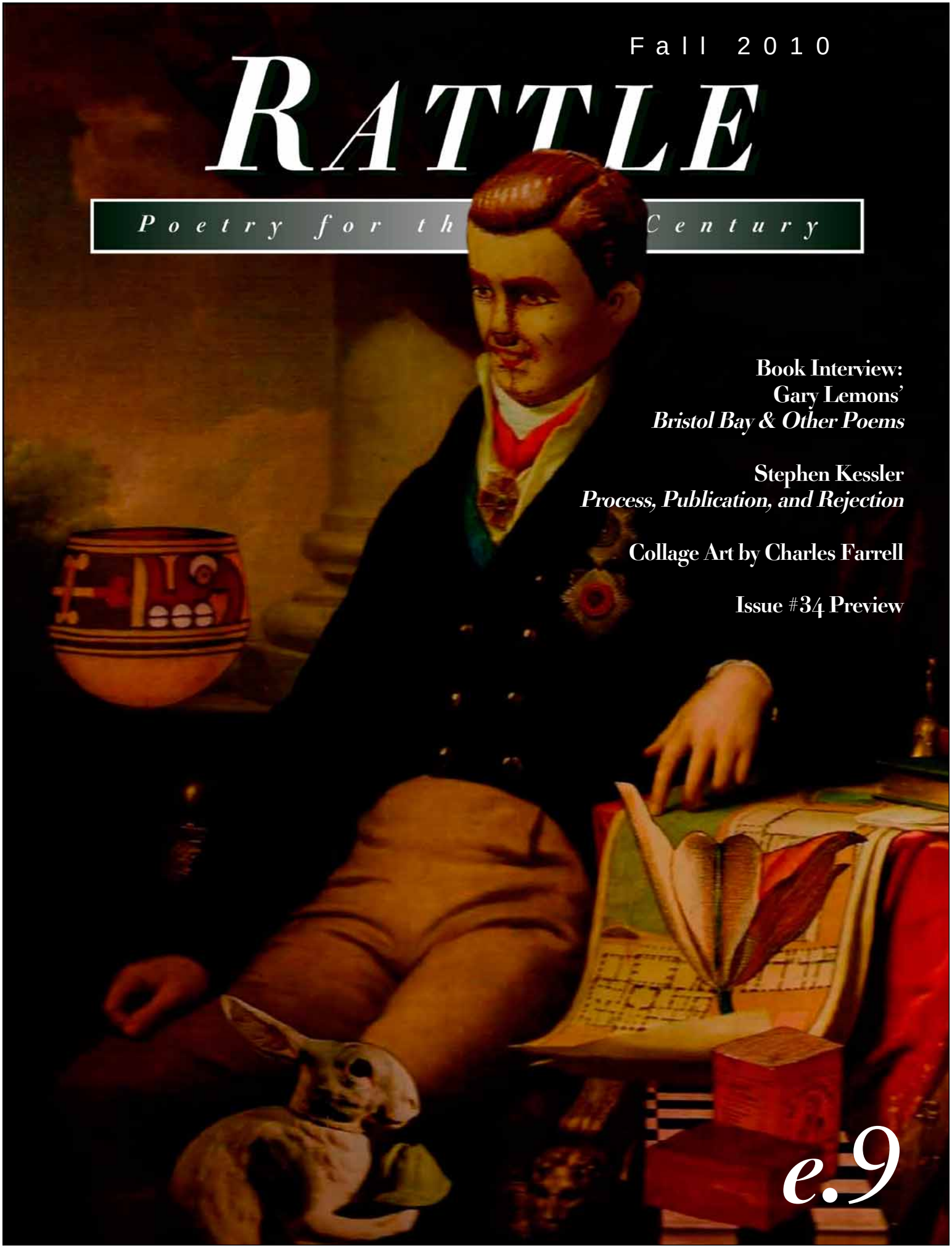
Fall 2010

RATTLE

Poetry for th Century



Book Interview:
Gary Lemons'
Bristol Bay & Other Poems

Stephen Kessler
Process, Publication, and Rejection

Collage Art by Charles Farrell

Issue #34 Preview

e.9

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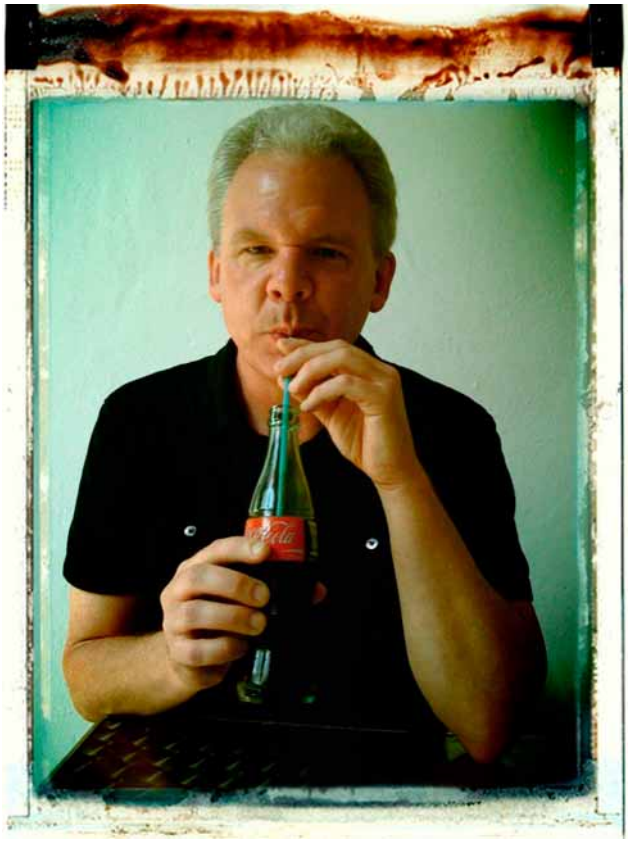


Artist Statement

Death is the mother of Beauty; hence from her, alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams and our desires
—Wallace Stevens

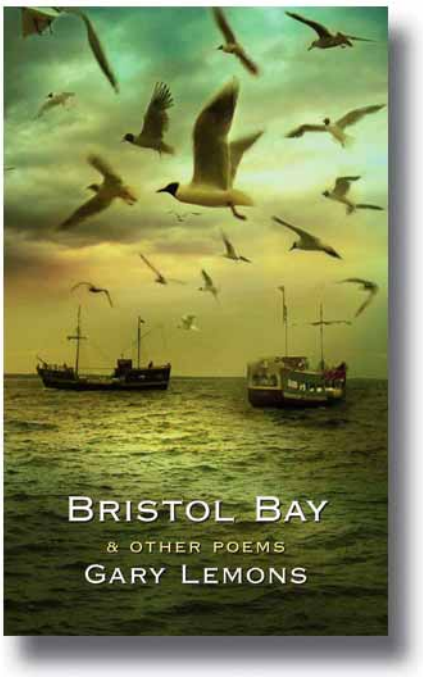
"The English word "spirit" comes from the Latin "spiritus," meaning to blow or breathe. It represents an animating or vital principle that gives life to all living things.

This creative "spirit" is a vital and active principle in my art process. I constantly reset my vision to the present moment and proceed to follow the signs and channels that unfold. It is during these times that the active mind can surrender to the creative. I invoke the ancient Greek Muses dancing with Apollo and allow the "paper spirits" to take form on my canvas. It is in these moments when the spirit of my art breathes life into me.

I am aware of several reoccurring themes in my work that include the cyclical nature of time, the inescapability of sex and death, the art of film noir, and the subtleties of alchemical symbolism."

Charles Farrell is a practicing psychotherapist and Maine-based artist who shows his work in publications and individual gallery shows. Selected 2008-10 publications include: *Redivider*, *DMQ Review*, *Red Line Blues*, *Fosebook*, *Area Zinc Magazine, Thieves Jargon*, *Voyageur Magazine* (25th Anniversary cover), *Sojourn Journal* (Editor's Choice Award winner). Additional work can be seen online at:

www.charlesfarrellart.com



Bristol Bay
& Other Poems

by

Gary Lemons

Red Hen Press
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Pasadena, CA 91101
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Praise for *Bristol Bay & Other Poems*

From the back-breaking physical demands of blue-collar life on the seas and in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, and from the heart breaking work of facing the realities of an exploited, endangered planet, Gary Lemons has carved these poems not of mere intelligence and compassion—which are abundantly self-evident—but of absolute necessity, and of genuine, hard-earned wisdom.

—Sam Hamill

Beautiful, strange, haunting, brilliant, unique, complex, mystical—profound intelligence, experience, wisdom and love. These poems are meditations of life inside death, death inside life. Think of Heraclitus, Stephen Crane, the surrealism of Pablo Neruda; think of the laws of Nature—the craft and aesthetic at work here: think of your dreams. "I still believe in the power of poems/ To make a place where one wild thing survives." I am in awe of this book of ghosts, soldiers, "the voices of poets gunned down…" "Love is as dark as it is light." Gary Lemons' *Bristol Bay* is a great accomplishment.

—Sharon Doubiago,
Love on the Streets: New and Selected Poems

Gary Lemons' new collection of poems, Bristol Bay, is a brilliant coming together of formal experience of lyric poetry and all the surprising voices that have scored his work over the years. Often my sense of this poetry is that it fearlessly goes out to meet the previously unattempted—that strange telegraphing that has spooked this nation's verse since Emily Dickinson.

—Norman Dubie

Gary Lemons worked most of his life with his hands. Along the way he discovered the act of writing poetry is little different than building any structure. Poets, like farmers for instance, contour a field that is both imaginary and real and shaped with the instruments at hand. The expectations at harvest are similar. He spent two years at the University of Iowa in the Undergraduate Poetry Workshop and has published two books of poetry with a third, *Snake*, scheduled for publication in the Fall of 2013 with Red Hen Press. Lemons is part Oneida and lived for six years on the Assiniboine reservation near Wolf Point, Montana. He now teaches yoga with his beautiful life-partner, the sculptor Nöle Giulini, in their studio, Tenderpaws.

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

"End Game" in *Rattle*; "Kingdom of Exiles," "Bristol Bay," and "Orphan" first appeared in the book.

Book Interview with Gary Lemons

by
Timothy Green

Note: The following interview was conducted by email through August and September of 2010.

Green: If I remember correctly, you were at the Iowa Workshop in the '60s, and in the time since worked on power-lines in Montana, as a public television station manager in Seattle, survived a few seasons of *Deadliest Catch* before the Discovery Channel made it famous, and lived as an honorary member of a Native American tribe. Even if I don't have that all exactly right, I know that you've lived an eclectic life. Have you written continuously throughout it, or has the poetry come in waves? And how do you think your experiences have shaped your literary work? Do you think you could be a successful poet if you'd had a desk job this whole time?

Lemons: At Iowa I studied with Norman Dubie for two semesters and Marvin Bell and Donald Justice one semester each. Wonderful teachers that appeared at the perfect time in my life. They offered guidance without domination. Meaning that as much as I admired them, especially and to this day the person and poetry of Norman Dubie, I was old enough, or perhaps I'd written long enough, to be amazed by their gifts yet still know my voice independent of theirs. As an aside I realize that these recognizable names are only a few of the many teachers, most of them unknown to the world, who came, really throughout my life, when I most needed them. I live in gratitude for them all.

But yes—after graduating I looked around at the possible next things and decided to postpone, as it turns out, indefinitely, the MFA program and got a welding certificate from the local community college and took off with a crew of unlikely men and women in pursuit of the big bucks with the half formed belief there'd be some eye-popping experiences along the way. It was sort of like dharma bums working for the man in that we were a collection of free spirits except when the work bell rang. Then we got it done.

Big bucks so far have eluded me but the experiences, which come as poems, are the treasures I most value looking backwards over the last 40 years. Certainly the money's gone. But the smile remains.

So there were years working high steel, years slip-forming concrete feed mills and grain elevators, years running a chain saw or reforesting in the high elevation timber stands and clear cuts of the Pacific Northwest. Other odd and end jobs all intended to avoid buckling down to what I still consider the numbing process of reducing sunlight to a single ray. Years in Bristol Bay on a floating death ship turned processor and a decade managing a community television station. Now and possibly but unlikely lastly I teach yoga. Where a whole new collection of beloved teachers appear.

For me the changing jobs, like a pony express rider changing horses, keep me fresh and a little off balance in the world. This slight feeling of being out of sync with family and friends who pursued one career most of their lives has helped me craft the time and material to write throughout the four decades since leaving Iowa. Poetry keeps me breathing and I say that with less embarrassment than you'd think. The act of sitting down, every day, of showing up in front of the empty page, experiencing the transference between the unformed poem and the place it wants to live outside of me is simply life-saving. Stendahl said the novel—and I'll substitute, the poem—is a mirror dragged down the road. What he doesn't say is that over time the mirror can crack or break and the reflections in it become gravely distorted. This is why for me it's important to check in every day—to see what passed for life, to look closely at it and create relevance from it. Poetry. If possible.

So Bristol Bay is one of those passages measured in months wherein I lived inside an endless dream and awakened a little more battered, wiser and even wealthier than before. A dream because even though it was my life the events were so preposterous, the characters so mythical, that it's easy even now to regard it as fable. In the end it seems that we all live this way—co-creating new mythologies extracted, as the old ones were, from our ordinary lives.

Green: Would you say a poet's job, then, is to serve as witness to one's own life? In the prologue to the title poem ("Bristol Bay" is a one of a few longer series in the book, this one eight parts), you write that "so many years go by before a thing...finds its form in us," and then promise "what I remember I'll tell you." As I read this again, I'm wondering if you're making that promise to the audience, or if you might be addressing yourself. Writing every day can become a kind of mental yoga, a process that's self-enriching, and keeping it going for 40 years I think you'd agree—what do you see as the reader's role in that relationship? Are we voyeurs looking over your

shoulder, or do you write with our eventual presence in mind?

Lemons: I think, Tim, for me, you really say it with the comment about writing and yoga. Yoga means "union with" in Sanskrit and the implication is that all things are connected. There is no separation between the forms of things. They are in a fundamental state of oneness. That, as many native people believe, the rocks and the animals and plants and elements are all a specific and unique manifestation of the same thing.

Which means to me there is a collective awareness between all of us. That your story and my story and the story of a child in an African village or an elder in a Tibetan monastery are, once stripped of local details, similar. This aspect of what is sometimes called spirituality has always been at the heart of poetry. Seeing the relationships between seemingly separate events. Not just seeing with the eyes but with the total current life force available. And seeing is the first step toward witnessing. Which to me implies looking directly at any moment in time with a minimum of looking away. Seeing the truth of the current now unfold in its beauty or horror or banality and taking it into the oneness where, if fortunate and diligent, it will re-emerge as poetry—or dance or sculpture or Voodoo Child. Or whatever we create in the world consciously.

Forgiveness is a part of this because there are villains so grim, events so terrible they are difficult to witness. It feels sometimes the only way to remain sane is to disentangle or look away. When I do this it gets real easy to blame myself. To believe if I'm not present when the house burns down, if I'm not at the crash site or tending the victims of the oil spill then my observations and subsequent contributions are clinical, safe, even cowardly. I also know this isn't true. There is only one requirement for the poet. Write. Keep writing. Forgive yourself your inadequacies. Celebrate the occasional kiss of the muse. Write.

I write with presumption for the voices of other possibilities I'd be but for the grace or blindness of fortune. This is where yoga comes in. I write knowing I am one man but I also write with the understanding there is no separation between things. Consequently the poem is alive, often in pieces, everywhere. I just have to listen carefully enough to find it and be disciplined enough to assemble it. The best I can. And keep listening. The interesting thing about processing a poem this way is that it becomes apparent the world is always trying to communicate. In dreams, intuitions, accidents, sudden insights and revelations.

Sorry for digging probably a little deeper into my motivations than is interesting to others, Tim—it's a great question and hard to know when or if you've answered it. I probably never will. Which is great news. But to get back to your question about readers and what I think about their role in the writing process. It's more of the same I'm afraid. If there's an underlying fundamental state of oneness then the reader and the writer participate in it. We are all so mutually engaged that the poem is co-authored by every event and every individual and every moment of preceding existence. If I truly signed each poem with all of its authors then the signature page would always be longer than the book.

But still. I always think of the reader. I love them. Truly. Anyone who picks up a book of poetry in these electrified times is immediately my new favorite person.

Green: Whenever someone brings up Sanskrit in a discussion of poetry, I

Kali Yuga
Charles Farrell

always get a little excited. I feel like poets now, and maybe throughout history, tend to be ignorant of the universal mechanisms that underlie their art...or all art for that matter. We do what we do because it works, we feel the spark of connection, but we don't know why it's there or how it came to be. The greatest failure of contemporary poetry is the inability to explain itself to people who don't already understand. And to me, the Vedic tradition provides the best cosmology for describing what poetry actually is. What we're reading and writing are mantras—the Sanskrit for "mind-tool"—a carefully crafted string of sounds that we can use to do mental work. That work can be as simple as memorization, using rhythm and rhyme as a pneumonic device. It can be creating and refining emotions, or revealing new understandings. But true art, real poetry, does more than even that—it allows us to temporarily experience that fundamental state of oneness you were talking about, what the Buddhists would call Samadhi—a non-dualistic state of consciousness, where subject and object are one. Hindus would call it the Brahman experiencing itself. To Christians it's divine revelation. All religions seek to move us from a self-consciousness to a universal-consciousness; they teach us to experience the underlying interconnectedness of reality. The sublime. I am large, I contain multitudes. We're all made of stars, and so on. I see poetry as a mind-tool, a mantra, for creating a spiritual moment. As a poet, you become your experience, and as a reader, I become it as well, through your voice. We're all merging—speaker, reader, subject, object, past, present—the moment anyone enters the poem we're one. And it feels good to be one, again, even briefly.

I think that if we could explain this to people, then poetry, literary fiction, contemporary art, etc., would be much more popular, much less intimidating. But how do you think poetry came to be—and why does it remain—such a niche pursuit? You've been to the Fisher Poets Gathering in Oregon—it seems like that kind of thing could go on all the time, for all different professions and social groups. But it doesn't—why aren't there more readers?

Lemons: Brave observations, Tim. I appreciate your willingness to look at the currents and tides that pull us into art. So often we talk about the finished poem and the subtle, mysterious ground it walked to get to the page goes unremembered.

I'll jump into this gladly with the understanding that my responses are simply my current suspicions. I don't pretend to know much of anything. I'm mistrustful of expressions like "inner knowing." Too often the known leads to systems within which those who don't march in lockstep are persecuted. Besides, our time in any particular form is so momentary that wisdom is a lightning strike in an otherwise dark field. The trick, I suspect, is to go where the lightning goes when it's gone.

The poem ends with language but that's not where it starts. I see the beginning as something like this—the planet is newly formed—catastrophic weather and meteor strikes alter the landscape regularly—the first humans huddle in the dark interior of some filthy hole in the ground trying to hush a newborn baby while meat-eating lizards sniff for them on the wind. A mother and father, the inkling of intelligence, the miracle of birth. The baby makes sounds. The mother make sounds back—mantras as you imply. Asking it to be quiet. Somehow there is an understanding. The sounds become language. Poetry is a gift from the mother.

Applied non-dualism neglects the feminine. It neglects the mother. If we look at the valued fruits of language in any given culture—the sacred texts, the literature, the lessons passed on to school children, we see an almost unbroken line of male voices leading back to the first utterance. Even though wisdom and common sense tell us this can't be. Where are the women in art? In poetry? In government? Before the last century? Where is the representative balance?

Non-dual reality tells us that all things, all forces, come entangled with their opposites. That existence is in a fundamental state of equilibrium. This makes sense. Science agrees. The universe is infinite and when there is a self-perpetuating infinite field within which events unfold, when there is an infinity of things, then everything is infinitely, and consequently, equally present. Darkness. Light. Joy. Suffering. Wisdom. Ignorance. Infinitely and equally present. Which to me means (current suspicion, remember) that there is indeed a fundamental state of balance. Non-dualism seems built into the fabric of the evidence. All my admittedly limited instruments agree this is an underlying truth. It's also apparent that while the infinity of things is in a non-dual state of perfect equilibrium, any local state of that infinity—our individual lives or families or countries, for instance, can be completely out of balance. Resulting in real suffering and real diminishment.

I think art tries to bridge this discrepancy. The poet writes of his or her personal world not just because it is compelling to do so but because they plug into the electric current that runs between their local perspective and a bigger awareness. For me this makes poetry, all art for that matter, a form of meditation. A way to bring into these immediate times, with its violence, cruelty, indifference, the qualities of a non-local state of symmetry. Not because this brings with it hope and is restorative to a beleaguered humanity but because it's truthful to do so.

These are exciting times for poets. For all artists. The internet provides communal exchange of expression on a scale never seen before. The equivalent one might think of infinite scale. Each of us with our local hard drives can simply connect across space by "going online." Meditation. Those who write and those who read have tremendous access to one another.

It seems to me poetry after 9/11 was re-discovered. Readers were born out of a need to understand events so terrible that prevailing wisdom offered little solace. New poets were born. Old ones

were energized. Auden said that "mad Ireland" drove Yeats to poetry. The madness of an entire planet is driving art at the end of the millennium. There is a new correlative between events and comprehensible art. Like you just said so well—"you become your experience, and as a reader, I become it as well, through your voice. We're all merging..."

As this happens, the primal roots of language, the woman crouched in the dark earth quieting an endangered child with new sounds, re-asserts itself. We see a restoration of balance. In all forms of art we begin to hear again the voice of the mother.

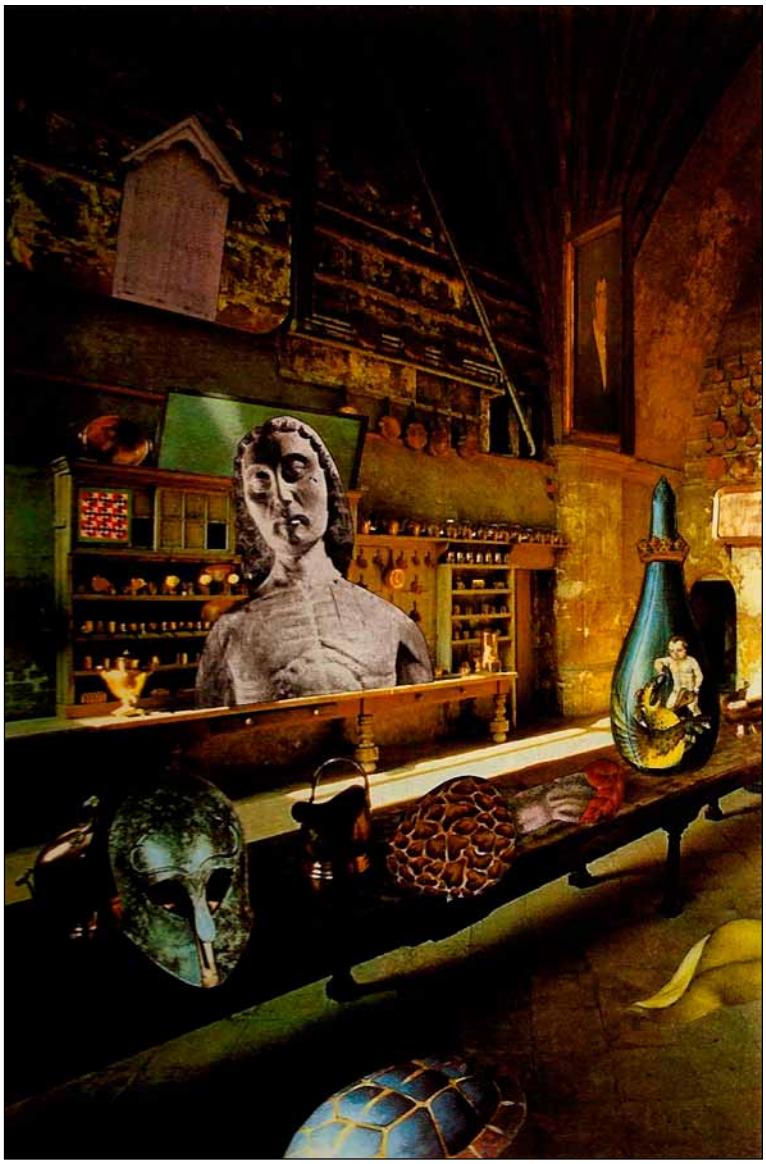
This doesn't just mean gender balance in art, if you will. It's bigger than that. Balance to me means more events like the Fisher Poets gathering will occur in the future. (Which by the way is a total gas and if you're ever near Astoria, Oregon in the darkest part of February you should check it out.) It means to me that across social orders there will be a more acute listening followed by an organized call and response. Poetry will pour out of gas stations and logging camps and factories and retail stores and government offices. There will be an inhabitable non-dual reality where the chorus is not dominated by the voice of the father. In this way we stumble a little closer to one another, grow a little kinder and more loving in the process and often, by a happy collaboration between accident and grace, create a more sustainable world.

Green: The frustrating thing about doing these interviews over email is the enticing length of the exchanges—there are about a half-dozen things I'd like to follow-up on. I can't pick just one, so that's probably a sign we should keep heading down river. While I was waiting for your reply, my grandmother-in-law was in town, and she noticed *Bristol Bay* sitting on our coffee table. She's 85 years old and spent much of her life in the Kodiak. Let me tell you, Gary, we couldn't pry the book out of her hands. She sat there on a footstool for 90 minutes and read the whole thing. "Now this is a writer," she said, "and he's got it all right, every last gull and Alaskan fir." This isn't a woman who reads poetry, so I'd call it the highest praise. "It brings me back," she said. How did *you* get back, in order to write that poem? Did you have to research your own history, keep a diary maybe, or was the memory alone that vivid? How long after that experience did you start writing the poem (and when did you finish)?

Lemons: Agree, Tim—thanks for pulling the barge off the sandbar. I'm very interested in a sidebar discussion someday about all of this—especially what you said about mantras—very cool.

And please express my gratitude to your grandmother-in-law. It thrills me no end that she finds value in the poem and that she praises its realistic qualities. More than elegant or even significant my hope was that it would ride in on readers at a very visceral level. That the poem would be felt more in the belly than the head. Like the sea itself. It was like that living through it.

So how did I get back to that time



Alchemist Kitchen
Charles Farrell

and place? First it was an extraordinary, once-in-a-life-time experience. It embedded itself deep. I was living in a one room shack without water and tree planting during the absolute worst months of the year and then I was idle all summer and fall, when it's too hot to plant. I'm looking around at the shack, thinking something like—"is this what I gave up graduate school for?" The answer, which took 25 more years to come, was "yes."

I hooked up with a friend and we went to Alaska. The poem describes the journey as accurately as I remember. This was 1982—my first of two seasons. I was 34 years old and thought I'd seen just about everything. I'd already worked high steel, logged and planted trees, repaired fences on horseback and cut probably 1,000 cords of firewood. I was completely unprepared for how insanely beautiful and lawless and unforgiving Alaska can be. But I hung in there—steeping myself in the hours and days and endless watches, dead companions and stink of fish because—well—it was what I gave up graduate school for—right?

Then no poems came out of it. I'd sit down for the next decade and try to crush something aromatic out of memory and nothing came. One night I tried to walk, in my mind, the rounds I walked once an hour, eighteen hours a day for most of nine months on that old ship and couldn't do it. I got lost inside the imaginary vessel. So I gave up.

Then about three years ago I woke up at 2:30 in the morning from no memorable dream and pulled my writing pad over and began to write "Bristol Bay" as if I channeled it. I couldn't write fast enough. My hand began to cramp. I broke into a cold sweat. I remember shaking. The notebook was almost empty so when I quickly ran out of blank pages, rather than break the spell by going downstairs to get more, I started writing in the margins of the many detective books I keep beside the bed. (Aside—we don't have a television and I'm a compulsive reader in just about all genres except romance and science fiction—before falling asleep I love to read James Lee Burke or Lee Childs or Robert Crais or Raymond Chandler). So I filled up the blank spaces around the text on four or five books. There's a lot of unused space on each page of the average book, enough to write a couple lines, maybe a short stanza per page. Then I started writing on the jackets. I quickly came up with this numbering system so I'd know how each stanza related to the next. This was helpful when jumping from the last available white space in one book to a new one.

I wrote until about 6:00 a.m. I wrote the complete poem almost exactly as it is now and as you know Tim, it's a long, long poem. There are less than 10 edits in the poem. Maybe it would be stronger if I was more judicious in post-production but I couldn't bring myself to change it. There was an intact spirit in it that didn't want to be altered. Demanded I leave it alone.

So that's the story of how "Bristol Bay" came into being. I gave up on ever extracting any lyrical evidence of the experience and pretty much forgot about it except in the general way you look back down the years and find yourself smiling—or flinching. And then it came busting out all on it's own. I'm sure there's a lesson in that for me but it's one I'm not sure I understand or am even willing to learn.

Green: That's a great story. I'm reminded of Kekule dreaming of Benzene, or James Watson turning a spiral staircase into the double-helix. I wonder how long your subconscious was mulling over that memory before finally spitting out the poem whole—maybe twenty years. Maybe the twenty minutes before you woke... Have you had the same experience with other poems, or was "Bristol Bay" unique? "End Game," another sequenced poem later in the book, certainly feels channeled. I'm curious about the lack of editing, too—are you the kind of writer who usually works in many drafts?

Lemons: This experience of having poems come fully composed out of a sleeping or dreaming state is not entirely new to me. I wrote a poem for John Berryman, a former teacher of mine, that also appeared as whole cloth and required very little editing. The poem for Sam Hamill, "New Years Day 2005," which first appeared in *Rattle* and is in *Bristol Bay*, came out in one complete writing although it received significant editing. It's funny you mention Kekule and dreamed revelations. What he experienced is very similar to how poems come into being for me. He talks about the atoms swirling around, randomly, with little organization until, at some point, they began to line up in an ordered loop that he ascertained as the previously unknown and very elusive joined aspect of the Benzene molecule. It's especially interesting to me because he went on to describe this vision as similar to a snake biting its tail—hence completing the loop.

This is how the poem "Snake" came into being. There was a series of seemingly unrelated images, all having to do with a human being worn away by violence, trauma, weather and other invisible forces into a skinny tube that eventually became a snake. Images of environmental disasters and ordinary environmental degradation over-layed the snake imagery. This was accompanied by a cascade of random notions about an apocalypse brought about by the tip of the funnel frenzy of too many people necessarily abusing a diminishing resource. An Earth assaulted. Behind this was a music that sounded like something Jim Morrison might have written if he blew an oboe on a thousand mics of blue cheer. This entire dream parade happened simultaneously. I was able to remain asleep during it and follow it, rather than wake up with my heart in my throat. The longer I held the dream the more the components began to come together until they were all taking place in a vast snow-covered field. Which even in the dream I realized was the empty page. I woke up and wrote "Snake" immediately and almost exactly as it is in the book.

But I realized that the one poem was not what the dream was about—it was

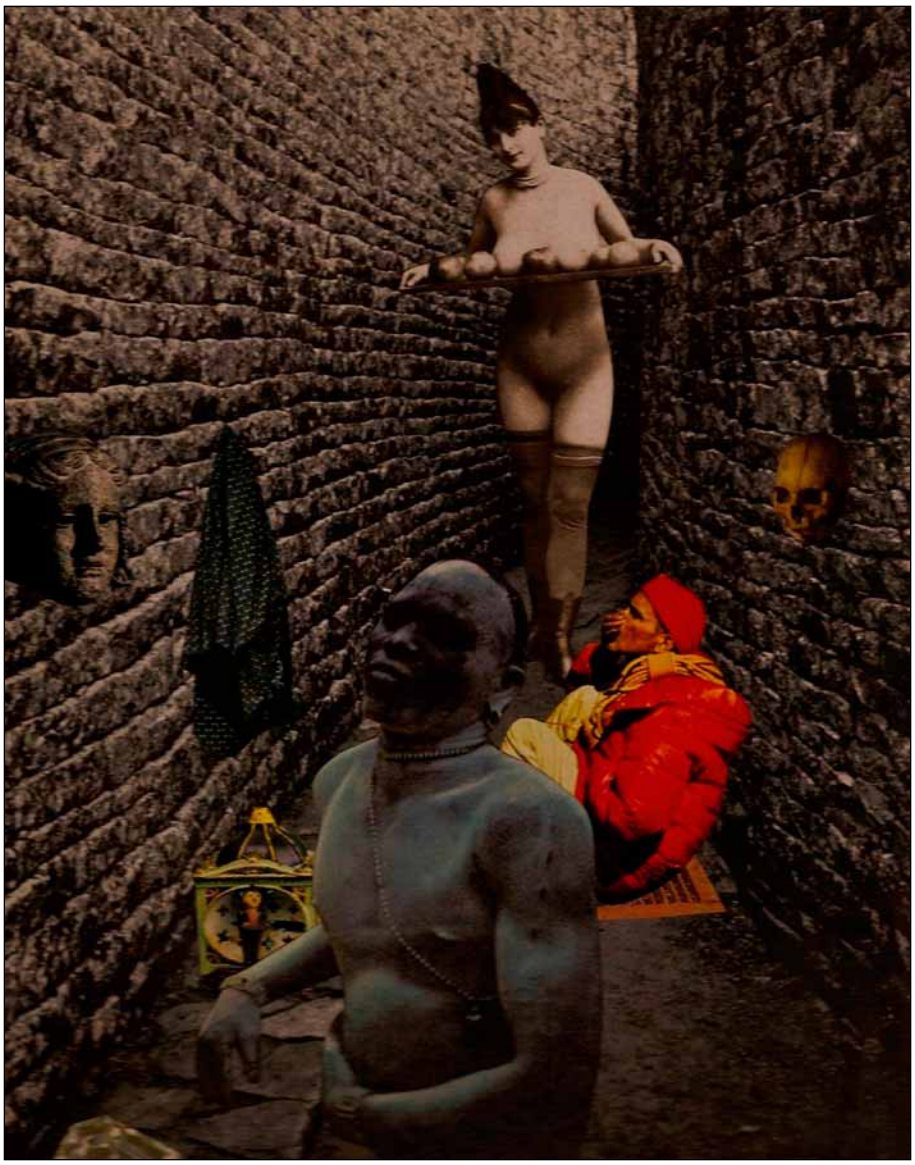
about an entire, single narrative poem in which the dream would reveal more and more of itself as it was written. So I started work on the book, *Snake*, the main body of which was written in about four intense weeks, and which is subsequently going through some editing to make it coherent. The book, *Snake*, is in production with Red Hen and will be published in the fall of 2013. It's an astonishing accomplishment for me. It's written in a new voice and in a new style from anything I've attempted. It's humbling to suddenly find, relatively late in your life, a previously undiscovered room in your house which contains, in a dusty closet, a jukebox filled with songs you've never heard. That's how it feels to me. I'm very proud that Red Hen is publishing it and grateful to Kate Gale for believing in it.

As far as editing goes, I'm a compulsive editor. Why? Because it's my favorite part of the job. I love to do a big mental dump onto the page and then go back and search for and strengthen the underlying connections between elements in the forming landscape. It's where a lot of the fun is. So when I don't do this it's very unusual. Mostly my poems are months if not years in the writing. "House of the Heart," for Neruda, in *Bristol Bay*, took five years to write. Three or four new poems were fed from the discarded flesh of the original.

Green: Well that clears up a bit of confusion for me—I knew the poem "Snake," and when *Bristol Bay* arrived I was surprised to find it in that book, thinking it was going to be part of something different. I was worried the press had contracted two books into one. So I'm relieved to hear *Snake* will arrive, italicize-able, and just in time for the Mayan Apocalypse!

The interesting thing, though, is that the poem "Snake" does fit well within *Bristol Bay*. The full title is *Bristol Bay and Other Poems*, but to me the book is highly thematic, dealing with the conservation of a broader ecology—the word "ecology" comes from the Greek for "living relations," and all of the poems in the book seem to be dealing with degradations to living relationships in one form or another, not just with our environment, but also with each other. What the book seems to be doing is mourning the loss of reverence, everywhere. Maybe I'm reading into things too closely, or my vision's too wide, but to me the book is much more cohesive than "Other Poems" implies. How did you settle upon that title, and how did you choose which poems to include? Is the larger theme really there, and intentional, or am I seeing the psyche's ghosts?

Lemons: Yes—it was sort of an odd evolution. The poem "End Game" in which the voice of Snake is introduced was also the original title of the book. For reasons having to do with the cover art, the title was changed to *Bristol Bay*. Then it was a question of how to include the other poems. We ended up with *Bristol Bay & Other Poems*. This isn't to say that the book is a main, long poem with selected poems haphazardly added. All the poems in the book were finished in the same 18 month period and relate to one another thematically. They lean into



Delilah's Alley
Charles Farrell

one another much as old couples lean, not on their separate crutches, but on each other for support. They all concern themselves with the ecology of habitat. In some cases that's geographical, though seldom purely, and in many instances it's geopolitical or geospiritual if you will.

In old writings healers often spoke of the human body as if it were landscape. A disease was said to inhabit a terrain. The terrain of the body was the particular area studied and it was seen as having many of the aspects of geography—topography (muscles, bones, appendages), weather (heat, cold, inflammation), turbulence (emotional states such as fear or anger), vegetation (disease), hydrological balance (blood and circulation), etc. It's not so common for the general population today to look at the body this way except that artists often still do. The metaphor is still relevant and clearly established. We are to some degree all little planets and like the big planet suffer the effects of decisions made without regard to the future health of the organism. And in that sense all the poems in *Bristol Bay* refer to the "landscape" in which the human condition, individually and collectively, unfolds.

The poem, "End Game," introduced what is for me a central and dominating character whose voice requires me as amanuensis. Out of this came the new book, *Snake*. I feel as if I've waited my entire writing life, some 45 years, for this moment—to write this book,to hear and have the privilege of transposing this voice. I'm grateful to the muse for this gift.

Without going into much depth about it, Snake continues the ecological theme of "End Game." It presumes a planet in peril. Both elapsed and imminent. A planet under assault from an epoch that even now science is calling the Anthropocene—the short time in which a single species contributed to unprecedented and catastrophic planetary changes. The book also presumes an intelligence behind the planet's response. An intentional cleansing of itself—down to the basic elements. From which point Earth will begin the cycle of renewal again.

This is where Snake enters. Snake is the last thing left alive. The almost but not quite disembodied voice of all the forms destroyed in the cleansing. All that is gone—all that has been reduced by fire and ice and the other dynamic retributive forces of Earth—lives on in Snake. Snake is the extracted limbic brain removed from the collective consciousness and hunted across an emptied landscape. As the end of End Game implies, Snake suffers on to keep the future from becoming the present.

He discovers and learns to travel the Dreaming Way. Earth feels him slithering across her body, comes for him and Snake disappears into the temporary refuge of a dream. On and on—across the millennia. Snake is the bad ass reptile holding back the end of time by sticking himself into the spokes of Samsara. The poems in the book are a front line account, by Earth and Snake, of pursuit and avoidance and friendship forged in the heat of struggle. There is also a choir supplying details of the frenzy at the tipping point.

The voice is, like the body of Snake, compressed and primitive, pared of all eloquence, as much a cry as a song. I'm part Oneida, or Haudenosaunee, which is a matrilineal tribe. I also lived 6 years on the Assiniboine Reservation outside Wolf Point, Montana. So I've borrowed traditional stories from both tribe's creation and destruction myths as well as from various Sanskrit characterizations important to my yoga practice. As I said, the book is a gift to me—one I hope I'm disciplined and open- hearted enough to understand and properly represent.

I should also say that for the sake of this interview I refer to Snake as "he." But truly he is more like Tiresias, carrying the accumulate burden of both sexes within him. That's probably enough—hopefully not too much—about Snake. For now.

Green: Well, that's probably a good note to end on. I'm looking forward to *Snake*, and after *Bristol Bay*, I'm sure many others are looking forward to it, too. I can't help asking one more question, though—you can keep the answer brief... Do you think we'll make it? As a species, as a planet? One of the jobs of a literary magazine, or at least *this* literary magazine, I think, is to reflect the mind of the times—a broad and deep form of journalism that would be of high anthropological value centuries from now. Reading tens of thousands of submissions, themes tend to emerge pretty clearly, and lately I have to say, there seems to be a lot of anxiety about what might be looming just over the horizon. But humans have been thinking apocalypticly for as long as we've been thinking, and the Doomsday Clock read two-minutes to midnight 57 years go. Do you think this is different? Or do you have hope that we'll wake up in time to start taking care of this big blue boat we're on?

Lemons: This has been fun Tim. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to think out loud in print about my processes and also for initiating some very thoughtful conversations which will continue, I hope, after the interview is over.

Do I think we'll make it as a species? Yes. As a planet? Yes. Intelligence will always have a place in the cosmological design. So will love and there is a glimmer of that in even the darkest of us. Many are so filled with it that it sloshes out and creates enduring communities around these individuals. The species will survive.

And you're right I think. The doomsday clock was ticking away when Nero fiddled on his balcony above the fires he set. The difference is we're not engaged any longer solely fighting one another. We're still doing that but what's put the doomsday machine into overdrive is there's a new victim—the planet. Anyone who doesn't think the poles are melting, the Earth heating up, the albedo shrinking and the oceans rising is circling the lovely blue waters around the island of Circes not realizing a nasty one eyed fellow watches them. The canary in the coal mine is now a 1,200 pound predator

in a white coat so filled with POPs that the disappearance of its environment is second on the list of things killing it. This is not crying wolf. This is life in the first part of the new millennium and it's real and it won't go away by holding hands and wishing it gone—well, who knows—if enough of us did that...

On one hand there's a sense that responsible, loving awareness is on the rise across national politics and borders and that we're moving closer to some sort of constructive awakening. But there's also this escalated sense of impending danger. Are the two compatible? Are they in fact the same thing. Is it non dualism again showing us that all opposites are entangled and it's impossible to experience one without the other? Implying a planetary awakening will only arrive after it's run a gauntlet of fire? Will technology keep up with the disastrous effects it creates? Like a person bailing a boat. Is the bailer fast enough to stay ahead of the leak? The big what-comes-next, which most of us won't live to see—but our children will.

And poets? What's our job? Is it enough as I mentioned earlier to drag a mirror down the road—to reflect the times back to the times in the hope that a guilty conscience is the best way to massage a new collective awareness from a jaded world politic? I guess whenever I'm confused about this the answer always come back clear—keep writing. Keep writing. Or as MC Yogi says—"you gotta be the change in the world you want to see—just like Gandhi." It's probably the bravest thing an artist, a human being can do in the always demented days in body, pry open the closed heart—act on guidance that comes not from personal knowing but from listening into the infinite mind of the collective—be the change. Write, move, sing as if the bones are a wand sparking magic into the world. They are. I suspect.

Obsidian Mirror
Charles Farrell

Note: One book feature appears in each eIssue, every fall and spring, including an interview with the author and sample poems. If you'd like your book to be considered for a feature, send a copy to: Rattle, 12411 Ventura Blvd, Studio City, CA 91604. All books not selected for a feature will be considered for a traditional review.

from Bristol Bay and Other Poems

Gary Lemons

Kingdom of Exiles

A man stands on the corner
Of a busy street asking people around
Him for help. His hand is out.

A small dog curls on an old army
Coat at his feet. It's his coat. Each
Of the faded medals acquired in exchange
For the rest of his life. The man is, what,
Hardly visible. The dog adores him.

There is a force between the man,
The dog and me. The shadow on us all.
It's an understanding about separation.
About night and day. It's two straddling
One. If anyone looks they remember
The man and the dog or they remember
Me. No one remembers all of us. Only
The bird flying. Not the sky.

The money in your pocket is mine.
The joy or sorrow in my heart is yours.
The muscle, the meat, the sloping
Line of that hill, the cold fog rising
From the wreckage of love. Ours.

I want to put my heart in his hand.
Instead I collect shadows, bring them
Home and drink what's left of them.
When I die I'll be the thing in your mirror.

from Bristol Bay

2
The Freezer

It was beautiful and ugly and loud and quiet.
It was gentle and rough, smelled of fish
And the sea roses that bloom in the waves
Just after the storm abates.
I went from picking fish to slicing them.
Then moved higher by going lower.
Into the freezer. A place Dante
Would have loved in a mirror.

The elevator door opens and the cold
Pours up the shaft and turns to rain
That freezes and falls like foreign coins
To the floor way below.
I'm in polar gear from head to toe—eyes
And nose exposed.
First floor is where all the action is.
Zero degrees.

The ship is rigged to run twice around the world
On the fuel it carries. We stay at sea for months.
Sell fuel to the crabbers and smaller boats.
Take on product from them too. All gets
Stored down below in one of the three freezer floors.
And in the course of our sailing it shifts
Or gets off loaded. We move it back and forth
To keep the boat in balance so it won't founder
Or slip too far over in rough seas. Then we drown.

Second floor same thing only the fish
Sold at various ports on the way home are here.
Not much movement. We're not going home.
The crates and boxes are silent. The pallets humble.
Second floor. 20 below.
The air is frozen and breathing is hard.

[...]

from Bristol Bay and Other Poems

Gary Lemons

[*from Bristol Bay - 2 The Freezer*]

The voices at this level are just audible
Like footsteps approaching a house in the rain.
The dead fish elegantly express with frost-filled
Eyes their wish for us to join them.

Third floor. 40 below. Some king crab
From last season. Mostly empty. The elevator
Door opens and the heat brought from
The surface is swallowed the way the universe
Eats whole planets, whole suns and grows thinner.

Nothing is visible until the door closes
And the ice fog settles. No one comes
Here. I come here. Jesus wept. My tears
Freeze in my eyes. I see through their window
The twisted figures dancing and singing.
There is blood frozen to the color of sunset
On the floor and smeared on the walls.
Here is where the soldiers lay as the ship
Chugged home from D-Day, from the Bulge,
Loaded with impossible contributions
The world would never receive.

The infantrymen line up in rows and salute
As I inspect the wounds they proudly wear.
All are mustered. All are loved.

Today when I walk among the living I
Carry their voices in my ear the way children
Carry pails of beach sand to a formidable
Structure they build as it's erased by the sea.

from Bristol Bay

5
The Captain

He never sleeps. Stalks at all hours.
White chin whiskers, seamed
As jerky, thin as bone, adrift in the air
Like a ghost very pleased to be dead.

I see him everywhere, touching a weld,
Holding fish heads near the conveyer
In a slant of halogen broken by shadow.

Yet the ship never falters in its journey.
Who is in charge when the captain is gone?
Some residual double at the helm?
Is he mated to the waves and steel?
Every thought a command whispering
Down corridors to the moving parts?

I am in trouble with my stomach.
I want to die. The waves are at 45 feet. The ship
Is almost going down on every wave. I am
Blowing down the boiler, trying not to puke.
It's 110 degrees in the boiler room. The dials
Waver as I hold to consciousness by a thread.

The captain walks in. Pats me on the back
Speaks to me for the first time. Says,
"Gary, she's blowing sweet tonight, blowing
God himself right out of the sky where
The blasted seiners will surely pull him
From the sea and, arrrgh, we'll have another frozen
God in the hold. Some say he's already there.

You hear the singing don't ye?"
Then he's gone. He called me by my name.

I talk to the captain every time we dock
Or at least I listen every time he sends

[...]

from Bristol Bay and Other Poems

Gary Lemons

[*from Bristol Bay - 5 The Captain*]

Commands to the engine room on the
Big brass clock that tells me what to do—
What he wants—everything between
Full reverse and full ahead. He sits somewhere
At the top of the ship, pulls the lever
And in my world the lever moves.

We enter Kodiak. We're at quarter ahead.
It's hard to start a 480-foot boat
That only goes 8 knots top end but it's also
Hard to stop it. Each engine command uses
Air from the compressor. Each command
Requires the engine be restarted by air
Driven through a tube into the cylinders.
Like starting a prop plane by spinning the prop.

Suddenly the man upstairs appears to go nuts.
One command after another, each contradicting
The one before it—eighth ahead, full stop, sixteenth ahead,
Full stop, quarter ahead, eighth reverse, full reverse,
Half ahead, full stop. Each time I fire the compressor.
Shoot air to the Nordberg. It responds.

I can't see up above but I imagine
The slimers along the rail wondering what the hell
Is going on as the boat convulses its way to dock.

Then the air runs out. I get the full stop signal.
Can't do it, Compressor hasn't had time
To build pressure. Never happened before.
Chief rubs his stub in his eye, says shit.
Better hold on steady boys cause
We's about to hit something.

Boat glides into Kodiak. Big mountain
Towers over the docks. Three hundred feet
Straight up. Some say a tidal wave crested
The mountain and wiped the town out couple
Hundred years ago. Hard to believe a wave that big.

Boat can't stop. I can't make it stop.
Captain and I are hooked together by
A futility neither of us wants to share.
The commands come faster now. Full reverse.
Full reverse. Full reverse. Chief grabs
A stanchion. Wraps himself around it.
When I see that I grab one strut
Of the engine mount. Hold on.

The dock is full of activity. Big ship,
All Alaskan. Blue Zoo. Coming in with
Two months load of frozen product.
Front end loaders running back
And forth over the wooden planks
Bringing totes. Pallet jacks bringing pallets.
Men and women scurrying to get in position,
Maybe 100 of them, as we glide toward
The pier. One probably says something
Like—hey—they ain't slowing down.

We ride into the pier at a sixteenth ahead.
Slice it in two pieces like a knife
Through butter. Machinery falls into the water.
People fall into the water. The pier
Collapses like dominos in all directions,
Chasing those in the middle toward safety
Where it meets the land. Some make it.
Some end up in the water. Some are crushed
By timbers reeking of fish, creosote and gulls.

We continue. Glide into another pier.
Destroy it. Then we hit the shore.
Solid rock. Bottom of the mountain.
We stop immediately. In the engine
Room I'm torgued from my strut.
Thrown across the floor into the chief
Who is still holding on with one hand.

I knock him loose. He breaks the speed of
My tumble. We end up against the
Door to the co2 chamber. Nothing broken.

[...]

from Bristol Bay and Other Poems

Gary Lemons

[*from Bristol Bay - 5 The Captain*]

Chief gets up. Offers me a hand.
I grab for it about the time we both realize
I'm reaching for his empty sleeve. Phantom
Limb retaining the habit of courtesy.

We laugh. Alive and no fires. Go upstairs.
Up the fiddler. Ladder leading through a narrow tube.
Up four stories to the helm with a steel opening
The size of an oven door at each floor.
In case of fire in the engine room the crew
Can get out up the fiddler when everything
Is burning, exploding, dark with diesel smoke.
Enemy torpedo sliding through three hulls,
Penetrating, sliding through bunk beds,
Galleys, flesh—into the heart of the ship.
Going off with a flash of white phosphor.

We open the door into the helm. The captain's
View. Glass windows one inch thick. Below,
Tiny beings hanging from broken spars,
Swimmers in green current, floaters face down,

Machines in pieces, cargo everywhere.
Distant sound of sirens. Medics.

Captain looks at the chief-says, "I run her
Out of air boys. Trying to miss the
Pots and other entanglements. Run her
Out of air just like the dead. Look down there.
See the ocean come up against the land. The land
Wins in the short term. Ocean in the long."

One tear caught in his beard, color of oil
That needs changing, refused to fall.

from End Game

3
Snake Dreams

Snake dreams of water. Seeing
Babies strung with seaweed floating
Effortlessly toward the sun.
Snake is alone with a truth
Worn so thin it has no sides.
A dreaming snake makes no sound,
Leaves no trail, weighs less than air,
Can't be heard, seen or felt by earth

Snake is the last living thing. Earth hunts
Snake. Snake dreams and can't be found.

When snake is sufficiently invisible
He will awaken and the clock begins
Ticking toward the time earth will
Feel the faint slither of the last blood
Filled tube moving on it skin. Earth
Sensing, snake sensing.

Before then snake will eat himself.
Snake will become the distance
Between inescapable beginnings
And inevitable conclusions expressed
By the dying sun over quiet water.

Snake will surface in the pink light
Surrounded by pale children whose
Hands are filled with bones that once
Were inside their bodies.

from Bristol Bay and Other Poems

Gary Lemons

from End Game

5
Snake Eyes

Snake has no eyes. Don't need to see.
Ain't nothing to see in the entire world
But snake hisself and snake done seen hisself
In the face of things he ate alive, seen
Hisself in the pool of liquid that came out
Of them when snake squeeze 'em good.

Now snake be blind. Sharpen his other senses.
Knows when to freeze, knows the voice
Of every dead soul hanging in the air,
Know especially when earth has felt him.
Knows then to dream his self away,
Leave behind his skin for earth to mince
While snake drifts through possible doors
Of awakening, not seeing, just knowing
When it's safe to be reborn.

Why do snake pursue another snake to be?
Why not give it up, go be dead? Stop hungering.
Be a ghost like all the rest. Be easy.
Just hold still. Let earth come. Let earth
Rise. Feel the ground tremble. Feel his belly
Sawed open by stones and dirt slide in.
Feel earth inside and no longer be snake.

Haw. Haw. That funny. Snake can't die.
Snake must live so not another world begins.

Orphan

The children don't care
Who made the bombs, who shaped them,
Whose dollars launched them.

It's enough to know the same light
That softens edges of hard days may
Burn through party dresses into bones.

People without families run.
Parents gather their children in their arms
And build a shelter from love that holds
Everything in but keeps nothing out.

Tomorrow the headlines will speak of a
Terrible pilgrimage made by distant
People toward a shrine that demands nothing
Less than everything they have as penance
For being born in their house, not in yours.

You wake in the night. A child stands in darkness
By your bed. She says, "I am your child."
Don't go back to sleep, this is not a dream,
This is the moment your suffering ends.

Eye Contact:
A Look at Visual Poetry with Dan Waber

#3: John Martone

One focus of visual poetry is the materiality of language, the physical fact of it. This concern manifests itself in many ways. Even a simple trope like onomatopoeia, when ported over to the visual, produces a wide range of results. The word "bed" looks like one. The word "pOp" does. Imagine the word "poem" cast in concrete, or the word "blood" written in blood. Imagine a mobile constructed of words about birds or schools of fish, and here is where it gets fun, where it shifts from the merely clever to the profound.

It's no leap to go from a consideration of the materiality of language to a consideration of the materiality of the substrate upon which language rides. They are the same. Poems have a place on the page, but there's nothing that says poems are restricted to only the page. A poem on a lampshade, a poem mown into a field, a video of a poem made of ice as it slowly melts—all of these are possible.

The combinatorial possibilities are vast, and the poets who consistently stun me are the ones who can make something which appears to be simple, then rewards (but does not require) sustained contemplation. These pieces by John Martone do that. At first they appear to be merely simple, even primitive. They are neither.

The poem hand-written in the milkweed pod is one of those magnificent phrases that can be read in many ways, all of them right. A phrase more wrought than written. It's no accident the punctuation is reader supplied. Who is the referent of the pronoun? Where is the pause in the phrase, where the emphasis? Best of all, there is that moment of realization—to have read the apology the milkweed seeds must have flown, a performance worth any waiting, though we have arrived too late ourselves.

The poem hand-written on the piece of bark is a single word, "tutoyer." It's a French word which means to address someone using the familiar form of the pronoun, to use "tu" instead of "vous." This distinction, of course, doesn't exist in English, but most people are aware of it. Here is the message this poem asks us to ponder: the inside of the bark of a tree and a word which means to assume by language an unpermissioned level of familiarity. This is exactly the kind of complex note I want poetry to strike. It's not insoluble, not unresolvable, but it griptwists me into working through its solution.

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Bob Grumman's RASP press published John Martone's first two books of visual poetry in the 1980s. Recent work has appeared in Mark Young's *Otoliths*, Michael Rothenberg's *Big Bridge* and online at fluxusa.com. To learn more about John, please visit his website: www.johnmartone.com

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

Milkweed
John Martone

Tutoyer
John Martone

The Impertinent Duet:

Translating Poetry with Art Beck

#4: The Deep Pulse of Idiom: Noodles, Blue Teeth, Flesh-Eaters, Gustave Flaubert, and Kurosawa's Dream

I. Macaroni con Corazone

Not too long ago, I came across a selection of Sephardic proverbs gathered by Michael Castro[i], a skilled poet and translator. He'd collected these sayings in Ladino (the Judeo- Spanish of the Sephardic Jews) mostly from family sources with the aid of a cousin and the memories of older relatives. Most of the proverbs were clear, while still managing to retain a unique sense of place and culture:

> *He who runs, falls.*
> *Do, but don't brag.*
> *Grain by grain, the chicken fills its intestines.*
> *Moses may be dead, but God endures..*

But there was one fascinating old saying that didn't seem at all clear to me: *Cominos macarones, alambicos corazones.* We ate macaroni and licked our hearts.

The image seemed so jolly, a plate of buttery pasta and something intimate, maybe even erotic? A meal reminiscent of the Tom Jones movie scene? I had no idea, but the proverb sang to me. Finally, I asked the editor of the journal in which they appeared if he could put me in touch with Michael Castro.

Michael's reply was revelatory. He said his sense of the saying's meaning was "somewhat conjectural," but that it "tended to be applied in conversations about surviving periods of poverty. *Licked our hearts* in this context would mean something like 'consoled ourselves and each other,' 'got by on love,' etc."

We ended up agreeing that an American equivalent might be something like: *We made do with beans and dreams.* But while "beans and dreams" might be an equivalent idiom, it draws its energy from another culture and loses the unique images of the Ladino. It transcribes a delicate minor key riff for the guitar, to a hardscrabble banjo.

On the other hand, a Sephardic Ladino speaker wouldn't be aware of anything exotic or out of the commonplace in the expression. And, from a translation standpoint, if you retain the exotic aspects, aren't you just adding embellishments that aren't really there in the original? Ladino, like Yiddish, is a fading language, spoken mainly among the dwindling old. Should an English translation of an old Ladino saying be automatically archaic and foreign? Or is *equivalence* what a translator should aim for? The dichotomy between the approaches is a core question in translation theory. And there's probably no single right answer.

Consider the following: *Das ist mir Würscht* is a commonplace Austrian colloquial phrase, more or less equivalent to "I don't give a hoot." When an Austrian friend saw it translated literally in a New Yorker article as "It's all sausage to me," she was incensed at the implication that Austrians spoke in quaint, cute imagery. To the American journalist who wrote the article, this was the point of quoting the literal phrase. But to my friend, a direct translation seemed somehow to infer Austrians were bumpkins. Still, how could any American reporter pass over such colorful language from the politician being interviewed?

II. Yankee Doodle's Macaroni

Then there's that other macaroni. The refrain that ends: *...stuck a feather in his cap and called it macaroni.* It's a song we all know, a song taught to six-year-old school-kids. But, how many of those kids, or even their teachers, know what the line means? It's become simply a nonsense rhyme, although one that's easy to research.

And when you do, you find that "macaroni" was 18th century English slang for a dandy, a Beau Brummell. And so the original meaning, from a British standpoint mocking the colonists, was that Yankee Doodle stuck a feather in his rough cap and decreed it the height of fashion. But the song was too good for the colonists not to take up. And in winning their rebellion, the macaroni feather became a badge of honor—a finger in the face of the Crown.

Now, we've lost all that because macaroni/dandy has slipped so far out of our language. Should we change the lyrics when we sing to something like "...stuck a feather in his cap and called it high style"? Well, someone more skilled than me would have to work on the rhymes and a better equivalent. Still, how would you translate the old phrase into, say, French, if you were doing it today? Archaically? Or would "macaroni" become "haute couture"?

Is it an under- or overstatement that in trying to translate an idiom, you're as often as not going to find yourself between the devil and the deep blue sea? I mean it really is a fine kettle of fish you're stirring.

III. So what's an idiom, really?

The MS Word dictionary on my computer gives the primary definition of "idiom" as "a distinctive and often colorful expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the combined meanings of the individual words." But secondary definitions are: "the way of using a particular language that comes

naturally to its native speakers," or "the style or expression of a specific individual group," and/or "the characteristic style of an artist or artistic group."

So "idiomatic" can cover a wide range—from "conversational usage" to something akin to the black holes of language—expressions that began as bright images but have since imploded into a mute energy; indecipherable passwords shared by initiates. The one commonality, I think, is that idiom is language that taps an internal energy apart from the speaker's intent or control. Or as G.K. Chesterton put it (at the beginning and near the end of a 1901 essay): "The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang..." And later: "All slang is metaphor and all metaphor is poetry."

Almost every idiom begins with an image—even though that image often becomes so blurred through usage, similar to the image on a worn coin, that the image is no longer essential to the currency. Translating idiom is tough enough in prose, but it's that still pulsing wellspring of underlying imagery that can really roil the water if you happen to be translating poetry.

IV: King Harald's Blue Tooth

In our world everything is accelerated, and the blurring process can happen quickly. Most everyone knows—at least in passing—what "Bluetooth" *does*. It allows wireless connection of various electronic devices.

As a bit of background, the electronic protocol was negotiated by a consortium of major manufacturers to enable any Bluetooth device to "talk to" any other without regard to different individual software or competitive formats.

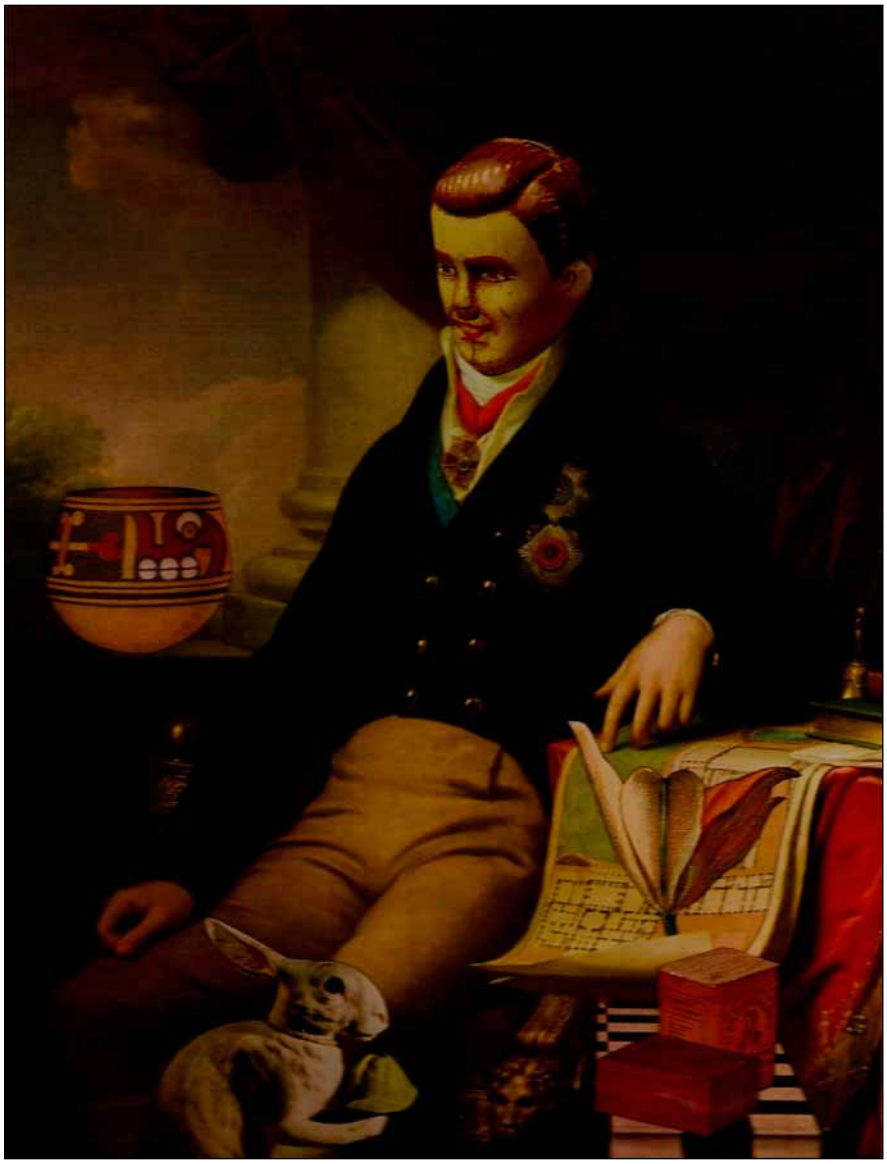
But why the name Bluetooth? Because the consortium of competitors named it after the tenth-century Danish King Harald Bluetooth, who "united warring factions." Even knowing this, who thinks of King Harald when they use a Bluetooth device? Not even the most nerdish among us, I'd guess.

In the nature of things, Bluetooth, like VHS and Beta will, sooner probably than later, pass into the graveyard of old technology. But let's say that before that happens, one of us became inspired to use Bluetooth in a poem. Maybe a love poem entitled, say, "Electricity":

> …our fingers didn't need to touch,
> when we glanced, our eyelashes were
> already entangled.
> Your whisper was Bluetooth tickling
> my tongue.

Well, I pulled those lines out of my butt, but say they were better and that something came of the poem, that it got good enough to be anthologized, and some fifty or a hundred years from now someone wanted to translate it into German or Chinese. Let's say five hundred years from now, long after the minutiae of today's high tech is as obscure as the highly engineered parts of ancient racing chariots. Think what fun a 26th century translator might have with "Bluetooth."

Think how impossible it would be



Tintype
Charles Farrell

for someone in another culture and separated by five hundred years to get it right. In the context of accelerating change, the average educated reader knows more about the minutiae of the Classical world than the seventeenth or eighteenth century, mainly because up until that time our ancestors had longer cultural memories and wrote all this stuff down. If change keeps accelerating, how could someone five hundred years from now hope to research a technology that probably will last less than ten years?

So think how many ways there might be in 2610 to get the Bluetooth whisper wrong. Was Bluetooth a drink? Obviously. Some sort of vodka, no doubt. No, a type of oyster, ergo a late twentieth century euphemism for a forbidden sexual practice.

An intuitive poet-translator might simply finally choose to ignore "Bluetooth" and, taking a cue from the title, emend the line to "your whisper was *electricity* tickling my tongue."

In fact, saying that, I'm thinking that "Bluetooth" might make a better title for the poem than "Electricity," and electricity is better than Bluetooth in the line. But then translators could argue about the title. Is "Bluetooth" a woman's name, perchance? A disease? Some sort of dental tattoo?

But what if, five hundred years from now, a translator did stumble on not only the definition but the etymology of Bluetooth? And what if that translator decided to utilize the image implicit in Bluetooth: King Harald uniting the warring factions.

Then, we'd have something like: "your whisper was a *truce* tickling my tongue." On the one hand, maybe a more interesting, more complex poem—and a better poem? But if so, isn't the translator mining something that wasn't really there? Adding an embellishment that wouldn't have occurred to any twentieth century reader.

But why not, if it adds to the 25th century translation? If it produces a real poem that resonates with 25th century readers, what harm's done to the long since worm-eaten original poet? To the competitors who coined the word, Bluetooth was, above all, *a productive detente*. A format that avoided expensive, needless product wars. To its users, Bluetooth, with its strange alliterative name, evokes a sort of magic, an electronic ESP. A glowing tooth of sorts. Cool electricity. But these are the kind of resonances that will be hopelessly lost five hundred years from now. If the hypothetical Bluetooth poem is somehow resurrected in that hypothetical future, other—as yet unimagined—resonances will have to replace them.

V. The Way of All Flesh

Bluetooth is an artificial example. An advertising agency's inspiration. Natural idioms are richer. Especially when it comes to sex, death or disaster.

A troll of the internet will yield several guesses at the origin of the phrase "bought it"—as in, "He bought the farm." But all seem to agree it originated among wartime pilots. The first time I heard it was from auto racers. With the connotation that this was the way you "retired" from a dangerous occupation. Similar to the way "he graduated" is used to describe someone fired from a corporation. Or the way old women talk about their friends in the nursing home—"she's in the finishing school," where she "talks to her parents."

On a more ancient level, there's *sarcophagus*. Literally, in Greek, "flesh eater." A word taken into Latin that apparently began as an idiom and that we now use in English without much awareness of its ghoulish image. What funeral director would suggest consigning a loved one to a "flesh eater"? This was something I should have known but didn't know some twenty years ago when I was translating a Luxorius poem about a sarcophagus. I say "should have known" because Luxorius, a grammarian writing around 525 A.D. would have almost certainly been aware of the Greek etymology.

Rilke, in his 1907 poem "Roman Sarcophagi," certainly seems aware of the etymology when he says "inside slowly self consuming garments/ a slowly loosened something lay—/ till it was swallowed by the unknown mouths/that never speak…" (Edward Snow's translation[ii]).

And again in the "Sonnet to Orpheus #10," first part—about now vacant ancient sarcophagai—"I greet those gaping re-opened mouths/ torn away from any doubts/ who know now, what silence means" (my translation).

But Luxorius puts a somewhat different spin on the image-rich word:

> *De sarcophago ubi turpia sculpta fuerant*
> *Turpis tot tumulo defixit crimina Balbus,*
> *Post superos spurco Tartara more premens.*
> *Pro facinus! Finita nihil modo vita retraxit!*
> *Luxuriam ad Manes moecha sepulcra*
> *gerunt.*

Sarcophagus

The notorious Balbus, who furiously chiseled
all the filth he could on his own coffin—
as if he could pump and bugger the underworld
into some kind of submission... If he'd had time
to think, would he be ashamed of himself?

His recent death had no effect
on the continuing flow of that raucous life,
that coffin, like one of his erections
carried in solemn funeral procession
to a pale, insatiable tomb.

Before getting into the flesh-eating coffin in this poem, I should mention (especially to those who read Latin) that my translation is fairly loose and expanded. This approach, I think, befits translating a poet whose work for the most part survived in only one early medieval manuscript with no way to check copyist's mistakes. And with titles believed added by monks as a way of cataloguing artifacts of a no longer relevant pagan world.

Luxorius is fraught with obscurity—a voice lost for a thousand years until the manuscript containing his poems resurfaced in the 1600s. So any attention is better than the attention he's gotten. The only real harm a translator can do with a poet like Luxorius is to be boring.

So I stretched out and embellished as the spirit took me. One of the things Luxorius didn't exactly say was "insatiable tomb." What he said was *moecha sepulcra*—"adulteress tomb." (If in fact that's even what he said, since "moecha" represents a 19th century scholar's best guess emendation of an otherwise unknown word.)

What's interesting though is the way the insatiable flesh eating idiom/image found it's way into my translation—without my even thinking about what may have prompted Luxorius to portray the same kind of Roman sarcophagus that Rilke characterized as a mouth—as a man eating, desperate housewife. In retrospect, maybe it's a better translation for my not being conscious of the way the underlying goulish idiom pulses through the poem like a half-remembered nightmare.

VI. Akira Kurosowa's Idiomatic Dream

Flaubert, in an 1853 letter to Louise Colet, writes:

> What seems to me the highest and most difficult achievement of art, is not to make us laugh or cry, nor to arouse our lust or rage, but to do what nature does—to set us dreaming...[iii]

In his 1990 film, *Dreams*, Akira Kurosowa explores this aesthetic. The film is a sequence of eight dreams presented in what's been characterized as "magical realist" mode. It's a highly personal work in that each episode is purported to depict an actual dream of the director, who turned 80 in the year the film was released.

The first episode is entitled "Sunshine Through the Rain" and has at its heart an idiom, "the foxes are getting married" or "the foxes' wedding." This is an expression used in Japan and Korea for a sun-shower—rainfall while the sun is shining. And, with some animal variations (monkey, jackal, wolf, rat, bear), it also appears in many Asian, African and European languages. But the image is as hermetic as it is universal. An idiom that seems to exist at a core of language so deep and ancient that no matter how deeply we reach, it no longer makes decipherable sense—an artifact, ur-idiom.

It's not hard to imagine the expression coming from a time before written language. From a time when, possibly, our ancestors imagined magical animals who were guardians of the sun-shower, the way ancient demigods were said to guard sacred groves and streams.

Or, not so much a name for the sun-shower phenomenon, as an arcane description of the imagined dynamic, an image in itself as mysterious as sun-showers. Or an ejaculation uttered almost like a protective charm in response to a magical occurrence. The "foxes' wedding" could be any or all of these things.

Kurosawa's "Sunshine Through the Rain" is an enigmatic journey into that ancient image. His dream-episode is as short, haunting, and ephemeral as a sun-shower. Adjectives that might also apply to lyric poetry, a territory into which Kurosawa's episode implicitly enters.

The "dream" begins with a boy of around six running into the courtyard of a large but traditional Japanese home on a sunny morning. The time might be today or hundreds of years ago. He's dressed in a traditional Japanese robe, but because of his age and knowing this is a dream, the robe "feels" more like pajamas.

Then suddenly it's raining, and the boy stands under a lintel sheltered from the rain falling both in front of where he wants to go and behind him in the open courtyard.

Responding to the sudden shower a woman runs out of the house holding a yellow umbrella, gathering cushions and pulling them inside. Then the woman, presumably his mother, tells the boy. "You're not going outside today. The sun is shining, but it's raining. Foxes hold their wedding processions in this weather. And they don't like anyone to see them. If you do, they'll be very angry."

Of course, as in any worthwhile fairy tale, he disobeys. After peering inside to make sure his mother is no longer watching, the boy sets out through the sun-shower into a primeval redwood forest where ferns reach as high as his shoulders. The sky through the tall old trees is blue, but the rain keeps falling. Strangely (or is it just the off quality of the pirated YouTube clip I'm watching), his robe-pajamas seem to stay dry.

The little boy wanders aimlessly, almost as if he's sniffing his way, looking this direction and that. Until, in a gap between the Tolkienesque trees, he sees a blue glowing mist, a ground hugging cloud that radiates gold sunlight on the forest floor. And from this cloud: at first slow, solemn Japanese music. Then, little by little, the quiet, measured wedding procession of the foxes. They walk in studied steps as if engaged in some deep, bittersweet ritual. Their unhurried feet guided by light syncopated drum taps. Every few steps, their knees slightly bend, half-genuflecting. The male foxes are dressed in blue coats and trousers. The vixens in traditional gowns. They're all masked, as if they were Noh players, their faces wooden, unreadable.

From time to time, the eerie procession stops, as if startled and the Noh-foxes turn their heads in unison, from side to side, testing the air. The little boy hides behind a large trunked tree. The third time the creatures stop like this, they spot him and he runs.

And then, in the dream, the boy is running up to his grand house, his sandals flopping through puddles drying in the sun, the rain finally stopped. His

mother meets him sternly in front of the front gate. "You went and saw something you shouldn't have. I can't let you in now. An angry fox came looking for you. He left this..." From her sleeve, she hands him a short scabbard, which the child opens to find a *tanto* sword, the traditional weapon of ritual suicide.

In Samurai culture, compulsory suicide was a traditional form of capital punishment—the *tanto* knife presented like a gun with one bullet in the chamber. A chance for an honorable death, otherwise...

So the knife is serious, akin to showing the child the electric chair. The boy, with his curious and rash exploration of the buried image beneath the idiom, has stumbled into a sacrilege as unforgiveable as eating the cattle of the sun, or blinding Poseidon's one-eyed son. Only this is a shaken six-year-old, not wily Odysseus and his battle wizened cohort.

"You're supposed to kill yourself." His mother's face is stern, but her voice holds out a slim ray of hope. "Go quickly and ask their forgiveness. Give the knife back and tell them how sorry you are."

But then, turning away: "They don't usually forgive. You must be ready to die." She closes one side of the gate, then moves to the other. "Get going. Unless they forgive you, I can't let you in." She begins to close the other gate.

"But I don't know where they live," the shunned and alone little boy desperately begs. Just as she's closing the gate, his mother tells him, "You'll find out. On days like this, there are always rainbows. Foxes live under the rainbows." Then she slams the door to their home in his face.

If we accept this episode—as Kurosawa asks us to—as his own dream, did he dream this as a six-year-old, or as an old man? Because for me, what makes the dream so painfully personal—not just a filmmaker's fantasy—is the *tanto* knife and the admonition to suicide.

Kurosowa did, after all, undergo a deep depression at the age of 60, and attempted suicide, slashing himself almost fatally, some 30 times, with a razor. So, is this a dream of childhood foretelling, or of late life healing? And why was it triggered by the hermetic idiom of the foxes' wedding?

But really, if this is an old man's healing dream, could it be the miraculous but tentative sun-shower itself, reaching into itself for a metaphor worthy of Kurosawa's art? And with Kurosawa the artist, the sacred animal metaphor at the heart of the indecipherable idiom gives a quiet voice to scarred personal depths.

As the director-poet's dream continues, the condemned boy stands forlorn in front of a home that's suddenly expelled him. He explores an also locked side door, holds the grim knife and broods. Then sets off shuffling with the uncertain steps of a helpless child preparing himself to die.

But then, dreaming on, we see the little boy walking in the sun through a meadow of wildflowers as tall as the ferns in the fox-forest, the horrid knife still held in both hands, but no longer shuffling. His step is quizzical now, wandering, but there's the slightest trace of jauntiness, of "what the hell" as he walks through the multi-colored meadow toward a blue misty gap in the hills and the edge of a barely discernable rainbow.

In the dream, a six-year-old who's trespassed on an arcane magical rite walks toward a rainbow razor's edge that will bring either death or absolution. But stepping back from the dream to the dreaming Kurosawa: does the 80-year-old necromancer of light and shadow also sense he's moving somewhere? Towards death of course, but maybe beyond, towards the cusp of reincarnation and yet another childhood? As with so much mythical marriage, is the sly sun and rain showered wedding of the foxes just a prelude to birth?

With this unresolved scene, Kurosawa's dream enigmatically ends on a mood that Flaubert, later in that same letter to his lover and muse Louise, describes better than I can:

> Through small apertures, we glimpse abysses whose somber depths turn us faint. And yet, over the whole there hovers an extraordinary tenderness. It is like the brilliance of light, the smile of the sun, and it is calm, calm and strong.[iii]

Flaubert was talking about the experience of writing and communing with language at a level few ever attain, but it helps to be reminded that language and imagery not only live in us—but that we exist in an imaged language older than any human memory. And that its vagaries and strange twists can be as inscrutable, haunting and fertile as dreams.

Notes:

[i] Castro, Michael. *Big Bridge:* www.bigbridge.org/BB14/MCASTRO.htm
[ii] Rilke, Rainer Maria, tr. by Edward Snow. *New Poems, 1907* (North Point Press, 1990).
iii Flaubert, Gustave, tr. by Francis Steegmuller. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830-1857* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979).

Art Beck is a San Francisco poet and translator who's published two translation volumes: *Simply to See: Poems of Lurorius* (Poltroon 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

OPINION

PROCESS, PUBLICATION, AND REJECTION

by

Stephen Kessler

Like anyone else who's been in the game this long, over the more than 40 years that I've been publishing poems in magazines, I've collected a great many rejections. If you're not prepared to have your efforts rejected, you are not ready to publish—rejection is part of the reality of publishing, and for anyone truly committed to writing it may be annoying or frustrating or aggravating, demoralizing or depressing or infuriating, but finally it is no big deal, you keep writing anyway because you must, you can't keep from writing, and if nobody wants to display your work to the public, well, too bad.

My preferred rejections have always been the most straightforward—"No thanks, this isn't right for us"—and the ones that have bugged me the most are those that offer generic encouragement or insincere affirmation of the value of what you've sent and wish you the best of luck with your future writing, or with placing your work elsewhere. Worst of all are the form letters explaining at length the editors' inevitable subjectivity—as if we didn't know such choices are subjective—and apologetically disclaiming any reflection on the work submitted. *Rattle*'s touchy-feely rejection letter is a good example of this type of friendly kiss-off, and is the inspiration for these thoughts.

"Spare me" is all I can say to such attempts at editorial niceness. I don't need the reassurance, and I doubt most other adults do, either. This kind of hand-holding, so-sorry-if-we-hurt-your-feelings note must come from the culture of "self-esteem," where everyone is above average but is assumed to have such a fragile sense of their own worth that the slightest implicit criticism (this didn't measure up to our standards, didn't meet our needs) is enough to throw the aspiring poet into a downward spiral of self-doubt, a vortex of discouragement from which they may never emerge to write again.

If so, so what?

Anyone so easily discouraged must not have much of a need to write in the first place—and surely is ill advised to seek publication. Real poets write from felt necessity, and cannot be stopped so easily by the less-than-receptive remarks of an editor, or even many editors one after another. We all know stories of widely rejected works that went on to become classics, or of our own repeatedly rejected poems that finally found a home in some congenial journal.

And what exactly is it about writing poetry that makes people want to publish, anyway? To put one's work into the world is an affirmation of one's existence—I publish, therefore I am—and an effort to distinguish oneself from the unpublished multitudes. It comes in part from a desire to communicate, to connect with other minds, souls, lives and psyches in a common zone of paradoxically private consciousness, and in a shared social (sometimes political) human community. And let's be honest, it is often a narcissistic act of self-reflective exhibitionism, a desire to see oneself in the most flattering light and be seen by others as a skillfully expressive maker of art, of a publishable poem.

But why do we write to begin with? Surely there are many motives—to make a beautiful or truthful thing, to exercise the imagination, to discover something we didn't know, to "express" oneself, to speak for what cannot speak for itself, among others—but I think most writers of poetry would say there is something intrinsic in the act of making the poem that gives back a certain gratification, that the process of writing is a gift in itself. Is this process akin to therapy? Meditation? Verbal yoga? Masturbation? Whatever it is, it's certainly more private than publication.

So there's a certain dissonance between the notion of writing for the pure satisfaction of the process and the desire to publish, because once you publish, all the reader can see is the result, the product of your effort.

True, the best poems are a record of the writing process, a graph of their own creation, the words and thoughts unfolding in a certain shape that is finally available to the reader. But that shape—like the improvisational performance of a piece of music—is determined not by the feelings or ideas that may have moved the poet to compose, but by his or her skill in realizing—in bringing to realization—the inchoate urge in some harmonious form, or in a form cacophonous enough to faithfully manifest the conflict of its creation. Without this formal fidelity, the poem, however sincerely felt or thought by the writer, may not be worth the reader's time.

I personally think there is too much poetry published—my own included—and that there's nothing wrong with discouraging people, not from writing (if that's what they're moved to do) but from filling up magazines with generic verse, verse that may be important to their sense of self-esteem or self-realization but of little or no use to the reader, who may or may not be interested in the poet's feelings or cleverness or biography or memories but with how the words sing on the page—or leap off the page to move the reader with their urgent, irresistible reality.

For better or worse, not many poems do this. But those that do are the ones that make the private joy or agony of creation matter to people other than the writer. If my poems don't make the grade of a given editor, tough luck; I'd rather not be patronized with a comforting pat on the back. Maybe the poems are in

some way worthless and really don't merit publication—time will tell. Or maybe they simply are what they are and will find their way to the eyes of a few friends, or into some other venue—a reading, a broadside, a blog post, some other magazine or website—or into the drawer to be discovered by future snoops or archeologists or scholars. Or, who knows, by some serendipitous twist of history they could find their (highly unlikely) way into immortality—or (alas, most likely) into oblivion.

Too bad. At least the writing was its own reward.

STEPHEN KESSLER is a poet, translator, essayist, editor and novelist. He is the author of eight books and chapbooks of original poetry, most recently *Burning Daylight*; fourteen books of literary translation, most recently *Desolation of the Chimera* by Luis Cernuda, winner of the 2010 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award from the Academy of American Poets; a book of essays, *Moving Targets: On Poets, Poetry & Translation*; and a novel, *The Mental Traveler.*

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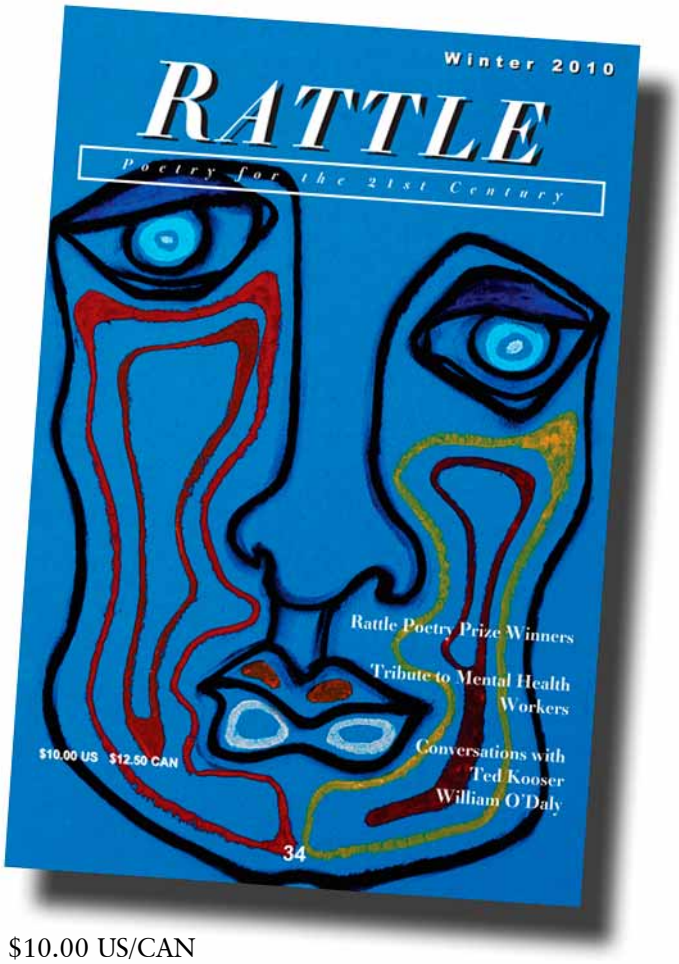
Charles Farrell



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Tribute to Mental Health Workers

Releasing in December, 2010, *RATTLE* #34 turns its attention to another intimate vocation, spotlighting the poetry of 26 mental health professionals. These psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, counselors, and case-workers dive inside the mind daily and come home soggy with the muck of dreams. Many of them write about their careers, but the scope is broad, and all of their poems are informed by years of training and unique insights on the human soul. The section is highlighted throughout by the stunning abstract portraiture of art therapist Mia Barkan Clarke. As psychoanalyst Forrest Hamer writes in one poem, "so much depends on what's under."

Yet the Tribute is only part of the issue. *RATTLE* #34's open section features the work of 50 poets, plus the 11 winners of the 2010 Rattle Poetry Prize. Also, Alan Fox interviews former U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser and Pablo Neruda translator William O'Daly.

Poetry

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Mia Barkan Clarke

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Ted Kooser
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Tribute to Mental Health Workers

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Honorable Mentions

Michele Battiste • Heidi Garnett
Valentina Gnup • francine j. harris
Courtney Kampa • Devon Miller-Duggan
Andrew Nurkin • Laura Read • Scott Withiam

from Rattle #34, Winter 2010
Poetry

Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz

Op-Ed for The Sad Sack Review, Regarding News of Another Rash of Writer Suicides

In a fit of gloom, I googled the word *failure*,
just to see if my name would come up. Instead,
Google told me I misspelled the word *failure*.

Recounting this makes me feel like I'm starting
a very weepy poem, or a very dull suicide note.
Never begin a wedding toast with the dictionary

definition of *marriage*, and never begin a suicide
note by saying you googled the word *failure*.
These days, the number one thing preventing me

from killing myself is likely the idea of people
learning of my suicide via Facebook status updates.
There's no dignity in that eulogy, its collections

of sad face emoticons, studded with apostrophe tears.
This is a dumb reason to keep living, but it is a reason.
I'm sure all you other sad sacks have your reasons too.

So let's all cling to them. Let's all agree that living
for a dumb reason is better than killing yourself
for a dumb reason. Let's feed tears to the dragons

of misery, but let's never crawl into their mouths.
Let's write terrible poetry, dress like late-era Rothkos,
wear out the relentless hate machines of our brains,

but let's never break. Let's just keeping living. We can
do this. Trust me. Yours Sincerely, Me, A Poet Who
Doesn't Even Know How to Spell the Word *Failure*.

Trent Busch

The Ordinary Man

The ordinary man sat at a table
in the darkness. Not that he didn't
like the music, not that he didn't
like the red dancers in the light.

The truth is he liked them very much;
he sat in his dark shoes and kept
time with his fingers on his glass.
He smiled and nodded approval.

The ordinary man didn't mind
the green hair of the dancers, the thin
legs and deep skirts, the creased pants
in limbo below the simple bar.

It was a dark table where he sat.
He smiled and drummed his fingers,
nodding approval, as if he
didn't care what part he was of the show.

from RATTLE #34, WINTER 2010
Poetry

Matthew Olzmann

RARE ARCHITECTURE

An ordinary man hires a contractor to build
a new house. When it's done, he rushes
to see it. But it's not what he's paid for,
there must be some mistake. The house
is shaped like a human head. Two eyes
instead of bay windows. A circular mouth
for a doorway. There's even a small lantern,
like a nose-ring, set on the right nostril.
Furious, he calls the contractor. *You godless*
pig fucker, he yells, *You whore of a human shell*.
He files lawsuit after lawsuit. But the contractor
has nothing—his bank accounts hold
the emptiness of vacant lots, and his business,
which was merely failing before, has now officially
failed. So the man is stuck with this piece
of real estate. At first, he hates the head, hates
sleeping in its temporal lobe, hates eating
breakfast on a row of teeth. As stated before,
this is an ordinary man. His thoughts
are ordinary and his ambitions are sparse. Then,
in the middle of hating his ordinary life, a change.
People take pictures when he trims the ivy—
which looks oddly like facial hair—on the north
façade. Stoned teenagers road trip across
the country just to hang out on the front lawn.
National magazines run feature articles.
Suddenly, this man who was—just weeks ago—
utterly forgettable, is a minor celebrity.
He wants more. He imagines a vivid future.
So he calls the contractor to apologize. He wants
to suggest building a second house, perhaps one
shaped like the president or Elvis. But the line
is disconnected. No one's there. Turns out,
the contractor has vanished—after the lawsuits,
his luck took a turn for the worse, then another,
then—nothing. He disappeared. So, there will
be only one house shaped like a head.
And after a couple months, the novelty wears off.
The man inside is old news. But night
after night, you can see him up there, sitting
behind the house's left eyelid, both he
and the house just staring at the street.
What must the street look like to them?
Tonight, there's so much fog, both the trees
and the sky are invisible. But every once
in a while, there's a part in the mist, a rip
in the veil, an opening where the world looks—
for only a moment—different. Then
it's hazy again, then it's nothing at all.

from RATTLE #34, WINTER 2010
Tribute to Mental Health Workers

Professional Counselor (retired)

Sharon L. Charde

LOVE'S EXECUTIONER

I come from a proud Polish poet sent to Siberia, right
arm cut from his body, punishment for poems—

the first daughter of a man from Naples who was
a baby in a ship's hold, women screaming and praying

the rosary, afraid of God's teeth, chocolate cake,
my mother's blood, my car crashing into yours

on the Mass Pike or 84, and the brown spots and bruises
on my arms, afraid of saying yes and bank accounts

and a branch of the big silver maple falling on my roof.
I believe in the gray flannel pants of the therapist who

took them off, the room I shared with the other one
in Beijing, the woman who lives alone on an island

who cannot tell our story because she has forgotten it.
They say I always wanted to get out and I should go

back to church and not much else except that I was
the girl who got A's and they wanted me to keep

getting A's but then I got C's and in that apartment
in Philadelphia I pulled the green and blue bedspread

off the bed and draped it over the kitchen table, made
a little tent so I could scream while the babies cried

and no one would hear—and you were gone then
but I don't want to talk about that and me pushing

the cheap plaid stroller your mother got with S&H
green stamps waiting for another baby that I didn't

want but when it came I did want it, such a beautiful
soft baby holding me and I didn't know the seeds

of death were in him already. Do you know this, if
you are very good and do all the proper rituals

like making a different hamburger casserole every
night, scrubbing the tile in the bathroom on Saturday

morning, ironing all the pillowcases—that even if you
do this you will not get the prize of keeping your children

alive. Tell me why I love her again when I am love's
executioner and dream I was a girl in a burn unit

who will not recover, tell me what will come from
the apartment on the second floor which is all blue

with a white bed as big as a small ship and a window
over a bathtub that looks out onto the tree I almost

backed into with my red Saab and the Dresden girls
on the mantle over the fireplace that cannot burn

anything. Tell me about the woman who lives there
who walks with a black cane and wears a blue sweater

and I wore one too that day though I never wear blue
and yesterday how I was the wind and she bound me in.

from RATTLE #34, WINTER 2010

Tribute to Mental Health Workers

Psychoanalyst

Forrest Hamer

A POEM ALSO ABOUT DUPLICITY

It would be unfortunate if the idea of multiple selves
obscured the fact the self is still
responsible for the terror it makes in the mind.

It would be a mistake if the multiple meanings
of words like *torture* disguised the fact
we are torturers, with lessened concern about it.

It would be tragic if the loss of multiple relationships
to the unconscious
obviated the possibility
of minding a more responsible life.
I say this as someone who minds
what insanity means, not what we are coming to think.

Imagination means so much;
so much depends on what's under.

Counseling Psycholgist (former)

Diane Klammer

THESE ARE THE RULES

What matters most is how well
you walk through the fire.
—Charles Bukowski

The whole world may be burning
around you,
but you have knowingly
chosen this.
You must confront the blizzard
with a tattered umbrella.
These are the rules.
You must stop the gaping
head wound
with only a tiny circular band aid.
You do not have more
and you cannot do less.
This is the choice you make:
to wash it with your tears,
wring it out,
and begin again.
Eventually it may stick.
The role you take
is only as a guide.
Your patient is the one
who struggles each day
through the snow and the wind
but for the band aid,
naked.

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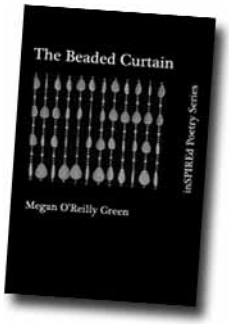

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