

[A Dream of Eros and Living Alone](#) [1]

March 14, 2016 [Featured Poetry](#) [2]

Hybrid Poetry by Erin M. Bertram

Finalist of the 2015 Talking Writing Prize for Hybrid Poetry

A Dream of Eros

In August, in New Orleans, in love, the heat is animal, the scent of magnolia hangs in the air the way smoke fills a crowded bar. If you're quiet, you can hear the streetcar clacking the tracks all day, barges making their slow way downriver, the current easing east to west toward the Gulf. Only at night do you hear marauders moving through the dark, a little gathering wind. Even before landfall, the intimacy between us lay dog-tired on a frayed red rug. The almond cookies you baked despite the heat. The claw-foot tub. The small drum we kept in the kitchen to make the cockroaches disappear. The waves in my hair, suddenly, no longer there. All the sweat. And that giant orange "X" spray-painted on our glass front door. It was too late to go back to the way things were, too early to cut our losses & move camp in search of higher ground, repair the levee between us, clear the debris rushing in. So we stuck it out. Made do. We made it work in our tiny apartment until the pieces no longer fit. The silence hung heavy around us, on & off, for years. You were my best friend. There was nothing left for you to say but *I love you, just not the way you need me to.*

Living Alone

Just after midnight. A piece of cake waiting cool & sweet for me in the fridge. The dull, steady hum of rain outside my window. Hip-hop & Brahms alternating on my speakers. Hat-head. The aftertaste of lager. I haven't been out of my apartment in three days. The dishes done. The phone quiet. Everyone I love, for the moment, warm & safe in their beds—my partner, two states away, asleep on the opposite side of the bed. I choose to sleep on a mattress on the floor. I have two tattoos, five pairs of shoes, a vibrator, a crown I need to get fixed, & a penchant for stories that are not stories, not really. I know how to pray & when to keep my mouth shut. How to make soup, mend a hem, subsist on the sort of leanness sustained attention demands. I know how to say I'm sorry. And I know how not to live like it's all I know how to say. In one month, I'll be thirty-three. Tomorrow, I'll wake early, hum songs I once knew all the words to. Hunger. Heat lightning. My eyelids

sweating. The look of me holding my breath.



Art Information

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Erin M. Bertram is the author of eleven chapbooks, including *Memento Mori*, published by Dancing Girl Press in 2014. An excerpt from her lyric hybrid text, "The Vanishing of Camille Claudel," was a published finalist in the 2013 *Diagram* essay contest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Handsome*,

A Dream of Eros and Living Alone

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Leveler, *So to Speak Online*, *Copper Nickel*, *Uprooted: An Anthology on Gender and Illness*, and elsewhere. She is a Ph.D. student and Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

On the hybrid nature of these pieces, she says:

My prose poems and lyric hybrid texts are grounded in various climates of the body: the senses, intuition, eros, illness, *memento mori*. I'm interested in gray areas and exploring boundaries that are voiced and that remain unspoken but are still very real. How bodies and poems are both read and read into—and the desire to make sense of these dual/duel readings—directs my attention. I tend not to work with the line as a conceptual unit, but instead favor the sentence. I'm drawn to the sentence's latitude of expression—its ability to contain asides and to exist in fragmented form—alongside its commonness, its accessibility. The sentence, then, helps me reflect everyday lived experience more accurately—both how things are and how I want them to be, respectively.

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Links:

[1] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/dream-eros-and-living-alone>

[2] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/talkingwriting-categories/featured-poetry>

[3] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kevinomara/14209629987/>