

Karla Linn Merrifield

Dashes Have Been Mourning Emily— Breathlessly—

for too long, but usher in—
on stealth bombers—
the era of gasp, the everyday
debacles of 2012—summer solstice
eve—and dashes help convey—
ohmigod— the nature
of pepper spray— no innocent
vegetable— and— damn!—
climate change; rush
into metaphors—suicide missions—
so that the frackin' trope— rape;
allusions— slavery; illusions—
mercy— translate abrupt leaps
of poetic faith.

Exclamation Point Redemption

Rolling their eyes, they whine:

*Oh, no, not an exclamation
point! Next thing you know,
gulp, smiley faces!*

Nothing wrong with either one!

Exclamations are vintage,
the original emoticon,
classic as Shakespeare
but Mad. Ave. hip, too!

So let them flaunt
their éclat with disdain!

I'll accept no substitutes!

Fuck 'em, if they can't
stand exclamation points!

Screw the stodgy old codgers!

Crying along with Leonard Cohen

I'm thinking I should go purchase
a blue raincoat, make it famous
by having *visions of blue pools*
whenever I turn up the collar.

It doesn't have to be J. Jill.
Goodwill will do. The stains are part
of its pale-blue stories of loss,
its bluesy songs of midnight-blue pain.

My old-new blue raincoat earns
its reputation on the raveled cuffs
of true-blue elegies— never enough. Now.
He's dead; and this tattered blue suits me.

But I know he'll recognize the woman who made
his raincoat famous with the bluest tears.

in memoriam Don O' Neil

African Instrumental

Wisdom is wealth.

—Swahili proverb

Wealth is dew.

—Anzanian proverb

I
did not
meet Leonard
in Africa.
Leopards, yes. Alas
no Cohen in grasslands
among giraffes, not among
lions atop sun-baked koptjes.

Baboons do not croon, and I forgot
to learn *hallelujah* in Maasai.

The Price

Mornings I gulp Columbian coffee
sweet with sugar
and the black sweat of twelve million slave ghosts
sours my palate

Afternoons I sip Darjeeling tea
sweet with more sugar
and the black blood of twelve million slave ghosts
turns my tongue bitter

Evenings I quaff Mexican cocoa
sweet with even more sugar
and the black tears of twelve million slave ghosts
burns my lips with salt

All the time I remember colonial Barbados
the quadroon pale enough to pass the sugar

A nine-time Pushcart-Prize nominee and National Park Artist-in-Residence, **Karla Linn Merrifield** has had some 500 poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has ten books to her credit, the newest of which are *Lithic Scatter and Other Poems* (Mercury Heartlink) and *Attaining Canopy: Amazon Poems* (FootHills Publishing). Forthcoming from Salmon Poetry is *Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North*. Her *Godwit: Poems of Canada* (FootHills) received the Eiseman Award for Poetry and she received the Dr. Sherwin Howard Award for the best poetry published in *Weber - The Contemporary West*. She is assistant editor and poetry book reviewer for *The Centrifugal Eye* (www.centrifugaleye.com), a member of the board of directors of Just Poets (Rochester, NY), and a member of the New Mexico State Poetry Society, the Florida State Poetry Society and TallGrass Writers Guild. Visit her blog, *Vagabond Poet*, at <http://karlalinn.blogspot.com>.