

Sunday, October 7, 2007

Simmons B. Buntin



Simmons B. Buntin is the founding editor and publisher of Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments, an online journal that explores the nexus between the built and natural environments through literary and technical work ranging from poetry to the UnSprawl case study. Terrain.org, which publishes theme-based issues twice per year, has been online since 1997, and celebrates its 10th anniversary with a reading on January 31, 2008 at Cornelia Street Cafe in New York. Won't you join us?

Simmons's first book of poetry, *Riverfall*, was published in May 2005 by Ireland's Salmon Poetry. He is a recipient of a Colorado Artist's Fellowship for Poetry and an Academy of American Poets Award. He has a master's degree in urban and regional planning, and is currently in the MFA program in creative writing (nonfiction) at the University of Arizona.

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Track Simmons down at www.SimmonsBuntin.com or www.riverfall.blogspot.com.

Publication Questions:

1) *What projects are you currently on? (Include issue #s, books, chapbooks, broadsides, special projects, print and web).*

Terrain.org's next issue, No. 21, launches on January 10, 2008--with the theme of "Islands & Archipelagos"--so that's keeping me busy. I just conducted a pretty great interview with science/natural history writer David Quammen, whose work I much admire; and in mid-November I'm flying to Baja California Sur to visit and photograph the sustainable new community of Loreto Bay, which will be our case study. The latter isn't typical, but I'm always looking for an opportunity to get down to Mexico, where I don't speak a wit of Spanish but sure love the people and landscape. Alas, the immersive language CDs lasted for only three of my daily commutes, however.

I'm also working on a manuscript, which won't be ready for another year and a half at least, of personal essays, subtitled "Essays on the Borderless Desert." Some of the essays are beginning to find homes; most aren't yet written.

And then I'm helping out on the University of Arizona Poetry Center dedication and festival the weekend of October 13. The new Poetry Center is amazing, both in architecture and content, and is worth a trip to Tucson in and of itself. Lucky for me: I live here!

2) *What has been your biggest challenge as a poetry publisher/editor?*

Certainly time constraints and high rejection percentages are challenging. But to be truthful, it's so much fun--both the editing and website development--that I make the time and happily (if not sometimes glossily-eyed, if there's such a phrase) make my way through the submissions at the expense of other things I ought to be doing, including I regret to say spending time, near issue launch anyway, with my family. Or paying bills. Or catching palo verde borer beetles to send to my nephew in Indiana.

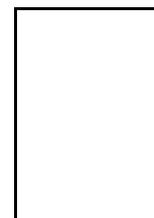
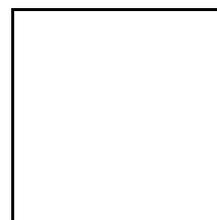
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portraits

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Actually, the biggest challenge has been marketing the journal, because we're nonprofit but not 501(c)(3), and so have no funding, nor "marketing time." The peripheral but imperative things like marketing are always second on the two-item list of editing the journal, so that suffers. I suspect there aren't many sugar daddies or mommies among this readership, but if folks feel like donating their marketing expertise and time, or some cash, I'd be glad to have your services!

3) Do you regret any paths you have followed as a publisher/editor?

Originally Terrain.org was quarterly, but as I'm the primary editor and web guy, that became too much. While I think publishing two issues a year is respectable, I'd prefer to publish quarterly. Is that a regret? More of a shucks, perhaps. My other shucks is that our discussion forum---which we launched early on but then faded away, and then relaunched just about a year ago, but pulled after a month because of spammers--hasn't been successful. An online publication can be much more than a static publication--it becomes a venue, a community. Tools like discussion forums, comments, blogging, and the like really add to that. I do regret that we haven't yet been able to incorporate those tools more fully and successfully.

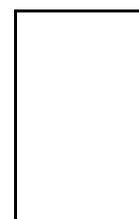
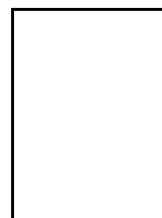
4) Name one poet who has not appeared in your publication which you would love to have included and why.

Mary Oliver, because she's my favorite poet, and because her poetry is a perfect fit for Terrain.org. And because I love her. And because she knows what it means to be a hummingbird and the honeysuckle it visits and the hillside on which it grows and the mountains that give it shadow and the sky and stars and pinwheel galaxies beyond. And because A.R. Ammons, my other first choice, is no longer with us and Mary, bless her, is probably not far behind.

5) Who is the designer of your web site and how much input do you have in the design of the web site and the other design elements including covers for books, etc.?

I am the designer, so I have all of the input, though I gladly accept recommendations and other input from our editors and editorial board. And from you: suggestions?

6) What recognitions have you received as a publisher/editor?



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About Me



Didi Menendez

I paint. I publish. I parent.

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stuff



We've received some good words and awards here and there--mostly there, now that I think about it, since it's been a while. *Utne Reader* once named Terrain.org a best of the alternative web. From a literary perspective, we get mentions every now and then in blogs or magazines. Personally, recognition comes in the form of friendly emails, submissions from folks whose friends or writing communities suggest our journal. Perhaps the most "I'm pretty sure I don't belong in this excellent conversation" recognition I've received was an interview that Michael Vaughn conducted with me and fellow poets Grace Cavalieri, Jane Hirshfield, and Dorianne Laux for the April 2006 issue of *Writer's Digest*. It's almost as if I'm a real poet (though secretly I know better). But there should be no doubt that Terrain.org is a real publication, and that's what brings and deserves the attention.

7) Where do you see your publication/editing in 5 years?

In five years Terrain.org should just about be on Issue No. 30. I envision more interactive features--Flash-based poems and video essays, for example, and article/essay commenting from readers. We're also considering online chapbooks and annual contests. The web is moving to handheld devices, so a "mobile" version of Terrain.org seems in order. What I hope you won't (continue to) see is advertising.

8) What are some of your other interests?

Family first and foremost--I have a lovely bride of 14 years now, and two daughters aged 10 and 7 who are the best poems imaginable. Otherwise, I enjoy photography, hiking, travel, Harry Potter, fantasy football, college football, reading, Halloween, off-road driving, wildflowers, wildlife, sustainable communities, craft-brewed beer, coyotes, sphinx moths, the family of Gamble's quail in the backyard on certain mornings, school, community schools, basketball (though my shot appears to be worsening), obscure but wise quotes, Charles Darwin, scarps and cliffs and bajadas and peaks, Facebook, fish tacos, fish and chips, Irish pubs, microbreweries and brewpubs, and farmer's markets. That's enough to be going on with, for now.

9) What is your favorite poem as of today and why?

That, woman, is a tough call. Let's go with something from A.R. Ammons, since he played second cello to Mary Oliver in a question above.

As to why--because it humbles me to the marrow in my bones, and
because it changes me that deeply, too:

CASCADILLA FALLS

I went down by Cascadilla
Falls this
evening, the
stream below the falls,
and picked up a
handsized stone
kidney-shaped, testicular, and

thought all its motions into it,
the 800 mph earth spin,
the 190-million-mile yearly
displacement around the sun,
the overriding
grand
haul

of the galaxy with the 30,000
mph of where
the sun's going:
thought all the interweaving
motions
into myself: dropped

the stone to dead rest:
the stream from other motions
broke
rushing over it:
shelterless,
I turned

to the sky and stood still:
oh
I do not know where I am going
that I can live my life
by this single creek.

10) Recommend a poetry book, blog or web site to our audience (not from one of your press) and why.

Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*. Probably everyone reading this has read it as part of an undergraduate poetry class. If not: good God people, get on it! It will give you second sight and other powers you always knew you were capable of but could otherwise never summon.

11) What is the most exciting aspect of being a poetry publisher/editor?

In a word: craft. I get to create something with unending life--until the Internet goes away, anyway, which with global warming and all might not be so far off--that itself is crafted, but more importantly contains the pure craft of 20 or 30 artists in each issue. Together, the works and the publication take on a single and distinct form, a new subspecies in the lineage of literary publication. Good Lord, I sound like a control freak, and yet that's precisely it, for what is writing and editing poetry if not control--artistic control that, through its process, creates something wonderful and living and thriving and, if done well, breathtaking, breathgiving?

12) Leave us with a recipe for poetry.

Ammons, again. Our journal's name comes from his poem "Terrain."
Here are the first four lines:

The soul is a region without definite boundaries:
it is not certain a prairie
can exhaust it
or a range enclose it:

Posted by Didi Menendez at 7:50 AM 

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