

Carol Smallwood

**Interview with Theresa Rodriguez**

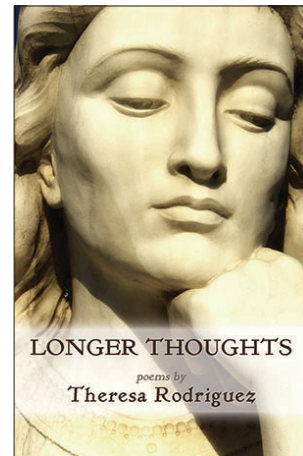
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*Longer Thoughts is the third book of poetry by Theresa Rodriguez, a retired classical singer and voice teacher who holds a Bachelor of Arts in vocal music performance from Skidmore College and a Master of Music with distinction in voice pedagogy and performance from Westminster Choir College. A native Manhattanite, she now lives outside of Philadelphia. With deep emotion, Longer Thoughts presents poems on such topics as: love, beauty, mortality, aging, and theological questioning.*

**Smallwood:** Why did you call your new collection *Longer Thoughts*?

**Rodriguez:** As opposed to my previous collection of sonnets, *Longer Thoughts* contains many longer poems in a variety of forms as well as free verse. It is a small collection but diverse in its range of subjects.

**Smallwood:** When did you begin writing poetry? Do you do other kinds of writing also?

**Rodriguez:** I am sure I began writing poetry in earnest when I was about ten and by high school had some poems published in my school's literary magazine. In addition to poetry, I have written articles for *Classical Singer Magazine* on a myriad of topics of interest to classical singers. When I was a young mother I wrote a book entitled *Diaper Changes: The Complete Diapering Book and Resource Guide* and had articles about cloth diapering published by various parenting magazines. My book *When Adoption Fails* explores my life story as an adoptee in a dysfunctional adoptive situation. In *Warning Signs of Abuse: Get Out Early and Stay Free Forever* I provide encouragement and instruction to women in abusive relationships. I am sure I have a few more books inside of me yet to come! I have also begun writing book reviews as well.

**Smallwood:** What are the classical poetry forms that appear in *Longer Thoughts* and what did Evan Mantyk of the Society of Classical Poets comment about your sonnets?

**Rodriguez:** In *Longer Thoughts* I have included the villanelle, rondeau, triolet, ode and sonnet forms, in addition to free verse. Of my sonnets Mr. Mantyk has said, "In fourteen lines, her sonnets in particular are able to communicate what takes essayists and writers thousands of words." I have endeavored to branch out to other forms while maintaining my inclination towards the sonnet. I have also begun writing in the Petrarchan, rather than mainly Shakespearean, sonnet form and have some examples of this in *Longer Thoughts*.

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**Smallwood:** How do you use symbolism and imagery in *Longer Thoughts*?

**Rodriguez:** There are three poems in particular that use symbolism and imagery in *Longer Thoughts*. In the poignant free verse “China Crystal Fairy” I describe a “delicate fairy creature” which symbolizes a particularly fragile relationship that I had broken apart though my own clumsiness. In another free verse entitled “Full Circle” I use the imagery of a tree and the fullness of its life cycle to symbolize the aging process. In the sonnet “The Rise of Fall” I also reflect on the aging process by comparing its phases to the four seasons.

**Smallwood:** What are some magazines your poetry has appeared?

**Rodriguez:** My poetry has appeared in the *Midwest Poetry Review*, the *Journal of Religion and Intellectual Life*, an Anabaptist publication entitled *Leaf Magazine*, *The Road Not Taken: A Journal of Formal Poetry*, *Mezzo Cammin: An Online Journal of Formalist Poetry by Women*, *Spindrift*, the Shakespeare Oxford Fellowship, and the Society of Classical Poets.

**Smallwood:** Please tell readers about your activities with the Society of Classical Poets?

**Rodriguez:** My work began appearing with the Society of Classical Poets in 2014. In June of 2019 I and three other poets—James Sale, James B. Nicola, and Mark Stone—participated in a poetry reading at Bryant Park in New York City where we each read from American poets including Poe’s “The Raven” and then read selections of our own work. This year I am one of four featured poets who will be reading at the 2020 Society of Classical Poets Symposium. My background as a classical singer has given me the ability to render my spoken poetry in an interesting and engaging way without being overly dramatic.

**Smallwood:** One of your poems is about keeping a journal. When did you begin writing one and how does it help?

**Rodriguez:** My first poems began appearing as diary entries in junior high school. As I mention in the sonnet “My Journal,” the place where I write is “a sanctuary, hallowed space.” It is where I work out the rough drafts of my work, prune and hew and adjust and temper what I have done, as I craft it into art. I am not a very fluid writer and there are lots of marginalia and scribbled out lines and words in my journals. What I usually do these days, is get the poem written to a basic condition, then type it up on my computer, edit it and prune it some more, and then again, and again, as many times as necessary, and then transcribe it back into my journal, so that I have both the rough material and finished product in the same place. It helps to have a journal because it is my workshop, my studio, where I can work hard and get dirty and then preserve a polished work at the end of my endeavors.

**Smallwood:** Do you have ideas for your next book?

**Rodriguez:** I am currently working with Shanti Arts to publish *Sonnets* in an enlarged second edition. Since the first edition in 2019 I have begun writing in the Petrarchan sonnet form and these as well as other new poems will be a valuable addition to my current sonnet collection.

Theresa Rodriguez’s website is [www.bardsinger.com](http://www.bardsinger.com)