

The Awful Truth

Diana Hamilton



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N. Y. N. C.

If the artist (in whatever medium) is searching for the self, then it can be said that in all probability there is already some failure for that artist in the field of general creative living.

—D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

Our problem is that we think too much. All day, all night. At night, we call it dreaming. Everyone dreams. We can't stop the dreams any more than the thoughts. Since we can't stop them, we must be more aware of them. To be conscious of these thoughts and conscious of these dreams: 'The sea can be violent or still . . . It follows no pattern' . . . 'My family is very ordinary.' Heaven, Hell, virtue, sin are nothing but suppositions.

—Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour*

That's it. That's as far as I've gotten. I've left a lot out of this, including a lot of dreams but the dreams often provide me with the words I need to work from. I haven't finished anything but I have the idea that if I now take a space & inundate that space with words, all the words that have come out of this, set it up so that the words can be looked at, read & listened, all at once, for days, hours, the observers, or the audience, would be in a corner, pushed into a corner, into being me, or just into me. Anyway it's a good question.

—Bernadette Mayer, *Studying Hunger*

Write in Your Sleep

Some say we shouldn't describe our dreams.

I say: fuck that.

But saying "fuck that" won't persuade everyone.

Instead, I'll prove it with "research"

about dreams & wishes. Specifically, two:
the wish to write, the wish to feel better.

Here's an annotated bibliography
on how, when we dream, we write:

—if lazily, in fear or love, without credentials.

In *Venus in Furs*, "the story is set in motion by a dream

that occurs during an interrupted reading."¹ (So's this.)

An unnamed man tells Severin his dream

of "speaking to Venus about love while she wears furs"²

who, among her many cruelties, tells *him* that he, and his people,

"do not know what love is about." Severin listens

under a painting of the same woman—"That is how I saw her

in my dreams," the narrator exclaims; "But I was dreaming

with my eyes open," says Severin³—

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (Boston: MIT Press, 1971), 22.

² Wikipedia contributors, "Venus in Furs," *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Venus_in_Furs&oldid=780633396

³ Leopold Sacher von Masoch, *Venus in Furs*, in Deleuze's *Masochism*, 148.

and recommends he read a book about it. (Good advice.)
Bob Glück, in *About Ed*, says “I slept
so lightly I complained in my dreams
about still being awake.”⁴ He dreams of his lover

helping him paint the loft, buy a bathtub, Denny
with an unruly dog, and as he writes the dream
down, he understands it “means that Ed was giving [him] a hand
with this book.” Freud says he’s nervous

he’s not a poet given how much
of himself he’s about to tell.⁵
Same. Writers should go to sleep
when they need help:

Hamilton, Diana. “Onion Poet’s Dream, on the eve of her birth-
day.” Email message to therapist. December 7, 2013.

Hamilton dreams that she is at a party of older poets. They are
collaborating on an impressive dish she does not want because
she has chronic IBS.

To contribute, she makes her “specialty,” which is a big loaf of
hearty bread, cut into slices with an onion spread. She demon-
strates how to make it: it’s just an onion, cut in a secret way
that, when unlocked, reveals units of paste instead of slices—as
if you roasted a head of garlic and cut it in half. All of the older
poets are impressed, and though they are from many different
countries, they all say it reminds them of a food they had in their
childhood and that they would rather have it than the fancy
meal that is coming.

⁴ Robert Glück, reading at the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s Church in the Bowery,
December 7, 2016.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York:
Basic Books, 2010), xxiv.

In the dream, Hamilton forgets that, in real life, she stopped eating onions once she developed the IBS; i.e., her dip is a terrible solution.

Yet in her sleep, she writes a story that

1. minimizes the work women put into preparing food,
2. earns her the attention of her elders, and
3. rejects luxury in favor of sustenance.

Describing a dream is like reading the first draft of a poem aloud to a friend who didn't offer to listen:

It's rude. But it's a fine way to force someone to help you get over writer's block.

Dreams appear among Bernadette Mayer's "experiments." She says to

Write down your dreams as the first thing you do every morning for 30 days. Apply translation and aleatoric processes to this material. Double the length of each dream. Weave them together into one poem, adding or changing or reordering material. Negate or reverse all statements ("I went down the hill" to "I went up the hill," "I didn't" to "I did"). Borrow a friend's dreams and apply these techniques to them.⁶

I did this on accident: I wrote dream notes on a whiteboard to see what "came together," and what came together was love:

A lover was a book by me, I had written
him, but he was still man-sized and book-sized. He wanted me
to inscribe him to him, an act I've always hated,
and hate requesting. For this reason

⁶ Bernadette Mayer, "Bernadette Mayer's Writing Experiments," accessed May 27, 2016, http://www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html

I'll only do it when it feels urgent: I saw Bernadette Mayer in Oakland recently, and I couldn't help but ask her to sign my copy of *Ethics of Sleep* because I love her more than all poets who have ever existed and that was the book I had just bought. I told her I loved her. She laughed and asked for a sip of my beer. One thing you might not know is that Bernadette Mayer is the most beautiful human. She asked me: "So you like my work. Should I keep writing?"

I hesitated. I said, "Of course, selfishly, I want to say yes. But you should do whatever the fuck you want." She threw her head back and laughed again as she opened the beer. "You know I can't sign my name since my stroke?" She wrote "BM" in block letters. I said, "yes."

When people ask me to sign a book I feel like they are asking me to revise it, to come up with a line that was left out by mistake, and that line is the one where I would have made it clear that I love them, in advance. In my dream, the book/lover that I had written specifically asked me to inscribe him, "I love you, _____," where that blank is his name, you get it. I wrote "Dream where D is book I wrote, ILY" on the whiteboard, lived another day, went back to sleep, dreamt of another lover, who, in the dream, had my body. Specifically, I saw her belly fat hang in the same way mine hangs: stretch marks having loosened the skin such that, in any position other than lying flat on my/her back, it sags low, and, since neither me nor this dream lover is so insecure that we would

avoid the kinds of sex where your belly hangs
for the sake of vanity, I watched her belly swing,
I thought, "I didn't know she had the same body
as me, that's surprising, from here, on her,
it's hot, I want her even more than I would
if her belly were tight." This is a lie: in real life,
she is too beautiful and no skin hangs, and because
I like her, I like these things about her,
too, I'm glad she doesn't have my body, but
there I was: one lover was my body, the other my book,
I just need to sleep with someone new
who can be my mind, I guess; from other's dreams, I get
the sense it could be useful to have one
who is my mom or my dad, too.

Remember the opening to *Midwinter Day*:

Stately you came to town in my opening dream
Lately you've been showing up alot
I saw clearly
You were staying in the mirror with me
You walk in, the hills are green, I keep you warm
Placed in this cold country in a town of mountains
Replaced from that balmier city of yours near the sea
Now it's your turn to fall down from the love of my look
You stayed in the hotel called your daughter's arms
No wonder the mother's so forbidding, so hard to embrace
I only wait in the lobby, in the bar

I write
People say, "What is it?"
I ask if I must tell all the rest
For never, since I was born
and for no man or woman I've ever met,
I'll swear to that,
Have there been such dreams as I had today,

The 22nd day of December,
Which, as I can now remember,
I'll tell you all about, if I can

Can I say what I saw

In sleep in dreams⁷

You want to write, “Yes, of course, Bernadette,” in the margin but she’s playing you: she doesn’t need your permission to write this book, just as she didn’t need mine to write whatever she will or won’t in the coming years, but this is her dream: “People all around me / Wondering what it is I write”—she’s dreaming and writing of a needy reader, a lover who shows up alot. It’s the dream itself that permits you to write it. Dreams are more confident than poets, they don’t wait to win prizes from the Poetry Society of America:

Hamilton, Diana. “Dream in which the Poetry Society of America mistakenly gives me a prize.” Email to self. April 27, 2016.

Hamilton is sitting in the basement of an event space where people approach her to let her know she’s been awarded a large prize by the Poetry Society of America.

She explains that there’s no way it’s her, she didn’t even apply, and anyway, she doesn’t write the kind of poems that win those prizes. They point to her name on the envelope and show her that it says “Diana Hamilton,” but it has a different person’s address and phone number. She explains that there are a lot of people named Diana Hamilton. But she can’t convince them it’s not her, and they show her their poorly formatted spreadsheet, which says “Diana Hamilton—OK, OK,” the title is misspelled

⁷ Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (New York: New Directions, 1999), 1-2.

and she knows it's not for her. She wants to be left alone. She explains that whoever filled out their spreadsheet probably researched the title of the writers' books *after* making the spreadsheet, so it doesn't mean anything. They try to give her the envelope announcing the prize anyway, because they've only been tasked with making the deliveries.

And, they explain, they've been looking for her "forever."

That's when Hamilton's ex shows up and gives her second envelope, this one full of all of the letters and scraps of paper she ever wrote to him, including printed emails, as if he's trying to get more money for the linear feet of his archive, and because he "doesn't need them anymore." She can't take this, so she goes to the bathroom to hide from the need to cry, but someone is following her, she knows they are going to attack her, she tries to hide by crouching over a toilet seat. Once hidden, she realizes that whoever is following her only has to open each stall in turn to find her, so she gives up, she falls on the floor and cries anyway, this time from fear and sadness. By the time they find her, they are no longer a villain, they are the ex, they are a villain, they get in a car together and she has to run errands but again she can't take it, gets out of the car with her envelopes and runs, but the car catches up to her, not on purpose, just because walking is slow, and she is humiliated but gets back in.

It seems generous of the dream to have selected me for the prize, but the dream is actually too busy being proud of its own ability to give prizes to worry about me or my book⁸ about crying, often in the bathroom stall. Diana, your feelings will find you wherever you run and wherever you pee, leave your book behind, you have processing to do, run faster. I am not the first poet to have been awarded a large prize by falling asleep.

⁸ Diana Hamilton, *Okay, Okay* (Queens, NY: Truck Books, 2012).

[...]

Freud may not prove that dreaming is writing, but
Die Traumdeutung is an archive, you can't deny
that the dreams take up space on the pages, indicating that,
with enough sleep, you'll have a book-length manuscript.

I'm curious about masturbation
as baby steps, though: do you think Freud's patient got off
before he dreamt he should practice his *études*,
or does the dream merely echo F's reproach?

"I have not come in seven days,"
I started to write, and then remembered, no,
that isn't true, I have not entirely neglected
my piano-playing, and the only dream I recall
this week followed said lesson:

Hamilton, Diana. "Dream before leaving for Kentucky." January
2017.

Hamilton walks out of a window and onto a dock, but a dock
without water below it, a fire escape, in fact, made of wood that
stays in place without stairs or other support.

At first, the deck seems to operate via some sort of pulley system,
and when she steps out of the window, she tries to lower it, but
does it wrong. An ex comes out the same window and begins to
explain how she has erred, but in the end, they demonstrate that
they can make it levitate such that they are now floating while
having a fight.

They tell her that she has always been difficult, as they float on
the deck, and she gets very sad. She decides that the only way to
not get more depressed in response is to go for a run.

Despite the difficulty of running in dreams, Hamilton does it; she even manages to run fast instead of encountering the normal underwater-dream-resistance. She runs to Deming Park, the park of her childhood, where she often runs in her dreams but never ran growing up. She looks down and finds out she is bare-foot, which she hadn't noticed because she had been levitating, and she sees she is also holding a pile of laundry and dropping the clothes as she runs. She returns to the house and is proud to note she has run "two miles."

We have to get our priorities in order.

I want to dream, I don't want to go to work,
I want to sleep, I don't want to check my email,
I want to fly over a pond of koi fish, the word
"coy" echoing off water and clouds, I don't want to
create a personal budget. But those who love to dream
can become assholes, it's like you're demanding
a personal TV series that no one else is allowed to watch
and which the entirety of your day is organized around viewing.

I searched my dream journals for a transition, here:
a dream that related to masturbation, to dancing, to crushes,
to restraint, to abstinence, to love, to friendship. I found,
instead, an interruption—a complaint that "life"
came between my dreams, instead of another dream.

There's more than one interrupted dream
in *Venus and Furs*: when Wanda instructs Apollo
to whip Severin, "Apollo whipped all poetry
from" him and he realizes he's been caught in the "net
of woman's treachery" "as though [he] were awakening
from a long dream." In this unconvincing resolution,
Severin loses his interest in the Venus in Furs,
making a dual call for women's subjection and their rights:

The moral is that woman, as Nature created her and as man up to now as found her attractive, is man's enemy; she can be his slave or his mistress but never his companion. This she can only be when she has the same rights as he and is his equal in education and work. For the time being there is only one alternative: to be the hammer or the anvil.²⁶

Between the opening and closing dreams
of *Venus in Furs*, Severin's dreams come unhappily true.

Between my dreams, I complain
about the world's intervention:

Hamilton, Diana. "Dream of Inconvenient Shower." November 16, 2013.

Hamilton is with an ex's parents and has to shower, but their shower is in the center of the room without drain, curtains, or glass; just a showerhead over the carpeted floor in a shared social space. She has to solve this problem (a recurring one). In the journal, she notes that she also has an issue with the shampoo, and that she paid for something in cookies.

Then, she writes:

X wants a hug (real life) so I feel not left alone to do my thinking

and notes that she woke up "so much more alert than usual."

A girl so respects her dream life as writing
that a lover's need to hug her while she sleeps
not only disrespects her "thinking" but also
merits transcription.

²⁶ Deleuze, *Masochism*, 271.

Meanwhile, the important thinking she's doing in her sleep is all about cookies:

Ibid.

I was buying cookies at a cookie store and lost my wallet. I found it. I never got to eat the cookies.

Three years and two months later, she dreamt again:

---. Email, January 19, 2017.

The writer has lunch with either X, with whom she was living, or with current lover, or with both, or perhaps with many exes at once, purportedly in order to look at a map.

Rather, it was a smaller subset of a larger map, and the writer knew that the larger map was at her home—"a map of something else."

She decides to run to her own apartment (implying she does not, in fact, live with any of these exes with whom she was dining) to retrieve it (Hamilton developed the ability to run in her dreams in 2016). Once she had gotten a block or so, though, she realized it would take "one hour and a half to get the map and return."

Instead, she runs back, and passes a sidewalk café where, she sees now, she left her wallet and cigarettes, a table since abandoned by the ex(es). She narrates all this in the "voice memos" function of her phone.

In the recording, she tries to remember: "What was the thing I said?" she asks. A long pause, a groan. "It had to do with listening to his radio show."

You lose your wallet looking for cookies.

You find your wallet, you miss your cookies, you lose your wallet looking for maps. You find your wallet, miss maps, you're interrupted by your impression of men's need for your attention, you lose their attention, you find men to miss you, you overlook the fact that the need, and the attention, were yours to begin with. Call yourself on the phone, girl.

*

[...]

Fear and Trembling

Elsie Maria Kingdon

[I found this novella—if you can call it that—on Christmas Eve, 2016, outside of Metrograph, a movie theater in lower Manhattan. I was coming from a screening of Carol, the adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s lesbian classic, The Price of Salt. I asked at the theater and the neighboring bars to try to track down its writer, and I performed the requisite searches, but she’s either made use of a pseudonym or written in relative obscurity (of course, coming advances in machine learning will make identifying her easier). Though, lying in the gutter, it gave the impression of having fallen out of a taxi in some sort of skirmish, the manuscript looked freshly printed, and had the phrase “FINAL DRAFT” as a running header. —D.S.H.]

Recently, every young person I know agreed they were “very anxious.”

Life was full of dread, they said, and the body, they discovered, warded off problems by creating “meaningful,” if unhelpful, physical symptoms.

They started acting as if knowing this served some purpose, as if, to recover from anxiety, it were enough to recognize it.

Their parents having loved them too much or too little, their shits, cum, coughs, and dizzy spells, their sleeping too much, their forgetting the purpose in going to work or going for walks, their feelings of sadness and difficulty making decisions, their desire to sleep with abusers or fathers (that too-often inclusive ‘or’)—all these were not only signs of some hopefully identifiable pathology, but necessary steps.

They could not say towards what, precisely, but they seemed to imagine they were inching closer to a successfully repressive adulthood, towards their careers, or, I don’t fucking know, towards Connecticut.

Laura looked forward to telling her future children about the time she believed she was dying from watching *Avatar 3D*, from the plot’s stupid allegory, the apparent proximity of weird shapes to her face, and the two cups of coffee she had before the show—all combining to produce heart palpitations, tears, and the sense that she would never be allowed to leave the theater. When she does tell her kids this, one day, she will make it into an “incident,” safe in its isolation; she will forget, consciously or un-, how she couldn’t go to the movies for a year.

I know: Like all anxious people before them, they have suffered. Some still suffer, stubbornly; for these, the symptoms are signs only of sadness’s truth. These I admire more—though they’re worse off—than those who recover quickly: those who shat blood or fell flat on the sidewalk, bed, or veranda in order

to “move on,” and who did move on, though only in a limited sense: their bowels regained consistency as unhappy couples do (by deciding to get married to solve their problems). The binding removes only the outward sign that there is something to deal with.

The girl who stands up from her collapse in order to recover never bothers to wonder how she got there, or why, or what this terror meant, outside of a general narrative of self-improvement—she devotes herself to a set of tasks meant to produce recovery without reflection, with the post-religious zeal of a lapsed Catholic.

Instead of getting up and, whatever, “going running,” she should stay on the sidewalk where she fainted. (If she has, at this point in the story, already stood up, it is time to lie back down.) She could not be expected to do this all day, of course—that would be dull—but whenever she starts to forget that it’s impossible to stay upright, she should talk to strangers while prone, if she can bring herself to, or let herself be talked at. Cities could provide funding for such programs in order to stem the tide of productivity currently ruining the potential for new friendships and affairs, both of which are known to stimulate local economies.

Though Laura will deny herself this knowledge in her future, she had it then, or now: after avoiding the movies, after trying to get “better” by reading “books” and “taking it easy,” she tried—instead—attending as many movies as possible.

She took notes on her anxiety’s progress: “Gripping the torn-up upholstery on the armrests at Film Forum while the newly restored edition of Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* plays,” she wrote, “I might vomit or worse,” the worse being her belief that the film would never end.

(As the armrests at Film Forum are actually intact, this is further evidence that the theater had become a hard drive for her fears. Laura was a bad writer, and like other bad writers, she asked description to stand in for feeling.)

At the same time, though, she was happy: unlike with the

first film-induced panic attack, this movie was great. It was worth freaking out through. She noted how contemporary special effects had inscribed themselves so successfully on her body that an identical reaction could now be triggered by sharp lighting contrasts in a 1927 silent film: the longer shots were tied to the stress produced by the awful brevity that had so specifically gotten under her eyelids before.

Realizing she could more easily leave this time, having attended alone, she didn't mind staying. Going alone removed this factor—the fear that, if she were to *become* anxious, she would to have to make an awkward exit from a date, for example—and made the anticipation of panic more experimental (“If I choose a relaxed posture, do I calm down? Do I pay more or less attention when I'm anxious? Does attraction to one of the actors make it easier?”). In a week where she had passed out daily on the way to work, she went to see *Carol* for the second time, having guessed that the presence of friends at the first screening had prevented the escape she needed, via the movie's textiles. The train-panic rose into her throat, but in the theater, she was guaranteed a seat; she considered thanking God for this comfort, remembered she didn't believe in him, and thanked the seat itself; she started to cry, exhausted from how hard she had had to work to stay calm that year, and realized everyone else was crying too, but about Theresa's impossible love; she joined them; she imagined her hands in the folds of Carol's fur; she gasped aloud at how heartbroken she was to not yet have had the love of a woman; she sank back into the seat; she stayed on edge, but every edge had another scene beyond it.

In movies, from there on, she did not find relief from her stress, per se, but she found a place to keep it. The scenes that made her panic in each film became related, so that her symptoms proved themselves able to write a new movie out of their overlaps.

[...]

At first, I was furious with Sophie. Her outright rejection of the very process she had set out to try was so like her, but so frustratingly apt, that I could only read it as an act of hostility.

Of course *I* would be limited to a duller version of my own idea—living through anxiety without attempting to get rid of it—while she would quickly see a more complicated way, something maintaining the relationship to scripts and to repetition without needing to do so literally (and so expensively—film equipment is not cheap). Ever insistent that any good strategy ought to be available to all classes, she quickly moved from character to character until she returned to the subtitling role, her preferred job among the ones she'd tried.

Sophie threw *Jeanne Dielman* at me, insisting that women have tried “film therapy” for as long as they’ve “kept house,” steadily repeating the roles that cause their anxiety in the hope that they grow accustomed to hell. They wake up and find their son’s shoes while he’s still sleeping, get them ready for him to enter the world, spend all day planning a meal they don’t look forward to and don’t care for, fuck if they have to, if that’s how they maintain their lives, and, hopefully, commit murder.

Soon Sophie had developed still further strategies beyond mine, and had begun to write to me about them; above all, she needed to prove that the act of writing was not incompatible with the act of accepting one’s lack of control. She came up with a series of procedures to carry out, but there was one she could never bring herself to do, in a way that surprised both of us.

“You say we shouldn’t bother to write in the absence of any real control,” she said. “I say, fuck that.” So she wrote me a story.

“Silent Treatment,” by Sophie

Sophie’s not-talking this week was somehow more unnerving than the always-talking that constitutes so much of the other fifty-one. She made coffee in silence; she drank it in silence; she ordered it in silence—by apologetically slipping a note across the counter that read “1 small coffee, no room”—and she sat, in silence, across from you, looking as if she expected you to talk anyway.

This was all extremely annoying, anyone would agree, he thought. Silent, she seemed even stupider, younger; she dressed more colorfully, with more care for the materials than for her appearance; she didn’t cook him dinner, or lunch, or make the bed after she woke up. Before and after this silent treatment, as he called it, she woke up after him, still sleepy, which he used to find beautiful, but which now, especially *now*, looked selfish, like a childish refusal to do what others do, a stupid posture that relied on groggy morning whispers to overcome itself.

He tried to return the quiet favor, but felt himself, despite his earlier protests, coming to understand that the way he was normally silent only towards her (as opposed to her indiscriminating dumbness) was, in fact, an act of hostility.

Though he resented the change, it wasn’t as if he had something to say to her. He was mostly angry, in fact, about this revelation, that he had only ever spoken in response to her speaking. He found in her “peaceful” “introspective” sitting-still the anxiety she must experience in everyday life with him. In short, she had failed to make up for his emptiness, and she had thereby forced him to miss her.

Silence journal:

Somewhat sad. Hungrier than usual. Cheeks slightly discolored, as if underslept.

I thought the hardest part would be failing at social situations, but it's not so bad—

at the very least (I think this is right?) I don't have to worry whether I have said the right thing.

I find myself reading a lot more often—that part is the best—and thinking about a thing I can't write down yet.

Yet, he was still better than her.

He would not keep complicated spreadsheets and drawings of the way his body responded to silence, smiling while he noted that, when asked a question he could not respond to with words, he did not compensate with gestures but instead stood still, as if the body's movement only followed speech.

She, meanwhile, had already broken her promise to herself by writing imaginary conversations she wished she could have with him:

- I don't want life to be so clean—"I love you, good morning"—½ can twice a day, one of us remembering to close the curtains when the sun is hot.
- Me either, Sophie.
- Do you really mean it?
- At night, I don't want to drink the right amount to only kiss whom I'm supposed to kiss—I don't mind this during the day, though—
- The train comes just as we get on the platform, every day.
- Exactly. Or when it doesn't, we have our books ready, or we hold hands.
- And I never forget to come home to you.
- I want to forget.
- But I don't want to ruin our life.
- You won't. Instead, you will kiss women.
- And you will live in neither cities nor towns. You will find out how to have left the town you grew up in without having gotten anywhere.
- I will wake up in the arms of someone else's dog.

[...]

Diana Hamilton is the author of *The Awful Truth*, *Okay*, and *God Was Right*, as well as various chapbooks. She writes poetry, fiction, and criticism about style, crying, shit, kisses, dreams, fainting, writing, and re-reading. You can walk through audio recordings of her dreams in the first-person shooter by Alejandro Miguel Justino Crawford, *Diana Hamilton's Dreams* (Gauss PDF), sister project to *The Awful Truth*.

She published her earliest books with The Dolphin Publishing Co. at Davis Park School in Terre Haute, Indiana, where her subjects included cops' suicides, abusive relationships, escaped polar bears, and grief. In 1996, her bio indicated that she hoped to grow up to be a teacher and writer and live in Duluth, Minnesota. Instead, she now teaches writing in New York, where she lives with the poet Shiv Kotecha and the cat, Émile, a.k.a. Monster. She received her PhD in Comparative Literature from Cornell University, where she tried to determine what "style" is.