



Local Writer Kate Carroll de Gutes Wins Oregon Book Award, Is Nominated for A Lammy!

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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Last year, Kate Carroll de Gutes released a compelling collection of essays titled *Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear*; which won the Oregon Book Award in creative nonfiction and is finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in lesbian memoir/nonfiction!

I had the opportunity to hear Kate read from one of the essays at her open mic GenderFuck last year, and was struck by how fully her presentation and vocabulary mirrored each other as she spoke honestly about the awkward nature of masculinity: as it's been constructed, moments of deconstruction, and coming to understand how it applied to her. "It was important to learn to be uncomfortable being masculine of center and embracing butch without wanting to transition and/or stigmatizing or degrading those for whom transitioning is the right decision. It's part of why I started an open mic in Portland for queer, genderqueer, and trans writers. I'm hoping that we can listen to each other and find some understanding."

GenderFuck, a welcome addition to the local open mic scene for the queer community, is currently on hiatus.

"A couple of things happened: deaths in my family, and the deaths in St Johns of both spaces where we held the open mic. I haven't had the energy to search out a new location, but one of the regular participants recently contacted me and wants to co-host it at Post 134 on Alberta. If it's going to

happen, I'm definitely going to need some help."

Writing about yourself can be a difficult process for many reasons, even with a background as varied and informed as Kate's, but writing this book meant rising to the challenge.

"As a lifelong journal keeper, I've always written about myself in way or another -- if only documenting bits that were going on in my own life. I started my career as a journalist, a feature writer, in fact, so there was more chance to insert yourself into a story--this was in a time when personal essays were written but not widely published except in places such as the New Yorker, Harper's, and the Atlantic. My early essays were patterned after this New Yorker, feature writing style, where the writer appears, but is not necessarily the subject of the essay. So, in many ways, the essays in *Objects In Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear* are some of the most deeply personal essays I've ever published, especially because they look at sexuality, gender, and relationship. And what I learned -- ex post facto -- is that although I chose what to include and what to omit, people still feel like they absolutely know who I am, what I'm about. That's a little disconcerting for both me and my ex-wife."

I was struck by how Kate played with tense and timeline extensively throughout this book and wondered, as a fellow writer, how she decided on things like which tense to use, and whether to go chronological or not.

"I wouldn't say I play with timeline -- the book is in reverse chronological order, but what makes it feel like I'm playing with the timeline is that I use tenses such as future perfect and past conditional so that I am able to reflect forward and backwards, as the case may be, and actually have a degree of understanding about what happened, rather than simply telling you a story. All of this happened in revision. I don't typically write in first person, present tense because my belief is that it's very hard to reflect on what happened in this case. So, many of my pieces were written in straight past tense. Then, when my editor, Judith Kitchen, and I conceived of the idea of putting the manuscript in reverse chronological order, I started playing with the tenses because some stories had a natural affinity to each other even though they occurred years apart. By rewriting the essays in a different tense, I could put them in a different order in the manuscript without truly changing the timeline."

Lambda has been hugely influential for queer writers for decades, and to be a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award is a big accomplishment.

"Oh, my gosh, it's stunning to me. I used to get the Lambda Literary Review mailed to my house in a brown paper wrapper. That's how old I am, and how important it was for me to know about other LGBTQ works -- especially because you did not used to be able to simply walk into any bookstore and find work by LGBTQ writers. Lambda kept me connected to a world of other writers and my history and my literary future. And to be a finalist for such a prestigious award, an award I've been tracking for almost 30 years now, is such an honor. This year there were 933 submission -- think about that -- many of them from mainstream houses. That tells you the strides we've made as a community--mainstream houses publish our books and submit them for awards--it demonstrates the vibrancy of our literary culture."

Not one to sit back on her laurels, Kate has several projects in the works already.

"The essays from my blog are being collected into a book that will be released next year by Two Sylvias Press, and I've also started on a new series of essays about Alzheimer's and grief which will be more traditionally narrative in structure and include research on how to set things up so that the people you leave behind do not have a nervous breakdown looking for your car title."

You can learn more about Kate and read her critically acclaimed blog, "The Authenticity Experiment," at www.katecarrolldegutes.com.

Sossity Chiricuzio is a writer and columnist based out of Portland, Oregon. She is a regular contributor for PQ Monthly and focuses on social justice, communication, community, and changing the world. You can follow her adventures online @sossitywrites and find more at sossitywrites.com.