RICHARD HEDDERMAN

Media Kit

“Poetry is not a matter of life and death. It’s more important than that."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Photo Credit: Darren Hauck

Richard Hedderman's latest book of poems is *Choosing a Stone*, (Finishing Line Press). His writing has been published in dozens of literary journals in both the U.S. and abroad, and in several anthologies including *In a Fine Frenzy—Poets Respond to Shakespeare* (University of Iowa Press). He has performed his writing with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, served as a Guest Poet at the Library of Congress and as a Visual Arts Grants Panelist with the National Endowment for the Arts. A multiple Pushcart Prize nominee, he was also formerly the Writer-in-Residence at the Milwaukee Public Museum. He is currently the Coordinator and Creative Writing Instructor for the Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books.

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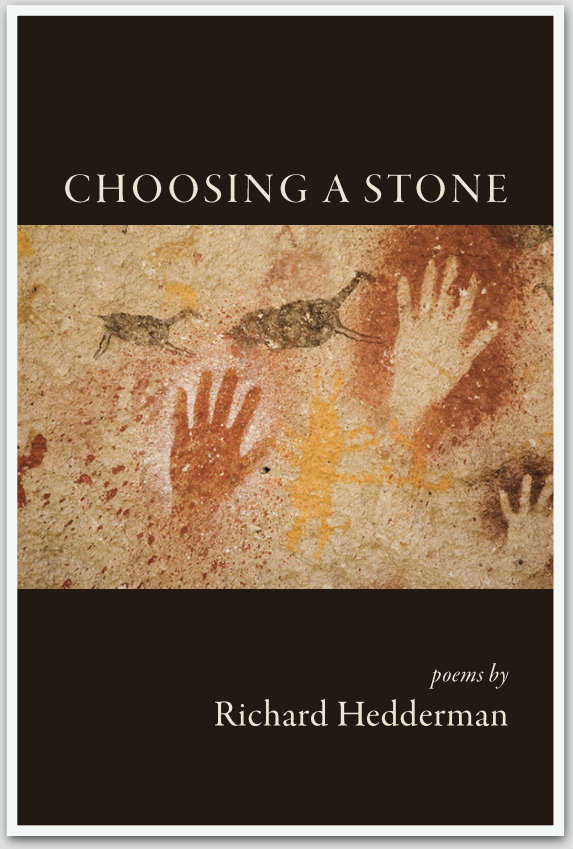

Choosing a Stone

Poems by Richard Hedderman

Finishing Line Press

Full-length, paperback, 71 pages

$19.95

ISBN: 978-1-64662-176-7

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Available from the publisher, amazon.com or through your local independent bookseller

"*Choosing a Stone* is a hymn, my hymn, a canticle to this planet - our home base - and everything I know about the living, the non-human, and the abiotic forces that shape our common history here. For me, each poem in the book is a cairn, a stack of weather-worn rock marking a path through an interior landscape, and across the dark plain of human mystery to a place of infinite revelation and surprise."

TESTIMONIALS

"Amazingly learned poems!"

– John Montague, first Ireland Chair of Poetry

"Much in the manner of Francis Ponge, Richard Hedderman's poems in *Choosing a Stone* delve into the essence of things in startling ways to reveal hidden depths. Here, for example, an avocado's slightly musty odor is "like an old well / where the five senses have come to drink and drowse," or "the moon is an ax // grinding itself against the wind." Whether luxuriating in the simple delights that life offers—hammocks, Basque cuisine, cloud-gazing or reinventing scenes from Beowulf and Hamlet, the poems are sensuous and painterly, and (if I may appropriate one of Hedderman's images for tomatoes) they "hoard . . . in their flesh fabulous waters."

– Richard Foerster, author of *Boy on a Doorstep: New and Selected Poems*

"The poems in *Choosing a Stone* are rife with all sorts of deliciousness. Such elegant writing! Most important, Hedderman's language is exquisite. His word choices are attuned to sound and echo giving them a haunting quality. As well, these are love poems —to a woman, to objects of nature, to history and its heroes and villains. It's as if Hedderman is speaking to past, present and future at once as the author of his own mythos. He "gathers together fragments of time" into wonder-filled verses. Most important, these are poems of refuge. There is a sense of sanctuary, safety and respite. With him, readers will "Walk, clothed in rags,/into [his] astonishing world."

– Karla Huston, Wisconsin Poet Laureate 2017-2018, author of *Grief Bone, Five Oaks Press*

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the first book that made you cry?

Sorry, did you mean *laugh*? Stewart Copeland's memoir, and any book of poems by Philip Whalen. Both of these guys just crack me up.

2. Which themes are your favorites to explore?

My work explores the intersection of geography and landscape with consciousness, excavating the physical world, and traversing both human and natural mythos. I'm interested mostly in the rejuvenating impulses in cognition, the archaeology of the subconscious and the non-human: the revelatory force of darkness, the power in solitude, the numinous spiritual codes of animism, and the gravitational implications of history that shape and focus a resonant comprehension of our place in this world, and the one we've come from.

3. Which other writers/poets inspire you?

Shakespeare, Gary Snyder, Sylvia Plath, Charles Simic, Bei Dao, the Beowulf poet, Philip Whalen, Linda Pastan, Louis Jenkins, Ron Koertge, Ruth Stone, Li Ho, David Shumate. I'm leaving out a lot of poets here.

4. What do you consider to be your spirit animal?

The Pacific Gray whale. If animals had jobs, the Pacific Grays would be the poets.

5. Do you consider writing an art or a craft? Why?

Well, let's back up a little. To start with, you don't go and buy poems at your local hobby shop. So, art/craft needs to be separated a little. It's not a toy airplane model kit or something. And let's not imagine that writing is one or the other. Let's think about it this way: handmade wooden cabinets are an art form. The craft is carving, designing, cutting, joining the wood, etc. Poetry is the art form, shaping it into a poem is the craft. That's the hard part. That's where the rubber hits the road, or the ink hits the paper. Or something.

6. If we were going to make a movie about your life, which actor should play you?

Dom DeLuise, God rest his soul. Right, he's dead. Pete Davidson.

7. What is the most difficult thing about the writing process? What is the easiest?
First, the hardest thing is concentrating. I'm like a kid at a carnival–very easily distracted, and I've got a short attention span. Except in the case of things that aren't good for me, like staying up late and binging Grateful Dead concert films. For such pastimes, my concentration is obdurate and immeasurable. The easiest thing is starting poems. I could start poems all day long without even thinking about it. Rolling off a log is harder. Finishing them, however, is awful. I commonly struggle horribly to finish a poem.

8. What's your favorite writing snack or drink?
Decaf French Roast made in a Chemex. Black.

9. What are the most important elements of a good poem?
They tell you something that you've never heard before or never really thought of. They're revelatory. And they don't stop, they *end*. A good poem has intention, musicality, syntactical rigor, fearlessness. A well-crafted ending and mind-rattling imagery don't hurt either.

10. If we could read only one of your poems, which would you recommend?
"The Last Explorer." It's one of my favorites of my own poems, and it's got everything in it. It says it all. Finally, it's a statement about who I am as a poet and a human being, and how poetry has formed me and transformed my cognition. It's also short. I like short poems.

COLLABORATIONS

- Boston Symphony Orchestra
- Library of Congress
- Milwaukee Public Museum
- Museum of Science, Boston
- National Endowment for the Arts
- New York State Writers Institute
- U.S. Department of State

A SMATTERING OF PUBLICATIONS

Book: *The Discovery of Heaven,* Parallel Press, 2006.

Book: *Choosing a Stone,* Finishing Line Press, 2020.

Poem: "Animals," *The American Journal of Poetry*, Summer, 2021.

Poem: "Mummies," *Rattle*, Fall 2015.

Poem: "Needle in a Haystack," *The Stockholm Review of Literature* Fall 2022.

Poem: "The Modern City," *Pinyon*, Spring 2021.

Poems: "Horse Lessons," and "The Discovery of Heaven," Chautauqua Literary Journal, 2004.

Anthology: "Ophelia," and "The First Players Monolog," *A Fine Frenzy - Contemporary Poets Respond to Shakespeare,* University of Iowa Press, 2005.

Book Review: "Miraculous Knots," *The Worrier* by Nancy Takacs, University of Massachusetts Press, 2017.

SELECTED BROADCASTS

Essays, interviews and poems aired on *Lake Effect*, WUWM's (Milwaukee's NPR affiliate) magazine program:

- "Choosing a Stone" Interview/Poetry Reading: Feb 25, 2021
- "Mummies": Oct 26, 2018
- "Why I Write Poetry": April 19, 2016
- "Wauwatosa Man Learns Silent Lessons from Trappist Monks": Jan 7, 2014

WRITING SAMPLES

THE LAST EXPLORER

My nails turn white in the bitter wind.
Feet thicken in the frost. Standing
just beyond the firelight, I can see
how the moon is an ax

grinding itself against the wind.
By dawn, I will turn into a spruce
standing at the edge of a snowbound forest
torn by the wind

and cradling an armload of blue needles.

CANTICLE FOR THE NEW MOON

God's eyelid closes on the day,
and for a little while there's a bone
        left to gnaw in the coal sack of night.

This is the one you've heard of
in the children's verse where the new moon
        is cradled asleep in the arms of the old

which flares in its fiery draft. Too thin
to howl at, too slight to light the path home.
        Satellite of a lost planet,

sleepwalking scrap of crab shell, pared
from the galaxy's tidal murk, worn to a hollow
        in the solar undertow

but burnished still, and waiting
only to be struck, as is a coin
        or a match in the dark.

MUMMIES - MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM

When children ask if it's frightening
when they come alive, I tell them yes,
of course it is, it's absolutely terrifying,
and believe me, you don't want to be around

when it happens, especially at night.
When they ask if the mummies walk
with their arms outstretched like mummies
in the movies, I tell them no, it's nothing

like that. You see, I explain, the muscles
of their arms have atrophied from thousands
of years of disuse; they just can't walk
around the way mummies do in movies.

In fact, I explain, their feet have been so
lovingly and carefully bound by strips
of linen, that it's difficult for them
to walk at all which explains the halting

gate, the fear that at any moment they will stumble
and pitch forward, landing in a heap of rags.
Can they talk? No, they can't talk, not after
all those years in tombs choked with the dust

of centuries and the weight of eternity
upon them. Can they see, they want to know.
Not any more, I say, for their eyes
were replaced with onions or stones,

stones as white as the sun. Finally, I explain,
they long only to wander forth as they used to,
so long ago and once again admire their reflections
in the shimmering Nile of the gallery floor.

ESSAY: ***Why I Write Poetry***

- Aired on *Lake Effect*, National Public Radio, April 2016

T.S. Eliot famously observed in his great poem, "The Four Quartets," that April is the cruelest month. Economists quote this line every year during the first two weeks of that month when referencing the climax of the great American tax period. And so I suppose it's ironic, that April is also National Poetry Month, poetry, unlike the American tax code, being an endeavor without rules or penalties. One never gets penalized for writing bad poetry, thankfully.

Oddly, I've never encountered anyone who has parsed Eliot's line in the context of poetry itself. To what was Eliot referring? I couldn't tell you. I've never been curious enough to sit and figure it out and, let's face it, Eliot was a drip.

The question of why I write poetry occasionally comes up during National Poetry Month, and I find the reason can be as difficult to decode as Eliot's line. Like so many male poets before me (maybe even Eliot!), I started writing poetry as a schoolboy out of one great desire: to impress girls. I was convinced that girls liked poetry and were fascinated by boys who wrote it. Write poetry, I reasoned, and girls will flock to you like pigeons to a statue.

That's perhaps not the most successful image, but the idea was that if I wrote poetry, girls would find me fascinating; I'd be the irresistible focus of their attentions. Sometimes this worked fabulously. Most of the time it didn't, but that's OK; I liked poetry anyway and stuck with it.

To begin with, I love poetry for its immediacy, its promise of infinite surprise, its threat of immanent combustion. And I like the compression, how in a poem the entire universe can be packed into a single line. I like how physical it is—it's compact and powerful like the short, sharp jabs of the boxer. And yet it has an astonishing fluidity: a poem can swim like a trout, plunge like a cataract, heave and spill like an ocean wave. And I'm always fascinated by the sight of ink sinking into the brilliant white flesh of the page as I write it.

I find it distinctly alchemical, wresting the everyday, mundane ordinariness of life and casting it into astonishing new forms—something that is magical, lyrical, heroic, glorious and transformative. It's without limit in subject or range; a poem can tackle anything. And it's curative; poetry can calm, console, cauterize and heal.

And I'm also utterly taken with its persistent and enthralling contradictions: a poem can kill two birds with one stone or breathe life into the dead; it can bite like salt or bind and soothe like a skein of silk.

I don't entirely know why I write poetry instead of another form, or doing something else like throwing pots or playing the oboe. It's certainly not easy, and it's not exactly what I'd call fun. Sometimes it is, but that doesn't keep me writing. I guess it's just a good fit. It's a job that somehow I like doing.

In a letter to his brother, Theo, in September 1881, Vincent van Gogh wrote, "I no longer stand helpless before nature." And that's the way I feel when I write a poem: it mends the void between myself and the rest of the world, and there is no longer a divide between me and what surrounds me.

Once or twice I literally tried to give it up as one would a bad habit. The impulse to write can be annoying, intrusive and inconvenient, and writing well is hard. It has been said that writing good poetry is like mining lead with a butter knife, only it's not as lucrative and nowhere near as much fun. (Actually, I said that.) But I couldn't do it. I couldn't give up the one thing that allowed me to be conversant with the world, and articulate what I felt about everything in it.

And I'll tell you this: if tomorrow, every sheet of paper—every scrap—blew away in the wind, and all the computers blew up, I'd find a stick and get down on my hands and knees and scratch my poems in the dirt.

EDUCATIONAL TEXT: from *Netsuke—Mastery in Miniature*

- Milwaukee Public Museum, March 2023

In its simplicity, the Japanese kimono leaves no room for one particular feature that no one today could quite do without: pockets. But, as with so many things, this problem became an opportunity. The solution emerged over four hundred years ago during the Edo period when Japan experienced its first period of extended peace in nearly 500 years. During the Edo era, Japan saw a higher standard of living, accompanied by increased agricultural development, education and literacy, prosperity, and a blossoming of artisanal craftsmanship.

To compensate for the absence of pockets in kimono, men began wearing sagemono, small cases or pouches suspended from the sash, or obi, making it easy to carry small objects such as seals, pipes, coins, writing implements, and materials like medicine and tobacco. A cord, or himo, attached to the sagemono, was tucked inside the obi and anchored by small, elaborately carved fob-like object that served as counterweight, preventing the himo from slipping through. These objects are called netsuke, and they are extraordinary.

Japanese craftspeople turned netsuke into stunning, diminutive works of art reflecting naturally found objects, plants and animals, heroes and beasts of legend and myth, gods, religious symbols, daily activities, theatrical masks, and historical, literary or everyday figures, and myriad other themes. Some were
considered talismans and ascribed with religious or magical powers intended to protect or heal.

Over time, their design grew increasingly intricate, whimsical, and masterfully carved, displaying an astonishing range of styles and themes. Small and inconspicuous, netsuke encapsulated the refined aesthetic sense and subdued elegance of the Edo-period.

BROADCAST COMMENTARY: from *Mummies—An Essay*

- Aired on *Lake Effect*, National Public Radio, October 2018

Over the years, the Milwaukee Public Museum's visitors have found our mummies to be a source of enduring curiosity. And this is not surprising. Since the beginning, mummies have been objects of fascination and considerable misadventure. Ancient people all over the globe mummified their dead. In fact, the Egyptians were not even the first to do it. That was likely the Chinchorro people of what we now know as Chile and Peru. They were mummifying their dead in the dry air of the coastal desert about three thousand years before the Egyptians even thought about it. But the Egyptians were the virtuosos, and a well-preserved mummy from ancient Egypt is a master work of the form.

Napoleon knew this, and sent mummies back to France during his disastrous military campaign in Egypt in the late 18th century, generating our modern interest in them. By the mid 19th century, mummies were trending. Very much a thing to have if you wished to project an air of cultural adventurism, many well-to-do Europeans brought mummies back from Egypt or sent for them. It was common to hold "unrollings," as they were called, where guests were invited to watch as the mummy was unwrapped—or "unrolled"—just out of curiosity, just to see what they looked like under the bandages.

A source of enduring mystery, mummies have long been thought to bear a powerful life force. Since at least the Middle Ages, apothecaries ground mummies into powder which, added to various concoctions, were cheerfully peddled as miracle cures well into the 19th century. A kind of snake oil, if you will, it may have made up in morbid curiosity what it utterly lacked in potency. It was, of course, useless.

VIDEO SCRIPT: from *The Language of Snow*

- Milwaukee Public Museum, 2018

It is sometimes said that the Inuit—one of several indigenous peoples of the Arctic Circle—have a hundred or more words for snow. In fact, among the people of these many nations, there are likely more than 100 words for snow–and ice, and sea ice–as well. Some estimates put it closer to 200 words.

This caliber of linguistic complexity should come as no surprise. For us Wisconsinites, snow is a part of life for a few months out of the year. Arctic people do more than live with it, they live on it, and snow and ice are practically a way of life, pretty much all the time. So, this gives us an idea of how important these things are for the Inuit, and the way they communicate with each other about it can be a matter of life and death. They need to know whether ice and snow is fit to travel over, or whether you're going to sink through it. Thus, we see language as a vital and compelling tool for learning about the people who speak it.

By one calculation, there are close to 100 words for money in the English language. How many words for money do you imagine can be found in the language of indigenous Arctic people? Probably not too many. Traditionally, these people had no word for it.

WORKSHOPS

Excavating the Soul

- 90 minutes
- No prior experience writing poetry is necessary

It's been said that poetry is the natural history of the human heart. And if so, then we might consider that shaping language into poetic form is the process of excavating the soul. In this dynamic interactive program, we delve deep into the nuts and bolts of that process through a close reading and assessment of the participants' poems. Bring in your best work in-progress, and learn how to take the next steps toward revision and polishing to bring your draft to completion. We'll explore such poetic dynamics as form, line breaks, musicality, tension, and how to *story* your poetry for stronger narrative force. We'll likewise focus on the compelling and elusive realm of the ending, and how to craft it for maximum impact in your writing.

Wingtip with a Slice of Cantaloupe

- 90 minutes
- No prior experience writing poetry is necessary

You don't have to be a poet to write poetry is the chief lesson of this interactive writing workshop. In this program we demystify poetry, open the creative imagination, and bring the writer's essential tools of intuition, language, and poetic structure into practice. We also explore such writer's secrets as trolling for vocabulary, vanquishing fear of the blank page, and how to invest your writing with *tension* - the chief driving force of the poetic impulse. The workshop begins with an informal discussion of our connection with poetry, then explores the poetic process through a structured writing exercise engaging with the world around us. Participants will have the option of sharing their new poems with the group.