

INTRODUCING THE SRPR ILLINOIS POETS:
JACKIE K. WHITE AND SIMONE MUENCH



Jackie K. White earned her PhD in Creative Writing (poetry) from University of Illinois at Chicago with concentrations in Latino/Latin American and Women's Studies. A former editor with *RHINO*, she is now professor of English at Lewis University where she serves as a faculty advisor for *Jet Fuel Review*. Her poems and translations have appeared in *ACM*, *Bayou*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *FOLIO*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Third Coast*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and online at *prosepoem.com*, *Seven Corners (7C)*, *shadowbox*, and *Superstition Review*, among others. She has also published three chapbooks: *Bestiary Charming*, 2006 Anabiosis Press Chapbook Award; *Petal-Tearing & Variations* (Finishing Line Press, 2008); and *Come Clearing* (Dancing Girl Press, 2012); and is an assistant editor of *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* (Black Lawrence Press, 2018).

Simone Muench is the author of several books including *Orange Crush* (Sarabande, 2010); *Wolf Centos* (Sarabande, 2014); and *Suture* (Black Lawrence Press, 2017), a sonnet collection written with Dean Rader. She and Rader (with Jackie K. White and Sally Ashton) edited *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* (Black Lawrence Press, 2018). The recipient of an NEA Literature Fellowship and a Meier Foundation for the Arts Achievement Award, she is a professor at Lewis University. She serves as chief faculty advisor for *Jet Fuel Review*, a poetry editor for *Tupelo Quarterly*, and creator of the HB Sunday Reading Series.

Counter Measures

an erasure from The Monkey and the Wrench

We confess: we don't own this language.
We maneuver our way through a wilderness
of wrenches and the mystical. We're discontents

amid the infinite accumulation that leeches
what seems cornucopia into goodbyes.
What other moves can we make? What persona

is coming? We are to Drink X. Drink ends
of poems. We are wired to trap doors, hearing
words repeated: goodbye, goodbye; Oslo,

Oslo; sea, sea-girls, seaweed. Fast-forward to
statistics, suspected; remedy, limited; instruments
distressed. After decades of complaint, even

lovers have less faith, tongue a ringing slogan
in a vacuum, and simply melt away. Are we
to respond with explosion or lament?—

facing a striking absence, a sign missing,
radio sizzle settling down. A wilderness
of night agents traces a desolate world.

Whirl the story—tell something that will change
the seashore. Address the sunshine and its
marquee-anatomy for monotony is a hard chair.

Hex and Howl

You study the orange girls, cinema
gazes, wounded bodies, and angles
that wolves unbend. I look through the eyes
of chameleons, the nightmare houses they

inhabit with crystalized skins: pebbled
and primordial, shedding their way into
waking. You and I are told to swallow
our hexed howling, refuse the reptilian

and the mammalian, unless it's tame,
you know, cow-eyed, with a roundness eager
for petting. Now we do the refusing; now

we flame in the celluloid dark, a primal
unwinding where the wolf and the lizard
let loose the elemental code to our riling.

Revolve

Put your eye socket to sonic and turn
the curve of each line without the steadfast
clasp of vowel chime figuring the count
of the next syllabic showdown. Broken,

too, the tidy containment of each boxed
set of lines. We've a mashed-up scratch tape
in place of that singular little song.
We've unshelved selves, put rips in the tropes

tradition stitched. Still, there's an itch as if
for a missing iamb, an ache for false
clarity, the lure of the chiseled form that

keeps us siren-circling to see what comes
from the wreckage of our own breaking—
the music shifting, surface to sunken.

Portrait as Landscape: Shell Game

She's silk static and wetsuit smooth. A shawl
of dark water, eclipse, sealed
record. Gloss and gumption, plum-sauce
sweet and machete ready. A skilled

tactician of ephemera and sass,
ready to tape shut any ask, to spill
the opaque glass, stir up some operatic scat.
She's divested, self-vetted, unheeled,

even unhooked, but not undone. Not numb
or succumbing. She's a red feather lure
and the line. The measure of her fervor

has never been met. Contradiction?
Or just adept shape-shifter
once demanded, once considered conned.

Self-Portrait Lined by Ingeborg Bachmann

*Beneath the threshold, in a mirror, my dark
house floats* floodwater swift into the owl-eyed

forest. A strangle of fog, a hood of glass,
landscapes inverted as if I've swallowed Dali,

been forced to, for seeking to cut myself loose
from this wreck of reflection where I am river-

dredged, dangling in the slipstream of some
strange machine, machine of body gone slack,

machine of cluttered skies I can't align with.
As if an anchorless skiff, I want to be held aloft,

or let loose in the wilderness, no longer breakable
but fierce and free from this throttle of grief

even as the house sinks. Sea and river become
bodies one can walk away from; my body, once

some alien form lingering in the wet mirrored
surface, a sad engine composed of flesh and wish,

shatters the luminous planes. It's the only way,
says every loose and natural thing. The only way,

says the mist concealing all that's lost.
From white feathers to a boat's exhaust, we drift

but not rudderless. We let ourselves drift, this
time, in these times. Ride out the shattering.

Self-Portrait Lined by Osip Mandelstam

*Peel blood-oranges, put on your roller-skates,
spin your way to the sea, into salt and oblivion.*

That orange is the old sun sinking with you
and your childhood, the one there was no key for,

no press "return." The past is bramble and trance.
A syntax to detangle: citrus or suture, skate or scar;

mermaid lures you had to needle your own way
out of, stripping the wallpaper and cradle.

The window opens into the astral glow of lemon
trees. Follow the electric leafage back to flamed

blueness, from a hue refracting "once upon" tales
through a bonfire archway to an oceanic light show.

The dampened other life you once imagined sparks
and you dive into breakwater, wild and fully fleshed.

Rust

A woman is a rain rustle, an echo
under ice. She snips a thistle
in the strangling rain, tongues
an orange and whispers strange
rustling songs. She is the thistle,
the ice, the orange. A tongue of rust
and rain in this strange erasure
of afternoon. Let rain be oranges
and iced sweetness, let the rustle
of thistles in the orange-rust noon—

the iced noon, the wrestled noon,
and you, thistle-woman, rustling
the orange autumnal echo, tongue
snipped over strange ice, rain slicked, silt
shimmering, fire the orange tongue
against icy rustling with singed
snippets of thistle that rain down,
estranged echoings of she and you,
of harvest moon unsnipped from day
as rust rustles all that's gold to brown.

Scorch

One morning I woke choked
as if a knife wanted to rise up
out of my throat and cut

my tongue in two, take out
the half-self taught to silence
the no's, the bold. Inside

my mouth, a word grows.
I hold it, roll it, precarious
tooth. No, it's a hawk,

wingspan stretching the limits
of my jaw. Then it contorts into
a shiny disc, hinting I must be

a contortionist, too; must be danger,
haunt: breathless and full
of pulsing. And I let it go, let it

flash flood through the underbrush
of my body. Like smoke, it can't be
contained. It soars, shapeshifts.

When silence seeks to sear all
into withering, when the withheld
is about to sour, and what was dulled

or tamed clamors for vibrancy, for verb
fusing the full one that I am, sending
the next arrow sharp and fiery,

I spit it out: first effigy, then electricity.
This word. This gold wattage.
Fierce and untethered being.

Duologue

a cento with lines from Simone Muench + Jackie K. White

Let us rewind and revel
that we are women speaking in the dark.

Let the lungs fill till transparent.
Reach, reach, we want to say

with honey and history, and so the girl
feeds the submerged surging:

lacquered, damp and deep pink, pomegranate
underneath an autumn frosted Florida spring.

In a world sketched on a wing,
it is difficult not to fall under the spell

but we spin in reverse of every old script and cycle.
Amid wreckage, bed of wet petals, the unsaid,

we linger, saying we want more.
The windows are waking us.

Of Salt and Ache and Rendering

a cento

The winter is the winter's own release,
a pail of blue milk across morning.

In it, I became formless as fog, crossing
like a scar that opens again.

Day sinks down; and in darkness tomorrow,
I will not stand by the water's edge

hearing the sea's invisible drag:
the very drawer of salt and ache and rendering.

There is, in this waiting,
nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying

from a seaborne eternity to a pistol crack.
If you pull dry sea-weed from the sand,

what divine or what strange voice
would write a letter with my scissor mouth,

for there is nothing but water in it
and only the waves reply.

Lines and fragments taken from Helen Hunt Jackson, Lynda Hull, Claudia Emerson, Olga Orozco, Amy Lowell, Leonora Speyer, Lynda Hull, Lucie Brock-Broido, Alejandra Pizarnik, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, H. D., Yves Bonnefoy, Sappho, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Emily Dickinson

The Bright Obvious

a cento

There are lies that glow so brightly, we consent:
pleasure delayed is pleasure amplified;
what is beautiful alters, has undertow,

seen from afar, like a Mondrian.
The bright obvious stands motionless in cold.
Darkness stands in indistinct mounds.

It's something else we're looking for, something else—
The sky dusts itself blue; our stained hands flush with
all of that bright vitality, so restless,

sinking to the very bottom of the world.
Our bodies continue to lament.
We read letters of the dead and are like helpless gods

voicing the vacant altitude's agony,
searching for the narrow road to wander,
for some human and flamelike unfolding.

Lines and fragments from Marge Piercy, Marilyn Hacker, Linda Gregg, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Wallace Stevens, Sándor Csoóri, Vicente Huidobro, Anne Herbert, Rosalía de Castro, Anna Swir, Nelly Sachs, Wisława Szymborska, Anna Hanjal, Maura Stanton, Bella Akhmadulina

Light in a Dead Hour

a cento

Whoever built a house became a window
purged of anger and the body's hunger.

I am looking out the window. I'm an echo,
an earlier season of quiet like foxes on a snowy

night. I am here—the hypothetical spectator—
the sound of the light in a dead hour,

in my own shade from a broad tree
with the knives of strangers at my back.

Just before the ceiling opens
seeking another victim, I move along,

bring errors into blossom. Tomorrow
I am prepared to be content, tomorrow

in the house with the tortoise chair.
Now I must live in my lantern

but it will have a door
cast in gold in the gathering shadows.

Lines and fragments from Lina Kasdaglis, Forough Farrokhzad, Wallace Stevens, Hayashi Fumiko, Gunnar Ekelöf, Coral Bracho, Alejandra Pizarnik, "Sumangala's Mother," Eva Mylonas, Jenny Mastoraki, Rubén Darío, Günter Eich, Ángel González, anony. Nahuatl, Mina Loy, Anne Sexton, Anna Swir, Wu Tsao

A Cento Suite: Declarations

i. *Atmospheric Embroidery*

a cento homage for Meena Alexander

Book of singing grief
witnessing damage.
Open it, you whispered,

turning to me. It is—and we—
fit for a brutal season.
Then the sky put paid to us

a hot wire warbling:
tongue torqued, fierce filigree,
the green throat of the hummingbird.

How did we get here?—
where ghosts swim.
Your skin blue, ablaze,

bound by a cord of blood.
Come closer to me.
There is a door each soul must go through—

o that other life, not yet come.
Who will grant them passage?
Hungry, with bones and ash to stay

and all the marks the body bears.
The first materiality is all we have.
The garden of consolations is at hand.

ii. *The End of Spectacle*

a cento homage for Virginia Konchan

First, brace yourself, convalescing from the fiction
that there should be ceremony,
devotional altar, lit by a scented candle.

My body has never been my body:
I was datum, flesh, a beast.
Faceless, lucent, reduced to proximity

and touch, my suffering has disappeared.
Slow, in the collapsed space between what
was a metaphor for the drama of delimitation

and dream, motion understood as lissome
as song, I abstain, icon of sublime
indifference. You see me as if through glass,

stretched like a skin over frame.
I am embraced by a canopy of skulls.
The illusion is almost complete.

iii. *The New Nudity*

a cento homage for Hadara Bar-Nadav

In the language of still-twitching fish,
the loose change of your mind
gurgling undertongue,

you swoon inside a cathedral,
grief crowing overhead.
A note held and held:

troubling histories.
Smoke and hunger
paraded like a god.

The dead want to rise
like a symphony
that will not take flight.

Who services your hunger?
Who isn't barbaric anymore?
Lacquered and puckering

with too many mouths.
What is taken for your staggering?
What contains your phantom self?

Little blades of slate
hiccuping black air,
chandeliers and silence

that last for days,
the darkness of another world,
and pull of null.

iv. *Age of Glass*

a cento homage for Anna Maria Hong

Life was a journey unpredictable as weather.
We learned to help ourselves. An abridged spell
to finesse the fallacy of hedge and spillage,

the glass sea breaking. It was our time to savage
old roots scraped from autumn's cavity.
Each day to night was mute perfection

as we wrote our memoirs in diamond on mirror,
addicted to riddle and reversals—
the ultimate binary pair, but only

product and process, again, again.
Positions, poisons, margins, intentions.
Our keenest minds bone-homed in elegant

organic matter: entrails, birds, skulls,
my tropic of horn, your tropic of rinser,
the skin stretched tight on spine and diamond

among the coral whose stories have no lessons.
In the cosmic breeze that ships us, let's imagine that
we never began: a marble spun from parable, sand.

v. *Bully Love*

a cento homage for Patricia Colleen Murphy

My only power is this ability to name.
It is only chant, a stream, a crossing.
It is proof that succulence lives in me, that I will

plan the next forty years based on my
lips that will swallow our measured steps.
And I will bolt west for the stars and the spaces

between stars, just short of rapture.
I want to tell you something:
where I come from—not from the water

but creosote, arroyos,
desert shimmering under a weight
of another fantastic storm. The morning radio

finds our ears, and the sun becomes us:
from here to there is not impossible.
At night I feel the lake filling, rising, so that when

I startle from the deepest slumber,
I see the churning water, the hot bow
of the years approaching like a heat.

Alone in a stand of velvet ash,
with the only three things I own.
I want to hold them in my hands like a bird.

vi. *When I Wake It Will Be Forever*

a cento homage for Virginia Smith Rice

Summer, I am leaving now, before night arrives
leafed into the shape of a skull.
In the hand that breaks the clock

words ripple, unreadable, out of reach.
I want more than you. I want to step into now
or that or blue. I want to reach calamity and not be

pillars the autumn sun shines through.
Each year stoops closer to the ground.
I imagine light tugs my ankles,

color of summers one never expects.
Call it millefiori-brilliant, tracing language dissolved
and how easy it is to let things go. Voices gather in

a dust-red throat: a voice thorned and singing
this light this tree this room this house, the way back
just as remembered, and how often, gently, with a click

a chain lifts, link after link, past a window.
I've tried to be a stranger on this earth, and I don't want
the empty that is here and hidden

memory. It steps toward me on steady feet,
convinced that it is possible to develop a competence
that still cuts and hums. That charms the trees, gold

seagreen needles stitching the split. I leaf,
step into this moment, toward another.
Each buried secret says the same thing, if you listen.

vii. *Sometimes We're All Living in a Foreign Country*

a cento homage for Rebecca Morgan Frank

She'll say, *A girl can be anything*
a single drop of blood
leaving a footprint. Not once seeing

doors just power without a hint of stop.
I want to be the mirror of her photographs
with nothing to contain me. I am

a gun. A violin. Someone else's puzzle
hurdled across the lot. Something to be
beating her shoulder against.

A kind of solitude. Ditched here
in the middle of the night.
I want to say *I'm sorry*

laced with the smell of mint and pine and mud.
Collateral of correspondence and I want to palm it
like the inside of a mouth, an elsewhere

across the atmosphere. This
is a narrative that cannot end
knived by the mouths of gods.

Midwest Traveler

*a cento with lines from Michael Anania, Simone Muench, Jackie
K. White*

for Michael Anania

I have traveled this river south,
he said, Midwest traveler, rowing the words
in our ears: *Here. Hold this. Feel this—*
the breath of things quickening.

From hazelnut to bridge, highway to leaf,
something is certain to carry
shadows of boats that appear flickering,
dreams fluttering like pages—

they are nodding, *yes, yes*, palms pressed
as if to oar or pen or lover's palms,
scattering the thousand prisms of self.
One more loose sentence to puzzle over.

Ceremony is, after all,
the pulse within all bodies;
the impulse in each one of us
"to find a pathway in a field of doubt."

We are a multiplying sigh
between breath and breath, restless,
altering what we see with what we sing,
its swirling sentences like fire in motion.

This is, I suppose, how we hold the sun's
luminous text, in bright lines there, and visible
as waves, the river's wavelets,
and just as fleeting and timeless.

THE SRPR INTERVIEW:
JACKIE K. WHITE AND SIMONE MUENCH

Carlo Matos and Amy Sayre Baptista: Did you discuss the form of the work before starting the project or did it develop organically? Do you write together? Are there strict deadlines? How did the collaboration come about? Have you two collaborated before? I know you are colleagues and friends, but we'd love to know what your Batman origin story is.

Simone Muench and Jackie K. White: We had a general idea of what we wanted to do at the outset inspired by our previous collaborations with others as well as our extended work on *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* with fellow editors Sally Ashton and Dean Rader, which was published by Diane Goettel of Black Lawrence Press. (Sally Ashton just published a wonderful essay in the February 2020 issue of the *Writer's Chronicle* called "Who's Colluding? The Case for Collaborate Writing" that we'd highly recommend.)

We discussed that we would be experimenting with a variety of forms, thus our working title was *Playing the Field* where the field references both the textuality of the page as well as the female body, in addition to traditional poetics, contemporary investigations of the cento, and emerging forms. As we began our work, what did develop organically is that we incorporated forms we hadn't planned on, and kept spinning into new directions, finding pleasure in parameters but also enjoyment in designing new architectures for poems: sonnets, multi-authored centos, single-authored centos, glosas, decimas, and self-portraits.

Do we write together? Yes, in fact, we're sitting at an Italian restaurant drinking wine, discussing poetics, and typing up this interview. Most times, however, we are writing back and forth via email, and then meeting every two weeks to revise more and discuss issues, inquiries, and potentialities of the poems. There are no strict deadlines, but if one of us has sat on a poem for too long, we'll give one

another a kind nudge. And, because we work together as colleagues, and are subject to the academic calendar, we are often aware of one another's schedules.

CM & ASB: Did the form come first or the idea / concept / themes? Did you have an idea for the whole project in advance or did it come from more humble origins? Was there a poem that set everything in motion or an epiphanic moment, a conversation, or something to that effect?

SM & JKW: A few years ago, we were each invited to write a poem for Lewis University's new president's inauguration, but thought, "Hey, why don't we write a collaborative poem," especially to celebrate our institution's emphasis on "association." The resulting poem—our first collaborative poem titled "Adaptations of Grace"—was very well received and, we felt, fairly successful. Mostly, we enjoyed the give-and-take, back-and-forth creating and revising process, and we've been able to continue in that vein, in that pleasure.

And then *Jet Fuel Review*, where we both serve as faculty advisors, showcased a special section on centos. For our supplementary blog, which is more internal, we invited students and faculty to contribute centos to an informal community post as a way to engage with, and respond to, *Jet Fuel Review's* cento dossier. As a way to bring more attention to our *JFR* authors, to participate in this community blog post, and in light of our previous experience with "Adaptations of Grace," we decided to craft a collaborative cento using poems from recent *JFR* issues. We were interested in the process of collaborative composition but also in providing a more explicit tribute to our contributors.

Given those two recent experiences and having had long careers exploring various kinds of collaborative writing, and then, especially, after working together as editors on *They Said*, it seemed only natural to continue to collaborate on poems. Once we committed to this specific project, we immediately began to collaboratively craft sonnets and other forms.

Also, the first line of our "erasure" poem is "We confess: we don't own this language." This acknowledgment becomes the platform of our collaboration since we engage in so many multi-vocalities. Furthermore, the final line of the poem states that "monotony is a

hard chair"; and, in our decision to collaborate, we created a way to circumvent the occasional monotony of our individual minds and to be more engaged in collaborative play and experimentation.

CM & ASB: I know Simone has collaborated with other writers, but have you, Jackie? Did those collaborations have an influence on your current one? Have you learned lessons that have improved how you work with others? Are there pitfalls you look to avoid in advance? Are you collaborating with other writers at the moment?

JKW: Not technically, and not to the extent that Simone has, but I've done translations of, and with, contemporary Latin American poets and I found that it was, in many ways, a collaborative process. I've also collaborated with other translators on the same work, first, in graduate school with Professor Frances Aparicio on César Rondón's *The Book of Salsa*, and, more recently, with Socorro Cintrón on Sher-ezada Vicioso's *Something To Say: Feminist Essays on Caribbean Women Writers*. In both cases, I experienced the give and take negotiations over word choices, sound choices, repetitions, the ordering of lines and where they break, much as is done in collaborating on original work. The dynamic pleasure of those collaborations definitely sparked my interest in the kind of project that we are now undertaking.

SM: In writing *Suture* with Dean Rader, which was a collection of collaborative sonnets, I found that the formal elements of the sonnet are conducive to the dialogic nature of collaborative writing. So, even as Jackie and I ventured into other forms, we kept returning to the sonnet. And, sometimes, when revising other poems, we found ourselves saying, "this should be a sonnet!" Though *Suture* was more recently published, I've been writing collaboratively since about 2006. William Allegranza and I crafted a chapbook called *Sonoluminescence* (Dusie Press, 2007). Then, I collaborated with Philip Jenks on a full-length collection of epistolary poems titled *Disappearing Address* (BlazeVox, 2010). Kristy Odelius and I also engaged in a project that arose from Harry Mathews's book *20 Lines a Day*, which in term comes from Stendhal's quote "twenty lines a day, genius or not." That 20 lines-a-day became the preparatory material for my "Orange Girl Suite" in *Orange Crush* (Sarabande, 2010) and for Odelius' "Dislocation Lessons" in *Strange Trades* (Shearsman, 2008).

SM & JKW: In terms of lessons, it helps to choose a collaborative partner who is flexible and dependable and whose voice you want to engage with. It's also beneficial, in the beginning, to set parameters on how much critique is allowed of one another's work as you move through poems. We decided that we were both open to as much criticism as required because we wanted the needs of the poem to dictate whatever revisions necessary. It's not Jackie's poem or Simone's poem, it's a third-bodied poem: a chimeric construction. As Jackie suggests, "writing poems collaboratively is akin to parenting where it often helps to have a shared, disciplinary approach to raising your kids."

No, we are not currently collaborating with anyone else, but we are always open to new possibilities.

CM & ASB: How do you manage revision?

SM & JKW: We revise as we write, then after we have several poems going, we also meet in person to discuss the coherence of a poem, looking more closely at line breaks, at the poem's overall tension and/or slackness, and discussing confusions, obfuscations, reliance on familiar language, and the overall tenor of the poem. We also revise against "this sounds like a Jackie or Simone poem." In other words, if one voice seems to dominate, we take a second look. And, as collaborators, we have an uncanny, inexplicable ability to both agree when a poem is finished.

For example, we were initially working on both sonnets and centos, and then Simone sent Jackie a proposed "self-portrait with a line by ...," and while revising the previous work, we began exploring a new direction, connected to but also branching away from the "full" cento. Then we were asked to write a poem for our mentor, Michael Anania, and decided to do a modified-cento of our *three* voices, weaving a line of his with a line or two that one of us had previously composed, and then another of his lines, and debating options and arrangement, playing with varying stanzaic structures through the emails we sent each other and, then, during face-to-face conversations. In the final version of the poem, "Midwest Traveler," you'll see we settled on quatrains as that further blurs or melds all three of our voices into a new—and hopefully—single sounding one.

CM & ASB: What draws you to collaboration? What advantages does it have over more conventional ways of working? What are the disadvantages?

SM & JKW: There's both a creative and practical draw. The creative draw is that it pushes us out of our comfort zones and stretches our voices, expanding our range, especially when playing with forms. The practical reason is it drives us to write, and writing makes us happier people. And, of course, it gets us to read and re-read, often revisiting poets that we've studied, taught, or even published in *Jet Fuel Review*. For us, there are no disadvantages so far.

CM & ASB: Were there any revelations or surprises that came about from editing *They Said: A Multi-Genre Anthology of Contemporary Collaborative Writing* for Black Lawrence Press?

SM & JKW: Mainly, the revelation was the range of approaches that writers took, which ultimately makes us realize that there are endless innovations that can be explored in terms of the ways language can be shaped. Also, it lets us know that writing is much more social than was previously acknowledged, as we've often been told that "writing is a solitary endeavor." However, humans like to talk to one another and sometimes, even talk over one another, which collaboration embraces. Additionally, collaboration highlights the fluidity of genres, which allows us to explore and explode notions of what a sonnet or cento or glosa can be.

Our poem "Duologue," for example, came about because we wondered what it would feel like or how well it would work to "sample" each other's work into a cento—so, more forcefully, perhaps, foregrounding the collaboration of our two voices. Simone selected lines from Jackie's previously published work and Jackie, from Simone's. While this building approach necessarily began as a kind of back-and-forth, call-and-response of our alternating voices, through revision we let go of that "scaffolding" and blended our lines more freely. While this may not end up being one of our stronger poems or may not end up in its current version, the experiment again demonstrated for us the pleasurable *challenges* that collaboration can open writers up to.

Another fun discovery or aspect of our project that lends itself to theorizing about collaborative work and subjectivity resides in our “Self-Portraits” given that there is, of course, no *single* or identifiable, biographical “self” painted in the “portraiture” of the lines that make up the poem. So, we’ve had a number of rich discussions about personal pronouns, as we often find ourselves shifting from “I” to “we,” and the potentiality exists—hovers or wavers—that the “I’s” are in dialogue and then fused, which is the goal, really, from the outset of our *making* the poem, though it may not be the goal or argument of the poem itself. In any case, given our attention to the female body as a “field” and to feminist projects we’re both engaged in, generally, we’re intrigued by how we both craft images that speak to and for one another as well as to and for our individual experiences.

CM & ASB: Simone, did the work you did with found poetry for your book *Wolf Centos* have any relationship to your interest in collaborative writing, or do you see these as completely different kinds of aesthetic work? For instance, does the tension inherent in a cento—the desire by the reader to link back to the original context of the line or phrase—draw you to collaborative writing since it too is in some sense always in tension as the reader may desire to know which author originated which line?

SM: Yes, my work on *Wolf Centos* leads directly to our collaborative centos. The desire for conversation and homage are the centrifugal force for me when composing centos; and our “Cento Suite: Declarations” arises out of this desire to interact with contemporary poets whose work we love. For this series, we began with Meena Alexander’s *Atmospheric Embroidery* to pay tribute to her as she once told me “it’s the book of poems that’s closest to my heart.” Not only did we want to pay her tribute but we wanted to make more people aware of her beautiful book; and, of course, her title is a wonderful defining principle for the very act of cento creation—after all, centos are often an atmospheric embroidery of lines across genders, geographies, timelines, and aesthetics.

For the reader, there may be a desire to know who wrote what, but as the writers, we are seeking to achieve a third voice that is not recognizable as one person or the other. There have been times when

we've been revising when we don't remember who contributed which lines: we recently excised a line that I thought originated from me, and Jackie responded, "I agree that it needs to be cut, but I hate to lose this line of mine."

CM & ASB: What most excites you about your new project?

SM & JKW: It allows us to spend more time conversing about the things we love outside of the classroom. In other words, we have an excuse to talk about poetry, and not just poems we're teaching but ones we're constructing together. It's a bonding experience that extends our collegiality beyond the confines of the university; it deepens our friendship; and it reinforces our identity as poets in that it requires us to foreground our identities as poets instead of professors, advisors, editors. Also, we're excited by the discoveries we've made in terms of poetics: for example, a book about poetry does not necessarily lend itself well to an erasure; and sometimes a glosa needs to be untethered from its originating source. Ultimately, it's a collaboration that underscores what initially brought us together as friends, which is being poets whose individual work we admired.

CM & ASB: What effect has collaboration had on your noncollaborative work?

SM & JKW: Mainly, we've learned to make new moves as we're continually challenged, when collaborating, not to fall into old inclinations and poetic ruts. We always want to surprise and inspire one another. Writing for a specific audience in mind—in this case, your collaborator who knows your work—really asks you to up your game. When crafting poems, you also have to be willing to shift directions because your expectations of where a poem may be going keep getting upended by the lines that your partner weaves in. Collaboration also challenges your interpretive skills; for example, you submit a stanza to your partner that you interpret one way, but your partner interprets it in a completely different way, which is why the poem may keep shifting. To that end, for example, we've found ourselves focusing a lot more on the effect that punctuation has on how a line or stanza can be interpreted, often spending a good deal of our revision time changing a comma to a dash, or a dash to a colon, or simply cutting or repositioning the punctuation mark, as we realize we'd each read

the drafted lines differently! It also reminds us of the power of play in poetry and how important it is to keep “playing the field.” And we’ll leave it there because Jackie’s happy when a text closes with a frame, and now we’ve done just that.