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Iowa City Press-Citizen

Jeff Charis-Carlson, Opinion editor

Phone: 887-5435

E-mail: opinion@press-citizen.com

Opinion

A lovely, poetic thhhppppptttt

There's a childlike forthrightness at the heart of Aaron Belz's poetry.

Throughout his new collection, "Lovely, Raspberry" (Persea Books, 2010), Belz's poetic narrators prove to be simultaneously innocent and defiant. They each seem to be able to stick out their tongue at readers and offer the most eloquent and euphoric raspberry ("thhhppppptttt") the poet can muster.

Rather than discuss love-hate relationships, one of Belz's poetic personas ruminates on "the love-hat relationship." And what looks like a simple spelling mistake suddenly becomes, a serious/satiric poetic conceit in which Belz offers the sage/silly advice: "We all enjoy hats, / but they're not something to build an entire relationship on."

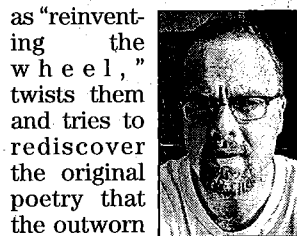
Belz seems determined to thwart all of his readers' expectations.

"You expect me to tell you about the interior of the room / in which I'm typing this, and connect that to my feeling," Belz writes at the beginning of the opening poem, "direction." "But I'd rather tell you about the interior of your room / and use that as a symbol for something less abstract."

Belz takes clichés, such



Jeff Charis-Carlson
Iowa Cityscapes



Belz

as "reinventing the wheel," twists them and tries to rediscover the original poetry that the outworn phrase must have possessed when first uttered generations ago.

"I tried to reinvent the wheel," he writes, "and it was fun, / because I did. It came out better than before, / rounder, quicker, and with less friction."

Or, as he explains more directly in the poem "privacy": "When every word sounds cliché, / each turn of phrase derivative, / that's when I turn to slapstick / and boorish sexual innuendo."

Of course, Belz's wide-eyed, child-like personas also inhabit a very grown-up world. They are able to quote with ease from T.S. Eliot and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. And they somehow manage to strike

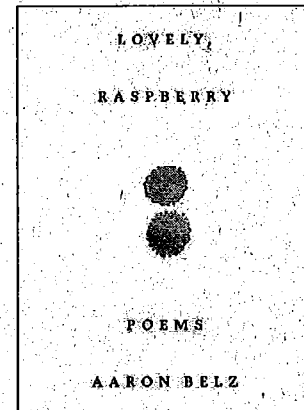
If you go

■ **What:** Poet Aaron Belz will read from his new collection, "Lovely, Raspberry"

■ **When:** 7 p.m. Friday.

■ **Where:** Prairie Lights Books, 15 S. Dubuque St.

■ **For information:** For information, visit www.prairielights.com or www.belz.net.



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up conversations with historical figures such as former Vice President Al Gore (who gets asks "about the muse"), Objectivist poet Charles Reznikoff (whose yard get tilled) and late movie star Katharine Hepburn (who gives a rain check for a sexual encounter).

But Belz offers something more than just scattershot bursts of aphoristic wit. Throughout the collection he walks with readers along a dream-filled landscape. His images — both within poems and between poems — shift through a process of association that's remarkably close to how 4-year-olds, lost in the details of their own story, interrupt themselves as

they effortlessly and intuitively break all the storytelling rules.

"Why did the elk, deer, chipmunks, coyote, sea stars, orca whale, sea lions, newt, weasel, and many different kinds of birds cross the street?" Belz asks in "five beginnings of jokes."

And — just like the 4-year-old — he never gets around to giving an answer. He just asks more and more questions.

Belz will be available to give — or to receive — a raspberry in person at 7 p.m. today at Prairie Lights Books.

Opinion editor Jeff Charis-Carlson can be contacted at jcharisc@press-citizen.com or 319-887-5435.

STUDY: CYBER-REALITY IS MAKING US DUMBER

LMAO

