



## *Running to Stand Still*

**Kimberly Reyes**

*Poems that explore visibility and erasure through memory and music*

*Running to Stand Still* is a dark, 21st-century fairytale set to music, short attention spans, and long, shared familial memories. The narration takes place inside a Black, female body more attached to and comfortable with outside narratives, lyrics, stories, dreams, aspirational relationships, and images, than herself. Once she turns down the noise, she discovers boundaries, real and perceived, societal and self-imposed, and the horrific and wonderful things that can happen when they are breached.

“This debut collection is the kind of book you can open anywhere and feel you’ve landed on the page you need. Reyes is a chronicler of migration in all its meanings and murmurings and, refreshingly, does not flinch from her own transgressions. . . . These poems, with through lines of gender, race, adventure, desire, build into a deeply moving provocation of loss and discovery. The brilliance of these poems is their achievement of discomfit as they simultaneously travel distance and move inward. ‘This is church’ a line delivers, only to turn in on itself in the next, “this is collateral.” The title of this collection is a promise: how poetry can at once run and stand still, and why that matters.”

—Valerie Wallace, *House of McQueen*

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Orders:

UCP 1-(800) 621-2736

orders@press.uchicago.edu

Publisher Contact:

Rusty Morrison | 510-237-5472

rusty@omnidawn.com

www.omnidawn.com

### Excerpt from “Untitled 2”:

When they’ve had you before they’ve met you / it’s  
difficult to decide on which terms they can have you  
and look pretty when you smile.

**KIMBERLY REYES** is a poet and essayist who has received fellowships from the Poetry Foundation, Columbia University, the Fulbright program, and Callaloo, among other places. Her nonfiction appears in *The Associated Press*, *The Atlantic*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Time.com*, *The New York Post*, *The Village Voice*, and elsewhere. Her poetry appears in/on *The Academy of American Poets*, *The Feminist Wire*, *The Acentos Review*, *RHINO*, *Columbia Journal*, *Yemassee*, *Obsidian*, *Eleven Eleven*, and other places. Her nonfiction book of essays *Life During Wartime* won the 2018 Michael Rubin Book Award and her poetry chapbook *Warning Coloration* was released by dancing girl press in 2018.





A brief interview with Kimberly Reyes

(conducted by Rusty Morrison)

*I'm excited that Omnidawn will have the honor to publish RUNNING TO STAND STILL, your first poetry collection. This text is a vibrantly alive, searingly relevant expression of the internal and external voices of a life, which come to us through encounters (both internal and external). Through the narrator's example, a reader can see how & what each of us learns from experiences, how they are a means of gaining intimacy with the selves we are, and might become, as well as enlarging our sense of those others who are in our lives, and our sense of the world we share with them (its denials, its demands, sometimes its surprising gifts). Can you speak to any of the ideas I've shared in this question? As well as how the book, as a whole, evolved for you as you wrote the poems. Did any poem or group of poems especially feel relevant to mention in the context of this question?*

The book came together in such a scary and perfect way, as if writing itself. I didn't plan how the pieces would fit together as much as they told me how they should. One poem and realization built upon another, the only *hard* part is/was making sure the order was as true to the journey-in-progress as could be narrated. I say *is* as well as *was* because while there's a definite journey, a vision quest underway, the book is also nonlinear and it's changed me and my trajectory in its creation.

The "enlarging our sense of those in our lives" is an interesting concept. I'd say the narrator, in many ways, learned how disconnected she was from the tangible "in the world she shares" and how that was a privilege and superpower and actually to her benefit in many circumstances. The women that came before her, the ones the book is in many ways a tribute to and the figures that loom largest in the narrator's life, did not have this ability, or any autonomy really. So the narrator's flickering in and out of even her own story and timeline became a cruel gift, rebellion and freedom.

*I could use the word "examination" to reflect on what this narrator offers, though that word suggests a kind of sterility, and there is no sterility here, there is no safe-distance, not for the speaker and not for the reader. "No safety" means to me that the risks the narrator takes, and that I take as a reader, are real to me: to enter this work is to see, by example, what I might demand of myself. There is in RUNNING TO STAND STILL a deep honesty (one that I trust more and more, one that enlarges, as I read on, from poem to poem)—it comes in many forms. One expression of honesty is the narrator's willingness to test the limits of what can be said in a poem—what are the limits of expression, and how can a voice risk to explore those limits. Helene Cixous says that a border makes up the homeland, it prohibits and gives passage in the same stroke. I find this work to be brazenly working its borders—*

*clarifying the home-ground of a “poem” and of a “self,” and then breaking into the ‘no-person land’ at the borders of self, and of poetic expression, borders that many of us are afraid to cross. Did the concept of “distance” and “proximity,” as an author, feel relevant to you as you wrote these poems? &/or the sense of a home ground of self, &/or a home ground of poetic expression, and its borders? Any sense of crossing into a “no person” land in some poems (which you could speak to), &/or in the evolution of the text as a whole?*

Well I think there’s a level of floating above, or watching while also participating in the moment that the narrator has always felt, like many other writers, so distance and proximity have always been hard to properly define.

But what strikes me about this question is the language around borders and boundaries because, for the speaker, where are they anyway? When did she learn them and who has ever respected them? Is it brazen to simply illustrate this? It seemed riskier not to, to greenlight the untruth that borders and boundaries can be erected and adhered to for all of us.

*In reading RUNNING TO STAND STILL, I gain an enlarging sense of how much of the actual of life, in life, can be explored in a poem. You clearly demonstrate something I believe, that it isn’t only content but also the use of lyric (and other formal strategies) that can do so much of this work. Adorno says that the unresolved antagonisms we feel in reality reappear in our art through the artist’s the use of form. I’m summarizing his words, and inevitably focusing this idea to express my interpretation of his words. This idea, that I take from Adorno, has stayed with me, and is very important to me. And I have come to see that, for me, an author’s uses of form (the shape of the work on the page, the craft choices, the music in the language, and more) have as much power as the content that the word’s attempt to express. Could you speak to your formal choices in this work? You have such dexterity!*

My world is and has always been music. My first jobs were working in the entertainment industry as a music journalist and I’m the type of person who walks around with theme music playing her my head, or maybe an everchanging, curated soundtrack I guess you could say. So I thought I needed to be true to that reality while mapping out the journey.

*Would you tell me a bit more about you? Anything about you that is not in the bio printed in the book. What you tell me could give insight into aspects of your relationship to this text, or not. Please feel free to offer anything that strikes you; anything you tell us will be a gift. Thanks for whatever you are open to offering. I’d love to hear anything that might come serendipitously to your mind.*

I guess that I'm really really really new to this all. I took my first poetry class with Alice Quinn at Columbia as an elective while in J-School at 36 years old. This is the only writing that's ever truly made sense to me but wow, the journey to get here...

*I know you can't list them all! But on first thought, on impulse, can you answer: Who are a couple, a few, of the authors, artists, thinkers, workers (in any mediums) with whom you feel a kinship? Who/What comes to mind, just at this moment: who are you reading, listening to, looking at, watching, visiting currently? (You could explain or say something about some of them, if you'd like, which makes this more alive for our readers.)*

Neil Finn first and foremost, because, again, music... Bono, David Bowie, Morrissey, Sinéad O'Connor, Johnette Napolitano oh and for sure the work of Melissa Harris Perry.

It's January in San Francisco so my inner goth is out to play and I'm listening to a lot of Sisters of Mercy. I never ever ever tire of their sonic landscapes and the shelter of their cozy, synth-covered darkness.

*You had in mind using an artwork for the cover design, and you worked closely with our cover designer, Cassandra Smith, to bring your vision to light. Could you speak to the artist's work, and to any aspect of the cover design process?*

I love Dominique's design. It's perfect. The colors and clash, the irony and drama, perfect. I'd worked with her in the past on my chapbook and know that she gets my aesthetic. It probably helps that we were in the same MFA program, so she was already familiar with me and my work. Cassandra is also a poet and she was very thoughtful and careful with the design (and book in general). Working with a publishing house full of poets is a joy and a pleasure when it comes to making creative decisions because nothing feels like a fight, it's all careful and considerate suggestions centered around the work. Not about what's easiest and what's not possible, but about the work.