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CALLAHAN COUNTY STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

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American Life in Poetry: Column 238

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Though some teacher may have made you think that all poetry is deadly serious, chock full of coded meanings and obscure symbols, poems, like other works of art, can be delightfully playful. Here Bruce Guernsey, who divides his time between Illinois and Maine, plays with a common yam.

Yam

The potato that ate all its carrots,
can see in the dark like a mole,
its eyes the scars
from centuries of shovels, tines.
May spelled backwards
because it hates the light,
pawing its way, paddling along,
there in the catacombs.

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A Friend

I never thought that I would find
a friend so great and a friend so kind
I look up to you in every way
'cause I learn something from you every day.

Without you I don't know where I'd be
but you're still here, friends with me
you deserve so much more than I can give
but without you I wouldn't live.

You've given me more than money can buy
and for you I'd give my all and I would die
This feeling I feel gets stronger every day
hoping not to mess it up, I constantly pray.
You're an angel from God up above
and Im thankful for your understanding love
because when you're around everything seems right
and for you, until the end, I will fight.

It doesn't matter what you do or say
because you will be my friend anyway
I know the real you that's down deep inside
and in you, I will always confide.

Thank you for being the friend you are
you're my best friend, an angel by far
everything in you is an inspiration to do great
and you will be loved by all cause that's your fate!

So never stop being the real and wonderful you
cause God shines through in all that you do
and whenever it seems like Im never there
remember this: I love you and I will always care!

Author: Unknown

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor
Eastland/Callahan County
Newspapers
P. O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448
email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

Submissions sought to:

Star
P.O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or liable material.

Poetry Media Service

Saga/Circus, by Lyn Hejinian. Omnidawn, \$15.95

In Lyn Hejinian's latest book, two long poems (but they hardly feel long) make short work of narrative and dismantle genre with an alert and damaging wit. First comes "Circus" or "Lola." This prose piece, with its attention to rings, battles, payers and players, moves characters through a tightening, finally dismaying cycle of events. Next comes "Saga," also titled "The Distance," which applies pressure to two figures of continuity: the first-person speaker and the sea voyage. Together, these texts form a contrast of cyclicity and stasis and test the limits of writing as vehicle and vessel of both violence and knowledge.

"Lola" begins as a pitch-perfect homage to the work of Gertrude Stein, advancing in short prose sections from "Chapter One" to "Chapter Two," titles she repeats until we do not know where we are. Eventually, we arrive at "Chapter If It's True," "Chapter Between Two and Three," "Chapter Supplied," "Chapter To View." This recalls Stein's delighted, flattening disregard for textual hierarchy, which produces the incandescent waywardness of such works as *Four Saints in Three Acts*. By the second page of "Lola," chapters seem literally to have come loose from the structural framework of narrative: "chapters in a mood, mid-air, in plumes."

Such recklessness is potentially hazardous for the characters who people "Lola," characters inasmuch as they recur and have proper names.

The sisters Hertha!

Drew!

Nina!

Abdul Tommy Ahmed!

Trish O'Reilly!

Kurt Krakauer!

Ludmilla Kaipa!

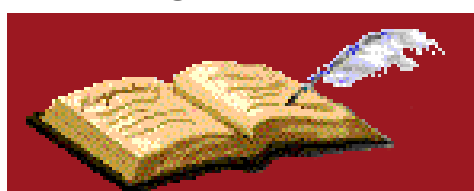
And Sue!

It is not just with that final "Sue," but in the very peopledness of these lines, that we hear Stein's "Susie Asado" et al. The first sentence marshals its many nouns like a marching band around the goal posts "are" and "are." The declarative energy of that nominative "players" is undone

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Writers &
Poets**



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The pen is mightier than the sword

by the duplicity of the word itself, referring as it does to those who act with agency, seriously; those who act in a drama, falsely; those who play games, literally; and those who play games figuratively, bending the rules like Hejinian and Stein.

Thanks to its writerliness (and its writer), many delightful, unabashed set pieces grace "Lola," including epigrams, metaphors, and extended images. These are often serious and dubious at the same time, such as "one wants to visit a town before buying a house there or burning it down," or, of greyhounds and, by implication, the Wal-Mart employees who allegedly own them, "they don't run from tyrants but for them." In an unexpectedly comic turn, "Lyn Hejinian" enters the text and is disparaged as a minor writer; a paper on her work is given a "C."

Where "Lola" most pointedly departs from its Steinian model is the entrance of violence into this merry, convivial text. At this point the cyclicity of the text appears less marvelous and more like a trap for its characters, who are victim to whatever fusillade or battle enters the sentences and who cannot escape violence except by disappearance from the text. The prose turns tense, then gloomy: "The chapters do but are never done;" "Grief takes time, they say—it takes it all." Hejinian's sentences, and her characters, cannot help but be interested in violence. It is 2009 already, and, as the truism goes, you may not be interested in violence, but violence is interested in you.

If there is one ultra-narrative (and ultraviolent) poetic genre, it is the saga, the Northern European form given to armed struggle, sea voyage, and obsessive genealogical accounting. As its title suggests, the mood of Hejinian's saga, "The Distance," is not one of action but of meditative stasis. Unlike a conventional saga, there is no historical or geographical GPS at work here; the speaking voice is simply at sea, shipbound, in motion but adrift.

... I won't pretend

To be an historian, how could I, when I

have no idea

Of today's date. Though I know we

embarked one morning early

In May, I have no idea how long ago that

was

And I don't care. I breathe, I twist my

hair. I watch

The sea. At times it resembles an eye

But it isn't watching me.

Lineageless, battleless, the female speaker shrugs off the patriarchal requirements of saga even while her free verse is gathered up in a rhythmic, graceful full rhyme ("me," "sea"), which stands in for ancient, songlike sound structures. As with "Lola," here genre itself is at once medium, material, and subject, the pliant, immersive sea in which craft sails. In "The Distance," genre's mutability and capacity is figured by the literal sea. The impossible relationship of writing to knowledge spurs the quest, but it is a quest of betweenness, not of arrival or departure. The same theme is restated elsewhere: "I want to understand / What I have seen and understand / That nothing I have seen explains what I have seen. Like that." In this version, that gestural "Like that" underscores language's excess to its own project, the way it adds to and even doubles the world it would describe, thereby constantly extending its own task.

"The Distance" is so busy with ars poetica that it is implicitly a more optimistic work than "Lola." Like *My Life*, which the author is constantly reworking and (happily) extending, the possibilities within Hejinian's oeuvre are inexhaustible, her working and reworking of writing's generic and epistemological potentials and capabilities is unending.

Joyelle McSweeney's poetry collections include *The Commandrines* and *Other Poems* and *The Red Bird*, and her reviews appears widely. She is co-editor of *Action Books* and a professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. This article first appeared in the *Boston Review*. Learn more about Lyn Hejinian, and her poetry, at www.poetryfoundation.org.

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*Any and all ages
welcome to write*