Flaming Blurbscapes

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Abstract
Intrepid poetic landscaper John Gallaher decided to buck the trend of getting blurbs from fellow poets for the back cover of his latest collection. Instead, he turned to the world of music, and so In a Landscape (BOA Editions, 2014) sports blurbs from The Flaming Lips’ Wayne Coyne and Clem Snide’s Eef Barzelay, both talented and left-field songwriters. I asked John about this break with tradition, and the resulting interview appears below Coyne’s and Barzelay’s blurbs.

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Flaming Blurbescapes
by Dan Coffey on April 22, 2015

Intrepid poetic landscaper John Gallaher decided to buck the trend of getting blurbs
from fellow poets for the back cover of his latest collection. Instead, he turned to the world of music, and so *In a Landscape* (BOA Editions, 2014) sports blurbs from The Flaming Lips’ Wayne Coyne and Clem Snide’s Eef Barzelay, both talented and left-field songwriters. I asked John about this break with tradition, and the resulting interview appears below Coyne’s and Barzelay’s blurbs.

Wayne Coyne:

Like all curious and worried (not neurotic) artists, Gallaher would rather communicate psychically . . . but like all of us he has to use words. You can feel it in his sentences, that if you were to actually talk to him he would probably say “you know??” a lot. I think it’s because we all “do know,” we just don’t know until someone triggers that thing that is the nerve ending that travels to the subconscious and PING! So yeah maybe I was wrong . . . Gallaher is not a writer or a poet, he is a psychic using words to trick us.

Eef Barzelay:

In a Landscape seems to say that although we’re all starring in the movie of our life the real stuff somehow happens off camera; in the “talking bits” that fall more naturally and honestly in between takes. There’s an ease and freedom with the words that’s very comforting, like having an inadvertently deep and intimate conversation with a neighbor you barely know.

The BlurbIr: OK, so my first question obviously is what made you decide to go out of the realm of poets to seek blurbs, and into the world of rock singer/songwriters?

John Gallaher: I was really at a loss as to who to approach for blurbs for this book. So
I thought, since I talk about music in it, and since it's kind of a different book in a way from my previous books, I thought it would be fun to try for some non-poets to write things. I quickly found out that it's very difficult to contact musicians.

**TB: Who was easier to contact, Coyne or Barzelay, and what hoops did you have to jump through?**

**JG:** Barzelay was easiest. There's an email address on the Clem Snide website, and I guess that was forwarded to him. All our contact was through email after that. Coyne was more difficult, but not really. I wrote him a letter with the first pages of the book a few years ago and sent it to the home address that was at that time available after some digging on the internet. I really wanted to send one to Neko Case too, but I had no luck finding a way to send it. I'm allergic to sending things to record companies. I tried that once for Neil Young, and they forwarded it to the legal department.

**TB: What is it about Barzelay and Coyne in particular that you thought would be able to speak to the high points of your work? What connection did you feel?**

**JG:** Really, I just love their work. About Coyne, in particular, there was something he said in an interview for *The Soft Bulletin*, about how he decided to just kind of say what he thought of some things without making it be about spaceships and aliens. Something like that.

**TB: But he went on to sing about such topics, no? Robots, at least.**

**JG:** Oh, absolutely. No one ever really sticks to their grand pronouncements, especially in art. For instance, they also said they'd not use acoustic guitar on *The Soft Bulletin*, and then they used acoustic guitar.
TB: I noticed that you quote Eef Barzelay and Wayne Coyne several times throughout *In a Landscape* — was this after you already decided to go to them for blurbs?

JG: No. The book was done (except for some editing, etc) before I went looking for blurbs.

TB: Do you feel like Coyne is right — that you would rather communicate psychically? That is a pretty far-out assertion.

JG: Wouldn’t we all? I mean, that would be pretty cool. I don’t know why he said it, though.

TB: I guess it depends on how you interpret that statement — I’d be afraid that people would misinterpret my thoughts without my ability to organize them via written or spoken words. Of course, misinterpretation abounds in the latter modes of communication too. I guess we’re screwed either way.

JG: Or that direct psychic communication wouldn’t need words or organization, as the electric flashes would be brain to brain or something. Right? One synapse here making one there go off and vice versa? Being screwed by trying to communicate is
something you can count on. That’s something that I think about a lot.

TB: Barzelay hews to a more established form of blurb, more literary. And I think he really nails the essence of your book. Is there anything in his blurb, or Coyne’s, that you would take issue with, or to put it more gently, not agree with 100%?

JG: Nah, I’m good with what anybody says, I guess. Barzeley’s really smart, I got that quickly from our email exchange, and Coyne is on another plane, you know? All I’d do is split hairs and look like a jerk, like saying that it’s true that, as Barzeley says, that the real stuff happens off-camera, but, you know, the on-camera is also real, just the “real for show” that we work up, that I was trying to get away from in this book. He’d agree, though, so it’s not a taking exception or disagreement.

TB: What songs by Clem Snide and Flaming Lips do you feel most resonate with your book?

JG: The Flaming Lips: “Waiting for a Superman” and Clem Snide: “Born a Man.” I really hope I can get Paul Westerberg to blurb one of my books someday.
TB: Do you say “you know” a lot?

JG: Yeah, well, I guess. I also say “Right?” And maybe and perhaps. I really kind of want most things I say to evaporate or something, so that I’d not have to deal with how wrong I think they’ll be later.

Dan Coffey

Dan Coffey hails from Buffalo, NY and has made the Midwest his second home. The librarian for English and World Literature at Iowa State University, Dan lives in Ames, Iowa, with his wife and son. He has had poems published or forthcoming in Poetry Bay, Kennesaw Review, MiPoesias, Dirt, and The Laurel Review.