, he didn't see the woman. She was something he resisted. Something in the way. In the beginning, when he let the words out, he saw only the words and the feelings attached to the words. He didn't see

himself saying the words to the woman. What he was trusting was not the woman but the words he was letting out. He was trusting to the words to find a listener. But now in the dimming light, he is seeing the woman. He is seeing the woman apart from his words. He is seeing the woman as more than a listener. He has found more than a listener with his words.

...

Published in *Short Fiction by Women*, 1991

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

ESSAY

FIRST IT HAPPENS, THEN I MAKE IT UP

Real life is a mess. Fiction is not. I take lived experience and turn it into fiction. It's not what happens but what the writer makes of it.

My process can be summed up as follows: *First It Happens, Then I Make It Up*. In first drafts, I look for the energy that makes me want to write more and/or delve deeper into what I've just written. If the writing feels dead, I throw it out. But if a single word, phrase, or sentence from that otherwise dead draft attracts me, I use it to write a *new* first draft.

If the energy *is* there, I start to revise which I like to think of as *playing around*. I add and subtract based on feeling and thought while always being mindful of the energy. It may take a few or many drafts until it feels right. I don't know in advance what will happen though I do have a sense of the path it will take. I know my short short works if it reads as though the piece could *not* have happened any other way.

...

Each of the three sections in the short short below were written originally as three separate shorts over a period of years. They never worked but at various times I *thought* each one did and sent them out individually to journals. A bad habit I *still* have. Often, *after* I send out a short short I realize it *isn't* finished. Of course, by then it's too late!

But sometimes the act of sending to journals gives me the freedom and/or distance to see that the piece isn't finished. A habit I certainly don't recommend.

If possible, to get some distance, tape yourself and play it back. Or at least read it out loud to yourself or to a friend. Notice when you slip on a word, phrase, or sentence. The rhythm may be off or some word choices may need work. Or simply and this is best, wait a few weeks or even months, then read it again before sending it out.

...

The *contradiction* in the title of this short short: *What Is (Not) Made Up* questions the space between fiction and nonfiction.

Originally, I worked on the three sections as three separate pieces at different times until I felt each one losing energy, so I stopped and put each one away. Some short shorts that don't work I forget about completely and only discover by accident in my files years later. That's what happened here. In the original three pieces I found there was still enough energy in a word or phrase even after a long break, so I returned to each piece. I'm a *boarder* of my own drafts—especially the first ones. I never know when I will find a word or phrase or sentence with energy I didn't expect to find in something I started years ago.

It was only by *playing around* that I realized I could condense these three short shorts to make a single story though each one takes place at a different time and in a different location. In order to do that, the woman and the places are unnamed. Instead, I chose to focus on the spiders, the grasshopper, and the lizard. The creatures had the most energy for me.

...

WHAT IS (NOT) MADE UP

What is (not) made up is the cocktail party in a city where the host tells the woman that she will never go to a tropical rainforest because of the spiders. But she gets a thrill hearing about them because they are so far away. When the woman describes them, the host laughs and scrunches up her nose. But when the woman mentions the spiders in this city, the host stops laughing. "Right here are spiders that rival those in the rainforest," the woman tells her. "There's the white-tail spider and the black-house spider which have very painful bites. The only lethal spider is the red-back spider. But it hasn't killed anyone since 1955. I saw one spinning a web on the grape vines in the garden of my friend's house. He refuses to kill any creature, no matter how dangerous."

The host suggests they talk about something else.

The woman can't think of anything except the news she heard this morning about the mosquitoes plaguing the city. She's not sure which of several viruses these particular mosquitoes cause, but she doesn't think it's the potentially deadly Murray Valley virus. All the viruses cause serious illness, the announcer said. There are no cures or vaccines.

...

What is (not) made up is the fact that the woman is not an expert on grasshoppers. She is not even sure this *is* a grasshopper. It is huge, bigger than any grasshopper she's ever seen. But everything in the rainforest is huge. The grasshopper has made itself at home on the soiled white hat of the squeamish woman's husband. The squeamish woman is making faces at the grasshopper, or maybe she is making faces at her husband, or maybe she is making faces at them both. The grasshopper is perfectly still while the others in the group take pictures. It doesn't seem to mind the squeamish woman's revulsion, but her husband does.

A member of the group says he knows a lot about grasshoppers. That is what he says. But what he knows is not much more than what the group already knows. "They're great jumpers, plant eaters," he says. The woman repeats, "Plant eaters?" She has never thought about what grasshoppers eat—despite the "grass" in their name. The "expert" says they've been around for about 250 million years. But even the "expert" isn't sure about this one. The grasshopper—if it is a grasshopper—is still on the hat of the squeamish woman's husband and she is still making faces when the group spot a beautiful lizard with a blue iridescent tail.

...

What is (not) made up is the tour guide who says. "When the first settlers arrived in the desert, they continued to dress for winter. In summer, women wore layers of petticoats and high-necked dresses despite the heat." The woman wonders how they survived until she is distracted by a lizard on the footpath. This lizard is without a tail. *Was it born this way? Is it native to this country?* She is curious. The woman thinks she remembers seeing a picture of it somewhere. She doesn't ask the guide about the lizard because she doesn't like him. *It's a chemical thing*, she tells herself.

Later, she tries to find a 'tailless lizard' online. But all she finds is a 'legless lizard.' *This lizard is not legless. Perhaps a predator lopped off its tail and the creature is lucky to be alive.* After that she loses interest in the lizard but that doesn't mean her thoughts return to the arrival of settlers in the desert. She decides what she already knows is enough.

"What is (not) made up" by Roberta Allen
Published 4-6-23 in *New World Writing Quarterly*

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

INTERVIEW

ASSOCIATE EDITOR PAMELYN CASTO

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERTA ALLEN

*A Tennessee Williams Fellow in Fiction and a Yaddo Fellow, ROBERTA ALLEN is an American micro and short story writer, novelist, and memoirist with nine published books, including her latest story collection **The Princess of Herself**. She taught creative writing at The New School for many years and has taught at Columbia University. Since 1991, she has taught private writing workshops. She is also well-regarded internationally as a conceptual artist.*

CASTO FOR O:J&L: Your book, *Fast Fiction: Creating Fiction in Five Minutes* (1997), was one of the first to offer help in writing the new wave of short-short fiction. I was interested in the shorties when I first explored them, but your book got me deeply interested. In a sense, it sealed the deal for me. The exercises and the wonderful example stories were a major help. I'm glad to report that your book is still available and still helpful to aspiring writers. (See it [here](#).)

I understand that you took a break from writing and chose to focus more on your art. And your art is certainly important. After all, not everyone gets their work in The Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and in various other museums worldwide. What does it feel like to be recognized and appreciated so highly in the art world?

ROBERTA ALLEN: You mention *Fast Fiction: Creating Fiction in Five Minutes*. A couple of days ago I was very surprised to receive a royalty check from sales of the German edition. Nice to know people are still using it.

But I digress.

Mostly my conceptual art from the 1970s-early 1980s is the work that earned me a reputation here and in Europe, and elsewhere. That's the work that is

valued most highly. But when I began writing very short stories—my first in 1979—I gradually shifted my attention to writing and took a very long hiatus from the art world though I still made art intermittently. I only became active again in the art world about ten years ago when there was suddenly interest in my old work which inspired me to make more art. But even during this last decade or so, I wrote quite a few short stories, and my small series of very short amulet stories.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: You are both a writer and a conceptual artist. Are the two areas sometimes interdependent or do you more often like to keep them separate?

ROBERTA ALLEN: My conceptual art and my writing both originate in language. In both, I question how we perceive ourselves and our world. Humor is often present. My art combines image and text. In recent years my very brief texts have become more “poetic” than texts in the works of other conceptual artists. Since the early 1970s, I’ve explored how language informs our perception of images. I’ve defined subjective views as facts. I like creating paradoxes. Text in my art, however, serves a different function. It’s not about creating a narrative but pointing in a particular direction.

Also, I was an artist from the moment I could hold a pencil (as my mother once put it) but I didn’t start writing stories until I was fed up with the art world in my mid-thirties. But writing is what I am concentrating on right now since finishing a very large series of drawings called *Mind Matters: An Unscientific Exploration*.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: You’ve written two writing workbooks, *The Playful Way to Serious Writing* (see [here](#)) and *The Playful Way to Knowing Yourself* (see [here](#)). As you likely realize there’s the old stereotype of the tortured artist, but you take a different route and offer play as an important part of creativity. What makes play so important?

ROBERTA ALLEN: Play is a state of being that is different for everyone. It’s a primal emotion as basic as food and sleep, hard-wired in our brains. Play is natural in children until it is suppressed in school. Adults need play just as much. The neurons of our play circuits need to be activated. Fear stops many writers. We need to feel as free as children when we write. My 5-minute prompts are a form of play. When we bring energy to the surface and focus attention for 5 minutes, there’s only time to be spontaneous. We need to feel free to try things out, free to write badly (whatever you may think that is), and not make ourselves wrong when things don’t work. It’s really “not serious.”

Tomorrow is another day. It's all part of the process. We need to be able to let go of ideas that don't work and allow ourselves to fail. Play is giving ourselves the freedom to create from a place in ourselves that we may not even know existed.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: I read in *Bomb Magazine* that you love the challenge of revising and that your files contain many drafts. I enjoy a little of it but it's such hard work. I always feel as if my work has improved after revisions, but the work is so hard that I dread doing it. After a while, I sometimes feel as if I've lost that spark that got the piece going in the first place. What do you think makes revision so attractive? What can the rest of us do to learn to enjoy and appreciate it more?

ROBERTA ALLEN: Writing is an exploration, but revision is a process of discovery. That's what I find exciting. Revision is the deep part of our exploration in which we may discover that our story is not what we thought it was at the beginning. Our exploration starts with a need, a desire. That's where the energy comes from even if we're not aware of it at first. Only through revision—by going beneath the surface of the story, sometimes digging deep into ourselves, do we discover what is hidden behind the words. So revision is not just about finding the right words but about surprising ourselves. Revision gives us a different perspective, a new perspective we may not have imagined when we began.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: In gathering information about you for this interview, I see that you've traveled extensively. How important has travel been to your writing?

ROBERTA ALLEN: Travel has been my inspiration. I've traveled so much in my life, especially when I began writing short shorts—especially in third world countries where I traveled mostly by myself. Not so many women were traveling alone in the 1980s.

I traveled alone to Central American countries, Mexico, Indonesia, Peru and more. In other places such as Turkey, Mali, Egypt and Morocco I traveled with a partner or in a group. Besides traveling all through Europe when I was very young, I also lived in Athens, Berlin, Amsterdam, Mexico and Australia on a six-month fellowship.

In my earlier collections of short shorts, *The Traveling Woman* ([see here](#)), *The Daughter* ([see here](#)), *Certain People* ([see here](#)), most are set in places

where I traveled, and many are auto-fictions (which I define as first it happens, then I make it up). I have never written *travel* stories per se except when *The New York Times Magazine* commissioned me to write a feature about Mali. One trip became an entire book: ***Amazon Dream*** ([see here](#)), a memoir about my trip alone in the Peruvian Amazon that was published by City Lights.

After my last trip out of the country, I felt I had seen enough. I no longer needed to travel *far*. I have always been attracted to what is strange, bizarre—at least to me. I've written a lot about alienation and missed connections.

My latest very short and short story collection, ***The Princess of Herself*** ([see here](#)) (*Pelekinesis*)—my most humorous collection—set in Upstate New York felt like writing about a *foreign* place.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: I find your amulets pieces quite interesting. I've read about six of them and look forward to reading more. Can you tell me more about those? How did you come by the idea? Are they always purely fiction? Or are some based on actual cultures?

ROBERTA ALLEN: My very short amulet stories began almost like a game. I don't remember exactly how this came about. But on Wikipedia I found a list of all the islands in the world. I rearranged the letters in each island name I chose, creating an island of my imagination. I think the *amulets* arose from the influence of my father when I was a child. He was a gambler. *Luck* was important in his world. I made up the amulets for my stories.

Instead of traveling myself, I've been traveling on YouTube to amazing little-known places and people all over the world. I might use a custom from one place and flora from another. I watched history, archaeology, nature, and anthropology videos. I found all these videos interesting on their own besides inspiring my own narratives with hopefully some relevance to our world.

This is a small series of very short stories. I am still revising a few but there are only about twenty. I doubt I'll write more of them. But this series brought me back to writing very short stories.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: I notice you avoid referring to your amulets as flash fiction. What's your view about the flash fiction label?

ROBERTA ALLEN: I've always disliked the label flash fiction because it makes the genre sound so inconsequential, and I think it is anything but. *Flash* sounds as though you can write and understand them in seconds. (My book *Fast Fiction* and my writing workbooks use 5-minute prompts, but these are for *1st drafts*.) I've read quite a few shorts that take time to read and may require several readings. And why only fiction? If I were writing that book now, I would include all shorts. Many writers have used my books for nonfiction as well.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: You've published so much in the past. Do you have more work on the horizon? Do you have work still to publish or still to write? In what form does it or will it take?

ROBERTA ALLEN: What I'm doing now is writing stories around 2,000 words or more connecting very short pieces. Recently, I found many unfinished shorts that I didn't know I had. I'm also working slowly on a book of selected stories from the 80s till now which I'm tentatively calling *Strange Things*. Many were published in journals or anthologies but never made their way into any of my books—and some are old favorites. But I keep delaying this book because I keep writing new shorts and short stories and want to include at least some of them.

CASTO FOR O:JA&L: Your creativity never ends. And I'm grateful it doesn't. I've enjoyed doing the interview and look forward to seeing so much more of your work.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER:

PAMELYN CASTO, twice a Pushcart Prize nominee, has published feature-length articles on flash fiction in *Writer's Digest* (and in their other publications), *Fiction Southeast*, and *Writing World* (and elsewhere). Her essay on flash fiction and myth appears in Rose Metal Press's *Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction: Tips from Editors, Teachers, and Writers in the Field* and her 8,000-word essay on flash fiction is included in *Books and Beyond: The Greenwood Encyclopedia Of New American Reading* (4 volumes). She also has a 5,000-word article on flash fiction as the lead article in the new book *Critical Insights: Flash Fiction*. Subscribe to her free online monthly [flashfictionflash newsletter](#) (first issue published in 2001) for markets, contests, and publishing news for flash literature writers. Casto is an Associate Editor at O:JA&L. Pamelyn Casto's new book *Flash Fiction: Alive in The Flicker (A Portable Workshop)*, a new release from O:JA&L's Buttonhook Press, is available now on Amazon.

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2021

- Salt
Poetry by Amanda Leal
Deer in Fog at Twilight Near Squalicum Lake Road
Poetry by Richard Widerkehr
Democracy has Lifted Up Its Voice
Poetry by Mike Puican
2YC Review: The Works
Poetry and creative prose by members of the Two-Year College Caucus at AWP
Promises
Poetry by Ellis Elliott
Home
Poetry by Amanda Leal
Study of Burkas
A poem by Dana Sonnenschein
The Open Window
Flash vignettes by O.G. Rose
Light in the Cathedral: Russian/English Poems
Poetry in two languages by Andrey Gritsman

2022

- Poems for Families
Poetry by Kirby Olson
Mogollon Rim
Poetry by Allisa Cherry
Hanno
Poetry by John-Michael Bloomquist

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

Poem scrawled on a maize-sheaf for her (last offering)

Poetry and art by Arturo Desimone

[The Curve of the Open Page](#)

A poem by Bruce Bond

[Murder in the House: The "Nutshells" of Frances Glessner Lee](#)

Poetry by Jessica Purdy

[War and Riff](#)

Haibun by Keith Polette

[Family Photo of America](#)

Poetry by Lynn Potts

[Chester River Reverie](#)

Poetry by Priscilla Long

[Salton Sea](#)

A short story by Mike Murray

[The Fiddler](#)

Poetry by Tim Hunt

A Balloon Called [YOUNG AMERICA](#)

Poetry by Jennifer Clark

[High Fashion](#)

Featured Collaboration

Poetry by Adjei Agyei-Baah & Fine Art Photography by Jerome Berglund

2023

[Nothing To Be Sorry For](#)

Poetry by Lynn Cohen

[Small Lantern](#)

Featured Haiga Collaborations

Haiku by Hassane Zemmouri and Photography by Megali Bretou & Bea Bauer

[A Sport and a Pastime](#)

Haiku (Americana) by Ron Scully

[Night Train](#)

Haiku by Jerome Gagnon

[The Aquarian Foundation](#)

Poetry (Americana) by Jeffrey Gray

[Once There Was a Way](#)

Poetry by Steve Myers

[Local Habitations](#)

Poetry by Edison Jennings

[Occasions for Listening](#)

Excerpts from a WIP by Spencer Silverthorne

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HOT BUTTON PRESS *Contemporary Issues* has titles in press.

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2020

O:JA&L Pushcart Prize Nominees: 2018

O:JA&L Pushcart Prize Nominees: 2019

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(from WIP NOT FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL)

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Flash Fiction: A Primer

A writer's resource by Associate Editor Pamelyn Casto

Poetry: Three Essays on Craft

by O:JA&L Featured Writers

Ray-the Roo

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2021

Just Willie Please: Eight Flash Fiction Tales

A flash fiction sequence by Don Robishaw

The Imp of the Perverse: Edgar Allan Poe's Misplaces Youth

An essay from a longer academic WIP by Anne Whitehouse

The First Annual O:JA&L Prize for Flash Discourse

Selected and with an Introduction by Associate Editor Pamelyn Casto

The 10 Best Flash Narratives 2017-2021

Here Comes Herodotus, Again!

Flash Discourse by Wayne Cresser

Where the Thin Winds Worry

Flash Discourse by Carolyn Mikulencak

(No longer available)

2022

Funny You Should Ask

Prose Poetry by Brad Rose

Hunger Pains

Flash Discourse by Mark Blickley

Comedy Hour

Poetry by Bruce Robinson

Delta Notes

Haiku by Jianqing Zheng

Scaring Crow

Haiku by Adjei Agyei-Baah

Dust and Rust

Haibun by Taofeek Ayeyemi

A Sweater for the Tayfel

Irish/English Haiku by Gabriel Rosenstock celebrating the art of Issachar Ber
Ryback

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

Zen and the Art of House Painting

New and selected flash fiction by Wayne Scheer

The Selborne Haibun

Irish/English Haibun by Gabriel Rosenstock, featuring passages from THE
NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE by Gilbert White (1720-1793)

2023

School Songs

Haiku & Senryu by Hassane Zemmouri

Being Ruth Aswawa

Poetry by Anne Whitehouse

Soldier, Sailor: Edgar Allen Poe and His Brother Henry

Academic Nonfiction by Anne Whitehouse

Tales of the Kite

Haiku by Adjei Agyei-Baah

How the Mayfly Got Its Megaphone

Prose poetry by Hekkei Huotari

Jackhammer Poems

Poetry by Ben Jacques

Six Coffees with a Madman

Experimental Fiction by Blossom Hibbert

Drops of Water

Haiku by Yuko Otomo

Irish translation by Gabriel Rosenstock

Scots translation by John McDonald

Just Looking

Haiku Sequences on the Mississippi Delta region by Jianqing Zheng

Qualm (Before a Storm)

Poetry by Bruce Robinson

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With an Interview by Associate Editor Pamelyn Casto

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The Buttonhook Press Masters Series: Ray Gonzalez on Prose Poetry

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And Other True Stories

A Novella of the Interwar Years 1919-1939

ERIK HARPER KLOSS

Polish Poets in Beds with Girls exhibits a fascinating and artful mix of history, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, footnotes, the semifictional (and autofictional) lives of Erik Harper Klass and his lover Rachel, and snippets about the actual lives of eight renowned Polish poets and their lovers. The force that holds this mighty mix together is the work of poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. Klass's book will awaken readers to the strangeness of literature and history, and to the strangeness of life and love.

PAMELYN CASTO

Author of *Flash Fiction: Alive in the Flicker (A Portable Workshop)*.

Klass offers a dense, thoroughly researched story laden with symbolism, which seems, above all, to be saying this: art *exists*. This work *is*. Art stands (sometimes literally) above what changes and what doesn't, outlives giants, and imbues repetitive, sometimes hopeless lives with color. For anybody who finds that meaning important, *Polish Poets* is a work worth taking in. . . . [It is] a multi-layered, provocative, and well-told story about art for art's sake, language for language's sake, and meaning-making itself.

RACHEL CUSTER

NEA Fellow (2019) and the author of *Flatback Sally Country*

We listen with sympathy and fascination to this series of intimate colloquies that Klass has created in his captivating narrative on several notable Polish poets of the interwar years (1919–1938). Feelings matter here—the relationships between the lovers. The expansive descriptions of tiny things matter here. The internal monologues of the individual poets matter here—their musings on the condition of the world around them. But it is the blending of all these things in Klass's precise proportions that matters most. His many thoughtfully nuanced ingredients in this literary recipe are the result of exhaustive research, and his efforts provide his readers with the ultimate experience of the vibrant Polish poetic community of the first half of the twentieth century.

VERA FALENKO

2017 graduate of the Moscow Aviation Institute and contributing editor and translator at *Open: Journal of Arts & Letters*

ROBERTA ALLEN

Flash Fiction

POLISH POETS

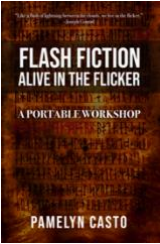
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AND OTHER TRUE STORIES



ERIK HARPER KLASS

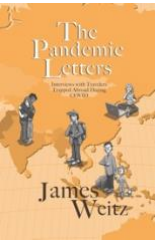
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