

RED WOLF EDITIONS

# ARS POETICA

AND OTHER POEMS



Karla Linn Merrifield

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## and Other Poems

KARLA LINN MERRIFIELD



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## Poetics

I have long found my inspiration for poems in two primary ways. Many of my poems arise from nature, whether a particular bird or beast, landscape or seascape. Then there are my Muses who spur me to write, whether a fellow poet (or his/her own words) or a lover or a beloved friend. My first published poem, at age 11, was about my relationship to my older brother.

Upon occasion, I'll explore my own interior landscape—my psychology of self—to find my ars poetica. You'll find examples of each in these pages.

Karla

## Ars Poetica

Here is dark morph northern fulmar,  
one among fifty thousand I will see,  
precisely as many as my thoughts  
on the average human day, eight percent

of them but echoes of an original—  
we think, rethink.

I have an idea:  
I wish to be a seabird,

then invent the doppelgänger image.  
I wish to glide far and wide above  
the Bering Sea as does the archetypal  
specimen of *Fulmaris glacialis*

who flies into this doubling line  
to complete the closing couplet.

Process notes: I wrote the poem while on expedition on the Bering Sea, seeing on the seascape these remarkable pelagic birds who seemed to echo my creative process—the wish to “glide.”

## Lode

In the pocket of stillness  
below the bottom-weighted  
horizon line at my body's core  
I detect a static vista of self:  
sleeping volcano above windless seas where,  
at the center of gravity at my center,  
no longer steaming in the magma chamber of grief  
but solidified in stone-strong strata of basalt,  
quietly love has begun to breathe again.

Process notes: This poem arose (same expedition) deals with geology via its diction, and geology grounded me (even at sea!) in my fresh grief for my husband's death a month earlier.

### **Waking Dream in Alesund, Norway**

When moon casts shadows on castles,  
quoth then old raven to young raven,  
*There is something I know.*

Troll-men may ride hard their wolves,  
snapping a bridle of braided snakes.  
So it is. But so it once was

eagles screamed in the rain  
and a heroine was born  
to slay snakes, wolves, trolls

of our imagination.

Process notes: Here's another "poem of place" that's grounded in the place's mythology, and suggests how myth works in our lives to heal us, guide us, expand our imagination's capabilities.



## Thinking It Over

Your thoughts are wild-winged things  
like a storm petrel's skimming ocean swells,

beating, beating, steady on, soundlessly profound.  
Your every thought feathers my dreams,

no twitch, but a tickling of synapses,  
no twinge, but a teasing of neurons

until my brain's waves alter course and force  
in flight to mind's desire.

I awaken, your final thought alit upon my lips  
like a sea bird's kiss: an eternal ephemerality.

Process notes: This is all about The Muse, cap T, cap M. A bird may lift me out of reality into the imagination, but it's the "you" of the poem who makes my poem fly.

## Timeless Licks

Whether the Flying Vee or Parker Fly or—  
you name it—the electric guitar  
is a sex machine,  
all spooge and squish:

it swoons into the innocent ear  
of a teeny-bopper the late night  
she kisses her guy on their first date;

it blasts the macho ears  
of BMOOC frat bro at the kegger  
where he'll bang his  
tripped-out coed  
on the game room floor;

it cranks the jaded ear  
of the hot-shot ad exec  
during the launch party  
when he nail a coked-up  
copywriter to the boardroom table;

and it weeps into the nostalgic ear  
of the silver-haired widow  
in the wee hour before dawn  
when she opens her body  
to take one last lover into her life.

Process notes: In late January 2020 (pre-Covid, mind you), I attended the National Association of Music Merchants with my guitarist friend Joe Craig for six days of seeing and playing some of the most beautifully crafted guitars on Earth, about which I was writing a collection of poetry that became *My Body the Guitar* (<https://karlalinmmerrifield.org/books/my-body-the-guitar/>). I awoke one night, 2 a.m. in our hotel suite, urgent to write something rising in me. I stood in our kitchenette under the light over the stove, and scribbled this poem in ink in my journal—in a rush, like a rock guitar riff!

## Bad-Bad to Good

Bad.  
Bad men.  
An army of bad men  
liked up confront me  
even now  
DraculaFrankensteinBluebeard  
Bigbadwolf.  
Why so many monsters?

All we'll have is Medusa  
to seduce with wisdom  
signified by writhing snakes  
idea serpents  
pythons of woman power  
to slay monsters.  
Hey you, look at all my thoughts  
slithering toward you.  
I'm be getting into your head.  
No more asps of brainwash,  
of propaganda reflecting  
your own lies.  
Let's do the snake dance, bad boys.  
Truth is fanged.

Process notes: This is one of my occasional feminist poems. A friend and colleague, poet Elizabeth Ambrose Johnston, who is a fem lit scholar and Medusa enthusiast, who has reminded me again of the power of myth—and how we need to and can revise myths from another point of view.

## **Tonight I Wish Of**

the taste of that hurricane season  
of the ten-thousand thoughts  
of wishful thinking that is  
of thee  
of thy brain and  
of leaning over in this poem welcoming you  
of salt from your fluid body on my lips  
of electrolytes delivered to my tongue  
of Beaufort-12 velocity  
of lashing me vigorously limp  
of humbled pose in the eye—  
of deceptive calm—then you, you  
of, oh, tumultuous thrashing  
of muscles  
of my well-toned pelvic floor, but also  
of my heart as organ, also fit, and  
of my heart, love's metaphor, imperiled

then of warbler song lovely and lilting,  
whistling again and again:  
you, insistent for me to listen—  
sing to me as you pass through me, all  
of me, my ten-thousand thoughts  
of wishful thinking  
we could be anything

Process notes: The source for the poem was purely my imagination and the inspiration of my muse, Craig Hordlow.

## Holding Patterns

1.

I hold you safely  
by a tanka's tight confines—  
deliciously—  
for we can come together  
on the spicy here and now.

2.

I  
hold  
you yet  
bodily  
in Fibonacci  
safety, perfectly boundaried.

3.

Encore! Encore! Unexpected encore  
of holding you again, a kiss's fleshy surprise  
within the slinky five-lined skink  
of a playful poem, on my flicking tongue:  
you holding me again, how kiss of flesh surprises.

4.

Trust me, I'm containering your hold  
to a scherzo.

5.

Holding you?  
What?  
Just  
fuckin' happily  
in bondage of a piem.  
Tight? Right!

6.

This:  
the box  
I cast us in  
together, not  
so much a looser hold

as one more expansive.  
In an ethere I wrap  
thigh-lengths of measured lines—heartbeats.  
En fin, this exuberance is skin-deep.

7.

All I gotta do  
is hold on, hold on—let go  
till who fuckin' knows.

Process notes: The poem draws on various poetic forms, using them as a metaphor for containment of the relationship being examined.

## Triptych: On Cinematic Waves

### I.

This is the voyage  
of movie songs  
of jigs and reels  
—oh, and of waltzes  
of blues and bar stools  
of parallel soundtracks  
of Bach and Brubeck—  
of your tempo's desire.

### II.

This is of North Atlantic voyaging  
of USA and Canada  
of international waters betwixt  
of British Empire born to independence  
of Boston port, 4th of July  
of an entire movie plot walking by  
of 1st Lt. O'Malley, his "breast salad"  
of four wars: WWII to Desert I.

### III.

This is to be a voyageur again  
of meta-documentary subject matter  
of chart and shoal in minute/second parts  
of another longitude of longing  
of northern latitudes  
of surprise and wonder  
of the quintessential video du jour  
of this truth: *I am the movie.*

Process notes: The poem was inspired by the performances of Paul and Kathryn Garthwaite, guitarist/singer and singer, aboard the *Queen Mary 2*.

## Père Lachaise Cemetery Diptych

#1

*Une  
rose  
blanche pour  
Héloïse  
et Abelard, deux âmes—  
les amants qui aiment aujourd'hui*

One  
rose  
white for  
Heloise  
and Abelard, two souls—  
two lovers who do love today

#2

*Une  
rose  
blanche pour  
Frédéric  
Chopin— l'âme qui joue  
parfums d'une polonaise perdue*

One  
rose  
white for  
Frédéric  
Chopin— his soul plays  
perfumes of a lost Polish dance

Process notes: The poem was inspired by a visit to Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where I visited the graves of both Chopin, and the medieval illicit couple, Abelard and Héloïse, who were only united in death.



**On her annual quest to Taos, JoJo the Poet's soul**

sopped up Puebloan vibes like so much spilled  
iced lattes, musing how *What is past or passing  
is to come*, an idea whose Native American time  
had taught long before Yeats copped it;  
trouble was Jesus the Penitente kept  
scourging himself in her midnight mind's  
eye— So JoJo'd no choice but to smudge  
sage through the cortex's casita consigning  
the extremist's spirit to his afterlife in Hollywood,  
leaving Jill and her pal Pi to obtain the mountain.

Process notes: The poem draws on my many visits to Taos, New Mexico, which often includes a hike along the Penitent's Way, an erstwhile al fresco Stations of the Cross once used by a small sect of monks.

## Our Words Began the Imagination

of time, its construct of eons  
and nanoseconds. Elasticity  
sticks to my tongue and stretches  
across your upper palate as we  
attempt to pronounce the number  
of hours to germinate the idea of love.

Likewise is distance reinvented  
every instance your synapses  
trick your lips into giving voice  
to the exactitude of bird migration.  
And my axons and my dendrites pulse  
with the articulation of new latitudes.

At long last miles and years evaporate;  
we are able to utter in unison: time is  
the longest distance between two places,  
two bodies and their minds. But with  
practice we are able to sing a belief as do  
peach-faced lovebirds -- *Agapornis roseicollis*.

Process notes: The poem was purely my imagination and the inspiration of my muse, my deceased husband Roger, aka lovebird.



## About the Author



Karla Linn Merrifield has had over 1000 poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has 15 books to her credit. Following her 2018 *Psyche's Scroll* (Poetry Box Select) is the full-length book *Athabaskan Fractal: Poems of the Far North* from Cirque Press. Her newest poetry collection, *My Body the Guitar*, recently nominated for the National Book Award, was inspired by famous guitarists and their guitars and published in December 2021 by Before Your Quiet Eyes Publications Holograph Series (Rochester, NY). She is a frequent contributor to *The Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*. Website: <https://www.karlalinnmerrifield.org/>; blog at <https://karlalinnmerrifield.wordpress.com/>; Tweet @LinnMerrifield