

In Conversation with Alexander B. Joy

MJ: I enjoyed reading your poem in this issue (“Dogsitting for a Childless Couple”), and one of the reasons I felt it was strong was due to the unique angle you approached. There are a lot of poems about animals, but I haven’t found many that center on the theme of your poem. Where did this idea come from and could you explain the writing process as you were putting it together?

AJ: “Dogsitting for Childless Couple” is mostly autobiographical, collecting a whirl of sensory experiences and tacit anxieties during a period in graduate school when I looked after a beloved professor’s dogs. Years later, I found myself thinking about what goes into inhabiting a space and making a home there – and about what (and whom) that process excludes. Wrestling with the unrelenting Millennial doubt that I’d ever enjoy the opportunity to forge such a space for myself provided the rest of the poem’s engine.

MJ: As someone like yourself, a former New England resident, (and who also happens to live in North Carolina), does the former region and its culture come up in your work a lot? Has that shift in place, especially in comparison to your previous home, affected your approach to subject matters and your creative process at all?

AJ: New England is in my blood, so it inflects my work whether I want it to or not. I don’t resist that. I think growing up in the woods of New Hampshire cultivated my sensitivity to nature – specifically, the aesthetics of the seasons and how they lend interest and meaning to the passage of time – and I try to channel that into my writing, when I can write.

In terms of the change in environment, moving to North Carolina is the worst decision I have ever made, bar none. I regret moving. I despise this place and am miserable here. My creative output is all but dead as a consequence. All I can do nowadays is polish drafts of things I’d written long before coming here, and bide my time until I can return home.

MJ: Having earned a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature, and having completed and presented research on a lot of subjects, such as film, social media, and language, I am curious if your academic work and scholarship have influenced your creative pursuits in terms of your approach,

preparation, and process, and vice-versa. If so, could you please elaborate on how exactly that looks?

AJ: My academic and creative pursuits have always felt like separate silos to me. In graduate school, my writing was an escape from the boredom and pressure of academia – an attempt to remain in touch with what made me fall in love with literature in the first place. Now that I'm done with the academy, my independent scholarship opens avenues for exploring topics of interest when an aesthetic approach is unwarranted, or when my creativity and imagination aren't up to the task.

I wouldn't say academia has done much at all for my writing – if anything, I had to unlearn academic writing conventions in order to grow as a writer – but it did instill the discipline to undertake sizable projects and carry them to completion through persistent effort.

MJ: Beyond your academic and creative pursuits, you also spend a lot of time in service. Do you want to talk about the memberships and projects you've been a part of, including the Inclusive Naming Initiative and the Ethics Committee for the Town of Merrimack, New Hampshire? Do you find your work in the community influences the poetry and fiction you write?

AJ: I'd encourage everyone to check out the [Inclusive Naming Initiative](#). It's part of a push in the wider tech community to revisit technical and computing terms that carry problematic connotations. The hope is to find less exclusionary alternatives that would work better as the standard terms. I was more involved back when I worked for an open-source company, but less so now.

I don't have as much to say about the Ethics Committee. It was an advisory apparatus that the charter of the Town of Merrimack wisely included to field concerns about the behavior of local officials when acting in a government capacity. I served a three-year term after winning a municipal election, but could not run again because I left town. (Again, I regret moving.)

I don't think my service influences my writing much. If anything, my writing influences my service. I pursue service because it helps do some good for the world that I know my writing can't.

MJ: Who would be some of the New England writers and texts that have most influenced you as a writer?

AJ: I oscillate between appreciating and disdaining Jane Kenyon, so I suspect she has a larger bearing on my writing than most. I'd love to claim Robert Frost as an influence, but the quality of my work in no way supports that.

MJ: What are you currently reading?

AJ: At the moment, I am reading William Sloane's *The Rim of Morning* (a single-volume edition of his two novels, published by [NYRB Classics](#)), and working my way through Montaigne's collected *Essays*.

MJ: Are you currently working on any projects? If so, could you explain the work you are doing? Where can people view your latest poems and publications?

AJ: Right now, I'm wrapping up a monograph on the Game Boy RPG *Legend of the River King* for Boss Fight Books. I'm also writing an introduction for the MIT Press's *Radium Age* series. I'm looking forward to seeing them in print soon.

Anyone who would like to see more of my work should visit https://linktr.ee/alexander_b_joy. It compiles citations for everything I've done, along with web URLs if available.