



'KonLit

with Elke Reinauer

Mind Stretching Poetry

Whitehorse-based poet Jamie Sharpe publishes his second collection

What does knitting have in common with writing poetry? Both must be done carefully. One mistake can ruin the whole image. Jamie Sharpe knitted a one meter wide and two storey long scarf and wrote a poem about it.

Sharpe's second book of poetry is entitled *Cut-up Apologetic* (ECW Press).

His work has appeared in magazines like *SubTerrain*, *Arc*, *Dreamland*, and *Vallum*.

How did he get the idea for the title?

"When you spend your days shuffling language, specific phrases end up sticking to the brain," he says.

"I find a useful tension between the different meanings of particular words: 'Cut-up' as both someone who is funny, and

that which is torn apart; 'apologetic' as one who is sorry, but also as an explanation or treatise. I like writing that exists between these spheres: the comical yet sad and that which admits failure but illuminates a potential path out."

Writing poems often takes more time than writing fiction. Sharpe spends a lot of his time playing with words and images. Some of the poems in the book are about six years old.

"Early in their careers writers enjoy the luxury of drawing from years of unpublished work," says Sharpe. "I now have about a decade-and-a-half's worth of scribbles from which to refine. You get to the point, however, where you've cannibalized every scrap worth using."

He offers a broad variety of topics in his book, from the question of having a child in "Talking to my Wife about Having a Baby/ That Canyon's my Son", to the



PHOTO: courtesy of Jamie Sharpe

The poet and the scarf

philosophy of Kierkegaard. His poems are playful, even when they're about fear, discrimination, or restlessness.

Sharpe loves reading fiction but finds it tedious to write.

"A novel is a connective tissue that establishes characters and scenes, or delineates the movement of people. I can never imagine myself writing a line like, 'When he awoke, Arnie was there again, sitting in a chair beside the bed and reading the *Cleveland Post*.' (From the John Grisham novel, *Playing for Pizza*.) I'd rather knit a mile long scarf than stitch together lines like that. Poetry's economy appeals to me."

There are collages and pictures between the poems in the book.

Sharpe sees a connection be-

tween poetry and visual art.

"The visual arts and poetry are more akin to me than poetry is to most prose. I've certainly been influenced by trips to the cinema or the gallery," he says.

Sharpe doesn't know what came first, the poetry or the art projects, but they influence each other throughout the book.

Where does he get his inspiration from?

"A hard question," he says.

"If I knew, I'd be endlessly inspired. Although I'm moved by nature – the grandeur of a mountain or beauty of a sunset – I'm not inspired to write about it. For me, inspiration is more inquisition than exhibition."

Sharpe is influenced by Julio Cortázar, Rae Armantrout, and Anne Carson's work.

"There is endless writing to fall in love with," he says.

Currently, he is working on another manuscript of poems called *Dazzle Ships*.

"It touches on the visual arts, examining modes of authentic expression in the increasingly automated world. It also asks how do we hide the things that are too big to hide? Hopefully it will be out in a few years," Sharpe says.

In the poem "Lululemon Toque" he writes: "if only I could make a poem / that stretches the brain".

But his poems are doing just that, they are stretching the brain with unique and sharp imagery.

Sharpe's latest collection is available at Mac's Fireweed Books for \$18.95.

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