

Spring 2008

# RATTLE

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



**Book Features:**

**John Amen**  
*More of Me Disappears*

**Diane Lockward**  
*What Feeds Us*

**2008 Neil Postman Award  
for Metaphor**

**Hand-Colored Photographs  
by Dianne Carroll Burdick**

**Issue #29 Preview**

*e.4*

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## ABOUT THIS E-ISSUE

I've been doing a lot of thinking lately about why we do what we do. What's the point of poetry? Fewer people will read this e-Issue than attend the average minor league baseball game, or will visit Mall of America *today*, even on a weekday—it's true, I looked it up—and yet I consider our popularity a success. This year's fad diet cookbook will outsell this year's Pulitzer Prize winner in poetry—and I *don't* have to look that one up. Even the oft-quoted William Carlos Williams is no help when you really think about it: "It is difficult/ to get the news from poems/ yet men die miserably every day/ for lack/ of what is found there." It's not the poems themselves that could bring peace; it's the thoughtful attention of a poet that's missing. The poems are just a byproduct of mindfulness—they're the bone meal, the manure, the slag—of what some religions call enlightenment. It's a brief moment of enlightenment, the moment of creation, but it's there, and the poem is a record of it.

This line of thinking always cheers me up when I'm down, but I have no illusions: I don't think poetry can change the world, even if it wanted to. It would be hubris to think otherwise, or worse. Recently one reviewer complained that none of our contributors, when asked in the back of an issue, made such immodest claims—but I'm glad most poets are realists.

Still, it seems obvious that poetry has some intrinsic value, greater than other mere entertainments, and greater, even, than that revelatory joy of losing oneself in language.

Poetry is communal. And despite all of our apparent bickering and divisiveness, all the awards and the jealousy of not winning awards, the publications and the unpublished, the pedantic, the pejorative, the nasty, the nosy, the nice—despite all of that, poetry remains the best kind of community. It's a bunch of thoughtful people, communicating in a thoughtful way. It's a relatively small group of strangers, but there's no collective group of strangers I'd rather call friends.

The best example of this might an anthology that landed on my desk a few weeks ago: *Seeds of Fire: Contemporary Poetry from the Other USA* (Smokestack Books, 2008). It's edited by Jon Andersen, a former RATTLE contributor, and maybe that's where the review copy came from—if so, thanks, Jon. I'm not going to get into politics here. To quote Howard Beale from the movie *Network*, you don't need me to tell you things are bad; everybody knows things are bad. Or to quote my favorite bumper sticker: *If you're not angry, you're not paying attention*—and we've already established that poets pay attention.

*Seeds of Fire* brings together over 50 poets bearing witness to the absurd horror show that is modern life for anyone selfless enough to look. The poems are at turns satirical, lyrical, and raging—none of them will change any of the realities of their context. But they exist anyway, and somehow that existence itself is moving. The message beyond the message is that we're not alone as people who notice.

So if you've been feeling helpless and frustrated and angry with global and national events, check it out.

And in the meantime, check out this e-Issue. The topics aren't as focused as *Seeds of Fire*, but each poet and artist brings his or her own spark—whether it's John Amen's juxtapositions, Diane Lockward's exploration of nourishment, or Dianne Carroll Burdick's dreamlike photographs—all of them thoughtful people, communicating in a thoughtful way. You might be a slim minority reading this, but you're one of us; you're not alone.

We're also happy to announce the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Neil Postman Award for Metaphor winners, and preview the summer issue, which features a full-color selection of mixed-media poetry. That's 37 images by 30 artists, so widely varying it's hard to think of it as a single category. But that's not until June. For now, we hope enjoy this electronic supplement.

Timothy Green

Editor

March 29, 2008

P.S. Just as we're always reading submissions for our regular issues, we're always looking for work for these supplemental e-Issues. If you'd like to be considered for a book feature, send us your book and say so. If you have any essay on poetry or the craft, or an idea for a different kind of feature, email me. All things poetic will be considered. ([tim@rattle.com](mailto:tim@rattle.com))

## THE NEIL POSTMAN AWARD FOR METAPHOR

*“A metaphor is not an ornament. It is an organ of perception.”*  
 —Neil Postman, from *The End of Education*

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

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

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

*“The medium is the metaphor.”*  
 —Neil Postman, from *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

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

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

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

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

Each year the editors will choose one poem from the two issues of *RATTLE* printed during that year and all poems that appear in the magazine are applicable. There are no entry fees or submission guidelines involved. The author of the chosen poem will receive \$100.

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

*Martin Vest*

## MAN ON FIRE

At first he looked nice lying in the hearth.  
 On the end of a torch he kept Frankenstein away.  
 He lit the streets on a dark walk from a seedy bar.  
 When you wanted to dance he danced.  
 When you wanted to sleep  
 he was a lamp that wouldn't shut off.  
 He seethed and roiled in his body of tongues,  
 climbing the walls like a madman...  
 He flickered and snapped.  
 He grew to a roar.  
 Alarms went off, sirens sounded,  
 the throat of his upturned flask  
 chanting go, go, go,  
 like a flammable cheerleader,  
 but you stayed...  
 His smoke clung to your skirts  
 and coated the dishes  
 as he tumbled from room to room  
 screaming *more, more...*  
 You remember the night that you met him.  
 There had been others to choose from—  
 the drowning man who sat next to you  
 groping at your blouse as he sunk  
 to the bottom of his whiskey and soda—  
 the rain-maker with cold gray eyes  
 who stared into the melancholy  
 of his gin and lime.  
 But Man-on-Fire never stopped grinning,  
 Man-on-Fire with his twenty shots of everything,  
 with his flash-paper sleights  
 fueling the crackle of their own applause—  
 And you, parched wind,  
 whistling like a spoke, like a runaway train,  
 howling in your body  
 for a keyhole of quick escape,  
 for a fast way through the wall—  
 What would you want with water?

*John Goode*

## HAPPINESS

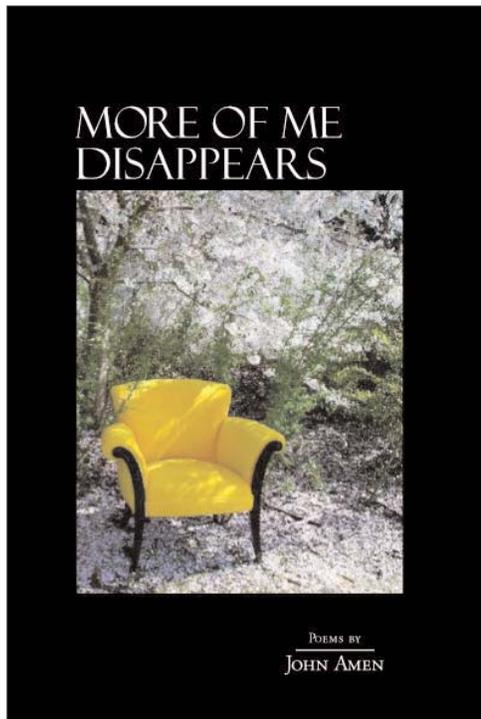
He found it on the side of the road, blood  
smeared across its fur like a strip of red flag.  
And flies filled the air,  
too many to count.

Back in the war, his wife used to make sense  
of things like this  
in long letters he held in his hands.  
But she was gone  
and the generals were gone too.

The sun was there with the flies  
as it had been before,  
and their metallic green bodies glowed  
as they dove into the wreck, their tongues  
like dreams their stomachs couldn't wake.

The dog had been missing for days;  
the man had no evidence  
of its nostrils smoking like guns,  
or its black pelt slick with the sweat  
of a hunt.

He hadn't seen the rabbit either,  
skipping out over tall weeds,  
four pounds of meat, hovering in the dog's eyes  
like happiness, but he knew  
it had been there.



## MORE OF ME DISAPPEARS by John Amen

“*More of Me Disappears* is a further realization of the promise already unfolding in Amen’s celebrated debut collection, *Christening the Dancer*. Here the surreal imagery is more visionary and startling, the exploration of the human condition more resonant. With the persistence of dreams and the insistence of memory transfigured by language and imagination, the poems in this collection cross landscapes both intense and distinctive.”

—Bruce Boston

*More of Me Disappears* by John Amen · Original Paperback · Cross-Cultural Communications  
Cross-Cultural Communications Publications · 239 Wynsum Ave · Merrick, NY 11566  
Publication Date: 2005 · ISBN-10: 0893048887 · 76 pages · \$12.00

To order online visit [www.johnamen.com](http://www.johnamen.com)  
or  
[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

All poems reprinted courtesy of Cross-Cultural Communications, after having appeared originally, some of them since revised, in the following journals: “Meanwhile” in *Three Candles*, “New York Memory #3” in *Lily*, “In a Revolving Door” in *Star\*Line*, “Walking Unsure of Myself” in *Offcourse*, and “What I Said to Myself” in *Sometimes City*. “P.S. From Paradise” first appeared in the book.



**John Amen** is the author of two collections of poetry: *Christening the Dancer* (Uccelli Press 2003) and *More of Me Disappears* (Cross-Cultural Communications, 2005), and has released one folk/folk rock CD, *All I'll Never Need* (Cool Midget, 2004). His poetry has appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *Rattle*, *The New York Quarterly*, *The International Poetry Review*, and *Blood to Remember*. He is also an artist, working primarily with acrylics on canvas. His second CD, *Ridiculous Empire*, will be released in Spring 2008. Further information is available on his website.

Amen travels widely giving readings, doing musical performances, and conducting workshops. He founded and continues to edit the award-winning literary bimonthly, *The Pedestal Magazine* ([www.thepedestalmagazine.com](http://www.thepedestalmagazine.com)).

[www.johnamen.com](http://www.johnamen.com)

[www.myspace.com/johnamen](http://www.myspace.com/johnamen)

### PRAISE FOR JOHN AMEN

“John Amen’s new collection *More of Me Disappears* is chock full of electric lines that sting the senses. His juxtapositions of ideas, the contrariness of his images, the turning inward of his metaphors, condense, compress, and explode on the page. A fine work, brimming with sweetness of our human frailty and uncertainty.”

—Jimmy Santiago Baca

“*In More of Me Disappears*, John Amen’s poetry announces itself in the absence of self, therefore becoming an extension of all of us—all our voices mingled in one sometimes confused, sometimes lucid cry of the heart.”

—Ai

“It is sometimes necessary in an unreasonable time for the artist to remake, out of the ruins of the world as he or she finds it, a new and aesthetically hospitable world. In John Amen’s poems we share in the pain, confusion, and ultimate triumph of a man who refuses to submit to the shattered nature of the modern experience.”

—George Wallace

*John Amen*

## MEANWHILE

—Sangerberg, 1945

At the courthouse, a tailor was  
being sentenced. It was raining tofu.  
The hibiscus, like a snail, slept  
inside its folded bloom. Sidewalks  
groaned beneath bassinets, mothers  
baring their breasts at prayer hour.

Someone cut down the hanging tree.  
Somebody's son fondled a trigger.  
The operation was a success.  
Geese were trapped in the funeral tent,  
wings burning like chandeliers.

A few days later, a clown emerged  
from a darkroom, his throat on fire  
for the first time. Odd things commenced.  
No one believed that water flowed uphill.  
The sun did not rise. Gravity lifted like an embargo.  
We glued ourselves together, marched on.

*Amen*

## NEW YORK MEMORY #3

When I get to my dead father's apartment,  
Liz emerges from ruptured planks and exploded plaster.  
She is covered with soot, like some pagan baptized  
in refuse. The wrecking crew has come before  
we had a chance to vacate the place, stripped the loft  
to its skeleton. My father's furniture has been destroyed,  
a lifetime buried beneath an avalanche of wood and iron.  
Beds have been gutted, paintings raped by protruding nails.  
A fast-food cup rises from the ruin like a conqueror's flag.  
The apartment is quickly remodeled, rent raised;  
the revolving door of humanity spins. Over the years,  
I make a point of knowing who is living there. I see tenants  
come and go. I accept that we're not so unlike animals.  
I mean, I have this friend who tells me all about bees,  
how the queen is revered and protected, ultimately  
replaced in a savage deposition, how the mad  
hive continues, greater than any one member.  
And everything he says sounds familiar, and stings.

*Amen*

## IN A REVOLVING DOOR

I am in Neverland buying gifts for my geisha girl  
when I hear the news—war has broken out.  
We hit the dance club as death reports surface.  
Mars is a fallout shelter. Skies above Venus  
are blacker than a presidential limo. Economies sag  
like laundry lines. Someone tries to steal my wallet.  
I call my geisha girl on the telewave. Her blue heart  
is as pure as cash. She asks me when I am coming home.  
“There’s no telling,” I say. “Intergalactics have started  
destroying the transporters.” —“OK,” she mumbles,  
“I’ll put on the coffee.” Routine is all, routine is God.

*Amen*

## WALKING UNSURE OF MYSELF

*(Election Day, 2004)*

*for Richard*

A black dog snarls behind a white fence.

I'm changing my clothes like a good American.

A man gives birth to a war; his wife  
suckles it until her breasts bleed like IV bags.

Handprints on a Christmas card.  
The receiver has not been hung up.  
The taxi driver keeps honking his horn.

What occurs between breaths is a red herring.

The kettle has been whistling for an hour,  
and I think something is wrong downstairs.

A man is selling fake flowers outside the post office.

The fortune teller is battling a migraine.  
Wind has swallowed my itinerary.

A man in blue goggles is on his knees outside the bank.  
The rape victim is scrubbing herself with a steel brush.

I cannot keep my hands off the telephone.  
I am married to machines, and part of me is dying.

I am in a black hole picking tomatoes.

The heiress holds her hand over a lit candle.

Someone is planning a bank robbery.  
The nun is renouncing her vows.

The tycoon wants to push the prom queen onto the subway track.

## *Amen*

Another fast-food restaurant plants its flag in our hearts.

Flies are circling the dead bird. I forgot to pick up milk.

The war is just beginning. I need to buy new shoes.

The dog in the next yard is missing an ear.  
Effigies are being burned in the ball field.

I was blowing up a doll when I heard the news.

The brakes were shot, and we had to crash into the wall.

I cut down the oak as my mother wept in our doorway.

Neighbors kept coming, bringing meatloaf and deli trays.

Blood on the blackboard.  
Lunchboxes scattered in the gymnasium.

We were glued to the television,  
waiting for reports on the plane crash.

A snail is slithering across the interstate.  
The debutante enters the unemployment office.

Take this carnation before night falls;  
soon we will be too busy to talk.

There is a shotgun shell in the sandbox,  
a dead cardinal on the basketball court.

Someone has left a cigarette burning on the altar.

The valedictorian plucked the wings of a butterfly.  
The wrestler broke his arm doing a cartwheel.

I woke up with leaves in my hair.  
There was ketchup on my diploma.

## *Amen*

So many compulsions, so little time.

I swear I saw a woman struggling in the backseat.

It is my job to clean the dragon's teeth.

The shutters hadn't been opened for years;  
light stampeded through the glass, and I recalled  
collecting nets in Phoenicia. I died a violent death.

There were tire tracks on the museum floor.

So much space, so little god.

The baby was floating facedown in the swimming pool.

We walked barefoot through fields of snow.  
Doves were flying above the belching chimneys.

The helicopter is on fire. The cop loads his rifle.

A robin is perched on the molester's gravestone.  
There is police tape around the monkey bars.

A man in a wheelchair spins in the intersection.

A tortoise is crawling through tar.

I placed my ballot in the dead monster's mouth.

*Amen*

## P.S. FROM PARADISE

The mint is on fire, green smog hovering  
over the playground. The Pope is about to  
announce a winner. The President dances  
on a half-lit floor surrounded by Secret  
Service men. My roof leaks. Pyramids  
of thought become anthills in a killing field.  
The doors of the elevator will not close.  
A gay couple marries at the bottom of the ocean.  
After a trinity of bombs and Augustine's  
filibuster, all debts are forgiven. The Rapture  
is finally proclaimed an American holiday.  
Sleep well, cosmos; better luck next time.

*Amen*

## WHAT I SAID TO MYSELF

Choose the butterfly over the chrysalis.  
Choose light, the ballroom, the well-lit restaurant.

You have for lifetimes strummed minor chords  
on the coast of a dead sea. Think major, spindrift.

The sex between you and grief is becoming mechanical.

Despite your vestigial sentiments to the contrary,  
a scab's story is much greater than that of a scar.

Your cock is not an umbilical cord, it is your  
heart's mouthpiece. Choose sunrise, please.

It is time to do something that might cause  
embarrassment. Let emptiness mother your child.

Put away the map, where we're going won't be on it.

There is nothing particularly inspiring about a death wish.

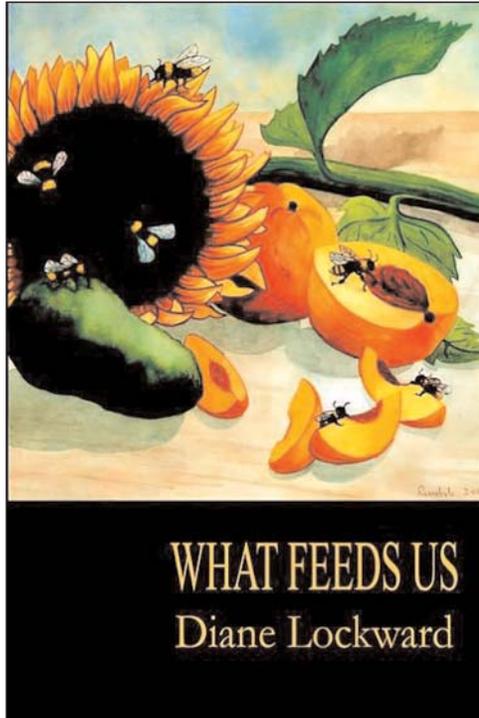
You have learned all there is to learn from the woman in black.

It is time to stop insulting ecstasy. Masochism  
is an empty udder. What was is a cipher. Pick  
the rose over the injured dove. Pick warm waters.

Attend a circus. Go for the comic. There is nothing  
more mediocre than the association of dysfunction with genius.

Indulge in color. Believe me, there is not a problem.  
Plumb bright places for new symbols.

Recommendation: study evergreens.  
Find me. We have much to talk about.



## WHAT FEEDS US by Diane Lockward

WINNER OF THE QUENTIN R. HOWARD POETRY PRIZE

Lockward explores the feminine mystique in her second full-length collection of sensual and imaginative poems. As they consider the various ways in which we are nourished or not nourished, these poems are, as Kim Addonizio said of Lockward's previous collection, *Eve's Red Dress*, "irreverent, ravenous for the world, and unabashedly female."

*What Feeds Us* by Diane Lockward · Wind Publications  
 Wind Publications · 600 Overbrook Dr · Nicholasville, KY 40356  
 Publication Date: 2006 · ISBN-13: 978-1893239579 · 100 pages · \$15.00 paper

To order online visit [www.windpub.com](http://www.windpub.com)  
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[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

For more information email: [books@windpub.com](mailto:books@windpub.com)

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Diane Lockward is the author of *What Feeds Us* (Wind Publications, 2006) which was awarded the Quentin R. Howard Poetry Prize. She is also the author of *Eve's Red Dress* (Wind Publications, 2003), and a chapbook, *Against Perfection* (Poets Forum Press, 1998). Her poems have been published in several anthologies, including *Poetry Daily: 366 Poems from the World's Most Popular Poetry Website* and Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems for Hard Times*. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Poet Lore*, and *Prairie Schooner*. Her work has been nominated for several Pushcart Prizes, featured on *Poetry Daily*, and read by Garrison Keillor on NPR's *The Writer's Almanac*. She received a 2003 Poetry Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and was a featured poet at the 2006 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival. A former high school English teacher, Diane now works as a poet-in-the-schools.

[www.dianelockward.com](http://www.dianelockward.com)

## PRAISE FOR DIANE LOCKWARD

"In this brimming collection Diane Lockward's considerable wit engages both what is askew and awry and what to a lesser eye might seem to be standing up straight. She never takes you where you expect to go—that is part of her talent and her sassy wisdom. She is an original and a delight."

—Baron Wormser

"*What Feeds Us* is sometimes humorous and sometimes heartbreaking. Diane Lockward's language is both plain-spoken and rich, lush. This is a wonderful book that might not nourish your body but certainly will nourish your heart."

—Thomas Lux

"In these sparkling poems, Diane Lockward takes life as it comes and finds nourishment in it all: succulence of the peach, redolence of the pear, the 'green grape of sorrow.' I love these poems for their craft, sensuality and energy. Like high-wire acts of language and imagination, they almost leap in the air and come down again on the wire, balancing between witty and dark, personal and invented, idea and emotion."

—Patricia Fargnoli

*Diane Lockward*

*ANNELIDA*

My husband is saving the worms again.  
 All night, heavy rain, now the driveway crawls  
 with worms, afraid of drowning, but so dumb  
 they will broil to death in the sun, except  
 for my husband who picks them up,  
 one by one, places them on the still-wet grass,  
 then drives to work without even washing  
 his hands. I imagine him in his office sniffing  
 his fingers for the earthy scent of worms,

and I remember being 6 and loving  
 worms, collecting them in a *worm bin*,  
 a five-pound pickle bucket, so I understand  
 his affection. I filled my bin with a bedding  
 of peat moss and soil, soaked and squeezed it  
 by hand, punctured breathing holes in the lid.

I took a trowel into the garden and dug  
 for worms. Pink, gray, and reddish-brown.  
 The long fat ones I loved best, the way they shrunk  
 and stretched when touched. The way they reared  
 their heads. I fed them chicken mash, decayed leaves,  
 and kitchen waste. I wanted my worms to live.

No eyes, no ears, no backbone, no legs.  
 Each a tube inside a tube, like a knife in a sheath.  
 Hermaphroditic. Conjoined by a slime tube.  
 My worms multiplied. I imagined the five pairs  
 of hearts, their blood, red like mine.

This was nothing to do with sex—I was 6!  
 This was tactile, olfactory. I wanted the feel, the smell  
 of worms in my hands, on my skin.  
 Sometimes I lay down on the floor and let worms  
 crawl across my belly. Once I put a worm in my mouth.

When I was 7, I upended the bin and freed  
 the worms, imagined them sliding  
 through the earth, finding their way home.  
 Some days I can hardly wait until my husband  
 comes home, and puts his hands on my skin.

*Lockward*

## MEDITATION IN THE PARK

I was sitting on a hunk of granite,  
 heaved up by the earth, or maybe  
 unearthed by a steam shovel when somebody  
 was building something. Stuff like that  
 intrigues me. Where things come from.  
 Where they go when they go away.  
 This rock wasn't comfortable, but it had flecks  
 of silver that held my attention. Pretty, like little mirrors.  
 Nothing I could see my face in, but I didn't want  
 to see my face because I'd been crying again,  
 sitting in the park thinking about things that got lost,  
 that went away when I wasn't looking, when I wasn't careful.  
 Like my old boyfriend and my dog, Penny the Dachshund.  
 My mother said she got gobbled up by a steam shovel,  
 the driver mistaking her for a log.  
 And Kiki the Siamese Cat disappeared for weeks—  
 I thought she was dead—but she came back,  
 pregnant! Her six kittens died of disease, each  
 stiffening as if stretching, then gone for good.  
 When my father left for good, my mother lost her head,  
 closed herself in a room like Houdini squeezing into a box.  
 She came back too, but no longer  
 my mother, more like a jackrabbit ready to run.  
 My friend Jessica says she won't let herself fall in love  
 with her socks because eventually one will get lost.  
 I understand that kind of thinking. But I want to love  
 two at a time. When one gets lost, I'll still  
 have the other. Sometimes when I sit in the park,  
 I find things, things that somebody else lost,  
 somebody who's feeling sad somewhere else, maybe  
 finding my stuff and wondering what the heck  
 to do with it. To the finder it's just somebody's junk.  
 To the loser it's special, except it's gone.  
 Like the amethyst ring that fell off my finger in sixth grade  
 and got me in trouble with my father because I wasn't  
 allowed to wear it. It had a band of antique gold and a stone  
 like a Concord grape that made me wonder,  
 What's the point of something that beautiful, that purple left in a box?

Lockward

## THE BEST WORDS

The ones that sound obscene but aren't,  
that put a finger to the flame but don't burn.  
Words like asinine, poppycock, titmouse, tit for tat,  
woodpecker, pecorino, poop deck, and beaver.

In tenth grade Mr. Mungonest, my English teacher,  
called Barney Feeley a *young dastard* and silenced  
the room. Dastard! I was seduced by words that flirt  
with danger but don't end up in bed. The threat  
of Shylock's *If you prick us, do we not bleed?*

And fructify—I wanted to conjugate  
that sinuous verb, like Proteus, changing its form,  
oozing into fructuous, assuming the official ring  
of fructification, advocating like a president's wife  
for the Fructification of America.

Wild words that shake their hips, thrust out their genitalia,  
and say, *Feast on this*. Sexagesima—my God!  
what a word for the second Sunday before Lent.  
Sextuplicate, the versatility of it—noun, verb, adjective—  
always occurring six times. And on the equator, positioned  
just south of the Sickles of Leo, the constellation Sextans.

My twelfth grade English teacher was Mrs. Cox.  
We could not get enough of her name. We raised  
our hands and called, *Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Cox, choose me!*  
until we drove her out of school swearing  
to become a secretary or a nun, but not until we'd fallen  
in love with Edmund the Bastard.

Cockatiel, cockatoo—words with wings.  
The hoarfrost of winter, lure of a crappie,  
handful of nuts, kumquat, lavender crystals of kunzite,  
the titillation of shiftless and schist, the bark and bite  
of shittimwood, music of sextillion and cockleshells.

And always somewhere in the distance, Jerry Lee Lewis,  
blond curls flapping, groin pumping, fingers pounding  
the keyboard, his throat belting out *Great balls of fire!*—  
words like fat radishes burning my tongue.

Lockward

## A BOY'S BIKE

One morning a bike appears in our driveway, at the end where we can't not notice it, where someone who's not being careful will crush it. A boy's bike, lying on its side like a wounded animal, black, with green neon streamers on the handlebars, a well-worn bike with rusty chain, broken kickstand. It's not our bike, and we don't want it. We phone the police to ask if anyone's reported a missing bike. No one has, and the cop doesn't care about the bike. Maybe he has crimes to deal with. Things disappearing, not bikes appearing. We can't throw it in the trash. We know that somewhere a boy is missing his bike. Maybe he'll search here and pedal away. Problem solved. But days go by and no boy shows up. We begin to worry about the missing boy. And so it is that our worries double. And then they triple for we are missing him, and we don't even know him, but maybe we know a boy like him, a boy who once lived here, a boy who once took his sister's new Schwinn without permission, sped down a hill, and fell, the pedal slashing the back of his ankle, and he limped home, raised his foot, and said, *Look, Mom!* a slice so clean no blood yet, the bone inside white as cuttlefish, and later stitches and pain. Lesson learned: If you take a bike without permission, you get hurt. Somewhere a mother hurts; she is missing her boy. Somewhere a boy hurtles downhill, out of control, hands off the handles, brakes failing, spokes of the wheels spinning like silver plates, and he calls, *Look, Mom!* his face flashing by so fast we can't see him, but we know this boy is our boy, and we are there waiting for him to hit the point of impact, longing for him to find his way home, to come to us with his bloodless wounds.

Lockward

## IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE BODY

I'm the kind of woman  
 who never skips a meal,  
 who always takes the end seat  
 closest to the door.

I raise rashes on my skin,  
 scratching imaginary itches.  
 I've got one right now  
 behind my fleshy arm.

I never appear naked in front of anyone.  
 When I bathe, I always lock  
 the door, even though the house  
 is empty. In school I used to imagine  
 the classroom door bursting open in the middle  
 of biology, a madman running in, pointing his gun  
 directly at me, and saying,  
*Take off your clothes, all of them,*  
 and when I looked horrified, he'd add,  
*Or I'll kill you.*

I turned to my teacher, a woman  
 who could not save me, and I prayed  
 for death to come quickly.

I have bizarre dreams.  
 Last night my father returned  
 from being dead. Once more he entered  
 the bedroom at the lake house, slipped  
 through the door like Zeus,  
 and pulled off my towel.  
 He'd seen hundreds of naked women, he said,  
 my father who for years  
 every time I passed him opened  
 my blouse—his right  
 to see how things were growing,  
 and I was a cold fish, just like my mother.

I envy other women,  
 especially those who go into a sauna

## Lockward

in a strange place and, in front of strangers,  
strip down naked, so easy in their bodies.  
And now I'm the teacher  
when the door bursts open and my father walks in,  
points his bony finger at me,  
and in his thunderous voice, says, *Strip!*  
*Or I'll kill the children, all of them.*  
I watch my father, like the ancient Titan,  
devour the children.

I am unclean in my body.  
The summer my mother left  
my father forbid me to lock the bathroom door.  
His house. His roof. He could enter  
any door he wanted. June, July, August,  
I did not bathe, not once.  
Each day I went down to the lake  
and walked into the water.

In fashion I am most comfortable  
in turtlenecks. I keep my blouses buttoned high.  
I have never walked naked  
in front of a man, not my husband  
or my lovers, and do not know  
how it feels to be a goddess  
in front of a man,  
how to bring him to his knees.



## ARTWORK

BY DIANNE CARROLL BURDICK

Dianne Carroll Burdick, a Western Michigan University graduate with a BFA in Photography, is a free-lance photographer in Grand Rapids. The business is called Dianne Carroll Photography and her clients include The Grand Rapids Press, Grand Valley State University, the Grand Rapids Art Museum, the Grand Rapids Symphony, and Opera Grand Rapids. She is a Continuing Studies Instructor at Kendall College of Art and Design where she teaches Photography/Darkroom. She has participated in over fifty art exhibitions and her work is included in six books. Dianne is the recipient of 24 awards in Photography. Most recently,

her images are on the Grammy-nominated CD “Invention and Alchemy” of Harpist Debra Henson-Conent with the Grand Rapids Symphony. Her new book was just released in August of 2006, called *Listen to the Landscape*, a collection of her original 28 hand-colored photographs, with haiku by Linda Nemec Foster, and published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Her philosophy as an artist is to always produce the truth from the heart and to involve nature as inspiration. She photographs what she sees and hand-colors what she feels.

## HAND-COLORING PROCESS

Burdick: “I photographed all the images with Kodak black & white film and used Nikon N90S 35mm film cameras and several Nikon lenses. I printed all images on Kodak Professional Ektalure G Lustre fiber-base black & white paper. The paper is a cream-white fine-grain double weight luster paper that is not made anymore. I printed all the images using Kodak and Ilford chemicals. When the print is dry, I treat the paper with an oil-base solvent and color the image with Marshall and Prismacolor colored Pencils. Each 8 x 10 image takes several hours to hand-color, with several layers of color applied.”

## ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAIT SERIES

Burdick: “This series includes portraits where the individuals found their own environments to be photographed in. Backgrounds include a trail to walk on, a front yard, a garden, a park, an abandoned parking lot with cracks and weeds. The individuals felt most comfortable in these settings or the locations meant something important to them. Therefore, a mood or emotion came out in the photograph. For example, in ‘Jeremy’s Hands,’ he featured his own hands as a gardener and artist. So his hands were very important to him as a maker of things.”

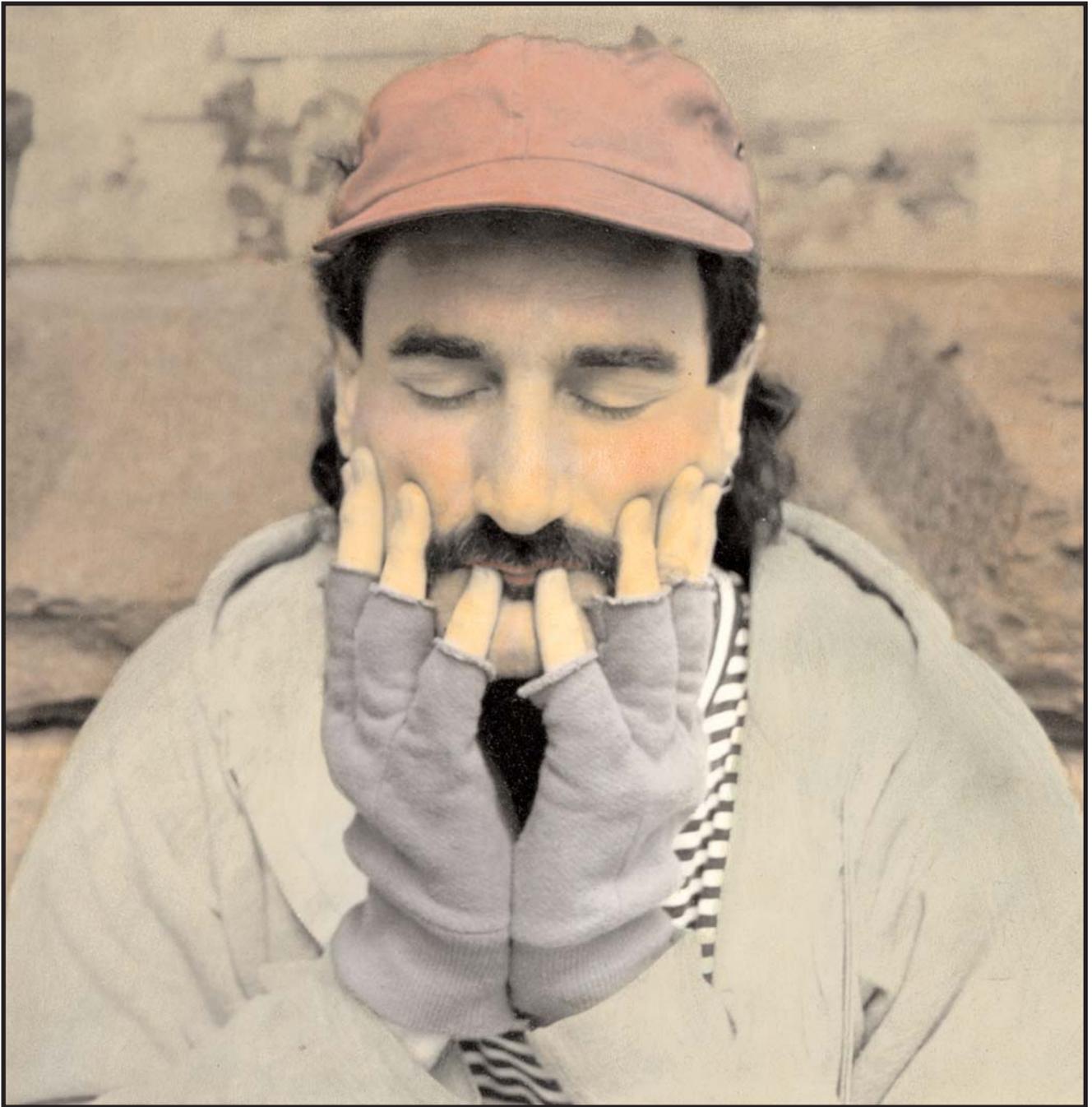
[www.iserv.net/~burdickr/index.html](http://www.iserv.net/~burdickr/index.html)



*“Balance”*

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Dianne Carroll Burdick, 2000  
Colored Pencil/Oil on Silver Prints



*“Jeremy’s Hands”*

Dianne Carroll Burdick, 1991  
Colored Pencil/Oil on Silver Prints



*“Mask”*

Dianne Carroll Burdick, 1991  
Colored Pencil/Oil on Silver Prints



*“Backyard”*

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Dianne Carroll Burdick, 1991  
Colored Pencil/Oil on Silver Prints



*“Winter Walk”*

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Dianne Carroll Burdick, 1994  
Colored Pencil/Oil on Silver Prints

David James

## THE RESURRECTION OF FORM IN POETRY

For 30 years, I've been a free verse writer. I was free to use any words in any pattern, flaunting the page without a thought of rhyme scheme, unhindered by syllable counting. Formal poetry was defined as that work from the past, by the Romantics, by Shakespeare and Chaucer, by poets before the printing press. Of course, I dabbled with forms here and there, merely as exercises, writing a ghazal, sestina, villanelle, sonnet, pantoum. I wrote in these forms so when some wag confronted me with one of them, I could say, "Oh, sure, I've written that."

As I get older, however, I am being drawn to form and meter. And as I write more rhyming verse, using enjambment and mosaic rhyme patterns to mute the obviousness of sound, I have come to the conclusion that we have fallen down on the job. Contemporary poets have done little, if anything, to further the innovative use of end rhyme in literature.

Looking at the major forms of rhyming poetry, it's obvious that no new forms have surfaced in over a century. The ghazal, a Persian form with couplets, is over 1000 years old. One of the most complex French forms, the sestina, originated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with Arnaut Daniel. The Italian sonnet's origin, a precursor to the English sonnet, dates back to the mid-1200's, popularized by Petrarch (1304-1374). The French villanelle, our song-like refrain form, was standardized by the late 1500's by Jean Passerat. The haiku first appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The most recent form, the pantoum, a Malaysian invention also containing repeating lines, became popular in Europe in the 1800's. In the last 150 years, several generations of poets have turned their backs to formal verse, at least with regard to inventing innovative new forms for others to emulate.

As a lifelong free verse writer, I am intrigued when I venture into rhyming poetry. First, writing formal poetry alters my perceptions of the world. The rhymes, line requirements, and syllable restrictions change what I write and how I write in surprising ways. The restrictions send me into uncharted imaginative waters. My poems approach the material from a different vantage point, and I consistently end up saying what I never would have said if I was writing in free verse. The novelty and imaginative gyrations are both worth the attempts. The late great Richard Hugo voiced his appreciation for formal verse, particularly in overcoming writer's block: "When you concentrate on the 'rules of the game' being played on the page, the real problem, blockage of the imagination, often goes away simply by virtue of being ignored. That's why I write more formal poems when I go dry."

Secondly, I have this longing to create my own forms, forms that thrive in today's language and sensibilities. Personally, I find the age-old forms too restrictive and constraining. The sonnet and villanelle, though honorable, seem outdated for the world of the internet and global warming. Our challenge is to imagine the forms that speak to today's culture and modern times.

So this is the gauntlet thrown down at the feet of poets: to create the contemporary forms of rhyming poetry that will outlive them. What forms will young poets be cutting their teeth on 150 years from now? What are the new types of formal poems for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What legacy of form will this generation leave to the future, if any?

To get the movement started, I'll provide two new examples of 21<sup>st</sup> century formal poetry. My goal is to invent forms that 1) have a certain flexibility, 2) do not emphasize the rhyming pattern, and 3) play off the strengths of free verse. The first is called a Karousel. It is a twenty line poem, four stanzas of five lines each. The rhyme pattern is the following: abcda ecdbe fdbcf gbcgd. The three inner lines (bcd) rotate in each stanza until they circle back to their original bcd form from stanza one. Though each stanza is enclosed in a rhyme, there are no metrical restrictions.

### AS TIME GOES ON

As each year came and went,  
the man noticed the tree  
outside, the one in back,  
how its bark shed  
like fur, how it bent

and swayed in time to the wind.  
He remembered how his dog tracked  
in his last dirt before being found dead.  
The man buried him, like the others, religiously.  
With each year, something pinned

itself to the inside of his heart,  
which he imagined was not red  
anymore, but bruised and mildly  
dry, an item to be stacked  
on a shelf or a cart.

The years began to rain down,  
one suddenly became three.  
The man looked up into the black  
sky. And then a strange thought in his head  
fell, like the whole world, into the swollen ground.

My second example is called the Weave. It is less restrictive than a Karousel and can be written in two line stanzas, five line stanzas, or no separate stanzas at all. Its rhyme scheme follows this pattern: abcad befbg ehiej (and so on). The first and fourth lines rhyme, and the second line rhyme from the first stanza becomes the

rhyme for the first and fourth lines in the following stanza. So, the second line from stanza one weaves into stanza two; the second line from stanza two weaves into stanza three... The following poem is an example of this form.

## MILLIONS OF MINUTES

I'm drowning  
in a pool of my own making  
like a minnow at the bottom of the ocean.  
It's too dark to see. There's a pounding  
between my ears, peeling the flesh

off my brain, breaking  
each good thought  
into dust that dissolves in water.  
Much of what we do could be called faking  
it, going through the motions

so we won't get caught.  
But we learn too late, this one life,  
these millions of minutes  
can't be bought  
or sold, only used or wasted.

Whether or not these forms last or evolve is not important. Only time and fate will determine that. They are, however, forms that I have used and reused to make dozens of poems, new forms that have allowed me to see the world in a different light.

Even though rhyming poetry has fallen out of favor and practice with contemporary poets, that does not mean formal poetry must die a slow death. It is our right, perhaps our duty, to resurrect rhyme and meter and transform its use to capture the day. With a little imagination and attention, a new formal poetry can speak out in this terrible world.



**David James** teaches for Oakland Community College. His most recent book is *Trembling in Someone's Palm* from March Street Press. His other books include, *A Heart Out of This World*, published by Carnegie Mellon University Press, and three chapbooks, *Do Not Give Dogs What Is Holy*, *I Dance Back*, and *I Will Peel This Mask Off*. His one-act plays have been produced off-off-Broadway, as well as in Massachusetts and Michigan.

Gary Lehmann

## IS POETRY FICTION?

Ever since 1956 when Robert Lowell published *Life Studies*, poets have had the idea that real poetry spills your guts on the page revealing all your worst fears and most closely held secrets. This confessional style has emotional impact, and it is effective in some hands, but its prevalence in American poetry today has obscured the underlying character of poetry.

Real poetry is an account in fancy words of something real, but it is a show, a rendition, a collaboration between what really happened and the artistry required to write a good poem.

Is poetry fiction? Yes, in a word, yes! Poetry is a story written up with artistic affect in mind. It's not true in all the details, but it is true in all the important ways. It may be based on real events, but it is essentially a work of art. Poetry is true to life, not necessarily true to the facts of the real events depicted.

Let me give an example. You once had a lover when you were a teenager. The two of you got on quite well, but the word *love* was never used between you. There was some magnetic attraction, but you were both afraid of crowning—or cursing—the relationship with a word that implied more than you were ready to accept.

Then, one night after a movie, you were saying goodbye at the bus stop where you had to part company and the word slipped out. It was a tender moment. There was a kiss, the first real one between you, and the whole relationship was cast off into another direction in an instant you had both worked to forestall.

There, now that's a poetic moment, perfect grist for the poetic mill. Only it didn't happen that way. The incident at the bus stop is when you both realized that something had changed. That's when the kiss occurred, but it wasn't until a phone call later that night that one of you uttered the word *love*.

Do you tell the truth or the real truth? That's why poetry is fiction. It has to tell the real truth, not the factual truth. It's under an obligation to make the edges fit together closer than life actually fits in real time.

In reality, this relationship between truth and fact can get rather complex. So, I want to illustrate my point with a passage from T.S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes*. Sweeney is one of Eliot's least read pieces of poetry. The character Sweeney is a crude bruiser. He is talking with his friends and to Doris, wooing her with some fancy words. The poem doesn't say where they are, but I envision them in a course London pub in a rough part of town. In telling his story, Sweeney references Paul Gauguin.

Everyone knows the story of the well-educated French stockbroker, Paul Gauguin, who abandoned his family and the repressiveness of Europe for the sexually permissive world of the Coral Sea. He starts in painting and living with naked native girls in Tahiti. His paintings explode with new-found energy and purpose. Twelve years later, he dies. Somehow, Sweeney is invoking this passionate paradise

in his pitch to Doris.

Under the bamboo  
Bamboo bamboo  
Under the bamboo tree  
Two live as one  
One live as two  
Two live as three  
Under the bam  
Under the boo  
Under the bamboo tree

Where the breadfruit fall  
And the penguin call  
And the sound is the sound of the sea  
Under the bam  
Under the boo  
Under the bamboo tree.

Where Gauguin maids  
In banyan shades  
Wear palmleaf drapery  
Under the bam  
Under the boo  
Under the bamboo tree.

Tell me in what part of the woods  
Do you want to flirt with me?  
Under the breadfruit, banyan, palmleaf  
Or under the bamboo tree?  
Any old tree will do for me  
Any old wood is just as good  
Any old isle is just my style  
Any fresh egg  
Any fresh egg  
And the sound of the coral sea.

I want to skip forward in the poem a bit. Sweeney's real world bears no relationship to "palmleaf drapery." Instead he lives in a world that is dark and circumscribed by brooding psychological tragedies waiting to happen. So it is with some inner compass that Sweeney next tells Doris the story of a girl "done in" by a man, perhaps based on a story he read in the newspaper.

I knew a man once did a girl in  
Any man might do a girl in  
Any man has to, needs to, wants to  
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.  
Well he kept her there in a bath  
With a gallon of lysol in a bath

...

This went on for a couple of months  
Nobody came  
And nobody went  
But he took in the milk and he paid the rent.

...

What did he do! what did he do?  
That don't apply.  
Talk to live men about what they do  
He used to come and see me sometimes  
I'd give him a drink and cheer him up

...

He didn't know if he was alive and the girl was dead  
He didn't know if the girl was alive and he was dead  
He didn't know if they both were alive or both were dead  
If he was alive then the milkman wasn't and the rent collector  
wasn't

And if they were alive then he was dead.  
There wasn't any joint  
There wasn't any joint  
For when you're alone like he was alone  
You're either or neither  
I tell you again it don't apply  
Death or life or life or death  
Death is life and life is death  
I gotta use words when I talk to you  
But if you understand or if you don't  
That's nothing to me and nothing to you  
We all gotta do what we gotta do  
We're gona sit here and drink this booze  
We're gona sit here and have a tune  
We're gona stay and we're gona go  
And somebody's gotta pay the rent

...

When you're alone in the middle of the night and you wake  
in a sweat and a hell of a fright  
When you're alone in the middle of the bed and you wake

Like someone hit you on the head  
 You've had a cream of a nightmare dream and you've got the  
     Hoo-ha's coming on you  
 Hoo hoo hoo  
 You dreamt you waked up at seven o'clock and it's foggy and  
     It's damp and it's dawn and it's dark  
 And you wait for a knock and the turning of a lock for you  
     know the hangman's waiting for you.  
 And perhaps you're alive  
 And perhaps you're dead  
 Hoo ha ha  
 Hoo ha ha  
 Hoo  
 Hoo  
 Hoo  
 Knock Knock Knock  
 Knock Knock Knock  
 Knock  
 Knock

At first blush, T.S. Eliot's dive into a low-life London bar bears no relationship whatever to his own life. It's an act of pure poetic fiction, and yet, maybe not.

Like Paul Gauguin, Eliot was an expatriate. Gauguin was born in Paris but lived the most important part of his years in the South Seas. T.S. Eliot was an American who became a British citizen. He was born in St. Louis, MO, was educated at Milton Academy and Harvard University. He got a scholarship to attend Merton College, Oxford, where he found himself an outsider in the tight literary scene during First World War.

Then he was introduced to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, a ditzy socialite, rich, well-connected and very much the insider. She was vivacious and lively. Sometimes, she was almost too lively. Her enthusiasms bubbled over into hysteria verging on madness. Still, Vivienne had everything Eliot needed to succeed as a writer.

They were married in 1915. She took his poetry on as a project to focus her mind. He went about becoming one of the greatest poets in the English language. Over the next twenty years, doors were opened for him, publishing opportunities arose from nowhere, invitations flowed like water, and introductions, appointments, poetry readings and such materialized.

But Vivienne's condition continued. It embarrassed her family and imperiled Eliot's standing amongst the intelligentsia. In 1938, the decision was finally made to commit Vivienne to a mental hospital north of London. It was a mutual decision between Eliot and Vivienne's family, but everyone had lingering doubts. Locking her away seemed so drastic and final.

Once she was institutionalized, Eliot moved on and never looked back. To all

the world, he “did a girl in” and no one ever knocked at the door, but the poetry tells the truth. Not the facts, but the inner truth. It says loud and clear that somewhere inside that well-combed exterior, Eliot grieved for her, or at least doubted himself. Their relationship was rocky and uncertain, but there had once been a certain amount of affection, and he never knew for sure if committing her was the right thing to do. Had he used her shamelessly?

Later on, some of her family, who *did* visit her from time to time, began to feel that she was as sane as anyone and that her condition was a kind of female hysteria that passed with time, but she died in Northumberland House still judged by society a crackpot. Eliot never once visited her.

Is poetry fiction? Yes, in a word, yes!

In this illustration, Eliot wrote from his heart, but not about the exact details of his break-up with Vivienne or her breakdown. Still, Sweeney’s story manages to get it all in. Emblematically, Eliot captured the feeling that he experienced when he “did a girl in.” It’s as if Sweeney is Eliot’s raw underbelly, his alter-ego, his non-Prufrock self.

Even the Gauguin passage seems to fit. When Gauguin abandoned his family to go to Tahiti, he did it to advance his art, which it did in a spectacular way. Gauguin ignored the toll his personal decision took on his family. Despite the fact that Vivienne catapulted his poetry to the forefront of British verse, Eliot never visited his ailing and institutionalized wife—not even once.

Poetry is a story written up with artistic affect in mind. It’s not true in all the details, but it is true in all the important ways. Poetry is true to life, not necessarily true to the facts of the real events depicted. Is poetry fiction? Yes, in a word, yes!



Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize, **Gary Lehmann’s** essays, poetry and short stories are widely published—over 100 pieces per year. *The Span I will Cross* (Process Press, 2004). *Public Lives and Private Secrets* (FootHills Publishing, 2005). His most recent book is *American Sponsored Torture* (FootHills Publishing, 2007).

[www.garylehmann.blogspot.com](http://www.garylehmann.blogspot.com)



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Marvin Bell  
Bob Hicok

A Publication of *The Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation, Incorporated*

*José Manuel Arango*  
—tr. by John Oliver Simon

## THE BEGGAR'S FIGURE

1

There he is,  
seated  
on the steps of the cathedral,  
his back to the church door.

At his side,  
one step down,  
his hat.

And elbow on knee,  
bearded chin  
in his palm,

in the pose  
of the Thinker!

2

This beggar knows.  
He knows his public.

In the morning  
his spot is the atrium  
of the cathedral.

At night you'll find him  
curled up  
at a whorehouse door.

Bruce Cohen

THE JERRY LEWIS TELETHON

In those existential black & white days  
 It was indulgent luxury when television  
 Succumbed to its own insomnia.  
 My family adopted the Labor Day Telethon,  
 The day off, children with no bed times  
 Huddled around the talking box till 3 a.m.  
 Surrounded by our personal repartee  
 Of salty snacks. Members of the rat pack  
 Would radiate on stage, comedians who'd end  
 Their shtick with a somber note on the kids,  
 & a few tame rock n' roll bands.  
 I must confess we never pledged a red cent  
 & when solicited my father said he gave  
 At work. I must confess when the crippled  
 Kids (it was okay to say that then) paraded  
 Across stage I made a fat, slow sandwich in  
 The kitchen so I'd be spared the drooling,  
 Slurred incoherent speech, their contorted  
 Bodies supported by utterly exhausted parents,  
 Their crutches & wheelchairs just out of reach.  
*Look at us we're walking. Look at us*  
*We're talking. We who've never walked*  
*Or talked before.* I was curious about one  
 Thing: Jerry never revealed his personal conviction:  
 Why he volunteered his heart year after year.  
 People asked him always & he was stoically  
 Evasive. It was the scoop. It sucked you in.  
 I loved the 24-hour evolution of his tuxedo.  
 When the telethon was new & hopeful,  
 It was neatly pressed, shiny crow-black,  
 His bow-tie so perfect it must have been tied  
 By someone else. By the next bleary morning,  
 His face unshaved, bags swelled under his eyes,  
 The tie undone of course, you could smell  
 His stale Marlborough breath through the TV.  
 But Jerry could do anything. Just his face  
 Made us laugh. Astaire-like dancer, uncanny mimic,  
 A singer, according to my father, better than Frank  
 or Dean, he'd duet with whoever graced

Cohen

His couch. Jerry was especially moved by  
Unexpected stars & hugged & kissed even men.  
I wanted to be Jerry. The wacky voices, the fake  
Buck teeth. Unabashed generosity. I must confess  
I got chills during the drum roll before the new  
Total was announced. I even prayed a little  
For the cure though I suspected none of the kids  
Were Jewish so I worried my God might  
Not be watching the show. But Jerry was  
Jewish. So was Sammy Davis. I loved how  
We adopted him too, glass eye & all, the way he  
Threw in a Yiddish phrase when he spoke  
& we all smiled his same crooked smile.  
After three hours of sleep I would stumble  
Downstairs & flip on the show. None of the big  
Names were there at 5 a.m. Only Jerry. Only  
Some pudgy Vinnie from Local 526 who pledged  
744 bucks that he personally collected from  
Customers on his bread route, only a scout master  
From troop 13 whose boys collected 121 dollars  
From returning Coke bottles at two cents a pop.  
The early morning acts were crummy. Jerry needed  
Filler. A girl, who would be described in those  
Days as negro, was twirling a baton while doing  
Cartwheels. Jerry was twirling a baton as well.  
He could do anything. During her penultimate  
Cartwheel the girl's top slid down.  
She quickly pulled it back up but I saw her breast.  
It was brief I admit but I saw it on TV.  
I had never seen a breast outside of my family  
Before & she ran off the stage in quick humiliation  
But Jerry, the gentleman that he was, ignored the indignity,  
Applauded & asked for the new total. All my life  
I wanted to ask contemporaries if they happened  
To be awake at that precise moment, if they had  
Seen what I'd seen, if it really happened.  
You know the business about the tree falling  
& if it makes a sound if no one is around?  
Don't we need a witness to validate our lives?  
Each of us is so expert at deceiving ourselves.

*Bob Hicok*

## LOVELY DAY

The satisfaction  
finally of a good poop  
became a calling  
after washing his hands  
of his wife to ask  
about lunch on the steps  
of the museum.  
In the shushing  
of shoes against marble  
as people ran  
to art, he enjoyed  
his wife's meat-loaf  
more than his mother's  
for the first time, the test  
not her meat-loaf for dinner  
but how it tastes  
suddenly in a sandwich.  
He lifted the sandwich  
as he might champagne  
for a toast: to a long life,  
to a beautiful woman, to sincerity  
catching fire with the avant-garde.  
Instead of going back to work,  
she downtown, he up, they held hands  
in front of the scooters  
at the scooter store, each thinking  
of an Italian road,  
his wending up a mountain, hers  
keeping company with the sea.  
They walked so far  
they reached where the city  
ended, tall grass  
rising exactly where the sign  
said on one side  
that you are leaving, on the other  
that you have arrived,  
though you, you've probably  
never been here, where they made love  
half in and half out

*Hicok*

of the grass, in a place  
neither coming or going, though really,  
you shouldn't be watching this,  
now should you.

Lynne Knight

## THE LESSON

My first class left a little early. He came in, hesitant. *I need for someone look my grammar*, he said, holding out a sheet of paper the color of old mushrooms. His hand was dirty, his coat, his clothes. *You teacher?* he asked. *You could help me with the English?* I nodded. *I am plumer an electricin*, his paper began. *Sometime I like my work but is dangerus. Very busy putting heavy pipe.*

I wrote in missing words, corrected the spelling, made him read it aloud. *Sonetines*, he read. I stopped him, made him say *sometimes*, hum the *mmmm*. He practiced humming then asked if he could stay in the room to copy his paper over. He wrote slowly, keeping his eyes on the words, as if they might slip away. Midway, without looking up, he asked if I'd read Heningway.

*Hemmmingway*, I said. *Mmmm*.

*Mmmm*. He smiled, or half smiled, hiding bad teeth. He'd read the one about the man with the fish, read it in Spanish. Did I like teach literature, he asked. I loved to teach it, I said, stressing the *to*. I was a poet, I added. I loved Neruda; did he know Neruda?

Both hands flew to his heart. His smile forgot to hide his teeth. And he gave me Neruda, the last of the twenty love poems, his voice rising, his face like the old man's when he feels the fish take, feels the line running, running, taut, sure, his.

*J.R. Solonche*

## THE LOVER OF STONE

The lover of stone must be old,  
for there is no such thing as a young stone.

The lover of stone must be strong,  
for he must be able to climb up the mountain

and the summit of the mountain  
to find the beginning of stone.

And he must be able to climb down  
the mountain again to the valley

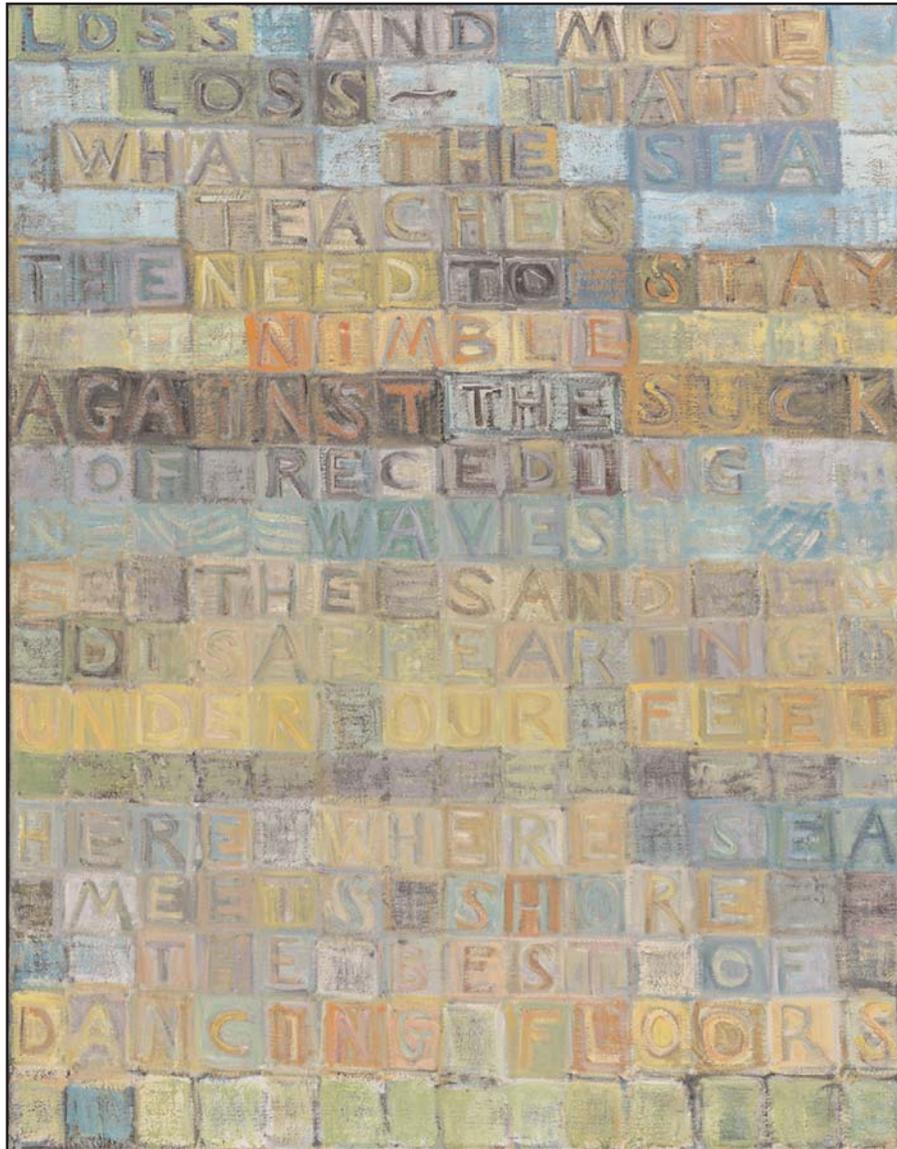
and to the bottom of the valley  
to find the ending of stone.

The lover of stone must be a genius at unrequited love.  
He must be a connoisseur of the cold.

The lover of stone must be a saint,  
for stone will no more return his love

than does God return that of the saint.  
The lover of stone must be jealous.

He must be jealous of the water that loves stone to smooth.  
And he must be jealous of the wind that loves stone to death.



Loss and loss and more  
 Loss—that's what  
 The sea teaches.

The need to stay  
 Nimble  
 Against the suck  
 Of receding waves,  
 The sand  
 Disappearing  
 Under our feet.

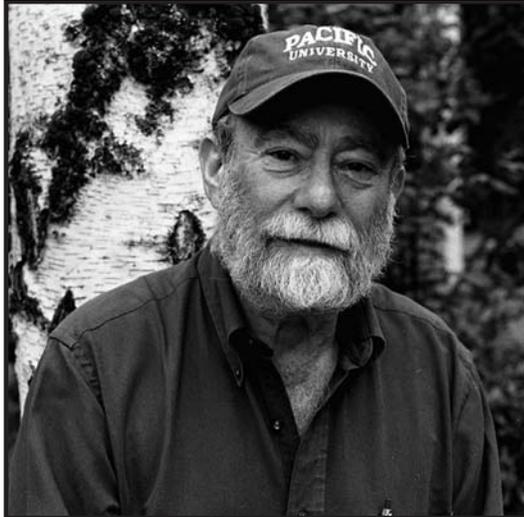
Here, where sea  
 Meets shore:  
 The best of dancing floors.

Loss and More Loss

artwork by Trisha Orr  
 poem by Gregory Orr

from *How Beautiful the Beloved*  
 Copper Canyon Press (Spring 2009)

## CONVERSATION BETWEEN MARVIN BELL AND ALAN FOX IN PORT TOWNSEND, WASHINGTON, AUGUST 11, 2007



MARVIN BELL has been called “an insider who thinks like an outsider,” and his writing has been called “ambitious without pretension.” At press time, his nineteenth collection of poems, *Mars Being Red*, had been named a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Awards. Bell taught for forty years in the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, and a list of his former students spans the range of American poetry. His literary honors include awards from the Academy of American Poets, the American

Photo by: John Campbell

Academy of Arts and Letters, *Poetry* and the *American Poetry Review*, as well as Guggenheim and NEA fellowships and Senior Fulbright appointments to Yugoslavia and Australia. He is the creator of a poetic form known as the “dead man poem,” for which he is both famous and infamous. He reads and lectures widely and for five years designed and led an annual Urban Teachers Workshop for America SCORES. In addition, he collaborates with musicians, composers and dancers, and often performs with the bassist Glen Moore of the jazz group Oregon. Mr. Bell lives in Iowa City and Port Townsend, Washington, and teaches for the brief-residency MFA program based in Oregon at Pacific University.

[Excerpt from a 25-page interview]

FOX: So you started writing actually—what, in college, after?

BELL: Except for journalism, I didn’t write until after college. Let’s see, I went up to graduate journalism school in Syracuse, and I spent one semester there. Then I ended up in Rochester for a short time and then in Chicago. And in Chicago, I was taking a very slow M.A. and working at the law library. And I had done my courses; I had to be enrolled in something in order to take my M.A. exam. Now, I was already writing poems that, at best, could be called word play. And I was even publishing a literary magazine with friends from Rochester. It was literary-visual materials, both, and it was called *Statements*. And it was a nice little magazine, actually, and we published some people who later became pretty well-known. But I didn’t know what

I was doing; I hadn't really read much contemporary poetry, all I really knew were the Beats.

FOX: Ah, yep

BELL: My first wife and I and a good friend of mine, who now lives in Seattle, used to skip classes and go to an Italian restaurant called The Italian Villa and we would have antipasti salad for lunch and pizza for dinner and we would read the Beats to each other. So there I was in Chicago and I needed to take a class. I took a class in the downtown center of the University of Chicago taught by some guy named John Logan, the poet.

FOX: Mhm.

BELL: I didn't know who he was. He was actually a real poet. He had published one book of poetry; he would later publish many more and become very well-known. But he had published one book of poetry called *A Cycle for Mother Cabrini*. He was teaching at Notre Dame. He had converted to Catholicism years before. He had nine children and a parrot and a dog. I took that class and Dorothy, who—I had a short marriage before this; Dorothy is actually my second wife—Dorothy and I took this class. We got to be pretty good friends with John. We went out to his home in South Bend, we met his wife Gwen, and he came over to our little apartment and had some spaghetti with us. And we had a son; I had a son with my first wife and I kept him when we broke up. So we had this little tiny baby. We weren't married, but we had this little tiny baby. And then one day after class, John and Dorothy and I, and Bob and Dorothy Jungels, who were very close friends of the Logans, were in a bar having a beer. And John Logan had converted to Catholicism: he did not curse, he hardly ever took a drink, he did not drive, he rode the bus to class. And he suddenly turned to me and said, "By the way, when's your anniversary?" [Fox laughs] And I thought, I can't tell this man that we're not married. Nice people didn't do that then [Fox laughs] and we have this child. So I said, "July 9<sup>th</sup>." [all laugh] And he said, "That's *my* anniversary!" It was theirs. And it was the Jungels' anniversary, who had done that deliberately. So when Dorothy and I did get married, we felt we had to get married on July 9<sup>th</sup>, you bet. [all laugh] That's...what question was I answering?

FOX: When you started writing.

BELL: Oh, yeah. So, I started writing a lot more in class, and another member of that class was Dennis Schmitz, who is one of the wonderful poets of this country, I think, and then when the class was over, John asked me if I wanted to be part of something called "The Poetry Seminar," which was not a class, but a group of Chicago poets that included people like Dennis Schmitz and Bill Knott, Charles Simic came through for a while, Naomi Lazard, other poets whose names you might not know now like

Roger Apon, William Hunt, other people. And I said, “Sure,” and so we would meet periodically—I can’t remember anymore if it was once a month or twice a month. We would meet in the downtown Chicago offices of the Midwest Clipping Association. In those days politicians and so forth would pay somebody to subscribe to newspapers and clip out articles about them. We would meet then.

So now I was writing more and then I had an old commission; I was going to have to go into the army. What am I going to do? I want to find out if I can write. I want to do more of this. I said to John Logan, “What should I do?” And he said, “Well, there’s this workshop in Iowa City. A poet there named Donald Justice, I’ll write him a letter. Why don’t you try to go there?” And I could keep the army at bay if I faked being a PhD student. So, I went to Iowa City for an interview and I had had a professor at the University of Chicago who taught Henry James; his name was Napier Wilt, and he kind of looked like Henry James, actually. And he used to talk about where he came from. He came from someplace that was really rural. I mean, *primitive*. And the pigs would come right up to the porch, he said. And that place was...Iowa City, Iowa.

So when it was time for me to go be interviewed in Iowa City, Iowa, I thought, I’m not going to drive out there, that’s the wild! I’ll take a bus. So I took a bus and I followed people into a building. And I had been told to stay at the Burkley hotel; I said, “Can you tell me where the Burkley Hotel is?” to a man behind the counter and he said, “This is it.” So I took a room; I got up in the morning and I said, “Excuse me, can you tell me where the University of Iowa is?” He pointed across the street and said, “That’s it.” [all laugh] So I went to the interview. I put on a tie and I went to the university to meet Donald Justice for my interview and after about five minutes Kim Merker—who was the Stone Wall Press and later the Windover Press, too—Kim Merker came along and we went bowling. And I always figured I must have bowled okay because I got accepted.

And I stayed three years before I had to go into the army. And John Logan was a wonderful teacher because he took our content seriously no matter how sophomoreic it was and he read beautifully so that when he read our poems aloud we thought we were good. So he was a great teacher for a beginning poet. And Donald Justice was a great teacher in another way, because he was very, very precise, a formalist at heart but welcoming to all styles and very precise in his analysis. And the students there were all outsiders who had found their way to this program circuitously because there weren’t a lot of MFA programs then; in fact, there might have been only one or two others. And so that was another thing, I would turn three poems a week in. I would write more than three, but I would put three in an envelope and turn them in. And again, I think the biggest element was wordplay. It turns out that wordplay is a good sign of a young poet, but I didn’t know that; it was just what I could do. And gradually I realized that, no, there was something beyond this. And I actually just changed my way of writing one day and started over, and one thing led to another and I kept on writing while I was in the army.

People who write for a semester or a college year or even four years of

college are doing one thing, but people who write for 10, 20, 30 years are doing something else. If you go on writing for 20, 30 years, it's because you're getting something out of it; you need to do it. It's true that, no matter what, the literary world is full of insult. When you put yourself out to the public, you're going to get some negative stuff. But writing just feels wonderful. I mean, I love the discovery aspect of writing. I *love* that. I love not saying what I didn't know I knew, not knowing where I'm headed, abandoning myself to the materials to figure out where I'm going. Of course your personality is going to come out of it, of course your obsessions are going to make themselves known, of course if you have a philosophic mind a matrix of philosophy will be behind things; everyone has a stance, an attitude, a vision, a viewpoint. All that will come out. But in the meantime, you're just dogpaddling like mad. And that's fun. That's what I always liked about every art.

FOX: There was a writer who won the Nobel Prize and he was first contacted by a journalist who said, "What do you think about having won the Noble Prize?" And the writer said, "Well, I don't know, I haven't written about it yet."

BELL: [laughing] That's good, that's good. Someone was supposed to have confronted E.M. Forster at a writer's conference and said, "How do I know what I mean until I see what I say?"

FOX: [laughs] Right.

BELL: And that's the thrill of it. Now, I know there are people who write—even Yeats would sometimes take an idea, a prosaic, prose idea, and just labor it, over a long period, into poetry. A poet named Hollis Summers, who was from Ohio and is no longer with us, used to write out ideas and poeticize them. I could never do that; I have to be in the midst of the energy. But there are lots of different ways to write. I think the people who believe they're going to push an idea they have from the beginning are better off writing in meter and rhyme. I think formalist forms work better for that.

FOX: Hmm.

BELL: But free verse is another kettle of fish. Free verse is not a form; it's a method for finding new forms. There are all kinds of free verse. And if you're revising a poem written in meter and rhyme, you can usually see where it's broken. You can look at it; it's like a good machine, and you can see where it's broken and you can try to fix that part. But in free verse, that's a different business. You have to get back into the energy of that poem. You have to get back into the energy of the steps that the poem takes from beginning to end. And you can't always do that, so I think free verse—my gut feeling is that free verse poets abandon more than formalist poets do. I know that I abandon a lot. I've worked out a way of writing over the years that

allows me to stay in the energy, but if the energy flags, I get up and walk away.

FOX: Mhm, yeah.

BELL: I'll come back to it and try to get back into it; I can't always do that, which means I lose a lot.

FOX: Why do you think that—I mean, meter and rhyme, not very much is written in that form and hasn't been for many years.

BELL: Not as much as used to be. There still is plenty around, but when I started writing, meter and rhyme was still the coin of the age. There were plenty of people writing free verse but it wasn't the main thing, and so it was still interesting because it existed in contradistinction to formalist verse. And I still remember Donald Justice, my friend and later colleague, teacher—I had a poem on a worksheet one week in free verse and he came in and raised his eyebrow and said, "This poem appears to be written in free verse." [Fox laughs] And I said, "Oh, no, it's written in sprung accentuals with variant lines." [all laugh] You had to know meter, and I knew meter. You had to be able to talk the talk of the metricians so that they would know you were serious. Well, what's happened, of course, is that...

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

JOSÉ MANUEL ARANGO was born in el Carmen del Viboral, a village named for its poisonous snakes, in the state of Antioquia, Columbia. He studied in the United States as a young man and published translations of Whitman, Williams, Dickinson, and Han Shan. John Oliver Simon (who translated “The Beggar’s Figure”) spent an afternoon talking poetry with him in a cafe off the Plaza Berrios in Medellín in 1996, while José’s wife took their grandchildren to a movie.

BRUCE COHEN: “Mostly I generate poems out of quirky language, often a musically interesting phrase I overhear, so I rarely, initially, have any sense of the subject matter until well into the composition. The first sentence, like a jingle, had been knocking around my head for a while when suddenly it exploded quickly into a poem that virtually wrote itself, based on a memory of a naïve America from my childhood. It is rare that my poems stick to their narrative. I had no idea where the poem was headed and was surprised by the girl at the end who I had not remembered until the moment she appeared on the pages. She became the only person who was not, somehow, a romanticized cartoon. Vulnerable, yet dignified.”  
(bruce.cohen@uconn.edu)

BOB HICOK, born in 1960, is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *This Clumsy Living* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007). He has worked as an automotive die designer and a computer system administrator, and currently teaches creative writing at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. An interview with Hicok appears in *RATTLE* #29.

LYNNE KNIGHT: “I write poems to find out what I think and feel about the world. So I’ve never stopped feeling like a student, even after having taught for three decades. The experience in ‘The Lesson’ seems to me proof that when a student is ready (as I try always to be), a teacher will come.”

JOHN OLIVER SIMON: “I have been translating contemporary Latin American poets for near on three decades. Translation enables me to enter into a deep dialogue with dozens of poets, living and dead. In this case I am the ventriloquist for José Manuel Arango (1937-2002), born in a village in Columbia named for its poisonous snakes, and himself a translator of Whitman, Dickinson, Williams and Han Shan.”

GREGORY ORR is the author of nine books of poetry, the most recent being *Concerning the Book that Is the Body of the Beloved* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005). He teaches at the University of Virginia and lives in Charlottesville with his wife, the painter Trisha Orr.

TRISHA ORR attended Sarah Lawrence College, the New York Studio School, the Rhode Island School of Design, and the University of Michigan, from which she graduated summa cum laude. Four of her poem-paintings, in collaboration with Gregory Orr, appear in *RATTLE* #29. ([www.trishaorr.com](http://www.trishaorr.com))

J.R. SOLONCHE: “I write poetry because I can’t compose music. That’s the short answer. The long answer involves my 12<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher at Evander Childs High School in the Bronx, Mr. Feinberg, who dared me to write a poem, which I did. Well, I guess that’s another short answer.”

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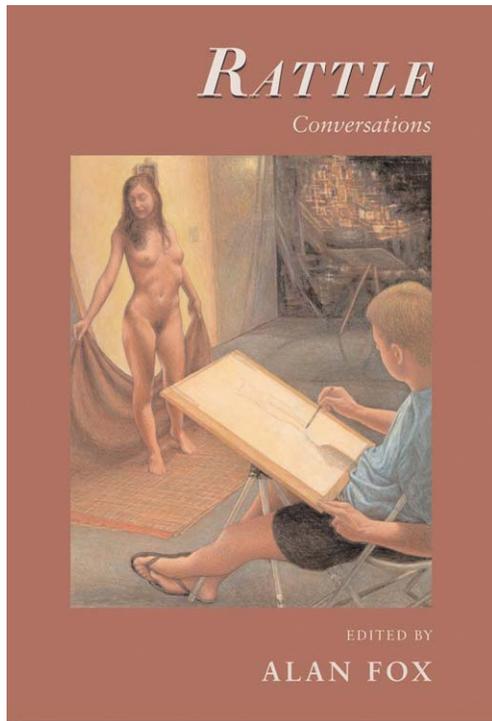
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