Interview with Remi Recchia: Author from the Texas Review Press

Was there anything you found difficult to include or leave out?

I'm not sure that I found it difficult, per se, but I did deliberate a bit on including the poem "my brother" in the manuscript. It's one of the more autobiographical poems in the book—I suppose many of the others can be read as being "about" me, but there's always some deviation or fantastical exit from real life—and it's about something that impacted others in addition to me. (To be frank: I didn't want to hurt my dad's feelings by writing about the private death of his son in so public a manner.) Ultimately, however, I found that I couldn't write a book on addiction in the same year as my brother's death via Heroin without including his overdose in the book. (Nile died in August of 2022; I defended Addiction Apocalypse as my doctoral dissertation in May of 2023.) I don't think the book would have felt as honest or as complete without it.

How do you see the past living within your work?

In flipping through the poems in Addiction Apocalypse now, some of which I wrote five years ago, I see that I maintained my sobriety by writing through it. Don't get me wrong: I also had a wealth of support from my wife and things to distract me from drinking like creation care and reading for my qualifying exams, but like any good academic, I recovered from the thing that was plaguing me by studying the thing itself. I did one of my qualifying exams in Creative Nonfiction; in my program, students were allowed to select texts around a theme in which they'd be examined, so I built my booklist around addiction and recovery narratives. This helped me a lot when my brother died because I already had the knowledge base to understand it, though that doesn't mean I didn't go through a period of deep grief and retrospective longing.

I also see the past in the ways that I, through various speakers, reflected in my desire for fatherhood, such as in "Things I Can't Tell My Landlord" ("Sometimes I wonder what God was thinking: / no balls, no sperm, no phallus for Remi? / I can't think of anyone yearning / more for fatherhood") or "When We've Been Married Nearly a Year, My Wife and I Share a Toothbrush for the First Time" ("And God said Remi. God said Remi if I'd wanted you to have children I'd have given you a penis"). By the time the book was published, my wife and I had had a child through IUI, though the phallus is a work in progress. My daughter is the light of my life and wholly unhindered by her father's lack of expected anatomy.

How does memory shape the way you approach place in your work?

Joy Harjo has a gorgeous poem, "Remember," whose line "Remember sundown / and the giving away to night" is immediately juxtaposed against the image of a mother giving birth. That poetic maneuver doesn't just (implicitly) compare a mother to the sun, or the giver of life to all things—it also suggests that much of life is dark: hard, cold, frightening. The brain protects us from stretches of trauma by helping us forget what happened. I don't have a single concrete memory from 2008. I suppose I think about memory as something that is infinitely malleable. Because I don't remember significant portions of my adolescence, I can recreate it into something bearable. Forgetting can be a gift.

What does "still here" mean to you?

In the light of the second Trump administration, any transgender person who can say they're "still here" is a success story. We are mercilessly villainized, our healthcare is constantly under threat of confiscation, our literature is (literally) being pulled from the shelves. Just last week the president said he wanted to "end" transgender people. This is very frustrating for me, and sometimes I do feel weighed down by the targeted negativity. I feel like I'm being bullied on a national level. Despite this burden, I go to church. I feed the cats. I do the laundry after the baby has spilled her third plate of spaghetti on her mom's favorite T-shirt. To me, "still here" means the same it always has: As Paul says, "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

my brother died

my brother died I tell the store clerk who drops the lemons, tiny suns bagged perfectly in expensive recycled paper, in shock not because of my brother's death but because of my violating the social script; *my brother died* I tell the JCPenney sales associate when she asks if I need a smaller size even though I'm clearly drowning in the sleeves so the question isn't so much a question as it is an indictment; *my brother died* I say on local television but only in my dreams because neither he nor I are (were) important enough to merit recognition; *my brother died* I type, failing to understand that my brother's death is not a question, into the glowing Google search bar reflected in my home office windows which are dark because it is nighttime and my friends are all asleep with un-dead brothers; *my brother died* I tell the telemarketer offering me a free cruise around the Bermuda Triangle and who without a beat tells me *that's okay sir we have a bereavement package have you ever kissed a volcano*; *my brother died* I tell my wife in bed before and after we attempt to make love but we can't because I keep getting distracted by how smooth my inner elbow is and how my brother's forearms had been tracked with pain; *my brother died* I tell my priest and he gasps, takes a step back, as if his very religion weren't based on the ugly death of a beautiful man; *my brother died* I want to scream at his dealer but I can't because the habit relies on secrecy and his dealer is therefore protected by anonymity; *my brother* died I tell the crosswalk signal when it tells me to *WAIT* but I cross the street anyway like an armadillo begging belly-up and if the sidewalk swallows me for jaywalking I'll just sink in and say *my brother died, my brother died, my brother died, and no one was there to stop it.*

Document from Remi Recchia's TRP book, "Addiction Apocalypse"

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Remi Recchia is a Lambda Award-winning poet, essayist, and editor most recently from Stillwater, Oklahoma. A nine-time Pushcart Prize nominee, his work has appeared in World Literature Today, Best New Poets 2021, and Best of the Net 2025, among others. He is the author of two collections of poetry and four poetry chapbooks and is the editor of two anthologies of contemporary poetry. He holds an MFA in poetry and a PhD in English. Remi is currently pursuing an M.Div. at Yale University, where he serves as the poetry editor for LETTERS and lives with his wife and child. His Instagram handle is @remi_dreamer