

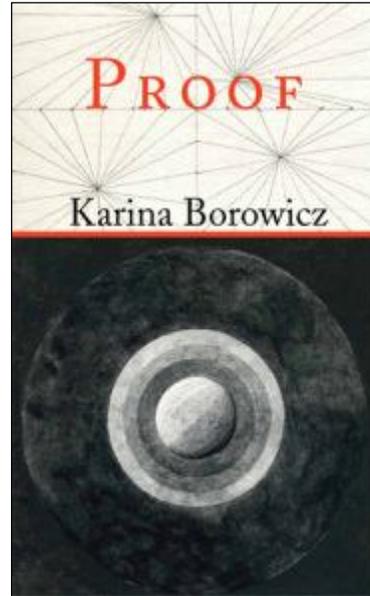
A Reading and Discussion Guide

Proof

By Karina Borowicz

Codhill Press, 2014

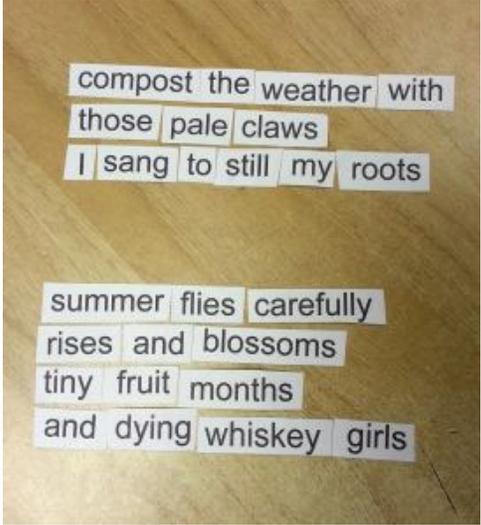
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Discussion Questions

1. What themes, motifs, and recurring images do you detect in *Proof*? How are they developed or linked?
2. As you read the poems, do you hear a particular voice coming through? Or are there multiple voices asserting themselves? Are there poems that are linked by voice?
3. In what ways may the ideas of “proof” and “proving” be applied to this collection as a whole? Single out specific poems that variously explore a concept of “proof.”
4. Some of the poems in *Proof* are written with punctuation suppressed. Discuss what effect this may have: how it guides the reader’s experience of a poem, how it changes (or does not change) voice. Why might the poet choose to suppress punctuation?
5. Discuss the view of nature in the collection. Where does the poet place herself in relation to it?
6. Which poems describe or are a response to loss? How does the poet respond to various losses?
7. Some of these poems explore issues of identity: “Rubber,” “My People,” “Folk,” “In Memory,” “Fourth of July,” and “Charo,” among others. Consider how identity—or the search for, or construction of identity—is approached in these poems.
8. How is the poet affected by the images and information she experiences through various media (news, music, television, literature, art)?
9. The collection opens with a poem called “The Invisible,” suggesting that Borowicz is particularly interested in the unseen and the overlooked. Later, in “Miniature,” it is the *hidden* eye of the Shah that attracts her attention. Where else does she focus her gaze upon the unseen? What attracts her to the hidden aspects of life?

Workshop Exercises

1. Some of these poems, like “Dog Adrift” and “Planet Kepler 22B,” were inspired by news articles. Write a poem about a news story that captures your imagination, provokes your outrage, or triggers your compassion.
2. Like the poet Jean Follain, with whom she is sometimes compared, Borowicz often shifts suddenly from one topic to another, leaving the reader to infer the connection, as in “Saw” or “The Grackle’s Yellow Eye.” Take two poems you have written and combine parts of them into one poem with a mysterious, implied connection.
3. Childhood memories can be particularly vivid. In “Guest Room,” the poet describes being sent to sleep in a room containing a nest of wasps. Write a poem about a time in childhood when you were frightened.
4. Photocopy a poem from *Proof* with especially descriptive language, cut it into individual words, and rearrange them to create something new. The example at right was created by Sarah Grace Logan, who runs a writing workshop in Manchester, England, working with words from Borowicz’s “September Tomatoes.”
5. One distinct cycle of poems in *Proof* deals with celebrities from the 1970s – Iggy Pop, Charo, Tiny Tim, Rose Marie. Another cycle was inspired by reading works of literature – *Anna Karenina*, *Kristin Lavransdatter*, *Madame Bovary*. Write about your own reaction to a famous person or book.
6. In writing about the craft of poetry, Borowicz sometimes cites Robert Bly’s notion that a poem needs a “troubled speaker.” She explains her understanding of this term: “‘Troubled speaker’ means someone bothered by something, trying to work something out. It’s a useful question to ask of any poem: what’s bothering the poem’s speaker?” Take several of your own poems and ask yourself: what is troubling the speaker?