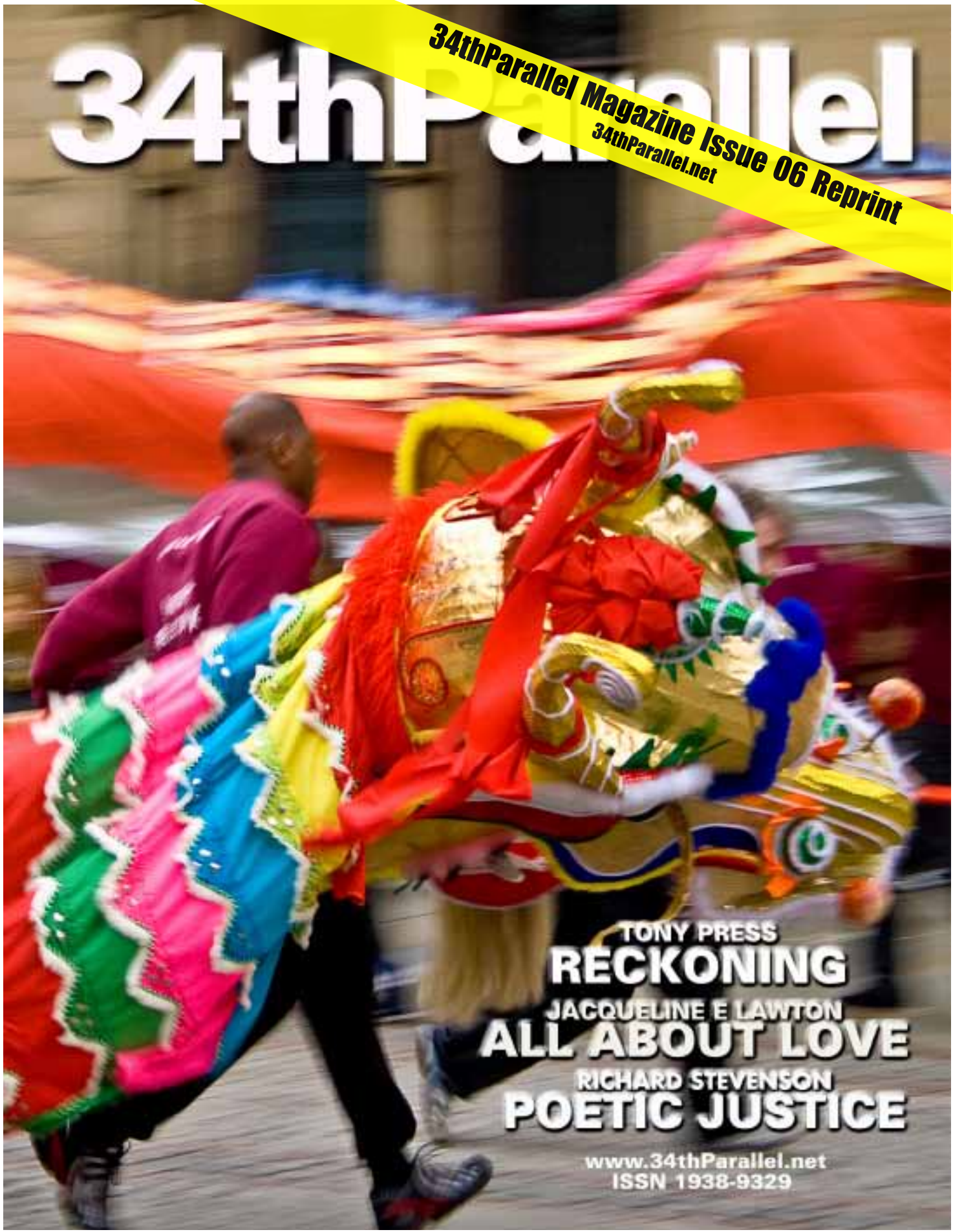


# 34th Parallel

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**RECKONING**  
JACQUELINE E LAWTON  
**ALL ABOUT LOVE**  
RICHARD STEVENSON  
**POETIC JUSTICE**

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**Jacqueline E Lawton** has an MFA in Playwriting from the University of Texas at Austin, where she was a James A Michener Fellow. She participated in the Kennedy Center's Playwrights' Intensive (2002) and World Interplay (2003). She is the author of *Anna K*, *Blood-bound and Tongue-tied*; *Deep Belly Beautiful*; *A Delicate People*, *The Devil's Sweet Water*; *Lions of Industry*, *Mad Breed* (Active Cultures commission) and *Mothers of Invention* (Discovery Theater commission). Her plays have been developed and given workshop readings at Didactic Theater Company in collaboration with the Kitchen Theatre at Round House Theatre; the Kennedy Center's Page to Stage Festival (sponsored by the Shakespeare Theater Company); Rorschach Theater Company's *Magic in Rough Spaces* New Play Development Program, and Woolly Mammoth Theater Company (with support from Arena Stage). Most recently, several of Lawton's 10-minute plays have been produced as a part of Rorschach Theater Company's *Myth Appropriations*, Round House Theatre's *the Heyday Players*, and the Source Festival. Lawton is a three-time semifinalist for the Playwright's Center PlayLabs and a two-time recipient of the Young Artist Program Grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities for Playwriting. Lawton's most recent productions: *Anna K*, an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, from February 19-March 1, 2009 at Round House Theatre (Silver Springs), *Deep Belly Beautiful* from March 31-April 2, 2009 at the Mead Theater Lab Program at Flashpoint.

# All About Love

**AT THE HEART OF ALL OF MY PLAYS IS A LOVE STORY. FOR ME, LOVE—  
OUR ABILITY AND CAPACITY TO LOVE—IS THE DRIVING FORCE OF LIFE.**

**JACQUELINE E LAWTON TALKS TO TRACE SHERIDAN**

**T**he tree-lined streets in the heart of Washington DC's Eastern Market just a few blocks away from the Supreme Court and the Capitol are a great contrast to the small farming community in East Texas where playwright Jacqueline Lawton grew up. Lawton finds it amazing: "It's kind of surreal actually when I think that the powerful decisions being made that influence the entire country and impact the world are made near where I live."

Looking out of her windows (she says she has six of them, a delightful amenity in any apartment let alone a basement flat) she can see the neighboring houses. According to Lawton, her building has a famous, if not infamous, history as it once served as a brothel. Aside from the building's illustrious past, Lawton describes where she lives as a quiet street where the only noise is "birds in the morning and crickets at night".

The journey she took in becoming a successful playwright required her to

leave Tennessee Colony in rural East Texas. Lawton says, "I went to the University of Texas at Austin from the fall of 1996 to December 1999. I majored in Theatre (playwriting/acting) and Radio-Television-Film (screenwriting). What I remember about UT was writing a lot and going dancing with my best friend as many nights a week as we could."

The collaborative relationships she formed there would be influential in shaping her passion for the theater.

"My mentors Amparo Garcia Crow, Ruth Margraff, and Omi Olomo Osun advised me to take an MFA in Playwriting. From there, I was able to work with Fran Dorn, Jill Dolan, and Suzan Zeder. My work deepened and my passion for theater was cemented as I was able to focus on acting, playwriting, and solo performance. I was also able to travel abroad a great deal each summer to research and write, which was great. I also attended the Kennedy Center's Playwright's Intensive between my

## I UNDERSTOOD ANNA'S DESIRE TO LIVE HER LIFE AND LOVE, FREE FROM SUFFOCATING AND OFTENTIMES DAMAGING SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS.

second and third year and was first introduced to Gregg Henry, Woolly Mammoth, and DC Theater."

After graduating, she worked for a year "teaching the UT football team how to write papers and sort out their schedules, and all the while I continued to write and act, but I missed being a part of a theater community".

And being a part of a theater community was integral to Lawton both as a writer and as an individual. She went to CenterStage in Baltimore where she worked in the education department.

Lawton had the opportunity to work for a number of theater companies but feels now she has found her niche.

"I went to Woolly Mammoth Theater Company and learned how to be a dramaturge from Mary Resing. I owe Mary so much. If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't be in this incredible DC theater community working as a dramaturge, playwright, and teaching artist. I've been in DC now for three years and just love it."

She has found an outlet for her own work. Her play *Mad Breed*, an imaginative comedy about John Wilkes Booth, received positive reviews. The plot centers on Booth's brother Edwin, who falls in love with a free black woman, Adah Rose.

The source of Lawton's creativity comes from every place imaginable. She says, "I'll write about anything if it resonates with me."

She's inspired to write about everyday life, history, paintings, music, heartbreak, hope, memory, negligence, injustice, sadness, an overheard conversation.

"There is so much to write about, so many stories to be told.

"I've written about self-hatred within the Black community (*Blood-bound and Tongue-tied*), the Lebanese war of 2006, CIA interrogation tactics (*The Devil's Sweet Water*), the Booth family (*Mad Breed*), homosexuality and Christianity (*A Delicate People*).

"Ultimately, I want to tell a story that introduces you to people you may have never met or re-introduces you to an old friend or family member or reflects who you are and what's in your heart."

The unifying theme of all her work, what Lawton's plays are about: love. She reflects, "At the heart of all of my plays is a love story. For me, love—our ability and capacity to love—is the driving force of life. The story lies in everything that prevents us from loving one another (fear) or leads us to love one another (hope)."

Lawton is working on a play called *Anna K*, an adaptation of *Anna Karenina*, which will be part of the Round House Theatre 2008-2009 Silver Spring Series.

Lawton read *Anna Karenina* in the summer of 2000, which she calls "the summer before the point of no return".

"I was affected deeply and profoundly by *Anna Karenina*. Growing up poor, in the rural and at times racist community of East Texas, I understood Anna's desire to live her life and love, free from suffocating and oftentimes damaging social constraints. In the novel, Levin's desire to love and be loved and commit himself to his work also resonated with me, and still does to this day as an artist devoted to theater."

She comments, "I am also fascinated

## **ABOVE ALL ELSE, AND I MEAN THIS, WORK TO TELL BEAUTIFUL STORIES THAT REVEAL YOUR TRUTH. DO NOT EVER COMPROMISE THAT.**

by Tolstoy's argument about the impact of a family in the life of an individual. Personally, the decision to marry/raise a family while continuing to pursue a career in the theater is terrifying. Tolstoy examines the notion that creating a family limits the freedom of the individual and that once the limitation of freedom is accepted, happiness is achieved. In *Anna*, we are shown an individual who destroys her family and meets with death as a result. The stakes are heightened, because *Anna* is a woman, who leaves her small child in pursuit of romantic love. With *Levin*, there is an individual who creates a family, and not only achieves a clear vision of faith and philosophical transcendence, but also comfort and happiness.

"I chose Josephine Baker as a character study for *Anna*. Baker is a groundbreaking artist, beautiful, talented, determined, and successful in all areas of her life except for a loving relationship."

"Also, I knew that I wanted *Levin* to be an artist, who, like Tolstoy's *Levin*, would devote himself to a career path that is in philosophical opposition to the status quo. For Tolstoy, this is the urban setting and the industrialization of Russia at the expense of rural life and farming. Once I decided to set *Anna K* in Paris in the 1920s, Dada, with its revolutionary response to the detrimental havoc and tragic loss of lives during World War I and its opposition to classical, more traditional art forms, became an obvious and exciting choice.

"Additionally, this setting allowed me the opportunity to highlight the life, romance, and work of Man Ray and his muse Kiki de Montparnasse, who will

serve as the character study for *Kitty*."

Lawton continues to work with young playwrights as a teacher and works professionally as a dramaturge. She says it's difficult to pinpoint what advice she would give to an emerging playwright.

"This is quote by which I live and write, which are the words and counsel of Rainer Marie Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*: 'Nobody can counsel and help you, nobody. There is only one single way. Go into yourself. Search for the reason that bids you to write; find out whether you would have to die if it were denied you to write.'"

Lawton encourages, "After you have committed yourself to being a playwright, be prepared to work really, really hard for a very long time. Develop a support system of people, mentors, friends and families, who will love, respect, and support you, because you will need it. Work and fight as if your life depended on it, because in truth, it does, to find your voice as a writer, as an artist. Once you've found your voice, shape it, hone it, and challenge it. Don't get lazy! Read as many plays as you can get your hands on and go to see as many plays as you can get to see. Go to Pay What You Can performances if your budget is tight. Find a community of artists (actors, designers, directors, and dramaturges) where there is a mutual admiration, love, and respect for the work being produced.

"Above all else, and I mean this, work to tell beautiful stories that reveal your truth. Do not ever compromise that truth. Remember, your name is on the work you do and one day you'll have to answer for every word you ever write." .