**Confessional Pronouns**

*to Pablo Neruda*

Nancy Beauregard

I fear—the pronouns in you,

Neruda, whose poetry I study,

analyze, admire. It is the man

in you—I fear most who

rapes her while your work

is immortalized.

You remind me—of him,

the boy who grabs me

between classes, beneath

my dress, between my

legs, inside underwear,

when I am twelve.

My mother is scared, too

embarrassed to tell my

father. I fear—those who

are supposed to protect me,

at school who tell me

“Take another stairway.”

I fear—him, the undergrad

student who says, describing

my childhood assailant as

“black” is not politically

correct. It does not make him

feel comfortable.

The I in me, a woman fears—

those that are my peers,

backs down from men,

the crime no one wants to

hear, changes the word, so

it does not offend anyone.

The girl in me fears—the I

who at nineteen, insists on

marriage, who does not air

her dirty laundry, who lets

him abuse her, strangle

her, make her feel ugly.

My body, I fear—betrays

me while I am married

to him. It loses my baby

before the due date, lets

them put his small body

in a paper lunch bag.

I fear—the I who throws

clothes in black plastic bags,

holds keys in her hand like a

weapon, waits to call him until

I know he is at work, drives to

nowhere to escape him.

Pain, I fear—will always be there,

some pronouns may disappear

from my life, others hold the

best of me and unlike you, Neruda,

I will not wait until an autobiography

to confess my pronouns.