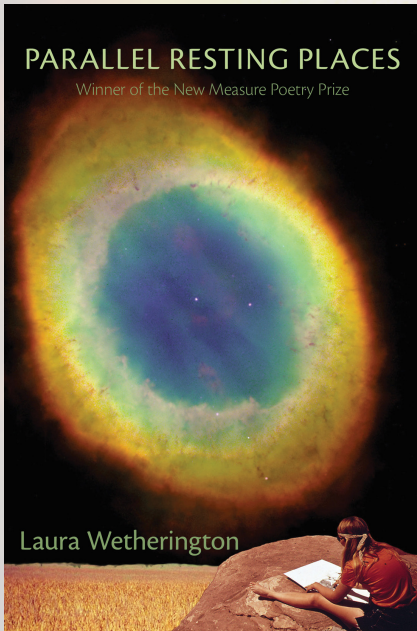


TEACHING GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



PARALLEL RESTING PLACES

Laura Wetherington

2019 New Measure Poetry Prize

Selected by Peter Gizzi

Free Verse Editions

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EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING

1. The book opens with an epigraph by Jean-Jacques Lercercle, “errors in translation often make pleasant reading.” Why do you think the author chose this quote for the beginning of the book? How does it connect to the poems?

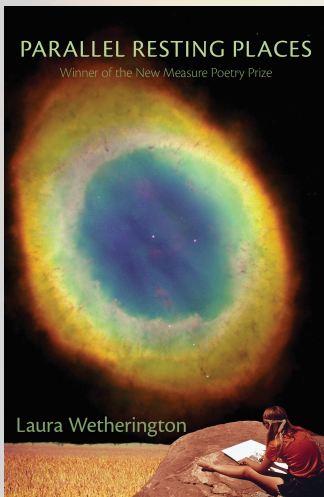
2. Many poems in the book are written “after” the work of French poets. In the afterward, the author explains that her particular sensibilities and internal geography are superimposed on the poems—that the poems are more like imitations or mistranslations meant to create conversation and bring her own “cultural residue” and internal landscape onto the page. How does the title, *Parallel Resting Places*, correlate to the poems in the book? How does it relate to poetic translation and/or mistranslation?

3. In the poem “With A Polaroid We Can Imagine A Past Or a Future Without Saying Anything,” after Jean-Marie Gleize, the speaker says, “I hold down all feminine pronouns/by their arms.” In the poem “Dear Randa,” she says, “I wanted her to be my future boyfriend and I wanted to be hers.” How is the author using pronouns throughout the book? What connections does the book make between gender constructs and language?

4. In a 2013 interview about textsound, an online experimental sound journal Wetherington edited for a decade, she says the journal would get .mp3 submissions, but that people “don’t necessarily send us a bio, so we’re listening to something and we’re not sure, ‘Is this an artist who has sent us this piece of art, is it a poet who sent us their poem, or a musician who sent us his music?’” She explains that the experience of genre-less listening can change what you hear, “Because you tune your ear a little bit differently depending on what the thing is — what it’s being called, and where it’s coming from — the field out of which it arises.” What changes in your reading of these poems once you know that they are connected to translation in some way?

5. Epistolary poems (“Dear _____”) appear throughout the book. These poems use a confessional mode to talk about gender, queer identity, politics, loss, anatomy, childhood, and relationships. How might creative or poetic translation and mistranslation speak to gender and/or queer identity? Have you ever felt mistranslated? How would you express that in a poem?

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6. In “Dear TC,” the speaker confesses she hasn’t “told many people about the miscarriage,” and seems to be baffled by her inability to express grief. She explains that when her grandmother died, she had no problem talking about “the gaping hole—that death-umbilical,” yet when it came to her own body and her internal grief, “language has died alongside.” Why does language so often fall flat when approaching grief, death, and vulnerability? In what ways is language, the vehicle for the message, an obstacle to understanding? Can reading or writing poetry get us closer to the thing we are trying to comprehend? If so, how? How might the form of a poem enhance emotion or get us closer to our and others’ experiences? How might sound?

7. About the journal textsound, Laura has said, “it makes me think about how I transmit sound on a page in a way that I wasn’t really thinking about before working with that magazine. In poetry a lot of times you’re thinking about meter, and you’re thinking about iambs and trochees, and now I’m thinking more about discordant musicality rather than really fluent music.” Are there moments in this manuscript where you can hear a discordant musicality, and how does that relate to ideas of mistranslation, miscarriage, failure, or other themes in the book?

WRITING PROMPTS

1. In the epistolary poem titled “Dear Sara Jane,” the speaker states, “what we should never wait for: permission to talk about our bodies.” Write an epistolary poem of refusal, in opposition of permission, about your body.

2. Re-read the poem “Dear Randa” and use the line “poetry tongues the things language can’t contain” as the epigraph for a confessional poem. Recall a moment or feeling from the past (or invent one) that your speaker wants to revise, and use the poem to trace how your speaker’s thinking or feeling has changed.

3. Write a poem in the form of a letter to someone you love and talk to them about our current political climate.

4. Choose a poem from the first section of the book: “No More Nature Poems.” Creatively translate, mistranslate, or imitate the text. Consider homophonic words, paraphrase, and the Oulipoan $n+7$ technique: <http://www.spoonbill.org/n+7/> What was lost from the original poem? How does poetry speak to erasure?

5. Translate, mistranslate, or imitate an older poem. Follow Wetherington’s approach of superimposing your internal geography, sensibilities, and cultural residue on the poem. Make it modern. Make it your own.