

Richard Ryal Personal Background/expansion material for ND Review:

I'm a writer and professor who first had a career in marketing, much of it in the academic and small business arenas. I committed myself to poetry because of this art's power to extend the use of language to its borders, saying more than grammar and vocabulary allow. Writing poetry is my opportunity to recalibrate the known for the writer and the reader. My great cultural heroes are those who shift their audiences' ability to see life differently.

My poetry heroes are the ones who push me around some. Foundational are Sharon Olds, Mark Strand, Albert Goldbarth and John Ashbery, which led me to Rilke, Trstromer, Plath and more. I love poets who aren't looking to be easy with their world but instead look for deeper intimacy with life's most engaging experiences, even if those get ruthless.



My "Lola" poems depict a nun with strong mystical aptitude who wants to experience more of the divine through meditation and prayer. She has a mystical experience which can't be put fully into words. Because Lola's journey takes her beyond what can be described through the logic of language, I use formal styles (villanelles, sestinas, and more) to frame her journey through changes in spiritual awareness. This has been a satisfying body of work for me because writing in forms creates lines I didn't plan on, allowing me, a free verse diehard, to say more than I intended.

I have always had interests similar to Lola's in naturally expanded spiritual consciousness. While her context is different from mine, I was able to fold my personal experiences into this series. While I explored these journeys indoors and in wilderness sites, I feel what I did in my own way is similar in important ways to what a young nun in her modest room could experience.

I hope to publish these poems together because they make the most sense as a full sequence.

My favorite interview was in 2016 with Lenny Dellarocca, a wonderful poet who founded and, at the time, was editor for the South Florida Poetry Review. I'm not just including the link here because you have to dig deep on the page to find me. So here it is (<https://www.southfloridapoetryjournal.com/interviews-2016-19.html>):

1 Can you think of a poem you did not like at all, but after reading it many times, have come to love? Please tell us the poem and poet. Place poem below if it's not too long (optional).

More than a poem, I think of poets to answer this. When I first encountered John Ashbery, I couldn't understand what he meant by anything he said. Worse, the lines of one poem seemed completely interchangeable with any line in another poem. Then I started accepting his work the way I accepted world music and it began to allow for a new process of meaning-making. It reminded me of when, as an aspiring artist, I began to appreciate Robert Rauschenberg, who had annoyed me for years. I had to accept that such work required me to change the way I was willing to think, willing to relate. Ashbery, like Rauschenberg, took me through a door I wasn't looking for into a vast landscape of inspiration, intelligence, and creative opportunity I could have easily missed.

2. Are most of the poems you read past tense, present? Why do you think that is?

I know this is a great question because I don't know the answer. I don't think about it, even though most of my own poems are present tense. Present tense keeps me enmeshed in the distinct world of a specific poem. I'm in what happens. I fall in and I can't get up. However, past tense is great for emphasizing how we now see differently the certainties we saw before. Still, I would love to invent a new tense to write in: a subjective pluperfect, carry the numerator, butter side down.

3. Do you write on screen or on the page? Why?

I've done so much of both that it isn't an issue anymore, though I love starting a poem with a pen on a page. I can cross out, make messes, and draw arrows as I edit. And doodle. On a screen, I can insert and delete easily, edit more strategically, but birthing a poem is better on paper because it demonstrates the mess of creativity. And the abstractions of writing are more vividly physical because I move a pen slowly.

4. Turns out your favorite poet is a horrible human being. Does that change your opinion of the poetry? Elaborate if you wish:

Some great artists are awful people. I try not to mistake the art for the person, though there are limits. For example, Rilke is essential to me but from what I've read (I did not do a thorough historical research), I don't think he was a great family guy. So yes to The Duino Elegies, but no to Letters to a Young Poet, since he's more idealistic than pragmatic there. My own best poems probably represent a better me than my friends and family know. Fortunately, most good poets I've met have been wonderful company, so I'm inspired when I seek them out more. Marvin Bell, for example, taught me how to watch college basketball. And Sylvia Plath taught me needlepoint. (Or was it Auden? The police said alcohol was a factor...)

5. Do you use a prompt to get the juices going when the muse had left you high and dry? If yes, please tell us what that prompt is:

My poems prompt me. A phrase comes into my head (more often when I mutter to myself about nothing in particular). The words could be a title, opening lines, or the center of the poem. They may even lead into the real poem and need to be left behind. I love the mysterious origins of work I can only pretend to be mine. However, I'm going to attach here an example of a prompt I give my writing students. (I grab strange photos online and give them writing prompts in a PowerPoint at the beginning of class. Their job is to write whatever comes into their heads.) But I agree with young Bob Dylan, "Open your eyes and ears and you're inspired."

Richard Ryal has had several careers over a lifeline that has often perplexed us all. He's been a therapy aide, teacher, spiritual healer, teacher, bookseller, and now a writer, professor or writing, editor, and project development guy. He's lived on both coasts and hung out with the most interesting people he could find. Higher altitudes make him purr, so poetry is his linguistic equivalent of clear weather in the face. For Richard, poetry had been a long, continual argument between logic and inspiration. He has dedicated a considerable amount of time to presenting the best local (Elisa Albo, Barbra Nightingale, Zan Gay, Stacie M. Kiner, John Arndt, Maggie Schwartz and Richard Blanco) and famous poets (Denise Duhamel, Yusef Komanyakka, Lyn Lifshin, Janet Holmes, Richard Jones, Enid Shomer, Carolyn Wright and Albert Goldbarth) to unsuspecting audiences while co-president of the Hannah Kahn Poetry Foundation.

Some other poems of mine available online:

"Lola Wavers," Amethyst Magazine

<https://amethystmagazine.org/2023/03/06/lola-wavers-a-poem-by-richard-ryal/>

"Lola Returns," Amethyst Magazine

<https://amethystmagazine.org/2023/04/11/lola-returns-a-poem-by-richard-ryal/>

"Our Bodies Release Certainty," Sheila-no-Gig online:

<https://sheilanagigblog.com/volume-7-1-fall-2022-the-poets/richard-ryal/>

"Lungfish," Survision:

<http://survisionmagazine.com/Issue11/richardryal.htm>

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If there's anything else I can send you, please let me know. Also, if you need to edit this material in any way, have at it. If you want to lie to make me more interesting, that's fine too.

I sent you the audio recording from my phone just now. If you have any problems with it, tell me and I'll try to fix it.

Thank you for your support. I feel a little less anonymous as a result.

Richard