

V I A

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**MARIA TERRONE . NO KNOWN COORDINATES.
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On a subway ride that drops under a river, to a NYC art museum, and a tour of her Jackson Height's neighborhood are three outings I want to take with Maria Terrone. And although I know she won't, I want her to do all the talking.

Dana Gioia in "What is Italian American Poetry?" named four qualities of Italian American poetry and using Maria Terrone work, we might add another: the tension of culturally-imposed privacy. For Italian Americans, in my experience, faith and family are radically private entities. To be from our heritage and yet desire to be a poet ignites a singular type of tension. Terrone explains in her essay "Revelations," "I grew up in a family and culture where we lived by the dictum, 'Never tell anyone your business.'" And so as an adult she "gravitate[s] to physical spaces that help protect [her] and [her] privacy" but then explains her deepening journey as a poet towards self-exposure. In *No Known Coordinates*, the journey continues. Her poetry reveals intricate memories and private-public tensions at a level of intimacy that makes me want to travel with her.

Although I want Maria to carry our conversation, our subway ride will be wrapped in observational silence. The subway is a vehicle that carries the paradox of intimate versus communal in Terrone's poetry; she moves with her community, yet she remains quiet—detached by action but attached through empathy.

Early in the collection, the subway is the place of her "Disappearing Act" as she watches her reflection against shifting backdrops. Through introspection, the poet admits to the mutability of her identity and so feels ephemeral and without agency. This poem also informs her other subway poems in which the subway seat is a private perch. "What We Wear in the Subway," presents crafted empathetic portraits of those in the car with her, but she herself is "wrapped in . . . skin-tight . . . silence." In "Speaking in Tongues" Terrone follows the subway custom "that no eyes meet." In many of the subway poems the cultural tension between the private the communal is present as the poet, using intimate images, connects to her fellow riders but does not breach what both family values and NYC values dictate. Then our subway plunges under the East River and into Manhattan. Maria tells me of her grandfather who dug subway tunnels, and I tell her of my grandfather, who built the subway in the Bronx.

We emerge from the subway, and our next stop is a museum. "In the Sculpture Garden -*MoMA, NYC*" begins with contemplation: "Some art can make me wonder what isn't there—" This is a wonderful musing to start our museum conversation. It also echoes the private-public theme as the poet is wondering about what aspect of the subject

remains hidden in the open act of art making. Terrone provides a poetic tour of observations and questions until, "Enter George, a dear friend dead seven years..." The conversation is powerfully overturned by a revelatory memory that ends with a poignant assertion that neither art nor the dead need to explain themselves. The collapse of time is a technique Terrone deftly employs throughout her collection to expose a deeper self. We see this approach often in touching poems about her mother and about her childhood as she snaps together the flint of past and of present.

Another poem where remembrance and visual art are used to spark confession is "Under the Hawthorn." The poet sees Durer's woodcut "Weeping Cherub" emerge from the "tree's warts." Then layers of religions are found in the hawthorn as Terrone admits to "conflicting mythologies" and thus holds "this truth/untruth to be / self-evident/hidden." Art in conjunction with remembrance provides revelation: faith, whether religious or artistic, brings us only to the edge of truth. The assertions about faith and about empirical knowledge are a way of understanding a central theme and the title of the collection. Faith and truth have "no known coordinates." However, for Terrone unanswerable layers and tensions are the reason we write poetry.

On our tour, there are multiple genres of art to consider, including film. "Film Loop: Two Hotels" is a favorite of mine. It is courageous and surreal. Terrone's style ranges in the collection. There are poems that are narrative and have declarative final lines. However, many poems, including this poem, open like a city, have no known coordinates, and invite exploration. Although, I want to linger longer, we must leave the museums and head to Jackson Heights, Queens on the E or the M train, or perhaps the 7? Maria knows.

In Jackson Heights, I will ask Maria to show me her favorite trees, where to find birds, and from which windows she watches the snow. One poem that reveals her communal link is "Your blood was no longer on the stone." After the injury of the poet's husband, a kind Honduran woman aids her in his care. When she reaches out via email, the woman does not reply and "vanished / into our neighborhood of immigrants." The poet's local priest says the woman is an "Angel" when the poet shares the story. Terrone holds the woman in high regard and proclaims her "nameless and numinous." Through this divine understanding of the event, Terrone discloses that community is faith and can provide one momentary coordinate against uncertainty. She swells with the need to connect to Jackson Heights yet some neighborhood poems, such as "Jaipur Wedding Palace, Queens" are observational and introspective. The private persona and the fully confessional self of a poem such as "Erased," which forcefully remembers a sexual assault, provide conflicting layers and in these layers, we find intimate poetry.

Our outings would finish, yet I would still be paging through my copy of her collection with spiraling notes about all the layers of her work that we did not visit—lots of introspective, confessional yet communal questions because that's where and how her poetry travels.

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