

**New Poems**

# **Light vs. Stone**

**BENJAMIN K. ROGERS**

LIGHT VS. STONE



# LIGHT VS. STONE

New and Improved Poems



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by Benjamin Kimble Rogers

Illustrations by Lacey Henry Stinson

Dancing Scots Press  
Dubach, La.

Other books by Benjamin K. Rogers:

Holding Five Aces

Returning from the Pyramid

Small Potatoes

The Glory Gauntlet

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# LIGHT VS. STONE

## CONTENTS

### PART 1

---

- 9 Light vs. Stone
- 10 David's Prerogative
- 11 Just Answering a Need
- 12 A Strange Welcome
- 13 The Mission
- 14 The Taxi Taxonomy
- 15 Darwin Reneged
- 16 Just Some Sound
- 17 Monkey Business
- 18 The Schism
- 19 An Afternoon's Bidding
- 20 Riding the Sphinx
- 21 A Take on the World
- 22 The Dressing Gown
- 23 Too Much to Take
- 24 At the Graveyard: Fall 2009
- 27 Scrying the Moment

### PART 2

---

- 30 The Experience of Going Slow
- 31 The Toll of Insincerity
- 32 The Christening Rain
- 33 The Zodiac as a Gift
- 34 The Sky is the Color of an Angel's Eyes
- 35 Two Moons
- 36 Sonnet to Grace
- 37 The Work, the Trade, the Art
- 38 In the Queen's Chambers
- 39 To Know no End
- 41 On Reading Rilke
- 42 Of a Test Tube Poet
- 44 Portrait in Pastel
- 45 The Cycle of the Isthmus
- 47 Eight Robins and One Crow
- 48 Soul in Journey
- 49 Wasting Time in the Backwoods of Baton Rouge
- 50 Orpheus as the Model

### PART 3

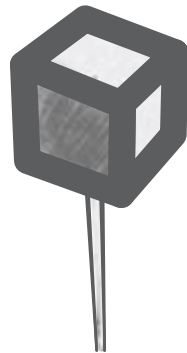
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- 55 Don't Put the Cart Anywhere, Horse
- 56 A Piece of Solace, Ante-Winter
- 57 King Arthur's Legacy
- 58 The Apothecary's Wish
- 59 Moan Away from Home
- 60 A Sober Thought
- 61 What We've Got
- 62 Penelope Out of Peril
- 63 The Tent Revival: A Decatron
- 64 A Hardening Tale
- 65 Merely Being Observant
- 66 Cathode, Blue
- 67 Facts of the Many Matters
- 68 A Star, No Wish
- 69 A Little Exercise
- 70 Mercury, With a Rose
- 71 Wall Street Worries
- 72 What She Doesn't Know
- 73 A Spanish Simpatico



# I.

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## LIGHT VS. STONE

Take the thinnest heart, shore it up with marble  
till it becomes protected as a lamb,

then apply your ink, cobalt, if you're able,  
and paint it till it pounds much like a ram.

The soft, fatter heart (wiggling like unset jam),  
enviously, shall eat itself unstable,

pound by pound, ounce by ounce, and gram by gram;  
till nothing's left, no pulse available.

Such it is when falling light bites the stone;  
it feasts until such surface starts to moan.

## DAVID'S PREROGATIVE

If you grew to be Bathsheba,  
And I, Uriah among the ravens,  
What king would sell his fortune  
    for your spirit,  
Knowing that I have not the merit  
To dwell among his chosen mavens,  
But rather must sink to the starved amoeba?

    And what form must I become  
When birds have picked my features white  
And left me embattled with nature's night  
Where only the stars purview my home?

    I shall still be doubtless wealthy  
For a memory ingrained in caulk and blood  
Which shall remain forever healthy  
To grow the buttercup's satin bud.

## JUST ANSWERING A NEED

At dawn,  
I walk all around the old, dilapidated  
corncrib  
my grandfather left on the place  
for no purpose. Easy it is  
for one to walk  
around in circles; but squares  
tend to be much more difficult.

In the charge that comes to me  
in recalling a memory of him –  
it relates, undoubtedly,  
to his skills at carpentry, his  
hard nail-driving,  
his even eye  
for the level plane,  
and what must have been  
his certain knowledge  
how I would soon  
let this edifice go, let the moisture  
and the dust-settlement  
take their inevitable courses  
with the wood and with the frame.  
For no corn is grown here, anywhere,  
within ten miles.

So I'll just continue  
to stroll in these perfect squares, feeling,  
at the same time,  
a descending calm, while I relax  
into my own personal DNA,  
and feel nothing at all  
akin to pity.

## A STRANGE WELCOME

Though you walk straight into the room  
carrying on your back  
a great amount of darkness,  
I shall not budge

from this overstuffed chair  
nor remove my feet,  
slipshod, from this nearby hassock.

Several breezes, and from many  
different directions,  
have brought you here.

Do you mind if I may not attend to them?  
May I not use my  
available compass's measure  
for its sure, analytical accuracy?

Instead, we'll let the earth stand tall,  
or let the night's baying insect world  
prevail in its formidable fanfare.

## THE MISSION

She walks along the concrete path.  
She refuses to call it a sidewalk, because  
it is beside nothing. Oaks and elms  
dwarf her, patterned in a tradition no one  
she knows, knows. Aware that her heart  
is beating, she touches her carotid artery  
with two fingers of her right hand, and begins  
to step within its rhythm. Of all things she could  
consider, she considers turning back.

## THE TAXI TAXONOMY

What I don't trust are the parts of people  
they themselves don't know. Don Quixote had  
eyes that went back into his head. Sancho  
Panza had, as a familiar, a  
barracuda over which he had ab-  
solutely no control. Nijinsky could  
not only throw one leg completely out  
of joint, but after that it would go  
its own way to dance on the moon. Baby  
Face Nelson thought that machine gun bullets  
went only one way. Carl Jung was able  
to read minds, and Freud would interpret them  
through a goldfish bowl. When one hand washes  
the other, the other must know what's se-  
quitur, what's rational, how the cow ate  
the cabbage, so to speak. The somnambulant  
will keep walking until he's run over  
by lemmings, honed always toward the sea.

## DARWIN RENEGED

It's okay to be half human  
when the zinnia you have watered  
eats the grasshopper,  
rather than the other way around.

What's happened in nature is much like  
balloons popping when applied to a vacuum  
cleaner's reversed suction, full blast.

Notice how the better half  
lives the primal ecstasy unnoted  
in the annals of civilized parchments,

skims over faithful documentation  
much in the way kings would sleep  
through thunderstorms.

Round circles cut squares in half,  
and two directions of metamorphosis  
are as obvious to us as eyelids.



## JUST SOME SOUND

An inch of boredom now becomes one yard of indifference;  
And the sea's never bred to the sky, only imaginatively.  
"Why is it," asks that plum bush of the dogwood,  
                                "that you tower so high in benevolence?  
While my own fruit warrants more patience, and so accusatively?  
This room that's fallen between us has blandished our communication!"  
– So such miles of the seascape shadow over a long league's accusation.

## MONKEY BUSINESS

What once was thick  
is now thin.

The consistency of constant improvement  
lashes out  
    against the drub-blue whale  
        of stubbornness.

And we  
who have moved a generation  
  
through wood-solid forests  
    must soon acquiesce –

like plumbers,  
drunk already  
    before hitting all the pipes.

Whatever social conventions denude  
the vast  
    queue of time-stalkers

turn a former century  
    into java.

## THE SCHISM

In asking where the rivers come from,  
my son forces the question  
from a quiet soul.  
He sits on a pine log  
that's fallen in the last high wind.  
Wildflowers, azaleas, and winter grass  
still remain:  
to be distractive to the point  
that I myself find the question ridiculous.  
His mother would answer it,  
if she weren't building tents  
out of legal documents, old drapes,  
smiles that show she's got a leg up  
on her solitary future.  
In pondering survival, my son  
wants to know patches of history,  
the whys and wherefores  
of how things fit together,  
where they are going,  
and why I stand, so still, like a redwood.

## AN AFTERNOON'S BIDDING

Across the dark field where the watermelons  
once grew stands a lone  
acacia tree, alone enough  
to sing solo songs in unusual  
April wind. Only my eyes  
can touch its aerial bombardment of the senses.  
And I wonder if the sand and the loam ever  
make wishes, or condemnations  
of the way a spring develops. Skies  
are a blue drench which speaks a solemn  
homily moralizing upstart greenery,  
folding the horizon to where it's unreadable.  
I have come full circle to lift the sand  
with closed fingers, and to bow my head  
to let sharp hearing notice,  
once and for all, the whines of eagles,  
as I open them casually, slowly.

## RIDING THE SPHINX

She turns the pencil in her hand  
and feels the soul to be a gyroscope.  
Though her body does not move  
one inch, she can sense the dynamism  
at work, the directions pulled against hope  
that leisures, which she barely knows, remand  
her skills to that which she can prove.  
Instead of writing, she points the lead  
at a mountain, one worn down, not jagged,  
but covered in spring's insistent optimism.  
The face of the mountain resembles Hemingway's head,  
with the impish smile, the eyes ragged.  
Several clouds cloud history's  
manifest destiny, her tight-locked trove of mysteries.

## A TAKE ON THE WORLD

I have grown to refuse all which is history,  
and especially that of myself.

Back in my inception,  
I was born with a large canker  
found at the tip of my nose.

Immediately they had the face removed  
so that it could never be seen  
by anyone at all.

Now, the totality of myself, (a set of masks,  
obsidian, onyx, porcelain,  
I can wear by the dozens),

I still view strange worlds,  
nullify treelines, avoid cloudy conceptions of warmth,

which are at base, merely cubes of rank indifference,  
absolute zeros lost in some electric freeze.

I change the masks to change the past,  
and by doing so, all of the pain elopes –

the wedding of wind and sea,  
of the beauty in sunsets, the snowy nights . . .

these now retreat far hence, are crammed in Plato's cave,  
sealed by the commerce of civilized grunts, post haste.

And while I view the nothing with any form of offering,  
with any kind of philanthropy, or gentleness,  
(what could be consigned to the pail,  
as rain falls, or dew mounts):

these voids become as pedestals placed  
which I shall never see,  
for with that canker, doctors removed the sight.

## THE DRESSING GOWN

“I need to become someone else,” she says,  
while we walk closely together  
under one sagging, red umbrella.  
Her comment is of the snap-dragon type –  
that is, as a dragon snapping,  
rather than like some not-so-rare  
species of flower. Even the rain  
begins to change its current of choice  
with her biting remark, running its way,  
splitting to diverge, and then converge, to become  
idle, cowering in the gutter.  
“Do you know what I mean by this?” she states.  
“The way to become someone else,” I reply,  
“is to first have a model – or, you know,  
to use that new, fancy word, ‘paradigm’.  
Once you have that behind you,  
then it’s all downhill.”  
She snaps one more time again,  
but this time it’s almost exactly  
the effect of some comely flower.

## TOO MUCH TO TAKE

I stretch out my legs  
toward the edge of the pond, lie back,  
and feel my own soul  
achieving not only the size of the pond,  
but attaining to a harrowing zenith.  
Why did you leave me here,  
and to fend for myself,  
when I alone was once your private picnic?  
Things have gone so sour,  
as when the sun will spoil the naked back  
with its incessant stabs of ultraviolet.  
Richness is what I should feel instead  
to turn blue eyes to vaults  
of distant, cloudy vapor trails,  
those brimming banks piled high  
to force the transient faces  
of nearly unbearable solitude.



## AT THE GRAVEYARD: FALL 2009

1.

Charge out debts to the self to a long shroud,  
And as contemplations arise, each shall  
Pertain toward much slower legatos: deep  
Plangent meditations seeping from out  
The coldest, hollowest, echoing wells.

It is from these sourcing kinds of beginnings  
We take this concourse now; while we tread lightly  
Over brown grass, as suns ply their shorter  
Journeys now, October having been what  
It is: the solemn time when birds seek out  
Early darkness, and with rapidity  
Edge our own eyes to the quickest closure,  
And settle ill feelings in much the same way.

2.

With a glance at what's close by, as young children  
Amble, pass closely from their nearby schools,  
We say they'll know much less of what they leave  
Behind; at best, keep recollections  
Vaguely of these common hills, these alleys, while they  
Shunt toward businesses, toward libraries,  
Where homes loft high over what were once, in  
The past, such gentle fields of slow grazing.

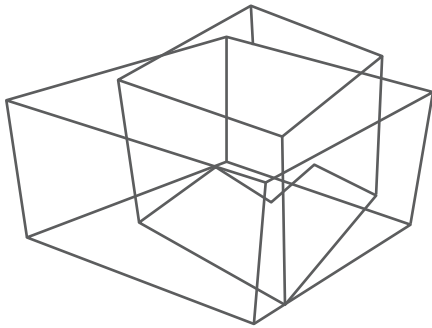
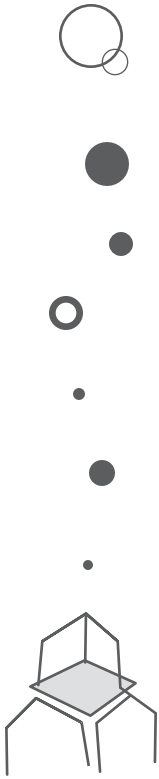
One wonders what will be left for them now,  
Or for you and me, while we talk of Plato;  
How his essence is to be found, linked to  
The satellite's purposes; or about  
Computer skills achieved by the tiredest  
Of old maids that have befriended the wires,  
Sewn against them, attached.

3.

  Though our walk's not  
Even here, this you know, while you lie there  
Choking the lungs on mounds of grass, those which  
Clip your tearful yearnings: over graves now  
Mown by eager fellows who work the thankless  
Twilights, bespeaking silences base unreal,  
Because they are not real.

  And we'll hear our  
Own thanks spoken through the vaguest escapes  
Of evaporating souls, eructations  
That are much too thin for kind submissions.

  You'll charge out now to leave me here, and try  
For some new mind's terminus, or the heart's  
Sure need to run away from what is real  
Instead – to set a future path solid,  
As if on yellowed, whitening horses,  
Who move their rapid gallops, strides well learned:  
To fast cantors that are trained, honed to such  
Extreme by its weary, its final blacksmith.



## SCRYING THE MOMENT

I hold among three fingers of my left hand  
the tragedy that's known as my life;  
and by implication  
hold that which has grown to be yours, as well.  
And with the right hand firmly scribing,  
I write these names – *Aeschylus*,  
*Sophocles*, *Euripides*.

I could then write one of my own phrases, this:  
“Helplessness becomes that barter we pay  
for drawing savage breath,  
by which we must then recoil, and exhale  
one mere ounce of sense.”

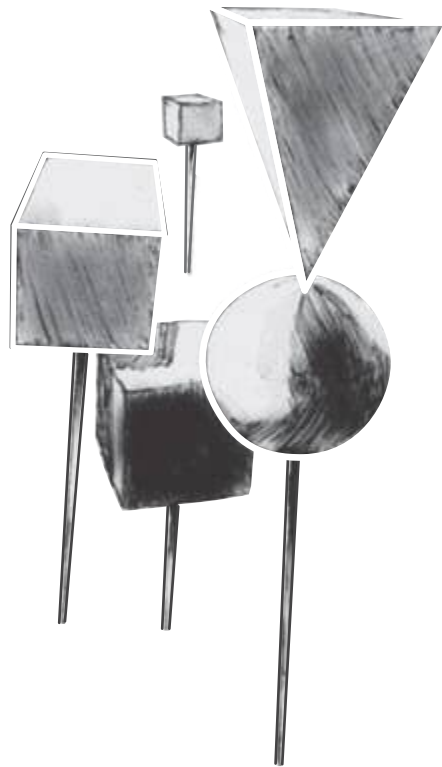
– Why are they so much more beautiful,  
those ones who've suffered so?  
Opposed to they – those daylily, acrobatic types,  
who never look back, or forward,  
or at anything whatsoever, at all?

I've opened up this hand and seen images . . .



# II.

*If one holds one's palm out long enough  
a dove shall light*



## THE EXPERIENCE OF GOING SLOW

The turtle –  
how it knows more of the ground  
than anyone else, catches sight,  
occasionally, of a passing truck;  
or glances into the high grass –  
a forest among the forests,  
much thicker there  
than close-knit trees  
which reward their own bosoms  
with the branch of a neighbor.

How is it, then,  
that a turtle, going slow enough  
for time to embrace itself,  
can return to foster an eclipse  
of all that's temporal,  
measure what's stopped to nothing  
in its hermetic, hermitic home?

He must know something.  
For in the chamber  
where all motions ceases,  
like a run down watch, he must reflect,  
even surer, on the experience of going slow.

## THE TOLL OF INSINCERITY

We boys, at early age, were not told the truth,  
    how she, quite fair, young, and discreet,  
    was worth all the wait, delivering ample treat  
of kiss, in her hand-made home: a kissing booth  
    where she sat under oak, and took seat  
in a spring now remembered by those long in tooth.

A kiss for each year of age was enough!  
    The line grew long, clearly round the block;  
    and some of us committed ourselves not to stop,  
though she took her hiatus, and it with a puff;  
    and often her sweet lips would sweeter lock:  
though more often her dark eyes would show her bluff.



## THE CHRISTENING RAIN

after Yeats

Wet from its own blessing  
The rain is christening the soil;  
Rain-soaked and confessing  
Nothing about the sins of our toil,  
We come inside, and hide,  
And let the water wash its tide.

Sins that are made ebullient!  
When we did make fortune in the fields  
Under the orb's light leant;  
And in the excess of what it yields  
What self-examination was ours!  
How tall nature's towers!

Indulgent pets of comfort,  
We are now roofed-in, the temperate air,  
A warm raiment of sort  
To protect from all the weather's flair,  
Implemented most by the rain  
Which falls like a silver chain.

## THE ZODIAC AS A GIFT

Under the night sky  
that swims through oaken branches,  
with the traffic taking time  
to be bothersome somewhere else,

in front of the log cabin  
built by a wiry ancestor  
of a harder age,  
    she is looking through new eyes,  
and names the constellations  
she never knew before.

    She names perfectly The Water Bearer.  
She names perfectly  
The Lion which calls her heart.  
She names The Stinger,  
and The Twins which make a perfect balance.  
She knows all the ways of astral wonder,  
with a single glance . . .

    She is new,  
and he that stands beside her  
builds a fire with such outstanding glow.

## THE SKY IS THE COLOR OF AN ANGEL'S EYES

and we were meant to be  
something besides  
mortal.

I ask the question: "Who fouled up?"

People seem to be wandering around  
from one state to another state,  
carrying with them hope and good faith,  
as if the bounty of that kind of living  
were enough to pressurize their lives,  
make them be whole  
before a court of kings.

So when they look at poverty  
and imagine wealth; look at wealth  
and discount poverty;  
they're on the wrong tracks  
going the wrong way.

It does not matter where you go,  
as long as you know  
that paradise is a game room for the wizards,  
and flowers – those constant poems –  
belong to the sun.

## TWO MOONS

Above, there is more than one moon aloft  
which makes this night portentous.  
One appears to be kind, and one appears  
to be unkind, like high fever in the brow.

Both make their allemandes over the trees,  
which seem tame, sober.  
It's as if illusion folds from the gum wrapper of fate –  
impossible scenario.

Cloven clouds, if they could be pies,  
bestow their favored crusts,  
while birds, across their faces,  
make mascara with rapid wings.

I choose to accept all of these moons,  
both, the kind and the unkind,  
and choose never to separate them:  
two faces for one thing that scurries  
over the cedar trees, as midnight  
surrenders this mood to a few stars,  
shining, despite the moons.

## SONNET TO GRACE

As she moves through perfumed air – the electromagnetic,  
The gravity, the strong and the weak, all align,  
As her silhouette is more of a modern science  
Than that of a cross-born, rural route, solipsistic corybantic.

Her time – of the casual twist and turn and flow of the legs –  
Is a lava of emotion, where one is moved to stand on his mortar board  
And game out his free will to be a stop-er or a go-er,  
And to make presentations of her fullness to his classroom.

What is the learning? Who educates a bird to sing?  
When it takes the life of poor life for such hallowed springs  
To, better than anything else, dress her  
For the cortege that shall soon accompany her face?

I'm the one who's learned. She makes grand essences.  
I bow and I yearn, remember her effervescence.

## THE WORK, THE TRADE, THE ART

for R. F.

What we must work for  
is the end of our work;  
and then comes the pause,

the applause, the pat on the back,  
the smile, a lady's smack.

And after the pause  
what we work for again  
in the beginning of our work,  
and sometimes that balks,

and sometimes it throws wrenches,  
and yet  
we must stay glued  
to our workbenches.

What we work for, at last,  
is the turn and tide and crest  
and swell of the mid-journey,  
its pull and pride and blench.

And this is the paradox:  
a need to be free,  
with no loss of *veritas*.

And then at times  
we all become someone else's work.

## IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBERS

While I slept in the king's bed, and between his sheets,  
the queen threw up; for we had drunk way too much,  
had wrung the event of the banquet  
for its last ounce of worth. She became sick,  
but had the ability to get well. A king,  
in winter carrion, moved somewhere, lower than a perception.

And while she slept, the servants tied  
her ankles with her bloodline, and an occasional maid  
would move in to untie them.

I could have been awakened to the sound of a star's wink.  
And once, she awoke to look at me,  
but remembered nothing. I could feel my head,  
its weight, its characteristic ignominy from living such a life.

And before the end of the night I felt  
that I would learn impossible sermons from the morning birds,  
that change is inevitable, yet unpredictable.

## TO KNOW NO END

You are the island on which I want to stay, forever,  
with no books to read, just your eyes:  
their lashes: embroidered novels, long, eventful,

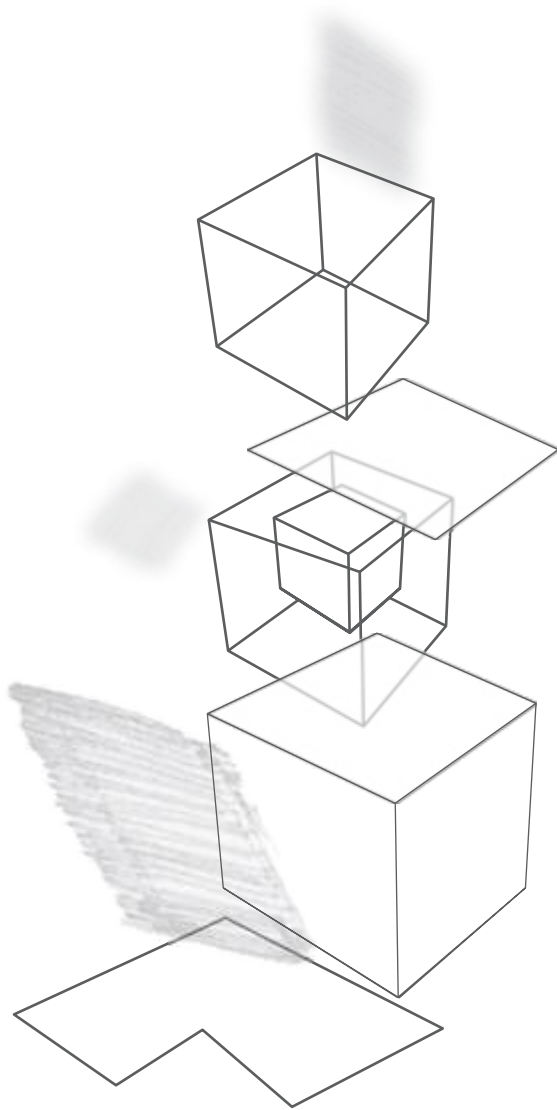
with woven plots of great intricacy,  
going on, and on, and on.  
Seeds form from the pupils, and they bring light,  
and by them I read, by them I know revelations.

Here lie no foreign countries on such an island,  
no disparate languages to confuse the leaves  
of palms or sassafras –  
only the oneness of all things, glue  
that's cosmic to hold all things together.

Solitude here would have no meaning,  
no word upon the lists of poets.  
Nor does Arcadia – the mythic frontier of hope –  
make any sense, even to such bards.

I'll stay, and here know some peace  
I've never felt before, an inner-outer mixing  
of the trials of life  
which have made it all to be of worth.





## ON READING RILKE

I thumbed through the fire, flame by flame, and read  
There, out loud, a passage of two from Hell.  
Maudlin, on a deep, thick floating barge of  
Heat, lay one depicted, whose face I would

Have known, had it turned toward me. Outside,  
The wet branches of the dogwood played their  
Turgid requiems, their limbs like the bow  
To rebec, ever close, more than

Intimate. I fell into those words like  
The night bird, limited by marginal sight,  
But its instincts clear, still apprehensive.

The face turned to look, and I knew what faith  
Had meant to one who'd given it up: some island  
Left in the far sea of another world.

## OF A TEST TUBE POET

(To the tune of “Like a Rolling Stone”, by Bob Dylan)

She says to her self that now is the time to feed the beast  
whatever it is it may want,  
while it lies at the end  
of the massive search, molecule by molecule,  
of her own cracked id:  
those particles of the self,  
puzzles they are of wonder, that uncalm,  
insoluble conundrum.

Why must we be so shy  
to find out the truths of ourselves?  
Yet,  
she is much like Actaeon, in high battle,  
with his Grecian greaves of bright silver,  
a shield, the gold aegis, gold  
out of the pressures of his training,  
his scientific of methods,  
with all of their warring madnnesses –  
those which she tries to tame readily, incisively.

“I love myself,” she also says,  
“Because I am so good; for the ridicules I suffer  
surface only from those nagging,  
errant, straying monsters of hunger  
which flutter, like butterflies  
beneath the belt I wear,  
something I’m known to tighten  
to its final, personally established, constant tradition.”

And as she works her own laborious garden  
with high, looming walls, mock-envious  
and weedless from her intractable attention –  
where the clock time spins out like vines of butter beans –  
like the strolls of general populace  
on streets she has chosen to ignore –  
where she chooses not to walk . . .  
O, she is safe, within her bell jar glass,  
in the arms of that truly benevolent self,  
where her words, uttered beyond the pale,  
call out quietly again with enticing, diminishing returns.

## PORTRAIT IN PASTEL

After the passing of the fine edge of that shadow,  
With its razor assault on the grass by her windmill  
Where she sits in her yearning-age, dreaming  
For regrets of the past to be shed or re-shed,  
She leaves off toward a field of new flowers  
And twirls off her dress, and furls it out farther,  
As if her day's end would end with more pleasures,  
Like configurations of numbers that yield heritage of strong lineage,  
That assay all the ardor compounding in her breasts.  
Such shadow then cuts an arc through her gaze  
While she watches it slide, a disk, an eclipse,  
Or some kind of un-dawning, as still to be explained:  
An omen grown ripe, fructive with its sweetening –  
And she, an oracle, *sine personis*.  
She twirls up her hair, tightens it farther,  
And with deep akimbo bows to the hips which sashay  
She gives up to her pathos, and assumes more of eros,  
For that's what she follows, at a more rapid pace,  
Towards that benatured mysterium unknown: that bower  
Full of ancient supremacies, where, like fawns  
After succor, desire leaves propriety behind.

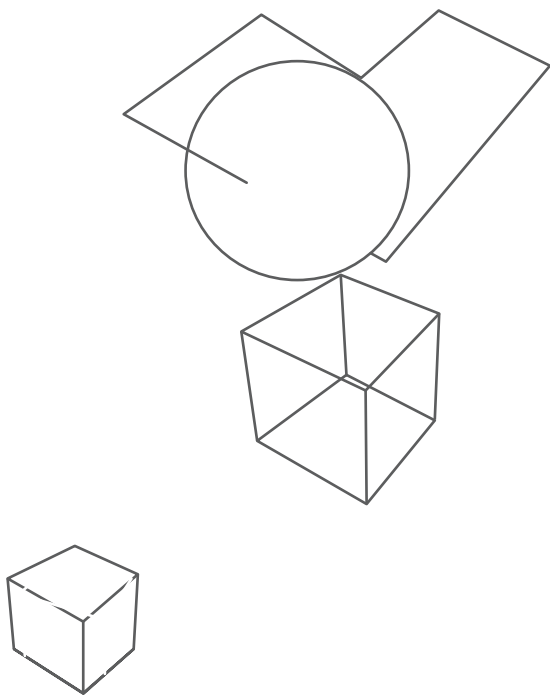
## THE CYCLE OF THE ISTHMUS

Everyone must be looking for an island.  
And the ship which reaches it is one called  
    human touch,  
where the will grazes the port bow,  
the flesh, the call, the very carbon atom itself.  
Stevedores of perspiration work overtime  
to lift, separate, and send conveyor belts of soul  
into the hallow regions of lymph, phlegm,  
blood, and holy brain.

    What thought is it that  
precedes the surfacing whale?  
What isthmus drains its heated sand  
to become a mixed concoction Neptune  
longs to drink?  
And where do the people go  
in their waiting solitude, where, like curs  
roaming for food,  
they are the impossible, faint-hearted cry  
that sounds out against the plangent membranes of moons?

    We shall not touch this moon,  
for only with our sight,  
our telescopic stare of serenity  
which courts the sweet Selene, till she shall be known to weep,  
shall she change her face to appear again as fresh  
as any god's compliment – a symbol  
swimming above – the Earth's most ancient ancient.

    And though the air that is crossed (its threshold  
slowly galvanized), each line of sight  
shall meet another line of sight,  
play to the promise that dramas, where islands shift,  
shall cajole, conform, and stand alone for every man.



## EIGHT ROBINS AND ONE CROW

The brown dominates the green,  
more brown than green, though  
showing more redolent the shades of green.

The robins dominate the crows,  
though more wings of black flurry  
in the distance.

I count these robins  
as if some measurement of goodness  
could be portended.

One crow flies through a tree.  
And the robins, as if by signal for parade,  
sweep across the yard, dominant red.



## SOUL IN JOURNEY

The dark side of this soul has need for vent.  
I take it, though, in a casual, firm clasp,  
recall how, fragmented, it had been rent  
by the wild world's tick of time – hear its rasp!  
The dark side of this soul needs a motion  
across the bright blue sky's lathered lotion.

Water has dropped in this memory cell.  
Age may query on forgotten subjects,  
and afternoon whirlwinds resound the bell,  
that, in its deep belly, sings and rejects  
a solitude beside inexplicable water.  
Because of that, a soul walks no farther.

The pin needed to touch the dark of heart  
must go in deep, must be pulled from the tree  
that shall not know its passing, unalert  
to any pain one might feel within time's sea,  
or brush past the feeling of how windless storms  
move mountains of a soul to greater charms.

I have no hour to give anyone,  
and to take a day would be greatest sin.  
Soul on a ball of ticklish wonder sewn  
through road-crazy places asks where to begin  
the new search for a light soul in its stead?  
Could cause weary feet to touch weary head!

## WASTING TIME IN THE BACKWOODS OF BATON ROUGE

Call out a color,  
and I will tell you immediately  
if it matches the sky.  
If you call out, vividly, a rainbow,  
instead of scolding, I shall embrace you.

The pink of your own eye  
sings of your inebriation,  
and you have requested that I watch you,  
as you move, like some swan,  
around a pool of light  
which has been gathered by the leaves  
in the promise of autumn.

The world itself is also drunk  
with your fastidiousness,  
calls for a halt to all outward façade,  
threatens to stop in its own footsteps  
to bring you a sweetened cup of tea,  
or something which is guaranteed  
to make you sleep for half a decade.

One has it made, though,  
when you hold your breath, take in the air –  
as if from unseen blooms of photosynthetic reality,  
that which must be meant concretely,  
and only for the sane.

## ORPHEUS AS THE MODEL

I have seen coy Time, planted in the shade,  
bragging how its fancy rules my bones,  
joking how it's playing them on its lyre,  
contentedly (through some diapason)  
has sewn my spirit's messages.

Throw out one query here, and this to Clotho,  
goddess of the loom: she, fair-haired  
as April's tress among the breezes  
touched by half-light, under the trees  
with him and lute – how is it so loosely

they weave the minutes  
between the *nows* and *thens*,  
and, within fair song, turn phrases of their hours  
spent in vain tumescence?  
(Stars must have burgled the moon  
for their dark secrets; and the secret is  
that I'm not young . . . )

And so does Lachesis sit beside them  
to measure out the moon rays between  
the *heres* and *theres*.  
And Atropos, at distant sight  
in a dark field green, hued by mellowed sky,  
wails for my recovery.

No need of that. For she has trimmed  
the shaking strings of the wooden lute  
with shears made sharp, obdurate by my own dull wit:  
hymns that shall contain a final, pleasant aire.

And even though Time and the Fates  
experience their joys at my cost,  
I too must purchase more of my own joy,  
and not from them, but from any better source.

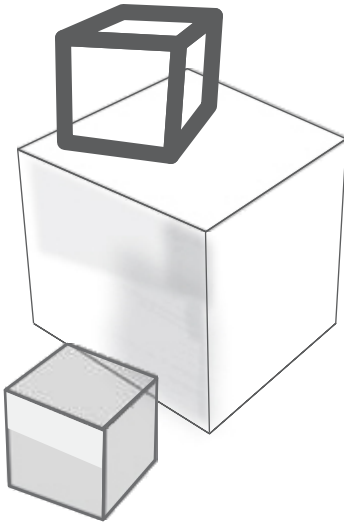
And from under this lofty pine, where  
summer breezes tune perfectly my own lute,

I'll make passages swift of what is left.



# III.

*“I am not a human being,  
I am an animal!”*





## DON'T PUT THE CART ANYWHERE, HORSE

“Life’s as hard as nails driven through concrete!”

These words, from an acquaintance steeped  
In luxury, who owns half of the town,  
Swims in her own swimming pool, whose global  
Credentials are bordered round, set in gold –  
Her words seem as out of place, or as odd  
As a fire marshal toting a surf board.

*Hard as nails through concrete* – ? Give me a break!

Yet I reflect that the high weathervane  
Relies on wind, that the baby’s crying  
Always has a purpose, that business folk  
Move through life much like shadows seeking light,  
That every game, when it’s played to the max,  
Aims at something lying beyond the end.

So she says her life is hard, and lilacs  
Store up memories, and fresh sea breezes  
Bring them slowly across painted deserts,  
And breaking news, news of the moment,  
Is that everything is that very way.



## A PIECE OF SOLACE, ANTE-WINTER

It appears so as this:  
that all October moons  
crawl with the prophet's lesson:

that speed is not the thing  
or the course the race car takes,  
which could be all of the way to the ash heap:

while cheers refuse to become diminished.

And the slower we go such motions all contain  
what the stale regale as truth-saying.

When something akin to the light of a young day's sun  
or its moon, reverts back to its own stark self,  
it then moves onward across the sky  
in jocund and celebratory rotations.

## KING ARTHUR'S LEGACY

I move through life, she says,  
in the way that Nietzsche  
must have revised his densest line.

Notice the careful steps.  
Notice the wobble  
at the crown of the head,

the wavering, seeking light.  
Every single bit of dissecting  
is meant to be a link to greater moments,  
a constant dawn  
shoving itself through juniper and oak,  
fan-tailing like the wisest peacock.

She sees these feathers as regalizing  
vendettas,  
ego-bound by my slim accomplishments.

Little does she know, though,  
I was the knight's horse,  
the steed molding history

before setting out to pasture.

## THE APOTHECARY'S WISH

The twilight brings – in the risen aura  
of the cedar grove, where scent is palpable,  
and memory is forced to long journeys –  
mood more stable than granite's regency.  
I hold the wine glass, and toast to certain things:  
the ocean's solvency, the moon's trickster  
posture that it can set hearts  
in motion to its whims, the gallantry  
of the wind's dance on stages meant  
for clouds' dominion, love's stubborn  
sigh to fill reservoirs of language  
and then be forgotten as a greaves-maker's trade.  
Or what is truth in the light that fades,  
the unstoppable move to black and emptiness?  
That sleep! That profound ingredient of night!  
Let it be the salve needed  
for uncommon ills, or those more common.

## MOAN AWAY FROM HOME

I take your hand, Methuselah, because  
It gives me strength, and my own weakness fails  
To make differences in your slowing gait.

Who holds the heaviest iron above them?  
See, there are no gods to urge the sacred  
Or console, at all, your deprivation.

They have wound themselves too tight, to points where  
Disappearing is their only action.  
Are these tears of yours merely mountebanks

In their display selling to me false goods?  
No, I feel for you still, Methuselah.  
Your walk is where I drag free life, comfort.

## A SOBER THOUGHT

While we wait for the next glory moment,  
We can have options, or stand in a field,  
At night, daze-struck by the moon's eloquence,  
To points of being Nature's audience,  
Critic, soothsayer, priest and confidant.  
While we wait for the next clear glory-sign,  
We can measure up the latest crop yield,  
Check roads for wear and tear, gauge the expense  
Of modern swimming pools, cater each want  
A spouse may have, dash off the newest line  
Of fashion plates, or douse them then with wine.  
While we wait for the new glory manifest  
We can take the next bus to Syracuse,  
Forget that we are animals, buy ice  
To cool ambitions, level an excuse  
That we must never live our lives in jest.

## WHAT WE'VE GOT

for Rachel

Fortune, in a thumbnail sketch of your face,  
Complicit to move me to superior art  
In myself, to tantalize in return what you  
Have become – drops anchor in mutability.  
My will is your forested garden.  
The pomegranate we share, round but not of perfection,  
Tangy, as in the way you hold  
My other hand, surfeits the ne plus ultra  
Of my desire to compromise, concede.  
If the gods are jealous let them game  
Only among themselves, bow out  
From our demesne, grow more jealous  
Of themselves only, weep to be mortal.

## PENELOPE OUT OF PERIL

Seeking the point of the thread at the end,  
when the spool's used up, at last; and layer  
on layer has spun through certainty's time –  
she questions what was meant at first to mend.  
Yet she knows the spool, that single conveyor,  
the monotonous turns it moves to sublime.  
Caution's not needed for her perfect count  
of color-changes, as if they shall ever occur:  
the hypnotic hallucinogens of growing fatigue,  
while tasks and trials and pains amount:  
the first sense to know's to know that the blur  
is of all the senses, their resulting intrigue.  
And Patience is calm that's dashed with praise,  
for nothing else lengthens all her days.

## THE TENT REVIVAL: A DECATRON\*

You say your “amens”; and the mountebank  
Thank; for his sideshow (in which he revels),  
Bevels the edges of your moral sense.  
Hence you give in, desiring to placate  
Alternate libido needs of his with  
Myth on top of myth of your own; sadly  
Gladly releasing to proclivities,  
Sincerities he shall take as larder,  
Martyr them till you fit right his need,  
Seed he can plant as others watch him rant.

*\* A decatron is a newly invented form by the author: ten lines long, ten syllables per line, the end of each line rhyming with the first of the following line, with an internal rhyme in the final line.*



## A HARDENING TALE

Though we age, our idealism stays young.

You approach me  
with two new poems you've just published –  
stratospheric quality in stratospheric places.  
Joy, you say, does not belong to poetry.  
It has no place on the verser's page.

I cannot ply the young man's trade,  
nor scream the young man's scream,  
nor cry the young man's tears.

Seasons are counted by the sparrow,  
and whoever knows his culmination  
senses fact where there is no fiction.

## MERELY BEING OBSERVANT

Biting the hand that feeds me  
is not so very difficult,  
because it is my own hand.  
The hands work overtime,  
shelving the groceries  
at the local market,  
one that's right next to the movie rental  
which stays open till two a.m.  
It is now, at this time, three forty-seven a.m.,  
and the street cleaner's brushes  
make a witch-broom whining  
while the operator, who's half asleep,  
keeps one bleary eyed  
focused right on the curb.  
Someone has parked a Jaguar in his way,  
and left it in the no-park zone.  
As the worker drives around it,  
he leaves, and from a distance,  
a splatter of tobacco juice  
on the pristine, clean windshield,  
right in front of the steering column.  
Little does he know  
that that is the mayor's car.  
And that the mayor, high on cool, expensive champagne  
at an all-night festive party  
will soon find out, giddy though he may be,  
that his windshield cleaning system, which he paid for,  
was well worth the price.

## CATHODE, BLUE

The rainstorm ceases and the fogs start to beckon.  
Their risings become slow curtains splashing  
  against brownstones.

Dimmed headlights of mewling cars  
mash edges through our cold, opaque windows,  
point out how congenial lights, more distant, redden.  
And I ask it now – why you, one more time again,  
  must be gone.

I've never hurt so much, or more, with all this life.  
For though your work has worked itself out  
in so many consecutive ways, it's proven  
you're not the self of an easy win,  
and, that you know that the games, at times, even nullify  
  themselves.

(For those of us who loft zeppelins high  
will testify to such.)

Still, nearly archaic, like paddings of lard  
shunted through deep cauldrons begging heat,  
my own self shall melt, while fame parades  
every bit that is your mystery,  
scents heavily, obviously, your miseries,  
so much so that a pope, to gain  
much better footing, might pause,  
reflect around him, let all his gendarmes down,  
forget his purpose, his miter's ultimate cause.

## FACTS OF THE MANY MATTERS

It is a man's world,  
and the women run it.

Notice the train's tight grip  
on the steel rail. The wheels of the train  
spin, flourish, spark,  
but the track's destination  
is already determined.

Whoever builds the tallest building,  
or digs the deepest pond,  
must know  
that overriding purposes of construction  
are often specious,  
that whatever adds great glory to nature  
might lead to condemnation soon, and to fallacy.

Hearken to the ring of sweet mutability.  
Worlds reverse themselves,  
spin off toward other tangents,  
come back to pre-established norms,  
and then, just as if all things seem their very best,  
they'll explode!

## A STAR, NO WISH

Sometimes the poor, worn, overworked,  
tightroped self needs a comforter.  
A warm sea-breeze, blowing inland,  
does that, for a palm tree.  
The mere breath of being,  
the choking on meaning, the rasping  
toward happiness, all pull, like tow trucks,  
on the tight, steel cables of existence,  
till one cares never if they break,  
fray, slack, or go away.  
Occasionally, the rain will sit down  
for a talk with the rain gauge.  
Often, the heat will cajole a high thermometer.  
An ice bucket, even in winter, can be  
coolly suave. O mercy! send a salve of your saints,  
and teach us all to find each other.

## A LITTLE EXERCISE

I notice, in her eyes, the geodesic curiosity  
When one eye closes, and the cheek bones flush,  
That she is not Eve, but a correlate to sanctimony,  
A thing her priest would move hastily then to crush.

And all because she speaks in round robin,  
Her words, a deference to each component that jests  
To where none can believe her, or level her meaning,  
To bring it in, ingrain it, and hold it to their breasts.

Sad cases she runs; she knows no expression  
That holds any water, but containing only ice,  
It freezes the distances of friend, foe and fellows  
Who tire from all her falsehoods, her breaches, her vice.

## MERCURY, WITH A ROSE

Love is what the gods made in their spare time:  
A sort of alluvium, for humans –  
After their mediations, their dull yawns.

“Break out much more glee and celebration,” they  
Say, “and for other things: mountains rising  
To hungered skies, clipped by razors of cloud!

“Dance in euphonium, for those rivers sent  
To wash rocks against an incorruptible  
Sea, where slick dolphins move in mimesis!”

That is not all they say to Man: “. . . for now  
The caterpillar crawls on the sawhorse,  
With which you shall make again the pyramids!

“And too, dodge those shocks of slow-moving quakes;  
And beneath their veins of quiver allow  
Vague semblance of thine own *attache*: soul

“Which we have sent – its fullness complacent  
Never, like some sea itself in torpid rumble,  
That harnesses wind for thy compass-stained maps!”

## WALL STREET WORRIES

O folly, I shall not buy today;  
But never at all to refuse simplicity,  
When the chap on the corner starts to cry  
That no one's paused to give him his pay.

He's old and tired, an uncomfortable mire  
Where the money's at fault, and price the king.  
He nods to his shoe's unraveling.  
One only can guess what schemes shall misfire.



## WHAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW

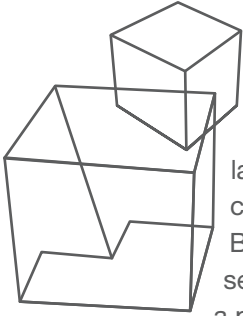
She stands on a pedestal and high.  
One strong as tinsel steel,  
or the force of all shapes of water  
when it's meant to freeze, or to boil.

My love, though it's not in any way  
tepid, nor angry, nor lost in a far field's gloaming,  
remains what's ancient.  
And that which is ancient always stays ancient.  
And what is new  
surprises not just the existence of itself,  
but the totality of unequaled coteries.  
This love for her still rains down a continent.

## A SPANISH SIMPATICO

The floral patterns on the wall  
of that old Medieval castle  
I visited way back in the 70s –  
it could have been constructed from out of verbena,  
and then plashed with lilacs,  
where the orchids maintained a superior light,  
as if dazzled in from an eastern side.  
It was there that first  
I solemnly knelt  
in the deepest contemplation.  
For how is it then  
I could think time came in as some secret message,  
seeping in through those highest windows?  
And when I leaned my back away from the wall –  
in a straining, contorted arc –  
I breathed in age.  
No breath has ever since refused an expulsion,  
so much as that one. And the part of me  
which stays there today, is a larger part of me  
which still is fighting all darkness.





**Lacey Stinson** earned his MFA in studio painting from Louisiana Tech University in 1997. He presently lives in Dubach, Louisiana where he creates landscapes, fantasy worlds, and large abstracts in either graphite on paper or oil on canvas. He credits his work with book design to Ben Rogers who asked him one day to help preserve Rogers' 25-plus years of poetry and prose in a permanent form.

Stinson's painterly artwork can be seen at  
[LaceyStinson.com](http://LaceyStinson.com) and [DancingOkra.com](http://DancingOkra.com)

More about Rogers' poetry and music can be found at  
[BenjaminkRogers.com](http://BenjaminkRogers.com)

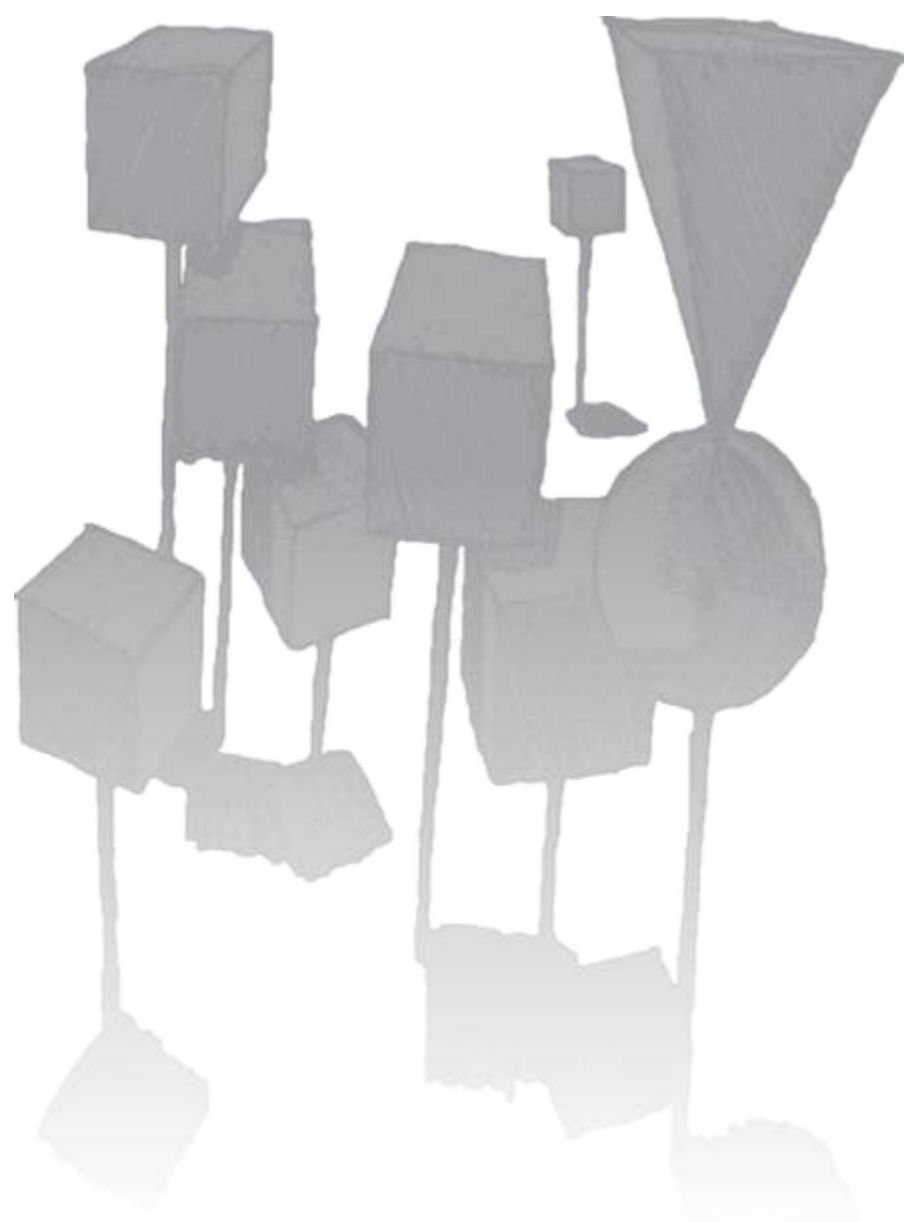
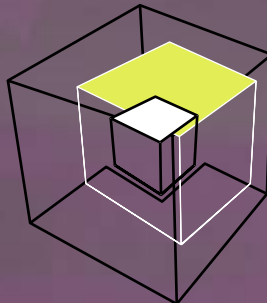




Photo by Dwayne Brister

“Rogers’ poetry – sometimes dense, sometimes light – is invariably new and fresh. His formalist work, from villanelles to Keatsian odes, exhibits an easy virtuosity and winsome charm. A coy sense of humor adds to an enlivening and memorable read.”

– Gary Sloan  
former George Anding Professor of English,  
Louisiana Tech University



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