

# An interview with Francis Blessington, author of *Wolf Howl*

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Q: How did you assemble the collection?

A: Well, when you create a volume of poems, it's really a process of revising, rearranging and retitling various works. You want the poems to stay fluid throughout the book so that what you put next to each other goes together. Although, they should go together at least in an intrinsic sense because they all came from the same brain.

Ultimately, the shape of the book becomes a question of structure. In *Wolf Howl*, the poems begin with a personal use of self and proceed to poems that feature a voice outside of the writer's.

Q: How would you characterize your revision process?

A: I probably revise each poem at least 30 times. And, by using a computer instead of a pen and pad of paper, it's much easier to create multiple drafts. You could easily change just one line or even one word and consider that a new draft. But, the development process does go on for quite a while. You just hope that the poem doesn't fall apart a year later.

The main editing step is to look at the poem at different angles at different times. It's a feeling of constantly replowing the same ground. Luckily, outside editors often offer suggestions to fix your blind spots

Q: Does your background in the classics affect your writing?

A: I'm sure it does. In fact, I've often considered that connection. I think an understanding of the classics forces you to concentrate on the meanings of individual words, to focus on your own language. You can then use words that feature both contemporary and classical tones. These words provide historical linguistic strength to poems.

Q: In addition to your writing, you teach English at Northeastern. Do you find that this position influences your work?

A: Yes, because when I first started to teach, I didn't think it was a good thing to also try to be a poet. Now, I've found that the opposite is true. By working with students on their writing, you're forced to examine different techniques and other people's weaknesses. Then, when you focus on your own work, you bring this heightened sense of awareness to it.

Q: Which writing genre do you prefer to work in?

A: Poetry is my main focus, although you could argue that all writing is poetry in one form or another. I naturally turn toward writing a poem instead of a play. I don't think about this when I start writing, but once I'm engaged in a piece I notice that it works better as a poem.

Q: Are you conscious of the reader when writing?

A: When you begin a work, the focus is on self-expression. You don't stop to think how it will be interpreted. Your job is to capture the immediate impressions and images and translate them into language. Through revision, the meaning of the work becomes clear. At this point, the work evolves toward a form of communication with an audience.

Q: What projects are you currently working on?

A: Right now, I'm concentrating on fiction writing. And, I'm learning a great deal about writing, in terms of technique and perspective, from the process. It helps to bring in elements, such as the use of a narrative structure. The more knowledge you gain about writing in general, the more capably you can approach a specific genre. Poets are better off not just writing and reading poetry.