

# Political poetry can bridge gap between personal, political

Lately, I've been sitting by the shore of the Willamette River. There is one stretch where I can see river and highway adjacent to one another. The first time I was there, I thought how much the freeway of cars was really like a river of water. Recently, I've been noticing how the river flows in the opposite direction of the closest lanes of traffic.

As I have said before ("Art falls apart," ODE, Aug. 7), I feel poetry stands in opposition to all that a culture based on domination, patriarchy, violence and authority would represent and propagate. In Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's book "Ecofeminism," Mies writes: "What modern machine-man does to the earth will eventually be felt by all; everything is connected. 'Unlimited Progress' is a dangerous myth because it suggests that we can rape and destroy living nature, of which we are an integral part, without ourselves suffering the effects."



**Aaron Shakra**  
The poet's tree

Poetry, at its best, is an attempt to mend this disconnectedness between culture and nature; it contradicts both thoughtlessness and selfishness. To write it is to become a weaver, or seamstress, and to read it is to be placed in a space of limitless reflection. These two have a dynamic relationship, but I would like to emphasize the aspect of listening because our culture tends to emphasize the "telling" all too much.

Regardless of whether it's a poem or not, consider this exercise: Try listening to something else — your friend, a stranger, an enemy, a tree — without forming any judgment or waiting for your turn to talk. This kind of waking meditation is actually quite difficult. You know why? Listening for the sake of itself isn't a value that this culture cherishes. We're inundated with sound bites, advertisements, headlines almost right from the womb. When it comes to education, the general attitude is "Give me the information and let me get out of here."

I won't go as far to blame the world's problems on these examples — they are merely symptoms of a deeper-rooted disease. Still, there is no denying we are desensitized to patience and reflection as the result of them.

From my (albeit limited) experiences in the world of academic creative writing (a year in Kidd Tutorial and one advanced

creative writing class), I have noticed a hesitance toward the idea of political poetry. In a way, this is justifiable, because I'm not sure if there's a genre of poetry more prone to de-personalized and unfocused ranting. Here, the notion of "political" is tied up in broad, sweeping and arbitrary statements. Furthermore, such a poem doesn't write from a place of experience; lack of experience lacks emotional resonance.

However, political poetry is also feared for the power it can elicit within the person. The personal is political, and the political is personal. This means content doesn't necessarily have to be about some event, or object separate from the writer. A political poem written with focus and from a place of experience is devastatingly powerful and dangerous because it taps into something primal within us: our core. I don't want to say this is our true self, because that makes it sound like something fixed. In his poem "Avocado," Gary Snyder writes: "The great big round seed / In the middle, / Is your own Original Nature— / Pure and smooth, / Almost nobody ever splits it open / Or ever tries to see / If it will grow." This is closer to an idea of a "core."

I feel writers are especially prone to a fear of political poetry because it implicates a total connection between creator, creation and the world. Sylvia Plath likens herself to a mirror, silver and exact. Yet it goes farther when it comes to our core; the writer of a political poem places his or herself in a room full of mirrors, where they see themselves in everything. This is a place of intense reflection that many would rather turn away from.

I am weary of the ones who distance themselves from their work and deny its profound connection to life as a whole. This statement says nothing about what the content of what a poem should be, but rather what it should not. Poetry is not commodity. It cannot be left and returned to at the drop of a hat because the true poem never leaves us.

I overheard a conversation between folks about writer's block the other day. It sounded like many other similar conversations I've heard about the subject, which talks about it as if it were something that actually existed. But writer's block only signals a greater congestion within a person, one that is disconnected and alienated from writing, or even worse, views it as "work" to be done. The true poet writes as she takes breaths of air. It is possible to write in the world without writing, just as it is possible to paint without painting. All it takes is a blossoming and opening up. Writing in this sense is almost an afterthought, an echo of experience.

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Courtesy

The Argentinean film "Suddenly" opens this year's Queer Film Festival on Friday at 7 p.m. in PLC.

## 12th Queer Film Festival commences with 'Suddenly'

The event will feature 'Word is Out,' which is considered the first film made for and about gays

By Ryan Nyburg  
Senior Pulse Reporter

The Cultural Forum's 12th Annual University of Oregon Queer Film Festival kicks off Friday at 7 p.m. with the Argentinean film "Suddenly."

This year's festival is centered around themes of international queer perspectives and the role film has played in shaping queer history. Films from across the country will be shown alongside fare from countries such as Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Documentaries also make up a fair amount of the festival's scheduled showings. The 1978 film "Word is Out" — considered the first film made by and about gays — will show alongside the 2002 release "Hope Along the Wind: The Story of Harry Hay," about the founding of the first successful gay rights organization.

Other highlights include "A.K.A.," a drama that is split into three simultaneously playing frames; "Brother Outsider: The

Life of Bayard Rustin," about the openly gay civil rights activist; and "Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World," about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender struggles in countries south of the equator.

"This year I was looking for films that transcend boundaries," Queer Film Festival Coordinator Douglas Hopper said. "I wanted films that pushed the envelope, as far as form and content go."

Hopper, who selects all the feature-length films for the festival, believes the University's festival has a special place among other festivals of its type.

"It's important that it takes place in an academic environment," Hopper said. "It makes the kinds of films we can select a little more flexible."

One of the highlights of the festival is its short film competitions. The first competition features films selected by a special jury comprised of students and community members. The second allows the audience to select the best from a group of shorts.

One of the short films that was selected by the jury is "Love Life," by director Nanci Gaglio. Gaglio will be appearing at the University to present her film.

Her first short film, the B-movie parody "Pussies from Outta Space," will be showing at the audience choice competition.

"My films seem to do pretty well on college campuses," Gaglio said. "I think it's because I don't fit into any particular genre. Mainstream gay and lesbian festivals have a hard time with films that don't fit into a box."

With sponsorship from a number of campus organizations — including the School of Journalism and Communication and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Alliance — as well as lower ticket prices than in previous years, the festival promises to be a popular event.

"I think it's a good chance to see a broad view of queer media," LGBTQA Co-Director Jason Wicklund said. "You know, something that isn't 'Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.'"

The Queer Film Festival will run from Friday through Sunday with the showings at 180 Prince Lucien Campbell Hall. Tickets for the entire festival are \$5 for students and \$7 for the general public.

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