

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

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lyrical experimental poetry

it is hard for reviewers to critique experimental poetry. what is experimental writing? how does a critic come to understand experimental work? there are concepts and formulas and rituals that apply to poetry but are not always applicable to this particular genre. lyrical poems can be experimental (read Rae Armantrout). the term experimental writing has become a 'set' of rules concerned with being set apart from what is conceived as academic, provincial, modern, post modern, avant-garde, etc, etc; thus, the new genre of poetry has a set of rules (or lack of definitions), it has become conceived, by making steadfast the elements of style by applying a particular set of rules, and that is okay, except in the process of critique, the lyrical experiment is excluded, or so it seems.

in the following exercises, I explain, what maybe included in an experimental genre; my fanciful flight with word play:

*(instinct makes bronze stature-)
what then is instinct
if instinct makes bronze
is it (a) preconceived possibilities
perhaps perhaps (preconceived)*

the above poem is lyrical, but is it. we are given information, conceptual indications about the nature of instinct and (in simple) directives. what if I abstract even more from the poem:

*then instinct
makes a statue
statue possibilities
(perhaps)*

if I then take every third word from the first rendition I come to this poem:

*a what instinct
makes it*

we have one possibility of what experimental poetry is or can be or becomes, by first creating a poem, then through the process of abstraction, a poem.

in the next poem I take every seventh word from an essay by T. S. Eliot, "the Metaphysical Poets" first published in the times literary supplement, oct. 20, 1921, "dissociation of sensibility" extracting the words from the third page of the essay. I also occasionally revise the tense of a word, I make decisions on the line breaks, the punctuation and whatever is required to present a poem:

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*rest west
the sail gale soft
I be by there is a bishop*

may Herbert be metaphysical

*shall nor mystery lifted beauty
having found silent sense
their nothing exception
at which metaphysical association
time, word, language
to these and Herbert carried
without structure,
hand, this fidelity best ode*

*thought, whether nominally marvellous
saint, short solemnity thou
death limited*

lyrical may come from clipping words, (collage) pasting them together, yet, the poem is still experimental in being an extraction of a previous work. even in a listing poem there may be lyric or at least can be lyrical because of choice. I excerpt words from the same page to create a list of r and s words. I put three words to a line for the sake of space, also to be read across as well as down:

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| retake | rest | rise |
| ravished | resides | richness |
| rule | sleep | soft |
| slow | sit | several |
| stanzas | school | so |
| shall | shall | said |
| stars | such | silent |
| seize | sense | some |
| stars | smile | some |
| simple | simplicity | simplicity |
| success | structure | sentences |
| sometimes | simple | so |
| some | so | saint |
| speed | short | syllables |
| solemnity | sole | so |
| shrewd | sensitive | so |

the above list, becomes another poem when I add conjunctive words in this experimental poem:

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retake rest

*and rise ravished
and reside richness in ruling sleep soft
and slow sit several stanzas*

schooled so shall, shall be said

*stars are such silent seize
and sense. some stars smile
some are simple in simplicity
and simplicity in success in structure*

*and sentences. sometimes simple is
so that some are so so saint
speed in short syllables
and solemnity's sole so shrewd*

and sensitive, and so so-so

composing these experimental poems, the lyric remains because I am lyrical; I relate to lyric like another relates to words that impart knowledge or information or whatever...there is no separating the poet writer from their instinct or their inclinations. for me there is only, how I process words, phrases, there is only the way in which i play with those words and phrases until the poems resonate, because of the inevitable (choices).

to exclude poems from the experimental genre because they have an inner or outer rhythm, is tantamount to excluding a woman from the ladies room or a man from the ladies room. the room is set-up to be a place where one defecates, where one lets go of what has been taken in. the transference; what is thought to be a set space for a particular action or non action, can become something other than what it was intended for/as; intention is a self determination. kitchens can replace toilet space, (I don't recommend it) or living rooms or bedrooms. I sleep on the couch, (sometimes,) does that make the living room less of a bedroom. lets not argue over potty chairs; all the places we sit and take time to contemplate. some experimental poems live within a strict limit and some are all over the place, doing what the poem needs to do.

the question for me is, does the poem enter a space with intention? does the poem have an explanation, so that one might read the poem as it is intended. if an intention is to be realized by the reader and requires an explanation, then who explains? until there are more critics, critiques of this particular genre, we are stuck with the few critics we have, who seem to think thinly, thinking he knows what the intention is within the intended space. then there is the person who doesn't need to know what the experiment is and that person can read un-impeded by the poem's intention. is that enough intention for the reader?