

Kane X. Faucher

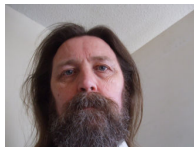
“Most of my poems begin with putting together two terms according to etymology, or constructing neologism by mutating an etymological root, a shift in prefix, or a transfusion of lexical elements from one robustly accoutered word to a more sveltely defined one.”

Kane X. Faucher discusses poetry, language and philosophy with **John C. Goodman**.



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John C. Goodman lived in British Columbia and Ontario before settling in Newfoundland & Labrador. He has published a novel, *Talking to Wendigo* (Turnstone Press). His stories, poems and essays have appeared in *The Fiddlehead*; *Otoliths*; *eli-mae*; *pax americana*; *Counterexample Poetics* and other magazines in Canada and the US. He is the editor of *ditch*, (www.ditchpoetry.com) and editor of *Trainwreck Press*.

John C. Goodman: Your poetry is mostly syntactical, uses conventional punctuation, and contains similes. You sometimes capitalize first letters of lines, and you often write in a subjective rather than objective mode. Yet you also use dazzlingly acrobatic language, juggle meanings, write non-narratively and, rather than breaking lines only at strong nouns or verbs, you sometimes break lines at the structural parts of speech, such as prepositions, conjunctions or adverbs. Can you comment on this mixture of the formal and the radical in your work?

Kane X. Faucher: I cannot say that I am fully conscious of the poem's format when I am writing it, although it does seem that some of the rhythm of it, staccato as it can be, emerges as if from the hindbrain. I suppose the schizo-poetic nature of the traditional and the radical would be a signal feature of my over-

all practice, resisting a clean synthesis and rather relying on the sharp tension between my own duality of latent conservative form and radicalized differences that cannot be subsumed under any rational banner. At times, the voice of difference rises up with tidal force, completely breaking apart the traditional structures, and at other times the somewhat Germanic aspect of trying to rein the work under control takes precedence.

I think where the poet performs her/his cuts can entirely change the poem in a seemingly imperceptible way, like the smallest swerve of the atom will result in another arrangement of molecules. The clinamen of the poetic line, where to apply the cut, where to let it flow toward that magnetic margin, is a concern for me. Poets like George Murray and his *The Rush to Here* know where to make that break, that cut, that

suspension, thereby making poetry a series – and serialization – of cuts and flows, breakages, fissures, and chaotic intercalating memes. The surgery I perform on a poem is not so voluntary or rationally derived according to some methodological program, and so the “subjective” appellation fits me rather well. It sounds terribly cliché to say I write what I feel, but there I cannot dismiss or downgrade the vital importance of intuition, sense, and feeling that goes into these cuts since it abides by perhaps a more intense logic outside the syllogistic way of thinking/creating.

The scene where formal and radical can best be identified would be my logophilia. As a child, there weren't many books around save for an encyclopedia set and a few dictionaries. Out of boredom rather than precociousness, I matched a tendency for language with the reading of dictionaries. It somewhat paid off since, in provincial testing, I was assessed in grade 2 of having a reading and vocabulary skill of grade 12.3. I became rather obsessive about etymologies, tracing the lineages and cognates of words in order to better understand the lexical holism of language and languages. Of course, language itself is always heterogeneous, always in flux, but being able to trace a word back to its etymological root and then observe its cousin terms opens up the scene for constructing or discovering new meanings. For example, “compilation” is close to “companion”, where the first is “compilare” (L: to pile up, associated with pillar) and the second is “com panis” (L: that which assists in the eating of bread). From these two terms which operate in a constellation of connected meanings we find associative terms like “arrangement”, “compendium”, “compound”, and eventually we can connect this to the German “Auszug”. Already, with one word, I can start connecting what would at first blush (and by common contemporary connotation) appear disparate, creating sparks and tension between words so that somehow I can speak of a compendium in relation to a bouquet of flowers, marshaling architectural and botany metaphors together to create a new landscape for meaning. As was told to me by my old supervisor, “etymology is a hooker”, and he is right. Most of my poems, and some of my academic work, begins with putting together two terms according to etymology, or constructing neologism by mutating an etymological root, a shift in prefix, or a transfusion of lexical elements from one robustly accoutered word to a more sveltely defined one. The

root of any word has very little fidelity if any, since it has a radial relationship to several terms. And so, there is a formal, almost conservative, method in the way I construct or discover certain poetic items, but the radical aspect is in the way I choose to flout a general system of order in favour of freer experimentation, cross-breeding words in my “logo-lab” whether they like it or not.

Language in all its structures fascinates me. I am among the few who could actually be rapt reading about grammar. The domains of semiotics, semantics, orthography, morphology, and linguistic history have always been a source of interest to me, and I freely use (and perhaps flout) the rules and principles I find there in order to derive the new.

I would love to take some creative intellectual credit for my use of capitalization, waxing wise on how it conforms to my poetic practice in meaningful ways, but the truth is far less thrilling and demonstrable of any insight. Depending on the text program I am using, a new line defaults to having its first letter capitalized, and other text programs it keeps it in miniscule. Now, if I wanted to be cheeky, I could fib and state that my use of majuscules (especially with nouns) conveys a German side to my poetry.

jcg: Words are certainly portmanteaus of meaning. Our words butter, eggs, milk and cheese are from the Friesian, so whenever we say *cheese* we are recounting the history of invasions from the continent that introduced dairy farming to Britain. And when we use a really old word, like *whore*, that can be traced back to the Indo-European **qar*, we are restating an embedded disdain for the sexual status of women goes back to our earliest language.

Such messages, histories and attitudes are inherent in words. There is a great deal of struggle evident in your use of words; they often seem on the verge of getting away from you. But I think there is more here than you are telling us about the conflict of emotional tides and rational structures. I believe that you have much more control over form than you are letting on; that allowing the random is part of your method of maintaining control the medium.

Some of the tension in your work is built between what you want to say and how you say it; how to

write in a poetic medium without it devolving into polemic, how to engage in philosophical discourse in a poem without being pretentious or pedantic. What is the relationship between the medium and the message, between the form and the content? It's almost as if you are defining what you are writing as you are writing it; that the definition is the process rather than the product.

KXF: Indeed, many Aryan and Ingvaenic words that have surreptitiously been left embedded in our current language's incarnation do carry some occasionally misogynistic and racist connotations, but if 'meaning is use', and the marginalizing or hate-ridden meaning of the word has 'dropped off', then perhaps they are salvaged and sterilized through language's constant mutations. My chosen language of expression, English, is perhaps one of the most schizoid languages as well as engaging in a great deal of "theft" by way of Anglicizing foreign terms almost without acknowledgement. French, on the other hand, and thanks to the efforts of Cardinal Richelieu's founding of *L'Académie Française*, has made the French tongue a museum of fixed words, inventing new words that are "uniquely French". For example, the word computer is for the most part the same in most languages, whereas the French decided on "ordinateur". Of course, French does involve a kind of theft, but a theft from itself, its origins in Gaulic Latin. Interestingly enough, Richelieu's policy was less about the preservation of language (itself a ridiculous thought when we consider the natural mutations of language), but more a means of giving sinecure positions and busy-work to the most vocal of the intellectual establishment, keeping them occupied from criticizing the State. And, hence, the word "quarantine" derives from *La Quarante* (the forty) – conjuring up this image that the smart and troublesome know-it-alls are tucked safely behind a sanitary cordon. But, back to English...the challenge of expression in English is dominated by its comparatively fewer number of expressive and sense-centered adjectives, favouring instead a kind of empirical, practical and mind-centered discourse. The Germanic heritage is obvious in English when we consider the simple words that have a practical connection to domesticity: haus, mutter, vater, blot, brot, and so on. The challenge posed to all poetry in English is in the way we can trick the language to be more sensual, more expressive, beyond the rigidity and scarcity of its lexical offerings.

On this notion of process as product, there are a few words to say. It may be as if I'm trying to reverse engineer conceptual art which is based on presenting documentation and process as the product, the process somehow gets derived from the product; rather than an ingredient list printed on the outside of the can, the process is inscribed on the inside package of the product. The event of meaning happens on that inner circumference for me. If that means the work gets caught up in its own tight and reflexive circle, my task has been to attempt brave escapes by following the radical tangential operator – a word, a break, a concept, a neologism, a monstrous portmanteau – to fly off or multiply interminably like a metastatic fractal.

I find polemic useful if done right, not veering into that "unholy trinity" Foucault admonishes against such as the judicial, religious, or political strains. I think there is hope for a purely literary polemic, a kind of narrative that is every bit as much sanguine lunacy as it is brazen erudition. I have in mind here those like Mencken, the occasional Henry Miller, Céline's latter trilogy, some of Pound, and the entire tradition of Gonzo journalism. Polemic is one method by which we can trick English into going mad, akin to provoking a very rational being into a moment of violence.

It feels rather odd to focus on just my poetic practice – itself a multiplicity since I adopt a multitude of voices for different occasions. Overall, I subscribe to different modes and registers, leaving me free and limber enough to cross "genres" so that I can write absurdist Gonzo prose, heavy Beckett-style prose, academic prose, blank journalistic prose, Nietzschean aphorism, Artaudian poems, or force cross-breeding experiments between them all. It makes it very frustrating for a reader or a scholar when the subject of study refuses to be reduced to a single sign denomination of having a single style x or a single writing mode y . This creates a confusion I enjoy cultivating, as confusing as trying to fit together Edison as an inventor and Edison as a capable sonnetist. This resistance of reduction to a singular designation by which I can be identified appears like tension, but it is a tension that is complicit with my view of never being one, but many.

Ah, philosophy in a poem. Trotting out names for their name-value and academic cachet is an ego

crime. There is a delicate art in the procedure of integrating philosophical themes and references so that the concepts being employed seem to belong, to make sense to the poetic attempt. Otherwise, it just smacks of arrogance, the concepts and names being dropped an ugly and discordant note in a poem. I have been guilty of this very thing in the past, I freely admit – and this was quite obviously and uninterestingly part of my development from the insecurity of what “income bracket” I came from, chip on shoulder, and something to prove. I suppose reading Deleuze, and reading him seriously, cured me of a great deal of pretentious palaver and the overweening urge to stud my work with jarring references for its own sake (or the sake of a static image of the ego). Instead, I consider my “intellect” to be a variable, malleable, and ephemeral thing that operates by ebbs and flows. What we commonly associate with intellect is merely the good faith we have in being utterly schizoid: the after-effects of a long cultural and intellectual inheritance of signs. Is not all knowledge just inhabiting and infecting us, wearing us like masks, while this thing called self (Soi) is occasionally fixed in the image of what it assigns itself? “I am x” where x = poet, husband, politician, or any role designator we wish to assign in order to arrest the fluctuating movement of a self that is constantly becoming-other. Now, I do know that implied in my above statement (or diktat) on integration of philosophy in poetry can be rightfully accused of being utilitarian in design; namely, if the philosopher’s name or the concept can act as a shorthand to avoid long explanations and be rendered useful to the overall poem, then it is admissible. However, I do not think that this is a universal requisite, nor is it the case that I am some transcendent objective being whose making use of a concept is the only and right way of a concept being useful. It may signal a kind of pedestrian or merely interested inclusion of concepts that lacks focused engagement with the gravity and meaning(s) of the concept itself, but the poem is not the place to work out pedantic rational considerations – the poem is the scene or the place to work out the concept in terms of its sense – beyond the confines of denotation, connotation, and strict meaning structures. On the whole, though, I agree with Derrida that there is “contamination” between philosophy and literature, and that we cannot make them mutually exclusive. Philosophy is in every way poetic as poetry is philosophical. The division between the two is fundamentally arbitrary, and the

prime example would be Nietzsche whose philosophical insights were expressed in the literary aphorism, and that without this fidelity to the literary way of thinking and writing, his philosophical viewpoint would not have the same puissance and robustness it does.

It is difficult to escape method since we are all condemned to being rational purposive agents involved in a world that has some very fixed ideas we have either voluntarily adopted, unconsciously absorbed, or resigned ourselves to be complicit with. For example, the very idea of “poem” cannot be divorced from what we have come to understand as poetry through our ritual reading of it historically and in seeing examples of “how it is done” in contemporary writing. It can be very difficult to think differently about the poem and not just repose on the idea that whatever we write that cannot be defined under the rubrics of prose or treatise will be given the hazy signifier of “poetry”. What makes a poem? Does it have an ontological status, and if so, should we obey the qualities that may derive from its category in the genealogy of writing? Randomness is a method, to a certain extent, but experiential accidents intervene and scupper many of our poetic intentions – which is fine. I believe that we should embrace the accidents fully. A poem is an experiment, and not all experiments succeed – but there is a value to the failed experiment since it can still be the scene of negative results that may be of some use to others.

jeg: Could you expand on how continental philosophy, such as that of Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault and Derrida, has influenced your approach to your work? And – if it is not too big a question – the philosophies of Plato, Kant and Hegel?

KXF: I must have been in the second year of my undergraduate in philosophy, nested within a department that was rather hostile to continental thought save for a few. One of my greatest teachers and later Master’s supervisor, Bela Egyed, turned me on to that “other history of philosophy”, focusing my rather youthful desire for a revolution in thought to patient study. His courses on Kant and Hegel were serious and among the hardest in the department, but he was always the first to say that one cannot understand Nietzsche or contemporary continental thought without a serious understanding and engagement with

German idealism since a great deal of critique comes from or goes against Kant and Hegel. At first, I had a bit of a love affair with Derrida's work and was enamoured with the way he wrote since it was far from the conventional method of philosophizing. This love affair lasted a few years and was gradually replaced by a more meaningful relationship with the works of Deleuze. Derrida inspired in me the rather healthy style of multiple interpretation and embroidered upon my reading of Borges who – in my opinion – is like Derrida applied. The freedom to mix and think differently was a tremendously pleasant shock to me: “you mean, I can actually write and think this way?” It just about justified my trajectory. Deleuze's work fostered in me a kind of balance between the ribald experiment and a meticulous reading of the history of philosophy. Notions like the virtual, body without organs, transcendental empiricism, de/re-territorialization, the fold, etc., compelled me in a conceptual manner that deconstruction could not. Instead of treating concepts as reverential and sacred things announced by the Canonical Philosophers, Deleuze and Guattari saw it in a much more amenable and practical way: concepts are just tools in your kit that you can freely apply, mix, and see what comes of them. That freedom to experiment without having to worship at the altar of Plato or Hegel was emancipating for my thought.

As to what effect they have had on my writing, I think that I try to keep to the esprit of their work. There is no way of “repeating” their method since the socio-political conditions are now very different. Deleuze came from a very stagnant tradition in France where existentialism was already old hat, new translations of Hegel were constraining thought, Heidegger's shadow loomed large, and philosophy was sinking into an institutionalized form of inconsequential wank. And thus, the Nietzsche revival, the second Spinoza revival, a Bergson revival, and all those who rallied to the plumes of affirmative differences. Conceptual experimentation and the freedom to invent was bequeathed to me by that spirit of 1968, although I was not yet born. The aftermath is rather disappointing; little more than 40 years later, the conservative contingent won the day, and continental “high theory” was forced to succumb to answering for its own value in terms of ethics with the whole Paul de Man controversy. High Theory expired, and in its place came postcolonialism, cultural studies, and the rise of social

scientists that borrowed bits and pieces from the Deleuze and Guattari books. Deleuze taught me that writing can be a chaosmos...it is okay to write in the tones of lunacy or the schizophrenic since we owe no fidelity to the bankrupt clinicizing House of Reason (a claim Foucault advanced in *Madness & Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, and *Birth of the Clinic*). Write according to your own line of flight, create a new image of thought, become the imperceptible, delight in the revel of the pure percept, affect, and concept. Design great assemblages, become a rhizome, be a nomad, create smooth rather than striated space, be a dynamic diagrammatist not a supplicant to a regime of despotic signs. Be molecular, not molar. What Deleuze advocated was not an anarchist throwing away of the rule book, but rather to co-opt it, to make it the source of the viral creation.

jcg: If I remember Nietzsche correctly, he said that it was not enough to be free *from* something, we have to be free *to* something else. While it may be true that to destroy is to create, we are plunged into relational questions about nihilism, anarchism, identity and meaning. What does the future of poetry hold in the face of post-avant, flarf, cut-up and total randomization? In reading your work I sense a constant undercurrent of the search for identity. Where is this taking you in your synthesis of experimentation?

KXF: Indeed, that is a good reading of Nietzsche, for to be free of the slavish morality in leaving the herd is not enough in itself, but more important to create one's own law tables. But we should clear up what Nietzsche means by nihilism since a lot is lost in bad translation and the prejudices resulting from the awful selective revisions of his sister Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a symptomatologist, and he observed nihilism from the perspective of a self-professed “cultural physician”. What he saw in then-contemporary European society (more specifically, the new German State) was a strain of nihilism that had not completed itself. The types of nihilism – such as passive nihilism and reactive nihilism – differ greatly. Nihilism is incomplete for as long as we merely negate a belief in god, appearance, and reject all supersensible illusions. At a certain point, the will to nothingness must end, and the will to power forces a break between merely denying all that has depreciated life to the value of nil and the need to get on with the construction and creation of a new “reality”. Pas-

sive nihilism only desires to pass away, what Nietzsche somewhat offhandedly dubs the Buddhistic consciousness. Reactive nihilism is the one who, after rejecting all values, is stuck in a solitary pessimism: “the world has no meaning and therefore no value.” Nietzsche finds in nihilism at least one kernel of hope: that there is will, and that will inherent to nihilism is the ground for a new will, the will to power which is expressed as the feeling of resistance perpetually being overcome, and for becoming itself to be the life-principle. Now, there is active will and reactive will. Active will embraces becoming and overcoming, whereas reactive will always wills “something” in particular. Reactive wills will a static identity, the anti-life principle of saying the “I am”: “I am (an identity defined by being) a insurance broker”, or “I am a success because I have achieved objectives x ,y, and z, these objectives imposed externally by a moral law table I obey rather than create.”

For Nietzsche, things like cruelty and war are necessary. It sounds callous, but history after Nietzsche has been one long forestalling of the inevitable, the clashes and strife that will hopefully bring active forces to triumph over the slavish morality of reactive forces. If Nietzsche could comment on cut-up, avant-

anything, and so forth, he might just see it as symptomatic of – not decline – a will expressing itself to create. And, just so long as it is not a decadent and self-aggrandizing project, that creation is also a critique.

If I am to stay true to the life-affirming qualities of becoming, I sincerely hope that there is no struggle toward some fixed identity in my work since that would violate my belief in constant becoming, that Spinozist notion of “conatus”. If such an undercurrent of identity-seeking exists in my work – and now I feel slightly paranoid that it might – then it would be my task to expunge that reactive part of my practice. The self is a multiplicity – it is the scene of events in perpetual unfolding and occurrences. “I” inhabit this body of becoming that is always becoming something else. “I” inhabit this mind that is also a body of becoming, and this “I” is a synthesis of what I have borrowed from history, knowledge, and experience, thrust into a world that is also in flux. In this way, “my” poetry is a visceral relationship in/with the world, an expression of this multiplicity of being. Dualisms get us nowhere, which is why I reject the mind-body distinction as an artifice, seeing the world from its base underside.