

# INTERVIEW WITH MARJORIE WELISH

On April 5, 2001, the University of Pennsylvania hosted an all-day conference on the writing and art of Marjorie Welish, the papers and images for which have just now become a book, *Of the Diagram: The work of Marjorie Welish*. Prior to *Word Group*, to be published in the spring of 2004, Welish has published four full collections and several chapbooks of poems, including: *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* (2000), *Casting Sequences* (1993), *The Windows Flew Open* (1991), and *Handwritten* (1979). Her poems have been anthologized in *Best American Poetry 1988*, *Experimental Poetry in America 1950 to the Present: A Norton Anthology* (1994), *From the Other Side of the Century: New American Poetry 1960-1990* (1994), and *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women* (1998). Her writing on art has appeared in such magazines as *Art in America*, *Bomb*, *Partisan Review*, and *Salmagundi*, and a selection of her art criticism, *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960*, came out in 1999. Her awards and fellowships have issued from the MacDowell Colony, the Fund for Poetry, Djerassi Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Howard Foundation. *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* was a finalist for the 2001 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize. She lives in New York City and teaches art and literary criticism and art history at Pratt Institute; she has also frequently taught poetry at Brown University. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper, Alexandra Forman, and Christian Hawkey in April, 2003.

*You seem to move easily among your various practices—writing poems, writing criticism, making art, teaching, etc. Can you discuss the way those practices relate to or contrast with each other?*

The intellectual mobilization necessary to prepare a lecture or to write an essay puts me in a creative state of mind. Often when I am in that state, formal schemes if not actual lines for poems or ideas for conceiving entire

poetry or painting series, suggest themselves. Or, ideas concerning entirely different disciplines, say, pedagogy or urban renewal come to mind. Sometimes I jot these down; sometimes I just go around tormenting people with these ideas. When I began teaching at Pratt Institute, the architecture building was the subject of renovation. I turned to a colleague, an architect himself, and I asked why Pratt didn't design a course around renovating this building, Higgins Hall, and enlist an entire class to see the project to completion. His response was, wryly, "That's too logical." Later on I learned that Samuel Mockbee did such a thing in his home state of Alabama, for which he got a MacArthur. But Mockbee went further than I did: he enlisted his architectural classes to help him design houses for poor people, who actually got the houses to live in. But I'm showing you the grain of my mind, what will bubble up won't necessarily be a line of a poem, but it could be—or it could be a form, or a solution to an urban problem. All this shows is that the synergy that informs creative thought will find a language, style, or way of organizing matter into form. It doesn't occur to me to illustrate one with another, or to translate activities literally—although the more I think about it, the more I have in fact done some of that as I play with ideas. My mentality does instead tend toward conceptual fantasy—I fantasize a lot.

*At a recent reading you spoke of how that synergy between teaching and writing recharges you rather than drains you.*

Yes, although I remember saying, "If and when things are working well." It doesn't happen nearly as often as I think it ought. Also, I am convinced that more people experience this phenomenon than they realize. I believe there are different kinds of mentalities writing and that are creative. I'm very interested in the way people learn: Do they need an anecdote? Do they need an example? Do they need a generalization? Do they need an overview? Through that regard for differing modes of cognition one can begin to understand not only the intellectual but also the creative process: how the

mind puts things together, takes things apart, explores its own world, sends out flares to unknown worlds.

*You also mentioned the Vico writings that Wallace Stevens was reading—I was wondering what brought you to that work?*

When I taught an immersion course on Stevens' poetry and poetics at Brown University—and lashed myself to the mast—I found it very interesting to approach Stevens through the romantic trope of the imagination on which he writes and rewrites. I sought a richer approach, a more complex thought than his stated poetics would suggest. Reading what he himself read was also a fresh way of reading him, and since I tend to have an interest in the critical register of things, it was a positive experience to go after that material, a process in part brought about since I had encountered B.J. Leggett's book *Wallace Stevens and Poetic Theory*.

*That material found its way into your poems as well.*

Of course. I went happily into overdrive teaching that course. Meanwhile, I was working on a commissioned essay on Roland Barthes' concerns with Cy Twombly—and I probably had two other meanwhiles going on as well. It was the perfect situation for total psychic collapse—or, an opportunity to make the best use of those interference patterns. So I took a post inside my own mentality and wrote "Preparing the Length of an Arc" and "About a Length of an Arc," incorporating some Vico and some Stevens and some Twombly into my own thinking about language. Vico is a very interesting character: at the time he lived (the early 18th century) "thinking" about culture meant to apply rational and conventional categories, but he brought empirical thinking into his studies of the development of language. By observing his children acquiring language—making those early "P" and "B" sounds—he generated a mythology that incorporated a developmental theory of language. That laboratory of linguistic development found its way

into my poems. Meanwhile, that the first line of “The Anecdote of the Jar” doesn’t find anything but instead places something in nature and so orders a world from experiential untidiness made me an obsessive creature. I thought I found a key to a phenomenological Wallace Stevens—but also, one could say, to a structuralist one. Throughout the semester I wrote notes on this idea, some of which became imported into poems. And even beyond the semester I was writing to that problem. For example, the poem “Thing Receiving Road” proceeds in sections that approach placement by positing different textual strategies for it. And then through these strategies I create my response to Wallace Stevens’ own placement. In one section the word becomes a kind of protagonist. Another deals with the word place in a very heterodox manner, as a concern of usage. I incorporate the word in different sentences, inflecting it with slightly different meanings in accordance to use. The last poem in that group proposes a simple sequence: a word, followed by a phrase, followed by a sentence. This procedure generated the poem that I let stand as a made thing that was found.

*It’s interesting you bring up that poem in the “Translation” section of The Annotated Here. In that section you address two influences—Stevens in “Thing Receiving Road” as well as Williams in “The Black Poems”—in very different ways.*

I was encouraged to juxtapose those and acknowledge my interest in both without compromise. I go about writing poems in different ways, and the approach to Williams was a perversity that I was challenged to do by Harry Mathews: an Oulipian challenge. So I elected to write in opposition to the very words given in the poem, in the source text. I took it on because satisfying that constraint is an impossibility. The poetic struggle was to find something antithetical but not, strictly speaking, oppositional. To put it another way, the nature of the oppositional response must shift from word to word because each word carries with it embedded contexts. What does it mean to say “the opposite of ‘red’”? This is non-sense, logically speaking. Cultural assumptions come to shape our answers: black and white may be the pair-

ing that we've been tutored to say, but in another context it could be black and red as antithetical or oppositional. But the chief impetus in choosing the Williams objectivist wheelbarrow was to think about the issue of antithesis or opposition in circumstances that do not yield that. This was that problem that made me happy.

*Which of your practices came first?*

A historical answer would speak to the culturally alert household my parents maintained, not in any systematic program for educating their daughter, but through their own interests in art, poetry, music, and dance, and actually the spoken word. My mother's idea of entertaining herself was to attend a lecture on art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I remember that after hearing a slide talk on Le Corbusier, perhaps at age ten, I had wondered why the world had not altered to reflect Le Corbusier's vision. I wondered why the world had not altered to reflect the vision Le Corbusier had for it. Through this conversion experience I understood that architecture could be the vehicle for the profundity of style, where style realizes its potentiality to conceive—even reconceive—the world as we find it. Anecdotally, this is typical of the horizon of expectations my parents valued, even if they were constantly disappointed not to find it expressed in their world. In other words, theirs was a cultural household, but not in any coercive way, however. I'm proud to say they were so ill-suited to the life of suburbia that only a few years after they built their so-called "dream home" they fled macaroni salad, patios, the spaniel across the street—all that silting up what they would hope to have been a life of independence—and fled back to much smaller quarters in the city down the street from the Metropolitan. I was about nine, and at the time I didn't get it—but later, when we went to Europe, and I traveled to other cosmopolitan cities, I understood that New York was not to be measured on beauty, even in hospitality—but it was a city. And having seen other cities then, as a teenager, I got the whole point: its history, culture, and relative classlessness compared with European cities.

I read the city as a text, and I've never been restless since. The principle here is that of cosmopolitanism, put in play early on by my folks, a cosmopolitanism that became my set of assumptions well before talent, let alone vocation, became an issue. I assumed it was my birthright: you pick up an issue of *The Nation*, then you go outside and you look at Mom's rock garden, you come in and you do a drawing, then you have a fantasy about making a city using your blocks. It's play, transposed to the adult plane. The cosmopolitanism has to do with intellectual access to arts and sciences, to a belief (however unfounded) in humankind as potentially cooperative, and interested in learning.

*Is this the connection between Marjorie Welsh the painter and the poet?*

One way of answering this is that the mentality that would call both a poem and a painting a thought-form might also produce analogous, corresponding, compatible, or related thought-forms. Very, very occasionally do I set out to do the equivalent merely transposed from one medium to another. For example of thought-forms in paint, I recall that in 1994 or '95 the International Studio Program gave me my first studio outside the home. I couldn't believe my good fortune. To celebrate I codified an issue that had been on my mind and in my practice, and putting two yellows on a piece of paper, Cadmium Yellow Light and Cadmium Yellow Lemon, I punched a nail through the paper and I said: think about this for a year. (It sounds as though I was incarcerated.) What I meant by formatting this was to create a kind of post-structuralist or post-modern situation by visual means goes like this: if one truism of modernism in the visual arts is that there be necessary and sufficient conditions for a painting or sculpture (instanced, say, by centering on red, yellow, and blue, through which to represent the visualization of the commonplace, called primariness or essence), how would the postmodern react to this? By positing two reds, two yellows, two blues—that's what I meant to think about for a year. The self-imposed challenge was less concerned with the perception of the two yellows

(although that becomes a very practical problem in the studio and has its own phenomenological quandaries), and more about the epistemological: what does it mean for someone in the late twentieth century to respond to modernity and its inherited literature? One response might be to relativize its assumed poetics, principles, theory. You can relativize it through context—hence a diptych or triptych to show difference from panel to panel which nonetheless share common terms. You can do it in any number of ways. Several years later I wrote the poem that is the equivalent to that problem (although I had planned to write it at the time of my studio residency). That's one instance in which I went about in a very . . . I wouldn't call it programmatic way, but in the interest of genuine research to translate a problem from the visual to the verbal medium. Which actually proved difficult. But it may have to do with what is universally called the translation problem: when you move from any *a* to any *b*, the *b* is on the defensive, given that *a* is initiating the terms. What does *b* do in response? Capitulate? Ignore it? Neither of these two? What are the rules of engagement whereby *b* has something to do in relation to *a*?

*How did you get your start as an art critic?*

In college I took a degree in art history. I'll give you the anecdotal version of how I got into art criticism—though I am on record as being opposed to anecdotal accounts of things. In my last year of college at Columbia, I was studying for comprehensive exams and working at Macy's. Standing in a bodega at 11:00 at night looking for junk food, I saw someone I know. I tried to become as much a part of the stacks of soda pop and potato chips as I could so he would not see me in such a compromising mode. Unfortunately, he recognized me from the front of the store and came charging back, and said "Marjorie, how are you? What are you doing?" I started to mutter, "Well I've just begun working at Macy's, and I'm studying for my comprehensive exams in art history," and he interrupted, "You'd be perfect. You'd be perfect! The art editor just quit on *Manhattan East*—we

need somebody.” And I said, “I’m not interested—I really cannot do this, but could you describe the job?” And he said, “I knew you’d be interested. Kathy will call you in ten minutes when you get home.” I thought, “Well, he’s not going to remember. He’s an enthusiast, a lovely guy, but he’s not going to remember.” But Kathy called, and so at the age of twenty-something I became an art critic for a distributed paper which paid the munificent sum of ten dollars an article. The job of art critic presented me a timely professional rationale for what I was doing. I was so relieved to have something to call myself, to have a name of some sort of vocation; of course, I was also grateful for being able to learn on the job, even as I was informing myself through the systematic study of that same discipline.

*Was poetry something that came later? Or was it simply more private?*

It was more private. In high school a very demanding English literature and poetry teacher was instrumental in guiding me, but I was not writing so much as reading until college. I started taking workshops at Columbia simultaneously with doing my studio work. So that’s how the creative practice aggregated.

*Who were you reading, and/or studying with, while you were at Columbia?*

Well, at Columbia Leonie Adams taught and encouraged me, and I won my first poetry prize at Columbia owing to her. She had her students read Wallace Stevens, “The Snow Man.” After studying with Adams I took quite a few workshops with Jill Hoffman, a superb teacher who urged me to study with her opposite, David Shapiro. That imperative was a measure of her strength as a teacher. Through Shapiro, I read some of the New York School poets, whose work I did not necessarily enjoy then as I had come to the critical response to the New York School before I came to the poems of New York School itself. Even as I was going to school I went to poetry readings at the YMHA, but also at Max’s Kansas City to hear Paul Blackburn

read before he died, and to the West End to hear David Shapiro read with Jackson MacLow yet also with Walter Abish, reading from what would become *How German Is It*. The experimental novelist Robbe-Grillet (along with early modernists in poetry—Pound, Eliot, Stein, and some Europeans) and experimental film, dance and music then had more sway with me. And then to St. Mark's, where I heard Ishmael Reed read from *Mumbo Jumbo*—which gave me a position on expressivity and orality, and I haven't looked back. I did not enjoy reading Ashbery, so I set myself the assignment of hearing him at St. Mark's. At his reading I remember thinking, I don't get it, I don't get it, I can't deal with that persona through which he is reading. And then—as they say, all of a sudden—I found myself saying, “Why, he's speaking in idiolects and sociolects!” And again, I never looked back. Whether deliberately or intuitively arrived at, I can think with concepts and project from there.

*Do you feel the cross-pollination between artists and poets that was such an important part of the New York School is happening now?*

I am tempted to say that the New York School represents only a moment in the continual, if not continuous, interdisciplinary productive mismatch and interactivity between the visual and verbal arts. I do believe the New York School has come up with several interesting collaborations, though not as many as some would think. Frankly, the Russian Futurists were more innovative, and perhaps more cognizant of what it means to elicit a spacialization in poetry, or a temporalization in the picture. Let me explain this: in the Soviet era one of the great missions was to bring a feudal society into the 20th century, and for this purpose the largely non-literate culture had to be taken into account. Hence the agitprop trains that went into the countryside were also instruments for literacy. The government sponsored little plays in which the book was the protagonist: it came on the stage and presented itself; it was a material object yet also rhetoric for knowledge and ideology. The team of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara

Stepanova designed such books for the stage and also made what we call photo albums, which initially were largely picture books promoting the idea and the reality of the five-year program: telling a story or a narrative for a future reality to be internalized in the present. The innovation of the album lay presenting a narrative in visual terms because most people couldn't read. So, when it comes to the question of whether or not there is a validity in the visual and verbal dialectic, or cooperative juxtaposition, the answer has to be a decided yes. I mention that not only to give warrant to the Russian Futurist experiment as a historical movement, but also to note an ongoing set of problematics put in play that some people today—let's say Johanna Drucker, Carla Harryman or Barrett Watten—might be considering. That also puts me in mind of acknowledging very different poetics that have cooperated with their counterparts in visual arts—whether the Symbolists or the Surrealists. The cultural implications of formal invention in passing from oral to written to visual texts can mark the social relevance, say, of literacy. I do not necessarily endorse all things that have been done under the aegis of those styles as interesting, let alone significant. However, when we go back to the very complex condition of modernity, some acknowledgement must be made as well to the hieroglyph, or the ideogram, as the nexus or vortex of not only dynamism but of the visual-verbal interaction. That said, there is at this moment a decided spike in visual-verbal cooperation owing to the recent cultural imprint on poetry through structuralism and post-structuralism. For instance, note the linguist schemes of a structuralist type inaugurating Emmanuel Hocquard's *This Story is Mine*, or Norma Cole's post-structuralist naming something through a spectrum of descriptions both visual and verbal, or Jed Rasula and Steve McCaffrey's agglomerated creative conjecture through writing meant to be seen as well as read in *Imagining Language: An Anthology*, or Johanna Drucker's perpetually renewed vow to the artist's book even as she investigates the implication for the word in digital media—all these amply indicate the avidity for interdisciplinary verbal art and visual text in the aftermath of a particular interpretation of modernism that would distinguish the two domains. I was about to say that

I myself have not engaged directly in a collaborative intermedia project when I realized that recently Siah Armajani, the installation artist, has commissioned lines of poetry from me for a public site at Ohio State University, in Athens, Ohio.

*The story of the plays reminds me of your poem “Cities of the Table,” which looks at the book as an object, then breaks the book down into a series of smaller parts.*

Thanks for mentioning it. In that poem I was responding to a particular book and its particular table of contents. It’s Gerard Genette’s book *The Architexts: An Introduction*, a small, absolutely lucid taxonomy of the lyrical poem. Genette establishes that Aristotle never discusses the lyric in his poetics, and that although Aristotle mentions the dithyramb, a choral ode to Dionysus, it is to praise its narrative thought or feeling. And that defining it by what it is not prior to misreadings that have accrued is about as close as we can get to the origin of the lyric. Otherwise, this book makes explicit that what we respond to when we call up the phrase “the lyric poem” is very much a Romantic construction. I was so enchanted—can one be enchanted by a table of contents?—I was so enchanted by the table of contents of *The Architexts* (which reads thus: Contents, Foreword, Translator’s Note, Architext: An Introduction, Index) that this became my source text for brooding, worrying, constructing, framing different sorts of tables of contents. I will spare you my reading the resulting series except to note a favorite found table of contents that enters a poem of mine: List of plates, Foreword to the First Edition, Foreword to the Second Edition, Foreword to the Pelican Edition, One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Notes, Supplementary Bibliography, Second Supplementary Bibliography, Table of Names and Dates, Index. I am fascinated with apparatus and supplemental paratextual register. The last section in the new manuscript, called “Delight Instruct,” consists of poems which one way or another derive from thinking about, or manipulating, or citing paratexts—a group of poems I’ve just finished—thank goodness.

*When I read “Cities of the Table,” I thought they were imagined pieces—I didn’t know the poem refers to an actual Table of Contents. It is very playful and, at the same time, I perceive it to be at the center of your philosophical argument.*

And how would you place the philosophical argument? Which isn’t to say I’m interrogating you—I genuinely want to know what you meant by this.

*You strip words of their associative meanings, and present them as objects.*

Organizational elements. I think that’s a reflection of how I think, play, create; it’s also integral to how I approach an artifact, an aesthetic object, a conceptual idea, a conceptual framework, a problem in the world.

*To me, it’s not a deconstructive practice, though—it’s more generative.*

That’s right. Let me propose this somewhat aberrant reading: deconstruction is an investigative process through which the semantics of a structure yields its literary potential at the expense of its philosophical claim. That’s very different from the structuralist approach—which the post-structuralist would say is as much a projection as anything else—that you can get “back to basics” or know the tectonic from its rhetorical accretions. Putting it in other terms (and I’m thinking of the Prague Structuralists here), the structuralist might maintain that linguistic rules are in fact a register of competence with which the poet plays even insofar as he transgresses them (because for a transgression to be meaningful it must refer to that structural, or analytic, set of conventions). I see myself as a lapsed structuralist, or the structuralist with a wish to relativize, to keep as problematic the notion of structure rather than to arrive at a solitary solution that keeps poetry and criticism cognitively distinct. I guess the term cosmopolitan could do, but I don’t want that term to become an allegory of my life.

*They have great magazine covers.*

It's true, but I was hoping for something like *Metropolis*, or *Textual Practice*.

*Your poems seem less a critique of the lyric as a mode than an attempt to raise criticality to the level of the lyric. Why is this important to you?*

One course I teach is called “The Lyric Lately.” I’ve taught it as a workshop and as a seminar, and as a talk—which was my initial foray into the subject. The talk centered around this question: With the lyric poem so identifiably an expression of early modernity, does it have any use or place in the poetics of post-modernity? One answer is no, insofar as the lyric is an obsolete term professing closed borders on what has become the grand heterogeneity of writing itself. Another answer is perhaps, because it is my interest to speculate, to conjecture utilizing other models. There is a place for the lyric, then, provided that it has something to do other than be a voice, confess its feelings and hum to itself. I maintain these are degrading activities more often than not—and besides, the Romantics and their followers have strategized the lyric in wonderful ways: the Symbolists invented a radically decadent poetics, and the New York School (decidedly French in orientation) have rendered that decadence problematized within a range of high and low sociolects and idiolects. What if the lyric were not a voice, were not an utterance, but were written, hence construed through a presupposition of literature rather than through a presupposition of orality, with its spontaneity and cry. Why not start with the written cultural register and see where that gets you? Posit that there can be such a thing as a thoroughly written form of the lyric as opposed to a sung or spoken one and say or sing critical thinking as it alights on things, or ricochets off them, suspended in a thought process. Allow then the written our expanded notion of the melic, to mean any kind of plangency we can tolerate: We have, after all, been the lucky beneficiaries of jazz, but also of *musique concrète* with Edgard Varèse’s *Poème Électronique*, and all the rest of it. Our notion of music can be expanded to include much, so why not project a notion of the lyric that is written and has an expanded discursive expressivity.

*What I like about your poems—and maybe this is my own misreading of your work—is that you begin with a series of equations and then start playing them out against each other to see where they might lead. There’s a freedom there that is the same as a jazz soloist beginning with a melody and then stretching out—*

Beginning with a given, and even a standard. In jazz a standard does not necessarily develop melody—or even chord relations; departures can really be imaginative constructs precisely because a stereotype is thoroughly known, precisely because one can count on the commonality of that material. This connects to my relationship to the reader. I don’t think of a reader in terms of audience. Millennia of creative and creatively intellectual products are in the public domain. We are late in this conversation. Does that mean that anyone who comes along must recapitulate in some remedial fashion that which has preceded them? I hope not, though *The New York Times* and nearly every art magazine suggests that remedial irrelevant chatter suffices. I would maintain that, if we are charged with anything, it’s the charge to be interesting to our antecedents, and the people who will come afterwards who will be worthy of them. I’m not writing to speak to Dante and no one else; I’m trying to do my best work, that’s all. And I’m speaking to anyone who can put up with the stuff. And when I read someone else’s poems it’s my responsibility to learn the language that this person’s work is engaged in, to learn the textual context-literature in the broadest possible sense.

*I keep thinking that beauty resides very comfortably in your home, and I wonder if you would agree?*

What do you mean by beauty? I really need to know that before I answer you.

*I’d be curious how you define beauty.*

Well, I’m going to go to the mat on this one. I will work with anything you give me, but I need to know what you mean by that term.

*It's very similar to a notion of who the reader might be. In any art form there is a tradition, and notions of beauty change from period to period. I think it's generally defined as something fairly Romantic, and consequently there's a lot of resistance to it.*

Well, what do you mean then when you say that it's something "I'm fairly comfortable with"? We could use some help here.

*What about the first three stanzas in the first poem in The Annotated Here:*

*The here of actual space, addressed  
in face, to face  
proximally yet aesthetically in pencil  
like an eyelash*

*an eyelash addressing the cameras  
which tantalizes.*

*And so forth.  
"And so forth," meaning "setting out"  
reiteratively from the heartland.*

*The pacing—the phrasing, the syntax—as well as the way in which the pacing creates a kind of thinking that addresses ideas, yet lets the ideas come in a sort of mellifluous fashion, a fashion that is your own. It has a kind of beauty of statement that I immediately respond to.*

I'm going to suggest (playfully) that you're responding to two things: assonance and the word aesthetic. Assonance, that is to say, something that can be said comfortably through the voice, tends to be identified as lyricism. And although the word "aesthetic" refers to the philosophy of beauty (prior to their synonymy in the 18th century), they are two very different things and yet we conflate them. I also think that perhaps you might be responding to the circumstance of the face, or the naming of that part of

the body which in nature and very often from the male perspective is the marked site of forms that are seen to be beautiful, that is, beauty as pulchritude. I think the aggregate of those things deludes you into thinking those three stanzas are beautiful.

*I would say that what's beautiful about those three stanzas is the way in which there is a kind of sonic mellifluousness that is not just assonant but alliterative and rhythmic. It parallels a kind of fluid thinking process. This union of form and content is what I would define as beautiful.*

Okay. Now that makes more sense—not necessarily in terms of my poems, but as an attribute of what people consider beautiful: that there be a seamlessness, whether it's the contrapposto in a classical mode that Reynolds restates as the serpentine line or a graceful mode of thought which appears beautiful insofar as it is unimpeded or unobstructed. They are very often identified in certain philosophies of aesthetics. By the way, my essay “Contratemplates,” published in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, discusses Duchamp's paradoxical redrafting of this mode of beauty.

*I'm also very aware that there's a lot of imagistic, rhetorical, and philosophical leaping in the poem. This creates a psychic dissonance, and yet the writing is fluid.*

That introduces a different dimension to beauty: what you find beautiful is actually a kind of tension whereby registers of meaning proceeding at variance with each other form a mental complex. Getting away from my poem for just a second (because the critic in me, as you have observed, is now mobilized), in my seminar “The Lyric Lately” I introduce a couple of poems for which lyricism is the decided affective or sound construction. For instance, C.D. Wright's *Deepstep Come Shining* is an incantation, and as such its aesthetics are decadent and gothic, yet in its soundscape has a heightened, almost exaggerated, lyricism. Alternatively, John Taggart's “Slow Song for Mark Rothko” or “Abide With Me,” is pietist, and Barbara Guest's “Quill

Solitary Apparition,” is hedonist yet hermetic, yet these engage a mellifluousness of particular sounds and images. I would maintain the lyric poem is all too readily identified with the lyricism of those attributes. That’s why I also resist, obnoxiously, the term “beauty” which is actually really vexed and complex. Sometimes beauty is established through the tradition of Kant and how it has been culturally colonized, and sometimes it is discussed through sex and identified with attractiveness. And these are very different worlds. When I hear that term I have to stop everything and at least find out what the person means by it if possible, or else we’ll never get anywhere. That’s why I became a bit feisty.