



Carol Smallwood interviews
C.B. Anderson, author of *Roots in the Sky, Boots on the Ground: Metaphysical Poems*

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Carol Smallwood: Joseph S. Salemi commented on *Roots in the Sky, Boots on the Ground: Metaphysical Poems*: “On the one hand it aspires to a high level of intellectual seriousness, but at the same time, the book maintains an unbreakable link to our terrestrial limitations.”

It’s cover and format makes it a very attractive book. Many (besides me) will recognize you from the very popular PBS television series of over twenty years, *The Victory Garden*, in which you were head gardener. What’s

some of your other background?

CBA: Well, I matriculated at Wesleyan University in Middletown CT, where I had an opportunity to study poetry under Richard Wilbur. Alas, I did not take advantage of this, because I did not know then what I would be doing some forty or fifty years later. For three years I lived in a mountain valley in rural Arizona, where I worked for the local ranchers as a cowboy. I later continued my college education at Harvard University Extension, where I finally earned my bachelor degree c. 1988. While there, I took courses from Calvert Watkins, the greatest American Indo-Europeanist, which still inform my tendency to borrow from other languages in the family, which include Sanskrit, Farsi & Tocharian A & B. I grew up in a small town in eastern Pennsylvania when there were still many woods around to wander in.

Smallwood: How did you come upon metaphysical poetry? It makes me think of grad classes and difficult poets to understand like John Donne! You have a lot of courage to use it.

CBA: I think I read my first John Donne poem for a high school English class. Back then you could still get a decent education in a public school. Why do you say that John Donne is difficult to understand? His language is a bit archaic, but his themes seem fairly modern. It didn’t take courage on my part to cozy up to him. The man was a straight shooter, as I myself would wish to be considered.

Smallwood: What are some popular subjects of the classical metaphysical poets and how do they compare with yours?

CBA: There is always present the contemplation of the divine and what it might mean for those of us who live within the sphere of the

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created world. And then there is erotic love, or sex, which is the eternal subject around which the world revolves. In many respects, not much has changed in the past four hundred years.

Smallwood: A conceit is a metaphor that compares two very dissimilar things and metaphysical conceits are usually bold and complex. Please give an example of a conceit in one of your poems and why you selected it:

CBA: Let's take "Escrow" — the conceit, in the normal sense of the word, is that I can address God as a peer, as an equal, in other words. This is clearly absurd, but the Lord is merciful, and metes no punishment to those who take liberties with conventional etiquette and reverence. The reason I selected it has to do with the fact that in the past few years a number of my oldest closest friends have passed away.

Smallwood: Which of the 80 poems in *Roots in the Sky, Boots on the Ground: Metaphysical Poems*, was the most difficult to write and why?

CBA: The most difficult to write? Maybe "Who" owing to the fact that I don't write a lot of blank verse, and that I felt I was putting myself at risk for a fatwa. But honestly, "Goats" might have been the most difficult in a technical sense, because it's hard to turn a rhyme every two beats.

Smallwood: Did [Mortal Soup](#) and the *Blue Yonder* use your gardening experience?

CBA: Who can say? If I wrote any poems where plants are mentioned, the answer is obvious. Incredibly, in neither of these two volumes do any of my advertently horticultural poems appear.

Smallwood: What are some links to your poetry and prose in [Society of Classical Poets](#) for readers:

It's not necessarily exhaustive, but it serves the purpose.

Smallwood: Around 700 of your poems have appeared internationally in such magazines as: *Lucid Rhythms*, *The Lyric*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*. What are a few of the most recent ones:

CBA: most recently my poems have appeared in *Snakeskin*, *Better than Starbucks*, and *Expansive Poetry Online*. They should be fairly easy to find if one is willing to undertake a concerted search.

Smallwood: Are you working on a next book and do you also write fiction, nonfiction?

CBA: For the most part, I write nothing but poetry, though I did publish "How to Write an Alexandroid" at *Society of Classical Poets*. I sometimes wish I were able to write good science fiction, but so far I am only proficient at reading it.

Carol Smallwood is a literary reader, judge, and interviewer. A recent poetry collection is *Patterns: Moments in Time* (WordTech Communications, 2019).