

## Editor's Notes

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It's a great pleasure to feature new poems by Judith Baume! in this issue of Folio. Poet, critic, and translator Judith Baume! is Professor of English at Adelphi University and lectures on contemporary American poetry at Oxford University. A former director of the Poetry Society of America, her work has been published in *Poetry*, *The Yale Review*, *Agni Review*, *The New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*. Baume! is the author of three poetry collections: *The Kangaroo Girl* (2011), *Now* (1996), and *The Weight of Numbers* (1988), winner of the Academy of American Poets' prestigious Walt Whitman Award for first collections. Baume! is also the recipient of awards from The New York Foundation for the Arts, and Bronx Recognizes Its Own, as well as fellowships for residencies at Yaddo, Saltonstall, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

To read a poem by Judith Baume! is to tumble headlong into a world of capacious thought that brings rich rewards. Her signature style wedds the meditative sweep of the classical essay to a rich, highly dimensional lyricism. Since her first publication, critics have consistently praised Baume!'s "bravura intelligence."

At the same time, Baume!'s work is admired for its accessibility and wit, as well as its deep grounding in places and people. Her belief in poetry as document and tribute is unswerving and no doubt accounts for its appearance in numerous literary anthologies, including *Telling and Remembering: A Century of Jewish American Poetry*; *Gondola Signore Gondola: Poems on Venice*; and *Poems of New York*. Writing about Baume!'s most recent collection, *The Kangaroo Girl*, poet Gail Mazur credits the poet's wide-ranging curiosity, noting that she "is interested in everything historical, from the medieval persecution of the Jews to the toys of technology, to the stories of our bodies."

In this new poetic sequence, Baumel explores life as a “brutal business,” one that is no less worthy of a “song of heavenly glittering.” Drawing on the visual tradition of the still life, this poet uses closely observed details to capture the beauty of the quotidian, creating a domestic space with a richly shadowed awareness of time. Equally compelling is Baumel’s technical facility in widening the range of her canvas so that the many surprising intersections between private and public life, between the contemporary and the historical, are brought into view. In “Open Arms,” for instance, we meet a mother who seeks consolation in the act of remembering those who have passed from this world, and imagines “assembling them like a doll party.”

As the poem proceeds, single instances incite a host of memories so that the speaker’s multiple identities—mother, daughter, wife, and artist—refract the passage of time and the rich pageant of multi-generational history. This inheritance sparks in the speaker an impassioned, seemingly paradoxical desire to “grab everything and go”—a wish also inspiring the poet’s oath to “do better than Odysseus grabbing three times the shades.”

Baumel is fascinated by the limits of love and language, a theme that emerges in “Another Young Person’s Suicide,” where the speaker reflects on a loss that “retuned” her life, “Made me dry soil so I absorb /Every drop thirstily. Made me wet soil the rain/Spills over wastefully, past my roots. Dark Soil./Top soil. Poor soil.” Elsewhere, the ornamental art in public space becomes something more than visual backdrop. Turning her attention to the monumental sculptures of Augustus St. Gaudens, in whose work the literal and metaphorical problems of perspective are eminently visible, the poet observes a disquieting historical truth:

Victory’s vacant stare  
 would surely confirm the good  
 commercial outcome of the war  
 and how far they came from hooded grief.

#### “Nike and Clover: A Study in Perspective”

In another poem, “Class Roster As Sicilian Atlas Index, PS 97, Mace Avenue, The Bronx, 1964: A Reverse Ovidian Meditation,” Baumel approaches human fallibility and history’s transformations with bemused wit. A roster of Sicilian surnames “changed from earthly town to American children” is but one of Jupiter and Juno’s “concessions to the fleeting urges of the other gods, to their own dim-minded mistakes.” Like the Roman poetic forebear, Baumel celebrates the surprising effects of mutability. “Locations” become “locutions”—vivid traces of fortune’s shifting tides.

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With open arms, this poet embraces the knifing cold weather of adult life, where grief and beauty co-exist and healing comfort is found in scenes large and small: there's the pleasure of a shared meal of home-made pasta on Sunday evenings that is undercut by an older relative's revelation of enduring pain; there's catching cheer in the "sure perfume" of lilacs and "the generous rot they toss into the air after a few days in the house" ("American Lilacs"). The poet's memories of these real flowers, grown so fluently in "the strip of my childhood ground," by the poet's father take on resonance in the literary kinship they share with "the lilacs of Walt Whitman,/the lilacs of Adrienne Rich, the Syringa of John Ashbery," and yet are "better and more to me," presaging as they do "adult failure."

As elegiac as they are celebratory, Baumel's poems span present and past, popular and literary culture, rendering for her readers a world of wit and wonder.

—Jane Satterfield