

Spring 2010

RATTLE

P o e t r y f o r t h e 2 1 s t C e n t u r y

Book Interview:
Lynne Knight's
Again

Gary Lehmann
Dear Editor

Fractal Art by Stacy Reed

2010 Neil Postman Award

Issue #33 Preview

e.8

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Alan Fox

EDITOR

Timothy Green
(tim@rattle.com)

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Megan Green
(megan@rattle.com)

EDITOR EMERITUS

Stellasue Lee

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Spring 2010, e.8

ISSN# 1097-2900 (print)

ISSN# 2153-8115 (online)

All rights revert to authors on publication. Print issues of *RATTLE* are 4-color, perfect-bound, and include about 200 pages of poetry, essays, and interviews. Each issue also features a tribute section dedicated to an ethnic, vocational, or stylistic group. For more information, including submission guidelines, please visit www.rattle.com.

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ARTWORK

FRACTAL ART

by
Stacy Reed



ARTIST STATEMENT

“ Chaos. Infinity. Immortality. The idea that there is something beyond what we know, something larger than our existence, yet perhaps something as simple as a single string of infinite code. These concepts fascinate me and provide the foundation of my passion for fractals.

Fractals are, to put it simply, a plotted out mathematical equation that infinitely repeats. Recently, in the last 30 years, computer programs have been written that allow us to finally test theories that before could only be “guesstimated” at by history’s great mathematicians. The mathematics behind fractals has always been with us, and it is my opinion that the fractal itself is not owned; it’s the world’s fractal, the explorer just found it. A photographer does not exclaim, “I saw this great forest of trees on a mountain, I took a picture of it, and now I present to you *my* forest of trees on *my* mountain!” In the same way, I refuse to claim the numbers or the math. They’ve existed all along; it’s up to us to reveal their beauty in a snapshot of artistic expression. The fractal, while visually remarkable in and of itself, should be considered a tool—a prop—it is not *the* artistic statement, but a means to one.

That said, I should point out that the process of fractal creation and exploration *is* a honed craft. For me, it’s always been an enjoyable and enlightening way to get lost in time. Philosopher Alan Watts once said that the fundamental, ulti-

mate mystery—the only thing you need to know to understand the deepest metaphysical secrets—is this: that for every outside there is an inside and for every inside there is an outside, and although they are different, they go together. You and I can see those very principles of polarity at work in fractal mathematics, positives and negatives work together, not in opposition or conflict, but as a united whole. The simplicity of this balance inspires me the most. Through studying and exploring different avenues, by making changes in perspectives and code, by magnifying and altering these digital virtual planes, I have come to a better understanding of my current state of existence in a physical world...a world in which the concept of infinity can be explained, yet exists just within the realm of our mental grasp. A world where fractal shapes and patterns in nature can be seen as evidence of evolution—matter taking shape, forming those intricate insides and outsides for billions of years amongst the chaos of infinity.

The artworks I’ve submitted are symbolic representations of springtime here on our three-dimensional, living fractal planet. My hope is that you’ll go outside and take a closer look at the mathematical beauty that surrounds you this time of year. I invite you to marvel with me about the innumerable ways life on our fractal planet regenerates, repopulates, and regrows. Let’s consider what the future may hold for this world of wonder, and embrace our sentient role within it. ”

STACY REED is a visual artist with diverse interests and talents that range from the more traditional mediums, like painting and sculpting to the ever-expanding world of digital art, with particular focus on fractal mathematics. Her artwork has been exhibited and published across the globe; her fractals have made appearances on billboards, CD and book covers, magazines, video games, websites, museums and coffee houses. A leader among the fractal art community, Stacy lectures at colleges and galleries, and provides free fractal resources online. She currently lives in Cincinnati, OH, where she works as a software librarian, copy editor, and content producer for several websites, including Tucows, butter-scotch, LibrarianChick, and FOSSwiki.

www.shedreamsindigital.net

THE 2010 NEIL POSTMAN AWARD FOR METAPHOR

"A metaphor is not an ornament. It is an organ of perception."

—Neil Postman, from *The End of Education*

When one thinks of champions and purveyors of metaphor—those certain folks who habitually view experience and ideas as “like” something else, who are invested in better navigating, complicating, decoding, and enriching the human condition through comparison, juxtaposition, allusion, and all other available schemes and tropes—one normally thinks of poets: Shakespeare, Wallace Stevens, and the like.

Neil Postman rarely comes to mind. If he does, he’s at the very end of one’s mental list, dangling from a metaphor shaped like a string. And this, we think, is a lamentable thing.

Postman wasn’t a poet, strictly speaking, but he had a poet’s nature—a poet’s soul. And like poets, he always spoke crucially to his readers without excluding or pandering to them, and he thought that ideas could help save us were we mindful, or help ruin us if we weren’t. He espoused the same values as most poets and addressed the same questions with equal fervency and fluency: careful thought, the import of probing questions, the dangers of definition, the celebration and propagation of humanism, the love of language, etc. He understood Blake’s dark, satanic mills and militated against them. He knew Thoreau’s quiet desperation and hoped to help us avoid it. And he knew how to

eat a peach and steal any number of plums from the refrigerator.

"The medium is the metaphor."

—Neil Postman, from *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Although primarily known as an educationist and a media critic, Postman was, at his core, a “noticer”—and he particularly noticed what we do with metaphor and how metaphor shapes and creates our cognitive world. Much like George Lakoff and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Postman maintained that words (and words, in truth, are metaphors) are as much the driver of reality as they are the vehicle. Consequently, metaphor was not a subject to be relegated and limited to high school poetry units wherein a teacher drones on about the difference between “like” and “as” and considers the job finished. For Postman, the study of metaphor was unending and metaphors were as crucial as they were omnipresent; they served to give form to and dictate experience. Is America the great melting pot, or is it an experiment in unity through diversity? What metaphors are embedded in television commercials—are commercials, in fact, parables and/or metaphors for “Heaven?” Is language a tree or a river? If the medium is the metaphor, then what framing mechanisms are at play when one reads Dickens as opposed to watching *Friends*? Can one “save time” without a clock? Can a certain medium

of communication, say, smoke signals, convey significant truths? Can a poem? All of the above questions are questions that Postman pondered (and, come to think of it, they’re all good ideas for poems).

Throughout Postman’s books (to name a few greats: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, *Technopoly*, *Conscientious Objections*, *The End of Education*, *The Disappearance of Childhood*), the importance of metaphor comes up time and time again. Put simply, Postman (like his teacher and hero, Marshall McLuhan), maintained that the medium through which information is conveyed directly colors meaning and our sense of the world—hence Postman’s lamenting the slow death of the “typographical mind” and the rise and present ubiquity of television. We are, essentially, what we see, hear, and read. Postman might go so far as to opine that we are the metaphors we use.

In honor and remembrance of Neil Postman, who died on October 5th, 2003, we have established the Neil Postman Award for Metaphor. The *raison d’être* for the award is simple and two-fold: To reward a given writer for his or her use of metaphor and to celebrate (and, hopefully, propagate) Postman’s work, and the typographical mind.

Each year the editors will choose one poem from all of the submissions *RATTLE* received during the previous year. There are no entry fees or submission guidelines involved. The author of the chosen poem will receive \$500.

We hope that the winner will buy books with the money. And kill their television.

- 2010 Winner -

Mike White

NASCAR

Not rolling in liquid fire
or pulled apart by physics.
Not between commercials.

But the way an old dog
half-blind
noses around and around

some quiet
apple-scented
chosen ground.

- 2010 Runner-Up -

Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz

AT THE OFFICE HOLIDAY PARTY

I can now confirm that I am not just fatter
than everyone I work with, but I'm also fatter
than all their spouses. Even the heavily bearded
bear in accounting has a lithe otter-like boyfriend.

When my co-workers brightly introduce me
as "the funny one in the office," their spouses
give them a look which translates to, *Well, duh*,
then they both wait for me to say something funny.

A gaggle of models comes shrieking into the bar
to further punctuate why I sometimes hate living
in this city. They glitter, a shiny gang of scissors.
I don't know how to look like I'm not struggling.

Sometimes on the subway back to Queens,
I can tell who's staying on past the Lexington stop
because I have bought their shoes before at Payless.
They are shoes that fool absolutely no one.

Everyone wore their special holiday party outfits.
It wasn't until I arrived at the bar that I realized
my special holiday party outfit was exactly the same
as the outfits worn by the restaurant's busboys.

While I'm standing in line for the bathroom,
another patron asks if I'm there to clean it.



AGAIN

by

Lynne Knight

Sixteen Rivers Press
P. O. Box 640663
San Francisco, CA 94164
ISBN-13: 978-0-9767642-8-1
96 pp., \$16.00, Paper

www.sixteenrivers.org

LYNNE KNIGHT's fourth collection, *Again*, was published by Sixteen Rivers Press in 2009. Her previous collections are *Dissolving Borders* (Quarterly Review of Literature), *The Book of Common Betrayals* (Bear Star Press), and *Night in the Shape of a Mirror* (David Robert Books), plus three award-winning chapbooks. A cycle of poems on Impressionist winter paintings, *Snow Effects* (Small Poetry Press), has been translated into French by Nicole Courtet. Knight's work has appeared in *Best American Poetry 2000*, and her awards include a Theodore Roethke Award from *Poetry Northwest*, a Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, an NEA grant, and the 2009 RATTLE Poetry Prize. She lives in Berkeley, California.



Note: Some of the poems reprinted here first appeared in the following journals:

"Prologue" in *Poetry*; "Wanting" in *Green Mountains Review*; "Ghost Sailing" in *Runes*; and "The Severing" in *Poetry Northwest*. "In a Time of Mourning" first appeared in the book.

In *Again*, Lynne Knight's musical and compelling fourth full-length collection of poetry, her measured and lyrical voice reveals desire and memory as physical presences: spirits invoked by the spell of the poem so that the reader embodies her stories of the body—of damage and breakage, recovery and repair. Whether autobiographical or ekphrastic, the poems are equally genuine, bringing image to life, like "bright fruit constantly replenished." Following hunger and beauty to their extremes, the poems allow us to confront loss as well as grief, "which finally requires of us// acceptance but also tact/ in the doing: breakage, yes, but not utter ruin."

PRAISE FOR AGAIN

"What is instantly remarkable in *Again* is the exquisite clarity of its imagery and its profound, fervent tone. And what I love about Lynne Knight's poems is that they feel and sound *exactly* true. Hers is a voice one immediately trusts. It is sensuous, attentive, intelligent, and ruthlessly honest as she interrogates the tangled relationship between what is said or kept secret, loved or feared, lit or kept in shadows—a chiaroscuro that her poems relentlessly explore."

—Laure-Anne Bosselaar, author of *A New Hunger*

"Her poems are luminous and musical, whether she is writing of a family fleeing its home, a drowning, the light of memory, a painting, or the trials of love. She plumbs the depths of grief and joy, and this reader is with her all the way."

—Grace Schulman, author of *The Broken String*

"Lynne Knight is a consummate lyric poet. Her themes in *Again* are the big ones, time, love, longing. Exquisite, haunted, these poems search out a balance between beauty and despair..."

—Richard Silberg, author of *Deconstruction of the Blues*

BOOK INTERVIEW

WITH

LYNNE KNIGHT

by
Timothy Green

Note: The following interview was conducted by email through February and March of 2010.

GREEN: This is going to be a book interview, so I want to focus on *Again*, but first, inquiring minds want to know more about the poem that won our poetry prize last fall, “To the Young Man Who Cried Out ‘What Were You Thinking?’ When I Backed into His Car.” I’ve always assumed the event it describes was real—how long ago did that happen, and how did the poem come to be? Was it the kind of situation where you knew there was a poem going on even while you were within it, or did the poem reveal itself much later? Did you go through many drafts, or was the composition quick once you pinned it down?

KNIGHT: The poem came long after the event—thirteen years after. It’s a pretty accurate recording of what happened. I’d just begun tending my mother, who had Lewy body disease (somewhat similar to Alzheimer’s) although she hadn’t yet been diagnosed. We both knew something was horribly wrong. It’s strange because the sensation of hitting the car seemed like a defining moment. I just didn’t know what it was defining. My exhaustion, it seemed at the time. I remember thinking, “I can’t take much more of this.” But there were eight more years to come. During them, I wrote poem after poem about my mother and her descent into dementia. I winnowed them for my third book, *Night in the Shape of a Mirror*. But it never occurred to me, during all that time, to write a

poem about that afternoon.

Then, sometime in the Spring of 2009, I heard Camille Dungy read a poem (not her own) about a pickup truck. The next morning, when I sat down to write (I write every morning), “To the Young Man...” came. I wrote it as fast as I can type. But it’s not really truthful to say it took less than half an hour to write the poem. It took thirteen years.

I revised the ending—the wording, not the images—before I submitted it to *Rattle*, and I tinkered a bit with a few other things. I studied with Donald Hall at the University of Michigan, and if he makes any change at all, even a comma, he considers it another draft, so by that measure there were maybe five drafts. Generally, I don’t revise much. I write every day, so my revision process has more to do with getting the junk out of the way to clear a path for the poem. Philip Levine said one of the advantages of getting older (he was 52, I think, when he said this, in a Lannan interview) is that you know when to stop working on what’s never going to turn into a poem. If it’s dead, it’s dead.

GREEN: Thirteen years, I had no idea! I imagined it was a week, if not that same day. When you submitted that for the prize, along with three others, did you think that poem had the best chance at winning? I’m always curious about the way we view our own work—it seems

more often than not that an editor will pick what seems like the weakest poem from a batch. I’m speaking mostly as a writer, here—if I send five poems to another magazine, two of them will be what I see as “hit singles,” and three will be “B-sides” I don’t expect to go anywhere. And more often than not, if they pick anything, it’s a B-side. Talking to other poets, this seems to happen a lot—a novelist’s favorite book is rarely their most successful, and so on. So it’s interesting to see how much honest opinions and tastes can vary. Did you have any special hope for this poem, or was it just another poem in the batch?

KNIGHT: Yeah, well, it’s kind of a shocker to me, too, that it happened thirteen years ago. It doesn’t seem that long ago because my memory of it stayed so clear. Cinematic, really. So when I did finally get around to writing about it, it *seemed* as if it had just happened because everything was still so vivid.

What you say about “hit singles” and “B-sides” happens to me, too: The poem I think will be a hit single turns out to be just another B-side. No, usually they’re *all* B-sides, no hit singles to be found. I used to mope for days over rejections. Now I’ve got it down to about half an hour. Practice!

I didn’t have any special hope for this poem. I thought it was the strongest one in the bunch, but not a hit single. A one-day-on-the-charts poem, maybe—an honorable mention.

But I don’t think we’re ever the best judges of our own work. Some days, and I hope this happens to everybody so I don’t sound like a flaming egomaniac, everything I’ve written seems terrific. I’ve learned to my own chagrin that it’s a very, very bad idea to send work out on those days because, of course, most of what I’ve written is not terrific, at all. Most of what I’ve written is exercise.

GREEN: Well, you’re among the leaders in number of poems in *Rattle*, including one of the most popular ones on the website—they’re all hits here! You mentioned writing every day, and I get

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the feeling that you're very strict about it. How long have you been doing that, and what percentage would you say gets saved?

KNIGHT: Well, I'm happy to know I've got a hit single! That's gratifying, and it's also a reminder that you just don't know what's going to happen. I met the poet Anna Rabinowitz several years ago. She'd just come back from Europe, where she'd gone with the opera company that was performing an operatic version of her book, *Darkling*. She told me that after her book had come out from Tupelo, to some quiet attention, she got a call one day out of the blue, from someone who'd read the book and wanted to make it into an opera. So he did, and it was well enough received in New York that the company took it to Europe. When she finished telling me this, she said, "You just never know what's going to happen. So sit at your desk and do your work."

I thought of her when you called me about the prize. You really *don't* know what's going to happen. So sit at your desk and do your work. Really, that's the most useful advice any writer has ever given me.

I came back to writing poems in 1989, after a long hiatus. I was still writing during that time, mostly short stories, but I wasn't writing poems. I heard Robert Hass say once that when you write poems, there's a little bird at your ear saying, *Tell the truth. Tell the truth.* I'd been living a life whose truths I wasn't prepared to tell. In 1987, a poet friend had sent me two Mary Oliver poems, "Wild Geese" and "The Journey." I think it's fair to say they changed my life. Especially the last lines of "The Journey"—"determined to save / the only life you could save." That woke me up. I was in a bad marriage—a good man, but a bad marriage—and I realized I had to do something.

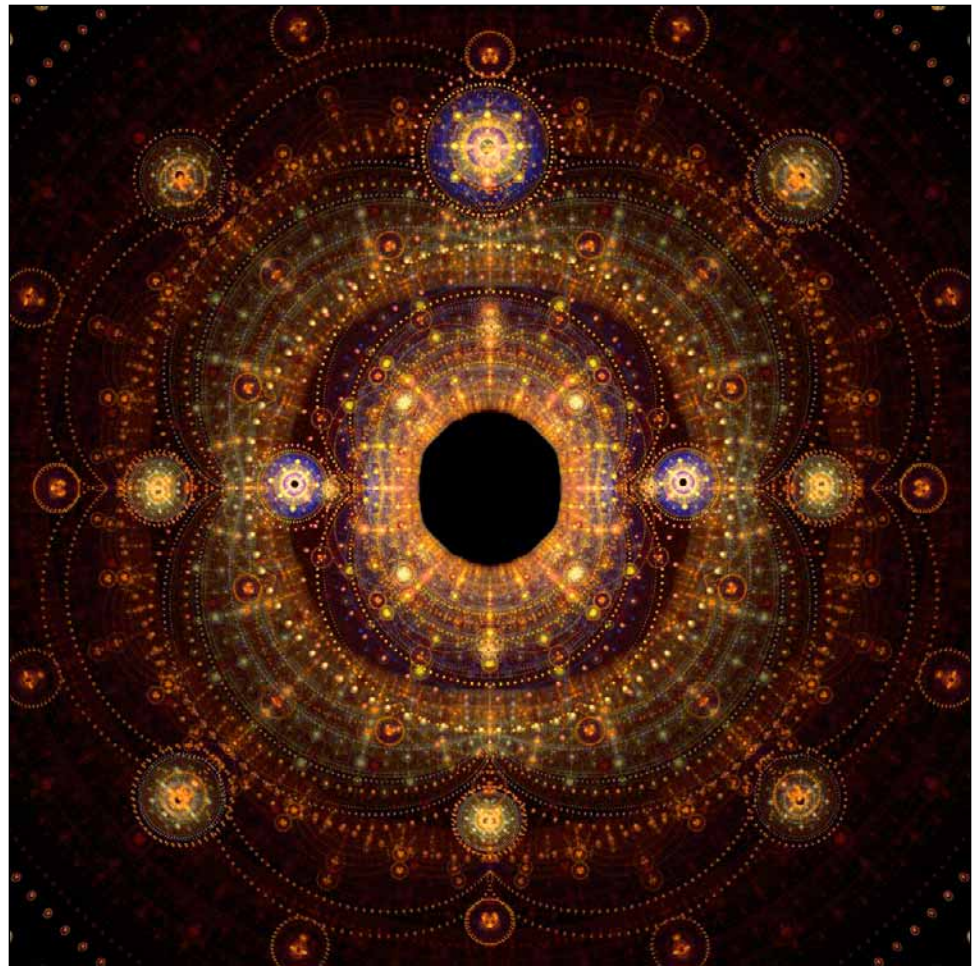
When we separated, I started to write poems again, and then I moved to California to reconnect with my mate Michael, whom I fell in love with when I was 21. He's been an enormous help to

me in all ways, not the least of which has been providing me with a room of my own to write in. It's a narrow room that backs into a Berkeley hillside. I can hear all that dark earth behind me when I write. This might sound a little crazy, but usually a line comes into my right ear when I sit down, and it seems to be coming from behind me, from that dark. I follow the line. Most of the time, it doesn't lead me anywhere new. One of my friends told me recently that he'd stopped writing for a while because he was writing the same poems he'd written ten years ago, only they were better then. I feel that quite a bit. I actually had to impose a moratorium on poems about my mother, I'd written so many of them. But now I'm all for breaking a self-imposed moratorium because otherwise,

I would have stopped myself from writing the *Rattle* poem!

You've heard me say that I used to teach with an artist who told his students at the beginning of every year, "There are a hundred bad drawings behind every good drawing, so let's get to work." I pretty much have to write my way through bad poems to get to the good one. I think it was Frost who said that a poet's lucky to get twelve good poems a year. That seems right to me—a dozen or so out of the 365 I write.

I have a couple of rules, besides sitting down to work at roughly the same time every day. (I've arranged my teaching schedule so that I can write every morning.) I don't talk to anybody before I write, if I can avoid it (except my dog Mia), and I never read my e-mail



Celestial
Stacy Reed

BOOK FEATURE - KNIGHT

before I write. That's an inflexible rule. Once I have a conversation, in real time or cyberspace, I'm finished. The ear gets shut off.

Sometimes the ear's shut off even if I haven't talked to anyone or gone online. When that happens, I grab a postcard from the basket of postcards I keep on my desk, all of them reproductions of paintings, and I write a poem about the painting. Last summer, because I was away from my desk for over six weeks, I set myself the task of writing a sonnet a day in a notebook. I stopped writing poems by hand when I was eighteen, so it was strange to be writing in a notebook, almost as if it were someone else doing it. I've heard many people say they *have* to write by hand, to feel the intimate connection between the hand moving the pen across the page and the mind, but I feel a more intimate and direct connection between the keyboard and my mind. I can type faster than I can write, so the censor is less apt to intervene.

I've always loved reading about writers' habits. Apollinaire facing a blank wall. Schiller with his feet in a bucket of ice water. Slowly I realized what works for one writer probably won't work for another. I have a friend who goes for weeks, even months, without writing anything at all, but when he sits down to write, the poem is there. So he does all his bad drawings in his head.

GREEN: Yeah, I think it's the ritual that matters, not what the ritual is. We have to clear a mental space for the poem to come through. A writer's rain-dance. And maybe it's just the placebo effect, but the rains come. Your feet on ice and poems come. The email rule, though, that must be universal! What if Homer'd had a Facebook?

Let's talk about *Again*. I love that title—"again" is the last word in the prologue, and then continues to ring through the rest of the book. The experience to me is like living in a house with a grandfather clock: the chimes are a relentless reminder that time is always turning over, and yet the sound itself is always at the very edge of consciousness.

I won't ask if that effect was intentional—because what is intention?—but how did the book come together? You said that 12 out of 365 poems are successful. After four years that becomes 48, but how do you turn those 48 poems into a coherent collection?

KNIGHT: I love what you say about the grandfather's clock. When I was three or four, my doctor had a grandfather's clock in his waiting room, and I can still hear it. I've never heard another clock quite as beautiful. Beautiful, but also melancholy. Of course I had no idea of melancholy at the time. I just knew the clock's sound made me want to sit very still. Stop, time!

So the thought of your almost hearing a grandfather's clock in the background as you read the poems in *Again* pleases me immensely, even if I didn't intend that. I did intend for the book to be about loss, and then going on despite the loss.

It took me a while to find the title. *Again* was maybe the fifth or sixth choice. I don't even remember all the others. The first was *Recovery*, after one of the poems, but friends said that sounded too much like an AA manual. When I submitted the manuscript to Sixteen Rivers, the title was *Against Grieving*. I liked the double sense of "against"—I thought of the poems as being about grieving, up against it, but also in opposition to it because we can't go on grieving forever; we have to accept loss.

But it's so hard to do that! It is for me, anyway. One of my favorite poems is Lawrence's "Piano," and I love it because I don't think any other poem has ever captured for me the passionate and tender anguish of that longing to go back, to be the child under the piano again. And the idea of being *under* the piano, sheltered by it—the piano becomes a metonymy of his mother, really, so it's a longing to go back to her. Maybe to the womb. Stop, time, again!

Anyway, nobody at Sixteen Rivers liked the title *Against Grieving*, and since it's a collective, they all got to weigh in with their dislike. Their arguments were

persuasive, so I started casting about for another title. I ended up with *Then Time*, which seemed to me to say what I had wanted to say with *Against Grieving* but in a more interesting way. But alas. One of the Sixteen Rivers members pointed out to me that there's a poem called "Then, Time" in Robert Hass's *Time and Materials*, which had just come out. And which I'd just read—so it seemed like theft, however unconscious.

At first, I wanted to keep *Then Time*, but finally I decided it would be better to find something of my own. So I kept reading through the manuscript with the faith that something would pop out at me, some word or phrase. Nothing did. I put the manuscript aside for a week or so, and when I next picked it up, I got as far as the first poem, "Prologue." I saw the last word, *again*, and I thought, *That's it!* Everything fell into place. It was already in place, but now I understood why more clearly.

How everything fell into place isn't a process I can describe easily. It's not as if I'm following any clearly defined plan, but it's not random, either. It doesn't feel as much like thinking as it does like knowing. Intuitively, I just know that this poem belongs here and not there, and then somehow (and often reluctantly) I know that this one doesn't belong, at all.

I remember hearing Tree Swenson say, way back in the early '90s at a Bay Area Publishers Conference, that the days were over when you could just slap all your good poems between covers and call it a book: Now you had to have a theme. I had just started writing poems again, and this was before I had enough good poems to put between covers, let alone a theme. I remember thinking, *Now I need a THEME? I'll never get a book published.*

Sometimes when I'm putting a manuscript together, I think of what Tree Swenson said, and it makes it easier for me to cut poems that don't belong. Still, it's always happened that when the manuscript's a book, there are a few poems I wish I'd left out, others I wish I'd put back in. You could spend your whole life revising one book, though. At some

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point, you just have to move on. How did Valéry say it? You never really finish writing something, but at some point, you have to abandon it. Like the character in Camus who writes the same first page over and over and over, perfecting it, but never manages to get past it to the novel itself.

At that same publishing conference, I heard Tom Centolella, whose first book had recently come out, say that having a book changes nothing for you as a poet. I'm paraphrasing, but he said that you *think* everything's going to change when you finally have a book, but nothing changes. The pages are just as blank as they always were when you sit down to write. I thought, *Easy for you to say*. But I think he was right, too. Nothing changes. The book goes into the world, and nothing changes, whether it's your first book or your fourth. The pages are just as blank when you sit down to write. Of course, *something* could change. You just never know, to go back to Anna Rabinowitz, so sit at your desk and do your work.

GREEN: There's a lot I want to come back to here, but first let's go off on a tangent—I didn't realize Sixteen Rivers Press was a collective. Can you explain how that works? Looking it up now, it seems like an unusual model—between a collective and a traditional small press. There are six founding members, and ten additional members selected in a manuscript competition. I assume you're one of the latter, since your earlier books weren't published with Sixteen Rivers. Is your membership now permanent? What's your experience been in contributing to the press?

KNIGHT: I guess "hybrid between a collective and a traditional small press" is a good way of putting it. The collective is modeled on Alice James, and it takes its name from the sixteen rivers that flow into the San Francisco Bay. The aim is to produce beautiful books, inside and out. There's not a prize offered in the competition, but then again there is a prize—if your manuscript is selected, the press

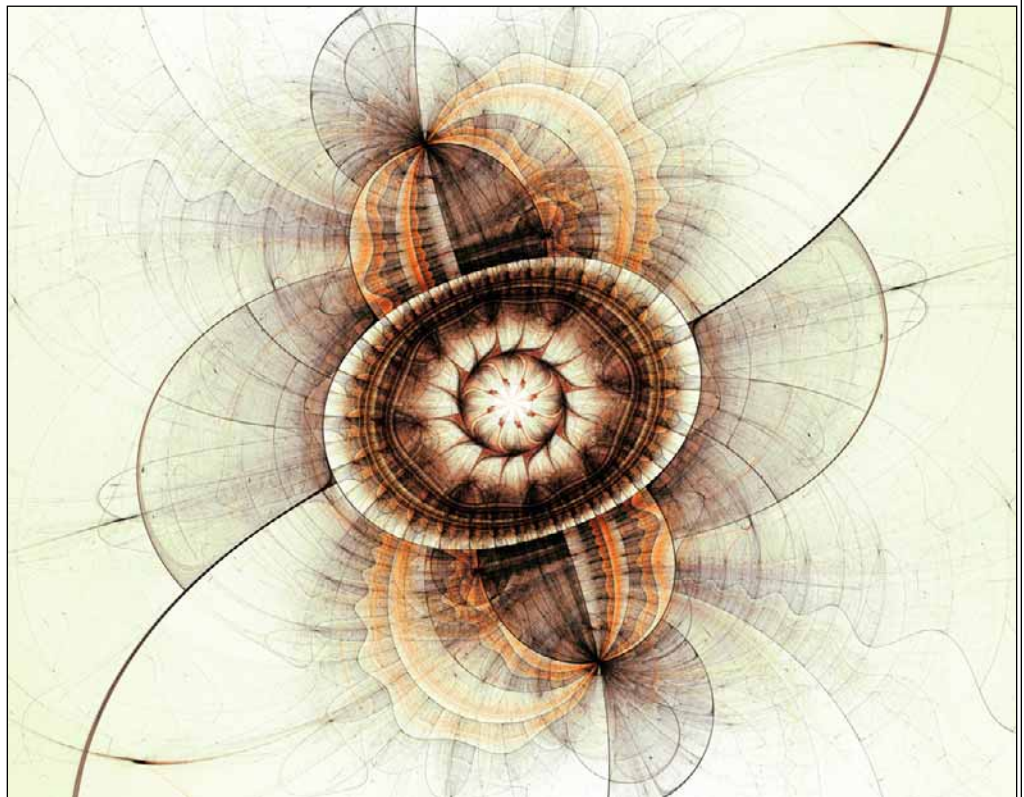
"gives" you \$5,000 to produce your book. You get to choose the designer and cover, you get to choose the font and the printer, and you get to decide, finally, what poems to include. All of that is subject to press approval, but I don't think anyone's choices on content or design have ever not been approved. Suggestions have been made, opinions expressed, but nobody's ever invoked our equivalent of a nuclear option—on any matter that comes before the press, any member has the right to invoke his or her "I can't approve of this, and I can't stand aside to let it happen." We do everything by consensus. That can be pretty slow and messy at times, and sometimes one or another of us is left disgruntled, but there's enough mutual respect for all of us to move forward for the good of the press.

Members have to attend monthly business meetings, and they're expected to work an average of ten hours a month for the press. There's not an office; we're

a floating operation, so we meet in different people's homes, one month in Marin to accommodate those on that side of the bay, and the next month in the East Bay. Poets are active members for three years; after that, a poet can choose to remain active, become a supporting member (without a vote but also without the obligation to attend monthly meetings), or leave the press altogether.

Besides individual collections, the press has produced a CD, *Naming the Rivers*, of the Sixteen Rivers poets reading their poems, and an anthology, *The Place that Inhabits Us*, which just came out. Murray Silverstein was the mover and shaker behind both projects. I think the anthology, which deliberately doesn't have poems by Sixteen Rivers poets, will really attract attention to the press—good attention because it's a thoughtfully arranged and beautifully produced book.

I'm basically a recluse, so the idea of joining a collective seemed a bit odd even



Connect
Stacy Reed

BOOK FEATURE - KNIGHT

to be contemplating, but I'm glad I did it. I've made what I hope will be lasting friendships. And then having eleven poets scrutinize and comment on my manuscript really helped me refine it. I think the book is stronger than the manuscript I submitted.

GREEN: That sounds like a great model for making books, actually. But back to yours... It's interesting that *Again* and *Against* in one of your earlier titles are derived the same word, the Old English for "opposite." Yet *Again* has come to mean a return and rebirth, rather than merely resistance. In a way, *Again* transcends *Against*—it's really the perfect title for the book, and it was hidden right there in your early title the whole time. That's a great example of how a collection comes together, I think—through a kind of intuitive evolution. As you said, "it doesn't feel so much like thinking as it does like knowing." Do you think that's the same creative process that's behind individual poems? After you've written a poem, do you think the poem had really been there hidden in your psyche the whole time, or do you think the process of writing actually made something new? I guess this is the poetry version of the chicken-or-the-egg question...

KNIGHT: I had no idea the two words had the same origin. I never thought about it, and I never even saw the one inside the other till you pointed this out! Now I'll never see either word without thinking of both of them—like learning a new word and seeing it all over the place, where it was all along before you were able to recognize it.

It's strange to think of the title being "hidden" inside the rejected title all along. That reminds me of something Jack Gilbert said about a poem I took to a workshop of his in the early '90s. Maybe he just said it out of kindness because it wasn't a good poem. But what he said was, basically, *Okay, fine, but now write the poem behind that poem.* That was eighteen or nineteen years ago, and I still haven't gotten to the poem behind the poem. I can feel a physical

block going up when I try, like part of a dream my conscious mind won't let me get back to.

So, by way of answering your question obliquely, I'm sure that when I write *that* poem, if I ever do, it will feel like a poem that's been hidden in my psyche—maybe it's more accurate to say hidden by my psyche.

I don't like to think about the creative process too much; I'm too superstitious, and I'm always afraid too much scrutiny will chase everything away. I certainly hope I'm going to write something new every time I sit down at my desk. Pound's *Make it new!* got etched into my psyche early on. But how do we do that? I guess that's the struggle we all face.

Not that I really think of writing as a struggle. I think of it as work, but not in any toiling sense. I'm not tearing my hair out. Something works. Something doesn't work. Why? Why aren't I better than this after all this practice? What if I were playing an instrument, and practicing like this every day? Where would I be? Well, I'd probably be one of those musicians who play for several symphonies and spend much of their lives racing up and down highways and freeways from one gig to another. It can be grueling, sure, but at least they get to play their instruments; they get to do the thing they love. Language is my instrument. I'm way better at playing it than I ever was at playing the piano. I have to practice more than seems reasonable, and sure, I'd love to be first violinist. But that just isn't going to happen. I try to console myself by thinking you can't make an orchestra out of first violinists. You need the minor voices. I remember being at Michigan and hearing Donald Hall tell me I was going to be a "minor A poet." I thought, *Minor my ass!* I was twenty, so of course I thought nothing could stop me.

GREEN: Well, I don't believe in major or minor—half of art is accident, and the other half is luck.

If I had to characterize your work with a one-liner, it would be something like "illumination through loss." Do you

ever feel too exposed when sharing your writing with the world? Some of the most powerful poems for me in the book are about bulimia—the "ox-hunger" and all of the emotions that are dragged along with it. Even in a contemporary poetry landscape where Confessional voices have reigned for 50 years, that subject is still somewhat taboo. Your self-exploration is so unflinching—do you ever flinch?

KNIGHT: Well, I haven't gotten to the poem behind that poem in eighteen years, so that's one long flinch, I guess.

I don't think I could have written about my bulimia unless I felt I'd come a long way away from it. Past flinching distance, I guess. I was bulimic for almost nine years. I stopped on my own, without therapy but with a powerful impetus. I was living in upstate New York then, and one of my students, a beautiful, bright, wonderful boy, was killed in a horrible farm accident. In the face of his death, it seemed wrong for me to be doing something so self-destructive. So I stopped.

As for "illumination through loss"—first, thank you, since that's really what I'm trying to do in writing about loss—to move beyond the loss. So it's more than gratifying that you see something of that in the work.

I understand some of the reasons for my preoccupation with loss, but I always feel I could write a thousand poems about loss and still not finish getting to the poem behind the poem, the one that's *really* going to say what I need to say. I think this is a lucky thing. If I didn't feel this, I might not be so willing to sit at my desk every day.

GREEN: Earlier you mentioned that nothing changes once a book is published—it's just back to your desk to face the same blank page once again. So where are you going from here? Your recent collections have moved through a loose cycle of love, loss, betrayal and renewal—do you avoid those topics now? Do you try to focus where the writing goes, or do you still let yourself go where it takes you?

BOOK FEATURE - KNIGHT

KNIGHT: Maybe I should avoid those topics for fear of repeating myself, but I think they really *are* the topics, for anybody. How we bear the unbearable, how we endure loss, how we manage to find or hold onto faith despite betrayal—even if we know these questions are unanswerable, I think it's our job to keep asking them. To paraphrase Ginsberg, to keep putting our lonely shoulders to the wheel.

That said, I always wish I could be more political, or more experimental, or more—well, more whatever it would take to move from the minors to the majors. Probably everybody wishes that at some time or other, even some of the majors. You can't will these things into being. Or I can't, anyway. If I try, I'm not even writing exercises. I'm just writing junk.

GREEN: Thanks, Lynne, I think this will be very helpful for everyone working to keep their own wheels turning.

✪ ✪



Simplexity Earth

Stacy Reed

PROLOGUE

from *AGAIN*
Lynne Knight

While we slept, such heavy rain swept past
it shook the last roses loose. They lay
smashed on the deck this morning, their petals
scattered like big white tears. I shouldn't say
a thing so sentimental. But there they were.
And you, my father, so long dead, why
should I not expect you to be everywhere,
reminding me how little will be left—
vague ache in my own daughter's heart
as she sweeps the steps after rain whose mercy
is all in the coming, the coming again.

WANTING

Knightgown, they called me, and how I wished
a nightgown would descend on me whenever
I stood before them, to hide my fat girl body
from their mocking eyes and tongues.
*You may be the smartest girl in the class,
but you're also the fattest!* All these years later,
I can still name the one who shouted that,
remember looking down at the rough dirt

playground, strewn with maple seeds,
then back up to the old brick building where,
the day before, I'd been made to go recite
the Gettysburg Address, lean speech
the fat fourth-grade phenomenon reeled off
to every class, blood rising high in high
school boys' faces as they laughed behind
their hands. *Now we are engaged...*

I grew to hate my arms and legs, the way
my stomach sat like something extra
in my lap. My whole body seemed extra,
an outer fleshy suit sealed tight to the one
I knew was truly mine, the long slim lithe one
like my sister's, like those of girls in books I read,
or almost all the other girls who lived, but when
I climbed trees to dream of it, the branches

threatened to give way, and I trembled,
clutching the firm, fat trunk, my twin.
Being slow at books would be far worse,
but how much worse I seemed to know
less and less. Then, thirteen, I fasted
during Lent. My clothes began to drift past
the extra body I was killing off, uneaten
sweet by sweet. I loved denying her. I loved

the strange sensation of walking light
into a room. Most of all, I loved the end
of taunts. Then one night in the mirror I saw
the fat one pouring back inside the shadows
of my thinness. She looked so lost.
Still, I turned away. But she never left me.
Not even the cries of lovers alter her. Night
after night, she lies in my arms, wanting.

GHOST SAILING

The boat came slowly, sails reefed,
no one at the till. *Ghost sailing*,
the woman thought, watching from
a point just north along the shore.

The moon lay its broken path
over the bay. At moments
she felt she might glide forth,
walk across water. If ghosts

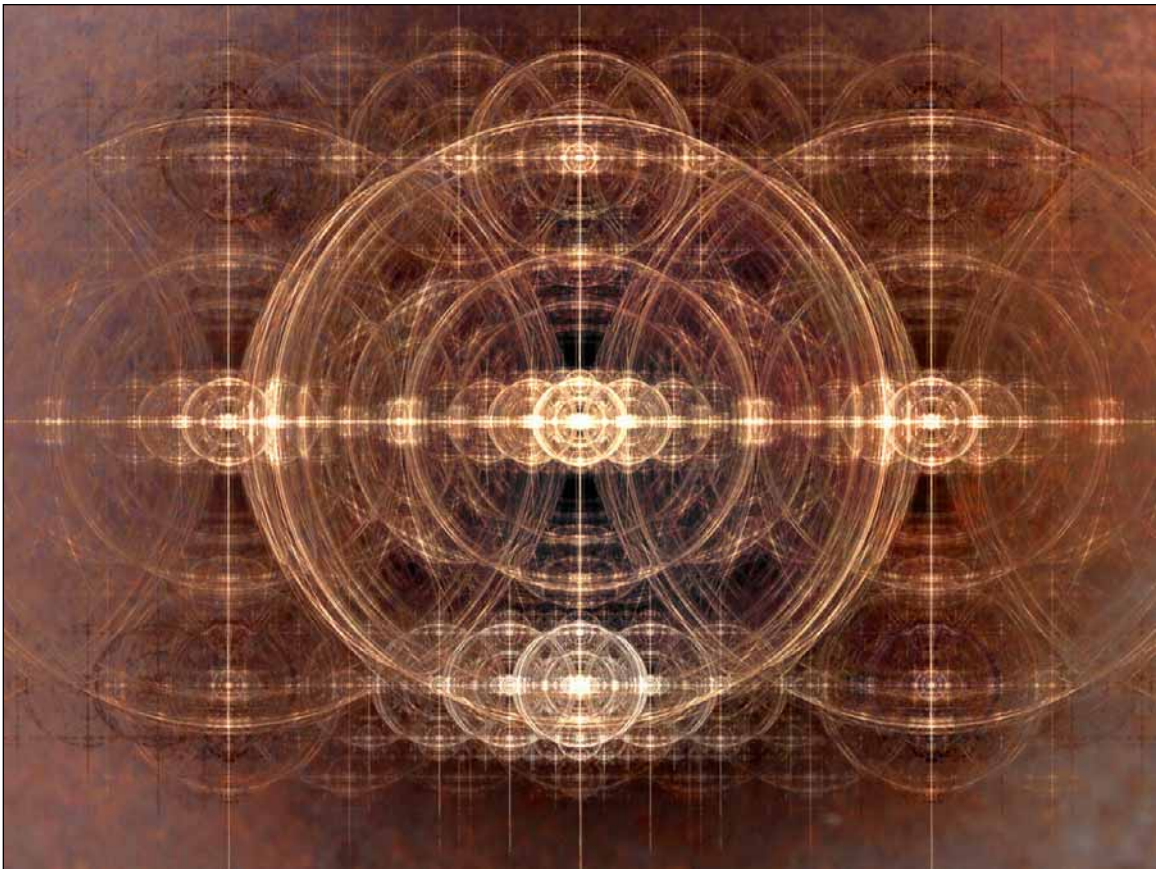
could sail... But she stood
where she was below the rush
of stars. She'd left her lover
sleeping, then driven down the hill,

their pointless argument resounding.
Was he planning to leave her?
The boat banged like a door
against the rocky shore. She took

a few steps toward it, thinking
someone hidden in the hull
might waken. Nothing but the mast
pressing its shadow at the water

like a sketch begun, begun again.
Then the boat listed hard, settled.
He would stir when she slipped
back into bed, reaching out

as she did now, wanting
to feel the boat's skin
but sensing it too cold
and not, anyway, hers.



Relics
Stacy Reed

THE SEVERING

from *AGAIN*
Lynne Knight

When the dog brought the pig's head
from the farm across the street and dropped it
on the back walk, it was midsummer, warm
even deep at night, so by dawn the flies
were already stirring their hard bodies
toward it. By the time I came out to shake
crumbs from the tablecloth, the head moved
like a live thing with their gorging.

The dog lay unroused by all the buzzing,
himself gorged on brain and blood.
I didn't scream. I draped the cloth
over the porch rail and went down
to squat beside the thing. I took a stick
from the lawn, poked a little, making
flies swirl up like smoke and settle back.
The dog watched through a barely open eye.

A stupid dog, who the week before had herded
the Hannos's cows onto the farmhouse porch,
then sat and barked as they clattered back
and forth, their blank eyes spinning wild.
I poked some more and saw a pig eye
missing. The cut-off veins and gristle
clotted over bones I didn't know enough
anatomy to name. I waited there

as if for revelation. Inside the house,
the man I claimed to love had finished
with his coffee. I heard the water rinse
his cup, heard the click that lit another
cigarette. Then nothing but the flies,
moving like a heavy dream you know
you'll keep the feel of when you wake.
I touched the small red branches

of a vein high on my thigh, first sign
my legs were aging. Sometimes his tongue
moved there, moved slowly there, in ragged
circles—like the flies I brushed at then in quick
revulsion, standing as I threw the stick,

dizzying just as he came down the steps.
What in hell, he said, and went to get a shovel.
That afternoon a downpour washed away the stain.

I could tell you I dreamed the severed head,
sign of what I knew I had to do. But it was real,
as real as all my lies there, where I lived
another dozen years, dreaming of another

life, one that wouldn't distance me from all
I longed for. As if a life were not continuous
with longing. As if I'd ever stop those years
from meaning all they do beyond their severing.

IN A TIME OF MOURNING

After the rain had fallen through her skin
night and day for a month whose name
was washed away, she began to swim
from her body like dreams she had lost

years ago, and nothing impeded her;
she slid through barbed wire fences,
climbed slick rock faces, kept
going through caves where light

would have seemed a grotesque eruption
from dank wall or floor. She forgot all
the words she'd been stuck in:
Desire. Betrayal. Ambition.

Reeds gave way for her; she slipped
over roads like streams. She was being
washed clean. She swam until houses
fell through her hands like water,

until horses and dogs shook wings
and carried her dead to high ground.
It never seemed like prayer. The earth
was mostly water, and she swam.



EYE CONTACT:

A LOOK AT VISUAL POETRY WITH DAN WABER

#2: Denise Fontaine-Pincince

People ask me all the time, “What is visual poetry?” and after decades I find that my answer changes every time. I like to think it always improves, or that over time it shows a general tendency to improve, but then I remember the classic blunder of confusing the quantitative with the qualitative. Visual poetry isn’t quantitative, and neither are its useful definitions. Visual poetry is qualitative, and so are its useful definitions.

I’m a pluralist by nature, and tend to prefer solutions that are inclusive rather than exclusive. Poetry in general, and visual poetry in particular, continues to interest me after a lifetime of exploration because of their slippery resistance to being told what they can’t be, what they aren’t. You can say what visual poetry is, but, you run into trouble any time you try to say what it isn’t.

These two pieces by Denise Fontaine-Pincince exist in a place where some might like to say this isn’t visual poetry, it’s a visual accompanying poetry. I say look a little longer, look a little deeper, spread your arms and spin for a bit within the field of tensions these pieces establish, twist them open and you’ll see that they’re not like peanuts with a couple of meaty bits inside, they’re more like milkweed.

How does that happen? I think it happens when form and content, or in this case when text and visual, are in an augmentative relationship. Picture the continuum of physical book aesthetics. At one end you have the trade paperback, which is all about the text. The book object itself is nothing more than the delivery (and marketing) device. At the other end you have exercises in fine book binding, many of which don’t even

include text, because they’ve concerned themselves so completely with the book object that text is no longer needed. In the middle is the sub-continuum of artist’s books, which, at their best, so completely blur the line between form and content that they fuse into a cognitive arch able to support more weight than the sum of its columns.

So, too, with these pieces. The visual and textual components work together in ways that are augmentative. The visual shape, the materials, the arrangement, are all calculated to not simply frame or be substrate to the text, but to support, lift, blend, fuse, embrace, and dance with it.

Visual poetry, by my definition (today), is when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.



DENISE FONTAINE-PINCINCE, before coming to art and poetry, owned a private elementary school, and a large day care center. After selling her 25-year-old business, she enrolled in Lesley University’s MFA in Creative Writing Program and graduated in June of 2009. Two of her recent projects, *Laundry: Stories in Poetry and Paint*, and *Hardware: Art and Poetry*, can be viewed at: www.poetryandpaint.com

DAN WABER is a visual poet and multimedia artist living in Kingston, PA. For more, please visit his website: www.logolalia.com



Lesson #1

Denise Fontaine-Pincince



Sterling

Denise Fontaine-Pincince



THE IMPERTINENT DUET: TRANSLATING POETRY WITH ART BECK

#3: *Finding Yet Another Way to Say What Can't Be Said Any Other Way*

The American Literary Translators Association is a loosely knit, unique organization where academics and professional linguists interact with an eclectic mix of creative writers and poets. (A number of its members wear all the above hats.) A perennial topic at annual conferences is the question of translating poetic form. What follows is adapted from my notes for a 2003 panel talk on translating form in poetry. "Reading papers" is strictly forbidden at ALTA panels, and hopefully this piece retains some of the conversational dynamic of an ALTA conference.

Let me preface by saying that I plan to talk about some specific Rilke poems—some of which I translated in “free-form” in the late ’70s. And re-translated more formally in the last several years. But before getting specific, I’d like to talk about what I think are some of the general questions inherent in translating form into similar form. Some of these have to do with something as basic as positing a definition of poetry.

I don’t know if my experience is similar to yours, but for years I happily wrote poetry without giving much of a thought to poetics. It wasn’t until I started translating that questions of the theory began to get insistent.

Until then, I have to confess I never asked myself what constituted a poem. But when you take on the task of translating someone else’s poem in someone else’s language into a poem in your language—you do have to ask yourself—just what is a poem?

I began translating poetry in the early ’70s—a time when hardly anyone thought of writing in anything but free verse. This made defining a poem harder than, say, in the 19th or early 20th century when end line rhyme schemes dominated. Then a poem either rhymed or—it wasn’t a poem.

Along these lines, a 19th century

American translator of Horace, William Peterfield Trent wrote:

When the translator makes up his mind to attempt a close approximation to the Horatian meter, it would seem that he should eschew the use of rhyme as likely to operate against that effect of likeness to the original which he is striving to secure. *But, since the use of rhyme in lyric poetry appears...to be essential at present if the English version is to be acceptable as poetry*, this close approximation can be desirable in a few special cases, only.

From the 18th through the 19th century, Horace was almost universally cast in strictly rhymed translations. Of course, this kind of thing grates today. Horace wrote in formal meters, but rhyme was only an incidental embellishment in his poetry. Why artificially impose a rhyme scheme that isn’t there? *But can't the same objection be made to ignoring a rhyme scheme in the original?*

What Trent said is also good to keep in mind if anyone is inclined to question why the modernists felt the need for liberation from rhyme schemes. But, now we’re liberated and we face the other side of the coin.

There’s a 1948 entry in the Greek Nobel laureate George Seferis’ (mid 20th century) diary that contrasts formal and

informal ages and implicitly points up one of the problems inherent when an “in-formalist” tries to mimic a formalist. To quote Seferis:

In Byzantine art everything is traditional, predetermined by tradition... It is a “god-given” art...it issues from the “Sacred Scarf,” the icons are miraculous because they are god-given; its basis is imitation. And yet, in spite of what people say, it has lived, with intermittent reflowering, for so many centuries. *In this art the excellent artist excels by a minute deviation from the traditional...* The ultimate evil of the Byzantines is ossification, the ultimate evil for us is dissolution.

In other words, in formal periods the craft may lie in the constraints—but the art is always a jailbreak. The in-formalist trying to imitate the formalist needs to remember that breaking into jail isn’t very exciting.

Of course, informal poetry, as Seferis says, has its own danger—dissolution. The danger of becoming mere “words on paper.” For me, one working definition of a poem—formal or informal—is: *an arrangement of words that has reached the point of becoming something that can't be said in any other way*—the point where language talks back to you.

But this is of course hopefully the case with the poem you’re translating. *So how do you find another way of saying what can't be said any other way?*

I’m going to offer the opinion that one way you can’t do it is simply by imitation. From the time Robert Lowell used *Imitations* as a title for his collection of loose translations, I’ve always disliked calling translations “imitations.” And I think Lowell’s translations are the opposite of what I perceive as “imitation.” For me, imitation is akin to a slavish art forgery.

Conversely, I think a successful poetic translation reaches into the original, and draws as much directly from the landscape that’s portrayed as from the original poem’s portrayal. The object of the translation is, ideally, not the

THE IMPERTINENT DUET

“portrait,” but the subject of the portrait: *A new poem that attempts to tap the same source the original poem tapped.*

That, of course, is what Lowell was doing and, while his caveat not to expect a literal translation was appropriate, I wish he had used a different word. I’d have preferred “performance.”

What I think is essential to a “performance” is—for want of a better word—what I characterize as the “internalization” process. The long, slow taking in of the original until you reach a point where you’re no longer working with the energy of words in the source language, but in your own. So that like a fledgling swimmer plucked from a pool and tossed into a river, the poem and its images either sink or swim on its own in English. (Or whatever language you’re writing in.)

The implication with any performance is that the performer won’t be invisible. But that presence may be more or less noticeable. For example, you can’t listen to John Lewis’ adaptations of Bach without being aware that Lewis is a jazz pianist having a dialogue with Bach. What he’s playing isn’t quite jazz, isn’t quite Bach—but there’s a distinct sense that Bach might tap his foot and smile. Glenn Gould is a pure classical pianist, but are his renditions of the Goldberg Variations—music originally written for a plucked keyboard and reborn with all the dynamic nuances of the pianoforte and Gould’s rich ear—any more “pure Bach” than John Lewis’ syncopated renditions?

Which brings us back to breaking in and out of jail. What happens with Gould and Lewis—with any performer worth listening to—is that they’re enraptured—*arrested* if you will—by the piece they’re performing. They’re already in jail and free to plot their break.

ORPHEUS

In poetry, the “jailbreak” is the difference between writing *into* a form or *out of* a form. Perhaps it’s worth remembering that Rilke whipped out the 55 Sonnets to Orpheus in what he claimed was a two

week space in 1922. It’s obvious he wasn’t writing into but out of the form—the way Charlie Parker might roll out chorus after chorus of the blues. I use Parker as an example, rather than someone more traditional, say Jimmy Rushing, because in the Orpheus sequence I think Rilke stood the traditional sonnet on its head.

The sonnet form often takes on an almost geometric progression leading to a “closed conclusion.” The Sonnets to Orpheus, and even some earlier Rilke sonnets such as Archaic Torso, tend instead to take flight and end with harmonic ambiguities and open statements. It’s worth noting, I think, that when Rilke returned to the sonnet form for this late in life sequence, he said he wanted an “*open*,” “*conjugated*” sonnet, i.e. something both akin to and yet not a traditional sonnet.

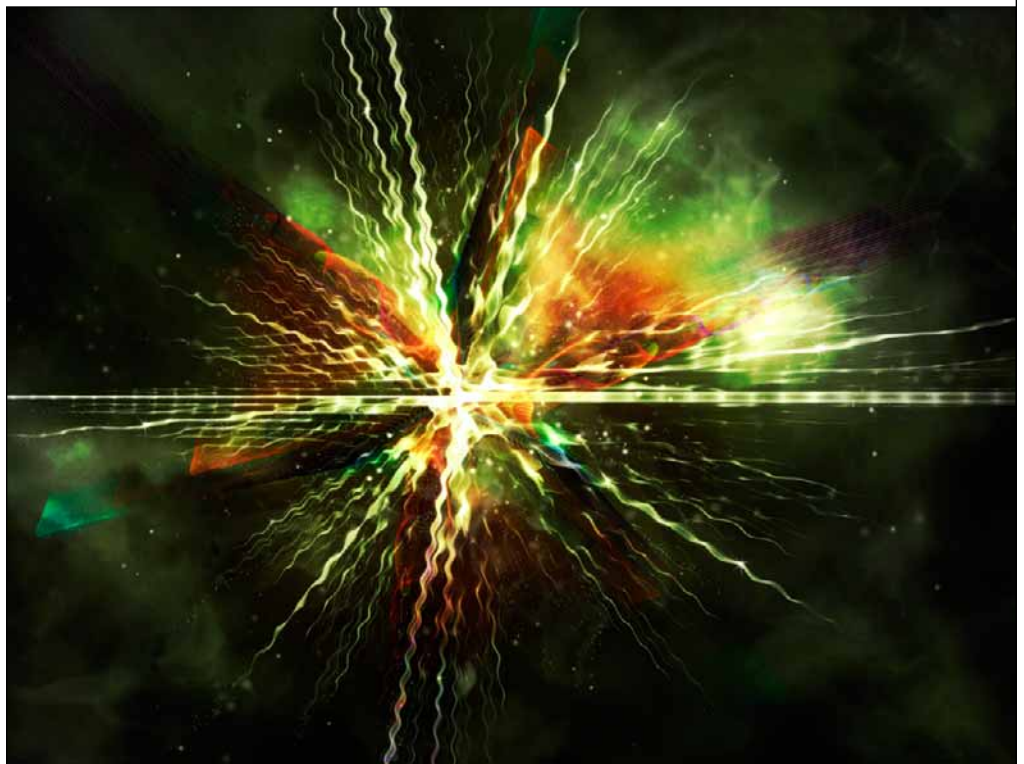
One of the problems in translating these poems formally is that I don’t think we have any precedent for them in the traditional closed iambic logic of the

English sonnet. They almost require a new sense of form in English. I’ve always felt that Rilke stands with one foot in the 19th and century with the other firmly planted in 21st. So for me, the main danger in translating these essentially modern—maybe even still emergent—poems is that in chasing form we may risk pushing back into the 19th century rather than to following to where the poem is pulling us.

But conversely, how can you ignore the question of form in a poem like #5 Volume 1 of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. My translation is still in an early draft, but far enough along I think to demonstrate a point.

As an aside, one reason I’m tentative about the quality of my translation attempt is that Rilke’s poem has such big historic echoes—Shakespeare’s sonnet #55: “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme...”

And Horace’s Ode #30, book 3, which Shakespeare probably drew on for



Big Bang Baby

Stacy Reed

THE IMPERTINENT DUET

his sonnet #55. The Horace ode opens (in Burton Raffel's translation): "The monument I've made for myself will outlast/ brass, reaches higher than Egyptian/ kings and their pyramids..."

Rilke, in his sonnet, focuses not on his own mastery, but on the prototypical mythic poet, Orpheus, who serves throughout the sequence as a persona for Rilke, the poet and man. And distinct from its predecessors, Rilke's sonnet speaks to the vulnerability as well as durability of poetry. It begins:

*Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Laßt die Rose
nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Gunsten blühen.
Denn Orpheus ist. Seine Metamorphose
in dem und dem. Wir sollen uns nicht mühen...*

Don't erect memorials of stone. Just let
the rose
bloom every spring as his token. Because this
too is Orpheus—another of his
metamorphoses
into one thing or another. Why stress
ourselves

deciphering all his names? If there's singing,
now and forever, it's Orpheus as he comes
and goes.

Isn't it enough that every so often he lingers
a few days with the rose petals in the bowl?

So much of him has to wither so you
can know.
That frightens him too, as he fades. But just
as his
word goes beyond what's here, what's now—

he's already there: alone where you can't be.
The bars of the lyre strings don't cramp his
fingers. Even transgressing he obeys.

A poem, I think, not only about the coexistence of life and death in poetry, but, incidentally, about form and the jailbreak of art.

SOME SAMPLES—FREE VS. "COPY" FORM

Below are samples of my old and more recent translations of two of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*. The first versions date from a volume I published in the early '80s and obviously the translations aren't in

sonnet form.

Let me tell you a little of what I was trying to do. At the time Rilke wasn't the icon in America he's since become. The only translations I was aware of were Mrs. Norton's and Mac Intyre's and a few others dating from the '30s and '40s. But this was also the time that David Young's iconoclastic translations of the *Duino Elegies* started coming out in Field. They bowled me over. Young recast the *Elegies* in William Carlos Williams-like triplets that seemed to energize and focus the rambling poems. This was a poet I didn't recognize in Norton or Mac Intyre. So I started playing with translating Rilke on my own—not the *Elegies* but the *New Poems* and *Orpheus* sonnets. Above all, I wanted to hang onto that "21st century leg." Not only, sad to say, did I not have the slightest interest in the sonnet form, I couldn't have written one if I wanted to. I was a child of my time.

I still like some of those old translations although I wouldn't do them this way again. I imagine some of you may like them, and others will grit your teeth. But—I think—for reasons other than formal vs. informal. It's interesting that the editor of the chapbook series these first appeared in was a budding formalist and I got surprisingly warm feedback on my 1983 volume from other dedicated formalists. But for a lot of people, these won't sound like the Rilke they've come to love. It's the *voice not the form*—and that voice was intentional on my part.

I'm also including my recent, more "formalist" translations. The new versions were prompted by a challenge from someone I respected, but the re-translation went far beyond a re-casting as "faux sonnets." In revisiting the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, I found that in my young enthusiasm I'd often left half the poem on the table. But what didn't change much, I think, was the voice—for me Rilke's "voice" seems to live in the harmonic, half elusive images—not especially the rhyme or meter. Rather in a more subtle underlying music that resonates with what might be said as much as with what's said.

I should note that I use the term faux-sonnet because none of these use full rhyme. Some of it may be a continued lack of skill on my part, but over time I've also come to feel that English has come from being the language of a small island to being a planetary language. There's no longer any one correct way to speak it. It's too dynamic and fluid. And for me at least, it likes assonance and corresponding words and hints of rhyme. When I find myself using full rhyme, it's usually in a comic mode.

For readers accustomed to a "different" Rilke voice, I can only offer that as with any performance, the choices are personal and will vary between performers. I think it's wonderful that America is rich enough to have dozens of versions of the *Sonnets to Orpheus*—the Germans can only have one. But, of course, they've kept the best for themselves.



ART BECK is a San Francisco poet and translator who's published two translation volumes: *Simply to See: Poems of Lurorius* (Poltrou Press, Berkeley, 1990) and a selection *Rilke* (Elysian Press, New York, 1983). His chapbook, *Summer with all its Clothes Off*, is reviewed by Ellaraine Lockie in *Rattle E-Reviews*. His article on Rilke, *And Yet Another Archaic Torso—Why?* can be accessed in the Australian online journal Jacket at: www.jacketmagazine.com

X (PART TWO)

1980'S TRANSLATION

As long as it presumes to exist as a soul
instead of an obedient thing, the machine
manages to threaten everything we've acquired, it
edges the stones for our formidable buildings squarely,
just to stop the master craftsman's hand from
making a lovely, tentative spectacle of itself.

We don't know how to leave it behind, never
escape it just once. Even oiling
in the quiet factory, it still
belongs to itself. It's life! It's sure
it knows what's best for us when
it sorts out, fashions and destroys with
equal determination... For us, for

whom existence is a hopeless magic, creation
something still erupting at a
hundred different places, a game
of pure powers no one seems to

be able to touch without dropping
to his knees in admiration. The words
that flow so tenderly from
the unsayable. Self replenishing music
building her consecrated house of trembling
stone in every useless place.

ORIGINAL

Alles Erworbne bedroht die Maschine, solange
sie sich erdreistet, im Geist, statt im Gehorchen, zu sein.
Daß nicht der herrlichen Hand schöneres Zögern mehr prange,
zu dem entschlossenern Bau schneidet sie steifer den Stein.

Nirgends bleibt sie zurück, daß wir *ein* Mal entröhnen
und sie in stiller Fabrik ölend sich selber gehört.
Sie ist das Leben—sie meint es am besten zu können,
die mit dem gleichen Entschluß ordnet und schafft und zerstört.

Aber noch ist uns das Dasein verzaubert; an hundert
?Stellen ist es noch Ursprung. Ein Spielen von reinen
?Kräften, die keiner berührt, der nicht kniet und bewundert.

Worte gehen noch zart am Unsäglichen aus...
Und die Musik, immer neu, aus den bebendsten Steinen,
baut im unbrauchbaren Raum ihr vergöttliches Haus.

from RILKE: SONNETS TO ORPHEUS*tr. by Art Beck*

MY MORE CURRENT VERSION

So long as it presumes to exist as a soul, not just an obedient
tool, the machine menaces everything we've gained. It squares
the bricks for our ambitious projects perfectly—and keeps
the master craftsman's hesitant hand from coaxing their

lovely glow. We don't know how to escape it:
To, just once, leave it behind. Even oiling in the quiet factory, it
answers to itself. It's life! It's sure it knows what's best for us
as it sorts, and fashions and destroys with equal determination.

For us...for whom existence is nothing if not magic, a graceful
fountain still erupting at a hundred different places, a game of pure
powers we're unable to touch without genuflecting

in wonder. Words that still whisper from things
there are no words for. Self replenishing music building her
consecrated house of trembling stone in every useless place.

XXIV (PART ONE)

1980'S TRANSLATION

Should we dissolve our ancient fellowship with the great
 gods who never crudely call attention to themselves because
 the hard steel we've so austerely tempered can't recognize them?
 Or should we quickly try to find them somewhere
 on the chart?—

those violent allies who carry the dead
 away from us without seeming to touch our machinery
 anywhere.

We've civilized our feasts, dismantled the public
 baths and for such a long time now
 their messengers have been too slow:

we always outdistance them. The loneliness of
 being totally dependent just on ourselves without
 their ways of being able to understand each other. We

don't mark out those beautiful, wandering
 hillside trails anymore. We've learned
 how to grade our roads in straight lines.
 It's just in the boiler room that we burn
 with the original fire, the gears that hammer
 themselves into something always larger. While our
 power continues to fail us, like swimmers.

ORIGINAL

Sollen wir unsere uralte Freundschaft, die großen
 niemals werbenden Götter, weil sie der harte
 Stahl, den wir streng erzogen, nicht kennt, verstoßen
 oder sie plötzlich suchen auf einer Karte?

Diese gewaltigen Freunde, die uns die Toten
 nehmen, rühren nirgends an unsere Räder.
 Unsere Gastmähler haben wir weit—unsere Bäder,
 fortgerückt, und ihre uns lang schon zu langsamen Boten

überholen wir immer. Einsamer nun aufeinander
 ganz angewiesen, ohne einander zu kennen,
 führen wir nicht mehr die Pfade als schöne Mäander,

sondern als Grade. Nur noch in Dampfkesseln brennen
 die einstigen Feuer und heben die Hämmer, die immer
 größern. Wir aber nehmen an Kraft ab, wie Schwimmer.

from RILKE: SONNETS TO ORPHEUS*tr. by Art Beck*

MY MORE CURRENT VERSION

Should we end our age-old fellowship with the great gods—who
 never did advertise their presence—just because the hard steel
 we've so austerely tempered can't recognize them? Or should we
 scramble to find them somewhere on our charts? Those

violent allies who spirit the dead from us without touching
 our machinery anywhere. We've civilized our feasts, dismantled
 the public baths—for such a long time now their messengers have
 been too slow. We outrun them every time. The aloneness of being

completely dependent just on each other, unable to understand
 one other. We never mark out those beautiful meandering
 trails anymore. We've learned to grade our roads in straight lines.

It's only in the boiler room that we burn with the original fire,
 the pistons pounding themselves into something always larger.
 While our power continues to fail us, like swimmers.

SUGGESTION FOR A PRETTY GOOD POEM

by
Gary Lehmann

Dear Editor(s):

A few weekends ago, my wife and I went to North Adams, MA, to visit the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, Mass MOCA. (That is to say NOT Modern Art. That's 1910-1985. No, Contemporary: That means NOW art.) The Museum is housed in a gigantic Civil War factory complex that has been renovated into a large number of colossal rooms. You've never seen a museum with such a big footprint!

One of the main exhibitors is Sol LeWitt whose "paintings" are called wall drawings, because they largely consist of pencil drawings on a wall. Sol does not actually do the drawings himself. Instead, he sells the museum a contract which contains detailed instructions on how artisans at the Museum can do the drawings themselves, like an architect who sells the owner a plan for a building but doesn't actually construct the building himself.

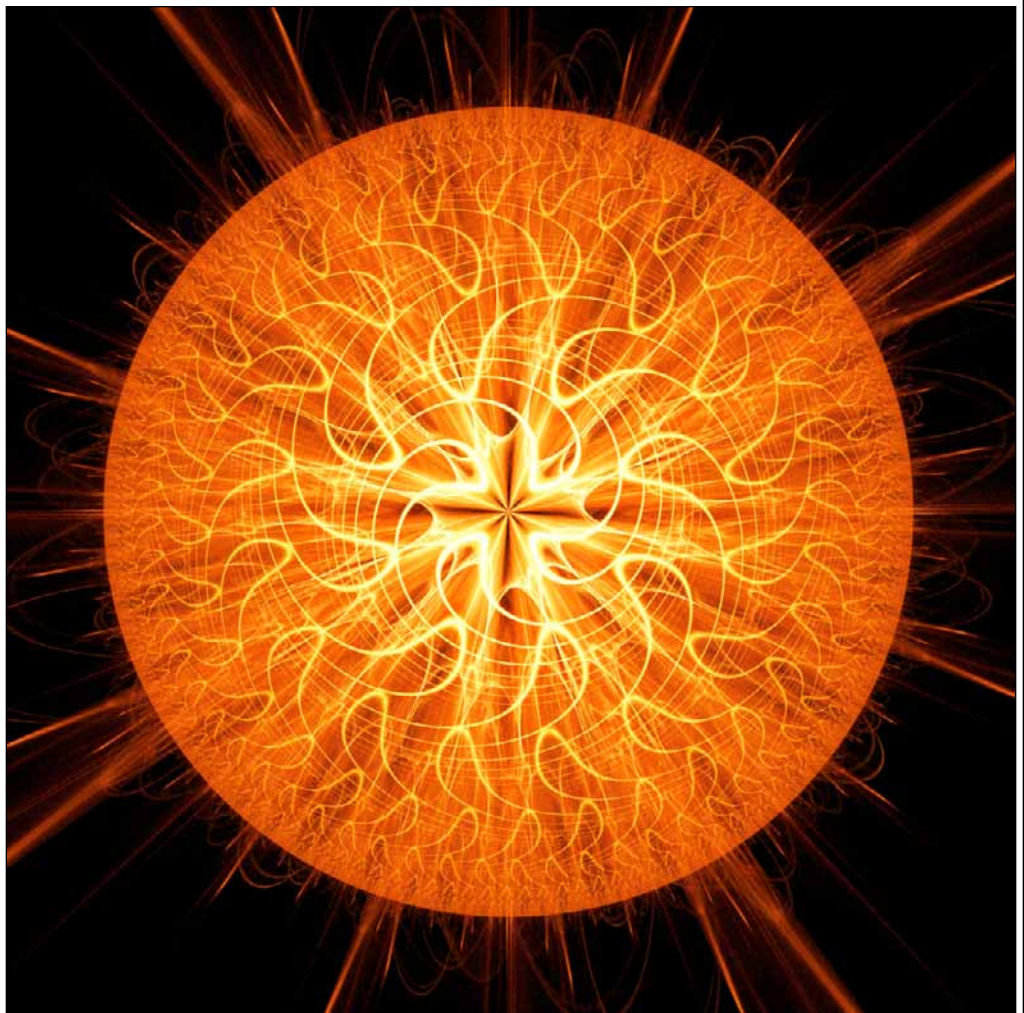
If museum officials decide to sell this work of art, they first have to paint over their representation of it. Then they can sell the contract that permits another museum to hire artisans to reproduce this work on their own wall. This way the actual image only appears in one place at any one time, but can be lent or sold just like a canvas painting, and it transports at a whole lot less expense. It's an entirely new way of thinking about artistic ownership and production.

On the long drive home, I got to thinking about whether there was any way to apply Sol's idea to poetry. Could a poet, for example, write a formula that would allow a subsequent poet to write a poem which replicated the characteristics

of the original poet's typical work? This might produce a kind of Do-It-Yourself poem. The original poet would be saying to the Do-It-Yourself poet, "If you enjoyed my poems in the past, maybe you'd like to try to write one yourself." Such a collaboration, if we could get over

our hang-up about single authorship, could turn out to be just as satisfying to the Do-It-Yourselfer as being presented with a new poem by the poet he admires. Imagine the excitement of being given permission to participate in the act of construction—if not design. The end result would be a poem which combined the characteristics of the original poet's work with the originality of the admirer. What a deal!

Of course, new poets have imitated the style of established poets for centuries, but this would be different. In this instance, the model poet is giving guidance and permission to the imitator by providing a step-by-step instruction kit on how to write *a la me*. Just think about the fun we could have writing a



Sun God

Stacy Reed

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Robert Frost poem or an E. E. Cummings poem if only they had each left explicit instructions on how to write their kind of poetry. Frost and Cummings follow well-worn design principles. We all do. If they had only left behind a Do-It-Yourself kit, we might all be writing something along their lines right now!

But let's be honest here. We both know we're not going to write a better Frost poem than Frost wrote, but we might be able to write a pretty-good-Frost-poem that would teach us a lot about the features we like best in him. Imitation is the highest form of flattery. Just think of this methodology as extending imitation into an authorized zone, and, there's an added benefit. We'd have the fun of doing it ourselves.

For a famous poet, it would be like leaving a potential fund of future poems that might appear for years after you're dead—a sort of poetical legacy for the world. Maybe we could call this Partici-

patory Poetry. *Voilà!* Virtually every poet, alive or dead, great or small, could offer a paint-by-numbers guide. Any poet with a following might offer his admirers a Write-My-Poem-For-Me poem as a kind of epitaph. It might turn into a whole new genre, new poems that are halfway between an original composition by the model poet and literary criticism. It's the literary equivalent of the painter who goes to the Louvre with his paints and easel to learn to create canvases like the masters.

Sol sold some 870 paintings this way during his lifetime and made a pretty good living out of it. If we could find a way to sell these design poems, this approach could even make some poets rich! (Maybe.)

With that in mind, I humbly submit the following Do-It-Yourself-Poem for possible publication in *Rattle*. If you find the results of the process satisfactory, I suggest leaving several subsequent pages

blank, so that your subscribers have room to transcribe their own.

I've included a brief bio, and a SASE for your convenience. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
Gary Lehmann

✉

Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize, GARY LEHMANN's essays, poetry and short stories are widely published. Books include *The Span I will Cross* (Process Press, 2004), *Public Lives and Private Secrets* (Foothills Publishing, 2005), and *American Sponsored Torture* (Foothills Publishing, 2007). Foothills Press will be publishing his newest book, *American Portraits*, later this spring. Visit his website at www.garylehmann.blogspot.com

Gary Lehmann

PLAN FOR A PRETTY GOOD POEM

Begin by researching the life of a famous person you admire.
Keep reading 'til you find some highly characteristic event.
Tell the story with as little ornamentation as possible.
Use traditional stanza breaks and punctuation marks.
Focus the punch of the story on the key moment in the life.
Write tight and check all the facts over 'til you're sure of them.
Rewrite the finished poem a few times to smooth out the language.
Be sure to include my by-line. My name ends with 2 n's. Thanks.

TRIBUTE TO HUMOR

Funny on paper isn't easy. So much of humor relies on tone and timing, and all the nonverbal cues of the comedian's trade. We received far more poems for this theme than for any other we've done—perhaps as many as 10,000 were submitted—but the Tribute to Humor is no longer than any of our other themed sections. After six months of reading, only 25 poems tickled us enough that we can call them funny. They deploy a number of strategies: Some use pacing and enjambment to mimic comedic timing. Others carefully craft a voice to conjure their own comedians. Some set up rhymes in order to subvert the rhyme's expectation. Some leap wildly into the absurd. Some are funny stories, simply told. The only thing they have in common is that they kept us laughing through a long winter of editorial meetings, and we think they'll keep you laughing, too.

As always, the Tribute is the focus of the issue, but not the totality of it. RATTLE #33's open section features the work of 38 poets, including a long narrative poem-noir by Tony Barnstone, with illustrations by the artist. Also, Alan Fox interviews Aram Saroyan and Carl Phillips, and in the back pages, our first-person contributor notes are almost as fun to read as the poems themselves.



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Mathias Nelson • David Romtvedt • Jan Seabaugh
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Carol A. Taylor • Jeff Vande Zande • Mike White

ARTWORK

Tony Barnstone
Jeremy Gregory

CONVERSATIONS

Carl Phillips
Aram Saroyan

J. Scott Brownlee

CITY LIMITS

Once every year, we slaughter
the bulls. We make burnt offerings
to God while clans of poor Tejanos
jump in old Ford trucks, waiting to melt
the pools of asphalt for new roads.
We take our time when we make
love. We are proud soldiers
who have twice toured Iraq:
our loaded guns, our livelihoods
off safety. We are deer hunters
not for sport, but for survival.
We have fought wars you would not
fight. Our bullet wounds and PTS
are proof of what we've witnessed
outside church: that only suffering
can make a body bleed enough
to cleanse it. We work so hard
some days our backs swell up
on loading docks like Christ's,
but we keep loading anyway outside
of Buttery's. A few of us, the lucky ones,
drive fork-lifts. The rest of us, on foot,
still use our hands: this heaviness, this
waiting for the weight of day to pass
into the arteries of night. Then
we can rest. Blood is the weight
of sin we carry. Blood is the color
of the sky. It's so important to us.

from *RATTLE* #33, SUMMER 2010

Poetry

We make burnt offerings to God
every December. We light candles
with their promise of redemption and
return. We still say *Merry Christmas*
and believe the Bible's true because
we know it mostly is. The swimming
pool is where we go to waste our time—
there or the Sonic with its cheese fries,
flurries, drinks. And at DQ you get
a dipped cone for a dollar twenty-five,
although it used to be much cheaper.
By ten most people fall asleep. The rest
shoot pool at Granite-O, that bar just
outside town where young men bury
any evidence of prayer. Each
shot glass empty, empty, full. And
there's a hoot owl, somewhere, singing.
The milking does and dappled fawns
lie in the brush outside our plywood
houses, bedding down. When they rise
it's Saturday, and raining. The bigger
kids play soccer in the mud, wake
their parents in the trailer park. By noon,
they're playing soccer with the red ball
they stole from Dollar General.
Tweaked out on meth, a mother yawns
and then gets up to make some breakfast:
Coca-Puffs and bargain orange juice. She'll

from RATTLE #33, SUMMER 2010

Poetry

("City Limits," cont'd)

watch cartoons and laugh while smoking
grass with her son Grant. Another empty

bowl, then Sunday comes. Tomorrow,
work the self-serve. Town and Country:

where your coffee's always cold, but also free.

And then on Monday after school
our JV football team at practice

in the sun, their helmets gleaming,
insect phalanx. Yellow Jacket stingers,

combs of crab grass at their feet.
It must be August once again

because the Jacket phalanx breaks.
The boys say look. Look, Daddy.

Look at both my arms, bruised
up for you. Look at my legs,

how they are broken.

Kerrin McCadden

ELEGY FOR SOME BEACH HOUSES

The break off Chatham broke and spilled
old homes into the sea, just spilled them
like dresser drawers pulled out too far,
quiet underthings sent flailing like old aunts
into the surf. Just seaside, just at the beach,
just where the generations had combed for
jingle shells, whelks, the unrecognizable
bones of fish. Just there, the houses tumbled,
like only a house can, full of argument, debris
and leftovers. Just there, the houses groaned
like only a house can, full of mouseshit, must,
armoires and settees, full of lobster trap
coffee tables, old letters, tattered rugs.
First the buckle of underpinnings, then the
hipbone joists, the planks, the studs. The walls
sighed like pages wanting to turn, illustrated
with photos of old dogs, children, words
like *Beach, Happiness, Family* painted on shingles.
There was tipping and buckling and the keening
of nails pulling out. A roof wanted to slide, whole,
into the sea, but failed, the ridgepole splintering.
Its backbone broken and all the bits finished,
the houses were quiet. The old china floated
a bit, small boats. Newspapers, books drifted.
Daily trappings went down fast—some lamps, buckets,
deck chairs. This is not to mention all that sinks
right off (a watch, jewelry left on the sill). The fish
looked as curiously as fish can look, bumped cold noses
against dolls, mirrors, dishtowels like seaweed in the dusted light,
turned sideways, finned off. Little housed mollusks
made no notice. The ocean settled and
breathed, wave, wave, wave.

from RATTLE #33, SUMMER 2010

Poetry

Miller Oberman

EARS

Days like this, I hate to admit I remind myself of my father,
 who used to wake me, school days, five minutes before my alarm
 buzzed, saying, *Well, it's another beautiful day.* How despicable I found
 his enthusiasm as I dragged on my blacks and went to high school.
 It was all so clear. I could hear so perfectly then, like now,
 when the muffled forms that lurk in the dull dusk beyond
 perception instead rush against my ears, throttling out of caves like bats.
 This morning I had the wax sucked out of my ears with a tiny
 vacuum and now New York is sound studded, my ears two disco
 balls catching and reflecting even the most minute waves.
 The wax itself glowed dark as Mars and would've overflowed a thimble.
 Now everything is loud and consequential, the scream of hawks
 over the East River, cab tires chirping against the curb.
 Back at work, Eugene's letter rubs between Leon's and Gertrude's,
 whirring like the finest sandpaper. I can hear the fizz in my seltzer
 surge up, oceanic. I had to call Stanley Katz and tell him
 sir, your credit card was declined and he cleared his throat so raucously
 I bent the phone slightly away from my head and poor Stanley,
 of a certain age said CAN YOU SPEAK UP and I did, but it wasn't enough.
 I wanted to tell him my ENT's name, Kacker; it is so satisfying
 to say Kacker, to cut that hard K twice with the root of your tongue
 against your palate. To realize, again, the joy in, as I've been accused
 of more than once, the sound of my own voice. Even the clack
 of the adding machine in my cubicle isn't that bad, as Cathy
 bangs away at it, softened, as it is, by the gentle thrum of the cables
 in the elevator shaft and the relentless grind of the paper shredder,
 chewing what is too sensitive to be kept.

Tomaz Šalamun

Anyone who falls into
 an arabic night should know that
 laws there are ruthless and
 brutal at first one hears *tingle*
tangle from the high stone
 walls someone drops a rope
 with a basket leave the dates
 alone! don't eat them that's
 how they stop drovers if the rope
 is strong enough allow yourself to be
 pulled up
 for three days I was smiling and
 bowing and was just about to eat
 the rugs when god
 caught me
 naked.

—tr. from the Slovenian
 by Sonja Kravanja

from RATTLE #33, SUMMER 2010

Tribute to Humor

Richard Garcia

A POEM BY ANDY ROONEY

How about these paperclips?
 Consider the humble paperclip.
 Paperclips do not like to remain in their containers.
 Paperclips can be found at the bottom of the sea.
 The first paperclip was made of mastodon ivory.
 Some paperclips are covered in plastic.
 Some paperclips are plastic.
 Metal paperclips are desirable.
 You can twist them while on the phone.
 You can use one to pick your teeth.
 It is not recommended to use a paperclip to pick your teeth.
 A paperclip can unlock a handcuff.
 A paperclip cannot unlock a plastic handcuff.
 Last time I mentioned paperclips
 I received boxes of paperclips in the mail.
 Here are some candy paperclips.
 You can use them to attach important papers together.
 You can eat candy paperclips.
 Paperclips are like some marriages.
 They clip things together temporarily.
 Please don't send me any more paperclips.
 You can use paperclips to brush your eyebrows.
 It is a little known fact, but every computer
 has a secret tiny hole somewhere on its body
 into which you can insert a straightened paperclip.
 Usually, a frozen computer will start up again
 when you insert the unfolded paperclip into its tiny, secret hole.
 Your IT guy at the office would rather you did not know
 about the tiny, secret paperclip hole in your computer.
 Paperclips have been sprinkled into space by scientists.
 Paperclips ring the planet. Some planets have rings of ice,
 boulders, bits of exploded comet, purple and yellow meteor dust.
 Our planet has a ring of millions of paperclips.
 Recently it had been noticed that the paperclips
 are joining together, each clip attaching to each clip
 forming a paperclip chain in the ionosphere.
 Maybe Mankind could learn something from all
 the paperclips that have fallen into remote corners of our offices.
 Here are some biodegradable paperclips made of recycled paper.
 Here are some paperclips made of compressed diamond dust.
 Here is a paperclip I have carried in my pocket since 1944.
 It saved my life at Omaha beach by deflecting a sniper's bullet.
 As you can see by its girth, they don't make paperclips like they used to.

Carol A. Taylor

A FADING MEMORY

Two elderly farmers rocked on the front porch,
 talking and scratching an old hound dog's head.
 "I swanny, I'm getting so gol-derned forgetful
 I can't remember your dog's name," said Red.

Sam pondered a moment, then turned to his friend
 and grinned, "What's the name of that flower that grows
 on the fence by the mailbox, with thorns on its stem?"
 His visitor answered, "Oh, you mean a rose."

"That's it," Sam exclaimed. "That's the flower I mean!"
 He threw down the Burpee's spring seed catalog,
 reached over his shoulder, and opened the screen.
 "Rose!" he yelled in. "What's the name of our dog?"

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—Denise Duhamel

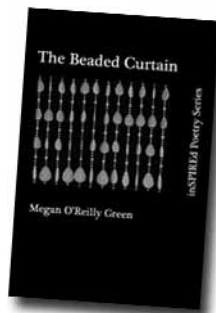
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