



Join us at SJSU Creative Writing Week from November 12 to 20!

In this Issue

An Interview with Kate Evans
Annie Tobin

Top 10
Vince Bergado

Searching for Religion in Iced Tea
Samantha Lê

My Back Pages
Dave Kern

poetry:
Jesse Kay Martin, Josh Cembellin, Nitza Agam, Annie Tobin & Samantha Lê

fiction/non-fiction:
Jen Ghastin

Creative Writing Week

Nov. 12–20 (for more information, visit us at www.orchardvalleyreview.com)

12 English Department
Career Fair

Four Minutes of Mayhem

12–13 PWC Book Fair

16 Nils Peterson 75th Birthday
Reading

17 PWC Bowling with Writers

17–18 Steinbeck Center Tour

18 Nick Taylor Reading

19 Creative Writing B.A.
Launch Party

Terrence McNally Lecture

20 Cannery Row: A Celebration
& Exploration

An Interview with Kate Evans

by: *Annie Tobin*

Kate Evans is a faculty member San Jose State Department of English and Comparative Literature. Kate’s stories, poems, essays and book reviews have appeared in more than 50 literary magazines and anthologies such as the *North American Review*, *Santa Monica Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *ZYZZYVA*. Her novel *For the May Queen* was published in September by Vanilla Heart Publishing of Seattle who will also be releasing her second novel, *Complimentary Colors*, in the summer of 2009. Her previous books include a collection of poems (*Like All We Love*, Q Press) and a book about lesbian and gay teachers (*Negotiating the Self*, Routledge).

In 1991 she received an M.A. in English Literature from SJSU and her Ph.D. in Educational Philosophy at the University of Washington. She then went to Yokohama, Japan, where she taught English for a year. When she returned to the Bay Area, she took a poetry class at SJSU from the poet Virginia de Araujo—a class I was also taking. That is where we met, and we have been together now for 15 years. Kate and I recently married on a boat off the coast of Santa Cruz. When it was suggested I interview Kate it seemed like an interesting angle—being an insider and all.

Annie: How has graduating from San Jose State’s MFA program affected your career as a writer?

Kate: Applying to the program was a great way to signal to myself and others that I was making a commitment to writing. When I decided to apply for the MFA, I was teaching at San Jose State but in a different department, in

continued on page 2



TOP 10

QUOTES FROM NOVEMBER 4 THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT TO PRINT

by: Vince Bergado

10. "You call that socialism?"
9. "I wish that girly-man was in our party."
8. "I'm not gay or anything, because, like, I don't believe in that, but damn, he is the best looking president ever."
7. "But, gosh darnit, I was a sexy strong woman, all out there on display. I don't understand why more women didn't swing my way. I'm a poet, you betcha."
6. "I've been saying all along it was going to be close, and look, it's now 10 p.m. Eastern, and they still haven't called it."
5. "I'm going to miss those negative ads."
4. "I never thought Americans could be so ageist."
3. "You know what this campaign needed? More death threats."
2. "Wow. And still tens of millions of people decided to stay home"
1. "I knew the terrorists would win!"

An Interview with Kate Evans

(continued from page 1)

education. I was feeling restless, like I wasn't really doing what I wanted to do in my life. So when I decided to go for it and do the MFA,—you were there, you remember because you're the one who suggested it!—when I made that decision, I knew I was veering my life in a new direction, toward what I truly wanted to do.

Which authors do you read? Is your writing influenced by other writers?

I'm an eclectic reader. And definitely, my writing is influenced by everything I read. I'm always reading on two levels: for the power or enjoyment of the piece, as well as for an awareness of the writer's craft. I read poetry, stories, novels, memoir. I have a huge list of writers I admire, including Emily Dickinson, Jeffrey Eugenides, Virginia Woolf, Isabelle Allende, Marilyn Hacker, Toni Morrison, Monique Troung... I could go on and on.

Why do you write in so many different genres—fiction, non-fiction, poetry? Are you drawn to one genre more than another? Is there a common thread that runs through all of them?

For as long as I can remember, I've written stories, poems and essays. Each genre has its own power. I like to read writers like May Sarton, Margaret Atwood, Mark Doty, etcetera who write in multiple genres. I like to see how they treat their obsessions from different directions.

That's one thing, by the way, that I like about San Jose State's MFA program is the requirement to focus on two genres. If I could have, I would have done three. When I came out of the program I'd completed a story collection and a poetry collection.

What, from your perspective, are some of the most common mistakes first-time authors make when starting out in the business?

Perhaps focusing too much on the business and not enough on the art. Perhaps forgetting what they love about writing in the first place. Listening too much to what other people say they "should" do and should write as opposed to following their hearts.

Lastly, what's your favorite thing about being a writer? And what do you totally hate?

I love the solitude of writing, the way I can lose myself in a world of my making. What I hate about it is that at times it can be really hard. Sometimes just pushing the words out is hard. I crave those days, which don't happen as often as I'd like, when writing is complete fun and flow. At those times I feel that writing is the most difficult thing I've ever loved. Other than you. Ha!

Editors

by: *Jesse Kay Martin*

Such countless worries weigh on women at work:
a boy won't call, a family is too far,
but these we do not share. Monotony's
enough. We carefully pass the sheaves of eleven
by seventeen paper back and forth
so not to give each other paper cuts.
We brandish red pens with a flourish, splash
the bloody ink on fingers, even forearms.
One girl has short nails to rebuke herself;
another, long nails bolstering herself.
I watch the hair on my arms stand up and lay down
under the vent; my fingers swell up and
deflate; the pinky so stiff at the end of the day,
too weak to type a key without the weight
of the whole hand rolling on it. My hands
become a microcosm indwelled by
the scribe, or 19th century mill girl.

There are
parentheses left open in our lives—
not only with each other, but ourselves.
We scan the page for what it lacks.
Our lives, our social spheres, are unrevised;
my final resume is still tk*.

On Having Fires

by: *Josh Cembellin*

With hobbled steps, he hauls five logs and stacks
them on the pile against the weathered gate.
He'll be there tomorrow early with axe
and wheelbarrow on house-chore Saturday.

Sawdust sprinkled white throughout his hair,
sleeves stained with streaks of sweat and dirt.
His boots drop mud in crosses tracking where
he splits blue oak, loads, stacks though he is hurt.

He's got that tree smell—stagnant birch, walnut;
musty earth, chainsaw gas. Gnarled hands crack dry
year round, calluses ring circles like cut
trees exposing age to his naked eye.

With every log he tosses in the fire,
my mother moves her blanket with desire.



Searching for Religion in Iced Tea

by: *Samantha Lê*

Rosebushes - Waiting for the rosebushes to
die, I grow resentful. Why are they holding on?
Plucked roses and I already went through a
summer without water, passing each other like
wind and dust. The time has come for goodbyes.

What do they want: to see another spring arrives
with black bugs, like periods ending sentences
on their petals; or drops of winter rain to trace
their stems, like a lover drawing lifelines on
perky leaves? All I have to give is another head
clipping from my tired, rusty trimmer. I have
become the weary caregiver of demanding
rosebushes. Each snip and snap makes my
temperature rise—fever, like a schoolboy's ardor
at the sight of newly grown cleavage protruding
from dresses on the first day of school, seizes me.

Blossoming into life, each bush sprouts
leaves and buds of different colors, even in a
dehydrated autumn. California autumns have
grown mild; and I have grown mild with it,
losing all that was wild inside of me. There's not
enough bite left in the easiness of days passing
days to make a statement for life, but dying here
is not an easy task.

With a giant shovel, I dig massive graves beneath
the twisted, rose roots; fill them with chemicals
like toxic pride, and walk away, feeling the
potency of my bitterness triumphing over
beauty. Within days, red leaves push through the
air to flourish again. Life, it is everywhere. Sweet
fragrances linger in my hair; thorn punctures
burn raw my flesh; brown sweat-marbles skid
down my face; but I cannot bury the part of me
that is missing your hands sweeping across my
exposed petals.

The Sukkah

by: Nitza Agam

Sweet smelling etrog
ancient fruit
citrus perfumed
breathe it in and return to the wilderness
where Hebrews wandered
and built
these booths.

Long, elegant palm leaves
hover above us
reveal bits of sky
so God can peek in.

Shake the palm in six directions,
first towards Jerusalem,
and then west, north, south,
upwards and down
to all the peoples of the Middle East,
The Jews, the Palestinians, the Bedouins, the Druze,
The Christians, the Greek and Russian Orthodox.

We eat and sleep in the Sukkah
a hut made out of wood
and branches for the roof,
as our forefathers and foremothers.
I feel the breeze from the hot, dry
desert.
A hard rain drenches the Sukkah.

On this holiday of harvest and temporary shelter
we remember
The homeless and those
who lost their homes to war and to battles,
who were displaced and sometimes forgotten,
to those who choose to wander
and to those who are forced to.

I remember the Israeli desert
the orange and red sunsets,
swish of the water sprinklers,
the roads that seemed to lead to nowhere.
Only the Bedouins know where to go
in the curves of the vast desert.

I still feel
the desert wind on my face
on the back of a motorcycle
riding away from the city
towards the booths of Sukkot
in autumn's
ancient and new country.

The autumn of 1973
among rows and rows of identical graves
marked not by name, but by number.
I searched for the one that was my lover's.

I was 22.
He was 24.
I close my eyes and
smell the sage and brush.
I mourn the freedom
and possibility that ended
before Sukkot.

Shake the Hadas,
the myrtle leaf
to the East,
to Jerusalem, to all the
directions of the world,
to the desert,
to my people,
to peace.



Sunday Bathers

by Samantha Lê (for JEC)

I want all your Sundays—
naked on the sofa Sundays, locking toes and counting out loud your freckles.
Accidental moans from your mouth skirt my lips. I say,

I want all your Sundays—
ten more sit-ups, chicken salad wraps, dog-chasing relays;
give me your nose to trace, your hair in my face, your story from every angle.

I want all your Sundays—
naked on the sofa Sundays, locking toes and counting out loud your freckles.



Laws of Perspective

by: Annie Tobin

I sketch the hemisphere's curve,
the edges of form destined
to converge. Passing my arm west
to east

across the horizon I leave a
commitment of graphite
arcing across the paper. Years ago

I learned the rules; there are
strategies for
the composition of things. Yet far
below the horizon I fix

a set of vanishing points. Slowly I
outline a distorted contour of oaks
clustered in the basins of hills.
I could leave

this drawing unfinished—a sketch,
a study in arbitrary
perspective and scale, but picturing
a world without shadows

terrifies me. Trees unanchored
to hillsides, outcrops of
weightless rock,
the sun's position indeterminate.
A shadow's structure depends

on the slant and strength of light.
Shadows illuminate. Shadows weight.
The ground is designed to bear the
bodies of things: granite, rivers,

bones of hawks, oaks and madrone,
bodies of people
I loved. I would break all the rules if
I could.

My Back Pages

by: David Kern

Bob Dylan - It appears George W. Bush isn't the only one concerned with his legacy these days. Bob Dylan, who, at 67, seems anxious to seal his place in America's cultural consciousness, is at it again, trying to prove he's a top-caliber poet. To that end, he released "Hollywood Foto-Rhetoric: The Lost Manuscript" on Nov. 4 and published two teasers—"#17" and "#21"—in *The New Yorker*.

While I've always been a big fan of Dylan the musician, I find it nearly impossible to compare a lyricist, bound by the constraints of rhyme and meter, to the plethora of fine poets working in the modernist tradition as defined by Pound. Talk about apples and oranges.

But, that said, I've always considered Dylan the voice of a generation and the epitome of cool.

That's why I was happy when my mustachioed, fedora-wearing pal, "The Guru," offered assistance regarding this tough question of taxonomy.

"You look perplexed," he said, folding his trench coat over his chair.

"I am," I replied. "This has me stumped worse than my seventh-grade science project."

"The one where you tried to study the impact of light on planaria?"

"Hey, how was I to know my control group would die?"

"Kid, that tends to happen when you drop a heat lamp in water." His mustache couldn't quite hide his smile. "But congrats, you discovered toaster worms."

"Umm, Guru, the subject at hand?"

"Uhhhh yeah. Slowly, step away from the '60s. That entire generation was high, and Miles Davis is the epitome of cool."

He really *can* read my mind! I listen up.

"Dylan's done this before, gone out of his way to reinvent himself. He's been a folkie, a rocker, a crooner, a blues man, a Jew, a Christian, and a Shaman."

"So much for 'You've Gotta Serve Somebody.'"

"Precisely. Here's my point: Dylan always manages to be riding the crest of a wave, but he's never the force pushing it along. Call Bo Didley and B.B. King. Ask them what they think."

"So when can a songwriter be a poet?"

"When they're an original."

"Ouch."

"I call them like I see them. If you'll excuse me, I must polish my cufflinks."

"Shine on, Guru, shine on."

School Fights

by Jen Ghastin

*H*onestly, I wasn't listening when the fight began.

I was taking attendance on the other side of the room. A cacophony of "What bitch?"s and my hand rose for the phone. I didn't say anything, not to them, not to Carmen and Arielle, not to the class already ha-roo and ha-raaing, taking sides and circling. I didn't step in-between the girls with my arms outstretched, crucifying myself for the safety of the class. I didn't yell or blow my whistle. No, I just rose from the computer, dialed "O" and reported, "Fight in 812." The other end said okay, and by then Carmen had invited Arielle to take the fight outside. The class followed the girls to the doorway. I pushed my way through them and shoved the one strangler back into the room.

I gave a few weak, "You guy"s and "Stop"s. But I didn't intervene. Arielle went for Carmen's throat, missed and Carmen lugged her slow and hard right in the back of the head. Later, security would say that the girl's didn't even know how to fight, but from my point of view the fight was straight vicious.

Once, a few years back there was a girl-on-girl fight in my classroom. Those girls were real little, so I stepped in-between them thinking that would stop the fight. It didn't. I was caught and hit, and caught and hit some more. Nothing serious, but a seriously bruised right arm. They were little girls.

Carmen was huge, not fat, but several inches taller than me. She had an edge to her, and you didn't want to ask. The kind of student who doesn't trust you, because everyone she's ever trusted has wronged her. When I asked her about her parents coming to back to school night last week, she smiled and said, "They don't care about me." I wasn't surprised

by her response, but I was saddened. I wanted to tell her, "Yes they do." But I don't know that. Then I wanted to tell her, "I care about you Carmen," but it seemed so corny, so I changed subjects. Arielle didn't come to school for the first month. I should have called home the first day, because second month into school her parole officer introduced me to her and explained how she was intercepting the school's messages home and had spent the first month of school at her boyfriend's house. After our introduction, her attendance was still splotchy. I didn't call home then either. I figured I was calling home for the ones I could save, the ones who cared, the ones who were here. I missed her. She slipped. There were one too many, ten too many, twenty too many, and I let some slip. If I had called home that first day, would she have come? If I had kept calling home would she have come? If she had come that first day would she have done this?

You know, I'm not a god or a superhero; I am a high school English teacher, which on most days feels like less than human. Like today.

Lugs to the back of the head, the other teachers close their doors. Lugs to the back of the head, and I stop Alex from joining, holding her by the door, holding them all in the classroom, with my body, with my wobbling high heel shoes. Maybe if I had wore boots, I could have, would have. Ten blows later, a large, large cop, the principal, also in wobbling high heels, and the vice principal, a white older man, came running down the hallway. Carmen stops on her own. Arielle is lifted off the ground by the large, large cop. He twists her head to the right, I think he is going to snap her neck. Later, I learn this is a head-lock—you know so she won't bite. They are gone, and my students ask me

why I am shaking. They ask me why I didn't stop it. I ask myself. I honestly know I couldn't even if I tried. I get a phone call later. The girls are expelled. Both. They said I did everything "text-book perfect." It doesn't feel that way.

I open the back door to Ms. G's classroom, and she jumps. Like I'm gonna attack her or something. "You swear I'm gonna jump you," I joke. She wants to know where I am supposed to be right now, and I honestly have no clue. "I'm supposed to be in your class." I look around, and no one is in the class like a bad dream, and I'm misplaced in reality. I know I just smoked a blunt, but that wouldn't make the whole class disappear. Actually, I decide this is better. "I'm having a serious problem right now, Ms. G You've got to help me." She asks if I am hiding from administration. I guess I was hiding from them this morning, but no, I think they forgot. She looks at my ankle bracket and asks if I am hiding from the police. No, can't hide from them, I shake my leg, and we both smile. "Then why aren't you in class?" she repeats.

"I'm telling you. I am having a serious problem." She pulls away from her computer and gets into some sort of white listening position: head rests on hand, knees crossed. "I've got this new lady. And now, my old lady's been calling me saying that she wants to get back together. I like her, but I like my new lady too. What do I do?" First she raises her eyes and explains that of all my problems this one doesn't seem too serious, not serious



enough to miss Algebra I over, but it must be serious to me, so I need to make a list, a pro and con list. “I’m not writing a fucking—my bad—essay. I am asking you about these women.” She explains that I still need to make the list. I do and Ms. G goes back to her computer. Annalise on one side. She’s the new one. She’s on house arrest like me, is that a pro or a con? “Ms. G, if one of them is on house arrest, is that a Pro or a Con?”

“Umm... a con. You don’t want troublemakers.”

“No, but check this. If she’s on house arrest, I know she ain’t going be cheating, see?” I feel clever. Ms. G rolls her eyes annoyed at me, I think. I write down who they both kick it with, weighing in my mind back and forth which group I like better. The social mess of dumping them, how that’s gonna fuck with my other friends. Then I remember, Sabrina, that’s the ex, saying she had to go to Planned Parenthood and that she had to come back because a test was inconclusive or something, and then I remember Annalese saying she wanted to... and I didn’t, but we did but without, and I ask, “What about if they are gonna have my baby. Is that pro or con?”

Ms. G pulls away from her computer, cornering me and asks, “The one who is pregnant. That is the one you pick.”

I smile guiltily, “What if it’s not one of them?”

“Both of them are pregnant?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then you don’t need to make a list. You need to walk down to Longs, buy a stick and that’s your test. What were you thinking? How did you get two girls pregnant?”

“They wanted too. They said they wanted to have my baby. So I was like cool.” She’s mad. Her forehead is all wrinkles.

The bell rang, interrupting our conversation. She just stared at me, like she hated me. Sometimes I hate me too. Especially when people look at me like that. Especially when Ms. G looks at me like that. I buried my head in my hands. I didn’t even budge when a fight broke out. I stayed in my desk, head buried in my hands until the bell rang again, and I skipped history to go to Longs.

They are so immature. They are all so immature. Class opens with a stupid fight. And they all get up to watch, like they haven’t seen a fight before. And the teacher, she gets all nervous and shaking, maybe she hasn’t seen a fight before. Probably hasn’t. She doesn’t even do anything. She just stands there until security comes and then is all shaking and goes on with her lesson. We read a story yesterday about gay people— it was a total flop. She was all trying to teach

tolerance, and it backfired. The situation is actually worse now. And to add to that, she doesn’t stop; she keeps pushing it and pushing it. Doesn’t she get that they are all immature and stupid, and I think she thinks she can actually change people? Like she’s the great white hope or the woman in that corny movie. I forget the name of it. Never mind that there’s this huge gang fight, or whatever, let’s talk about gays, and this is bugging me because I am the only fucking lesbian in the class, right? And I don’t really feel like standing up and defending myself today. Trust me, I do it enough. Not only that but it’s coming out how the class is full of homophobes—it’s better if we just drop this whole thing. Please, I’d rather learn grammar or Greek mythology than this shit. The woman doesn’t know what she is doing. She writes in big letters “Proposition 8- the banning of gay marriage.” Now she wants us to write down if we are for or against gay marriage. I write this instead:

Dear Ms. G,

I get what you are trying to do and all, but the class is way too immature for this. I would appreciate it if we learned about something else. I feel very uncomfortable in class. Could we please not talk about this anymore.

Sincerely,
Cindy

She calls it “teaching tolerance.”
She’s trying to save the world, and
it’s killing me.

“You’re gay.”

“That’s gay.”

“Fucking faggot.”

“Fucking faggot.”

I sink and sink and sink into my
chair, into the back of the room,
out of the class.

“Security. 1014 Room 812. Over.”

“Copy,” I say walking away from the
ambulance, the last disaster. Carlos
Rodriguez had an anxiety attack and

stopped breathing during lunch.
He’s fine now.

I love my job, I love my job; it’s my
mantra. Now in a light jog, my keys
and change jingling. My dress shoes
slapping and clapping the white
concrete. I never know what to
wear to work.

Two girls in a hallway. Two girls who
can’t fight. Officer Shepard picks
up the little one and puts her in a
headlock. I charge the bigger one,
but she stops, and I have no reason
to knock her down. Damn. Because
with all this momentum I could
really knock someone. Honestly, I
was a little disappointed Shepard
got all the action. He pulled the
little one down the hall and into

his office. I took the bigger one,
Carmen, around the corner for
a walk, a cool down, and then we
returned to my office to write the
report.

There’s zero tolerance for fights.
That means these two are expelled.
Later, I try to explain to Ms. G that
the girls are broken. That nothing
is her fault. That she did the right
thing.

“The girls are going to learn more
today from this fight than anything
they could have learned in your
classroom all year long. Try not to
take things too personally.”

The lunch bell rings, and I am
thinking tacos.

In the News

Kellie Rice’s screenplay *ANDROMACHE* has been selected as one of the five finalists in its genre in the CSU Media Festival. Winners will be announced at an award’s ceremony on Saturday, November 8th, at the CSU Channel Islands.

Steinbeck Fellow **Lysley Tenorio** wins a \$50,000 Whiting Award - Tenorio, a past winner of the Nelson Algren Short Story Award, has been a Wallace Stegner fellow at Stanford and a John Steinbeck fellow at San Jose State University and has received fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. He is at work on a novel.

MFA Alumni News: **Ed Sams**’ prize-winning short story, “My Uncle Swan Got Saved” was published in *Maypop Magazine*.

We want to hear from you.

Email your events, reading dates,
publications, awards and happy news to:
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Call for Submissions

Get your work “out there” with Orchard Valley Review!

OVR is now accepting poetry, fiction and non-fiction submissions from currently enrolled SJSU MFA students. Visit us at orchardvalleyreview.com for guidelines and due date.

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