

Rosa Lane, Winner of 2017 Maine Literary Award for Short Works
Interview [archived] With Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance
USM Glickman Family Library, Portland, Maine
Published October 5, 2017

1. What is the most important part of writing a good poem? How did you come to learn this yourself?

The volta or “the turn” is for me the most important part of writing a good poem. Without this shift point, i.e. this point of change, a poem loses meaning and risks failure. Kenneth Boulding in his work *The Image* states in so many words: *no meaning, no change; no change, no meaning*. Following Boulding, for a poem to have meaning, it must then conspire change, which it does via its volta, its turn. Hence, for me, the volta makes every poem a political poem. I first learned about the volta, of course, through studying Shakespearean sonnets where the volta occurs just before the final couplet and in Petrarchan sonnets just before the sestet. Then I became aware that each and every poem I love has a volta. The voltaic poem, and each poet and each poem do this so differently, moves toward its “turn,” reveals it, and takes it into final line/s, which doesn’t always mean resolve.

2. What part of a poem is the hardest to write? The first line, last line, title? Does it vary?

The hardest part of a poem for me to write also happens to be what I consider the most important part, the volta. But for me, the challenge is *allowing* the volta versus *writing* the volta. I believe any poem in the making is *desperately seeking* its apex. I am referring to that place in the poem where one or two lines break the trance, sweep off the ledge, or jump the cliff into the field of the unknown and unexpected, taking the whole poem into peak discovery. This can be terrifying. At this stage of poem making, most of us just have to get out of the way, suspend our fear, the critic, the perfectionist, our love affair with logic and linearity, or any other certainty-seeking saboteurs. “The turn” is bold, defies logic, loves nonlinear, reveres the chaotic, enjoys a mess, and seeks the unknown. Once I have “the turn” in hand, and you know it when you got it, not only is there great relief, but also most other parts of the poem, at least for me, fall into place.

3. Are there any parallels between poetry and architecture? What advice do you have for people who want to pursue two seemingly different paths?

As poet and architect, I view poems as literary architectures with accessible portals that open into unexpected habitations and inner terrains, and living architectures as poems. In architectural design, what we call the *parti*, “the big idea,” emerges quite magically, out of the corner of the eye. Just as the *parti* for the architect holds the whole idea of the building within it, so it is for me the same in poem making, by which the *parti*, perhaps a single word or color or feeling, holds the whole psychic field or the whole dream of the poem inside it including its volta. Once the *parti* is revealed, I unpack (or keep working) its dimensions and details into structure whether architectural or poetical, and, most importantly, the very process of discovery must be embodied within the thing itself so that the magic reverberates, evolves, and is discovered and experienced by the inhabitant upon each reentry or reread. In terms of writers pursuing two different career paths, my being an architect has nourished, offered crossing points with, and informed my poetry and vice versa. Managing and balancing a multi-dimensional life has been the challenge and has necessitated my structuring time with set boundaries, so that the day job or career path doesn’t overstep and consume writing time. So, I suggest staying connected with other writers through literary organizations and libraries; participating in workshops and conferences; forming a small, local weekly or biweekly writing group in one’s genre; establishing and inhabiting writing space wherever it might be; knowing the preferred writing time of day; and being persistent. I have to say though that I could live without architecture; however, I would die without poetry.