

Interviews

# 3 Questions for Terry Mulert

Published by Miriam Sagan

1. What is your personal/aesthetic relationship to the poetic line? That is, how do you understand it, use it, etc.
2. Do you find a relationship between words and writing and the human body? Or between your writing and your body?
3. Is there anything you dislike about being a poet?

when poets moved away from a modernist attraction to form and meter, some felt that symbolized the loss of moral order. what next: no Latin in the schools? i am a poet heavily influenced by the postwar poetics of Kerouac, the innovative aspects of Williams, personal abstractions of Merwin, what i comprehend of Pound and Eliot. so the line to me is a vehicle to somehow make a poem from nothing, which is a formidable task and requires great sensitivity and hard work.

it may be considered a breath as in Kerouac, reference to the musician that phrases or the natural voice where the end of the line corresponds to logical pause and restart or as in the concrete poets where the visual sense of the line break paints a visual landscape within the sea of ideas.

as a poet, i have little relationship to craft as i depend more on my intuitive sense of making art. i admire those poets who can eloquently and insightfully discuss their poems in terms of HOW it got made. i find the moment i theorize, i contradict and distrust myself as if scrutinized by what Foucault calls the “permanent gaze” of self-surveillance.

2. as for the body: i have always liked to write and read within earshot of water, the feeling of ink as it tattoos the blank page, the sound of the pen tip scratching the surface, the innocent fetish of keeping a journal- holding and carrying it to other rooms, the smell of old books, shuffling a stack of newly typed poems, opening return envelopes from editors, the poetry of reading aloud.

3. what a funny question. it is my nature, perhaps human, to find things i don't like about things. to your question, Miriam: as artists, there is a stigma attached to being dissatisfied: either we are fulfilling the stereotypical image of the disaffected or we are betraying the cliché/opportunity “to be so lucky- you get to do what you love to do!” in truth, like any pursuit, there are ups and downs. for the most part, being an artist requires a life with a great measure of alone-ness which i think is different from solitude. you just can't make sculptures, write poems, compose music while drinking coffee at *Ohori's* and then there is the issue of earning a living which writing poetry is unlikely to satisfy. so the serious artist is quite often very, very busy with being alone while meeting the demands of a social and productive life contradicting the notion of the contemplative, immune to the workaday stresses of deadlines, meetings and incessant correspondence. at least that has been true for me. nonetheless, i am happy with the choices i have made and grateful to live in a society that places such high value on aesthetics.

4. unpublished poem that shows attention to line:

## Inside Walls

Born of wine  
the skin absorbs the moon

chains hold back  
the birth of traveling dew

trouble is  
our ankles have multiplied

the chances for escape

-Terry Mulert  
Córdova, NM

**Terry Mulert began writing and publishing poetry in 1980, and he has continued to pursue this art through readings, performances and publication in literary journals. In May of 2003, one of his poems was selected as an award poem by Plainsongs; a critical essay accompanies its publication. Recently, Mulert’s poems have appeared in The Lilliput Review, Mudfish, Mid-American Poetry Review, The Madison Review, Puerto del Sol, The Chiron Review, and others.**

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