

MiPO

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If you were able to place poetry in the world where it does not seem prominent, how would it behave there?

Like Wallace Stevens' firecat. It would leap – to the right – to the left – and bristle in the way. Then it would close its bright eyes and sleep and the game would start all over again at 9 a.m. sharp the next morning. Or it would take a more covert approach by slipping the occasional baboon and/or periwinkle into our dreams.

Lorene Lamothe



If you could spend a day with a living poet you admire, what would you do together? What might a passerby overhear?

Well, to be honest, I picture any real-life encounter being awkward and/or studded with attempts on my part to appear at least minimally un-idiotic and hip. Faced with such a prospect I would probably concoct a reasonably convincing excuse to cancel.

That said, I wouldn't mind a kind of surreal IM session with a dead poet, probably Emily Dickinson, which would allow me to retreat behind the anonymity of a screen name. In which case I would start out by posing a few high-falutin' questions to Dickinson about transport and most likely end by asking her gossipy stuff about the "master" letters. I also wouldn't mind a stream-of-consciousness session with Dylan Thomas - which I think would be an incredible off-rhyme image of random: yellow light, night-clouds, a tangle of reflections on windows, wind rattling, an argument unraveling in darkness, a sleepless clock ticking, someone's boredom surfing riffs on canned laughter... of course, it would be much better than this, but you get the idea.

Which is more important: a) poetry and politics or b) poetry and philosophy? Why?

I think there's usually more philosophy in poetry than politics. Or at least in the poems that I like best. That's as it should be. But I also believe the relationship between poetry and politics can be important, in that poetry can form a sort of counterbalance to politics. People in the Soviet Union used to memorize Anna Akhmatova's poems and recite them to each other because under Stalin it was dangerous to be in possession

of them. Under those circumstances the relationship becomes important - even critical - but not because the poems themselves are political. All the better if they're not.

However, I admit that perhaps there are times when politics must insert itself into the actual poetry. To quote Neruda on this: "...and you'll ask why doesn't his poetry/speak of dreams and leaves/and the great volcanoes of his native land?//Come and see the blood in the streets."

Please describe your favorite poem or kind of poetry.

I like all kinds of poetry and my favorite kind varies according to my mood, which in turn varies with the season, the tint of my daughter's happiness, and whether or not I'm having a good hair day. That's one of the things that draws me to poetry. Sometimes you need a poem in which the words react against each other so strongly that the images burn a hole in language and you're left staring up "in perfect silence at the stars." Sometimes you need a poem in which the words coexist more or less comfortably, like a woman knitting a blue scarf to the tune of her cocker spaniel asleep at her feet.

I like kids' poems, which I suppose is pretty much the same as saying I like the way kids talk. Because language is new to them they use words in ways the rest of us don't. Their syntax won't line up properly and they don't know which words match with which and that's interesting. When my daughter was younger she'd say things like "it's storming out" or "what if the sky is God's blue dress." The poems I like best do the same thing.

A few poets: Rainer Maria Rilke, Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath. Wallace Stevens, William Blake, Pablo Neruda, Dylan Thomas. Tomas Tranströmer, Edith Södergran. Keats. Bob Dylan. Izumi Shikibu.

Some new poets: Arielle Greenberg, Lisa Gluskin, Amanda Auchter. Many others.

Where will we see you and your work in five years?

I don't know. The poems I write always seem fragile, by which I don't mean beautiful or delicately crafted or anything of that nature. I mean they seem frail in relation to the idea of "work" – which is a sturdy, enduring, scary sort of word. Part of me would like to gather the poems I've written together into a full-length book; I've already done this, to some degree. Another part of me sees my poems aging rapidly, to the point where the lines wear through to translucency. Maybe someday someone will open a shoebox in my closet and the shock of that exposure will destroy the lines completely. Then maybe whoever it is will scatter the ashes of the words across his or her consciousness and make new poems. Whatever the case, I hope I will be able to keep writing, that I won't lose my connection with words and images and sounds, with poetry.

Tell us a story: what drew you to poetry in the first place? Why did you start writing?

Here are two:

About a dozen years ago I woke up and had a poem, or something resembling a poem, inside my head. It sounds ridiculous but I actually got up, got dressed and drove to the campus computer center. Nobody was there except the usual scattering of students pulling all-nighters

and a couple of guys playing video games. I wrote the poem and it was a bad poem, even a horrible poem. But it felt good to have written it.

Not too long afterward I dropped out of grad. school and my husky Jack and I moved back to my parents' home for a bit. I used to spend hours writing on this old computer in their unheated basement. I wrote maybe 300-400 poems in a fairly short time; it was the closest I've come to pulling an Emily Dickinson, at least in terms of productivity. Once when Jack and I were down there somebody came into the house and walked around and left. Later my mom noticed a bottle of her good wine had gone missing. I never found out who was in the house that night or if the disappearing wine bottle was connected with the incident in any way. Nor do I really understand why I started writing when I did. I had always read poetry, but had never tried to write it myself. I felt unequal to poetry, daunted by it. I still do. But if I'm not writing, I'm less happy. So I try to write.

Story #2 is really just a vague memory of an afternoon spent at a friend's house. We were about seven? The dining room table was strewn with crayons and paper, and I seem to remember attempting something elaborately unsuccessful with scissors. I'm pretty sure it was winter and that one of the poems I wrote was about snowflakes. Anyway, that's my first real recollection of writing poetry and it's a very warm memory. The poems weren't about words. They were about the colors and shapes and textures of words. I liked that. And that's still how it feels for me when I write poems.



Lorene Lamothe is the author of the chapbook *Camera Obscura* (Finishing Line Press, 2005). She teaches English and lives in a small town in Massachusetts with her six-year-old daughter, Caitlyn. She likes coffee, labyrinthine mystery novels, movie nights with her daughter, Hopkins scholars, and (if she can motivate herself) running. She has recently embarked upon a 20-year plan to write a novel.

Timescape #8

The future unrolls its neon carpet across a desert.

You smile and wave, but you're riding bareback on a credit card
traveling too fast for the human eye to see.

I wanted to tell you about the door a skeleton key sky
can unlock.

I wanted to tell you it's been raining funerals all day
and everyone I know is joining a congo line of ghosts.

Instead, when I get home, atv's are carving their initials
on forests and special sauces are waiting in line

so I curl up inside the fifth dimension, scatter schools of feeling
with chocolate and red wine.

All along the street, darkness covers phone lines. A thousand
lowercase letters sign into invisible motels.

In my diary I write: behind bars, half way past getting lost,
chandeliers and miscellaneous lamps burn yellow.

1:17:22

I was thumbing through the pages of a book.

The sound of sirens kept skipping.

The sky was hidden behind shades of gray.

Cars were backed up all the way to horizon.

The sound of an ambulance kept skipping.

Across the street faces filled windows.

The sky felt paper thin.

Then the ambulance turned off sound and drove away.

You could hear the silence cracking.

Someone came and put cones around absence.

Someone came and took pictures of absence

Someone came and took video of absence.

I was thumbing through the pages of a book.

The windows were empty with reflections.

Cars flowed toward horizon and faded over the edge.

Downstairs someone was washing dishes.

The present went on circling.

Monet to His Wife, 1879

You thought it was the fog, a shade
of green, vapors blurring

the badly set bones of your soul:
that the luminosity of eyes and skin

was just a shuffling of mirrors—
me dealing illusion for bread, wine,

even the birth of our child. I remember
how your cries slashed through

a canvas of half-empty hallway,
the brushstrokes of fear

traced and retraced. At dawn, the doctor
stepped into a frame of open door

and smiled. When I handed him
the painting, he tucked it under his arm

and turned away. Sky fanned
out from behind his coat,

a wake of poppies rose
from the rain seeds of his departure.

This morning, I stood over you
and snapped the air high above

your body. It filled with your
absence, then settled onto stillness.

There was nothing left, only colors: gray
of the Seine in winter, yellow

of skin waxed thick with sickness, blue
of your spirit gone missing. I did not

weep. Instead, 'like an animal
that could not stop turning a millstone,'

I arranged palette, brushes, your
eyelids, then peered out from behind

the easel and set off hot in pursuit
of the shifting light of death.

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