

13 Ways to Digest a Purple Coneflower by Martin Willitts, Jr.

One of my favorite poets and poems is Wallace Stevens' "*Thirteen Ways to look at a Blackbird*". In his poem, he moves through the ordinary to the sublime passing through the absurd. Every time I read it, I find something new. When I number a poem, it is homage to him. Here is an example: www.nycbigcitylit.com/apr2003/contents/Twelve12.html.

I am also an organic gardener that is interested in the healing plants. Purple Coneflower is one of the plants I grow. In this poem, I am tying in a lot of ideas, moving from planting to the cure, and along the way, the plants become humanized. We have forgotten how the earth can nurture us, and we forget how important nature is. Instead, we pollute. We forget the healing plants. I have a forthcoming award winning collection about ecology, healing, forgiveness, called "*Searching for What Is Not There*" (Hiraeth Press, 2013). Within this poem is the factual information of the many ways a coneflower could be used in natural healing.

I was once a Jazz musician, so I tend to write like one. There is a musical jazz phrases called, "Playing within the pauses". It means improvising within the structure of the stanza. I improvise a lot while writing, finding themes within themes, and ideas within ideas. I have a whole chapbook, "*Playing the Pauses in the Absence of Stars*" (Main Street Rag, 2012) about music. I like writing long poems for this reason: I can hit as many notes as I can and still feel like I can add more. In this poem, I think of a saxophone as a planter, and at the same time as a saxophone playing notes that become coneflowers and the high notes are flowers "worth smelling". I come up with images like this. A part of the process is this improvisation, willing to take risks in "one-take", trying to see where the music/poem takes me. I simply sit, write, and have no idea where I am going, how I am going to get there, and not even sure when I will arrive. Many of my published poems are written in first draft. I have to trust "the music" and worry about the results afterwards. Some writers would wince when I say this, some would notice errors, and some would say I need revision. I say, poems lose their emotional quality when the poems think too much. And sure, I do revise, edit, compose some poems, and they too get published. And, I have poems many that are simply bad.

I am a Quaker, and this poem is influenced with my worship practice. We pray in silence, and we get messages. Sometimes, the messages appear in my poems. Therefore certain phrases have meaning on a spiritual level such as "silence", "solemn truth", and the concept of repairing (people, places, things, and everything in the universe) is important to me.

I like playing with words. In the twelfth section, I play with the homonyms "picture" and "pitcher". In the thirteenth section, it is "notes" (as musical notes as well as taking notes) and "notations" (making music notations as well as taking notes). I play with the healing as a spiritual work in the second section when I mention "good news", which does not have a religious emphasis at the same time. Play and playfulness is important to this poem, because play can be healing. I am in a certain child-like excitement when I plant and watch as things grow. The poem tries to extend from joy and laughter to healing, from hope and anticipation to everything wanting the coneflowers to make them better. This is a poem of reconciliation and forgiveness, the celebration of divine spirit, the reward for seeking.