

Weird Without the Rhyme: An Interview with Maxwell I. Gold

By David E. Cowen, Bram Stoker Nominated Author of Bleeding Saffron (Weasel Press 2018)

Space Time Magazine. *Spectral Realms.* *Star*Line.* *Weirdbook Magazine.* *Penumbral Magazine.* These publications and many more have highlighted the fascinating poetry of Maxwell Ian Gold. Gold's latest volume *Oblivion in Flux: A Collection of Cyber Prose* (Crystal Lake 2021) is glowingly introduced by Linda D. Addison. The noted H.P. Lovecraft Scholar and strong advocate for the Weird Tale and Weird Poetry, S. T. Joshi along with Lucy A. Snyder, Daniel Braum and Angela Yuriko Smith, gave laudatory remarks for this volume as well. The volume is at its heart a fusion of cyberpunk and the Weird. What really sets this volume apart from the more recent revival of Weird Poetry is that unlike many such works it does not, with minor exception, heavily rely on formalism. Gold writes prose poems and this gives him a unique space in the subgenre of Weird Poetry.



Q: Your body of work falls squarely in what I consider the “Weird” Poetry subgenre. Just to frame this conversation tell us how you interpret the meaning of “Weird” as a subgenre of horror and speculative poetry. Also, do you consider yourself falling within “Weird” as often discussed in the writings of S.T. Joshi or “New Weird” as John Harrison coined the phrase in his 2002 introduction to *The Tain*?

A: This is difficult for me because I think I'm still formulating some aspects of my voice, despite being formally published since 2017. The short answer is my form of prose poetry straddles both subgenres. I try to utilize aspects of world-building and a sense of gritty, honesty truth coupled with the traditional prose one might find in weird poetry. I guess I'm trying to build something new and different.

Q: The subtitle to your newest volume of verse, *Oblivion in Flux* is “A Collection of Cyber Prose.” What is Cyber Prose and how does it fit within the definition of poetry and Weird Poetry?

A: The Cyber Gods started, for me, as a literary and almost philosophical experiment about the state of our world and humanity as a species, smashed together on this little rock floating in space. Quite often I think about it. How we see our existence and contemplate our place within its

structure if you could even call it that. Then, I wanted to develop some way to explore those questions with poetry that was more than the cosmic nihilism seen in the weird poetry of the early 20th century. The Cyber Gods to me, and cyber prose, grew into a literary personification of these questions.

I believe the Cyber Gods and cyber prose have a place in the subgenre of weird poetry as an outgrowth of our lust for reason, and fear of the answers that may lie on the other side of the questions we ask.

Q: I understood that you consider Clark Ashton Smith and the French author Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud to be solid influences. Smith relied very heavily on meter and rhyme. Rimbaud did some, depending perhaps on the translation. Weird Poetry is often associated with very formalistic poetry. What made you change course to focus on prose poems within this subgenre?

A: I do consider both Rimbaud and Smith as solid influence and credit author Craig L Gidney for introducing me to the work of Rimbaud. Well, I'd make the argument firstly that there is a misconception to some, that prose poetry doesn't rely on any sort of meter or rhyme, at least in the formal sense. And it's often lumped together with flash fiction or

fiction in general because most editors in the horror genre-at-large don't have a handle on where it should fit. Secondly, one of my favorite prose poems by Clark Ashton Smith 'Memnons of the Night' has a supreme example of a loose meter or a place where there's precise reason to give rhythm to piece:

"...a strong, a sombre music, strange and sonorous, like the singing of black stars, or a litany of gods that invoke oblivion..."

Comma placement is key to letting the prose poem flow as if listening to a piece of beautiful music. For me, that is partly where I decided to chart my course in going this route within the genre of weird poetry. Controlling the flow and friction of words through a poem without rhyme can create the most beautiful and terrifying sensation if it's done correctly.

Q: Rimbaud developed his own poetic style and as referenced by the Poetry Foundation elaborated "his theory of *voyance*, a visionary program in which the poetic process becomes the vehicle for exploration of other realities." I always found this theory a literary cross between "waiting for the muse" and something later found in a Philip K. Dick novel about people who live in multiple universes at the same time. Reading

your work there is a sense of channeling the “weird” like the more surrealistic works from Yeats during his spiritualism phase of “automatic writing.” Did that happen for any these works?

A: I'm familiar with Rimbaud's 'Seers Letters' and I think as I've begun this journey into the world where the Cyber Gods dwell, writing these poems it's almost like peering into little dreams about myself, places I've once traveled to. Sometimes they are planned, but I hate to use that word and other times it's as if I'm still learning more about myself when walking in the shadows of these strange creatures. I thought I had to know who they were, where they came from, and maybe I'll never really know what the Cyber Gods really are...

Q: A number of your poems have narrative storylines which begs the *cliché'd* question: How does the reader distinguish your prose poems, with such elaborate narratives, from flash fiction? I ask this because I run into a number of people, even fellow poets, who do not understand prose poetry and what it offers the genre.

A: Like I had mentioned in one of my earlier answers, I think one of the biggest misconceptions about prose poetry period, is how editors tend to view it, literally. It doesn't have the same look on a page versus a formal poem. So, it's going to be treated like a piece of flash fiction when it's

nothing like it. Regarding the question of narratives, yes, some of my poems do have aspects of world-building and reference one another, but they are not closed worlds or confined to each other. Meaning, I look at them like pieces of a dream, fragments scattered that might never be able to be connected again, but we'll do our best to try.

In terms of what prose poetry offers to the genre, I think it presents a unique distinction from more formalistic categories and it allows for freeform expression

Q: There are certainly homages to Lovecraft, Smith, Rimbaud and others in the language you chose you're your poems. Lovecraft loved to repeatedly us the words *dread, terror, fear and dark* in his fiction. Your poems amply make use of those words. What is different though is the concept of a new Weird Mythos – the new Cyber Gods which figure heavily in your poems. This may remind a little of Neil Gaiman's American Gods characters' Technical Boy and Mr. World. Are these New Gods, cyber gods, your contribution to the Weird Tale? Or do you see them as an extension of the “old gods” often referenced by Lovecraft in his works? Was Gaiman an influence here as well as the “old gods” of the Weird Tale?

A: I would certainly like to think they are (my contribution to the Weird Tale), at least that is my hope they will be. Though it is not my choice whether that comes to fruition. It was not my intention for them to be an extension of any existing mythos such as Lovecraft's.

Q: You do add a couple of sideroads from your prose poems with more formalistic pieces such as *The Unspeakable*, *The Old White Crone* (“*The old white crone stood in the square and smirked,/ While the sight of her pasty white eyes irked./ With her hunger sated, and ravages quelled, The wooden cart began towards some other Hell.*”) and the title poem *Oblivion in Flux* (“*I am the voice, deep at night,/ On ivory thrones out of sight. A curse to pay, inside my dreams, Forever lost, a voiceless scream.*”). These certainly follow more formalistic styles. The placement of these is an interesting change from the other poems. Why did you add them in and what do you think they add to the overall tone of the collection?

A: Experimentation is important and there is no one form that trumps all others. Initially, I tried the more formalistic approach before finding a path through prose poetry. I think I wanted to keep these pieces in the collection to show some versatility, but I'm not sure if I will come back to this form of verse in the future though nothing is certain. ‘The

'Unspeakable' does make reference to another project I'm working on.

Q: Writing poetry is as much craft as inspiration. Writing this type of narrative poetry may require much more craft in the planning and staging of the narrative and the words to set the tone and image. Reading the works as a whole we can see an interrelationship between the poems and the stories. How did you set out to write these types of poems? Did you outline a story as you might with fiction? Was it some word, image or thought that triggered the first few words or lines as often is with non-speculative poetry? What were the mechanics of creating these poems and the narratives within?

A: This is a difficult question to answer, because I don't have a formal process in terms of outlining my poems. Most of the time it begins of a few words in my notebook, maybe a title, or a concept or picture. I don't always have the end goal of world-building or a narrative in mind when I'm writing a prose poem which is why I approach them as an open window or fragmented dream.

Q: I understand you have an upcoming volume in collaboration with Bram Stoker nominee Angela Yuriko Smith. Tell us about that and any other new projects you have coming up.

*A: Yes! We're both very excited for our book of call and response poems titled *Mobius Lyrics*. I will have a prose poem in the new anthology *Shadow Atlas* from Hex Publishers titled 'No More Prying Eyes' about the fabled lost city of gold and the mysterious lake which inspired its legend.*

*I'll have two stories in the upcoming *Crystal Lake Dark Tides* series, and I'm thrilled to be collaborating with some great authors including Lee Murray, Angela Yuriko Smith, Michael Bailey, and Lucy Snyder.*

Also, I have a few books in the works, a second prose poetry collection titled 'Mouth of Mirrors: Dark Reflections of Spirit and Soul' and a Cyber Gods novella.

Please share some of your poetry with us:

Concerto

By: Maxwell I. Gold

Ancient fingers caressed eldritch keys, blasting ivory tones and mutilated fantasies out of an infested upright. Sagging on brittle oak legs, the grand carcass waned from side to side, movement to movement as haunted melodies were expelled in a

most hideous crescendo; emptied by damper and doom. Fingers caught between ghoulish glissandos, running up and down dastardly continuums of wild notes; soon fell victim to the unplayable song, the impossible compositions of new gods and simulated monsters. The lamenting music of entropy called me, howling from frozen oblivions while ancient fingers caressed eldritch keys, blasting ivory tones and mutilated fantasies out of my infested upright.

The Cyber God's Throne (originally published in Siren's Call 54, Summer 2021)

Trembling with craven, perilous eyes, I gazed in awe at a towering block of ivory and bone, cradled in a deep trench of toxic starlight and death. Lost in some world within the cracks of depraved imaginations and empty sanity, the stars themselves would pass glances in the shadows, gawking at the bizarre masonry. The piece of stone, soaked in black mythologies, cut from a dead mountain as an homage to a hideous deity from beyond my treasonous dreams. The hieroglyphs were awesomely dreadful in their artful depiction of the

thing and its incredulously disgusting form; with a scaly carapace, crustacean-like claws, and tentacles that slithered along the sides of the dark cube. I was hypnotized by the membranous depiction of the things' cavernous eye socket which looked as if it were hording a trove of priceless yellow sapphires as sparkling as the stars themselves.

Seeing the gruesome images plastered so large were bewildering, wondering as to how any civilization prospered with the facade of that gigantic monstrosity casting its shadow over reason and sensible logic. Upon further inspection, I noticed it was not merely a block carved, but some malignant throne. When I had finally understood the greater intent of the white marble block, a chill shot down my spine as if the primordia of the universe, gurgling in the belly of old stars, fourteen billion years in the past had been realized through my thoughts and nightmares. Pleadingly, I fell to my knees at the foot of the stone, for I had seen the throne of Ad'Naigon merely in dreams but couldn't help myself. The wild bodily music wailing, cried from my lips as I danced in rave celebration at the feet of the Cyber Gods.

I was grateful to devote myself to the mad wanton glory of that which birthed the Void, with one thousand amber eyes that saw nothing and swallowed everything. All at once, I threw myself at the throne, until I could no longer feel the reasonable bemusements of touch or sight; the simple thrashing of my body bearing down on the white marble throne in a rage of psychotic madness until I was nothing but a shelled corpse. The winds bent along the old stone and my body simply rested, fulfilled, and sated with the lust that I had seen the Cyber God's throne.

Curations from the Void

Floating mirrors inside dank vacuums of night smashed against dismembered eyes, trapped in untethered closets filled my thoughts. Hazy, unnavigable dreams, making absolutely no sense covered my eyes as if trudging through a thick, labyrinthian slime; brown with a shiny film coating the top. I swore though, I'd stalked the blackness of the Void once before, in a time, or existence where

hallucinations of light from fourteen billion years ago were as bright as the flame on my bedside table.

No, that wasn't it. Something was different.

Some nights, where less surreal nightmares were not as commonplace, an old theater grotesquely obscured in gold paint and red velvet curtains destroyed themselves as if they were glass bottles, shattering in stone, concrete, and marble, their ruins splattered everywhere. And then, they'd rebuild their awful bodies repeating the process over and over while I watched in congruent horror.

All the while the ingénues sat backstage, pallid and frail, staring into floating mirrors, pancaking their gaunt faces in copious amounts of powder and shame. Occasionally, their eyes met mine as one or both fell onto the table, splashing into mess of beauty and wrath.

Yeah, something was different, but the show always goes on and every night I watched a bizarre performance inside my head as if hoping for a different, no, *consistent* outcome. My thoughts remained littered with pieces of destroyed magic,

where nothing made sense and letters to liars
covered the floors of my mind.

Bios: Maxwell I. Gold is a Rhysling and Pushcart award nominated prose poet who writes weird and cosmic horror. He is a regular contributor to *Spectral Realms*, and his work has also appeared in *Weirdbook Magazine*, *Space and Time Magazine*, *Startling Stories*, *Baffling Magazine*, and many others. Maxwell has published over 100 prose poems and short stories since 2017. His debut prose poetry collection *Oblivion in Flux: A Collection of Cyber Prose* is now available from Crystal Lake Publishing.