



9-1-2015

A Poetics of Place: The 2nd Annual Poetry Section of CRSW

Danielle Beazer Dubrasky CRSW Poetry Editor
Southern Utah University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/crsw>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dubrasky, Danielle Beazer CRSW Poetry Editor (2015) "A Poetics of Place: The 2nd Annual Poetry Section of CRSW," *Contemporary Rural Social Work Journal*: Vol. 7 : No. 2 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/crsw/vol7/iss2/16>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contemporary Rural Social Work Journal by an authorized editor of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu.

A Poetics of Place: The 2nd Annual Poetry Section of CRSW

Danielle Beazer Dubrasky,
CRSW Poetry Editor
Southern Utah University

Editorial Comments

Geri Giebel Chavis, a long-time practitioner of poetry, states “Poets achieve a vivid compactness unlikely to be found in any other literary genre. A few well-chosen words and literary metaphors can tap a well of deep feelings, thoughts, and associations” (2). The primary purpose of poetry therapy is to facilitate healing from emotional, physical, or mental trauma. The purpose of *Contemporary Rural Social Work* journal is to provide a professional forum for social workers to share research, practices, and pedagogy in their field. The goal for this poetry section is to become a site for poetry that addresses an intersection between rural identity and human services. The poetry can be written from the perspective of the social worker, the client, or someone who is an observer. Social workers witness the human experience at its most challenged times and stand as advocates for those who can’t protect themselves. Can this same witness be expressed in poetry without being didactic, cliché, or too abstract, with all the nuances that poetic language is capable of creating? What kind of poetics develops from this intersection? What additional perspective do these poems give to the social work field? What happens at the crossroads of poetry, rural experience, and human services? The poetry that stands at this unique intersection needs to be strongly grounded in rural experience, yet be able to “tell it slant” to quote Emily Dickinson, allowing “a few well-chosen words” to convey a connection to the field of human services. This very narrow criteria allows for a unique forum, not only for the social work field, but also potentially in the area of contemporary American poetics—especially poetics of place.

Rural identity is often strongly rooted to a connection to place that can be complicated by both a sense of belonging as well as the challenge of economic or social disparity. With that idea in mind, the poems in this issue present a spectrum with regards to place. Abandoned structures—a house, a church or even a college—stand as landmarks of a fading past; in the midst of these structures are the memories of people who have left or the struggles of those who remain and endure. Thus, a subtle motif for these poems would be that of ghosts—of historical events, of past relatives, or even of a younger self. The traces of the past that intersect the present are perceptible to only those who understand their context—a storefront with a memorial to Emmet Till or a line of trees planted as a legacy. Sometimes the notion of human services is only implied by virtue of how abandonment has changed the vitality of a rural place. But there are other poems that address the experience of social work head on. Barbara Cecelia Harroun’s “What I Left, Unknown” describes a young social worker’s well-intentioned naiveté as she visits homes in Appalachia while Libby Day Merrill’s “Doublewide” gives voice to those struggling with rural poverty.

Within this range are other depictions of rural experience through a nostalgic memory of climbing a silo as a child or the poignancy of a daughter caring for her aging mother. However, what I hope the reader will also take note of is the craft of these poems, how images can weave a

connection between land and people as in these lines from Zara Raab's "That Is to Say": "The mill stands beneath the looming/Mayacamas, smoke rising/over the town where the highway/seams the land of the San Andreas/and brings only tourists passing/to Redwoods or House of Mystery." This section conveys a unique form of poetics—poems that stand as witness and advocates for those who are vulnerable but at the same time allow a few words or gestures to create nuanced moments of resilience in the midst of adversity.

One way to get to know a place is through their poets. The literary world of South Dakota (the location of the 2015 Rural Social Work Conference) has just transitioned from one Poet Laureate to another. Lee Ann Roripaugh has been appointed Poet Laureate, replacing David Allen Evans who has held that position since 2002. Their distinctively different writing styles give a diverse portrayal of both their relationship to language and to South Dakota. Their linguistic difference can be seen by looking at two of their poems that portray images of nature.

David Allen Evans has published eight collections of poetry. In "Sixty Years Later I Notice, Inside a Flock of Blackbird" Evans juxtaposes the memory of cleaning Venetian blinds with the image of a flock of blackbirds. The effect of seeing the world through Venetian blinds as a boy is described as "[pulling the] cord a few/times just to watch the outside/universe keep blinking." This memory is brought to the present as a flock of blackbirds "suddenly/rises from November stubble,/hovers a few seconds,/closing, opening,/blinking, before it tilts,/then vanishes over a hill." This short poem uses ordinary language yet spans time and distance with a sweeping overview. The simplicity of the language allows for the complexity of the "time travel" to happen almost unnoticed—the effect is as a "blink of an eye."

Lee Ann Roripaugh is the author of four volumes of poetry and the editor of *South Dakota Review*. The idea of meeting the past is explored in her poem "Chambered Nautilus" in which she describes the effect of relocating to various apartments, shedding places when they become unnecessary. A series of lines deftly weaves the notion of time travel with the metaphor of the nautilus shell:

Other times looking out the wider operculum of a new front
window, I think it's all a fantasy of space travel,
even though I'm never really sure where, exactly,
I think I'm going—although the cold, dark, and quiet deep
preferred by the shy and enigmatic nautilus is,
I suppose, an inner if not an outer space. What do
they see down there with their primitive lens-less eyes—making

their images through tricks of light like old, pinhole cameras?

Do they see the coelacanth and recognize a stranger
from their past—chambers rewinding, pinwheeling backwards into
prehistory like reel-to-reel tapes clattering on their spools?

To read these poems in their entirety, please refer to the websites of The Poetry Foundation and Coconut Magazine, respectively.

The 2016 Rural Social Work Conference will take place in El Paso, Texas. Two poets whose work relates to that area are Ray Gonzales and Ben Saenz. More information about all the above poets can be found through The Poetry Foundation.

References

Chavis, G. G., & Weisberger, L. L. (2003). *The healing fountain: Poetry therapy or life's journey*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press.

Coconutpoetry.org <http://www.coconutpoetry.org/roripaugh1.html>

The Poetry Foundation <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>