

Behind the Sestina: Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz’s “A Sestina for Shappy, Who Doesn’t Get Enough Love Poems”

Posted on [October 7, 2013](#) by [Alexandra Korcz](#) | [1 Comment](#)

[Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz](#) is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *The Year of No Mistakes* ([Write Bloody Publishing](#)), as well as *Dear Future Boyfriend*, *Hot Teen Slut*, *Working Class Represent*, *Oh, Terrible Youth* and *Everything is Everything*. She is also the author of two books of nonfiction: *Words In Your Face: A Guided Tour Through Twenty Years of the New York City Poetry Slam* and *Curiosity: Thomas Dent Mütter and the Dawn of Modern Medicine*, forthcoming from Gotham Books/Penguin.

Aptowicz’s most recent awards include the ArtsEdge Writer-In-Residency at the University of Pennsylvania, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry, and an Amy Clampitt Residency.

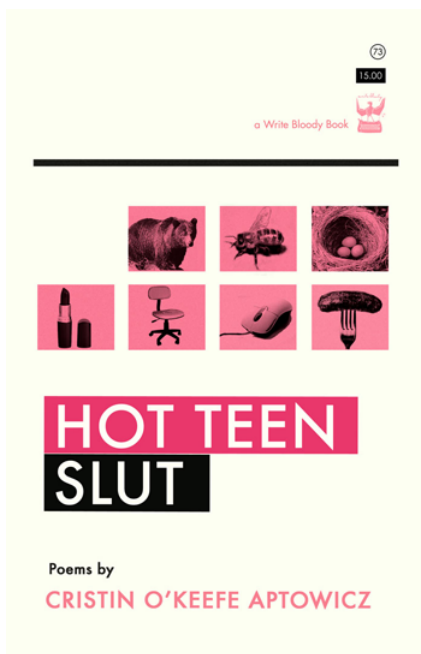
We unearthed Aptowicz’s “time capsule” and asked her about “A Sestina for Shappy, Who Doesn’t Get Enough Love Poems,” included in *The Incredible Sestina Anthology*.

When did you first discover the sestina?

I am sure I was first introduced to the sestina form in high school, but the first time I saw contemporary poets use it in a way that was exciting and inspiring was in the online lit journal, McSweeney’s Internet Tendencies, which only published poetry in that format.

Have you written sestinas before this one or since?

I have only written one other sestina, and it was written before this one. When I first graduated from NYU, the only job I was offered was a writer and editor for a porn website. And, as a hazard of the job, I was bombarded daily with pop-up ads advertising other porn sites. I noticed that many of the ads used the same words (you can imagine what they are!), so I spent MONTHS collecting phrases from pornographic pop-up ads to create a “found poetry” sestina. When I finally plugged in the last “found” line I was filled with such joy at a job well down—and then, almost after, a woeful sorrow at what my poetic life had devolved into! The resulting sestina can be found in my book, *Hot Teen Slut*, which is a memoir-in-verse about my year working that job.



Can you describe writing ‘A Sestina for Shappy?’

I was invited to try the sestina format again by McSweeney’s Internet Tendencies, editor [Daniel Nester](#), and when I tried to think of a subject to place in the center of the poem, my relationship with my partner Shappy came to mind. At that time, I had not written much about us, and the timing felt right. The poem came out pretty easily and I was thrilled when it was well-received both on the web (it was later accepted by McSweeneys) and page (it became a crowd favorite at my local poetry venue, the Bowery Poetry Club).

This sestina describes the tentative beginnings of a relationship. Now, six years later, what is like re-reading this poem?

I think it captures wonderfully that time in my life. Shappy and I dated for eleven and a half years, and our years in the tiny kitsch-crammed apartment are among the happiest I’ve ever lived.

Would you consider writing a sequel? If so, what do think the sequel sestina— a sequestina, if you will—would discuss?

I don’t think I would write a sequel. The poem is time capsule, and I think it is best if it remains that way.

The first sestinas were always dedicated to someone—who would you dedicate your sestina to (outside of the obvious candidate)?

The obvious candidate—my partner Shappy – is the only candidate. He absolutely earned every drop of love I crammed into that piece, and I still love him to this very day.

–Interview conducted by Alex J. Tunney