

A POET WHO EMBRACES THE WORLD

By Christopher Wicks

Marianne Klekacz is a poet who lives and writes in the central Coast Range of our state. Although an Oregon native, she is well-travelled, and her background includes both the English degrees associated with the writing life, and also much experience with the non-academic world. Her poems have been collected in a recent book, *When Words Fail* (2009), and an earlier chapbook, *Life Science* (2003).

The title *When Words Fail* evokes a vast emotional territory: those moments when our grasp on the world seems shaken, when the foundations tremble and new modes of seeing emerge. The impetus for our speechlessness may be a crisis, a natural marvel, or a strong emotion felt as the result of an artistic experience. Marianne Klekacz steps in as a poet where our prosaic stammering leaves off, and seeks to do justice to the inherent intensity of these moments.

Klekacz considers for us, in a few dozen poems, such seemingly disparate matters as the experience of American soldiers in the Vietnam War, the majesty of Mount McKinley, the music of Mozart, ancient Chinese verse, Euclidean geometry, a rare sighting of the Northern Lights in Oregon, and the comparative expressive capacities of vowels and consonants. All the while, her voice is recognizable, with its overtly or covertly serious intentions at times accompanied by a dry and self-deprecating irony.

Most of her poems are in free verse, but some metrical pieces, and even a *terza rima* (“What the Medic Was Thinking,” a war poem which might be unbearable without the formal design) are also convincing and fluid. A favorite practice is to place in quick succession words that sound very similar except for the change of an interior letter or two, for example, “roiling / rolling” and “discussion, dissension, destruction.”

Mahler wrote that “a symphony should be an entire world.” While some poetry seeks to shut out the world and bring about a rarefied, hermetic experience for its reader, Klekacz admirably welcomes the wide world into her language and lines. Thus, in “North of Harrisburg,” the speaker opens her arms to the aurora’s “green flames flickering/ across a deep rose sky”:
“Then there was no I, no sky. / I let the universe rush into me.”