

Outside



Marnie Reed Crowell

OUTSIDE

Marnie Reed Crowell

Island Heritage Trust

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ISBN

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INSIDE

Credits

Assuming some blank pages etc. so this following numbering merely indicates sequence and facing pages couples.

The Nature Poems – Deer Isle

This collection will take you through a calendar year and around Deer Isle. Visit every one of the IHT preserves in the photographs, with an easement or two thrown in for good measure. You could call me a back yard birder, but since we live just adjacent to Barred Island Preserve, that is quite a back yard.

-Marnie



2

New Year Resolution

Quiet in the glittering winter dark
the shrubs hold up bare branches
embracing night after empty night.

Come spring dawns, the sky weight
bears down no longer and
the gawky twigs will swell with promise.

Buds will silver with new life
and light will come in spite of icy winds

across the cold and heartless bay.

3

White on White

I acknowledge that I do not comprehend
the force which orders precious planes
of being for all flakes of snow
now and ever on and back.

Even this much comprehension
cannot hold: at my very breath
the crystal edges melt, and hidden
white-on-white, the watching
snowshoe hare beside me moves away.

January Dusk

In the shadowing dark
no path promises to lead me home
the antlered birches step aside
hooves barely clicking in the quiet
The white rock unfolds hind legs
moves off when I glance aside
Ice shutters bog eyes which since noon
have been staring at the sun
On owl wings the winter bat sky flies
Shape-shifters all, shamans on the journey
on behalf of others risking
night because we look away.

4



5

December, Northwest Harbor

On the frozen beach
where wave-wet pebbles glow,
keen wind brings tears
as if conferring special beauty to the brave.

Snow buntings - fifty in a flock,
barely overheard in private conversation -
come rippling overhead, sharp against cold blue,

bright and quick as sun,
idea, memory, life, or love
- in a mirror flash and gone.

6



7



Doves in Snow

In late afternoon light
lichens pale and barely green
hang windless from black boughs
as snowflakes feather down
through the sheer weight of silence
to buff, to beige, to good grey frozen ground.

A family flock of doves comes

whistling in, swaying, step, parade
across the whitening woodland duff,
each pink foot by some invisible ribbon
attached to inner fulcrum balancing
the dove heart with bobbing tiny head
as snowflakes feather down.

8

A lone dove on a low branch
pulls back its head upon its breast,
twilight colored: lilac, mauve, and madder,
a perfect match for spruce bark,
netted neatly black and white.
The dove blinks a lidded flash of cool strobe white
as snowflakes feather down.

A snow-roofed bough shelters
yet another dove, its calm eyes
closed, tail long, breast full
and soft, like peace,
it gently dozes while the other
committee members keep watch
for fox as snowflakes sift around.

As snowflakes and water differ only in form,
just so the wintry palette is dove hue,
is sound of snow, is sweet sensation
of heart listening, is acceptance with
or without the busyness
of doves in snowflakes feathering down.

9

Talisman, February Nor'easter

After night's ferocious force
the spruce cower
white-lined on the sea side.

Out from a final snowflake flurry
appears
white-on-white

an eagle

haloed like a magnet
with half a dozen heckling crows.

Of all the human words
that could be pinned
on the eagle disappearing north

disdain
hauteur
aplomb

only *aplomb* has the weight
to stay with *eagle*, enduring
like a pocket-riding stone.
10

Windchill Warning

Below zero, sundown
earnest footprints squeak
bright lashes zipper up
and nose hairs knit,
first curious then with menace.
A line of brow exposed
does shocking ache,
skull's bare teeth grinning
the least beyond demure.
We're all reluctant dames at tea
our lungs a nervous twitter
behind the scarf,
"Oh, just a wee bit, thank you"
to the evil air on offer.
Just out beyond the door
the weight of cold
cleaves through the dark
each breath a saber slice,
the waiting wolf of death
much nearer than before.
11

February Bay

Ice cakes floating free,
yodel-fest of arctic ducks
and fluting loons –

silver signs of spring.

Spruce trees in spring rain
stir somber lines
to
silver flash.

It begins to clear –
warblers.
catbird polishing silver.

Raven shout
hangs in the wet air
like a bulldozer.
Flood warning.
12

Dawn Frieze

On black spruce boughs huddle
oddly glowing remnants of last snow,
still night enough that Eagle Island Light flashes,
fixed star to far planet of first fishing boat.

Briefly offered brush of light
frescoes Camden Hills,
band pressed narrow by the lowering sky.
Masquerading as Mount Etna,
clouds lie upon on their northern flank.

The crows cry,
“Pay attention, now!”
and I do,
not just because
I’ve seen Pompeii
13



14

Snowbirds

A single red hibiscus bright in the window.
At the eaves the rain chain sings,
laughs with roof melt, calls me out,
suggests the beach in the February sun.

I cannot say what physics word is right
for vapor rising from the snow,
or the weatherman's term for south wind's blow
which fills the bay with a salty white,

crested loud with full, roll-over waves

precisely the color aquamarine,
Florida coast transferred to Maine.
No mistaking that beachy thud and pound
with slush like maguerita ice in color, sound.

No farther than I used to cast for silvery pompano
with stout surf fishing weighted line,
but here in the silvery glare –a thick-billed murre,
wintering south from the arctic, penguin-like,
and rare to us. Snowbirds, we two regard each other.

It feels like calm delight in the afternoon sun,
improbably mutual. Tonight the click and rustle
of palm fronds meeting in the dark
will whisper in our dreams.

15

Eider Envy

Inland I'm told
the maples are wearing garlands
of plastic jugs and pails.
The sap is rising.

Here on the Island
spruce shadows hold the cold
and we make do
with bare bushes
decorating dooryards with the neon
splash of plastic Easter eggs
and the lobsterman
sweatshirted in the sunshine
patting the elegant flare of his boat
by the ladder -
he's testing the hull.

Was it yesterday the frozen cove
was locked-down desert? Today
the shore is ringed with rotting blocky slabs.
In a languid band of Prussian blue the rockweeds wave
and the silver sheen is alive
with thousands of eiders.
It's galactic, this salt-and-pepper sprinkle,
about equal parts of male and females.

16?

The sound of this eider Eden
with the snoozers dozing in the middle
and the action out at the edges,
this megaflock - their splashing and bobbings
make wavelets' rippling sound.
Their murmuring conversations
may be private, for initiates only,
those who cannot imagine
wishing to be anywhere else today
when the sap is rising.

Thought Waves

Thinking
Ahead of now
Just enough
Like the wave
Pouring itself
On the sand
Just ahead
Of rising tide.

17



18

March Hill

Tarnish clouds now veil
the noon spring air
the February breath
before the long climb
up March hill.

Spring Geese

Half a hundred geese
winging north across the bay:
you've left some fecund, flowered place,

passed over warm and moistly green
full-petalled lands,

arrowing your fine dark lines
across the lonely blue
of open water, open sky,
the brown and grey and tan
of our just-melting world
to press on to your polar claim.

My heart cries Wait,
oh wait for me. I'm coming too.
Although you leave me spring,
you leave me.
How I envy you talking to each other
every wing beat of the way.

19

March Tracks

Perhaps the last of snows,
recycled, thawed, refrozen,
layered like the daily tracks on mine:
Fox prints at March melt-out
grown ego-big as Brother Coyote,
or maybe Wolf, Beware! But smile.

At shore between the tides
the X mark of the Crow,
whose cuneiform of message
is a tally not for me.

Winter storms have clawed
a clam shell scatter from the bank,
meals grown cold millennia ago,
bits of pottery on which
I fancy I can read the maker's mark,
pressed print of cord on clay,
and feel the touch of Dawn People
as I walk beside the waves.

Such company in these messages,
the comfort of creatures

of the near and distant past.
Their spirits speak to me
as we walk together on the path.
20

April Flurry

We're ready
to take the maple buckets down
when big flakes of sugar snow
seem some great pillow fight
over the roof tops
in mad mid-April.

I heard robins in the yard,
behind the bank,
at the Post Office and dump:
robins robins redwings hawks
song sparrows seed catalogs
Yesterday they all arrived.

We hurl our expectations
immoderately
toward spring
and laugh away
the cold and grey.
21

Melting

It's the blue glow in the ski pole's hole,
the snowshoe's lattice print,
the birch trees' brush-stroked shadows,
under delicate hues of the first spring sky

the crisp crackle sound in the woods
as branches let go their ice coats,
the offstage rustle like large ladies' skirts
before snow clumsy thumps
from spruce bough to the snow below

the quick calls of an airborne origami, crows
overhead the red squirrels' tightly wound chatter

between their tandem runs,
the silver splash of smelts hurling themselves
up the newly open stream
while unseen, unheard, sap rises in the trees

and we know it's maple season by the particular sound
of corn snow, that translucent rattle of the old days -
wooden skis, undershirts - and maple wax
dribbled on a pan of it, making melting

even into the mud of the universe
seem a good thing, although we rue
the necessity of ever having to let go.
22



Fish Creek, Early April

We were standing on a matted
salt hay carpet pressed by the spring sun
- velvet black spiders and I -

drinking in the golden topaz beauty
of winter's brew of tannin tea
melting down from inland woods

when a cold breeze made the tree tops sway.
Gaunt they were, those tall spruce,
and worn-looking against the young spring sky.

It was a hard winter. You wouldn't want
to say that they were dancing, those dark trees
with grey snow forgotten in their shade.

A sudden race of sun-sparks
rides the wind up the dimpling stream

like a school of spirit fish.
24?

To my eye the concrete culvert here
looks placed too high for swarms
of smelt or alewife to hurl themselves

come the moonlight, back to the pools
where they first saw spruce tops dance.
Do any fish still come here from the sea,

drawn by the sweet taste of home stream
as my dog and I first smelled the bay,
returning each summer to heart's home?
25

Spring Color

All the past weeks
the hills have glowed
with clear yellow greens,
new buds and new leaves,
and rosy breath of inexperience

blushing a spring world.

Unable to cope with all that
particular shade of blood red
alongside this hope green,
our human eye or brain
perceives these frequencies
vibrating in cosmic contest
one against the other.

From our small perspective
we humans have difficulty
distinguishing beginnings from ends,
so the trees in their quiet wisdom
show us how the world buds
and grows and crisps and flutters on
again and time again.

26

The Charm

Fold these words
and wear by heart:

At the end
a tree in mist
and spring leaves.

Untitled

You can decide that all poems
have been written
and then two or is it three
swallows twitter madly
about the new moon silver
high in the afternoon sky
with shadblow blooming.

27

Mud Season

After the long dark of winter,
most conscious of humans

being clay, vessel, lamp
burning with the frail light of life,

that first pale yellow-green inch
of daffodil sprout seems more bright
than all the rococo ruffles
of golden trumpets to follow,

more dear that brave sprout
which presses against the whole
of frozen gravity to part the frost.

Song sparrow clinging in the wind
to bony shelter of the bushes,
do you sense in your tiny feet

the swelling of the bud,
the invisible life
throbbing in that stick?

You, after all, have chosen
to hurry here rather than linger
among the full-blown cherry blossoms
along the Potomac just now.

Is it that you know the eagles here
each morning at that scant assemblage
of sticks atop the wind-blown spruces
are daily laying eggs,

all power and richness only relative.



28 and 29

First Osprey, April 16
Pandion haliaetus carolinensis

I recorded this poem for the video collection of the Lewiston Public Library to celebrate National Poetry Month.

Osprey, who dares
plunder the eagle and wins
we pause every time to watch
your casual crook-winged beat up the sky
mackerel gleaming in the talons of
your nonchalance.
As my son once explained to me
you have to be born to be cool.

There was nothing casual about
the line gale that yesterday screamed through here
shaking our bridge, plucking it like a lyre
licking hungry at the causeway
battering cowering houses with
waves of such awe that fishing boats stayed on their moorings, every one.
Not just their women, but sea-crusted men
spent the hours stealing glances over their shoulder.
We crept to our beds, shut windows to keep the deluge out
slept fitfully, wholly unable to block the ocean's roar
the answering grinding moan of beach rocks in the dark.

30

born cloudy, cool of its own sort
breezy morning finds us, all over the island
busying ourselves packing lunches
doing up breakfast dishes, gossiping over power outages
pausing to survey the gear going with us.
I imagine I hear ospreys
calling to each other
that unmistakable piercing whistle
I want so fiercely that I step outside
where they are circling overhead
calling, soaring
in signature
arrival.

Palette

grey day
blue hills
green waves
red haze of maple flowers
one warbler with a yellow spot -
what a tiny bird to bring the flame of spring.

31

Dawn Eagle

glides dark above the spruce
at just enough daybreak
to throw cloud shapes
across the bay,
edged at island tide lines
with a trace of snow.

North wind ruffles the bay,
but here's this year's eagle,
last summer's chick?
I see the bird not quite crow-black,
with that shadow pattern
of the distant hills,
and I suppose cold rocks, bare trees
it reads as future,
subtle sign of spring.

32



33



34

Grumble

At first light today
I took my wounded bear of self
shuffling down the frosty paths
seeking comfort in dark spruce hush
and found my way back by silver threads
where hardy spiders had decked the boughs
with fine garlands hung with snowflakes
expanding yet again my notions of possible.

35

Vernal Congress

8:30 PM, April 26

I'm standing in the rain
watching

Ambystoma maculatum congress,
as they say with irony or discretion.

I suppose I
could time
the intervals
at which a snaky head breaks
water to gasp a breath of air,

or measure
the temperature
of the clear pool with its litter
of winter-worn leaves,

or hypothesize
on the gender of the large, heavy brown ones,
the shiny blacker lean ones.

or calculate
how many dozen it takes
to make the seething softballs here.

Voyeur, scientist,
figuring words
to tell about the nudgings,
pawings, writhings
—you're not invited to the secret rite.

Just watch.

The only sound in the wet dark
is the gentle splash of rain,
drops dimpling and geysering above
the domino stars of the salamander backs.

The creatures float and sink:
a languor utterly without guile,
a twirl and twine unarmored, enamored.

My flashlight's gleam writhes too
with a steam of my mammal breath.
Light glances over the dark pool
through shrubbery hung with lichen lace,
onto naked dripping spruce trunks.

Wraith wavering with my breathing—
the shimmer that is them, oblivious to my light—
I could no more bring myself to stamp my foot
than reach a hand into their world:
Touch the magic mirror and the image vanishes.

They have disappeared, the dinosaur dancers,
wee folk gone by dawn, Cinderellas
of a Brigadoon that comes when
the maples haze red with bloom
and the hermit thrush comes back to sing,
yesterday and tomorrow.

36 and 37

These three were selected by Maine's Poet Laureate
Wes McNair for his poetry initiative Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry, DownEast Press

Peek

Between the twigs
a warbler sings

morning air
aglow with aria

and all I see
is a tiny eye.

Haiku by Sparrow

Pale sun, old snow
 white-throated sparrow
cold pure call of spring
call of spring

38

Spotted Sandpiper

Just at the silver seam
between the sea and shore
spotted sandpiper
teeters, speaks softly to itself
a poem it has by heart.

39

Driftwood

The bare silver
wind-pruned spruce
at the shore
beauty not pain
what we recall.

40



41

Woodcock

It feels like woodcock
the slanting light
of slightly after early supper,
the sweet impatient air
of spring mud and tired snow,
any day now pussy willows and redwings.

He never came direct to where I lived,
but I knew where to wait,
the brushy hill under the first star
of an April evening
where we always met, our small history,

the slanting golden light,
that electric call you can't pin down,
the whistling rise,

the private satisfaction
before the chilly dark.

42

Step Dance

Woodcock circles high
in the April evening
bringing down spring
in all its electric glory.

Woodcock step dances
on the frozen ground
to bring spring green
sprouting up.

Know it by the sign
wishing star snagged
on the old spruce.



43

Going Overboard

Snow flakes fall arrow straight to earth.
Lobster boats which wintered under blue wraps
in the snug tide zone of defiant Christmas lights
now turtle ponderously back to sea
down potholed roads
laned with dripping birches

in celebration of last snow

Alchemy

On red maple tree flowers
morning sun turns last night's rain
to diamonds just out of reach.

Ruby-throated humming bird
perches here, jaunty gem
just arrived from its
long trip north.

Not early, right on time,
all casual courage
-attitude for a cold spring day.
44



Mourning Dove

Grey April morning,
net of gentle rain.
First the silent beat,
small head thrust
out perfectly aligned,
throat feathers rhythmically balloon
above the warm breast,
the dark back, wings furled in static dignity.
But vaguely absurd,
as the tail dips
like the old well's hand pump
cranking out the liquid sound –
all carefully noted, described, yet inadequately
labeled: cooing.

Each silken call
comes soft across the silvery scene
with its muted jades of lichen,
birch tip drops reflecting
on the spring-damp air, pendant
sound replenishing the worn soul
of winter earth. I can't be sure
though I hold my breath to listen,

"Oh, do you rue?
"Oh, do you too?"
That's why we call you Mourning Dove.

46 and on to 47 as needed

Rainbow in Black and White

Cloudbanks glower
on the edge of night,
Blue hills still black

Dawn sun spotlights
fishing boats across the bay

We could have been asleep
too busy working

or just not looking

as white birds
fly through the rainbow.
47

Pick Up

Torrents torrents torrents
the windshield wipers sing
as they beat out the rhythm
spring rain, spring rain.

She waits in her car
till the school bus comes,
watches her son step off,
turn back to the steps,
commanding
his little sister,
“Hug on!”

She smiles as he carries her
laughing over the puddles
and gullied road
enjoying her small arms
tight around his neck.
48

Rain Crow

The black crow in winter rain
seems indifferent to the dripping
gems on birch twigs and tree trunks
shining coldly lush with lichens.
On my side of the window pane
on which rain is gently finger tapping,
on my side of the sheltering roof
with its deeper drumming, in here
where water means a warm bath
and machines at work in washing
clothes and dishes, this year end rain
is a luxury. In the moment soon
just before the drizzle prying

into my sanctuary freezes so
the roof will leak, the power will fail.
It's then the crow's laugh will tell me
nothing is for granted

49

Swashbuckling

Like a handsome man with a dainty woman at his side
the spruce trees black on the wooded hills
promenade the gentle birches
demure in new spring greenery
with billows of shadblow's lacey blooms,
the annual mid-May gala
to welcome back the warblers
just before the black flies crash the party.
The leaves of the bush that blooms when
the shad run up the spring-full rivers to spawn
- those leaves glow pink
before green pigment takes them ripely over.
Old spruces, do they think back to their youth,
and like the crone with the silver hair
still feel their inner self in youth?

50



51

Bird Whisper

Spring stirring above old snow
in the first warm days,
crows in the wood
holler and strut their space.
Blue jay bugles its trickster note
loud across the melting groove
of winter's fade.

A soft staccato pulse
melting spruce into spruce,
shadows trilling with the hidden
intimacies of small birds,
a whisper of wings, unfamiliar melody
cool in the dark like the small birds—

reveals that raucous dude, the jay,
in thrall of a private life.



53

Patriot's Day

Spring, finally, comes Downeast
in what seems unseemly haste.
Day before yesterday we shoveled snow, and next
the herons have flown into Haskell's cove,
Neva saw bees crazy at the crocuses by her granite step,
tree swallows by the post office – they know the flies are out again.
Mahogany twists of skunk cabbage poke up under the alders
where last night the salamanders writhed over each other
and butterflies were seen this morning.
It must have been yesterday afternoon
a garter snake almost made it across the road;
you can hear spring peepers singing in the center of the island
and they're getting elvers in the traps over to Greenlaw's Cove.
Eider ducks in pairs fly low across the bay.

Smoke rising at all compass points signals burning for blueberries.
I say "*carpe diem*" to my dishes in the sink
and hurry out to seize the sunshine,
to poke withered pea seeds in the barely yielding ground.
It's what we do here in New England
April 19, the anniversary of the day the redcoats
and the locals lobbed a shots heard round the world,
perhaps an odd observance, but we have to start early
if we're going to have peas for Fourth of July, a nation of our own.

54

Score for White-throated Sparrow Duet

Pale sun, old snow
 White-throated sparrow pair
cold pure call of spring
 call of spring

White-throated Sparrow Solo

Dawn finds the sparrow
bragging in sweet whistle
clear and claiming

"I'm here: mine, mine, mine."

In the warm hours of bright noon
the song is leisurely and thin
but come the shadows
at the evening end of day
I review and realize

how sweet to be owned
by a bird
and advertised as such
as once again he boasts,

"The world: mine, mine, mine."

55

April

Snowed in
with red tulips
and calico cats
is not alone.

Wet snow
bows the branch
til the crow
takes wing.

Sprouts push
through snow-pressed thatch
with such a green shout.

56

Wren Dreaming

small white flower
in spruce shadow dark
dreams itself a wren



Wrensong

silvery wren song
shimmers
on the indecisive light

of an April afternoon
like new love

57

At Asticou Gardens

"I usually say,"
I murmur to the treetops,
"that I'm quite content
to hear a bird,
but now I really want to see
that warbler they call Firethroat,
the one that clearly just says Ha!"

"Sounds like a poem,"
the man behind me mutters
behind binoculars.

"You ought to write it down,"
he says, so then I launch
in search of both a pencil and a bird.

Watching us peer and stare
and block the path,
the flame and orange and yellow azaleas

say to one another "How silly,"
smiling quietly radiant in the sun.

58



59

Kestrel Song

Some days I am a kestrel.
Threaten one I love
and hear my hawk voice.
I sing fiercely.
In my song
though bones and blood
I am not just kestrel
nor only shadow.

Do you see just crows
who gyre and laugh
and flock in amiable thousands?
No such thing as just a crow,
no small hawk is just a kestrel.
No , not just kestrel I.

Not just that shadow
though I see it coming
not crush
nor only feather.
Hear my kestrel cry.

60
Peregrine

I heard the faint snap of feathers' flex
the instant before
a shadow of hawk sped over me,
across the sunlit space
black knife blade of wing
bird intensely blue above, russet below
piloting swiftly low
between the gate posts
to take the woods road curve
on his own reconnaissance,
exciting a contrail
of complaining crows far into the distance
the way a shooting star across the Milky Way
flares into the vast dark
leaving invisible wake

awe and strange elation.

61





63

Bobolink

Wearing sun on his head,
moonlight on his shoulders,
bobolink so fills the morning air
with May meadow dandelion gleam
and hedgerows laced with shadbush bloom,

that long after it's gone
I feel
the shimmer and pulse
imprinted on the air.

Crack

On impact involuntarily
I shut my eyes so I failed
to see what kind of bird it was
which left a downy feather

glued to the window between
me and the rain and the star magnolia,
leaving us wondering if
that is any way to leave a life.

64

Blackburnian

I have heard in the top
of the dark spruces
ringing the cove
a tiny warbler they call
“the fire-throat”

but in the fog today
a small girl
in a spark-bright swimsuit
is the fire
as she abandons
her brother digging clams
far out on the dark flats

spiraling
 her way back
 and forth
across the mud
trying out rhythms with her steps

pausing
 at every measure as
 she looks

 back over her shoulder
at the tracks.

65

Sunbather

The meadow mouse is glad we have a meadow once again
Meadow vole, actually, and our meadow is just a square of

green, but it does have dandelions
as the Painted Ladies know.
This chill spring morning well before the sun has reached
the lawn I spied one of these orange bright ladies
basking up there on the birch leaves.
But for the brief flash before it settled
I never would have guessed.
How safe it might have felt, wings held flatly wide
worshipping the sun
like some topless sunbather on the green roof,
above us mortals who go about our morning coffee
unaware of what goes on above
or over our heads.
66

High Dudgeon

would not be too strong
a phrase for the small winged fury
screeching overhead,
small hawk
I'd startled into nearly
betraying her nest site
in the rotting spruce
from which I'd heard
the infant conversations.

I understood and sympathized
as I too more mother am
than pacifist.
No sooner did I turn
my attention to ripening berries
than the kestrel
vanished silently
and the glade fell quiet
in the sun.
67

Celastrina argiolus

Spring Azure gathers
all the loveliest of hues
then improbably alights
like a mussel pearl
on the beach at the blue bay's rim.

Lomographa vertilliata(Gn)

Spring White on
apple blossom, pear
and shadblow petal snow
drifts down the May morning
save one that flutters upward
a day moth sprite.

Fritillary

Demure the violets
tucked in the lush green
of May meadow morning
with one red-gold Fritillary pausing
by the hay rake rusting there

Papilio glaucus

Bare clapboards silvered
by time and winter
but by the door a lilac
the languid dazzle of a Swallowtail
New England economics.

Actias luna

Who first uttered the phrase
"nearly unbelievable good fortune"
must have heard organ toccatas
and wondered that there was room for us
in a world so sensuous with pale orchids
and pale green celadon of the Luna moth.

68 and 69

Nature Tourism

Kenya, *Colobus abysinicus*

Wazungu, Ladies and Gentlemen,
the black and white Colobus monkeys
you have just glimpsed overhead in the fever trees,
these kuluzu were - believe it or not -
once considered pests, troublesome nuisances.

Lovely, aren't they?
Elegant white mantle fringing their glossy night-black fur,
this troop will not dance as regalia
or lie in ornament on the lodge floor
as once they might, but as the forest trees are cut
refuges like ours assume a new significance.

Maine, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

Red squirrel, scolding at my hermitage door,
how the summer people blanch to see you,
wondering what mischief you have done inside their vacant cottage,
your shoe button bright eyes ringed so innocently with white.
Over your sleek red back you hold that fluffy tail
arched until the instant when you launch
your pocket rocket self in pure aggression at your peers.

How complex, so far beyond telling in an eco-tour
a nature story really is.
When our melting boreal relic island
is thoroughly invaded by suburbia and the grey squirrels,
who will pay to visit us rare relics
under old spruces at the end of the road?
We can't just retreat to Canada, can we?

Oh, little forest imp, you downeast dear,
you do not scold with near the wondrous whoop
I heard those sad-faced monkeys make,
but I can love you now, and so I do.



70 and 71



72

Spider Watching

When I was young

I was very certain
I once saw a faerie
dart behind a cobweb

and for years I loved to count
the filmy sheets on morning grass
like fine linen spread to catch the dew

but now I am an age
to just enjoy
the awe.

73

Cubist Logic

At the corner of the fields
are stacked
white boxes,
weathered grey
but firm in contrast to
the luscious undulation of
gleaming gold and copper alloy,
new-leaved blueberries
with their modestly hung
creamy flowering bells tucked out of sight.

That I dare not stop for a closer look
an ominous hum would warn
even if I somehow failed to see
the steady phalanx, bees
advancing to and from the field,
rent-a-bees, migrant workers
toiling here for a brief week
to pollinate the crop to come.

Last night a bear was seen here
foraging in desperation.
This lean time of year
harvest is a long way off.
No doubt the lobster fishermen sympathize
for they too have their stacked squares,
wire mesh traps
in dooryard ziggurats,

bright yellows and greens,
gaunt towers behind the tulips,
hoping for a harvest yet so far away.
74 and 75

May Birthday

On the waves
the ragged-edged
full moon path
points south to you.
Crows shout your name
along the shore.
Your old dog dreams
fondly of you.
In your father's arms
I listen to the wren
promising joy
doves murmuring
contentment
sweet challenge
of the hermit thrush.
In the dawn hush
of your birthday
Your mother smiles.

76

Sailing around the Island

The shocking smack of wave on rock,
 sibilant pour,
blue retreat, regroup,
 the surging heart
comes again to realize
 the most granite row of senseless rocks
eventually does yield
 to the forward press
of wind and waves.

The good sailor

trims and tacks
does not take down the sail
just because it is in the way of the wind.

Knowing that the sun won't always shine
and the wind be fair,
we trust the boat that carries us
to the unseen power, the rudder, sail, and chart
bringing us safe to port just long enough
to fit our craft to ride once more
the ceaseless tides of change.

77

A Small Poem

Wind writes
small poems
on grass

Rain

To hear the clouds
join birds at dawn
feel the drops falling
from spruce into
space between thoughts
the sound between waves

78

Cherry Tree

Future feels a burden,
the weight of visioning alternatives,
the past an insubstantial pleasure -
sorting through that vast collection
of joys
and not.

For now I want freedom,

unshadowed leisure
to hold out my apron
catching bolts from the sun,
words plummeting like hailstones
day and night, dreams
the half-sisters of poems
the Muses send.

Coarse tea bowl shards gold-mended,
the chick steps out from shell debris;
the cracked old head lets in more light.
In the flush of its last spring
the gnarled cherry tree
blooms with an exuberance
it's been aiming its whole life toward.
79

Crow Scroll

I

The crow kindergarten
is at it again
bubbling and bawling
in the spruces,
once more
bullying the eagle
without mercy.
In their uniform black
it's hard to say
just which cohorts
are assailants this time,
but probably
it's the usual Gang of Five.
Our national symbol
huddling there
against the tree trunk
fans its white tail,
spreads its great wings,
sails off across the bay
leaving the crows
to find other amusements.

80

II

Outlined
against the fog
the crows are
silently arranging themselves
in the serviceberry bush,
our Island pear,
Sung Dynasty *sumi-e*,
Maine ink
on Maine silk.
Preening,
arching for fruit
amid the graceful branches
the youngsters teeter
and flap,
outstretching their reach.
For them too
accepting who you really are seems to be
life's great challenge.
81

Diamond Merchant
Or Watching for Shooting Stars in a Summer Night

Though comforted by the familiar
necklace, crown, tiara,
of Corona Borealis overhead on velvet sky

you warm in my circling arms,
I shiver –all that cold
and everlasting distance.

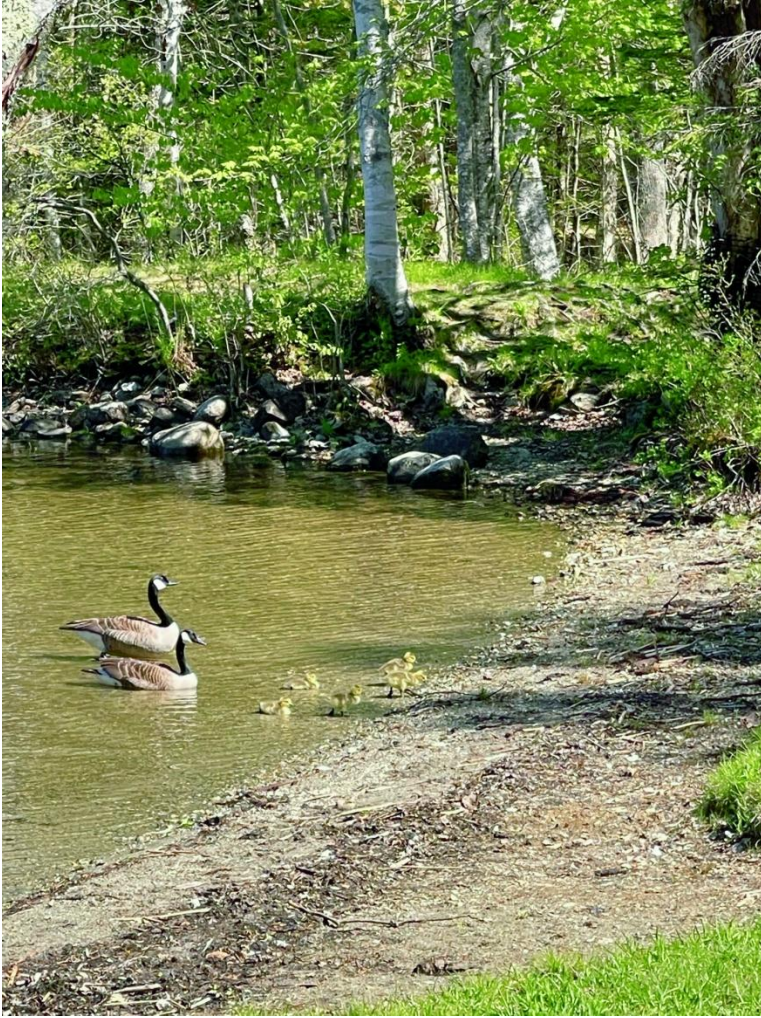
We pay for the incandescence
of our joys in coin of consciousness,
a dreadful sense of finity.

But I choose you, dear one,
all your faceted scintillation
on the a dark cloth that is life.
82

Silver Night

Intellectually apprehending
not only cycles
but seasons of the moon,
I have lived enough summers
now to know
just where to expect
a moon at midnight.

But in the thick hush
of summer fog
the lustrous moon astounds,
phantom pearl
exerting magic magnetism
with glow faint, inexorable,
grand as gods.
intimate as love.





85

Dowsing

These two bare twigs, formerly
bayberry, too scant to be driftwood
but nicely branched and silvered,
they fit the hand so well I carry them
full circuit around the island
with no vain intention of taking either
home with me, but I like the feeling
of winnowing the sea breeze,
of holding hands with the sky,
of sensing how a lobster feels
waving its claws in communication
with Poseidon and the sea.

86



87

Picking Crabmeat

I cannot quite shrug off the troubles of the world –
nobody asks me how to run it -
but bare feet cool against the kitchen floor boards,
I am picking summer crabmeat,
Italian opera on the radio as I work,
crab rolls for grandchildren.
No Roman emperor ever
had such pleasure,
earned by age.

Wiping my hands on the bibbed apron
like hers, I recall Vida
who taught me how to do this
with a small hammer and a slab of granite.
She wore stout laced black shoes
on her scoured clean wood floor.
I was young and far away
when she might have liked
help with storm windows
to keep out the loneliness and cold.

If only she'd known about Verdi.

88

Intersection

Maine doesn't need me
though it's my shoulder
over which the morning sun
lights pot buoys on the breathless bay
like fluorescent candy spill.

Terns fly stuttering over
 slightly out of register
through the drone
of a fishing boat
 carving wake
while a porpoise blows and sinks.

Pin pricks
of intersection
these worlds
 and mine.

89

No Inhibition

Young nuthatches launch
out from the birches
hawking for insects
rising from the blueberries.

Bright in the late sun
of late summer
the tiny birds
swoop and squeak
turning three-sixties
on the tree limbs.
They do aerial wheelies
utterly without inhibition.

Both my aged mother and a dear
friend, demented and disoriented
launch cruel remarks in their losing battle

but it's not a bitter hag in hiding
all those years that now comes out
just random signals hitting me.

You're the nearest mark the doctor said.
They've lost their inhibition.
I will instead now picture them
as dear young birds, fluttering emblems
of a soul preparing to fly free.
90 and 91

Bird Bath Song
found poem based on an e-mail from a friend

While I was watering my tomatoes,
crouched down
at eye level with their bases,
a tiny nuthatch flew in
through the fencing system and perched
doing his little ink, ink, ink.

Ink? Ink, you say?
Of course this is a poem
and it will have to be written.
If I were a poetical type, my friend writes,
this would be a great poem:
He was teeny, and another nuthatch
in a tree was making a big racket.

Ink, ink! Poetry is sharing they know.
So he is focused on the end of the spray wand
and hops closer
so I make a little pool
for him and he comes right in and takes a bath.

I'm sure I overwatered
trying to accommodate him,
but it was very fun,
and poets and tomatoes won't mind
our little ink ink song.

92 and 93

Line break

Persistently singing itself into being
a poem drives me out to walk
my shadow's heft herding grasshoppers
parting their numbers like backyard wildebeests.

An alliteration of crows mutters from each bald spruce
against the calls of a pair of sharp-shinned hawks.
So busy decreeing dactyls, splitting spondees
I trip over trochees, blunder into the web of a spider

awkward line break, that
the poem I came for quite forgotten.

94

The Touch

Dragonfly, you land
atop my writing hand
tiny cinnamon stick
with gossamer wings.
In your intimate touch
an I-Thou experience
no longer than the
moment between breaths
I cannot hold you
only the back of my hand
remembers what we might
have been trying to say.

95

Risk

Play badminton
with lit matches
lobbed over no net
keeping no score
in a field of ripe hay

once you understand
the rules.

Summer Pudding

I make this grand dessert
Just how my Scottish Granny did
Plain bread, no cake
whipped cream clouds
under blueberry skies
strawberry raspberry
blackberry too.

Dream Harbor

Cast off the cobweb morning
Sail down the sunset sea
Beyond blue hills of summer dusk
To where good dreams will be.

96

Curse

I cursed the birch
by the boulder there
grown up to block
the favorite view.

Birch beetles heard
and did it in.
It's dying now
so best take care,

you big house builders
who'd hide our bay,
I hear echoing hammers
of your crews

and my friends
the carpenter ants,
they are listening

97

Sun Halo

From my roof I can look above
the rampart spruce tops
and eavesdrop on eiders
who think they can come
chuckling in under my radar
by hugging the shore.

Angled to the ice-ringed sun
like some Arctic lizard,
my ears track foot taps up the slant.
I merely raise an eyelid
but even that's too much

for the red squirrel who has sidled up
to peek beneath my hat brim.
He leaps in terror or surprise
to the nearest tree reclaiming
just enough aplomb to scold.

Once in my meadow a weary bird
migrating under an autumn moon
mistook me for a boulder.
Rolling over to see who's there,
I felt its frantic fear claw
back up to the stars.

Eye to eye and still
we do not recognize
our selves in one another
nor look direct
without the veil.
98 and 99

Ghosts

Years ago we winterized
And modernized but still
I go to the camp shelf
stand bemused across the room
from the cupboard
where the drinking glasses are.

How long I wonder,
does a bee, a butterfly, hover
where I've picked a flower
and will I ever stop trying
to tell you something interesting?
100

Mackerel

Out of mind's vast
blue deep they come,
racing into coves
flashes of silver bearing
black-barred stanzas,
writing ripples.

You don't call mackerel.
You know the tide
and go out in your boat
or onto the pier
and you wait,
knowing that unless
a line or net is in the water
no one ever catches
the meaning
or the music.
101

Rowing

I step into the skiff,
shift my weight with competent grace
to take up the oars
pushing their smooth round
handles, watching the blades

cut the clear water,
feathering bright droplets
in near silence all absorbing
like breathing in and out
pull and return

until I send myself on ahead
to wade out and meet me,
putting a hand on the bow
to ground ashore on the welcoming sand.

102



103

Light on the Mountain

First hour of day,
bare dawn
plays most revealing light
on Camden's hills.
We see most clearly then
- that hour
waking from our dreaming
before the ordinary day clouds
overtake us.

104

Blue Ribbon

Big, ruffled, blue
iris alone
at the granite ledge
in the tidy lawn
declares
the modest silvery-shingled
Cape with its green stacks
of lobster traps and
orange popsicle cascade of buoys
first place winner:
Island gardens in the fog.

105

Learning the Language of My Neighbors

For weeks I'd listened
to the sweet hollow drain burbling
in the shadows of the spruces
where a nest of baby crows were
gobbling down whatever it was
their parents brought to stuff their maws.

Then I watched the morning four fledglings
hurtled through the summer sky,
all four aimed at a bare but single branch.
Quite unequal to the task
it sent them bobbing, teetering, gabbling,
tumbling one upon another.

When a squall came boiling down the bay this afternoon,
first thunderstorm they'd ever known,
four black parasailers launch themselves
expertly, feet dangling, wings wide
to hang-glide in enviable abandon
above the lashing spruce and waves,
pure joy in challenge needing no translation.

106

Ten spot Dragon Days

I don't remember when I was a kid
thinking ten spot dragon flies
were any more special than Cabbage White
butterflies hoping for broccoli
among the strawberries but now
when I see a dragon hover over the garden
pretending to be a great winged pterodactyl
I savor the illusion of summer doubly
doubly knowing it for now and for the way we were.

107

How to See in the Woods

Only twice I've seen
the deer before they saw me,
a red yearling doe
and once, a spotted fawn.

People on the trail usually talk,
go by so busy with each other
they never see me leaning here
against the lichen-laden bark
of the compatriot spruce.

Standing like a man or like a deer
I am quite free to water the trail.
With a some small concession
to being a woman,
I too enjoy that grateful after feel.

In the bushwhack thickets
on the deer trail byways
I've never met anyone else.
If I ever do, will I come again?

Caught up in this private conversation
I leave my hat perched on a stump.
All the way back I wonder,
does it notice?

108 and 109

Wood lily

In the company of kestrels
the wood lily holds aloft
its crimson flame, fierce
amid the glacial granite
boulders, above the sea of
berries cool New England blue

- how brief, how bright.

110



111

High Season

This morning we delivered the garlic bread
for the benefit supper tonight to pay for
Al's heart by-pass surgery and then
we dropped off the blueberries for
the Farmer's Market on the way to pick up
the mail and get the paper for Annie who
is not driving and take the painting to
the craft show to benefit the school art program.

I saw the minister on the way between
the funeral and the wedding and I know
her family is due to arrive this afternoon.

It's a clear-air beautiful day
with just enough wind for
an armada of sail boats out already
and the eaglets just fledged.
The Billings have picked more raspberries and
down in town, on my way home to grab lunch
I saw some tourists in their fancy clothes
heading out leisurely to do the galleries.
I hope they are enjoying vacation but I
would not trade places with them even though
for us who live here this is highly crazy season.

112 and 113

Empty Nests

On the dirt road where the robin and I
walk on a summer morning
she told me first she had right of way
as she hopped ahead to gather
what I could not see to feed her babes.
"Wert" she clucked in disapproval.

Wert what? Robins all say that.
"Bird thou never wert?"
Assuredly you be; you aren't a skylark
nor an English robin nor I Shelley.
Wert!

Her argument engaged, she hopped in tandem paces
ever pressing forward, never circling back
to useless solitude of road behind me,
in service of what sort of now?
Wert! was all she said.

When next we met on the summer shady road
she flew above my shoulder,
quiet companion clearly now more leisured
as I enlightened smiled at the pair we
were.

114 and 115



Mushrooms

A crowd of mushrooms on squat stems
Ivory Brittlegills ribbed beneath like Chinese carving
Pale as parchment
116

Chamois-soft as my grandmother's gloves
These deep-dimpled mushrooms
Caps indented with whose thumb in turning?

Caroline is two and finds mushrooms
Sprung from moss
Nestled with spruce cones
Equally enchanting
Amanitas, agarics, poisonous all
Worth a taste.

"No, don't touch."

She smiles, beguilingly mimics
Wiping her hands on her little red dress
Reaches a bare toe out to caress
Gauging precisely my response
She brushes the mushroom
With a black crow's feather
Satisfying us both.

In my arms, in the evening
Caroline points at a fairy tale page
Hansel and Gretel's red-topped mushrooms
"No, don't touch," she orders
Clever child, I hope I have not narrowed your world
Beyond the margins of prudence.

117



118 goes with 119

Ellsworth Schist

That's what he calls the Island's oldest rocks,
Ellsworth Schist.
Hear the echo of layer on layer,
volcanic dust softly sifting down
into a great rift gulf, Mane pulling away

—Africa left way over there—
five hundred and some million years ago.

I see a hopeful sheen in the greenish
foliate layers of that rock called schist,
banded with its blank white
quartz intrusions, too complex
to bear thinking of,
the rock in my hand torqued and stressed,
enduring heat and pressure for those
five hundred and nine million years ,
far more that I can bear to understand.

I pocket the pretty schistose pebble
from the beach, a wave-washed lucky stone,
to give to him because I had no words
to answer when he told me
“All I want is dreams
and someone to share them with.”

119



120



121

Before Marijuana was Legal - for Stephen Pace

“When rope makers couldn’t get hemp from the Philippines- – World War II was happening – we started to grow it on our farm. And that’s how hemp happened in Missouri. At just about this time of year we boys would rick it up and burn the corn. The weed come wild would make us high though we didn’t even know it, not till I went to parties as a New York artist and I smelled the old Missouri smell.”

All morning long, birds ride the ridge
funneling south along the shore,
so I climb the hill behind our house
to drink the wine of this wild world,
lie among crisp lichens, maybe harvest
the first few upland cranberries,
and watch the birds soar overhead
before they launch across the bay.

I think of him, my old friend laughing,
when I find my favorite seat is filled
by a row of plastic pots tucked in
the clearing. Who laid this jungle botany quiz
baking on bare granite, inside a secret ring of spruce?
How hemp happens here, but I am high on hawks,
fir balsam pillow smell, and good salt air,
Maine artist at a party where I'll stay until the end.
122 and 123

Garden Jazz

Standing birch trees rustle
like a concert cough.
Grasshopper lays down the beat
crickets, quick and silent scurry
knobby-kneed through the grass
pulsing when they find their groove.
Surround sound full-frequency clicks
round hot sound, electric splendor
of sonorities over the brief riff
of a lone cicada.
Hot garden gamelan jazz.
124

My Garden After Rain

After and overfull day off-island
foxgloves beckon me
to the green tangle where one tall
Jack-in-the-better-than-beanstalk
shoots above the shade,

Where one last peony has dropped
her skirts, her female parts confidently
naked in their rosy fertile swell,
petals around her feet full
with evening shadow and morning rain.

The spill of oxeye daisies and white clover
from unweeded pots draws the brown hare
who does all my pruning, the sunset
glowing through its listening ears.

Jack Foxglove and I climb quite beyond
the world of chores and cares,
cast off the cobweb mooring,
sail down the river of sunset
beyond blue hills of summer dusk.

124 and 125

Frog

Folded neatly still on the green
moss bank above the golden pool
reflecting you sitting on your side
I sitting on mine, we often meet so
I don't expect you to do more than
Softly pulse your chin in breath
or is it heartbeat? Or do you smile
I can't be sure. Don't laugh
I know I know I do not know
I just learned that I could not
rouse the sleeping night moth
from its day dream so how and what
should we three think of that?

126



127





129

Herding Butterflies

In the warm stillness of
a windless afternoon
on a country lane
flanked by a roadside in wild bloom
butterflies start up. Right and left,
ahead of us, over us, they fly
--beneath the shadow of
butterfly wings a surprisingly
peaceful place.

Slack Tide

Comes a slack tide moment
without wave or breeze
clouds coasting to a stop
fruit quietly ripening
the distant hum of the globe turning
under the shadow of a butterfly

as a spider lines down and tightropes
across from twig to twig
with neither sound nor gravity.

130



131

Senses Making Sense.

STOP.

Do you hear Spider whistling
in the petal ruffles?
Did you feel your mouth
make the small kiss of a berry
falling into fire?
Say the words again
for your hungry ears.
Rose does not glow in the dark
but waits to dance with hardly heard
poems as they sing together
in the sunshine
out LOUD.

132

Seaweed Sign

Here on the Island the harvest moon

Is a new moon, high wind up the bay
And a strong rinse of rain.

The road from the bar
Is windrowed with
Dark humps not roadkill

Lying there on the shoulder
Rockweed slithered off someone's truck
On the way to its next incarnation

Winter mulch
Slouching into summer
Lettuce and lilies.
133

Woodpeckers

A bounty of deteriorating birches
lines my valley of the shadow of death
so often I enjoy the company of woodpeckers.

In black-robed dignity the envy
of cleric or academic
a Pileated woodpecker works
just above me rearing back
Thwak, Thwack—then probing tap tap tap.

We're so close I hear its squeaky mutterings
to itself, the wheezing as he works.
We both eye the scrawny interloper
alighting six feet higher on the bole.
Mate or child? Duel? Duet?

He continues spelling message,
taps with dot-dash scraps of bark.
The god revealed in aureole of flame,
he raises the red crest of his pilea.
A grand though birdy burning bush,
he sends the stranger off into the fog.

Pileated woodpeckers still are common
—though extraordinary—so I can share
the secrets overheard, but what if

these great birds had been two Ivory Bills?
How would Moses feel, commanded
"Keep our fiery messages to yourself?"
134 and 135

Pair of Pearls

Did you ever think that day length,
like a cloth coat has a proper fit?

I've tried on
several times –
like equatorial Africa where it's more than inconvenient
to be caught out with lions
past exactly half the time of day and night.
There they know just when day begins,
shortly after half past Six, so they speak of
Saa moja, First Hour, year round.

So unlike dear Scotland's inconvenient times,
the January struggle when afternoon tea
needs a whiskey tot to buoy the spirits
against a winter's evening come by Four,
and then midsummer, oh
those bonnie Highland moors
aglow the whole night long.

Being a temperate type
I find the right size day comes to Maine
mid-August, signaled by the dawn
lobster boats begin the day wearing lights,
bright shining pearls whose reflections
trace slender lines across the dim bay
as they head out to haul.

Now of an August evening,
I snuggle under a light quilt
contentedly considering inky- black
calligraphy of spruce
branches brushing across the blue night scroll
and catch the first beam from the lighthouse,

this second pearl beyond price,
at an easy hour, embroidering
a day in a life that fits.

136 and 137

Lessons

When I pick one up, pressing ever so gently,
it squirts in the most graceful way,
right and left, and out both its spouts.
My classroom teacher self rejoins me
as mind and eye take in what we are looking at:
real tunicates, not text book drawings,
but blobs of life. Marine marvels, odder even than
Reach beach shimmy worms. The old
and simple ones I love, tunicates, the very ones
scientists say began experimenting with nerve cords
back in primordial soup, give or take a billion years or two.
No life-listing birder ever felt more triumph than I,
high on meeting up with ancients of the deep.



138

Tonight the paper warns that sea squirts may be coming.
Monstrous monopoly blotting Georges Bank,
big bully cousins of the little sweeties we just met.
The Web warns that the Brits are worried that
stealth squirt attacks seem to have been going on
right under our notice, ever since wooden hulls
and Revolution. Alien invaders, hostile takeovers,
newer, faster, more the watch words of today,
while we're just catching on, just catching up.



139

This next poem was commissioned for the Penobscot Peoples' ceremony to open the Penobscot Narrows Bridge and Observatory in Maine. A wreath of sacred boughs was thrown into the water to symbolize how bridges over the waters of the world connect us as people, past and future.

Gluskabe's Bridge

High atop the bridge tower the eagle sees both
Mt Katahdin in the Great Maine Woods distance
And the ocean pulsing in the lee.
Watch with eagle as Penobscot, the Indians' river,
threads the needle's eye, our bridge, on the way to the sea.
Hear the thrum, the song of the bridge,
As all night long a storm tracks by
A back hand strum as southerly winds from out at sea
Try pushing ocean back up-river from the bay.

Hear Gluskabe paddle by in his stone canoe.
With shouts and smacks he urges Penobscot back,
Back by waves, past Eggemoggin Reach, back beyond the quiet Bagaduce.
He turns to follow the river rippling round what man calls Indian Island,
To Orono, and on to Millinocket, threading through forest shadows
Till pure and clear the river flows from Wabanaki heart
Beating around Katahdin, lonely peak the eagle sees.
Spilled by the very clouds that bear the eagle
Every drop of water pauses on the mountain side

Gathering in the sighing spruce behind the mountain
For yet another snowsnake run, riding the rapids downriver
Through the towns and mills, under the bridge, back to the singing sea.
Eagles still ride river ice blocks where lumberjacks once rode logs.
Now that dams are gone the salmon flicker upstream like shadows under the bridge
Summer days belong to gulls soaring backlit over the deck and cable stays
Like sailors of bygone days who tended the rigging of masted schooners.
Autumn leaves now ride the tides back and forth beneath the bridge,
While on the painted hills the traffic stalls as folks admire bridge spires against the flame.
Where Gluskabe has left his mark on rusty rocks that bank the bridge,
One wonders whether Earth or Man has made the greater marvel
—mountain folks just don't talk like those coastal sailors—
A bridge makes us all one weaving,
Not other, upstream or down, more than flows under, flies above
But the way to cross over, lacing embrace of warp and weft—
All bridges are the weaver's shuttle
On the grand loom of country.
Gluskabe, the Great Maker, smiles.
140 and 141

Interwoven

Stand with the daughters of Delia, Molly, Mary
Feel their living heat, move with dancing feet
Heart beat gentle, drum beat strong, pound the winter ash
Your grandmothers made baskets for my grandmother

Picked sweet grass by the shore, brown ash brown hands
Bent with crooked knife, pale splints pass fierce through tiny gauge teeth
Berry-bright colors traded for aniline chemical dyes
The flagrant hues will fade to charm, the fragrance linger

Sewing baskets – who last mended a sock?
For collar stays, glove box, hat baskets – fashions change
String – who saves? – even the wastebasket finds itself abandoned
Gold spray paint not enhancing its value

My mother on a rescue mission haunts the yard sales
The shops, the auctions, filling our attic, garage, and kitchen corners
Till humble baskets achieve antiquesdom
And once again the wealthy choose them as possessions

Your grandmother forced to forget she talked Penobscot
Her daughter buys farmed salmon like the rest of us
Makes a reservation to climb Katahdin
The People gamble on college, a computer, casino

Baskets arrive in the new incarnation, signed and priced as art
Old basketfuls of baskets safely fill the shadowy study shelves
New ones glow from the gift shop at the museum's front door
 Waiting for my granddaughter and for yours
142 and 143

Fledging

Some cunning as they say here
on the Island, the curly-haired child
in hot and dirty overalls
licking a soft ice cream
covered head to toe
in rainbow sprinkles
or about to fledge chickadee
bouncing back and forth
across the nest hole like a Muppet
poking its yellow-lined beak out
to call mom and view the world.

144

Sweet Pea Trellis

Bright white, pale blue, dear pink.
Sweet peas look freshly ironed
modestly proud, daintily tough.
Rarely seen shriveled, aged or torn
but at night their tendrils grope in the dark
for support like the rest of us.

145



146

Blackberries, Late Summer

I go to pick blackberries
in the arcing glow of goldenrod.
Taller than I disheveled asters
star pale and wild above,
crickets fiddling away in the
hot sunshine of short grass.

White Admiral, surprisingly
assertive for a butterfly
dares me to come closer
flaps velvet black wings
as if it might alight
on my outstretched arms.

How rich the wine my tongue
kisses from the ripe fruit,
how fierce dry saber canes
snake-strike thorns marking
me again with the sweet pain
of every love I've ever known.

147

Blue Feather

It's shorter than my little finger—
the blue feather on the trail,
white-tipped and barred with black,
gleaming several thrilling
shades of blue in sunshine.

A Blue Jay youngster
must have dropped it,
judging from the funny
sounds I've heard all week.

Carrying the small feather
—can I say it's cute? —
into the woods shade
I watch the color go
—faster than fading—
and thank the temporary dark
for that small lesson
in being blue.

148

Squash

With surprise I recognize
summer squash is in the bag
which hits the table, that distinctive sound
no more describable than the subtle taste
of elegance lightly cooked, lightly spiced.

Attasquash, crookneck, *Cucurbito pepo* —
dismissive and ridiculous names
for this pretty vegetable,
delicate, ephemeral in young perfection.

Fresh from the sunny garden
singing hot nasturtium colors,
shimmering butterflies,
I sense an aura,
clear yellow radiance,

abundance on the silver fork.

Are we so beguiled by sugar
that we laud the strawberry and peach,
ignoring this unassertive squash?
Ask the overlooked among us.

149

Silence of Slime Molds

In the still shadows of the spruce forest
on a hot and humid
end of August afternoon,
spattered on the mosses
and slouching on stumps
are stalagmites in bewildering profusion,
lollipops and rock flows in miniature,
ivory, yellow, purples drab and nearly black.

Are such static beings live?
Most inscrutably yes,
these *myxomycetes*, the slime molds.
Animal, their plasmodia swarmed
when I was not looking
across the forest floor
like animated egg white,
or yolk threads, depending on the species,
but surely plant now blossoming surreal
to seed a further generation.

'It' or 'they', these cells of being, life?
They climb upon each others' shoulders,
wry tumblers that defy us to assign them
scientific labels and compartments.
Perhaps these ancient slime molds
are still deciding which way they'd best evolve.

150

In the muggy quiet of today
I sense the *myxomycetes* are considering,
carefully measuring pros and cons
of each contingent future.

It gives one pause
in the green and silent heat.
But why so breathless, waiting world?
With luck the outcome
won't be ours to see.







153

Yankee Harvest

In a crystal bowl, nasturtiums
by the handful, burnt orange, flame,
calliope pink kaleidoscope cascade

in terra cotta pots
tomatoes greedy green
a crush of yellow squash blossoms,
the last plump blueberries

in the china saucer
a lone and silken morning glory floating

azure beyond blue,
enhanced by a slight and jagged tear

in the cooling twilight
of a silently threatening
autumn evening
I savor the joyous profligacy
bold in the face of cutting restraint.

154

Vacation

We were basking
in delight of yet another
morning coffee
out among the flowers,
a midday swim,
the exquisite indolence
of iced tea in a hammock,
turning pages for good cartoons
and short fiction
the extent of our exertions.

Gathering ourselves
to light the grill
we tuned back in to the world
just in time to hear
the meteorologist on the radio
rudely say the "f" word.

Frost.

155

Still Point, Autumn

A thrill of winter dread today; whole air poised in balance
the wan perfection of late autumn afternoon
under the pressed petal of an old moon

Perfectly I remember the earth roar
the downhill dump truck, railroad train racing
behind my desk chair and the radio reported

what it had measured on the Richter scale

Surely I would have heard the globe skid
had the world stilled while I wasn't looking
because I once knew a still point in quiet time
when I had ceased to breathe - in the ICU and it was not quiet

I remember the nurse when they had succeeded in jumpstarting
my breathing once again, when I regained consciousness
she was quite curt with me. I did not seem to her
to be taking things like life quite seriously enough?

So how is it possible that not one single
Frost-crisped leaf on the golden birches
so much as hints a gesture? No dangle, no song
no sway, not even gentle breath of grass

now as if existence is a faded photograph
What a banner of relief, that lone indifferent chickadee
flying across the empty space from birch to birch

minding its own business like an errant thought
pranking in to the perfect light of the sitting mind
sweet unfrightened smudge moving on the still point of meditation.
156 and 157

Girl at the Blue Hill Fair

Read by Stuart Kestenbaum, Maine Poet Laureate 2016-2021, on his Maine Public Radio
series, Poems From Here.

High enough to view the bay
the Ferris wheel carries intrepid few
above the crowds who flow below
like a river eddying at the merry go round
where a sweet girl clings to her pretty horse
in measured pace of calliope prance
serenely up and down around
the whirling current of carnival lights
cotton candy color jewels of glass.
Like Mardi Gras Crewe tossing favors
to the crowd she smiles and waves
this bud of a Rose Bowl beauty
small princess on her palfrey but at every round

a quarter turn too soon I see her lean against
the flow and scan us all in anxious search until
my face she finds, our bond the gem amid the glitter.



158 and 159



160

Goldfinches, late August

Though something of a late bloomer
myself, I missed at first the meaning

when the purple darts at field's edge
disintegrated to a tangled fluff,
a disappointing dun of thistledown
marking summer's end.

It took three mornings in a row:
nesting goldfinches come to sip
the brimming saucer on the porch rail
- canary sunlets glowing lemon-gold,
in their sweetly feathered nakedness
wildly free of any cage.

161

Night Buzz

All air is body heat
The buzzing cry of terns in the
fog of an August night
like direct apprehension of the sacred
- something so wonderful
- (and natural)
- that I cannot seem to find
anyone to share it with
Haunting vibrations, those
welder's torch sparks arcing for the ear

On the gauzy underlay of waves
susurrations punctuated with occasional splash
a wanderer comes chirping by
by again, by the sounds of it
trying to understand my house in the dark
some small bird skirting the edges of man's world?
- may there always be edges
and messengers

A year ago this time a tiny warbler flew in the window
moth-like attracted to my reading light
I held it hot upon my hands while
it held me in the glare of its gaze
(Was it too just hoping to share with someone?)
Inadequate, I set it gently on the sill, and watched
till it rose, on its own time, shook, and resumed the night

"Who-up?" who says? oh, loon in autumn cry

then rain more rain and rain
sweeping sounds
Where are they all?
the loon, wet on wet
rocked by raindrops those shorebirds in migration
terns lasering through
air suddenly cool
pressing down the dark.
162 and 163

Dos Lados, or
Two Sides of the Coin

I heard a clicking noise
made by a butterfly in Costa Rica
head down on a palm tree trunk, spotted grey on grey.
They called it Crackers.

I see in Maine a dark new Admiral butterfly
wing bars red ranked, head down on a shaggy birch
with a nuthatch tapping.
Drab new fall warblers
gleaning insects from worn leaves
fuel their long flight
to meet bright colored tanagers of the tropics.

Hay-scented ferns grow here so crisply lush my grandson
throws his arms to the sky and shouts
“Car wash” as he pushes through.
Bunchberry plants dot the forest floor
with neon red confetti all beyond anything
I could explain to those small boys who play soccer
on the banana plantations.

164

Tooth Fairy’s Gift

The phone—and then from far away,
a small voice, “Did you know that I lost my first tooth today?”
So tonight my son, the dad of the voice in question
Will with his wife a family milestone mark.

I very much doubt my grandson will relinquish

that sweet bit of ivory to the tooth fairy,
tucking it under his pillow to be tucked away
by the same mysterious force that makes
sock widows in the laundry, black holes in the universe.

What sort of elephant graveyard is hiding out there?
Who still has one of their baby milk teeth,
in fringed and beaded pouch hung round the neck
or tucked away in a silver box in a bureau drawer?

I know you can't trust an empty hole
recalling the odd summer no Monarch came back.
I don't enjoy the empty eye of hurricane or nor'easter
but I welcome the space/time of no pain,
that one spring day warm with no black flies,
and I smile at the thought of my grandson's new grin,
the sweetest gapping innocent smile.

165

Wind's Eye

I
House creaks
Rain lines down the window glass
Some great invisible
Hand in very bad mood
grabs at the trees
nearly jerking them up by the roots,
snaps at the power lines
threatens and snarls.
Wind from the East,
Weather's a beast.

II
The sun appears,
out inspecting the
wake of temper tatters
strewn down the center of the road.
Eye of the storm, what does it see,
smiling benignly, no hint of contrition?

III
Lying like a plank
in the shuddering dark

listening for the roof to blow in or blow off
I apologize to wind
for comparing it
to insincere friends,
treacherous workers, spatting sibs,
defensive spouses countering on on and on -
If only the pressing wind will
round once again
and just move on
so will I.

166 and 167

Crow Tree
Tall spruce top bent odd
crows patrol the windy shore
--the weight of watching.

Sing of Autumn

The loons from the lakes
are back on the bay
calling the sun
down to the cold sea.

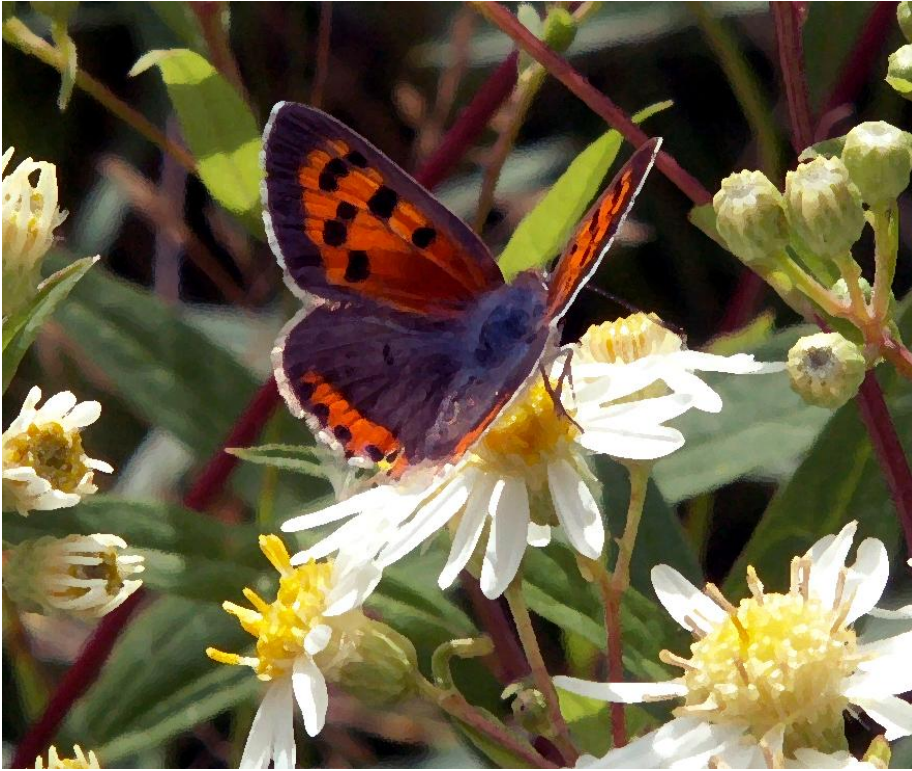
Snake in the Grass

Checkered brown and gold
appearing reappearing threading
under the grey-haired summer's end goldenrod
crosshatched in the slant sun
small head shiny your eyes large dark
almost pretty face
head arched high in the instant
before disappearing an a flicker

Though you leave no trace
there is a faint rustle
before the cricket
song ends.

168





Little Copper

has always struck me as a charming
yin and yang of butterfly,
its forewings bright as flame,
but hind wings dark, edged
with old-fashioned rickrack red.

September after a foggy summer,
this sunlit morning brought out the first
Little Copper I've seen this year,
as I was coming back to the kitchen,
arms full with jelly jars.

It's been a good year for red squirrels
noisy young everywhere, many
squashed on the Island's paved roads;
a bad year for foxes, though,
still getting over a plague of mange.

It's been a good year for nuthatches,
but I've yet to see a ruddy turnstone.
Great for grass, but no tomatoes.

Winterkill got the blueberries,
but cranberries we've got galore
so that's what I'm going to cook this morning.

Forget the jelly. Just send me one Little Copper
while I win or lose at money, health, and love,
or even peace and politics.
Chasing butterflies in the sun
instead of all the waiting work alternatives
I say I'm storing optimism
- which I'll surely need
to zigzag through what's yet to come.

168 and 169



Victory Chimes

When she wasn't called *Edwin and Maude*
or delivering in the pizza trade as *Domino Effect*,
the stout three-masted schooner pictured
on Maine's quarter coin affectionately
goes in these waters by the name of '*Chimes*.'

Yesterday I watched her come

silently ghosting up the late summer bay
as the first slight breeze began to stir.
Overhead white gulls and puffs of clouds

came coasting while a clatter of dragonflies
stitched back and forth across the blue of sky
whisking clouds like yard sale egg beaters
or a fleet of made-in-China wind-up toys.

What invisible road map, what home port
claims this hatch of dragons? I no more
understand the fabric of their lives
than the passing being of all those dudes
aboard the '*Chimes*. Both elsewhere gone today.

The cup of sky turned upside down
on the saucer of sea
holds the last of summer
which steadily slips away,
leaving only the muted click of change
rattling in some man's pocket, ebbing
light sheening off a spread of two-bit coins.

170 and 171

Snow Geese

The empty field wet with autumn rain
hosts a flock improbably white,
at once both pure
and ordinary.

Snow geese feed,
preen, rest,
watching out for one another
before the next night flight,

bright against dark furrows
like folks who try to live
true to ideals.

Hurricane Elsewhere

Just as the last berries ripen

a great bird comes flying
up from Louisiana
under its wings holding
hot breath night
all swamp magnolia
and cottonmouth moccasins.
At nearly dawn the wind
blows through with a wake
of fallen leaves to whisper
what comes next for Maine.

172

Moving Day, Lobsters

Along the valleys
of the ocean floor
improbable as streams
of bison in the bay
but green and clawed
they tiptoe out to sea
unobserved
as summer went

with less flourish
than the birch leaves fell.
The sea looks bleak
without the buoy confetti

for now first snow
is in the air
and only arctic ducks
still fish inshore.

173

Migration

Bird cries in dense fog
back and forth
back and forth
across the point,
and last night
those wisps of song

under the stars.
For you, like me,
is an empty space
in this busy world
now hard to find?

Red Admiral
slowly pirouetting
on goldenrod
— most handsome butterfly
of the autumn afternoon—
one would have to settle
for a Lipizzaner stallion
to own such beauty.

174

View from Settlement Quarry

Dwarf cinquefoil
no taller than the lichens
lining out the granite cracks
with clear sharp red leaves
like flaming magic sparrow tracks
surprised fall color comes
in such tiny packets at our feet
we ask why maples must have all the fun
then realize that nature needs no fancy
no similes, no metaphor, no measure
for all

just

is.

175

Privileged Lifetime

I have been allowed to see
the conjunction of
Jupiter wreathed with diamond
circumjovial moons,
Venus in her clear cool glory
Saturn with its saucer atilt,
sharing Galileo's gratitude.

Now the night birds sing in their travel
familiar mist of Pleiades overhead

and Mars comes close -
a golden glow like rich cream
with the willingness of wildflowers,
Black-eyed Susans volunteering to be admired.

Next Antares, ruby heart
of the Scorpion,
a rival redder than Mars,
that god of humans' war.

I haven't been in battle,
but I don't need
telescopes or television
to show me
war does not look like peace.
176 and 177

Chokecherry Harvest

Tired, sticky, stained I count
the pleasures of our annual Labor Day observance
autumn alchemy of gathering in the hedgerow harvest.

We sang the harvest with wooden spoon.
Quart jars ladled full and skimmed,
roily foam's full rolling boil
set aside for breakfast toast, and tea.
The equal measure of sugar was not too dear a trade.

We sang the harvest with red hands.
Squeeze and twist, the plump pillow case
bag dripping on the porch
invites raccoons from the night

We sang the harvest with the spangled spider.
Under all those eyes we misers roll the cherry gems
to banish the withered among them.
Away, crawly come-along caterpillars, writhing zoo of wonder bugs.

We sang the harvest with plastic pail.
Grab the ragged limb and milk the motley fruit
Mother of Cherry, ruby rain.

We sang the harvest from town hall.
Giggling from the leafy shadows
of the parking lot where this year's
prime cherries hung, we spied on our selectman
as he goes to laugh at us with the clerk
from whom we asked permission.
No Islander admits they ate mussels either,
before they were trendy with garlic and wine.

If road crews spare
the vernal lace of frothy blooms
before they brush and pave,
sweet harvest that would be
Not hard-times food, but

The Confident Gourmet's
New Native Natural Organic
Old Fashioned Essence in a jar
Chokecherry Wealth.

178 and 179

Gifts

Take words for a walk
where wilds can mean
anything we did not ask for.
Be a poet noticing those rocks
and rills and trees and toads.

Mind's spotlights and foghorns are
the Hand Me Up gifts of noticing
and when eyes and ears
are both doing the filing
the brain does not forget.

Open Sesame

Way back in Early On
eons of sunsets brought forth
an alchemy of energy,
ancient enduring traded

for evanescence of the living kind.

For the possibility of plants
we left behind the crystal lattice of permanence.
Becoming connoisseurs of change,
enamored of the opportunity
of ebb and flow, we tried trees,
trading seconds for still-transient centuries.

180

Spruce Pagoda Ch'an

The only sound more enchanting
than rain on the roof
may be rain in the woods
or rain on the hood of an old red rain suit
made in China by girls whose fathers
no longer wear rain suits of thatch
tier upon tier like gold pagoda roofs
above the relics of the Buddhas
change overtaking the unconsidered instant
roaring tree tops wind approaching no color at all
dragon seas swallowing the world
the Tao of autumn rain.

181

Persimmons

Wild child, I knew where persimmon
trees grew in the sandy woods at the edge
of the ball field just across the brook,
a gold disc harvest lovely as pale sun in haze.
I wanted to love the taste, but till a frost
had touched the fruits they were stringent
as Eve apples, and I could not swallow a single bite.

Now I know the six perfect persimmons of Mu Ch'i
and I bargain for the fruit in a market
where they speak only Mandarin. In the mellow taste
and cultivated beauty I sense the global garden,
worldly paradise, richer orange-gold of setting sun,
but I mourn the childhood wilderness quite gone.



180 and 181

Blackberry Pie

Community of Christ Dedication, September 25, 2004

See it, say it;
Feel it, pray it.

There's a road I know where blackberry bushes tower
and you're welcome to pick into pail or cup, according to your style.
Send the dark sweetness to stain your hungry mouth -
and the hiding mouse gives thanks for each berry that you drop.

It's that special roll of thumb
across the full ripe fruit which sends the berry to your cupping palm,
a gesture so subtle you have to live it to know it,
like a Christian life.

See it, say it;
Feel it, pray it.

To sip the orange jewelweed a hummingbird roars by,
a tiny Elijah on his chariot flight;
and a warbler peeks through the canes,
new testament text for this briary world with its crowns of thorns.

On white wings the butterfly ascends the sunny heavens
where just last night the Milky Way smiled across the starry dome
in a sky-wide grin, teasing us with the possibility of frost,
reminding that we're blessed both day and night.

See it, say it;
Feel it, pray it.

It's when you're alone and quietly busy you can attend
that private conversation inside your head and heart.
The busy world hides how the soul builds
a church, a spiritual life, by the humble act of baking berry pies.

Come with me on that lonely road
where the brambly bushes tower,
where the blue bay sparkles round an Island day
and all God's world will keep us company.

See it, say it;
Feel it, pray it.

182 and 183





145

Intrepid

Amid the chorus of crickets
a lone fluff of milkweed
stars the blue brightness
riding the island ridge in silence
like hawks and monarchs do
before they cross the bay.

Lee

In the lee of the Island

a hundred just-arrived white-winged scoters
float in the sheen of September afternoon
strange as Taoist scholars' rocks.

On the lee slope, goldenrod ignites
in orange flares of Monarchs
by the dozens gathering
not needing to be noticed
before they cross the bay.

186

Goblets

Some of us see
bare tee branches
etched against the evening sky
as goblets
destined for star shine
designed for those on earth
who like to see writ plain
instructions to drink life deep.

187

September Birthday

Sweet Tomorrow, on the day you were born
blue heaven canopied us windless, shining.
Only the hawk, the sharp-shinned hawk,
betrayed some awful urgency.

Wren in the raspberries,
no, wide-eyed Parula warbler
no, two, no four, this summer's family
moved across the goldenrod shadows of the spruce
while day stars—two butterflies—rose above the asters.

Perhaps we still aren't ready for such beauty.
My neighbor hurried by, his station wagon stirs a storm of dust
indifferent to this country lane—he prefers a store-bought landscape—
he did not see me sitting there in brocade wrap
with iridescent diptera, bright sparks of being,

black wasps of almost urban chic or menace.

But come, child, be charmed by such
as the green flash of the last hummingbird
heard before seen, felt after the shadow passes,
in a world of hungry innocence where leafy green
banners are flown to the glory of Allah, Yahweh and God
where killing is in consequence of food, not faith.
188

Rachety Clatter

I relish
ratchety clatters
of kingfisher, crow,
cicada, and jay,
especially that grand
stentorian rattle
when raven announces me
coming into his woods
showing no more surprise

than the elderly neighbor whose brief startle
I still remember
at my annual childhood Halloween prank
- when I pulled the string that
screeched
the teeth of the wooden spool
against his window glass
before I parted the bushes and ran away
laughing wildly plunging through the rustling leaves.

Ah, we rackety ones,
we never stop
our antic chuckling
through all the shadows
of the woody world.

189

Premonitions, First Day of Deer Season

On a fair crisp day in a north wind blow
I set out along the wooded road

till I was called by a cry so strange
I stopped to find the caller.

A leaning spruce tree beckoned me
to lay ear and cheek along its scruffy bark.
I heard the sigh of wind aloft,
the sandy sound of my own bones,

as from its core came untranslated sound
- somewhere between a bowstring's twang
and earthquake's looming groan.

With sickening heaves the angled
spruce trunk swayed; between the lever and the grasp
roots reared and sank. A snorting "chuff"

- somewhere between my own cough rack
and unexpected porpoise blow - told me we'd been watched
by a white-tailed stag who turned and fled.

Sometimes I think it won't be hard to leave this messy world.
Which of the three of us, I wonder, will be first
to lie finally down in our beloved woods and go?
And like all men I wonder is it gift or curse to know.

190



191

Lengthening Out

They speak of lengthening out, the fishermen do
as they move their traps yet deeper
following lobster to where they winter.

As the days grow shorter, no, it's darkness lengthening
that calls for ever longer lines, going deeper down,
deeper draught of danger, profit, freedom, wet and cold.

Here on the highway I see another who had the one good day he needed
to haul not battered by the north winds bringing winter to the bay.
One last haul, and then his traps are stacked
and tailored home to winter back behind the barn.

As I follow behind his pickup easing down the highway,
in raking light it feels like late but it's just past noonday sun.
The stacked wire traps sketch cage cartoons,
Common Ground Fair just two short months ago:
the show chickens in all their tweeds and fluff.

I see them perched, that one last haul,
ballast bricks barnacled and brittle starred,
lines coiled like rooster tails, each cage aswirl
with phantom fowl, the bottom bantams of the bay.

Next week when we dry-landers see turkey
on the platter, these men still rolling just a tad,
they'll see a different bird there on the table
as they fill their plates and pause in thanks.

192 and 193





Thanksgiving
 And sometimes at a windless dawn
 or quiet dusk
 comes a slack tide moment
 when all the bay, Island, world
 holds its breath
 when roily seas stop their warring struggles.
 The water clears like glass and you see clear in
 to the deep of things, to that holy center
 beyond where there are names for things
 - my god or yours -
 where we hear the waves sigh Give
 and the shore answers Thanks.



197

Thanksgiving, Deer Isle, 2003

For the Deer Isle Congregational Church

I

It was easy to give thanks
when the monarchs winged
steadily over the sparkling bay,
when rosy apples bent their branch,
fat deer, ripe berries beckoned in the sun.
How rich we felt when mushrooms
like gold coins gleamed among the fallen leaves,
ruby, mahogany, ebony wealth,
great underground galaxies, comets
from an unseen realm we do not see beneath the roots.
We thought each being individual,
but they knew

we are all
one.

II

Now that nor'easters have felled our trees,
lichen-laden boughs dropped like
rainforest canopy across the roads
while we huddled powerless indoors, facing winter, world up-ended,
it's harder to give thanks.
Fisherman tossed on the steel-grey bay
calculates anew the high cost of being his own boss
though he can't help but smile at the lords 'n ladies, the coots,

all those black-and-white ducks from the arctic down for the winter
bobbing nonchalant on the heaving seas.
At lowest tides the kelps wave their dead man's fingers,
rockweeds curl around the silent ledges...
He hears the waves sigh,
Give,
and the shore answers,
Thanks,
Give thanks
Give thanks,
with each breath of being.

III

And sometimes at a windless dawn or quiet dusk
comes a slack tide moment
when all the bay, Island, world, holds its breath,
when roily seas stop their warring struggles.
The water clears like glass
and you see clear in,
to the deep of things
to that holy center,
beyond where there are names for things
- my god or yours -
where we hear without words,
Give thanks
Give thanks
Give thanks,
with every living breath.

FALL TWEED

Ridiculously humble name
for the gallant
little spindle
of a bird, brown creeper
fluttering down with the
rain-driven leaves

to begin again
its persistent ascent
of the threadbare birch
weaving life, the only
anti-entropic force
in the wintry universe.

100

Off Season

Although the dripping
driveway chains across
November rains
are still intrusive figure,
not yet our ground reclaimed,
we die and laugh
regardless of the timer-lights
of empty mansions glimpsed
through cold wet trees
down private lanes
of near inconsequence.

101

Advent Outing

Garden harvest barely gathered in
first snowfall on the layer of fallen leaves
darkness blotting out the end of afternoon
with too much night when we go to the woods
to gather awkward armfuls of fragrant fir
to green our church and hearth.
Tipping we call it
you might think just for branches' ends

but in deeper truth we sense
a coming balance shift
we will go forth illuminating
frigid lanes, dark houses, bunkered world
merely human wicks not consumed
by the radiant energy of hope
aglow with trust in season's turning.
102

Tipping

Until a friend invited me over
to pick apples echoing in a pail
under her gracious Baldwin tree
I'd forgotten how much I loved
to admire the calm perfection
of a well-pruned tree,
smell pie baking in the oven
just when it's ready.

The friend promised me a reunion
next fall and I asked her over
to my side of this evergreen island
to pick all the fir tips she can use
for wreaths and garlands
for her Christmas.
We'll go tipping
just about the first light snow
and then come in to the fire
for tea and talk
about our former lives.

103

Sign Language

I know enough KiSwahili
to understand the guides discussing
which tree held a leopard.

At the Island potluck
I saw the smiling husband sign
what he heard for his deaf wife.

Acacia shadows on a leopard's back,
that loving flutter of hands,
play of light on the morning bay,
shifting geometry of a flight of birds
just above the waves:

I am an eager student
of the holy wordless languages
spoken by our world.
104



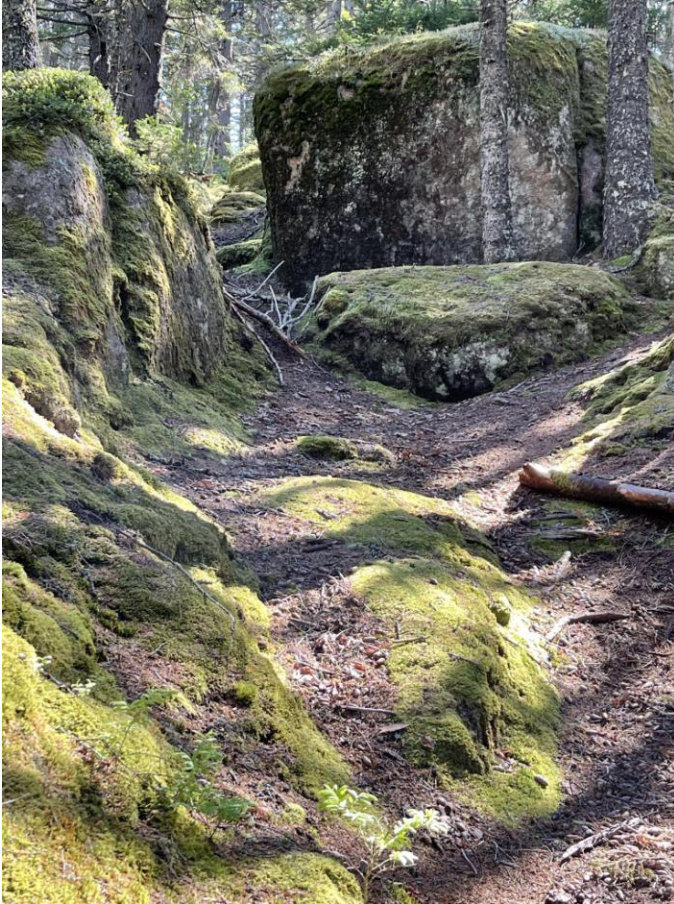
Cold Moss Mountain

There is a temple garden in Kyoto
Where monks have gone forth
for seven hundred years
to clean the moss each day.
Do they notice as they sweep,
how lush the moss in winter?

Richer, greener, with an air
of undeniable exuberance
the mosses raise their stems like apprentice
monks wrapped in their arms against the chill.
They answer back if trod,
still unskillful, with audible crunch.

Farther down the path
I find a fallen constellation,
improbable white on inky black,
feathers, lances, stars, the
tented wings of the Ice Moth
I'd never even heard of.

Crystal blades surround some holes
at the mossy base of silent trees;
a sentient being breathes therein.
The Buddha smiles at my enlightenment:
Only at this brief-day time of year
can we novice monks make such census.



107

December's Geometry

Man is indeed the measure
of angry, jealous, wrathful ways,
eager for authority, and in love
with all his symptoms of despair,
familiar with desire for the first word,
the only word, the last word.

But stepping out of doors
into the silent snow
to watch the falling flakes
catch on my dark sleeve
I sense another way of being.

Hearing grand vibrations
as the elephant and whales do,
seeing written on white flower throats

the lines bees see,
reading starlight as the ancient
horseshoe crabs can,

I acknowledge that I do not comprehend
the force which orders precious planes
of being for all the flakes of snow
now and ever on and back.

108



109

Guān Yīn

The brush rack with its two dragon heads askew,

ink brushes scattered,
When I tried to right the rack
twelve armed Guān Yīn tipped and cracked,
lost an arm to the window edge.

I contemplate creating a small glass sanctuary
for “she who hears the cries of the world”,
recalling the rows of figures larger than life
smiling out from glass homes
fronted like shop windows
in the shadowy temples all across China.

I loved their bright colors, chipped faces,
dingy dust, incense smoke, charred paper money,
plastic bags of worldly offerings,
oranges and cooking oil,
and I had thought the glass
somewhat distancing, museum-like,
but now I comprehend what the glass says
about the size of cats
they must still believe in
there in the Middle Kingdom.
110 and 11

Profound Cold

Like a clattering Chinese bird toy on a string
a flock of crossbills circles the spruce tops,
red and merry and utterly without foreboding.
Just before dark, great rolls of booming clouds
rear up across the bay, threatening snow squalls
which never arrive. As crystal-cutting dawn shrieks
in the rattling trees my huddled bones know
I will wake to see Dead Men Walking.
So fishermen call pale skeins of frozen fog,
indifferent beauty of a green but deadly universe.



113

Winter Symphony

Morning, after the storm
the wind commands
spruce branches to bow one another
while the woodpecker taps out
a trunk rhythm for the violins, the cello
and off in the distance
an occasional moan
like a double bass.

Reprieve

The absence of sound
that is snow in the night
trees, roofs, roads, lawn chairs
tucked snug in still white,
the downy comfort
of a warm bed

with no possibility of hurry ahead
– a second cup of tea,
another piece of toast,
while the well fills.

114

Behemoth Babe

I think I'd like to drive the snowplow

all that skillful rumbling rattle
riding my sparkling wave
surfing through the bright blue days

or lonely black and moaning nights
sweeping yellow lights hot butter
knifing through the shapely drifts

Act of God!
People would be glad
I'd gone down through.

115

Postmark

"Seen any orange blossoms yet?" Ray asks
at the party for his retirement.
Back when he had one more winter here than I
he taught me that's the local name
for the frost heave warnings they post
on the roads this time of year.

Those bright fluorescent posters this year
will have another message: Ray's gone to Florida.
He thanks me for past poems I've made for him,
trying to keep the banter light
as he looks around the Parish House party
where we're gathered over fizzy punch,
crab finger sandwiches, and cookies.

The strapping fisherman who has so far
been frozen out of scalloping by the record ferocity

of this winter surveys our crowd, says,
"Jeeze, my whole customer list is here."
"Whose name is at the head of the list?"
a man asks anxiously and we all laugh
as we eye each other, calculating our chances.

Ray sees us as his zip code whose intimate secrets
he knows well though I doubt he reads our postcards.
He's a gentle man who fits us well.
Crisp in his government uniform,
dapper as we see him Fourth of July
driving the fire truck in the parade.
His wife beside him is rumored to have booked a seat
on the next plane out, eager to leave this frozen
island in pursuit of fragrant flowers.

"The best ten years of my life" Ray whispers, trying to smile.
We need no poster to warn of bumps ahead
so we head out into the cold winter dark,
leaving before he does, adding what we truly wish,
"You know the return address."
116 and 117

Christmas Light Contest

It's layers of time pressing deep
that make midwinter nights so dark,
the press of past like annual rings
in wind-snapped spruce.

We read the year that Grandma died
the year the Russian trawlers anchored just off shore
when the bridge was built
when the grocery burned
the sardine factory closed
when Lisa had twins
and the neighbor's boy was killed in 'Nam
Dad's stern man drowned.

Sometimes we just go driving
around the Island to see the colored lights,
red and green, all blue, or clear and twinkling.
Folks keep them lit on roofs and trees
and backyard boats till spring for cheering comfort,
small acts of faith and civic generosity.
118

Cutting the Christmas Tree

We cut our tree just before snow fell
as large a tree as I can carry
but smaller than we used to have
when our tree was huge
with dangling prey and branchy lair.
I open the closet to root out tinselly boxes
and the old cat comes, observes
that I have left some stacked in dusty shadows.
We watch the sun depart with winter glow
turn on the single string of lights
and curl together in the chair
both satisfied with smaller servings now.
119

December Dream

It is our ritual annually
to cut a bayside spruce
and bring it in the house
as pagan Christmas tree.

We hang aloft
a pair of dainty blown glass deer—
childhood treasures, the stag and doe
who stand watch as we sleep.

Like unicorns this golden pair
descends the longest night
to celebrate, dancing on moonlight,
weaving silver ribbons of scintillations
across the waiting bay.

Come dawn,
along the rocky shore
the glassy shards of tinkling ice
whisper with wavelets a broth
like breath, a pulse and ebb like beating heart.

The ancient ocean echoes yet
recalling when and where
the old dark sea
begat the golden child,
the miracle of life.
120 and 121

Naturalist in Church
Field Notes/ Lectionary

Christmas Bat

The wakened bat
at the Christmas pageant
twittering back and forth
across the nave
announced its coming
so forcefully
we all gazed heavenward
in spite of ourselves.
121

Christmas Bird Count

My favorite is the list
of what the others saw,
the reassuring comfort
of redundancy,
sightings of the plucky ducks
slicking down the ocean waves,
trilling finches pinning up the winter skies.
122



123

Seeing Clearly

New to this community, my first wintering,
resident now as you can read from my muddy license plate,
sweeping storm debris from my front walk in the newness of April
I assess the list of things I had not known.
Through red haze of maple flowers and plump tree buds
on our island of an evening now the view is longer than in summer.
I do not still see the ski slope lights across the bay
nor yet the house lights on North Haven's shore,
but we do have t-bone steak and The New York Times in the grocery.

I am too polite to tell you that we got along with the Bangor Daily and Island AdVantage, when we
didn't see yogurt till Fifth of July.

Summer folk wintering over, person from away, PFA's whose huge houses
invade our zip codes, your money votes in school and town meetings.
You ask when we will treat you like you live here: When you act like it.

Please look at me. I smile back as an equal.
Listen closely: sometimes what we islanders do not say
is also very loud.

124



125

(and continue with appropriate page breaks from here on)

INSIDE - On The Nature of Poems



126

The image of Mark Island Light, which stands at the entrance to Deer Isle's thoroughfare, seems an appropriate way to begin this section. The Coast Guard maintains the light itself and Island Heritage Trust is responsible for the structure and island. Here we cast more light on the possibilities of poetry as we look inside some of my poems with the help of past Maine Poet Laureate Baron Wormser.

You do not need to know how a painter thinks about composition to enjoy the painting, However, if you do know something about how an artist manipulates such variables as line, shape, contrast etc. you are likely to appreciate the work of art more. The same goes for both making poems and appreciating them.

On Christmas Eve when I was twelve my mother laughed at me trying to sing Silent Night. "Oh, even after four years of piano lessons you still can't carry a tune," she said. Is it any surprise then that I never sang another note until I was 50?

Fast forward to college. I was inducted into the honorary literary society, called wonderfully the "Quill Drivers". Members got to write Q.D. after whatever they wrote! These young women were almost exclusively English majors. I was editor of our literary magazine and busy studying Latin, German, and French. Although I obviously adored language, those mean girls convinced me that I definitely was not "literary". Was I ever an outsider! You will not be surprised to hear that I wrote and read no poetry for years. I delved enthusiastically into Biology. How fortunate! What wonders of the living world I came to know rather intimately. Outside, a rich source of inspiration indeed.

In light of my personal history, it is not surprising that I did not understand that one could learn to read the notes on a musical stave and then, *mirabile dictu*, “hear” them in one’s head. How amazing! Well, maybe not amazing. Everyone I know carries on conversations in their head all the time. But reading music is apparently quite like learning to read a language. It was not merely a question of talent; you could learn the skill. The young Mozart probably did not need anyone to teach him about the Circle of Fifths when he sat at the keyboard, but most probably his ambitious father did teach his son to read and write musical notation.

That throws light on the fact that one does not need to be taught to hear the sounds, the music, of our language, but here is where the Mean Girls come in. With them came those want-to-be erudite poets who employ what is currently called Poet Voice. You have heard them. From as far away as you can hear them, you can tell they are declaiming a POEM. How does one learn how to do that? (Is that really desirable?) Quite out of my league.

As a society we laugh at immigrants who em-PHA-size the wrong Syll-AHB-les of our language. We have grown so used to the rising inflections used by the children of the Valley Girls that we barely notice what linguists now call “Upspeak”. Does that tell us that the English language is malleable? That inflection is the option of one’s choosing? Do only members of some literary In Group know Poet Voice? What are the rules?

When I was struggling to be a proper Quill Driver I listened with dismay to the confident manner of the others as they spoke of scanning poems in English. It was Emperor’s New Clothes to me. Yes, I knew hexameter and dactyls and spondees and the rest but in Latin the stresses did not fall wherever you wished; there were rules. If that vowel at the end of the noun was feminine, Nominative case, it was short. But if that noun followed certain prepositions and hence was in fact in the Ablative case, it was long. It had to be. Two consonants in a row made the syllable long, and on and on. English seemed so ...arbitrary. The highly inflected Latin language gave the only poems I knew a great and subtle power. I loved that one could put the adjective describing the mountain in the top line of the poem, and lines later, way, way down, were the words for the base of the mountain and the word endings allowed the reader to link the noun with its modifier properly. How many were the ways that the words made the scaling the heights of metaphor satisfying !

Years later I finally plucked up my nerve and sang in small church choir. I learned to read pitches and half notes and quarter notes, and that even that is not quite enough. Properly interpreted, music comes in phrases. What a lot that piano teacher of my youth had failed to impart to me! I understood now how it was that Beethoven could write his glorious music even after he had lost his hearing.

I learned that there were formulas for chord progressions and the like in various periods and cultures. And then came the Twentieth century, when artists no longer felt that such attributes as realistic narrative, color theory, perspective and compositional balance had to follow the old rules. That iconoclasm was equally true in painting and music. Yes, humans have

intuitive feelings about such things, but as we learned about the cultures of the whole round world, we came to realize that there are much broader possibilities.

My time as a poet had come. Those phrases I hear in my head could be put on paper. I had not quite the art of making whole notes and half notes and quarter rests—commas, semicolons and rest were rather out of fashion. But I listen to the words singing in my head and do the best I can to put them on paper and indeed others—some people at least—can apparently “hear” what I hear: the abstract music inherent in the words.

I observe that some poets, apparently successful or at least of considerable reputation, seem to make poems that are principally about ideas. While I want a poem to express an idea rather than just describe an emotion or a scene or situation, I always listen for that interior “music”. Just as the Indonesian Gamelan is an orchestra of percussion instruments that explores a progression of sonorities, I want my words to express a progression that unconsciously mirrors or enhances the content of the statements that the words are making.

I have in mind something more than simply onomatopoeia, vocal imitation. Some of my poems are quite literally onomatopoeic. The following, called Haiku by Sparrow, would be most likely recognized by someone familiar with the actual song of the bird or at least familiar with New England springs.

Pale sun, old snow
white-throated sparrow
cold pure call of spring
call of spring

In other poems I attempt to convey the rhythms and sonorities in a somewhat more abstract fashion.

Spotted Sandpiper

Just at the silver seam
between the sea and shore
spotted sandpiper
teeters, speaks softly to itself
a poem it has by heart.

Maine’s poet laureate 2011-2016, Wesley McNair presumably heard the music in those two poems as he chose to include them in his poetry initiative Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry, syndicated in newspapers statewide.

Scholars of haiku will note that the sparrow takes a number of liberties with traditional haiku form. It is but a short step to the whole world of free verse. Free verse is free, *vers libre* as the French say. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson taught us to hear what one can do with

rhyme, rhythm, cadences when the poem is freed from traditional constraints of form. As I work, I very much enjoy finding how often the form of the poem creates itself. Here you might say is onomatopoeia of both words and form.

ONOMATOPOPCORN

clink

plunk

pop pop

pause

here come the popcorn poems

bend down, ear close

can you hear that

racketing under the lid

when the kernels get hot, hot, heck it's hot

hear them corn babies

muffled laughter stomping hootin' hoedown

torrid tango tappin' frenzy in there

temporary

cease fire -

lift the lid

cautious

peek POW ZAP

MAJOR missile action

got no calories, mostly metaphor

sultan of Similes, shake it like a man

on the edge of total burn up

win or lose it all

fill the bowl

to over

flowing.

In contrast, sometimes the poem seems to call for keeping the underlying rhythms and the vocal sonority as quiet as possible.

Wind writes

small poems

on grass

Sotto voce. Pianissimo. I would certainly not write those directions one finds so often in musical scores to accompany that small poem. Not only are such directions for reading usually not part of our poetic conventions, but the problem in my mind goes deeper than that. The connotations would be all wrong. The phrase *sotto voce* has come to carry with it a sense of muttering, a hesitant or involuntary revealing. Any word with *piano* in it brings to mind

something of keyboard music. Neither of those terms should get even close to this quiet little poem.

As a student of Latin I have unavoidably inherited an interest in the connotations of the words we use. After all, a significant portion of our English language is traceable directly or indirectly to Latin. I like to think of these wisps of meaning as evening shadows or trailing smoke clinging to our texts. Whether the reader is conscious of them or not I feel that such meanings accompany the emotional effect of our poems.

Sometimes this puts me at odds with the rest of the speakers of English. Take for example the word *reticent* which comes from the Latin *tacēre*, to keep silent. Hence one's *tacit* approval is unspoken. These days it is fairly common to hear or read that one is reticent about doing something. Often I think they mean hesitant. Would you really say that the child was reticent about going to bed when the little brat was clinging to the stair post screaming his head off? There may well be on my part a sense of hesitance about mentioning some of my criteria for word choice concerning my Wind poem, but there is certainly no reticence. Quiet yes—in the poem—but I am not quiet about using the appropriate words!

Therefore I try to choose words that glimmer with a host of appropriate and reinforcing meanings. That these words also shimmer with appropriate sonority is yet another pleasure. Does everyone else hear what I hear underlying the lines of my poems? Probably not. Or maybe we hear but may or may not respond to that melody. Some folks like chocolate and some like vanilla. Some people like my poems and some dismiss them. Some of us like Brahms and some prefer Bach, Beethoven—or the Beetles, the Beach Boys. (Probably we hear the beat, even in that single sentence, right?)

When Baron Wormser, Maine's Poet Laureate 2000-2005, came to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts here on Deer isle, to talk about making poems, I knew I had found a good guide. Here is the result, what I call Word Paint, poem crafting for everyone.



Here is what Baron has to say about this Word painting.

I often wonder, as a poet, why more people in the United States aren't actively engaged with poetry. Was it something that poetry did or said? When people have the opportunity to come into contact with poetry in a non-threatening way (no imperious questions about what line six means), they usually respond quite intensely. The precision, concision and incisiveness of the language, the concatenation of sound and rhythm, and the sheer emotional momentum create some powerful feelings – both in the poems and in those who apprehend them.

What people lack in this society are guides. Poetry is rather like the Underground Railroad. Unless you meet a conductor, someone who knows poetry and its ways, you aren't going to get there. What Marnie Reed Crowell has done here is to write a guide for both young people and older people. Poetry wants to be passed on from generation to generation and her book, as it enumerates the ways of poetry, shows what is there to be passed on.

This is a work that draws on some notable traditions – haiku, calligraphy (here represented by Xu Bing's fascinating Square Word Calligraphy) and the ABC approach that Ezra Pound pioneered many years ago in his prose work that incisively instructs the reader in the recognition and enjoyment of good poetry. The core of Marnie's approach to poetry is the primacy of the image. Without the tactile, vivifying presence of the image, a poem is a mere

surd, a voiceless sound. The image is a treasure of feeling and perception and it glories in the physicality of existence. The image can be felt by anyone at any age. The image can be created by anyone.

She approaches the mystery of how we make images deliberately but playfully too. Through drawing, through using words, through considering how poetry works physically as it marshals lines and stanzas, through such Asian facets as the haiku, we approach the embodiment of feeling that lies in the senses finding the right words. She shows us how Square Word Calligraphy slows us down and makes us feel how the writing of every word is an adventure in its own right. This approach (which echoes Pound) makes us all learners and explorers as we probe each word letter by letter. The calligraphy is a paradigm for the making of poems.

We feel our way through a poem word by word. Each word is a stroke – accountable and unaccountable. She apprehends the poem as a living organism. We create poems but, as they live on the page and in our mouths and memories, they have their own lives. They are the stuff of process. They may heed the imperatives of art but they are stubbornly individual. Hence, the centrality of the haiku to Marnie’s approach, for haiku is the embodiment of perception. It doesn’t want to be any more than it is because as it exists it creates – through image – a realized world. The connection to spirituality, which Marnie notes, is palpable.

This is to be shared and savored as it straightforwardly and sensitively shows what stuff poetry is made of and how we – young and old – can go about making that stuff. Her tone is lively, engaged and informative. It is the tone of a guide who knows that each person must make his and her own discoveries. As she links the East and the West, she has created a wonderfully original bridge to the world of poetry. Nothing in this book is recondite. The pleasure lies in the reading and the making of poems. Word Paint is a key to a great box of treasures.

– Baron Wormser

PART ONE MAKING POEMS

This is a guide for the explorer, the beginning poet. Or perhaps you are a senior, a loving parent or grandparent who used to love poetry but you have forgotten so much that you are no longer confident about your ability to share this love with a youngster. Whoever you are, word paint is for you. The first section introduces the basics; then we go back and revisit everything from a slightly more advanced perspective. Polishing what you have written is a skill that develops with informed practice. Finally, we look at word painting around the world—in the traditional arts of China and Japan, and then in the emerging art forms of the modern digital age.

If you are young in years or in poetry experience, you will have no trouble deciding where to

spend your time. No matter what age you are, work on the parts that you are ready for but you will enjoy scanning the rest. Each new visit to the text and the ideas will bring you new rewards.

When you were a child of two or three you moved happily from smearing the colors and textures of mashed peas on the plate to smearing finger paints across a paper. Then you got the positive reinforcement of seeing your masterpieces displayed on the refrigerator. When you understood that your proud parents were mailing your art works off to distant relatives, was that “My First Publishing”?

This same child almost daily surprised and enchanted the fond parents with original figures of speech. Although you were still a long way from writing down those expressions, someone else could certainly collect the sayings, write them down and preserve them in some sort of notebook. That is word paint beginning to enrich a life. One learns early to think precisely, mastering elements of grammar quite painlessly. One enters the world of creativity quite routinely, confidently. How fortunate the individual who has always done that, who does not remember a time before knowing this joy.

The time comes when you learned to read. The child delights in the sounds and patterns of poetry. Writing skill lags behind, so at that point the adult is an invaluable guide to the rich rewards of making poems. As companions on the journey, the child and adult sing the words, hear the words, write the words, see the words, and savor the many decisions: words, words, words delightfully offering themselves as alternatives.

Words make pictures in your mind. Why not make pictures on paper as well? Write poems and make pictures, you beginning poets. There is something about taking yourself seriously enough to commit to paper that encourages your genie. You reward the pleasure centers in your brain. Making art becomes a valuable habit, a lifetime pleasure.

All you would-be mentors, parents, grandparents, teachers, if you make poems at the same time as your students, you share the gift of enthusiastically making art. No young artist should have to wait as long as you may have waited to learn all this great stuff, to acquire the self-confidence to venture into poem making.

The Look: beginning poets, you know that alphabet letters bring certain sounds to our minds and to our lips. They are also beautiful designs. Each one is different and distinctive. You need see only half of a letter to recognize which one it is. Most poets begin their poems writing by hand. We print letters, forming each one separately, and we write them joined to each other. We call this “running” together form *cursive*, from the Latin word for running. Since the writer does not have to pick up the pen between each letter, cursive is easy for the hand. It looks different from other lettering, doesn’t it? Although cursive writing is often not taught in schools these days, it is different from keyboarding.

Letters have a different look when they are printed with different kinds of type. Typeface means the part of a wood or metal block of type that gets ink applied to it. The type is then

pressed on a piece of paper. We call that printing. The word font, correctly used, refers to one complete set of the alphabet letters, in both upper case, capitals, and lower case, all made in one style. We talk about typefaces or fonts when we ask our computers to print different styles for us.

The look of a letter makes a difference to how the reader feels about the writing. We poets do care about how the reader feels about all the aspects of our poems.

We see letters with small tails on them, or serif typefaces.

This is a serif typeface.

This is a sans serif typeface.

We call styles of letters with no tails on them *sans serif* (from the French meaning “without” these end strokes.) Sans serif typefaces may seem to make the words louder. We use them for writing headlines. (There are now sans serif typefaces designed especially for reading on digital devices, on screen.) A serif typeface may seem more gentle. If you are reading a page with a lot of words on it, you may prefer a typeface with those helpful little serifs, the tails to lead your eye along to the next word.

Letters also signal sounds and we need to think about that when we make a poem.

Drizzle, drizzle, drip
Trickle, trickle, drop.

Can you hear the faucet close and the last drop of water fall?

Think about what we might call the SINGERS, the letters that make us sing, the vowels. We say vowel sounds with our mouths wide open: a,e,i,o,u, and sometimes y.

We call the other letter sounds consonants. Consonants signal us to close the sound of the vowels. Consonants are like big brothers or big sisters to the vowels – they shape them up. Pay attention to this, they seem to say.

The STOPPERS are of course, various letters that stop the breath.

There are QUICK STOPS, k, g, c (hard sound):

click
tick
quick

and GILDERS, letters that bring the sound to a sliding stop, l, m, n, and r as in
fall
groan.

BREATH STOPS, c, f, g, h, j, and x close with quite a bit of breath leaking out along the way:

fox

cough

Some letters, s, z, v, w, and y close with less of a push of breath

buzz

and t, p, d, and b close the sound with a slamming shut of your lips or tongue.

I said stop

SIGNALS

A big upper case letter on the word calls attention

Help

HELP

and punctuation can call even more attention

HELP!

Punctuation can also tell the speaker and reader

to hurry up

– a dash (look closely: this is not the same as a hyphen)

or to slow down,

a comma

or hesitate

a semi-colon ;

a colon : (which functions almost the same way as an equals sign)

a question mark ?

or come to a complete stop with

a period.

We call attention to the sound of a word

by repeating and repeating and repeating it

by fully rhyming with other words,

The sing-alike bird

is what we heard

or making it nearly rhyme,

not far to roam

Using the same first letter or sound for several words calls attention to that sound. We call that alliteration:

Find the funny fish in the photo.

Repeated vowel sounds are called assonance:

High white clouds
I see with my eyes
say in my mind
feel in the heart.

Echoic words sound like what they say. We call that onomatopoeia.

Hiss, moo, buzz, bark, tweet, drip,
Slosh, belch

Metaphor is a figure of speech making a statement that compares the characteristics of two things without using such words as “like” or “as”. Those comparisons we call similes.

A bobolink is a bird with yellow feathers on the top of its head and white ones on its neck. In the following poem, the sun and moonlight are metaphors, carrying meaning beyond the literal truth of the colors. In fact, in this poem there are several statements that are surely exaggerations. No wonder we refer to “poetic license”.

Bobolink

Wearing sun on his head,
moonlight on his shoulders,
bobolink so fills the morning air
with May meadow dandelion gleam
and hedgerows laced with shadbush bloom,
that long after it's gone
the shimmer and pulse
are printed on the air.

Here is a simile, comparing a flock of birds to a wisp of smoke with the word *like*:

A hundred tiny birds come
linking whispered calls
low through the dripping spruce.
Like smoke they flow
up across the granite boulder face

It is very common these days to use the word *like* as punctuation rather than keeping the word to signal a comparison. The wise poet would resist doing that. It's like, dumb. (That's like, a joke. Not like a joke; it was a joke!)

In both poems and musical songs we often like repetition. This repeating can create emphasis, or merely pleasant sound patterns. In this little poem, the repetition mimics both the rhythm and the sound of the bird's song. That means we could also label it onomatopoeia. Do understand that when learning about making poems, it is not the labels themselves that are important. What may be helpful to you is learning various ways of working with words that other poets have noticed.

Some words can look like what they say. These word-pictures are fun to make and fun to read. Some poems are written in lines that make pictures. These we call *shaped poems*.

They can be quite simple

a duck
is
a
boat
quite happy afloat

or they can be more complicated.

IMAGE AND FEELING

We smell with our nose, taste with our mouth, touch with our skin, see with our eyes, hear with our ears, move with our bodies, and think with our minds. These are all ways we bring the outside world into our inside feelings. We can make art with all of them. Your poems will be richer if you include words referring to several of your senses. Don't just tell us what you see and hear. Is there a special smell? A taste? A touch? Perhaps you will want to 'blend' the senses playfully. Tell us how a color 'sounds' or 'tastes' to you. (Neurologists call this *synesthesia*.)

Color is almost always the poet's friend. The more vividly it is expressed in a poem, the more the reader can sense it.

Palette

grey day
blue hills
green waves
red haze of maple flowers
one warbler with a yellow spot -
what a tiny bird to bring the flame of spring.

We call it art when we take an image and use it share our feelings. Something may be very pretty and decorative and require great skill and craft to make it; but if it is not very concerned with sharing some sort of feeling, we usually do not call it art. If every time you go back and look again at a painting or photograph, you then see something and feel something you did not notice the first time, we probably would call that picture art.

March Goodbye

Merciless March clouds
grim in again,
not with neutral grey
but the chill wrench of despair.

As if the weight of present
were too much to bear,
winter earth lies wounded,
oozing open rutted tracks
which mock all promise of a thaw.

Change comes hard,
I want to say
as I kiss your warm wet cheeks
and we quickly part.

If every time you reread some words – a story, a novel, a poem – and you come to some new feeling, some new understanding about the world and life, we would probably say that is art.

It can be fun to scribble lines, to splash paint colors, to sing notes, to pound drum beats, to call out words, but you may want to make pictures, poems, and songs that share some images or some feelings – and that is art. We are thinking here about making art.

TITLES

Think about the title you put on your art work. A good title may help us understand what you are feeling or thinking. Your art may or may not be a realistic picture of something in the world, but it will share some feeling. Can you help us to understand that by the title? We may prefer a title that is a suggestion, maybe even a question. Sometimes we do not like a strong, direct statement in a poem. That can sound too bossy. We resist. Probably we do not want to feel that the poem is shouting at us.

What do we mean by IMAGE?

We're ready
to take the maple buckets down
when big flakes of sugar snow
seem some great pillow fight
over the roof tops
in mad mid-April.

In these lines we do not see just snowflakes; we see a pillow fight on a grand scale. That's not just a description of white frozen bits of crystallized water. There is both something we can see and an idea lurking in there. Do you think of the battles between winter and spring? Do you think of the sunny joy that a cool but bright spring day brings, just as a romping pillow fight at a sleep-over can be fun? The short lines are a bit dizzying, just like whirls of snow. April is crazy the poet says. Even though this is only a fragment of a poem, you can guess that your reaction to the whole poem will probably not be a simple statement, and it will not even have to make sense.

THE TREASURE BOX, THE IDEA BOOK

You might want to make a bag or folder or box to hold your sketches and photographs, ideas for pictures you may want to work with later on. As you learn new words, you might write them on cards or in a notebook and save these too. They are also treasures. You might save pictures you find in magazines, copy words you like in poems or write down things people say that you like, or ideas that occur to you.

Hold out my apron
catching bolts from the sun,
words plummeting like hailstones
day and night, dreams
the half-sisters of poems
the Muses send

You might write down your dreams. What happened in the dream? What did you see? And most important – before you forget as you awake – how does your body feel? What does that tell you about the emotions you were feeling your dream? That can be very interesting. Ancient peoples thought the dream world was very important. Like us, they thought how you feel is very important. Where ideas come from seems very mysterious. They wondered if gods breathed the ideas into us. The word *inspire* means “to breathe into”.

Inspiration is so important in making the various kinds of art that the ancient Greeks gave names to personifications of the various arts. They called these the muses. They had a muse for dancing, a muse for music making, and so on.

Muslim poets said they sometimes got their ideas from what they call genies, from their word *jinni*. They regarded these as spirits that could be so mischievous or worse that we have the warning about letting the *genie* out of the bottle. Does that word remind you of our word *genius*? That word comes from the Latin for guiding spirit.

Modern brain science with functional imaging now tells us quite a bit about how we make ideas. That is mysterious and wonderful. Our minds are networks. We store different inputs in different regions of our brain. What we hear is stored in one region, what we see in another. The different parts of our brain communicate with one another without our willing them to do that. We refer to these new connections as our creativity. We can learn how to work with our ideas. We can learn to share ideas in works of art so that other people really feel what we want to share with them.

WHAT MAKES IT A POEM?

A poem is like a good joke which shows us something funny, but does not tell us when to laugh. A poem shows us something about which we share a feeling. More than a drink of water, more than a glass of frozen juice, a poem is more like the concentrate from which the juice drink is made.

Poems give us their picture or story in words chosen for their sounds and their power to suggest feelings. How a poem sounds is very important. Be sure to read your poems aloud so you know how they sound.

Poetry may or may not rhyme. Lines may rhyme in the middle or at the end, or in some other pattern. They may rhyme exactly or only approximately. Rhyming is not as popular as it once was, but it still gives us pleasure. Rhyming words may give emphasis or amuse us as in this Thanksgiving poem. The fact that you had to wait till the very end for the rhyming word was part of the joke. It would not be nearly as much fun if this little poem was just a statement about diet and over-eating, would it?

Day After All That Turkey

I had apple pie for breakfast
and mince pie for dinner

After pumpkin pie for lunch
I should have said no thanks

Because in spite of good intentions
I'm not getting any thinner.

Whether our collection of lines does or does not rhyme, we call it *verse* from the Latin word meaning *to turn*. The poet is very interested in where each line turns back from the right edge of the page to go back to start again at the left margin.

The dictionary says that prose is ordinary speech or writing. When you write a story, a report, an essay, or a novel, we call it prose. We write prose with the lines beginning at the left margin or the page and going to the right margin.

We write poems with lines that may begin at the left edge, or that may be indented. We may indent them with each new idea as we do with a prose paragraph, or we may choose to indent lines because we like how that looks.

How a line looks may influence how a line sounds when we read it out loud.

How the poem maker chooses to arrange the lines of a poem is important.

COUPLETS

We may want to emphasize that two lines go together. If we write them with a line space between every pair of lines we call that a couplet. Each line may add to the meaning of the other one. A line may question another, or it may disagree, making a contrast.

Tiny birds come at dusk
Regardless of the evening news

TRIPLETS

Writing three lines grouped together is a triplet. These lines can make a statement and then answer each other.

I say
You do?
Oh, yes

QUATRAINS

Many poems are written with lines in groups of four. This is a very old form. We seem to like the look of it. Would your poem like to look like that? Try it and see. Some of the groups might have only three lines, or sometimes the poet might want to make a group of four or five lines. The poet is free to try what feels right.

Which do you like better?

Dowsing

These two bare twigs,
formerly bayberry,
too scant to be driftwood
but nicely branched and silvered,
they fit the hand so well
I carry them
full circuit
around the island
with no vain intention
of taking either home with me,
but I like the feeling
of winnowing the sea breeze,
of holding hands with the sky,
of sensing how a lobster feels
waving its claws in communication
with Neptune and the sea.

or this version?

Dowsing

These two bare twigs,
formerly bayberry,
too scant to be driftwood
but nicely branched and silvered,

they fit the hand so well
I carry them
full circuit
around the island

with no vain intention
of taking either home with me,
but I like the feeling
of winnowing the sea breeze,

of holding hands with the sky,
of sensing how a lobster feels
waving its claws in communication
with Neptune and the sea.

METER

Meter is the heart beat of a poem, the drum beat of how we say the words.
Ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum...

Upon the road the colt did run

Meter can remind us of a pacing horse, a walking horse, a trotting horse, a galloping horse. Read a line aloud and let your ear tell you how the horse is going.

In the past poems were written with very strict attention to the patterns of beats. There are names for the different meters, the patterns of beats.

FREE VERSE

When the poet is free to make up the pattern, we call that free verse. Free verse has meter, a heart beat, a drum beat, but the poet is free to write it as heard for that particular poem, not in any named pattern.

PAUSES

The poet uses a pause between words and between lines the way a musician uses the rest between notes or between musical phrases. A painter uses blank space the same way.

INSIDE A LINE is also where you might choose to pause.

The STANZA is what we call the group of lines in a poem. The word comes from the Latin for a room. You can think of a stanza as the place where a poem happens, the architecture of a poem, like a picture frame.

LINE ENDINGS are very important. Line endings are writing around the corners of the verse. How do you want the reader to take that turn? The pause at the end of a line may slow us down. If the pause comes at a place in the phrase where we do not expect a pause, we may find that we hurry to leap over the pause.

The poet may choose to have the reader pause between stanzas by leaving a line of white space. That gives us the impression of a series of rooms, a series of framed pictures, a series of musical verse—perhaps with a chorus in between.

SECTIONS

1.

The poet may choose to divide a poem into sections, like rooms in an art gallery, movements in a symphony, acts in a play.

2.

These sections may move us through time like the seasons of the year.

3.

We may move from one place to another like rooms in a house or states in a country.

We may have a pair of sections, like the wings of a butterfly or two halves of a clam shell. The two halves may be alike or they may contrast, like *yin* and *yang*. Sections are often grouped

in three, called a triptych. Sections of a poem may remind us of pictures made in panels. The design may be repeated on each panel, or it may be spread from one panel to another, continuing the story or picture like a comic book. Panels, sections, that are each a variation on a theme are very popular in picture art and in word art, and of course, in music, the sound art.

EXPECTATIONS

When you create variations on a theme, you give some expectation of what “ought” to come next. A rhythm, a rhyme, a repetition like a chorus or any other pattern makes us want what we think will come next. The poet, the artist, and the musician all play with that. We set up an expectation. We make you wait for it. We offer you something else instead. You reject that. Finally we give you what you want. We resolve in a very satisfying ending.

But also we like

surprises.

If we are too repetitious,
it could get boring, boring, boring, boring, boring.

If we are not clear enough about what our pattern is, there is no expectation. There is no bait to be headed for. Not as much fun. On the other hand, if we are trying for variations in clause length or in sentence length, we may have to be sure the differences are enough to be noticed, several words’ difference, not just a word or two. We probably do not want to pattern every sentence or every line with exactly the same structure.

We tend to get especially impatient with sentence after sentence beginning with the word “I”.

HAIKU

The Chinese language and the Japanese language lend themselves to patterns of word syllables. From them we get the art of haiku, poems of three lines, a pattern of 5-7-5. We may change the pattern so much that we wonder whether to call the poems “free haiku” or just “small poems”. Whatever you call them, haiku and small poems are a very good length to consider for making poem pictures. Like point-and-shoot cameras, you can easily make good pictures with haiku. However, in time you will come to understand why poets say the smaller the poem, the harder it is to get it just right.

Wind writes
small poems
on grass

What is it that you like about a haiku or small poem? Is it the music in the words? Sometimes the words may not make much sense at all, but we love their sound. Perhaps the words of a small poem capture a vivid picture of something that we experience with any or all of our senses. If the words also give us an idea of our feelings and give us more ideas to think about, we probably feel that we have made a poem, even if it is only a few lines long.

More words might just mess it up. Knowing when to stop is very important when we are making pictures. Sometimes adding more lines makes us not like the picture as well, even if we cannot say just why that is. Leaving some things unsaid, some space empty, may be good for both our poems and our pictures.

POEM PICTURES

Chinese and Japanese artists were also the poets and the calligraphers for what we called poem pictures. They made albums of these poem pictures. Many were painted on round fans. Other tales were painted on long horizontal scrolls. To view them, the reader and any friends would sit at a low table or on the ground or floor and unroll one end of the picture. As the show progressed, they would roll up the part they had seen. This made for an ever-changing picture, a leisurely trip. What kind of poem pictures might you make?

You will also see that the text of the poem influences the look of the painting. You might want to use a computer to print out the text in various fonts. Play with various arrangements of lines. Print the poem on a piece of scrap paper and cut it out. Of course it would be even better if you learn and practice calligraphy (which means beautiful writing) and write the words on with your own hand. The Chinese say that every person has an individual energy which shows in their handwriting. They call that energy *qi* (pronounced *chee*) and they say you can see the difference in the *qi* if the writer got interrupted and had to begin again later.

You might want to try making a picture in one single brush trip, taking the line for a very quick trip around the picture. The Japanese call this an *enso*.

Have fun!



SQUARE WORDS

Can you read this? Look again. It is in English. It says Square Word in a calligraphy made by the Chinese artist Xu Bing.



Eventually pictures came to represent sounds of words. A riddle written that way is called a rebus. It can be quite amusing if the word means something other than what the picture shows. For example, a picture of a bear might mean that someone is not wearing any clothes. This is part of how languages developed written form.

As you can see, there are many ways to use pictures and signs and sounds. Play around with your own ideas!

PASS-AROUND POEMS

It is fun to make a game of writing poems a line at a time, especially when more than one person is the poet. Chinese and Japanese used to have parties where they did this. One person would be invited make the first verse. Everyone else then took turns adding their own lines. (You can see this would be fun and fast using email!) There could be rules for the links. You could be asked to use a word or a rhyme from the previous person's couplet. You could be asked to move the story along to a new place, to a new time. You could all share the poem-writing, adding, taking away, changing the poems. You may need to be very good friends to be able to share this way!

TITLES AND TAGS

Haiku did not have titles. Computer files do need a title, a tag. You may forget what title you gave a poem, but you probably do remember the subject of the poem. Was it about a cat? A dog? A snowball? Why not assign each poem a "subject tag"? Then you can file poems alphabetically so you can find them when you want them.

File your poems this way in your computer, or on a disk. Write poems on index cards and file them in a pretty box. Print them out and file them in a decorated notebook. Before long you will have enough poems to give them final titles and collect them in what poets call a chap book, a booklet.

How did you decide to group your poems? Spring poems? Poems about pets? Small poems? Poems about a trip? Notice how your poems change when they are together. Often this gives you an idea for another poem, for adding a word or line - or you may see something you want to leave out.

SHARING WITH THE WORLD

You may enjoy taking an idea from Chinese fans or Tibetan prayer flags. Let the wind carry your words. Or express your concerns and post them somewhere significant, in the way people use Jerusalem's Wailing Wall. Japanese sometimes write poems on narrow slips of lovely paper and hang them on a blooming cherry tree for a special occasion. You might print a poem, fold it up, and hide it someone's pocket to give them a pleasant surprise.

OUT TAKES

You have written a poem you like quite well. However, you find a word that has a sound you love, but the meaning is not quite right. Cross it out? There is an idea that doesn't really fit, but it's such a good idea. Throw it out?

The muses, or your genie, will not like your failing to appreciate the gems you have been given so why not do what film makers do? Save the bits that don't work as a collection of what are called out takes, unusable but wonderful film bits where something went wrong. Here is where you put all those lively lines you so wanted to put at the end of a poem. But they are probably "elephant pushers"! You were tempted to sum up the poem, or name the emotion, telling us how to react, like studio audience canned soundtrack laughter. Those words are better taken out.

Like a quilt which charms us with its use of fabric remnants, lines take on a new life collected as out takes. Not least of all, more wonderful words and lines and ideas will keep coming to you. After all, you show that you know what to do with these gifts. You're not going to throw the great words away; you're just moving them to a better place – the out take file.

PART TWO

TO REVIEW, TO REPEAT, TO REVISIT AND BEGIN AGAIN

At first you will think this next section seems repetitious. It is. Read on and you will realize that it covers once again all the ground we have covered so far. But you will see that more has been added, more than one would want for a first go. As mentor, you need to start where your young poet is. Better not to skim over material that you yourself have mastered, but take the time to look at everything with fresh eyes, to hear it all with fresh ears.

All you experienced poets, helpful guides, you know we use letters to bring certain sounds to our minds and to our lips. How the letter itself looks is also important. We call the writing of beautiful letters by the word from Greek language that means just that: *calligraphy*. To write English letters we use a specific alphabet. Over the years writers have developed rules for making these shapes, whether the letters are made by pen on parchment or by chisel on stone. Asian language characters are usually made by a brush and that gives them their own set of challenges and special possibilities, slightly different from what we do with our letters.

Our letters are very wonderful designs. They are very efficient. If you take a piece of paper and cover the lower half of a line of printing, you will find that you can probably guess most of what the letters are saying – even with only half of the information. Remarkable design work, that.

We have developed a streamlined form for writing letters quickly by hand. We call that running form *cursive*. Then came type and eventually typewriters, which also influenced the form we give to letters. Today we say we have many fonts, or styles, of letters to choose from, thanks to a computer and printer. The term *font* more properly refers to a complete set of alphabet letters (and usually numerals as well) designed to be printed with a certain typeface, often named for its designer.

"Letter look" makes a difference. If there is a lot of text, the reader's eye will probably appreciate the helping, guiding pull of a font that has serifs. A serif is the tiny tail on letters that

came from the Romans working on stone. The man with the chisel discovered that he could make the letters end neatly by turning his chisel and giving a tap to finish the ends. These horizontal lines lead the eye. Times New Roman is the classic font with serifs. We are very used to seeing it and we tend to trust it. Or we find it rather stodgy.

A type, a font, without serifs is called *sans serif*. Helvetica, designed in 1957, is probably the world's most commonly used sans serif font. Languages around the world use forms of Helvetica. Highway signs worldwide are apt to be in a form of Helvetica. There is a wonderful 2007 documentary film you might search out, called simply Helvetica. The commonly-used font called Ariel is a sort of descendant of Helvetica. We use these sans serif fonts to call attention to the words, in headlines, in advertisements, and the like. They are a little more work to read so you might get tired reading a lot of it. However, some people prefer it and say that it is clearer. (Notice that the first time the word *sans serif* was used, it was printed in italics. *Italics developed from slanted hand writing*. We customarily use it for words in a foreign language or perhaps for emphasis.)

Letters suggest sounds in our head even when we read them silently. Poems are meant to be heard. They really should be read aloud. An infant can enjoy the beauty of words sounds long before that baby understands any of the meaning. A very young child, the two year old, comes to appreciate a poem read aloud both for its intrinsic sound and for the meaning of the words. When a child is about five or six, that child will probably begin to make poems, although for a time they will want someone else to write the words, but it's quite obvious that already the child hears the music in the words.

The labels are not important, but considering how the various categories of letters work in our poems is worth thinking about. The piano player knows the names of the notes sounded by pressing each key, but that's not how music is made. It's just a convenient way of talking about the sounds.

People with hearing loss who get fitted with hearing aids may then go to auditory rehab, learning how to hear once again. That is because hearing is composed of both the ear mechanisms which register the sound, and the brain which interprets the sound. When both have been out of service for a while, both need retraining. What used to be called lip reading is now referred to as speech reading. The person in aural rehab learns to group letters together if they look alike when we say them. This grouping nearly but not quite matches the list we made for the beginning poets. By practicing these groups the retrained, now hearing, brain learns to infer correct meanings by context and by practice. So why might a poet find this interesting? Because poets wish to enlist the brain on their side! Scientists know now that we file things in a different part of brain if we they come in via hearing than where we file inputs that come in by thinking or reading them. It make sense then that we poets will put the tools into our heads in as many ways as possible so the muses (whatever that metaphor means) have the maximum to work with.

To review how we think of the various categories of letter sounds:

Vowels- the SINGERS

We call a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y, the vowels. We say each of them with our mouth wide open. People who first lose the ability to hear low-frequency sounds rely on the fact that we shape each sound with our lips as we say them.

We call the other letters consonants, and the consonants close off the sound of the vowels in various ways. The speech reader learns to analyze consonants as to whether they are sounds produced by breath or by voice, the components of speaking that use our vocal chords.

STOPPERS

Some consonants stop the breath. The letters k, q, and c (hard) produce a quick stop made back in the middle of the cave that is our mouth. (We may call these mutes since they bring the sound to silence.)

click tick quick Iraq

The letters b, d, and g(hard) stop the sound a little less quickly.

Bad dog

The letters t and p stop the sound with a quick tap.

The sounds made by the letters m,p, and b look alike on the lips. The letters t,d,n and l also resemble one another.

GLIDERS

Some consonants bring the sound to a sliding stop. We call the letters l, m, n, and r liquids for the watery way they pour the sound to a halt. We make these sounds in the front of our mouth.

groannnnnn

BREATH STOPS

We make these with quite a bit of breath, so we call them aspirates. They are c, f, g, h, j, s, and x

hissssssssss

Some consonants, v, w, y, and z, close the vowel sound with just half a breath.

buzzzzzzzzzz

You might enjoy exploring phonetics, looking up such terms as *fricatives*, *sibilants*, *glottal stops*, etc. By themselves, the words sound like poem material, don't they? But as we have observed, labels are not useful for a poem maker, but the concepts probably are.

We can signal to make the effect louder by capitalizing the letter or by using an exclamation point as punctuation.

Bang!
DumP
STOP

Or we can use all three special effects: percussive consonants, capitalization, and punctuation. As always, part of the specialness of the effects depends on our not overusing the device.

DON'T!

We can quiet the effects somewhat by how we surround them. For example, the ends—front or back—tend to be more noticeable. So we emphasize the starting sound of a word or the ending sound of a word. The sound that occurs in the middle of a word will be more subtle.

middle
subtle

The word that ends a sentence or other unit may stand out even more because of its location. (The beginning of a word is of special importance too, but the effect will probably be somewhat less dramatic than that at the end. Perhaps it takes a while to get us to pay attention.)

Don't forget what punctuation signs are designed to tell the reader. When Emily Dickinson uses a dash, it hurries the reader across the abrupt break in thought. The comma signals a slowing. Use it even if you have a conjunction, joining word, if the coming clause could stand independently, on its own. Use the semicolon to slow us even further; it joins two independent clauses in a sentence. Each half could stand alone in the spot light. Give each time to shine. A colon is nearly equivalent to an equals sign. Use a colon in the following cases: to introduce a list, when giving more information, but understand that connection is so logical that the slowing may seem less than when the sentence structure calls for a semicolon.

Do you feel the slowing hesitation of a question mark?

The period brings us to a full stop.

A poem may use no punctuation at all

We call attention to a sound or a word by repeating it. REPEAT, repeat, repeat
fiddle diddle diddle

We may choose to RHYME the word exactly, as in fiddle diddle, a full rhyme

or only approximately, as fiddle faddle, an off-rhyme, near or slant rhyme

and we can rhyme the word at its end or at the sentence end or line end

or only rhyme it in the middle of the word, sentence, or line.

If we repeat vowel sounds we call it ASSONANCE, as in the increasing open mouth sounds of the middle line climaxing in the last of these lines:

We crept to our beds, shut windows to keep the deluge out,
slept fitfully, wholly unable to block the ocean's roar
the answering grinding moan of beach rocks in the dark.

You may also notice the sharp contrast when the consonants of the last three words come to a clipping close.

The effect of assonance, repeating vowel sounds that rhyme or nearly rhyme, is more subtle than repeating the consonant sound at the beginning of a number of words, ALLITERATION. In these lines, the f sounds are even vaguely onomatopoeic.

I heard the faint snap of feathers' flex
the instant before
a shadow of hawk sped over me

In a poem we often like to hear some of these repetitions. Alliteration calls a lot of attention to itself, so we probably will usually want to use this special effect with enough moderation to keep it special. Tiptoe through those tulips.

Similes and metaphors are perhaps the figures of speech with which we are most familiar. If you know Greek and Latin you will not have trouble remembering which is which. The word "simile", as in *similar*, means "like" in Latin. "My love is like a red red rose" is a simile, from Robert Burns. The word "metaphor" comes from the Greek (in reverse order) for "carrying" and "beyond, farther". "A mighty fortress is our God", according to Martin Luther in grand metaphor. You make a statement that is beyond true. One figure of speech is not intrinsically better than another. It does not matter which label we put on our figures of speech; what matters is how apt that figure is.

ONOMATOPOEIA means using words that sounds like what they say; for example, *moo* and *hiss*. Echoic words like *slice* imitate the meaning's sound in a subtle way which can be very appealing.

THAW

crisp crackle sounds in the woods

as branches let go their ice coats,
the offstage rustle like large ladies' skirts
before snow
clumsy thumps
from spruce bough
to the snow below.

It's fun to play with letters. How they look may make a funny picture. A single word can make a joke or a picture for us. A word picture is part way to being a poem. Different letters not only stand for different sounds, the different sounds also tell us something of a story. Are these words a poem or a picture, or both? Should we call that onomato-see-ia? (You may wish to take careful note of your reaction to puns.)

Shaped poems use the space (and perhaps even the look of the font) to reinforce what the poem is saying. The shaped poem can be simple like the small poem we met earlier, or more sophisticated, like this one:

Lightning

When one pictures
Mr. Frost on
his New England
barn roof
bringing down
all those
poems
with a lightning
rod
the awful
danger
of
being
a poet
hits

.

IMAGE and FEELING

We humans have a number of senses that bring information from the outside world into the inside of us. We do some deliberate arranging of sensations of smell when we make and wear perfumes. We are using taste when we design and eat our meals, the art of cooking. We appeal to our touch with textiles of velvet and plush, or when we polish a surface smooth or tickle with a feather.

We call it graphic art when we draw. Visual art may include painting and photography, and of course, to some extent that includes the shaped poem and the very letters themselves. We call it aural art when we appeal to our ears, our hearing, as in music, speech, and reading poems aloud. Theater is combination of the visual and the aural, and adds a dimension of movement. The sense of movement, kinesthetic art, we enjoy in dance and sports. The neural activity for movement is more generalized over the body than for the forms of perception which use principally one type of receptor, such as eyes, with the interpretation chiefly in our brain.

Our brain – ah, yes, we can visualize in our brains with our eyes shut. We can hear sounds, tunes in our head. We can read silently to ourselves. We can choose words to express what we feel. Now we are using the language arts. We can even think thoughts in other ways, such as the way a mathematician can think in numbers. We can be creative in all these ways (and we are apparently using different regions of our brain and different neural networks when we do so).

Image + feeling = art.

For something to seem like art to us we usually mean that we have an image from the outside. We take it in and react with a feeling, an emotion. Image with no feeling can be decorative, can be skilled craft, but art is usually something more. We return again and again to a piece of art, whether it is a painting, a poem or a piece of music, or dance, or theater. With each return we experience the energy of some fresh or deeper meaning or feeling.

No energy = no art

Energy alone does not equal art.

Young children, up to third or fourth grade, may be principally interested in exploring and enjoying the process of making art, not concerned much with producing a product. They may find it quite puzzling to be asked of their picture, “what is it?” It may not be intended to represent any image. Their painting may or may not reveal some of the emotions the child is feeling. It surely does represent getting to know the medium, the capabilities of both artist and material, the medium and the message. This is important. Dribbling paint, scribbling lines, spouting words, can feel like fun for a while, can provide a fresh idea, a new approach, but eventually we, especially grownups, may want it to mean something.

Refrigerator magnet words have introduced a whole generation of us to the delightful possibilities of chance word arrangements. Poets not only recognize the charm, but work with it. They call these aleatory poems.

BEACH GLASS

Sometimes
I want to write poems

lines written by refrigerator magnets
aleatory anarchy

laughing zen blue rondo loon blooming lights Christmas twinkling lizard
stacked chocolate stacked chips stacked

the lovely way a child tosses a palm full of beach glass to the sky just to see the blue
bits race the green ones down

Abstract art gives us an experience possibly, probably, a pattern which, wonderfully, may evoke a feeling, an emotional response in us. This does not have to correspond with any logical or realistic or representational conventions, but it does have to be evocative and engage us, or we will give up and go away. The artist may have to give us some hints, clues, suggestions, references. We may not want an explanation – leave some of the fun to us, thank you – but we would appreciate something to get us started in the right direction. A good title, a suggestion rather than an explanation, may do this for a poem or for a painting or a piece of music.

IMAGE

What do we mean by image? That seems pretty easy. Take a camera and go out and capture a collection of them. Or take a sketch pad and fill it with your drawings. Or do both. Bring back the images, the visual gestures, and begin to work with them. Do they have any meaning? Any emotional resonance? Do they look better upside down? Bigger? Smaller? Reversed? In color? Color is almost always the poet's friend. Can you make your image more vivid by a splash of color?

Wood Lily

Fine-grained New England granite is obdurate stuff.
Long after the glacier's press it stands untouched
by the hot lick of burning barrens for blueberries,
the trembling flame of open wood lily at its side.

That lone splash of red draws the eye
more strongly than the brief burnt-orange zap
or the lazy float of Monarchs. Drawn by that
invisible force it torques the field,
the wood lily pulling bright against the rock.

Is your image repeated? With variations on a theme? What if you put two together? Do they tell a story? That is narrative, made in the same way that notes make melody. As we look

over the devices of poetry we will get a feeling for what differentiates a poem from a bit of prose. If we want a poem rather than a story, we will know how to tweak the material.

But the big question is still, does the image provoke a feeling in us? Some of us may not be used to identifying when we ourselves are feeling a feeling. We may not know how recognize when we have provoked someone else to feel a feeling. Examining and labeling our feelings may be a good exercise as well. Examining and labeling the feelings that an image evokes is a good practice. What do your photos and sketches have to say about what you feel? How about advertisements in magazines? Do those pictures evoke some feeling in you? Can you say why they do?

Look back at the poem we used earlier for examining poems that are more than pretty.

March Goodbye

Merciless March clouds
grim in again,
not with neutral grey
but the chill wrench of despair.

As if the weight of present
were too much to bear,
winter earth lies wounded,
oozing open rutted tracks
which mock all promise of a thaw.

Change comes hard,
I want to say
as I kiss your warm wet cheeks
– and quickly part.

As an adult you no doubt conjure up different feelings from the images. The assonance in the line “oozing open rutted tracks” quite possibly rings more painfully in your metaphorical inner ear. We are interested both in the art of feeling and the feeling of art.

When we wake up from a dream, often we can remember the feeling long after we have forgotten the images. When we are quietly meditating, or day dreaming, or falling off to sleep, we may be presented with very interesting images and feelings. These can be a source of inspiration for our art works. That well never goes dry. (Look up the terms *hypnopompic* and *hypnagogic*.) We just have to take time, practice asking, and then show up to receive the gifts of the muses.

COLLECTING

We have to show that we are prepared to use the gifts. We have to learn our craft. We need spelling and grammar and vocabulary, just as we need paint and brushes and paper. You may wish to form the good habit of keeping a dictionary by you in your favorite place to read. Words are fascinating. They not only have sounds and use, but they have a history, which clues you in to the shadows those words cast for people who have seen them before.

You can order inks and paints and brushes from an art supply store, but you cannot order words. You need to learn your own vocabulary. You begin with a dictionary and a thesaurus and much reading, but these building blocks have to go into your head. There they rattle around mysteriously, magically, and come out arranged as poetry or prose. That has happen in the head before it can happen on the paper.

You will also want what a biologist would call a field notebook.

In my field school
I would invite you to come with me
for a very quiet walk
hoping we will
startle some image
into singing its song
in words.

You write in it the interesting observations of your day. Did a funny phrase occur to you? Write it down and you will have it for later use. Did an interesting idea flit into your consciousness? Capture it. Did you read something you like? Write it in your notebook, but be sure you enclose it with quotation marks. That way, later, when you wish to use those words, you will know that perhaps someone needs to be credited with them. Perhaps not, but plagiarism is a tricky business. Saying “I forgot” is no excuse for using someone else’s literary property—as some people who ought to have known better found out to their sorrow when they were charged with plagiarism. Mark the words you borrow as you borrow them, and you can figure out later how to use them.

Try to keep in mind that making art and selling art are not the same thing. Aesthetics is not the same thing as economics. Art making is risk taking. It’s affordable.

Somehow keeping your word treasures, your graphic sketches, your wisps of melody written down and saved in box or bag or folder or notebook sends a signal to your imagination, your muse, your genie. Here is an artist who means business! The brilliant ideas then, eventually, shower forth.

Don’t tell us; show us. Don’t push the elephant.

This refers to how you catch an elephant, the art of catching elephants. You go out into the forest and dig a big hole. Then you go around to the far side of the hole and wave bananas. Sure enough, along comes a very big elephant, which spots those bananas, and, Whump! You have yourself an elephant.

(If you had tried to circle around behind the elephant and you leaned on it and pushed, you almost certainly would have been squashed. End of art.)

Delight is in the (right) details. If you have provided your elephant trap with a meaningful supply of delicious fruits and flowers – that is, adequate and coherent sensory details – the elephant will be content to remain in there for good long while, long enough to feel some emotion.

By ‘emotion’ we may not mean the sensation of feeling happy or sad, but we do mean that there will be an element of engagement, an attraction to a meaningful message, be it pleasant or painful. There will be something the art maker wants the viewer/hearer/reader to think about, something to be felt with considerable force. That is why the temptation to push that elephant is so strong.

PROSE vs. POETRY

The moment we sit down to write, we can choose where on the paper or computer screen to begin. That is, we set the left margin. You the artist can set that margin wherever you want it. Experiment. See how it works.

As soon as you have started out and reach the other side of that very first line, you are faced with a challenge. Where do you go next? When paper was scarce, people wrote all over the page, with as little wasted for margins as they could manage. When civilizations were just getting the hang of writing things down, in those early days – think Romans again – one would write a line of words with no punctuation, no capitals, no spaces, and then turn around and head back on the next line. We writers did eventually figure out that spaces help, making a single large letter to signal when to begin was a help; and so was putting in a comma to tell the reader to pause, slow down, and a period to signal a full stop. Poets were not long in discovering that this idea, the turning, the verse as the Romans would have said, was a useful device.

We usually write our prose with margins flush with the edge of the paper at both sides. Poems are different. The margins are often your first tip that you are dealing with poetry, not prose. Poetry revels in line. We have seen that in a shaped poem the poet decides to turn the line wherever it draws the best picture on the page.

In modern free verse, which developed early in the twentieth century, the poet is free to turn the line wherever it seems best.

COUPLETS

We often like the look of lines in pairs, couples. They may not really be questions and answers, but two lines seem comfortable together, handsome spatial couplets.

TRIPLETS

Three lines grouped together is a swinging thing. This is a very jazzy form, perhaps a result of the African call-and-response.

Statement,
answer,
oh, yeah.

QUATRAINS

Sets of four lines made up English poetry for centuries. Even though we may not do these forms any more, we may think that poems look good that way. These days we tend not to count very well. A quatrain may be followed by groups of three, or five or six lines. Whatever. A page of quatrains somehow looks like it must be a good poem.

METER

The flow of weak and strongly stressed speech accents is called rhythm. The pattern is meter. Free verse has implicit meter, but in a free, not prescribed pattern. Rhythm and meter are the heart beat of poetry.

In both Latin and Greek there are rules for deciding whether a syllable is long or short, stressed or unstressed. Certain case endings make it long, two consonants make it stressed, etc. French is likely to be heard as a grand rush of sound with little strong/weak pulse. In English, however, we make jokes about putting the em-PHASis on the WRONG syllABble. You have to develop what we call an ear for the language. Too often, even for the native speaker, scanning a line of poetry feels like describing the emperor's new clothes. Everyone hears it but us.

Ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum...Reminds us of a pacing horse, a trotting horse, a galloping horse. Clip clop, clip clop, clip clop. These beats have kept their Greek names: *iamb*, *trochee*, *spondee*, *dactyl*, *anapest*. Weak/ strong, weak/strong: we call this paired pattern of weak/strong by the term *iambic* feet. Five of these pulses, these heart beats, are about what the human breath can sustain in one go. We call the metric framework of that length *pentameter*, or five metrical units. It is the most common form in English language poetry. This iambic pentameter is the form used in sonnets, by Shakespeare, by Robert Frost. Frost uses the form in such a natural-sounding way that many people would be surprised to know that the poems are written in iambic pentameter and grouped in couplets or quatrains.

When you read poetry out loud, you can often hear the underlying beat more clearly. You know how to compose verse in meter; haven't you ever made up a limerick? The form is so well known that we instinctively know what to do when we want our poem to be limerick, wit, meter, rhyme scheme and all. When you write your own verse, you will want to listen carefully

to the beat you have put into it, especially as you may well have done so unconsciously. Playing with the rhythm, the beat, making it more regular, less regular, more noticeable, less noticeable, may be very useful to you.

THE PAUSE

In music the composer writes a rest. In a painting, the artist thinks carefully about blank space, the background around the figure of a painting. If a painting had no visual pauses, we would probably say it was “too busy”. If a person speaks with no pauses, we would probably find ourselves annoyed. Are we being rushed, bossed about, agitated, frightened? Not good.

Learn to use the silences of a pause. In the middle of a line of poetry this pause is called a *caesura* (say “sigh zhoo-ra”, from Latin *to cut*). At the end of a line there is a line *break*.

A pause is not just a stop. A pause is the small blank space where you gather yourself before you jump over the pause. This may have the effect of slowing you down, but it is also very likely to speed you up. You pause, gather yourself, and in a springing leap, hurry on. As a poet you can use this, especially at the line break.

When the thought of the line continues over into the next line like two legs of a phrase straddling a gap, we call that by the term from French, *enjambment* (sounds something like *strawberry jam*). As the poet, you get to hurry the reader along from one line to the next or give them some phrase to linger over.

Flowers for the Tea,
chabana

Tie my poem to
the blossom branch
with deft knots of
freedom and formality

silence to sound
vase to flower
page to ink

I sing the breathing words
of heaven, earth, and man
in bud and bloom
and fallen petal.

Notice here that the reader is hurried on by the prepositions dangling at the ends of lines 1 and 3. The words ‘to’ and ‘of’ are straddling any meaning. When you do read on and understand, as reader your thoughts are tied together rather tightly. This verse is quite

contained. The lines of the next stanza are even more quietly, formally balanced, with a contemplative pause at the end of each line. If you know a little about tea ceremony or the tripartite symbolism of traditional Japanese flower arranging, the second line of the final stanza takes on more meaning, but any reader understands that after lines 2 and 4 there is a sense of completion, and of finality. The other lines, the ones with more dramatic and insistent enjambment, coax or hurry the reader along to this realization.

With your computer you have great flexibility. You can cast and recast line lengths, putting enjambments in various places to see how they affect the meaning and the music of the words. It is lovely when an effect that you like occurs by chance, better yet when you recognize those gifts, and perhaps best of all, when you can recognize that something happens at cross-purposes with what you intended. You can remedy that if you can recognize what has happened. Do give enjambment thoughtful consideration.

We use the word *stanza* to refer to a collection of lines, a unit, set off by a space. In popular music there is one meaning. We speak of the first and second stanza of *America the Beautiful* for instance. Also, we know we have come to the end of a stanza every time we repeat the chorus. In older forms of poetry with recognizable metrical patterns, a stanza was easy to recognize. In modern poems, we may realize that we have come to the end of a unit, a stanza, when the thought changes or when we encounter a blank line. At the end of a stanza, we find a *stanza break*.

Stanza is a term we owe to Latin, meaning the place where we stand. In the structural sense of a poem, a stanza can be thought of as a room where a bit of the poem happens. It is much like the picture frame the painter or photographer uses. Cropping the image can greatly effect the impression it makes. Take scissors and a paper frame and try cropping your images or photographs from a magazine. Photocopy the results. Similarly you can change your poem by how you make lines, how you pause between them, how you group them into sets by even longer pauses.

Let us assume that a poem can be like an art gallery. There are stanzas, rooms. All the pictures in one room can relate to each other. They may have a theme, a common subject, a single artist, a predominant color or mood. So with the stanzas, the verse, in a poem.

You can be even more firm about the pauses. You can create sections in a poem. Like a succession of rooms in a gallery, movements in a symphony, or acts in a play, the series will create an arrangement. An arrangement creates a series. What sort of logic can there be?

First, there could be no rhyme nor reason (a phrase with a good sound basis). We have observed that there may be randomness, or scatter. And that we may have limited tolerance for that.

Sections may suggest the progression of time, such as the year's seasons, the ages of man, or yesterday/today/tomorrow. The series may be place, for example New York /New

Jersey/Pennsylvania. Perhaps we sing of the finger bone connected to the wrist bone, the arm bone, etc.

If we choose to present our poem as a single unit, there may be a limit to how large a block of text the reader is willing to venture. Consider how long a paragraph we find comfortable. A prose paragraph is often limited to one main thought or one principal event.

A pair offers aesthetic possibilities. Two equal halves, like a clamshell, or a butterfly's wings? Or the contrast of yin and yang. Painters in Europe found the triptych, three panels, a useful form for church art. It's simple math: the number of ways that three parts can possibly interact is very rich, definitely adding up to more than the sum of the parts. Both Japanese and Chinese artists have made lovely screens from assembling a series of panels. The scene depicted may be an extended whole, a simple repetition, or variations on a theme. In Western classical music this theme-and-variation form is quite familiar.

THE PROSE POEM

The line between what is considered poetry or prose is sometimes blurred. Don't let that make you afraid to experiment out there at the interface. I think that my poem *Elvers* could be written as prose but it is much more effective as a poem.

EXPECTATION

Familiarity, suggesting what "ought" to come next, is a major tool. We set up an expectation, and deliciously we either gratify that, or deny it, perhaps prolonging the suspense before resolving the question.

The poet can set up a rhythm, a repetition, a rhyme. We can also repeat a pattern of thought, of logic, of custom. We are free to set up the rules of the game or adhere to classical forms.

Too much familiarity and we are bored. Poems or paintings or melodies, chord changes, stories, jokes – any of these that are too predictable we call hackneyed, boring, trite. (This is a problem with choosing a subject like love, life, death, the sunset, my cat, the stars, etc. We may have a pretty good idea what you will be saying and not even wait around to see if we are right.) We like a little surprise. We enjoy novelty. As we have observed, we cannot be surprised by the next object in a random series because the pattern elements are so scattered that we cannot form expectations. We do not see a pattern; we cannot anticipate. We just grow weary.

Since we tend to like the comfort and heightened delight of a recurring pattern, we may feel frustrated or confused or left out if we "don't get it". Do not put down words and ramble on, repeating, again and again. Redundancy is not what we are after.

Conversely, you will not be well served by making your choices obscure and dense in the mistaken idea that this makes them sophisticated. Some poems do not present us with any clear images, or only images that do not seem very lyrical. We might nevertheless find them interesting because of the thoughts they share. These “idea poems” can be so abstruse that we, the readers, need help “unpacking” them. In some circles these poems are decidedly in fashion these days. If they are to your taste, you have company. If they are not, you also have company.

Children’s poetry often contains new juxtapositions of sound and meaning that are most delightfully original. This is freshness that gives energy. Listen to the whisperings in the far corners of your own mind. Much that is vibrant and fresh is waiting there.

POLISHING POEMS



Some years back it became fashionable in educational and parenting circles to make every effort to give children positive reinforcement for just about anything they did. Back then, adults sometimes struggled to find something nice to say to undisciplined, uncooperative spoiled little underachievers. There was a joke going around amongst harried teachers struggling to appear compliant: “Oh, Johnny, you are growing your hair so nicely today.”

Haiku seemed to be particularly fair game for this set of kids; scribble a few words and call that a “pome”. It was perhaps the philosophy of this era that gave us the self-satisfied but mediocre works of the young people we have today. They do not score very well on world tests of achievement but certainly rank high in self-appraisal.

However, if you have read this far, it is probably because you know that poem-making is a craft. As with any other craft, you may find you have a talent for poem making, but you would get better with effort and practice. This next section contains material that most young children will not appreciate just yet, but any enthusiastic student and anyone acting as mentor should find helpful.

THE MACKEREL CALLER

Out of mind's vast dark deep they come
racing into coves in pursuit
perhaps of herring, flashes of silvery blue
black-barred stanzas together
writing ripples of reality

You don't call mackerel
You know the tide and go out in your boat
or onto the pier and you wait
knowing that unless the line or net
is in the water, no one ever catches
the meaning or the music

The Mackerel Caller is a metaphor for the poet. Now that you know that, reread the poem and see if the poem seems different to you. There are some things about making poems that you do not learn from a teacher or from a book. Making metaphors is one of those things. These figures of speech seem to appear out of the prepared human mind, a catch precious beyond reckoning.

We have examined the building blocks of a poem, and by analogy, of many other forms of making art. We assume that you have made a poem, gotten it out and onto a piece of paper. Now you want to make it better. You revise. This is the half of the process that is more directly under your conscious control. Revision is fun. Most poets begin writing their poems by hand. Not only is the connection between brain and page more direct, but composing on computer allows you to over-value what you see on the screen, to accept too soon. Handwriting encourages you to draw arrows, cross out, and add symbols and other personal shorthand for ideas. Then see what the poem "feels like" on screen. Print it out, and jot down corrections. Alternating back and forth between handwritten and word processing versions is a valuable way to revise.

Revision is often a question of asking the right questions. Baron Wormser, Poet Laureate of the State of Maine for the five years following 2000, has for a number of years worked in the schools, and offered workshops for poets of all ages. He directed the Frost Place Conference on Poetry and Teaching at the Frost Place in Franconia, New Hampshire. With poet and teacher David Cappella, he created a most helpful text book "written with high school teachers in mind." The book is entitled *Teaching the Art of Poetry: The Moves*. It also makes a very fine way for any adult to be their own teacher. The following questions are based on Baron's years of experience.

The questions, useful for poetry and prose, are arranged more or less by topic. It may at first seem frustrating that these are questions, and not answers. You ask, How can I make my poem better? – and what you get in return is another question? People who read your poem and think it needs some fixing are often quite quick to tell you just how to do that. Most often they are telling you something valuable. At some point in the poem they probably identify fairly

accurately that there is a “problem”. Chances are that they are not so accurate about what the “fix” ought to be. There are many ways that their reading and their personal history might also be contributing to what is actually their “problem”. In that case, the things the poet does to fix the poem may all be counterproductive. Do not jump first to that conclusion, but do bear it in mind.

There are many possible ways to improve a poem, and the following questions can help lead you in exploration. Only your own intuition and perhaps many successive tries at implementing alternatives can lead you to answers.

QUESTIONS

Do you practice meditation? You might wish to learn. Our other layers of consciousness know a lot that our ordinary consciousness obscures.

The Zen masters who developed sumi-e, ink painting, and the poems that went on the paintings, meditated while grinding their ink for half an hour before the first brush stroke. They knew their subject well and painted and wrote its essence, its essentials, without looking at any still life set before them. They were not interested in the appearance of things, but the essential nature of things.

Just as it took some minutes for the old Polaroid pictures to develop after they came shooting out of the camera, it often takes a while for an idea to develop. Are you taking the time to wait for it? Are you really there for it? Or is there some way you are self-editing? This poem is not good enough, will not bring me enough money, enough fame, etc. (You don’t make poems for fame or money!) You are not satisfied? Good. Remember that you expect to revise, to polish, to work.

By the way, this is a good time to think a bit about the difference between learning about the history of poetry, learning to appreciate poems, and the craft of actually making poems. It is one thing to sensitize you to recognizing assonance. It is another for you to know about assonance and actively consider how to make that knowledge useful. You do not say to yourself, well, now, it’s time throw in half a cup of assonance, a teaspoon of alliteration. However, you might well use the concept to help you choose between alternative wordings in your poem.

Let’s look again at the example we gave for assonance:

We crept to our beds, shut windows to keep the deluge out
slept fitfully, wholly unable to block the ocean’s roar
the answering grinding moan of beach rocks in the dark.

When polishing, one might consider various synonyms. Words such as ‘sea’ and ‘shriek’ are possibilities, good words that describe a maritime storm. However, looking at the nearby lines, all those oceanic vowels in the accompanying words seem to cry out for (moan for?) being

enhanced by neighboring similarity. The contrast then with the coming clattery consonants means something very subtle to anyone who has actually experienced the clicking sound of shells and pebbles rolled in the surf at the shore. The effect may be entirely subconscious but you the poet have done what you can to elicit the response. This is what we mean by the abstract music of poetry. This music can sometimes be quite programmatic (the term musicians use for music that directly imitates, suggests, specific stories or images).

Poem making is a spiritual exercise. It is a Zen-like practice. You sit.

A to Zen

Aging adepts
learn to sit
on their expectations
breathe with interest
hoping for haiku

You become present and non-judgmental. You must examine everything for yourself, and learn to trust your intuition, your muse, your genie. Every word, every single word, every sentence, every brush stroke, is a decision. Is it compelling? Does it earn its place? Do you feel, not just intellectualize?

A phrase which is so right, so apt, that it gets taken up by everyone becomes a cliché. The wise poet learns to comb them out. Not only does a group of words become a cliché when it gets too popular, a meaning can be hijacked, “gay” for example. Are all of the allusions in your poem what you intend? Have any words been commandeered by a particular subculture? Are any words jargon, slang, known or understood only by some elite? Are you sure you want them?

It is also currently unfashionable to refer to nature and things as people. This is called *pathetic fallacy*. That even sounds like an insult, doesn't it? But doesn't it fit in this poem if you have ever seen round hay bales?

Summer

The first round bales of hay
squat grinning in the meadow
while up the hill
the next field simmers
in a sun of black-eyed Susans
and on the porch an old man
observes that blueberries are coming on good
this year and how sweet
the word for summer is.

You can get away with *apostrophe*, addressing the thing as if it were a person, but just barely.

Monarch

I remember when you were
but intimation barely visible
in the green goblet
and then you cracked that jade chrysalis
breathed into your unfurling
the flexibility of
the act of living.

I meet you now
poised aslant
on some air not visible
to my eye
but to some other sense
a new idea
floating on the ether
of consciousness.

Yet, many writers are guilty of “anthropophilia”; they are only interested in human beings, preferably a male and female. This does not exactly apply to figures of speech since what concerns humans is also found mirrored everywhere in the natural world. We do not have a corner on such things as sex, for example.

where one last peony
has dropped her skirts,
five female parts confidently naked
in their fertile rosy swell,
petals round her feet
full with evening shadow and morning rain

Although we have gotten our planet into deep trouble by forgetting that we share it with other species, another phrase which has come to mean something fairly insulting is *poetic discourse*. Writing about choirs of birds, dancing waves, singing winds and other such phrases that remind you of a greeting card will not do. The implication is that if you need to purchase a card to express your feelings, you need to reexamine the depth and character and quality of your feeling. That judgment is too harsh, but worth thinking about.

Beware the declaration. If you write a strong I-statement that seems self-evident (a passionately held conviction it seems to you), you may be inviting resistance, argument. (Were

you willing to join the poet watching the monarch butterfly emerge a paragraph ago? If you are not too afraid of breaking rules and fashions, you might well have been able to just enjoy the image and thought.) The reader may not like to be bossed around, told what to feel. Don't tell me. Show me the image. Let that evoke feeling in me by its energy.

Passive voice is not used much these days. Nor, say I, inversion much.

Naming brands and celebrities and street names does not tell us much, and not for long.

The best polishing often is done with an eraser. Good stuff is often buried: less is often more.

It is an erroneous assumption, a downright deception usually, to pretend that poems or paintings often arrive full blown in the hearts and minds of their creators. Usually it takes drafts and drafts of work.

PLACE

Setting

Do we feel the place? The place where the image takes place can be viewed as one of your characters. How did that place make it through the casting call? Why are we here? Is some aspect of the place a witness? Is this a particular place or a general one? Why did you make that choice?

Whose Point of View?

Is the voice with us enough? Too little? Specified or mysteriously unspecified? Why? Does the reader identify with the point of view? Why, why not, and what does the author want?

Are we at the right distance? We could be using a lens. Not only do we have a choice of which lens, we can use a metaphorical lens that zooms from time to time in our poem. Are we at the right distance? We need to ask that question again and again.

Remember, we need to be examining every single word, again and again. Every time we make a revision it affects the relationships throughout the entire art work. One brush stroke here in the painting, and something else may be required there...

First Person, I

Does it matter? Are we curious? The first person, declarative is the easiest of gestures. We make that sort of gesture all the time, whether or not we mean to. Are we saying, revealing, what we intend?

First Person, we

Is the reader really being included? Does the reader understand enough? If the writing is holding back too much, being too opaque, too esoteric, the reader may feel excluded, rebuffed, frustrated, alienated.

Second person, you

Does the reader want to be addressed? Second person can be a very inviting device. "I've got a secret to share with you. You can trust me and I'll show you" it says. It can sometimes feel too presumptuous or too exhortatory.

Third person, he, she, it, they

We should certainly be more sensitive to gender issues than writers were even a few decades ago. On the other hand, the reader may have stereotypes too, ones that the writer may play against. Third person offers the possibility of a little distance, some exterior remoteness, even omniscience. Would that be useful?

Picasso and his friends made the most of using a perspective from which more than one aspect could be seen at a time. The Chinese revised our notions of even such a little thing as assuming the direction from which light comes. Light can be depicted coming equidistantly from all sides if the source is thought of as an aspect of reality rather than an aspect of illumination.

Third person also tempts us to introduce many characters. Can the reader follow all of them? How are they made individual? How do we feel them? Does any character really represent the author? All characters probably represent some of us some of the time. Do you end up with a consistent authentic character? Are you aware of what assumptions you personally are making about the world? Is that package what you intend?

Are you personifying an animal? That is pretty tricky. Little details, for example the fact that a bear has a paw rather than an opposable thumb, may make big difference in how genuine or how cartoonish the animal feels to the reader.

TIME

Verbs: did you use the right tense? Present tense is colloquially popular, but English language does have other possibilities. Latin offers the Imperfect tense for continuing, repeated, customary actions of the past. In English we do not have such a tense so we use the Present tense for that. We are often beguiled into overusing the Present tense when we do not intend what it signals.

Present tense is very biological. Things evolve organically. Images can just be, rather than become intellectualized. This tense is a good way to avoid making judgments. Consequences haven't happened yet.

Are the tenses consistent? A tense shift is very significant.

Adverbs are currently more fashionable than adjectives. Verbs are more esteemed than any other part of speech, and active ones are considered better than passive, transitive better than intransitive. At least, these are different in their effect, and the writer would do well to consider that. But what if you took out all the verbs? Or do you want to go totally into “verbworld”? There is an intensity to that which may be what is desired.

An occasional sentence without any verb is a different question; it stands out in a way that is probably not desired. Sentence fragments get tedious rather quickly. Any word standing all alone stands out. It had better be the right one.

ON WORDS

Fear the abstract; such words bring on intellectualizing rather than feeling. Look for crucial words. Which words really work, really matter? Are you doing them justice? Are they getting buried by a bunch of other words? Do they bear repeating, rhyming, being tried in another place in the phrase, in the sentence, in the line, in the stanza? Are some words just showing off? Would we be better off without them? Especially look at the little words. Are some of those rhetorical? Do we need all the connectives? Any connectives? Do they seem judgmental?

Does every word ring right? Do we experience each word to its full capacity? What about its abstract sound? Would the energy change if the word appeared in a different place? What if you dropped some word? Added some? Used a different word? Is there the right amount of similarity or contrast in the collection of words?

Remember, a feeling and a comment are not the same thing. Are any words we use – particularly those big ones, life, death, happiness, etc. – merely a cheap short cut, a way of saying something we would rather not go into?

STRUCTURE

Short poems, under ten lines, are challenging, but they may be just what is called for. If you are writing a long poem, ask yourself often how long is long enough? Did you start in the right place? Often you could begin a lot later. Does the poem end in the right place? You do not need to walk all over the punch line. There is room for the reader at that end, you know.

How's the momentum? Look carefully at your words to see which are progression indicators. Are you well served by stopping and starting? Accelerating and decelerating energy? Remember good old foreshadowing, reprise, contrasting pairs, fulfilling pairs, incremental series, surprises? We have looked at cropping, taking out what we don't need, and cropping as reframing, but how about adding arching and other framing devices?

We mentioned that stanzas are a popular unit. We know to expect that the opening stanza has a particular role.

Sky Poet, November Night

Too human to hear the words,
I glimpse pulsing thoughts
as the sky poet works,
bold line of dipper handle stars
asserting meter
faint on the wild cadence
of aurora shimmer.

Just before dawn
the saucer of the old moon
balances aloft a stack of planets,
Venus and Jupiter
echoing that linear meter
of night's earlier stanza

until the sun reasserts
the radiance
of its own intention.

The final stanza also has special impact and perhaps more so. The middle stanza may serve as a pivot, a place for change, for resolution, for going deeper. It may be a fulcrum, or just be serving as dead space. Take a look. Beginning, middle, and end – are they working the way you would like? Are there narrative threads that need tweaking? Is there something we need to be reminded of once more? Rich details, strong feelings we need to manage properly? We don't want to lose them; we don't want to be overwhelmed by them. How do they feel?

RHYTHM AND RHYME

Do we feel a rhythmic presence? Very much? A little? Is it subtle, organic, instinctive? Or blatant but attractive? Is there a proper fusion of form and content? A sound unit is not the same thing as unit of meaning or a grammatical unit. The regular beat, with all the insistence of a metronome, demands some touches of rhythmic variation or syncopation. Not only do we enjoy well-crafted rhythms and rhymes within a line, we appreciate rhymes schemes of line ends. Rhyme is not passé; it just no longer has a monopoly on the way we write poems.

Rhythm can help move us along into the world of the poem. We might enjoy its comfort and support as well as its exciting energy. Long breathless sentences have different energy than short, powerful lines. Choose well. Is the energy appropriate, sufficient? How many long sentences in row or how many short sentences do we want? Are too many of the sentences of

approximately the same length? It will probably take a difference of several words to make us realize that sentences have different weights. Since we are weighing every single word, however, we will be sensitive to that, right?

Remember that rhythm might be of repeated words, sounds, patterning of images or ideas. Even a list may be a powerful tool for accumulative accretion.

How about near/imperfect/reversed repetitions? Are you lead by repetitions to boredom or to surprise? Are the repetitions creating the right speed? Do you feel satisfying, lingering pleasure or does the rhythm make you feel hurried, with good or bad consequences? A back rub is an altogether different experience than a beating.

A final thought on all these questions. Do you understand that the reader might prefer that the poet not ask a question and proceed to answer it for us? The substance of the poem rather than its particular words ought to be able to answer the questions it poses. If the poet, however, wishes to pose and then answer the question he or she has presented, then so be it. Since all fashions are fleeting, and many rules are simply the fashion that is popular at any given time, the poet is always the rule maker. We might, however, consider the possibility that the poem suggest an answer to a question that was not quite asked. Remember what happens when you push elephants?

The INTERNET as MENTOR

If you are interested in studying the more formal forms of poetry, you may find a very comfortable next step is the web site of a course taught at the University of Northern Iowa by Vince Gotera , <http://www.uni.edu/~gotera/CraftOfPoetry/imagery.html>. A quick search online will point you to more poetry courses than you can take in one lifetime.

PUBLISHING

Devising the alphabet and printing books cheaply enough to be distributed to everyone has been a mixed blessing. Literacy changes cultures. What were once community rituals and celebrations have become ever more lonely enterprises. Computers are often blamed for exacerbating this trend of isolating individuals. That sword cuts two ways: modern technology has increasingly put us in touch with each other in quite awesome ways.

Publishing is sharing your work with a wider audience. Publishing is usually a commercial venture. Whether or not the issues are primarily economic, publishing art work is not the same as making art work. Questions related to making art should not be answered primarily on the basis of how those choices affect the publishing or marketing issues. Art making is first of all about art.

This is not the place to examine the latest ramifications of copyright law, or to tell you how to find art galleries which might show your paintings, or which poetry journals and small

magazines might print your poems if you submit them. (A host of people have figured out how to make money of setting up a “poetry contest” for which you pay a small entrance fee to get your submission read.) Nor need we explore how to get a collection of your poems and paintings printed and bound in book form. We offer no opinion on whether that form should be a traditional letterpress chapbook or a modern digital printing of your precious collection. What we can do it to suggest that there are many possibilities.

With a computer, a printer, a copy machine, smartphone, or a tablet, the individual these days has many opportunities for getting work into a form for sharing. You do not have to own the marvelous machines that make this possible; there are many copy/printing services that you can use, currently available in almost any small city.

This is the place to suggest that your creativity can also be directed to come up with satisfying ways of sharing the art you have made. Have you thought who else would appreciate the gift of your words and images? Might you, for example, email a poem to some of your friends? You may make greeting cards, Christmas cards, of your work. You may give your work as presents. You might even want to use some form of your work as wrapping paper for other gifts you give. Then there are placemats, book covers, paper airplanes, wallpaper, note cards, all waiting to be made by you, with a little help from our marvelous machines. On what sorts of papers? This is the kind of thinking about sharing that nourishes rather than constricts your options in art making. Think about that.

IV EAST MEETS WEST

Usually we see haiku in English. Here is a taste of what might be called the first pouring off the tea leaves, haiku in Japanese language, written in *romaji* (“roman letter”), if not in characters.

*furuike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto*

old pond...
frog leaps in
water’s sound
BASHŌ (1643 -1694)

Bashō’s haiku about the frog is certainly one of the most famous of all haiku. Not only has it spawned numerous translations, but also it inspired subsequent masters to explore it, as in this version by Zen master Sengai, whose paintings and verse you will surely want to explore.

*ike araba,
tonde basho ni
kikasetai*

Should a pond be here,
I'll jump in
To let Basho hear it.
-Gai

SENGAI (1750-1837)

Poets around the world are still at it, composing in both Japanese and a multitude of other languages. In Japan there are flourishing haiku societies, members of which translated the following:

iken yururu
tsukino inochiya
towa narite

three hundred years of nights –
still pond water trembles
under moon breath
MARNIE (1939-)

Bashō is considered by many to be the finest maker of haiku ever. He is credited with raising mere amusement verse to a much more significant art. A banana leaf was a visual pun on his name.

Sengai was Abbot of one of Japan's most influential Zen Buddhist monasteries at a time when Zen was a supremely powerful force in Japanese culture. The banana leaf pun, the frog as symbol of a meditator, and his words integrate impressively to form Sengai's deceptively simple poem painting.

(Marnie is humble beginner, the author of the words you are reading now.)

Haiku for children in classrooms have evolved with their own conventions. Like a point-and-shoot camera photo, a haiku presents an immediate picture. A master artist like Ansel Adams knows there is more to it. Online haiku are yet another possibility, evolving in many different ways, with announcements for haiku walks to observe nature, international haiku clubs, and groups which explore manipulating digital photo images by computer for haiku.

WHY SMALL POEMS? WHY HAIKU?

You practice the art of description
the discipline of using a form
the challenge of intensifying expression
and the virtue of revisions

THE MASTERS

A favorite subject in old Chinese paintings is a gathering of three old men, interpreted as the Buddha, Confucius, and the Taoist, Lao Tzu. A wordpaint master would have to convene a veritable convention of venerable colleagues: the Zen master, the ikebana master, the tea master, and the martial arts master.

The Zen master would council you to remain in the current moment. Use present tense if you need a verb. Be cautious, however, as verbs lure you into making declarations (who is pushing this elephant?) rather than observation (which lets us deal with the elephant). If it doesn't have Zen feeling, it's a small poem, not a haiku this master would say.

The master who uses the flower arrangements of Ikebana teaches subtleties of using nature to say more than is apparent on the surface. The image has to evoke a feeling. Life closely observed reflects one's spiritual insight.

The master of the way of tea, *cha no yu*, demonstrates the virtues of the principle of spareness – the antithesis of gaudy. With only 17 syllables there is no room for anything extraneous. No subject is too humble in this aesthetic with its high regard for the patina of age, a lonely austerity.

The martial arts master extols the virtues of self-discipline, training in vigilance and focus – and he teaches you how to wield the brush—and the eraser.

Today we have *free haiku* which are adaptations of all the traditions, if for no other reason than that haiku are being written in languages other than Japanese. The Asian Old Masters have much to teach us about art-making which is both simple and sophisticated. Is it a haiku or just a small poem? Does it matter? Write what you want.

THE PRACTICE

About the time Zen got cool here in the States, perhaps during the '60's for most of us, haiku got discovered by Westerners. D. T. Suzuki had translated over a hundred books about Zen into English. Alan Watts, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg had turned us and a road full of countercultural beatniks on both coasts on to Eastern flavors. Haiku, short little poem, easy, right? Wrong. Any poem under ten lines long is quite challenging. No room to be wrong. The haiku is meant to be what you can say in one breath, just as there are one-sitting paintings in oriental bush painting. (There is even a genre of one-stroke sumi-e paintings.)

The Chinese had a verse form called *b'ai kiu*, amusement verse, characterized by lines of five and seven sound units, often four lines. As they did with Zen, with the characters for written language, and with tea, the Japanese took this art form and made it distinctively their

own, keeping the five and seven *onji* – sound units similar but not exactly equivalent to English syllables, using only three lines, going one better as it were.

The starting verse of *renga*, a linked series made by several poets, was called a *hokku*. It always contained a seasonal reference. When the first verse evolved to stand alone, it eventually came to be called a *haiku* and almost certainly contained at least a seasonal reference, at least for those who knew the code.

English haiku makers may or may not retain the seasonal reference. They are likely to keep the balance of one short line, a longer middle line, and a short final line, even without using a syllable count. They may choose to use no capital letters or punctuation marks since Japanese lacks these. Rhyme in haiku may be avoided because Japanese syllables all end not in consonants but in one of the five vowels (or the letter *n*). Rhyming in that language could quickly become overwhelming. Eastern poets do share our fondness for alliteration, assonance, and especially, onomatopoeia.

The strong influence of Zen at the time of the development of haiku may account for the preference for ego-less haiku. Further, the Japanese don't use case, number, pronouns, relatives, or articles the way we do, so no wonder English doesn't match very precisely.

Each written character for Japanese (and Chinese) words is monosyllabic and quite evenly stressed, or rather, unstressed. This makes counting sound units convenient. Verbs are not inflected into tenses. You do not add –ed to mean you did it yesterday; you have to figure out some other way to signal that. Ambiguity and allusive resonances are considered a plus. There was a fashion in many English language translations of Japanese haiku for using no active verb form, but only the -ing form of the verb. Perhaps that reflects the timeless characteristic of the verbs in Chinese or Japanese language.

In their painting too, these cultures developed different conventions for not only time, but also for representing place, how the artist expresses perspective, whether seen from the point of view of an insect, a human or a bird. They had quite different ideas about pictorial composition. For our purposes, it is enough to suggest that further study would be well repaid. There are more ways to do something than we were probably taught.

A good way to get used to the idea of framing pictorial concepts differently is to make pictures on a horizontal roll, wound evenly on two rods. As the narrative unfolds, one rolls up the viewed portion of the painting. Progress is measured and slow. Scene by scene. Each like a haiku. Next, try using the roll of paper vertically as a hanging scroll. Pretty narrow. The painting will be read from top to bottom or from the bottom up, but the eye will have to be invited. It will be a leisurely trip, with conventions differing from the Western ideas.

Even though most Westerners cannot read Chinese or Japanese characters, we sense correctly that the ones we see grouped on an oriental painting are words for a poem. Yes. In addition to seals of authorship and seals of ownership, and even seals of connoisseurship, there

will be text. There will also probably be a colophon, a slender line of characters that refers to the circumstances under which the art was made – who, where, when, that sort of thing – but the larger group probably is a poem. (Haiku were written in a single vertical line of characters. On poem cards, they may be written in three vertical lines. When transcribed into phonetic alphabet version, the Japanese is often written as a single horizontal line. So Westerners, be careful with your assumptions!)

Clearly the size and shape of that text matters in the composition. In the Sung Dynasty of the eleventh century in China, from which many masterpieces of this type date, expectations were that artist, the calligrapher, and the poet were all the same person. How's that for challenge? The picture, by convention, did not simply illustrate the words. It was considered more subtle to have the thought or emotion of the words be reflected or complimented in the thought or emotion of the painting. And of course the style of the writing would be appropriate to both. The placing of the characters and the calligraphy itself may be adjusted to provide a visual effect that compliments the words of the poem.

Our Western letters are aesthetically quite different from these characters. For one thing, it takes many more words to say what a few characters express. That means English-speaking poem painters will have to keep texts fairly short so the words do not overwhelm the picture space.

Western artists will have to think about how far away a viewer/reader can stand and still be able to read the print, quite different perhaps from the ideal stance from which to view the picture. Nevertheless, what an interesting idea it is that a poem and painting are co-created, one not subservient to the other. Thinking about calligraphy as an active partner is also a good way to figure out a lot about art.

Our letters do not work in the same way that characters do with a brush. Pen is the instrument of glory for the Western alphabet. However, modern felt tip or ball point pens without the flexibility of a quill would have no *qi* as the Chinese would say. No living energy. And using a computer font? Perish the thought. Further, pseudo-oriental fonts may just look tacky, as a cheap Chinese-American take-out restaurant is to Chinese cuisine, good food in China.

The art of contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing often deals with the meaning and the appearance of things, which are sometimes contradictory. He has appealingly explored the Chinese style of writing characters combined with Western alphabet letters. You might enjoy experimenting with this combination to print a colophon for yourself.

The Square Word calligraphy system developed by Xu Bing is an elegant approach to writing roman alphabet letters in a manner reminiscent of characters. This approach however unsettled Chinese speakers who thought they ought to be able to read his characters. English language speakers were at first similarly baffled by the characters. Wasn't that precisely his point? The ink and the calligraphy brush are used just as they are when writing Asian languages.

Concepts of qi, and continuous, uncorrectable movement apply here too. It's a splendid discipline.

Here are just a few principles of Xu's so-called New English or Square Word calligraphy, which he spells out a handbook which is itself written in square word calligraphy See his web site, www.xubing.com.

"It takes a linear, phonetic system of writing and changes it into a character system based on the square. The words here may look very much like Chinese, but in fact are made up of Roman characters and are phonetic. Upon seeing them we might feel that these words are both strange and familiar. This is because they are masked words. Their surface does not reveal their contents. However, once we try to read and write according to the lessons in this book, we will quickly appreciate this system for it will give us an experience like never before."

Masked words...the strange and the familiar. Does that not sound like wordpaint?

The alphabet letter components are printed, not cursive, and quite angular in form. They are organized as characters in a system based on a square grid. Strokes are brushed from the left to right, top to bottom, and words are deciphered in that pattern as well. Lines of characters, each character representing an English word, are arranged vertically on the page, beginning at the left. Choosing among the myriad possibilities to plan most aesthetically satisfying but readable designs is almost like playing chess with yourself, says Xu. Since that describes making poems and pictures as well, this may be a subject you would like to explore. "Book From the Sky", "Ghosts Pounding the Wall", "Background Story", "Forest Project" in Kenya, "Where Does the Dust collect Itself?" concerning New York's Twin Towers: a list of the mere titles of Xu's installations signals to the sensitive "reader" that he is bent on exploring the poetic interface between the everyday world, our perception of it and how we represent that. Politically convenient or not.

Here is an intriguing twist to think about. Literate Chinese have learned to recognize thousands of their pictograph-based graphic characters. This is done by *gestalt*, not by sounding out the elements phonetically. When we Westerners look at Xu Bing's arrangements of our alphabet, we do not immediately recognize the words. We are forced to decode them. That brings us to the question of phonetics.

The Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans also use alternative phonetic systems. We Westerners use one system of letters both ways. We learn to decode our words phonetically, but then we usually move on to mere recognition as we become proficient readers. (You do not move your lips as you read silently. You learn to recognize that exotic name of a character in a novel but you may never actually think about how it is said.)

Neuroimaging now tells us that we use different parts of our brain for the different mental operations of recognizing and of decoding. Thinking about this reminds us to take care to be

clear and precise in our thinking and use of language. Realizing that there is more than one way helps us to maximize our learning and our creativity. All this word paint is delicious fun!

Chinese or Japanese grass, or running, style calligraphy presents challenges equivalent to those of cursive handwriting. The writing may be lovely to look at but impossible to read. Here is another set of challenges and opportunities for you to pursue.

NOTE: To help you in further research, the term for Japanese ink paintings is *sumi-e*. The Japanese word for haiku poems made with paintings is *haiga*. When Zen priests made these paintings to use for teaching their monks, the text/pictures are called *zenga*. *Tanka* literally means short poems, *renga* means linked poem chain, and *hokku* is the introductory strophe of the *renga*, which later came to stand alone as a *haiku*.

The links in Chinese and Japanese 'answering verse' can be something as definite as a word in common or as subtle as echoing or reflecting relationships or the rhyme category. Oriental poetry shows us that there are possibilities for forms which feature a progression of thought or mood, as well as expressing a theme and then following with a chain of variations.

One has to learn to read haiku as well as learn to write them. By reading we mean both what goes on inside your head and what happens in your mouth. We use white space to indicate pauses, but some of us use other signs. Haiku poets at one time used several dozen so-called cutting words, *kireji*, to indicate pauses and instruct how words were to be said aloud, not unlike the way a composer writes on the score such performance instructions as *molto allegro* or *pianissimo*. (These little words are counted.)

Ya means 'read this with emphasis, perhaps an admiring exclamation'. We see it in Bashō's famous frog pond poem. *Kana* means 'read this with a wondering sigh'. *Ka* is questioning. What a useful idea, *kireji* - talk about poet envy!

Conventions may be stultifying, but they may also be stimulating. *Waka* are 31 syllable poems meant to be lyrical. They have titles. Haiku are meant to be brief, only 17 syllables, and intense, the poetry of the particular which leads to personal experience of intuition. One breath. (The Buddha says don't take my word for anything; test everything for yourself. After all he lived where there were elephants and he knew better than to push them...) At one time haiku were not expected to have titles precisely because they were meant to be intuitive, expressing what was beyond labeling.

The word *haiku* itself is a mixture of *hokku*, the 5-7-5 with a seasonal reference which introduces the chain of 7-7 of *renga*, and the word *haikai*, which means amusement verse. We have seen that forms evolve. A haiku with its several lines of poetry came to demonstrate a particular progression of thoughts, an interesting and subtle balance of ideas and feelings. We see a fragment and a phrase, a setting and a zooming in or out, an image and a reaction. When we move to free haiku, small poems, all manner of progressions are worth bearing in mind. What is next? Haiku and small poems are not finished evolving yet...

When Claude Debussy went to the Paris Exposition of 1889 he was charmed by the Javanese *gamelan*. This traditional Indonesian orchestra of strings and woodwinds featured gongs, drums, chimes, and other percussion instruments. The gamelan made music that focused on progressions of sonority, not just the harmonic chord progressions we are familiar with. What a concept! What possibilities! We can hear how that affected Debussy's music forever after. Hearing rhythmic progressions of other cultures has similarly changed our jazz musicians. Consider the possibility of tonal meter patterns as in Chinese poetry, and English language can seem impoverished indeed.

The woodcuts on display at that Paris Exposition fascinated painters like Van Gogh. The influence of Japanese aesthetics inspired a whole school of what we call Japonisme. Far beyond the paintings of fan-wielding European ladies in kimono by James Whistler, the Westerners came to love asymmetry and empty spaces, with scarcely an idea of how deeply they were being influenced.

Think about where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Pacific. At the poles there are ice caps. At the equator is the tiny waist of the Panama Canal forcing a labored connection, or at the southernmost tip of South America the stormy waters of the Straits of Magellan challenge the sailor. That is perhaps not very encouraging, but do not be deterred; there is good fun to be had where East meets West. But why use the old expressions 'East' and 'West'? We are functioning as the globe that we are. We are one contemporary community of culture, based, to be sure, on varied past histories. With all our individual histories, we meet. East of what? West of what? Being, simply here and now.

Once you have considered the fact that there is more than one way to make a poem, to make a picture, to write a thought, even to think a thought, you will probably feel different. There will be no boundaries to your oceans, your world, your creativity. Bon voyage. Your trip, of course, ventures both farther out and further in.

HOW TO MEDITATE

How to meditate, an ancient teaching story:

1. An elephant lived near the temple but worked in the forest on the far side of the village.
2. Every morning the elephant walked through the market.
3. With his clever trunk he sampled the mangos
4. and bananas
5. and melons.

6. He was a disaster.

7. "What can we do about him?" demanded the vendors.

8. "The elephant does not mean to be troublesome. He just needs work to do," said the old monk at the temple.

9. Give him a length of bamboo to carry on his way to work in the forest."

10. So they tried that.

11. The elephant carried the bamboo through the village, trunk held proudly high, looking neither right nor left.

12. A state of happiness and satisfaction was reached by all.

The history of humans is replete with indications that people were doing what we now call meditation. When you remove the various religious traditions that surround this ancient practice, there seem to be two different approaches. Both are valuable, but one might choose to use one approach or the other depending on the goal at the time.

There are two schools of thought as to whether or not you should close your eyes. The aim of this practice is usually not falling asleep. Keeping your eyes at least half open may help you. Soften your focus; gaze at something lovely or something plain – or at a blank wall, at nothing at all.

These two approaches may be thought of as beginning from a common place, like the stem in the letter "Y". Paying attention to the body's breathing is the beginning core practice. Settle somewhere comfortable, perhaps sitting with the spine upright and balanced. Perhaps count the initial ten pairs of breaths. You probably recognize that this is where the teaching story of the elephant carrying the bamboo pole proudly through the market place comes in. Breathing is the stick of bamboo that will occupy the errant mind and set it safely to work. You may also use a word or phrase as a mantra, the tick of a clock, or the intricacy of a design to keep you steady on your way.

A) THE FANTASY FLOAT

Picture a small boat and use your counted breaths to help you find your way aboard. Cast off the line securing the boat to shore and let yourself drift. Any thoughts that come to you are gently dropped overboard and allowed to float away. Since you are not propelling this boat, it is free to carry you to new territory. You are very likely to find yourself in that twilight land just before or after sleep and dreams. When you return to alert state, make an immediate effort to recall both the images and the emotions, the meaning and the music.

B) THE RADIANCE ROOM

Fix your gaze on an image about two feet in front of you, either an actual image or one in your mind. Now you must be very strict with the elephant. Keep returning your mind to the image (or word or phrase that you have chosen)

This experience helps you access the part of your consciousness that is not narrative in any way. There is generally no conversation inside your head, no dream-like images, no tunes, no equations – just a gentle sensation of radiance. A way to keep returning your attention to this sort of non-attention is to study the free-form patterns that occur as if projected on the screen of the inside of our eye lids. These irregular blotches strangely do not function in the suggestive way that ink blots do. Do not fret if you find yourself flickering in and out of this radiance sensation. The novice meditator no more rests in a stable and continuous sense of peace than the novice poet pulls full-blown poems out of the air. You take what you get and you work with that, with gratitude.

NOTE TO YOUR INNER EDITOR

If you are a young person and a beginning poet, you might note well these next words that essentially warn you not be discouraged. Sometimes people who are jealous may say something unhelpful about your poems. Pay them no mind. Other people may say they don't "get" your poems. Too bad for them. Poetry is a very personal art. If it's only good for you, it's still worth pursuing. Years from now when you come upon a sheaf of your poems, I assure you, you will regard them as a gift.

If you are a senior and wish you had had the nerve to persevere when you were younger, fear not. It's never too late to make poetry. If you find some poetry appealing but not the sort which seems to be currently fashionable, don't worry. I have a sneaking suspicion that a considerable number of poets only really like their own poems. The guidelines we have been working with are just that, guide lines, not rules. If you are building up your confidence, we hope by now you feel you can mentor with authority.

Back when my mother informed me that I could not carry a tune my piano teacher also pronounced me a klutz. I was an adult when I met the extraordinary musician Blanche Honegger Moyse, violinist, choral director, teacher, who assured me that anyone who could hear and vocalize could learn to sing. It was not till I was 50 that I realized I could indeed sing and I have been a choir member ever since. But do words sing?

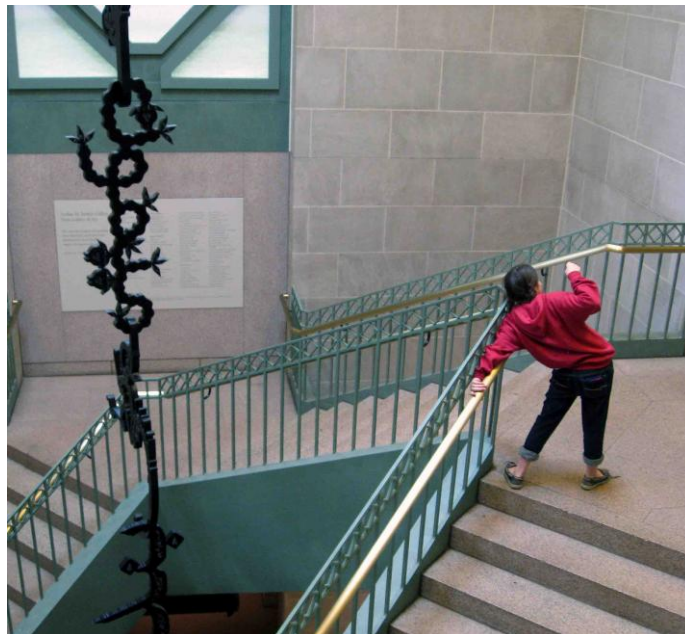
I never studied poetry in English but I did study Latin, a language which has quite precise rules for deciding whether any given syllable is to be stressed or unstressed, long or short. English seemed so arbitrary after that! But then I met Farnham Blair, recently retired from an illustrious career as an English teacher. What an invaluable ally he has been! He made an effort

to introduce me to some Maine poets, I suppose so that I would see that poets are people just like me.

Mike, as his friends call him, spent hours sitting a table, each of us with a tea cup in one hand, pencil in the other. Together we explored possibilities of ways to say things. In a sense, this was and was not “editing” since he never ever “voted” for one version or another. The downside of this approach is that it can sometimes seem that there are so many valid possibilities that you might never be sure a poem is “done”.

I was further blessed with the friendship of Marion Stocking, co-founder of the Beloit Poetry Journal. Together we went birding, but it was in her role as mentor that I thank her now. She sat me down next to her and she too taught me how to edit poetry. “Oh, this is lovely,” she said while reading one of my poems, “but the editors at the Journal will never take it.” She enjoyed it; I enjoyed it. That’s more than enough. I will be forever grateful.

I thought about calling this work *Poem-making for Dummies*, but that was not lyrical enough. Baron Wormser, Maine’s Poet Laureate from 2000 to 2006, encouraged me to honor my own lyricism. My “voice” is quite different from his; even my way of looking at the same things is quite different. Back then this manuscript was laid out in facing columns. On the left hand page of each spread was the version for beginning poets. On the right hand page was a more advanced version. “Oh, Marnie, you have got a tiger by the tail,” Baron said with a laugh. No, he had not seen a poem crafting book simultaneously for both the beginner and the would-be mentor, but he was wonderfully supportive even though that form made for an awful lot of pages. Of course he was; Baron’s life’s work is encouraging people to make word painting a part of daily life.



Caroline and her smartphone capture Monkeys Grasping at the Moon

Visiting the museums of Washington D C gives one a glimpse into the arts of the Far East, both ancient and contemporary. This calligraphic sculpture, called *Monkeys Grasp for the Moon* is the work of contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing and was photographed on exhibit in the Smithsonian.

Monkeys Grasp for the Moon was designed for the Sackler Gallery for the 2001 exhibition titled *Word Play: Contemporary Art by Xu Bing*. Each link forms the word *monkey* in one of a dozen languages. Interpretive panels explain that “The work is based on a Chinese folktale in which a group of monkeys attempt to capture the moon. Linking arms and tails, they form a chain reaching down from the branch of a tree to the moon, only to discover that it is a shimmering reflection on the surface of a pool lying beneath them.”

It is enlightening both for Asian students viewing European arts and vice versa to discover that half the world’s civilizations approach artistic practices one had taken for granted in quite a different manner.

Over the ensuing decades, I corresponded with Xu’s English-speaking assistant at his New York studio; Xu moved back to China; I took my poet granddaughter to Washington to see Xu’s *Monkeys Grasping at the Moon*; Baron moved to Vermont; I wrote more poems; made several trips to China; and taught meditation for Adult Ed. I supplied bird poems for the local Audubon Chapter members’ handsome photographs for *A Sky of Birds*. Among the most satisfying poem commissions, I was asked to supply a poem for the dedication of the Penobscot Narrows Bridge at Verona and one for the dedication of an Island church.

When then Maine Poet Laureate Wes McNair selected two poems for his weekly Take Heart column, featuring a poem a week by a Maine poet, published in Maine newspapers I was interested to see which of my poems he had selected. More significantly, he asked me to tell how the poems came to be. In answering that, I became acutely aware of how important it was to me to share what I’ve learned with young poets. Not just about making poems, but about my own development. Yes, my personal history with poems and poets would be described by the overworked expression “checkered”, but that’s quite an apt description. In high school I wanted to take art as a major subject but that conflicted with what was then called “College Prep English”. So what said I. After all, English is my native language; the “other” English course offered at that hour will do. And that is how I came to know a great deal about the New Jersey state reform school system and nothing about writing term papers or Shakespeare or poetry as it was in English. But that was only a step along the way. As I have said, I did have a strong education in the works of the Latin poets. I enjoyed eventually teaching Latin in a tough urban high school. My students loved what they learned about language, how they really had an advantage on college entrance tests etc, but that’s another story....

Reputations may still be made according to who you know, or what’s in or out of fashion. Success may be fostered or squelched by market forces, and this is still true in all the arts. But

making art, painting with words, remains all yours. The tools at your disposal are more exciting than ever.

If exploring poems, and the craft of making them has seemed appealing to you, the work of creating this book of poetry outside and in has been worthwhile. If, as Baron Wormser suggests, you have found this an engaging and not intimidating enterprise, I am delighted.

THE END
or
THE BEGINNING

yin/yang

1) **Called away suddenly, the Master leaves a note on the new rock in his garden.**

2) (note blows away)

3) **"This must be my lesson for today."**

(says androgynous student, puzzled looking at new rock in garden before shuttered house)

4) (student takes bug's eye view of rock)

5) (student takes bird's eye view of garden and rock)

6) (student sits before rock, at eye-level, meditating)

7) **"I hope I've got it."**

(says student packing up to go home)

8) **All the way home there is humming in the head of the student.**

(student hurrying on path, arriving at home)

9) (student with brush and ink stone produces poem-paintings in profusion)

10) **"This is a masterpiece."**

(says teacher to student at next meeting over a poem-painting)

11) "Oh, thank you, Master. You are certainly a great teacher."

12) **"No, good learning is always in the good student."**

(says Master)

Garden rock smiles.

- inspired by the words and pictures of renowned Tsai Chih Chung, Taiwanese author and illustrator, whose cartoons interpreting Chinese philosophy are popular around the world.

CREDITS

All poems are by Marnie Reed Crowell, except for the haiku of Bashō and Sengai.

Bashō's Old Pond

From *The Haiku Handbook, How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku*, by William J. Higginson, Kodansha International, 1985.

Sengai's Response

From *Sengai, Master Zen Painter*, by Shokin Furuta, translated by Reiko Tsukimura, Kodansha International, 1985.

Marnie's Still Pond haiku was translated into Japanese by Kimiko Shimazu.

Especial thanks to those who encouraged Marnie's first efforts at making poems, perhaps the most significant contribution one can make for launching new poets.

Poet Farnham Blair graciously added his insights based on his years of teaching in high school and some stints in the fourth grade.

Marion K. Stocking, one of the founders and for fifty years an editor of Beloit Poetry Journal added her characteristically acute observations.

Poet Baron Wormser served as Poet Laureate of Maine, the state in which he served as librarian and educator for thirty years. Baron taught at the Frost Place in Franconia, New Hampshire and in the Stonecoast MFA Program of the University of Southern Maine. He is author of numerous books of poetry and essays. With David Cappella he wrote *Teaching the Art of Poetry- the Moves*, and more recently, *A Surge of Language- Teaching Poetry Day by Day*.



Marnie Reed Crowell has taught gifted students, biology, art, storytelling, and Latin. Graduate of Randolph-Macon Woman's College with a Masters in Biology from University of Pennsylvania, her articles have appeared in such magazines as *Natural History*, *Audubon*, *Reader's Digest*, *Redbook*, and *Down East*. She is author of *Greener Pastures*, *Great Blue - Odyssey of a Heron*, *North to the St. Lawrence*, *Flycasting for Everyone* (with Gary Lewis and Peter McNair) and *Quick Key to Moths and Butterflies*, and *Quick Key to Birds* (with Kenneth L. Crowell). Her collected bird poems accompany photographs of local Audubon chapter members in *A Sky of Birds*. Threehalf Press was a joint venture with photographer Ann Flewelling, producing such works as *Island Meditation*, a handbook about how to meditate and Marnie's novel, *The Coast of May*.

An ardent supporter of Island Heritage Trust and its conservation efforts, Marnie lives in mid-coast Maine, where she paints and makes poems.

