

State of the Art-Nancy Bauer-Salon, TJ-Saturday, July 2, 2016

We shared the art space in the tower of Gallery 78 for 19 years

Dr. Shane Neilson recently lectured on pain and metaphor at a conference on medicine and the humanities. His lecture, now on YouTube, was a revelation to me. One of its theses is that the metaphor we use to talk about pain--weaponry and damage--is not a good one. The experience for the person sensing pain is not served by this metaphor, and professional research on it is skewed. In his lecture Neilson uses Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, itself a revelatory book.

A while ago I complained in this column about the use of the metaphor of war in describing the experience of cancer. Obituaries frequently say that the deceased died after a long battle with cancer or that they put up a courageous fight.

I dislike this belittling of our bodies; they are amazing—even sacred—creations. We shouldn't be fighting with them. We "wage a battle" against obesity. Women wear distorting high heels. At least we no longer have to alter our bodies with a corset.

I wrote about Neilson's book of poetry, *On Shaving Off His Face*. It's a book that will set your head spinning. After twice watching his YouTube presentation, I got the book out and am struggling through it again. Neilson, from Oromocto although now living in Ontario, has produced quite a man with this combination of doctor of medicine, poet, and student of literature. If I were Premier Gallant, I would make sure he comes back here.

The lecture got me wondering what a helpful metaphor for pain would be. I remembered that in child-birth the pain wasn't bad because I knew what it was, that it would be over and the result was going to be worth it. A few days after my hip replacement surgery, I had the worst experience of pain I've ever had. As it turned out, it was nothing, just my atrophied calf muscle being stretched too far. The fright, the unknown, had turned something simple into a horror. The pain didn't signal damage but rehabilitation, a lesson I learned well.

We don't think of poets as being essential. But of course they are. They refresh our language, and language is what makes us human. We live our lives according to metaphors. A simple recent example: the metaphor of virus for trouble with our computer.

Speaking of metaphors, here is a vivid one from Edith Hoisington Miller's *Crow Impressions & Other Poems*. "A clan of crows--/I counted 26--reunited/At their spring place,/Hailing one another/With signal caws and cackles." The book is published by Chapel Street Editions. My favourite of its eight sections is "Waterways". At her Westminster Books launch, Miller read the section's long poem "Brook", a delightful tribute to a landscape of her childhood in each

season. "In spring I made mud pies/Over a boulder and left them to bake,/Turned over rocks to see/Millipedes spiral themselves/In disguise as 'pennies,'/Paved muddy paths with sticks/In cross-hatches and endless/Geometric designs, and/Rinsed my hands in the brook."

Various waterways provide her autobiography from the Connecticut brook, to Long Island Sound where she was a crew member on her grandfather's sailboat, to the Quarry Pool in New Jersey, and finally to the Tidal Bore and the Tantramar Marshes of her adulthood. "Had I landed on a different continent/When I came from an urban order/Nearly fifty years ago to/The Tantramar Marshes?/Tintamarre—the din of migrating geese."

Miller's husband and three sons are musicians. In the poem "Spirit" she evokes the essence that moves them. "The music is alive, it inspires me,/Merges its spirit with mine,/And we are as one spirit." In "Mysterious Openings" she uses two early memories to describe her lifelong searching for meaning.

Typing out the quotations, I realized that Miller capitalizes the first letter of each line. To capitalize or not is a dilemma for a poet. A poem looks poem-like when the first line is capitalized; no one mistakes it for prose. Its line by line structure is emphasized. Even when the meaning and the grammar of one line carries over onto the next line—enjambment--the line ending is certain. On the other hand, not capitalizing makes the poem look less formal, more contemporary.

The fledgling Fredericton literary festival now has a name and a date. "Word Feast: A Saint John River Valley Literary Festival" will be held September 23 to 25. Thanks to the interest of Keith and Brendan Helmuth, publishers of Chapel Street Editions in Woodstock, the festival has been expanded to include the whole St. John River Valley. Leaders of this initiative are Ian LeTourneau, Fredericton's Cultural Laureate, Rob Gray, professor at the University of New Brunswick, and Julia Stewart, director of the Fredericton Public Library. If you want to get in on the beginning of the creation of the festival, email ianletourneau@bellaliant.net. Word Feast has a Facebook page you can like.