ENG255
Weekly Reading and Writing #7

READ

- Think Small, America’s quiet poet laureate, by Adam Kirsch from The New Yorker, April 7, 2010
- Kay Ryan poetry packet:
  - Spiderweb
  - Spring
  - Hope
  - Flamingo Watching
  - Periphery
  - Leaving Spaces
  - Green Hills
  - Why We Must Struggle
- Research Kay Ryan online
- Optional: packet of reviews and essays on Kay Ryan’s poetry on reserve in the library

Some Kay Ryan quotes:

1. Question: What are your intentions as a writer? Ryan: “I go in thinking there is something I want to understand or there’s a place I want to arrive at, something that is troubling my mind that needs clarifying and I keep writing until I have solved it or until it fails and I give up. You know, most poems don’t work for one reason or another. I write an awful lot of material that will never be seen.”
2. Question: What has poetry taught you about yourself? Ryan: “... through poems I find understandings that I am otherwise incapable of articulating... poetry allows for deep exploration.”
3. Question: What does writing in free verse offer you as a writer? Ryan: “I don’t know if I would call it free verse. When I think of free verse, I certainly don’t think of something as highly rhymed as my work. When I am writing, each word that I use in some sense calls to other words. It calls to its sound family so that all of these words come clamoring, take my mind into new directions even as I am still trying to go along that original path. So, I get redirected by rhyme. It is a very fortunate thing. As Milan Kundera noted, ‘Writing has to be better than our regular mind; some operation has to occur by which we are made better than ourselves.’ So for me one of the great properties of rhyme is that it simply enlarges my thinking.”
4. Question: What is the hardest thing for you to do as a poet? Ryan: “... giving up on a poem that isn’t working.”
5. Question about the interest in poetry. Ryan: Poems “carry some kind of deep meaning to us. Something we may not even understand. It’s an inheritance somehow that we may not even understand, but we don’t have to understand it intellectually. Somehow our bones understand it.”

Sources: Southern Maryland Online, posted March 25, 2010 and Stanford Report, May 8, 2010
Questions to consider as you read and enjoy her poetry:

**Write:** Please choose one or two of the following (one full-page, single-spaced, WW#7):

1. In what ways would you consider Kay Ryan a postmodern American poet? Of the poets we’ve read so far this term, whom would you consider influences in her writing (e.g. Robert Frost, e.e. cummings, Wallace Stevens, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Denise Levertov)? In what specific ways? Choose one or a few poems to discuss the connections you see between a modernist poet and postmodernist Kay Ryan. Ryan on Frost: “He sets the standard for clarity and the management of darkness.”

2. What would be the best questions regarding style to bring to a discussion of her Ryan’s poetry? Choose a few of these devices and discuss one or a few of the poems in our selection:
   - Sound devices: rhyme, rhythm, repetition, syncopation
   - Verse form, end-stop, enjambment

3. What would be the best questions regarding content to bring to a discussion of Ryan’s poetry? Choose several of these techniques and discuss one or a few of the poems in our selection:
   - Voice and tone
   - Imagery
   - Figurative language
   - Use of malapropism and reanimated cliché

4. Choose one or a combination of Ryan’s poems from our packet and describe its meaning and significance to you.

5. Creative Response: Be inspired by Ryan’s style, tone, and techniques and write your own poem in the style of Kay Ryan. Consider Kirsch’s description of her poetry: a narrow column of verse, held aloft by taut rhythms and irregular rhymes, using the technique of talking about people by talking about things.

6. Questions: Compose several questions that you would like to ask Kay Ryan related to her poetry. Consider bringing these questions with you to the Q&A for LBCC Students with Kay Ryan on Thursday, May 13th @ 9:30 – 11:00. You don’t have to ask your questions, but why not play around with what you’d like to ask?

“There’s a giggly aquifer under poetry.”
Kay Ryan