JANET McADAMS

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YOUR BODY, YOUR BREATH: AN INTERVIEW WITH JANET MCADAMS

The following conversation occurred at the end of New Medicines: A Festival of Native American Writing at Washington and Lee University, in May 2005. McAdams and several other poets gave poetry readings and participated in panel discussions on gender and the South in relation to American Indian writing. McAdams, a writer of Irish, Scottish and Creek ancestry, is the Robert P. Hubbard Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College. Her first collection of poems, The Island of Lost Luggage *(Arizona, 2000), earned the Native Writer's Circle of the Americas Award and the American Book Award. Her second,* Feral, *was published by Salt Press in 2006.*

LW: I'll start by asking you about the poetry series you're currently editing, *Earthworks*. How did it come about, and what are your goals?

JMc: Well, it really started as a fluke. I was aware that there were not nearly enough publishing venues for Native writers. There's an enormous discrepancy between the amazing wealth and variety of contemporary Native writing and the presses that are willing to publish it. I teach at Kenyon College, and the poet John Kinsella is my colleague, actually in the office next door to mine. A friend's manuscript was sitting on my desk, an Indian poet I had worked with, and I took it next door and I asked John if he might be interested in it for Salt Publishing, the press he founded. I knew that John and Salt Publishing had a long-standing interest in indigenous Australian poets, aboriginal poets; Native American was a natural next step. He said "Sure. We just don't know where to find any." I held up the manuscript in my right hand and said, "Well, I've got one right here." We went on talking, and by the time I left his office we had cooked up a book series. The great thing about John is that he's very effective at seeing a need and making something happen to fix it. Chris and Jen Hamilton-Emery, who run Salt, are also wildly supportive of the book series. I fumbled around for a name for a long time, and my friend Chad Allen, the Chickasaw scholar, came up with *Earthworks*.

What was really amazing about putting together the series was how many good manuscripts I got, both from emerging writers and from

really well-established writers like Carter Revard and Diane Glancy. It all happened very fast, within about a year after that conversation John and I had in his office.

LW: Are you going to publish six volumes every year?

JMc: I think six might be a bit nuts for every year, but already we've got some good manuscripts in queue and there will be seven in the next set. Certainly it's no problem to find that many good manuscripts — it comes down to whether I have time to actually edit and prepare those manuscripts. I love reading and editing poetry, just as I love teaching it, but you have to be careful to balance all that with writing your own poems. A little of it energizes my own work; too much drains it utterly.

What we'd like to do in future years is expand the series to include indigenous writers from other parts of world — Polynesia is a real interest — and I've already got a lead on an anthology of diasporic Polynesian writing.

LW: I'm reminded of the Black Arts Movement. The poets involved in that enterprise had to create a new set of institutions so that African-American writing could find publication. Do you think that Native American writers are now in an analogous situation?

JMc: Native writing was probably there about twenty years ago. The Black Arts Movement modeled a kind of publishing world for many marginalized communities. Lesbian poets saw that model and created their own presses. There were Native presses early on; it's really amazing what they did for the community. One is Maurice Kenny's Strawberry Press and the magazine *Contact II*. Neither of those is functioning presently, but for many years they brought so many Native writers into print. And then Joe Bruchac established the *Greenfield Review* and Greenfield Review Press. It's really hard to overestimate how important that work was. I just don't think that Native American literature would be where it is without Kenny's press and the work of Joseph Bruchac. It was important not just for those poets whose work was first published there, like Peter Blue Cloud; because that work was out there, a whole generation of Native writers thought, "I can write. This can happen for someone like me."

LW: Are there institutional changes, such as the creation of more publishing venues, that need to occur for people to start recognizing the wealth of writing that's out there?

JMc: I think many universities, if not most, now have some kind of course in American Indian literature, and I see a generation of young Native scholars who are coming into the academy. They have wonderful training; certainly they're better trained than I am. In Oklahoma I was teaching students who were just racing by me, because by then there were established American Indian Studies programs. Lots of people in my generation really just sort of patched together Native literature degrees.

Unfortunately, all this happens at a low point in American politics, and that low point in American politics is tied to a low point in American culture. There's a backlash against otherness, against diversity. We moved forward and now we're moving back. I hope that the new McCarthyism will be short-lived, so that these young Native scholars will be allowed to do the work they've trained to do. New Critical, conservative, white, privileged and masculinist ideology still has a stronghold in universities, especially in creative writing programs. There are some exceptions, but the majority of them are unfriendly to students of color. It's extraordinarily difficult for a writer of color to get a job teaching in an M.F.A. program; those students' aesthetics therefore remain narrow and don't reflect, I think, the wealth and plurality of American culture.

LW: That's a good segue into a teaching question. Your own creative writing teaching emphasizes reading and writing assignments at least as much as the workshop model, and I wonder if you could explain why. What do you consider to be the most important goals of a creative writing class?

JMc: I would think about it quite differently depending on whether it was an introductory class or a more advanced class. At Kenyon, I teach students who are very academically inclined. Many of them perceive themselves as writers and have already had some creative writing experience. They already have a fixed notion that in a creative writing class you hand out everybody's poems and sit around talking about them. But, as the complaint often goes, the workshop format

lends itself to certain kinds of poems. Students schooled exclusively through that pedagogical model will tend to have narrow definitions of poetry.

With young writers, what I most want is for them to see how many choices they have, and not to settle into anything too quickly. Students often want to find their own voice. I don't want them to find their own voice. I want them to find a lot of voices and practice ventriloquism for years and years and years. In Mary Oliver's *Poetry Handbook*, she describes how you learn to write in one mode and at some point you're exhausted. If you've not been simultaneously trying to learn other voices and understand form, then you're just kind of stuck in a fallow period. I think it's great to work through your obsessions whether they're form or subject matter, but I think you have to be training constantly as an artist, learning skills and techniques.

I do meet with resistance from students because the traditional workshop is, for a lot of people, their first publication. It's gratifying when you hand your poem out for people to read it. And I understand the need to be heard. But I would feel remiss if I didn't spend the majority of my class opening up students' reading experiences. I didn't really have teachers who did that very much for me. An occasional teacher would suggest poets to read or give me an idea about writing, but for the most part, they presented a pretty narrow canon. I went through a traditional M.F.A. program in which we workshopped every single poem. I'm driven to be the kind of teacher I never had.

William Stafford apparently told his class that students just wanted him to just fix their poems. Well, they still want it! He would tell them instead, "Revise your life." Writing classes should help us to be better human beings, good citizens of the world. We should be very responsible in our teaching and remind students to be responsible in their own practice.

I believe in a fair amount of play in the creative writing classroom, including — as you know — the day I bring in scissors and glue sticks and we cut our poems up. But the work you send out into the world ought to be work you're committed to, something you feel needs to be written. When students come to see me with work they feel tepid about, I send them away and tell them to come back with something that matters deeply to them.

LW: Workshops are often designed to help participants finish their poem. It seems to me that your teaching is very much about starting again and again.

JMc: Right. And if the class helps you to finish the poem, you don't ever learn to finish it yourself. Beyond poetry, democracy is a wonderful thing, but in terms of editing and revision, democracy doesn't work very well. Everybody compromises and you end up with a bland poem. I get tired of hearing relentless complaints about "the workshop poem" from people who've never really written poetry, but workshops can create problems. The author gets persuaded into compromise edits, and the result isn't very interesting.

LW: One quality of your book, *The Island of Lost Luggage,* is its resistance to "the workshop poem." Specifically, these poems resist the lyric "I," the notion of a coherent observer who is expressing thoughts and feelings through the vehicle of the lyric poem. You use lots of lists and second-person address, devices that fracture the coherence of your poetic speakers. I wonder how you've approached those questions as a poet.

JMc: That's a big question.

LW: It is.

JMc: During my M.F.A. program at Alabama, I took literature classes from the poet Hank Lazer, in which we read some theoretical writing by the Language poets and other pieces that really challenged what Charles Altieri calls the dominant mode of American poetry, a mode I'd just accepted as the default paradigm for a poem — it certainly seemed to be then in the mid-eighties. That really influenced me, though it took years for it to show up in practice.

I sometimes wonder if a poet can read too much theory. I know Peter Elbow tells you that you have to kick the editor out of the room; I've wondered if sometimes you have to kick the theorist out of the room, too. Nonetheless, I think that work had an enormous influence on me because I kept lapsing into that lyric "I," the kind of "my-own-personal-tender-experience I," uncomplicated and unchallenged.

In fact, when the confessional poets began to use this bald lyric "I," that was a radical response to things going on in American culture, to the relative depersonalization of their own lived experiences. So when they did it, it was striking and radical and interesting. When it trickled down, though, into what I call "debased confessionalism," that "I" became a trope in and of itself, a default category and not a very complicated or interesting one. When I was a young poet, I wrote lots and lots of those poems. When I began to read theoretical work by people like Charles Bernstein and Ron Silliman, I began to question that "I" and to understand it as politically charged. Further, when I lived in El Salvador, I began to understand that the uncomplicated voice was the uncomplicated voice of the imperialist and the privileged speaker, and the "I" got more and more disrupted. I lived my entire year in El Salvador as an uncomplicated, imperialist "I." The poems I wrote then don't document my life there; they document my deep regret about that "I" and its violent existence.

I think another factor that influenced me — and this may seem an odd intersection with Language poetry — is Adrienne Rich. Rich always has notes in her books, and I love flipping back to them. I think what she's really doing is disrupting the center with those notes, saying there is no center, we have to locate ourselves in history. We have to say I'm an "I" at a particular moment in history, and here's how I position myself in relation to history. She influenced me the same way the Language poets did, though she goes about her work quite differently.

LW: That actually doesn't seem strange to me at all. I know that Rich and Silliman would seem like a strange pairing in some circles, but I think those lessons are there from both kinds of writers.

JMc: Right. And I think that for Native writers, the idea of the so-called "universal" reader is impossible to accept.

LW: One feminist argument against post-structuralism is that dismantling the "I" is problematic for any group that has fought so hard for the right to assert it. Do you feel that complication in your poetry?

JMc: I feel that complication about life. I don't know if I feel that complication about poetry. That's an interesting question. If you dis-

mantle the "I," you can transcend the self, but there has to be a self to transcend in the first place. . . . So I began to figure out some ways to re-strategize the "I," the "you."

That's something I came to understand much more as a scholar and teacher of American Indian literature. I come from a white, mixed-blood deep-South family, one that acknowledged its mixed ancestry but didn't really identify itself primarily as Indian. But I think we always inherit the past, all our pasts, however conscious or unconscious we may be of the source of what shapes us. When I started studying writing at university, the model presented to me was that of the individual writer competing to be the most original voice in town. Those were never good parameters for me. There was always some discomfort. As my own studies shifted, I began to know more Native writers and to become aware of other ways to think about the purpose of poetry; the Wordcraft Circle, for instance, has been an incredibly welcoming and inclusive community — I'm very grateful for their support.

In Linda Hogan's work it's interesting when and how the "I" comes in. It can seem like Linda-the-poet speaking, but the poems never seem to be about her exactly. They're always about community, humanness, the world, all of the people of the world — and I don't just mean humans — but also the birds and the ants! In Joy Harjo's poems, the "I" is a witness. Like in that wonderful poem "Deer Dancer," the story circulates in a way that dismantles the controlling perspective. It's a community story. It's a story that's important to people. And whether you actually lived this as personal experience doesn't matter. It's irrelevant because you've lived it in some other way. So, Native women poets come to the "I" in some completely different tradition. It's very different from the "I," say, of Sharon Olds.

LW: So for Native writers the "I" is already complex, already embedded and implicated in community and a sense of responsibility to that community. . . . The poems in *Island of Lost Luggage* engage definitions of selfhood partly through memory. You seem very interested in the mechanics of memory as well as its philosophical implications. Am I right in remembering that your father was a neuroscience professor?

JMc: He was a professor of cognitive psychology.

LW: Did that have an intellectual influence on you?

JMc: It had a *huge* influence. Of course, all poets are interested in memory, all writers are interested in memory, human beings are interested in memory, but certainly growing up with a father who's a specialist in memory is really very important to my work. When I was a young writer and had a stormier relationship with him — we have a great relationship now — I would never have admitted to that. But, you know, I grew up hearing about how memory works in terms of the brain. My father particularly studied short-term memory, but he taught quite a bit about memory in general. There were sources lying about the house, like J.M. Itard's journal about the feral boy, *Victor of Aveyron*, which in some ways has triggered my second collection, a book called *Feral*. I'm fascinated with the idea that you have to learn before a certain age how to be human. If you don't, what are you? How do you remember things? What does language mean?

In the new book I talk about a case that Luria, a Russian psychologist, had. A man asked to be a case study. He could forget nothing, and it was driving him insane, so he went to Luria to cure him of it. It's so fascinating how we remember things. Passive memory. Active memory. How we forget things. How we remember things that did not happen with absolute conviction and clarity. And people do *not* want to believe that. How absolutely faulty so-called eyewitness memory is in a murder trial because shocking events disrupt memory.

LW: That seemed to be a particular interest here — the relationship between memory and trauma.

JMc: In those seconds leading up to something shocking, you just don't remember. Your brain just has this retroactive, retrograde amnesia. You have trauma, and it erases what happened. There's a lot of passive memory, too — we store memories away and we don't have the same kind of access to them, but they are there somewhere.

I believe strongly in the poet's role as witness to history. Memory lays out an elaborate paradigm for me to think about family history and how it fits into the larger pattern of cultural history: who we are, who our families are in terms of very large events. And I think, too, about land and about place. To me, in some ways, everything having to do with being human fits under this rubric of memory. The relationship between land and body is a relationship with memory. And perhaps the most important one.

LW: A lot of the poems in this book are less about place than about moving between places. How is *Feral* different?

JMc: It's a very researched book, involving library work about colonialism and imperialism. That's embedded in *Island of Lost Luggage*, but it's foregrounded in *Feral*.

There are journeys in it. There's actually a poem called "The Polar Journeys" which is about all those explorers to the North and South Poles. There's a poem called "The Orphan Train" about moving orphans out from the northeast into the western farm communities in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

I think the self doesn't take as central a place. The witness isn't as constant a thread. This book is much more about the gathering of cultural stories and unpacking them and sometimes twisting them. There's a poem about one of Grimm's fairy tales; it talks about all these stories where kings fall in love with the beautiful maiden who cannot speak and you sort of wonder what's going on with that. I have a poem, "The Colonization of Hands," about the murdered activist Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, a woman many Native writers have written about. I try, in the poem, to write about the ways her story has been disseminated, particularly how her hands — which were cut away from her body by the FBI — have become a key image of latter-day imperialism. One task of this new collection is to take on a set of stories and trace their circulation, what's their effect, where do they come from, what else is going on in and outside of the story.

LW: Speaking of the circulation of stories, as you write, at what stage do you start thinking about an audience? What audience do you conceive of for your work or hope for your work?

JMc: I try really hard not to think about audience at all. There's an amazing amount of wonderful poetry being published in this country, and I think that that's just great. At the same time, because so much has been published, there's a kind of constant, accelerated feel — it's push, push, push — and people think they've got to publish their M.F.A. thesis, and then keep cranking books out. You see jobs advertised with three books to apply for a one year's visiting position. There's this constant obsession with quantity. It's really hard to resist that pressure — that you're only legitimate if you're a poet who's published X number of

books at X age or at X stage of your career.

I've been trying to hold up Arundhati Roy as my own perfect model for a different way to be a writer in the world. She wrote a wonderful novel, an amazing novel, but when people ask her now, "What are you writing?", she says, "Well, there's this dam that needs to be stopped from being built." She's such a model for me. And I have to say that I read a lot of, many, many fine books of poetry — many fine first books — but I also read a lot of books of poetry where I think, "You should have waited. This could be a better book if you'd waited." I'd like to see us turn back toward more careful writing of all kinds and less of it.

It's always gratifying when you make a connection with an individual person — somebody sends you an e-mail, or you give a reading and someone comes up afterwards or sends you a note. For me, when I've given readings in Indian communities and made connections with people and they appreciate my work, it's just wonderful. It's just really, really gratifying.

LW: One of the tenets of Black Arts is that it's by black people, about black people, for black people. Does an American Indian audience have primacy for you?

JMc: I don't know if I would put it in those terms — it feels like ranking readers — but certainly it feels special when Native readers respond to my work. The feeling of being in a Native writing community and sharing stories and sharing work with other Native writers feels wonderful. If you read for Native people or you make connections with Native readers, and they respond to your work, you feel the presence of community. You feel that you've offered up a story that everybody made. And that can be a little bit different, and so I don't want to try to put it into a hierarchy, but that's really important to me, and I would be very sad if it never happened. It's also gratifying when I give a reading at a bookstore and people who don't usually read poetry have turned up, and they respond in a way that makes you know you made a very human connection. That's great. But I try really hard not to think about audience. I try to think about responsibility, but I try not to think about audience.

LW: We've been talking a lot about story and narrative in these

poems. In your novel manuscript, *Red Weather,* you re-approach some of the stories that also filter through your first book of poetry. I wonder why you wanted to come back to them in a different genre and how it's different telling stories in poems versus a novel.

JMc: It's really different. I feel much easier about lying in the novel. It is further away from me, and it felt more mechanical to me, although I think part of that is that I've studied poetry and written it for so many years, but I'm just beginning to learn the craft of a fiction writer. Also, I gathered stories instead of honing them down, discarding material the way I do in poetry. Geary Hobson says that first novels are either taker-outers or putter-inners, and I think mine is a putter-inner, although it's not that long because I'm a poet and I'm still compressing.

I wasn't quite finished with the stuff in *The Island of Lost Luggage*, although I'd written another book in the meantime. It's in four parts, and each part really is a kind of mini-book; I just took one of those books — a book about El Salvador — and expanded. I still have things to say, and I knew I hadn't said them in the first book.

LW: Another genre question. The "Thousand-Year War" poems in this book: would you call them science fiction?

JMc: Yes, I would. And maybe I should write more science fiction poetry. I started the series thinking about post-bomb movies, speculative fiction that takes place after some radical change to human existence, but the series really changed into a meditation on environmental degradation. This is really what our generation should fear, not one big emergency that would redefine living. We've never quite adjusted to the real fear: rapidly accelerated, pervasive environmental degradation. People are sick. We have all these illnesses that people can't account for — we live in a very toxic environment. It is just astonishing to me that we have a president who is in denial about global warming. It's frightening. It's more frightening than 9/11 and his response to 9/11. It's terrifying that the ice caps are melting and we're driving SUVs two blocks down the street to buy a six-pack of Coke.

LW: Does that mean that you'll keep working on speculative poetry?

JMc: I don't know. I'm not sure that poetry's the most direct way to reach people. The novel that I've just started, *The Year I Burned,* centers on an environmental activist.

I recently read Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer,* set in Virginia. It's a really rich novel, very loving about this particular landscape, the one we're surrounded by today, but it's also charged with a larger concern about what's happening to the living world. Books like that can change people's minds, make them more aware.

LW: You sound like a teacher!

JMc: Yeah, I should teach that book. In some ways we want big dramatic activism. We need to change the laws, we need to legislate efficient cars, public transportation, responsible packaging. We need to stop using plastic and petroleum products and stop filling landfills. That stuff has to be changed. But I also think there is a kind of activism that is not very sexy. It requires a constant vigilance about how you live your life every single day — how every choice is going to affect the next seven generations. Some of the students in my evening seminar walk down a half flight of stairs when they enter the building so they can take the elevator up two flights to the classroom. I suggested to them that this was maybe not the best use of fossil fuels, but they're worried they might be sweaty in class.

LW: The anthology that you're working on is also a kind of activism, right?

JMc: The anthology is called *The People Who Stayed,* and I'm co-editing it with Geary Hobson, a Cherokee/Quapaw scholar at the University of Oklahoma, and Kathryn Walkiewicz, who is Cherokee, and was my student at Kenyon and is now studying at the University of New Mexico. It's an anthology of post-removal Southeastern Indian writing. It will be the first of its kind and quite large — it's close to 500 pages and we could have put more in. Until we put the anthology together, I'm not sure that any of us were fully aware of the huge presence of Native Americans in the Southeast. It was a learning experience for me. There were many nations I'd never heard of.

Along the way we learned about "survivance" in the Southeast

(Gerald Vizenor's term). The people didn't just hang around; they survived in a very active way. There's a cultural persistence in activism, through people who continue to teach and honor the traditions, who continue to work for federal recognition. In one state there are four or five tribes who are looking for federal recognition, and they continue to work for it. I think that kind of persistence is evident all over the Southeast. I know the Mowa Choctaws have been fighting for federal recognition for a long, long time and are very well deserving of it. There are many Indian people coming out of hiding and saying, "We are here."

It's a mixed-genre anthology, including everything from oratory to contemporary poetry to discursive prose, fiction, a play. It includes major writers such as Louis Owens, Awiakta, Ralph Salisbury and Allison Hedge Coke. We have a lot of very young writers, and we have people who didn't identify themselves as writers but as traditional storytellers. We tried very hard to be inclusive, to really give a pluralistic sense of the Native American Southeast. We included people of mixed blood who don't belong to a traditional community but who've always felt that they were part Indian and that their Indianness is important to who they are.

LW: My last cluster of questions concern voice, sound and performance. First, what role does sound play for you when you compose? How do you conceptualize the poetic line — is it primarily oral or visual?

JMc: When I first started writing seriously, in my late teens and early twenties, poems always came to me as sound. I heard them in my head all the time. Just heard the music, and I'd listen very carefully, and eventually the words would come, too. There's some part of me that thinks that's really who I am as a poet. It's very hard to work that way, though, when you live in written culture, you teach writing, you are a scholar and you're in the academy — you're just in written culture all the time. So, I think in my own work there's been a greater shift to visual poetry. But I'm always checking back with music; every line gets read aloud.

For me the line has some deep connection to breath. I think it was Allison Hedge Coke yesterday, or perhaps Linda Hogan, who was talking about enchantment, incantation, poetry as song. Poetry has an

intensely strong music for me. I go to poetry readings all the time, and when they're over, my friend will turn to me and say, "Didn't you like that poem about blah, blah, blah?", and I'm thinking "What poem was that?" Because for me the music is so loud, a poetry reading is often like being in a concert and listening to the notes. When I read them on the page, it can be quite different. Although sometimes on the page that happens, too. I have to stop and say, "Wait, what do those words actually mean?"

LW: How do you approach performing your own work?

JMc: I would really love to be able to recite it — probably I have a little too much stage fright, but maybe someday. It's been wonderful to be at this conference, to listen to the different reading styles. I was stunned by Allison Hedge Coke's performance — what a voice! I've known her for so long, but I've never actually heard her read poems, and I couldn't even quite figure out what she was doing. She wasn't elaborate, she wasn't fancy, she wasn't stagey. She just got up there and it was like being sung to, it was so musical and amazing.

LW: Her rhythm sounded like slam rhythms to me.

JMc: Yes. I don't have a lot of patience with what I always think of as the Iowa style of reading — it has nothing to do with the present program at Iowa, I'm sure — but the style of reading where there's no inflection at all. I just have no patience with that. At the same time I don't want to feel like someone is reading me a piece of prose. I value line breaks and am astonished when students come into my class and say, "Oh, we were always taught just to read through the line break." The line should have some presence off the page.

Simon Ortiz's *From Sand Creek* is a poem I study over and over for its lineation. He can give a single word a profound presence on the page, so much so that you feel that word taking over — you, your body, your breath.

When I'm focused during the reading, every word is just delicious. I just love the sound of every word. That's the goal to strive toward — you want your audience to hear every word, and it's just like a lemon drop or a gorgeous flower or a chunk of salt or a piece of metal with edges, some *thing*, almost a concrete object coming from that part of you that is not material, that is some essence.

LW: My experience of listening to Native poets perform their work is not very wide, but watching the six of you over the last couple of days, there was no common thread in reading style. Are there factors that shape Native performance that are unique, that make Native poetry performance distinct from other modes of American poetry performance?

JMc: You might be able to trace the influence of academic creative writing on poets. I suspect that those of us from the M.F.A. world would be influenced by that. I have to say that I've been to a fair number of poetry readings where the poet mumbled or read the poems as if they were the dullest newspaper article on earth. I've never heard a Native poet do that. The poets who came to poetry by a different route maybe *are* more like storytellers. They're not just reading from a text. I'm trying to think about other poets I've heard read.

LW: What is Carter Revard like?

JMc: Well, he doesn't get all that many poems read because he just goes off into these stories, and they're wonderful stories, but after an hour reading, maybe he could get through three, and you've still got to yank him off the stage! I'm thinking about Simon Ortiz, with whom I had the good fortune to read in California a few years ago. There's something quiet about his reading, not in terms of volume, but there's an amazing stillness without being at all static. Looking back, I know he must have been reading those poems, but I felt that he was telling them and they were very musical poems, cadenced. Joy Harjo almost chants. She is a musician, and she will often interweave saxophone playing and chanting — it's just mesmerizing. It's really quite spectacular to hear her read. Heid Erdrich has a beautiful voice; Qwo-Li Driskill is very tender. Scott Momaday just booms along.

This is the second time I've heard Linda (Hogan) read, and she's a very quiet reader. She starts and the room gets so quiet, and there's a wild power to her reading because the words are so pared down, every word is pushing forward. She is so present. Deborah (Miranda), when she reads, it's so personal, and I don't really mean the subject matter, you just feel like you're right up next to her, like you're looking right in her eyes when she reads. It's very, very intense. I'd never heard

Ron (Wellburn) read, and I was interested in the way he read different poems in a very different way. He read that jazz poem, and it was so beautiful and syncopated and wonderful.

LW: What are you reading?

JMc: I've started reading some mystical poetry; I trained as a yoga teacher last year. And so I've been reading poets like Rumi whom I'd never had much use for because they were always on a calendar or something. I think there are some really bad translations of Rumi.

Lots of other poetry, too. Lucille Clifton's very fine collection *The Book of Light*, Richard Siken's first collection *Crush*, a book so urgent you have to set it down every few minutes. Margo Solod's *Some Very Soft Days*, which could be a how-to manual for writing a perfectly honed lyric line. Anne Winters' *The Displaced of Capital* — speaking of writers who aren't in any hurry to publish. I think Winters waited thirteen years between this and her last collection.

And Native writers — Joy Harjo always. Tiffany Midge's new chapbook, *Guiding the Stars to Their Campfire, Driving the Salmon to Their Beds*. Rereading a favorite, Anita Endrezze's *At the Helm of Twilight.* Diane Glancy's novel about Sacajawea is on my to-be-read shelf. I'm really looking forward to that.

LW: What about future projects?

JMc: I've finished the second collection, *Feral,* and am well into a third book of poems, tentatively titled *Earth My Body Is Trying to Remember.* As I mentioned before, I've started a second novel, a sort of literary mystery focused on an environmental activist.

Note: Thanks to Sandra O'Connell, who transcribed this interview, with great difficulty, from audiotape.