

Q and A

Mark Young

From the Cave's Jukebox

(Santa Barbara: Sandy Press, 2025)

1. What are the context and background of this collection of poems?

From the Cave's jukebox has a subtitle, "Some more Tom Beckett Titles," that gives form to its inspiration. Published in November 2025, it's a much smaller tome, 40 pages compared to the 152 pages of its precursor, *100 Titles From Tom Beckett*, that was published by Otoliths in June 2024.

My fascination with Tom's titles dates back to 2003, when we were both participants in the *As/Is* blog that was very active at the time. A post by Tom from November that year offered up three "Free Titles" with the accompanying invitation to "please take one." Which I did, & posted the poem to the blog a couple of days later.

For the next few years, I would occasionally ask Tom for titles. I wrote in a blog post: ". . . during one of those periods when nothing seems able to turn over the pebbles in your mind to find what hides beneath, I sought the help of Tom Beckett. *Titles*, I wrote. *Give me titles.*" Then came a gap of what I thought was fourteen years.

In January of 2022, I received a list poem submission for *Otoliths* from Tom titled "One Hundred Titles." I noted in my acceptance email that I might purloin some of the titles &, in fact, had already produced one or two poems before the list poem appeared online. Also inspired by the titles was poet & artist Thomas Fink, & a number of his paintings appeared in *100 Titles* alongside the corresponding poems.

Back to "the gap" mentioned above. I quote here from the Amazon site blurb for *From the Cave's jukebox*:

"Rediscovered (. . .) trawling through past posts & pages while putting together an introduction to the 2024 compilation, *100 Titles From Tom Beckett*, was another list of Beckett titles, this time a blog post containing sixteen titles that were later augmented by a further twelve to become a 'fragment' in his 2015 *APPEARANCES; A NOVEL IN FRAGMENTS*. Tom described them as "... titles of imaginary songs that appear on an imaginary jukebox in an imaginary bar called the Cave, a very special club house for the legendary performance art group Vaudeville without Organs."

"A comment from Young on the blog post indicates that he had seen them; but, unlike earlier instances from 2003 onwards, had not acted on them. That just might have turned out to be a good thing; because instead of sixteen titles being dispersed amongst various collections, it is now possible to present all the poems derived from those songs on that imaginary jukebox in a single volume, *From the Cave's jukebox*."

2. What are some elements of your writing process that were involved in its creation?

Again I quote, from the intro to *100 Titles*, but it has equal relevance to *From the Cave's Jukebox*:

". . . a common comment on my poetry is many of my titles have little relevance to the poems that accompany them. That is something I could not allow to happen here. Instead, the poems had to pay their respect, homage even, to the title that gave them birth.

"It doesn't mean that I approached all the titles in the same way. Some I came into from the side, some I confronted front on. Some titles spoke to me; others had to have their essence cajoled out of them. Some I brooded over for a period of time, & even then needed to deliver a few strong blows before the crust gave way. But always I adhered to one of my perennial maxims; let the poem shape itself.

"Which is why the reader will find here what may not be a hundred stylistic variations, but sonnets & erasures, vispo, mesostics, acrostics. & that's before poem #10 is reached."

From the Cave's Jukebox also contains a number of elements of my writing processes. I have said often that the poem shapes itself. That does not mean that I do not utilize formal structures, but only when the poem that arrives seems to warrant them. Behind the scenes are my two main drivers: stochastic processes — or the search engine as a powerful tool for generating poetry — & the ever-present influence of surrealism. As flavors, throw into the mix such things as the need for humor, my political beliefs, & a holistic *Weltanschauung*, but one tempered by the ridiculousness of today's world & how it often presents itself as a de facto parallel universe.

3. What approach informed your revising of this work and readying it for publication?

Most of my poems are written in the one day, creation & revision combined. I will then post them to my personal blogs where they stay for a few days before being taken down, & I use (a) those few days & (b) the actual taking down of the poem & its placement in another directory as a cast-my-eye-over kind of revision. Usually, if I'm putting a collection together, I will base the selection & order of poems on how they hold together as a group & what sort of commonality they have.

With *From the Cave's Jukebox* however, the titles were already arranged alphabetically so readying it for publication simply meant starting at A & working through to Z, which is also the order I wrote the poems in.

(As an aside; with *100 Titles*, because of the quantity, I used a random number generator to decide what poem I would work on next.)

4. What are some of the key traits that distinguish this collection of poems from your previous writings?

The obvious one is that this is a collection with a predetermined theme & order which meant that the internal commonality mentioned above was already there, &, because of that predetermination, their grouping was determined solely by the position in the alphabet of their title.

This, for me, is not — apart from the alphabetization - an unusual occurrence. I have utilized a number of tropes over the years, some specific, some more general, that have appeared in book form. The multi-volume ones include my 500+ ekphrastic René Magritte poems; "A line from . . ." poems; my *geographies* which are both visual & text; & the postman / postwoman poems. The one-off volumes include my *ficciones* — history re-imagined — & a number using chapter titles

from well-known books: Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*; John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*; & Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji Monogatari*.

Also unchanged is the variety of styles I use in the book. As I mentioned earlier, the poem often shapes itself, & outside the specific projects in the paragraph above, my collections tend to be wide-ranging in the topics addressed & the elements used.

What does change is the environment. Technology changes, climate changes, social mores & beliefs change, politics changes. Presidents & Prime Ministers change, some of them with outlooks that you share, some otherwise. Extreme wealth starts to coalesce in the hands of a few, even though the Pareto Principle barely changes. Attitudes harden. Age creeps in.

At the age of 84, it does become a bit harder to write, but the ideals, the desire not to remain static, the desire — the need, even — that one started out with, to improve the world, tend to remain constant though occasionally a little revision creeps in. As Charles Olson wrote in *The Kingfishers*, "What does not change / is the will to change."

5. What do you hope to see resonate with readers in this poetry collection?

The insights, the humor, the assemblage of words, the possibility of illumination, the continuity of belief, common concerns, the strength of purpose, a life well spent.

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