Lucy Corin is not a typical writer. Sure, she has an amazing collection of short stories in *The Entire Predicament* and novel entitled *Everyday Psychokillers: A History for Girls* and has had works in respected journals such as *Tin House* and *The Southern Review*; but she also blogs, teaches the next generation of awesome writers at UC Davis, and has short story gems like “Eyes of Dogs” (about a soldier who encounters a witch and a tree hole full of surreal dogs with snow-globe eyes) scattered on the Internet. Her unique approach to contemporary fiction is leading her to explore apocalypses. Also, she has a thing for Frank O’Hara’s poem “Morning.” As an author she has a deep sense of what she is doing in her work, and is not concerned with the idea of being popular, but more with writing for the hell of it. Corin is both promising and polished and her unique voice echoes that of *Prism Review*, with which she has agreed in all of her epic-ness to share a bit of what makes her tick.

*MC:* Hiya! How’s it going? Just reading over the intro to the interview shows that you are undeniably awesome. But this is common knowledge, and the readers of *Prism Review* would love a bit more: what sorts of breakfast items lead one to dwell on apocalyptic and other strange and wonderful thoughts?

Lucy Corin: I don’t think my breakfasts are that apocalyptic. I make my own granola and eat it with Pavel’s yogurt most days. I like the granola straight from the freezer, though. Do people think that what you eat for breakfast makes you think what you think?
MC: Hm. I hope never eating breakfast doesn’t leave me with a lack of thought. Let’s move past morning. Why don’t you walk us through a day in your life – or even two days, a school-day and a non-school day. How do you clear your mind for writing? Do you write every day, at the same time, or otherwise fall into spells of deep depression, as we do?

LC: So it’s more like I teach and prep teaching and do administrative stuff all day for six months and try to set aside one morning a week to think about what I’m doing in my own artistic life, maybe post something about it on my website if I can connect to my writing life in any way... and then for the other six months I try to walk directly from my bed to my coffee and then to my desk without really waking up and write until noon-ish depending on when I get up (I’m good for 4-5 hours of real writing concentration) and then try to do things in the afternoon that feed my thinking like go see art, read a book, talk with a smart person, interact with the larger community in some humane way, or get myself to a compelling landscape. Sometimes I ask myself a question about what I’m working on and think about it while I’m doing these tangential things. One day a week I do errands and laundry.

I like extreme fiction, fiction that does whatever it’s doing as intensely as possible.

MC: A writer’s dream, of course. Any killer bands you listen to while doing those loads of laundry?

LC: I like music but I don’t put a lot of effort into keeping up or being knowledgeable about it. I keep listening to The Knife these last months.
MC: Okay, the nitty gritty—The Entire Predicament is witty, sad, and even absurd (we mean that well). Could you take us through the process—from writing stories with thematic echoes to editorial discussions—of putting the collection together? What was it like working with a relatively new publisher like Tin House?

LC: Well the earliest of these stories was written in I think 1995 and the most recent was written in 2006 (book came out 2007). So over those years I wrote and published a lot more stories in addition to the ones in this book, and shaped and reshaped my collection countless times, with many conceptualizations. I’d make chart after chart reconfiguring my work as one collection and then another. By the time I submitted it to Tin House they just took it as it was. My editor, Lee Montgomery, suggested I cut one piece, an experimental piece I published in *Conjunctions*, a collage made of arranged bits of *Alice in Wonderland*. I can still see how it would belong in the book, and it’s not very long, but I think it just went further away from mainstream aesthetics than Tin House thought its readers would be cool with. I still want to write a collection that really finds a path across as widely divergent aesthetic approaches as possible. Other than that we tossed around a couple options for ordering the stories and that was it.

MC: That would make for a really interesting collection! I’ve noticed you seem to play with the idea of extremes in The Entire Predicament; in “Airplane,” the main character is in a relatively normal situation (at least at first), sitting beside a Marine on an airplane—and it’s the main characters’ wonderfully strange and frantic mental response to the situation that carries the story. Why are you drawn to mindsets like this? What is their appeal for you as a writer?

LC: Well, metaphors are made from contrast, the more surprising-yet-apt the better, and I think stories as a whole operate like big metaphors, so the stronger the contrasts the better there, too. I tend to
make characters, especially narrators; by just taking a way I think in a moment that I think is interesting and pushing it as far as I can. I like extreme fiction, fiction that does whatever it’s doing as intensely as possible.

**MC:** Speaking of intense, your recent projects include little strands of stories that revolve around the idea of apocalypse. This might be a predictable question, but why apocalypses? Did you have other contenders, like incense or firewood?

**LC:** Funny. No it was always apocalypses, but I’ve been fooling with the project for so long now I only vaguely remember how it started. The confluence of two things, I think: one was driving across the country on secondary highways and thinking about the desire to take pictures of the landscapes as if there were no people in them – so thinking about “unpeopled” places. Then I was also finding a way to be creative in small crevices of time while starting a new job, so I told myself to make fiction as quickly as possible out of any little fiction-y thought or line I had in the moment available to write. To begin and end a story as quickly as possible. So theme and form united, and I love iteration as a narrative pattern.

**MC:** Do you find writing with the purpose to begin and end quickly a challenge or a breath of fresh air? Has it forced you to discover anything about yourself that you weren’t conscious of?

**LC:** It’s both— I don’t think you get fresh air without challenge. If writing isn’t teaching me as I do it I can’t pay attention.

**MC:** Everyday Psychokillers: A History for Girls was published by the innovative press FC2, and your subsequent work has also edged toward the avant-garde. If you’re avant-garde, who else is in contemporary fiction, and what does the notion mean to you (if anything)? Who or what defines the ‘old’ guard nowadays?
LC: Well I often think it’s strange that my stuff is thought of in this day and age as avant-garde, because I really am not doing anything formally that hasn’t been around for a long, long time. What makes people say “avant-garde” these days seems more to do with seeing works in relation to current mainstream trends as opposed to “progressing” literary history or making narrative do what hasn’t been done before, which is what I think it was about back in the day. I think writers I tend to think of as “like me,” simply aren’t interested in reproducing ideas or aesthetic approaches they see in the literary mainstream, and are trying to write in a very personal or idiosyncratic relation to the history of literature, rather than writing to fit into a current literary market (which is how I’d define ‘the old guard’). So you’re right to suggest that various presses, like FC2, or Dalkey, or New Directions, are dedicated to publishing works that they think are pushing literary boundaries or working in what you might call a tradition of the avant-garde, but the term is not one that anyone I know feels comfortable using. It’s a dated term, ironically. I’d say that if there’s a general distinction to be made it has to do with what motivates the writer. An “old guard” approach is rooted in a desire to find, via fiction, those things that are constant through time or across cultural experiences. An “avant garde” approach, then, is primarily about exposing and disrupting problematic cultural assumptions about the world, and in particular about the way the world is being represented (overtly or implicitly) in literature. In the fiction I love the most, I don’t think these paradigms are exclusive. In fact, what I’m most interested in these days is struggling to hold incompatible truths in my head simultaneously, and then, of course, to try to manifest that in fiction. When it comes to a writer whose work is currently truly blowing my mind about what fiction can do, Roberto Bolaño is top of my list, both in form and content. Some writers who I feel, variously, akin to in US literary culture are Kevin Wilson (especially the stuff you can find scattered about online), Anna Joy Springer (great new book from Jaded Ibis, a new press interested in narratives that require multiple sensory elements like sound, pictures, smells, etc...), Shannon
Cain (who just won the Drue Heinz prize for her first collection of stories), and my teacher Rikki Ducornet.

_MC:_ Whatever its label, Kevin Wilson’s _Tunneling to the Center of the Earth_ is totally a great collection. In _Psychokillers_, you focus on the way the world perceives women and the standards of beauty we are held to, among other things. Do your current works consciously explore notions of feminism? What is feminism in the age of Palin?

_LC:_ That’s a very big question. That’s dissertations. My politics come through in my work, always, and they are queer politics, they are a politics of the disruption of commonplace thinking. Of course I am absolutely a feminist, because I think and live in the tradition that challenges the inequities and violations experienced by women. I am also annoyed with the way that term has been maligned and co-opted so often and variously that it means practically nothing – or nothing I can predict – to say I am a feminist.

_MC:_ Out of everything you’ve written, what’s your favorite ending?

_LC:_ I like the last line of EPK, the last paragraph of Airplane, the end of Mice, the last line of Woman with a Gardener. I like endings, it’s all about the endings, which is why I wrote a hundred of them for this apocalypse book.

_MC:_ In the opposite direction, did you consciously – or were you encouraged – to set your work apart in your beginning stages as a writer to appeal to literary journals and publishers?

_LC:_ I think you read and think and challenge yourself on the page and in your life, and then you send your stuff out and see if people are into it. If people like the work they’ll help shuttle it along as best they can, and you should do the same for others when you come into any place of influence or power. I think writing to get published is different
from writing to make art; sometimes they end up being aligned purposes and sometimes not. You have very little control over all that, except to do your research and do your best. It’s probably true that if you are charming in person you have a better chance of people who you meet wanting to read you than if you are a jerk. Unless you’re a certain kind of pretentious jerk who somehow makes people think you’re cool and smart and that makes them want to read your work. But then, you know, they still have to like your work if they read it. My best and dearest teacher always said, “do your own garden.” I have no idea how to try to write something to get published, to be successful, or anything like that, except to say pay attention as you revise to your desire to communicate, to take part in the conversations of the day in the language of the day.

MC: If you’re writing in a vacuum, then, is the biggest concern in your writing aesthetic – in response to the idea of what writing can and should be – or does it still have a social element, an awareness of audience? Can a work successfully be both?

LC: Social is aesthetic, aesthetic is social. Understanding and engaging in that dynamic is the whole project.

MC: Okay, one last question. You seem like you might be a fan of hedgehogs. Do you have a hedgehog? Or are you interested in any other ironically adorable animals?

LC: I liked the book Olga Da Polga as a kid but I looked back at it recently and thought it was not as good as I remembered it being.

MC: Well, guinea pigs are pretty fantastic, but I agree that most things are never quite as good as you remember – save for this interview. Thank you so much for your insightful, candid, and witty answers and all the great advice for our staff and readers.