

‘No Relation’: A review

By Jo Kibbee

This article is part of a series of reviews highlighting books that will be featured at the Washington Island Literary Festival, September 19-22, 2019. This year's theme is Generational: How we build, grow, change.

In the hands of a masterful writer, spare prose can pack more meaning than lush narrative. Paula Carter is that writer. Her exquisitely written book “No Relation” hovers between essay and poetry, memoir and meditation.

Through a series of brief vignettes that fit together like a puzzle, she pieces together the story of a broken relationship. But not just a romantic relationship. She leaves behind not only a lover, but also his young children with

whom she has a developed a loving but complicated connection.

Is she their mother? No. Is she their stepmother? Not really. What exactly is she to them?

As Carter explores this question, we learn how she fell in love with a man with a past. Only it's also a present. Previously married with two small boys, James comes as part of a package. As she unwraps it, Carter chronicles the challenges and satisfaction of forging bonds with the kids and negotiating life with James. Stories about navigating the difficult waters of blended families are not uncommon; Carter offers the perspective of someone who never got inside. Ultimately, she is no relation.

In a genre known as flash nonfiction, each titled essay ranges from perhaps 50 to a few hundred words. With spare and direct language, Carter presents scenes (The First Time), reflections (Cupcakes), stories (White Socks). Slowly the fragments gather momentum and power. The reader is left to wonder how, with so few words, Carter can conjure so much meaning and generate so much feeling. And yes, tell an absorbing story.

It just might be magic.

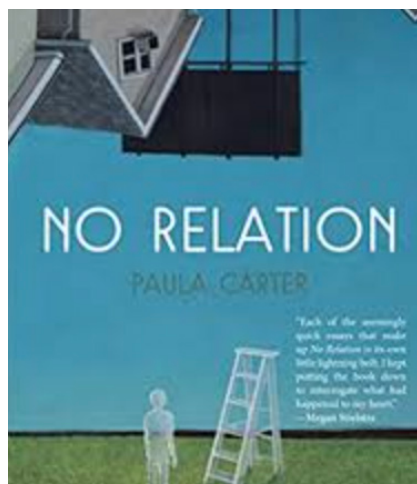
“No Relation,” published by Black Lawrence Press in 2017, 141 pages, is available at Fair Isle books, the Hotel Washington and the Washington Island library.

Author Paula Carter returns to Island

Paula Carter was the inaugural artist in residence at the Hotel Washington in 2018. The Literary Festival is delighted to welcome her back to the Island.

She will present a guided workshop as part of the Literary Festival's Creative Lab, “Listen to This: Storytelling as Art and Tradition.” Offered on Thursday, Sept. 19, at the Trueblood Performing Arts Center, the program is free and open to the public. It begins at 12 p.m. with a BYO brown-bag lunch and informal introductions. From 1 to 3:30 p.m. Carter will lead a storytelling workshop at which attendees will generate and share their stories.

All are welcome.



“No Relation,” by Paula Carter, will be featured at the 2019 Washington Island Literary Festival.