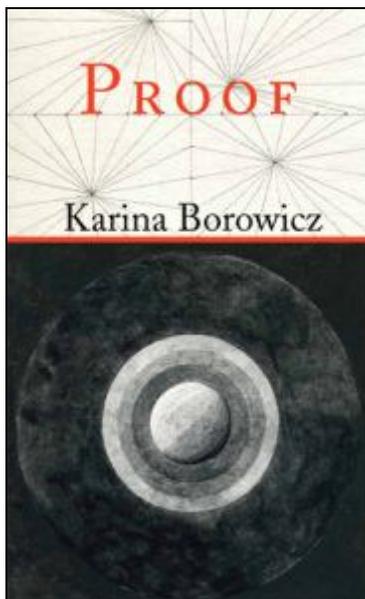
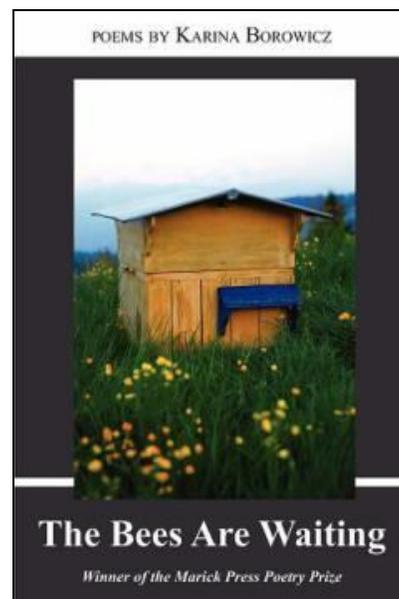


Karina Borowicz

Press Kit



Proof
Codhill Press, 2014
ISBN: 978-1-930337-75-6
9" x 5½" 73 pages
Editor: Pauline Uchmanowicz
uchmanop@newpaltz.edu



The Bees Are Waiting
Marick Press, 2012
ISBN: 978-1-93485-141-8
9" x 6", 92 pages
Editor: Mariela Griffor
mgriffor@marickpress.com

To request a review copy or arrange a reading or interview, email the author directly at **borowicz.karina@gmail.com**.

For more information, please visit:

www.karinaborowicz.com

About the Author

Karina Borowicz grew up in the working-class immigrant city of New Bedford, Massachusetts. She counts among early influences her community's relentless old-world nostalgia, the ecstatic moodiness of 70's rock and Portuguese *fado*, and the recitation of prayers and litanies that is every parochial schoolchild's inheritance. Poetry, she discovered while still young, can synthesize the earthiness and immediacy found in popular music with the otherworldliness and eternal gaze of prayer. These days, her work is praised for finding the sacramental in everyday activities and for making icons of commonplace objects.



Borowicz spent five years living and teaching in Russia and Lithuania and has published translations from the Russian and the French. Trained as an historian, Borowicz also holds an MFA in Creative Writing. She makes her home in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts.

About the Poetry

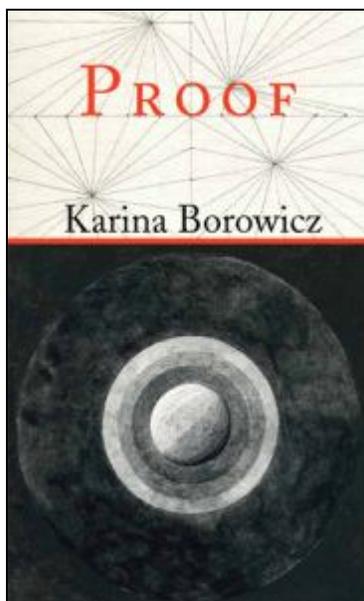


When Karina Borowicz first crossed the Russian border in the early '90s, it was with a visa to enter the Soviet Union—a country that had already ceased to exist. In a similar way, her poems grant us access to the other worlds, invisible or vanishing but still vital, that surround us all: dreams, childhood memories, the distant howl of nature, the secret hearts of loved ones, the hidden lives of strangers.

The poems in *Proof* testify with a quiet urgency to the existence and influence of these unseen places. It is with a singular compassion that Borowicz directs our attention to what is overlooked: the old woman walking her lame collie, a cardboard box on the sidewalk filled with the bric-a-brac of a dismantled life, the equation of objects lined up in a museum display case, a broken doll's arm poking from a nest of seaweed, the burst of crimson hidden in a poppy seed.

PROOF

Proof (2014) won the Codhill Poetry Award and was a finalist for the National Poetry Series and the Nightboat Press Poetry Prize.



The poems of Karina Borowicz are startlingly transparent and deliciously opaque all at once. They are deeply rooted in the soil of the natural world but at the same time they communicate intimately with the everyday objects—breakfast dishes, lipstick cases, socks, radio towers—that underpin and adorn our lives. In language elegantly austere and deeply resonant, Borowicz plays sophisticated and understated musical riffs in celebration of what it is to be alive, sensitive, and mortal.

—Sidney Wade, author of *Straits and Narrows*

I find myself reading Karina Borowicz's Proof two ways: as a reader admiring her quiet, strange authority and vision, and as a writer asking: how does she do it? Because these are poems I'd like to emulate: poems whose questions and subtle declarations knit together planets and the past, the invisible and the seen, the living and the dead. In "Frozen Boot," she writes: "I ran my hand along the frozen boot of the factory worker / because how else do you talk to statues." I had no idea before, now I do. There's puzzlement in these poems, and loneliness and needles and wasps, and in "Planet Kepler 22B," there's "the cave walls at Lascaux, where a herd / of red horses still circles in the darkness." So we get the darkness of earth and the heavens, and somehow, Borowicz makes that light our way.

—Andrea Cohen, author of *Kentucky Derby*

"God decided suddenly to grow teeth," writes Karina Borowicz in her spare new collection that observes those cataclysms requiring an especially lonely courage to notice. She witnesses them, at times with astounding tenderness, through a thin filter that allows only the right images through, and provides us with the guidance—not necessarily comforting—for beholding them. Whether its locus is in the wild or the eerie domesticity of "neighborhood," each deft poem presents detail, however splendid, that spells trouble. But it is a trouble through which Borowicz knows how to travel, despite danger that is frequently heartbreaking. She does not disturb so much as an ant colony sleeping in winter, but shows us the terrifying loveliness of our vulnerability.

—Frannie Lindsay, author of *Our Vanishing*

Selections from *Proof*

PLANET KEPLER 22B

They say they've found another
earth out there, greening like the shaded side
of a boulder.

I don't know which direction
of the night sky to face.
But that planet's there somewhere,
anywhere, despite me.

Despite everything that's turning here
with me. The sleeping
winter colony of ants,

the radio tower's red star
spilling the light of invisible mandolins,

the inner earth, our real
Milky Way, that glitters
with the minerals of ancestors,

the cave walls at Lascaux, where a herd
of red horses still circles in the darkness.

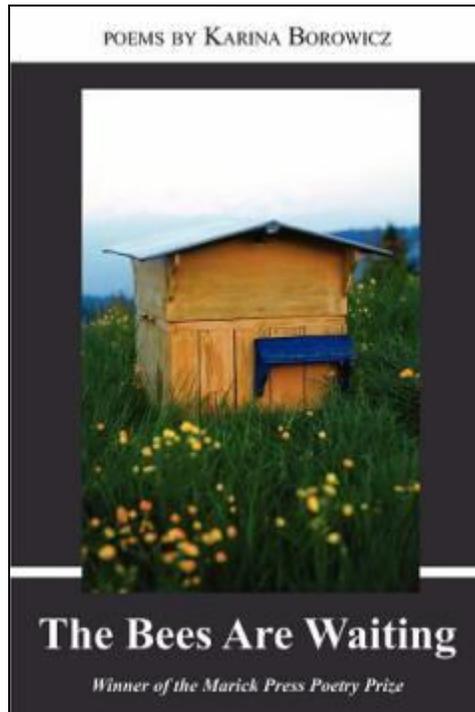
WINDOW WATCHING AT MIDNIGHT

Again the circle of green light.
My neighbor is sewing. With the two
natures of a moth, his hands
hover there, one futility
the other wing hope. And the fabric
is bunched up, from here
it's not clear what until a shirt
dangles its arm.

Other nights it's something
else, a square of cloth, a sock.
The work smaller and smaller till it appears
nothing's there, but the needle still moves
or what might be a needle, and what might
be thread is pulled, up and out.

THE BEES ARE WAITING

The Bees Are Waiting (2012) was selected by Franz Wright for the Marick Press Poetry Prize. It won the Eric Hoffer Award for Poetry and was named a Must-Read by the Massachusetts Center for the Book.



I find that Karina Borowicz's close studies of herself and others, of animals, of strange and familiar places, accomplished with her gentle penetrating gaze, direct our eyes toward something higher by actually moving the reader beyond the words.

—Franz Wright, author of *Walking to Martha's Vineyard*

These are poems that ask you to slow down and mull and ponder, to feel the light of the page shining through them. Things I particularly admire about the collection: the wonderful use of titles, the gnomic thought problems in the poems, the intelligence, the strong voice, the consistent style, the amazing images.

—Tony Barnstone, author of *Tongue of War*

Karina Borowicz captures the unbearable pulse of despair and hope in the world as its people pass across it, scarcely aware.

—Jeff McMahan, Editor, *Contrary Magazine*

Pulitzer Prize-winner Franz Wright, on selecting *The Bees Are Waiting* for the Marick Press Poetry Prize:

I feel grateful to come across a writer who understands that words have a moral dimension aside from themselves and who uses words for their ancient and original purpose of directing attention away from themselves in transparency and clarity.

In Karina Borowicz's manuscript "The Bees Are Waiting," it was the poem "Soap" which captured my attention most profoundly:

Even as a child I knew it and my parents
couldn't shield me from Sharon Tate and the Olympic
Games massacre, the hijackings the war in Lebanon
not to mention the nuclear bomb and the bodies from Vietnam
coming off the planes in coffins, some of them hobbling off
on crutches and one leg. With a magnifying glass I pored over
Kennedy's face thinking there must be some omen
I made a study of Hitler's hands but even his fingernails
looked like anyone else's, he trimmed them now and then
and washed with a bar of soap like I did, maybe even
my special way of spinning it around and around in my hands.

The recounting of her attempt as a child to make sense of evil by identifying an ordinary, shared human action like washing her hands is poignant enough, but by drawing us in deeper with childlike specificity, "maybe even my special way of spinning it around and around in my hands" she manages to bring "soap" back to the thing itself, as if it hadn't even occurred to her to raise the spectre of the by now overly familiar horror represented by that word in the context of Hitler. And with the words "my special way of" she conveys a child's endless reserve of compassionate imagination in stark contrast to the evil she has "made a study of" and thereby renews the impact of its true horror.

Instead of prevailing over and forcing interpretations of her own images on the reader, in poem after poem Borowicz gives witness to the common experience of fragility and confusion, both human and animal, using ordinary words in the humility of simple observation. In the poem "Ruins" which begins matter of factly, "When they saw that the nest/of bees had been dug out of the ground/overnight by impatient claws" and ends with, "they didn't know why/but they were afraid//even though just the day before/they'd been gathering the last cherry tomatoes/when the bees chased them all the way/to the edge of the woods/and as they ran the ripe fruit/burst in their hands" she allows the mystery of reality to stand. Her images arrive with an unassuming power, as she uses language in its original metaphorical sense to point to something more, rendering the buffalo's silent rage in "Buttonwood Park Zoo" in one stroke with "his glistening black eyes/bigger than a child's fist". Among other demonstrations of her willingness to think herself into the place of others, one technique she uses to relinquish her role as objective bystander is to interrupt her observations with questions such as, "Why is nowhere so hard to find?/And why are they taking away my piano?" as in the poem, "Mystery Piano Found Deep in Cape Cod Woods." As well as in her poem "Antarctica", where while the leopard, hungry, looks on from above as "any one of us" takes a wrong turn, she abruptly leaves the lost human, the "black dot/ [that] divides the horizon/from the sky" alone, ending the poem with the unanswerable, "Human speck/why have you wandered so far//So close to the jaws of nothingness". I find that Karina Borowicz's close studies of herself and others, of animals, of strange and familiar places, accomplished with her gentle penetrating gaze, direct our eyes toward something higher by actually moving the reader beyond the words.

—Franz Wright

Selections from *The Bees Are Waiting*

VISITORS

The students from Portugal
cluster at the window in the common room.

They've never seen snow before.

They want to know what it means
how it feels in bare hands
at what point excitement
should turn into fear.

Outside, they stick out their tongues
and shelter flakes in their palms.

The old woman walking her dog
from streetlight to streetlight
wonders why they aren't wearing coats.

It falls so fast, someone says
the whole world will be white.

KITCHEN CATECHISM

A light escapes from the cracks
in the old radio that sits on our kitchen
table. We're made of the same stuff,
that box and I –
a crowd of voices and hidden
fires and the searching
red line of a compass.

And when my mother lights
a ring of fire on the gas stove,
how can I look away? A crown
of souls hisses there, whole lives
joined in a dance, burning off
their histories in the time it takes
for the kettle to boil.

Interview with Karina Borowicz in *The Erie Reader*

Karina Borowicz is an award-winning poet who will be reading at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Thursday, April 18, as part of the Creative Writers Reading Series. Karina Borowicz is the author of two books of poetry, including *The Bees Are Waiting*, which landed her a spot as a finalist for the T.S Eliot Award. She is one of the most passionate writers I have had the chance to talk to, and her love for her work can be endlessly seen in her poems.

Eric Brewer: When did you first realize that you wanted to be a writer? What made poetry, of all forms of writing, stick out to you the most?

Karina Borowicz: At a young age I realized I wanted to write; I loved books of all kinds when I was a kid: mystery and adventure, nonfiction about people, places, and the past, and of course poetry. My parents always had lots of books around, especially the classics and history, and plenty of poetry, which I gravitated to because it seemed of-this-world yet not-of-this-world in a way that prose didn't.

EB: Is there ever a time in which you get frustrated or stuck with a piece of work? If so, what's your solution to help overcome this stagnant time period?

KB: Oh, yes, getting stuck is part of the job. But even sitting for an hour or more trying to resolve a line or phrase or word that doesn't work feels productive to me, as long as the wheels are turning in my head. At some point, putting the problematic poem aside for a few days or weeks while working on another poem allows me to go back with fresh eyes and solve the problem more quickly.

EB: What sort of things do you take into account when you start forming ideas for a new poem? Does a lot of it come naturally to you because you have been doing it for a while now?

KB: New poem ideas come from all over, even from out of the blue. From memory and experience, certainly, and from paintings and music and dreams and books. Writers should keep a little notebook with them at all times to record ideas, images, snatches of conversation, even a half-formed but interesting thought. These scribbles are a gold mine of ideas. In order to get worked up into a poem, however, the idea has to have some sort of emotional resonance for me.

EB: I enjoyed your recently published book of poetry, *The Bees Are Waiting*. My favorite had to be "Tools" because it had a sense of real life vividness to it, a plethora of detail being contained only by a few short paragraphs. Do you have a favorite piece of writing from this book?

KB: That's a tough question. There are pieces I like better than others, of course, but to pick a favorite... The poems I've written that manage to capture the wonder and consciousness of the child-mind really appeal to me, like "Tools," "Soap," and "Midnight Train." I have a lot of childhood nostalgia – it's such a fascinating and scary time, when you're observing intensely and trying to figure out the world. We live in the present more when we're young. I'm really interested in the human perception of time and how it changes as we get older.

EB: Has your writing style changed at all since you first began to write poetry to the present day? Have you found yourself writing more or less over the years?

KB: I was lucky to have the poet Charles Simic as a teacher early in my writing career. He insisted on the virtues of clarity and communication, which was something of a revelation to me at the time. He also taught that wide and deep reading of poetry is essential for any poet, no matter what point you're at in your career.

A daily writing discipline is important for me, and I aim to turn out about a poem a week, which I've been doing for nearly a decade now.

EB: I see your second collection *Horses Midstream* has been selected as a finalist in the 2012 Nightboat Poetry Prize. Congratulations on another excellent book of poems. Was writing this book more difficult for you or easier now that you know you have a wide audience following your works?

KB: Putting a book together – which means selecting poems, finding the core, and then arranging them into some kind of order – perhaps gets easier the more you do it. But as I mentioned earlier, my focus is always on the writing of individual poems rather than on a book or collection. And at that level, the daily work, I'm not sure it ever gets any easier. I wouldn't want it to.

—Brewer, Eric. "Q & A with Karina Borowicz." *The Erie Reader*, 17 April, 2013.

Excerpts on the Craft of Poetry from [The Poet's Studio](#)

The Finishing Line

How, as a reader, do you know when a poem is over? That's easy – you run out of lines to read. The question gets tricky, however, when we talk about the poet: it's not as easy as saying that the writer knows a poem is over when she runs out of lines to write. It's a fascinating question, though, and one that every poet has to grapple with on an almost daily basis.

In a recent interview in *The American Poetry Review*, John Ashbery asserts that a “timer goes off” when the poem he's working on is done, and he's found that it's futile to keep writing after that figurative *ding!*. Reading that, I get this weird and wonderful image of a poem as a mass of yeasty dough that you've got to knead and let ferment and then shape into a loaf and toss in the oven – after all that work the cook can only wait for the bread to be done in its own time, and there's that perfect moment of golden-brownness and hollow thump when you rap it's underside with your knuckles.

There are plenty of other ways of looking at how a poem runs its course. In grad school I had a professor say that just when you think it's done, take one more step. Push yourself a little bit further over the threshold you constructed, open the door, and walk through. You might be surprised at what you find. To this wisdom I've added the notion that what a particular poem might need is the very opposite move – for the writer to take a step back, to turn away from that door, to leave something unsaid.

Maybe moving a poem toward its ending is like rock climbing: finding the right foothold. Do I grab hold of this outcrop here, put my toe in that crack? Is it wise to try and reach that ledge over there, or should I shoot for that crevice instead? It's a game of finesse. One move may be safe and one may be more risky. You have to keep weighing alternatives again and again without becoming paralyzed by analysis, but it's what gets you to the summit.

Taking the poem in a surprising direction, the *volta*, or turn, usually associated with the sonnet, has the capacity to open, widen, or even detonate a poem as it draws to a close. That's exciting. I'd like to see contemporary free verse engage more in this kind of vigorous movement. It's healthy and it gets the blood flowing.

I look at poems I love by Frank O'Hara, Wallace Stevens, Yannis Ritsos, Emily Dickinson, Zbigniew Herbert, and others, and part of what I love about each one is that the ending leaves me

feeling like I have witnessed something true, and it leaves me exhilarated or unsettled or grateful, but never indifferent. It's true that I want the entire poem to make me feel, and the best poems do, but there is something that a poem's ending can accomplish which makes the finishing line crucial to the success of the whole. O'Hara suddenly pleads with his father to “forgive the roses and me” (“To My Dead Father”) in the final line of his poem, and it is a complication of what has come before instead of a closure, but it is the perfect ending.

The Troubled Speaker

I keep coming back to a statement by Robert Bly that “every poem has to have images and ideas and some sort of troubled speaker” ([Turkish Pears in August](#)). The notion of a troubled speaker captured my attention right away. It gets at two very essential questions about poetry: for the poet, why one is writing a poem in the first place, and for the reader, why one should even care.

“Troubled speaker” means someone bothered by something, trying to work something out. And all of us are daily engaged in working things out – it's what makes us human. But it is the artist's job to give voice to this process, to acknowledge the uneasiness, the doubt, the fear, the awe, the surprise, the difficulty, the dizziness, the contradiction that is at the heart of the human experience.

It's a useful question to ask of any poem: what's bothering the poem's speaker? To pinpoint the unease is one way of unlocking a poem. Take, for example, [“The Broken Sandal,”](#) a short poem by Denise Levertov.

In this poem, the speaker feels suddenly disoriented. She is faced with a decision, one she feels ill-equipped to make – either continue moving, which may involve pain, or come to a standstill. Either way, the unforeseen turn of events disturbs the speaker and raises questions about her present and her future. There must have been something she was moving toward, she feels, and she wants to work out whether or not it is worth suffering for.

A friend of mine, the poet MRB Chelko, once told me she thinks of poems as questions. This insight is similar to Bly's. I have found it very helpful to conceive of poems this way – as a seeking after, as a search. And I am coming to learn that a poem without this energy goes nowhere.