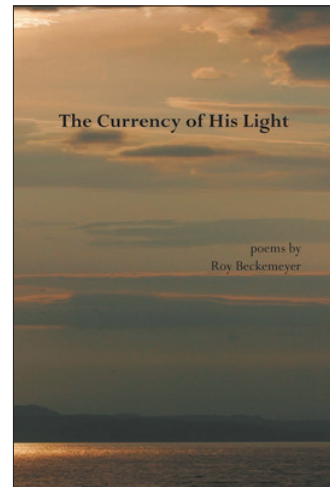


The Currency of His Light
by Roy Beckemeyer
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Review by Carole Mertz

Having written many ekphrastic poems and having published a collection of ekphrasis, I found reading Beckemeyer's *The Currency of His Light*, a deep pleasure. The author's unifying theme of light brings a fine cohesion to the work. Enjoyable, too, were the epigraphs he chose for each of his seven sections, passing from Milton to da Vinci, and on to Edith Wharton. The publisher, Turning Plow Press, succeeded, as well, in including fine reproductions of various artworks (in the public domain) to which Beckemeyer's poems refer, along with an exceptionally fine reproduction of one of Beckemeyer's own photos for the cover. The artwork reproductions are presented in color, which brings added delight to the reader.



Beckemeyer approaches the theme of light from countless angles. His approaches help us to consider the natural elements he uses as basic to the poems, presenting them as his personal witness to nature in all its seasons, light or dark, yet rendering them as fundamentally accessible. He studies as closely the sheen of a woman's seamed nylons as he does the dust-flung wings of moths or the "sparkling mirror shine" of cooking pots hung on a wall waiting to have their "hunger" filled.

In a sun-burst of satisfying rhythm, the author delivers a villanelle that ends with the striking lines "the father who lives longer than his son / whose novel ends before the tale's begun." (p. 66) Within the rhyming, we watch "the blackest sky at noon" approach the "midnight sun." The darkness of Beckemeyer's word choices speaks deeply of the finality of the father's loss.

"Palette," (p.26) is a kind of ars poetica that presents an essay of hues that move from mauve through "...all the tints / and despairs of blue." And the poem "Don't" (p.88) lets us rise with Jupiter into "the soaring September sky." These poetic leaps contrast with such down-to-earth elements as the humble onion, seen bubbling and rolling in a "synchronized swim" and floating in a Pinot Grigio sea. ("Vidalia," p. 74)

With vintages of Van Gogh-like color choices, the author asks to be

*...a tree-woven hedgerow,
windbreak of Osage orange and red cedar—
my kiting branches broadside to the prairie storm,
straining roots anchoring against everything
the world pushes my way. (p.97)*

And for a brighter image of light, I choose Beckemeyer's "Venus," (p. 96) where Venus "owns

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/2

the morning sky, / blatant, blaringly bright..." and "Moon stares, waning-crescent- / grin, agog at the sight."

Agog, as I am agog at the reading of *The Currency of His Light*, appreciating the way the author's personal light and perception(s) pass through his lines with equanimity. Finest of the ekphrastic poems is Beckemeyer's "Chiaroscurro," (p.64) as if he, like Caravaggio, is determined to draw light from the breath-taking and merciful withdrawal of Abraham's knife-filled hand on Isaac's sacrificial head. Perhaps with this poem, we can fully comprehend the author's use of "currency" in his title.

About the Author:

Roy Beckemeyer holds degrees from St. Louis U. and Wichita State U., and a PhD in engineering from the U. of Kansas. A poet since his youth, his work appears frequently in such venues as *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Poetry Magazine*, *River City Poetry*, and *The Ekphrastic Review*. He has published four previous poetry collections.