

Wendy Babiak

Wendy Babiak, Literary Editor for *QJI*, received her BA in Creative Writing from the Writing Workshop at Eckerd College. Her poetry has appeared in *The Louisiana Review*, and online at *undressed...*, *Butterfly*, *The Journal of Contemporary Buddhism*, and *The Writer's Hood*. She is currently co-host of the Your Writing conference at the Speakeasy, the online discussion forum of *Poets & Writers*, which is as close to teaching as she hopes to get.

Sort(ing) of Sonnet

Falwell and his ilk: ugh! Now they blame
abortion and the gays for this horrendous attack.
Jeeze, don't it just make you wanna yack?
Some folks think instead it could well be
evangelistic invasion sponsored by corporate slavery.
Or bin Laden's ear in Satan's clutch.
No doubt we're better but by how much?
In lots of ways our culture's lame:
we want our bread buttered on both sides
want ten kinds of cake, want to drive
our SUVs to pristine valleys
to somehow sleep in starlight with no bugs.
(((((((YOU))))))))) We send cyberhugs.
September ash tumbles like snowflakes in the breeze.

Too Many Words for Sorrow

Taste won't let her lean toward narcotics
not because that leads to trouble with the Law
or even because it's so unhealthy
but because she hates junkie fashion.

The whole War on Drugs is a racket
a swindle, an unabashed plot
to drain our collective wallet.
Is it fair to prosecute a man

because the itch in his bones and blood
leads him to smoke yellow flowers
rather than stuff his mouth with chocolate?
Which of us is immune to addiction?

On this fair morning she sits in silence
letting sweet coffee slide down
letting it lift her languid warmth
and restore her to the presence

of sunlight and wild strawberry
frolicking in her makeshift garden.
Should she be restless and obsess
if she finds her *cafe au lait*

necessary? Should she freak out
and pitch this ancient habit
never again to share with friends
laughter over a cup when they call?

She refuses to cut herself
loose from all the substances
to which she clings, however much
abstinence might be in style.

There is no curtain, no rift
between her and the infinite.
She is intimate with trees.
Each strand of the world

weaves through her, each breath
a chance to behold the art of relation.
She needs water and air, tortilla and croquette.
She needs to spin and doze.

As a bonus she'll take banter, the glitter
of emerald and sequins, the warmth
of a gentleman in the hour of frost.
She'll take her tortillas zesty.

She gives back breath for the pine
piss and snot and poetry.
The pine gives a perch for the falcon.
Later, a post for a fence.

This is not just slick rhetoric.
But let's change tack
and try another analogy.
Ponder this, true and terrible:

We plod on a track toward turbulence
addicted to marble mezzanines, to silver and copper
to food in fast wrappers, to a horrible plethora
of pesticides and herbicides that dilapidate the rain

running from mountain to ocean, killing coral
leaving the scarlet world broken, gray and still.
Our demise is as yet unborn but we live
in the prelude. When our candle

has burned out, when our smoke curls
so thick from smokestack and car
that the only light in the night bounces back
from the opaque sky to our embarrassed bulbs

and the stars no longer glitter
when our fields are bare
because nothing can grow in dead soil
we'll go the way of Atlantis.

Then no Magus will spur life back with iron blade.
There will be no mistrial to declare
no matter how chaste our lifestyle.
The loss will be total. For now

in her little quarter, a full nine yards across
she fertilizes her roses and hollyhocks
her sage and geraniums, lavender and lamb's ear
with compost, the soil an appendage

of her breathing self. She sips her coffee
watching a pair of dragonflies
freewheel in a spontaneous minuet.
The end is not here yet.

Poetry: A Syllabus

for LilyRose, and all students of Poetry

Introduction: *I love Poetry.*

I once spent a year in Spain. Of all the sick
dishes devoured strangest had to be squid
simmered in its own ink. I won't eat you.

I don't want to raise a school of poets, of any sort
but especially those...surely you've seen them
their faces pinched against bliss, their hands
curled in fists, knees ready to buckle
under the world's great weight.

Lesson 1. *Hard Truth: Poetry Cannot be Taught.*

Park your carcass right here and we'll chat
about poetry and how we can live it.
Do you really hope for me to tell you
"You do thus and thus, thusly"?

Lesson 2. *Dress The Part: The Uniform.*

Ornament yourself with the bright bodies
of insects: a cape made from butterfly wings
a crown striped with bee bellies.

Lesson 3. *Write One Good Line. And then another.*

Make some kind of magic, e.g.:

"Eleven boxes he brought, nestled like matryoshka.
Inside the last, a fish-scale, rainbowed in the sun."

Lesson 4. *Pace: Pace Yourself.*

We'll hide the embryonic poems
in the womb of our silent mouths.
How somber we'll seem with our unmoving lips!
(But our eyes will sparkle with intransient laughter.)
We'll let the poetry move outward at its own pace
like a smile on an amazed baby's face.

Lesson 5. *Work Ethic: Write if you Must.*

Look at the energy bees find for their foraging!

Lesson 6. *Show Me: Description.*

Let's build a mansion made entirely of Depression glass:

the walls wading in morning glories, the floors
sparkling with moonflowers, the light filtering
through a ceiling pressed with tiny lilies shaped like stars.
We can waltz around with our brooms
sweeping out the cobwebs from all unoccupied rooms.
We'll evict misery with our busy brooms.

Lesson 7. *Forget Everything. Really.*

Let's do it all backwards today:
dress from the outside in, clean from bottom
to top, splash tonic in our gin. But let's cover
our cups--there's dust enough clogging this throat.
Heck, let's just close our books and go outside.

Lesson 8. *Ponder: Questions & Comments.*

What calculus can determine love's learning curve?
What sort of forest will grow in this rain of words?

If the stone-paved road to poetry were as narrow
as the golden-needle way to Heaven
there wouldn't be so many damned poets.

No measurement can encompass
the width of the chasm
between two beating hearts.

Lesson 9. *What? Why Teach It, Then?*

A candle set before a mirror casts twice the light.
Between you and me I think there's something to this.
The impossibility of silence no longer fills me with dismay.
And we will weather all the sickness, all the scorn;
we will weather the sunny days too bright
remembering the coolness of the night.

Lesson 10. *Go: You're On Your Own.*

A poem must grow secluded in the dirt.
Would you dig up a lily to observe its roots?
A blemish on a rose's petal
just magnifies the surrounding pink.
As our vision clears we see what cannot help but be:
it's solitude we need, despite its lack of sympathy.
I really had hoped to finish before I said goodbye.

