

Darlington, Tenaya
MADAME DELUXE
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Darlington, who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, is the managing editor of *Beloit Fiction Journal*. Her work has been published in both anthologies and literary periodicals. The heroine of this debut collection, Madame Deluxe, is the flamboyant friend you want to kick under the table for telling the truth in public. But there's no use. She'll only embarrass you further by calling attention to your efforts to silence her. Besides, as vexing as her pronouncements may be, they are also howlingly funny, as only dead-on-the-mark observations can be. Madame's kvetching becomes addictive. When the poet is not engaged in being rambunctious, irreverent, scathing, or acerbic, she is just plain silly, as when she occasionally lapses into the kind of word-play and potty-humor that would delight most forty-year-olds. Her observations—which are equal parts folklore, whimsy, and sarcasm—may seem slightly askew, but that is because we are not used to hearing unprocessed truth. In one diversion, she likens trendiness in poetry to changing fashions (“shorter lines with less anaphora”), and complains that “mating is a game for hackers” and that “beauty has gone virtual.” All this is not to indicate that Darlington's work is concerned merely with the glitzy, fluffy, or fuzzy. Every now and then she lets loose with truths that resonate more deeply, as when she proclaims, “Illness is hatred spoken through bone.” Despite the streak of artificiality and triviality running through all things marketable, including mortal love, Darlington has not become cynical. Courageously, she continues in her search for that “one word that is still sacred and bright.”

“All anyone wants to do is knock off a good poem by the time they're thirty.” Darlington has done that, and then some. When's the last time anyone was caught laughing aloud while reading a book of poetry?