

PenChant

To increase awareness and appreciation of the Literary Arts

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JULY 2004

SANGAMON LAUREATE

By: David Pitchford
Introduced by: Thea Chesley

From a letter written in nomination of John Knoepfle as Illinois' Poet Laureate:

I have known John Knoepfle, ... for nearly twenty years. In 1980 I moved from Chicago to Springfield, a year after completing a Master's degree in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago, at which Michael Anania had been my thesis ad-

visor, respected mentor and dear friend. His advice to me upon learning of my intended move downstate was "you have to meet John Knoepfle. Find him and get to know him. ... In the years since, as I came to know John and his work from his books, his readings, and the impact his sagacity, moral values and gentle humor have had on



so many others, I regard him as an Illinois treasure."

Poets & Writers Literary Forum took upon itself the audacity this most recent

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THE COST OF SURVIVAL

By: Tim Sheehan

As the new club treasurer I am stuck with the task of delivering bad news. Are you ready? Membership fees are going up.

We publish four issues of Prism each year and post twelve issues of Penchant to every member. These services alone cost the Forum more than twenty dollars per member per year. That is to say the Forum spends more on these services alone than dues cover.

This does not account for paper, toner, incidental postage, post office box rental, or

any of the dozens of day-to-day expenses that present

We can continue on the road to bankruptcy or...

we can face the problem head on.

Some of the ideas considered to reduce expenses included reducing the number of newsletters or making our publications available in electronic form only.

The former will not reduce the expenditure enough and the

latter will interfere with our mission. So, at least in the short term, dues must increase. The board voted to set membership rates as follows:

Student: \$19.93
Individual: \$27.93
Family: \$33.93

This is a significant increase but necessary to allow for continued operation. These rates will become effective as of July 1, 2004.

As a reminder, your

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COST

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membership includes:

- Full year's subscription to Prism, the Forum's literary quarterly
- 12 issues of PenChant, our monthly newsletter
- First Consideration in selection of material for publication in Forum compila-

tions

- ⇒ *Family membership provides this benefit to all members of the household as well as two (2) votes at election time*
- Democratic voice in how the Forum is administered
- Support and encouragement from people with a passion for the written (and spoken) word

Finally, no association such as this can survive on dues alone. In the near future we will be approaching members to help plan and staff fundraising events. When you are asked to participate, please say yes.

SANGAMON'S LAUREATE

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spring to bestow a much-deserved award on John Knoepfle: Sangamon's Laureate. Why? Because of John's lifetime of writing and teaching, and for extensive publication. An honor as great as a Laureateship isn't earned by one deed, one word, a single poem – not even by a single volume of poems; it is earned over a distinguished career.

The question now remains, "what honor shall we offer Sangamon's Laureate for the best work of his distinguished career?" Said work is his latest publication prayer against famine & other irish poems, BkMk Press, U MO-KC, 2004. For reasons (one must assume them 'irish' reasons) of casting a vote for the independent markets, John's agents have managed to make available his new book from Springfield's Chapter One bookstore in the Fairhills Mall

and in the UIS bookstore (you won't find it at the commercial-imperialist establishments).

Local scholars should write a savvy bio and thesis on John while he's still around to help (we hope that'll be another few decades, of course). Meanwhile, prayer is a good place to begin. Not because it is blatantly academic, but precisely because it is not. Prayer against famine is a masterpiece worthy of scholarly attention, but it is first and foremost a work of love for the people of this world – whether Irish or merely human – and part of a great poetic/humanistic legacy from a man whose genius is understated to the point of seeming simplicity.

How does one speak of the things John speaks of in these lines and refrain from seeming bitter? How attend the stricken sans fury at the strikers? Great wisdom and deep understanding? Perhaps what John says of

Scott Joplin answers best:

the man taking his own measure
everyones measure

John takes himself into a world riddled with injustice, looks deep into the pools of humanity and discovers the image of his own face on both the oppressor and the oppressed. Because he is Irish, all his prayers are. Because he is human, all he sees is. Because blame is the end of responsibility, John chooses his *road less traveled*. He is a poet wise enough to see the universal in the specific, and one talented enough to convey this to his reader.

One reading "skibbereen the famine pit" cannot unaffected remain; and yet John pleads no mercy, choosing instead to allow his auditor whatever reaction is natural. The poet reports something he wishes remem-

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July 2004

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14 IMO's open mic @ 7p.m. followed by Featured Artist— Liz Huck	15	16	17
18	19 PWLFB Board Mtg— 7 p.m. @ Pitchford's	20	21	22 Open mic @ Barnes & Noble—7 p.m.	23	24
25	26	27	28 IMO's open mic @ 7p.m.	29	30	31

New Membership Rates will become
 effective July 1, 2004

August 2004

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

1	2	3	4 IMO's open mic @ 7pm	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16 PWLFB Board Mtg— 7 p.m. @ Pitchford's	17	18 IMO's open mic @ 7pm	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26 Open mic @ Barnes & Noble—7pm	27	28
29	30	31				

LAUREATE

(Continued from page 2)

bered. In these lines, he generously does what he is able to recognize “ten thousand / tumbled in one grave here / so many nameless bones.” Perhaps in this, his heart can “reach to the bottom of the world” to commemorate those particular dead.

Pages later, in reading “justina,” one finds another poem posing as a local logue with a lesson that cinches a knot in a thread back to Ireland. In essence, after so many images of this sort, *It Happened Here* becomes *It Happens Everywhere*. Again, john leaves it to the reader to decide what feelings to have and what actions to take. But he refuses their ignorance by showing them a world the royal empires have tried to deny throughout history, and especially in modern history. As he writes it, “it was only the poor / were driven to the margins.” Deliberately and astutely, john refuses to point out the obvious truth in his lines, that there are vastly more poor than rich the world over. In this way, john acts as agent of the “maker of the wheel” to fulfill his own request in the title poem, “cleanse our eyes oh god.” Cleanse our eyes is precisely what john does with his verse.

But as much as john’s verse points out the poignancies of social injustice, his prayers offer hope. While al-

lowing that *sometimes a cigar is just a cigar*, john uses the image of his purloined peacock feather to demonstrate something else. What that something else is, john allows the reader to determine. “Peacock feather” tells more story than twenty-four lines should be able to encompass. In this poem, john bemoans the fact that someone stole the object from his wall, and not merely the object but “stole something of my [john’s] life as well.” He commemorates the object as well as the incident, but in so doing seems to fill any space in his life that could be missing with the story and poem of its passing. This is poetry. This is what it does and how it works. A poem is the commemoration of everything in life, the *iou* we put where the thing should be. And john knoepfle’s currency is worth far more than the paper on which it is printed.

Is life worth more than the currency of verse? Let the reader decide. To make an informed decision, research good sources. I recommend Sangamon’s Laureate as a great primary source.

POETRY CRITIQUE

The following is the first poem being circulated in the “small circle of friends” that currently make up the Poetry Critique Circle initiated by PWLF’s Arkansas member, Barb Robinette.

If you are interested in joining this group to provide comments on one another’s poems, please email Barb at:

robinette70@centurytel.net

THROWING AWAY OLD FOOD FANTASY

She steps out onto the back porch armed with a limp banana. “Run Squirrels! Run for your

lives! Fly away! Fly far far away all you birds!” Her loaded shotgun creeps

stealthily behind her bare feet. It puffs a cigar as it peers into greenleafy trees,

silently scoping...



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PWLF

To increase awareness and appreciation of Literary Arts

If you are interested in contributing to—or taking over the task of editing—PenChant, please contact any of the PWLF Board members.

It is through the contributions and energy of all that we are successful.

Something worth Writing About!



Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield

Calendar of Events

July 14th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's with a featured reading by Liz Huck

July 19th—7:00 p.m. Board Meeting at the Pitchford's

July 22nd—7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Open Mic at B&N

July 28th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Aug. 4th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Aug. 16th—7:00 p.m. Board Meeting at the Pitchford's

Aug. 18th—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Open Mic at IMO's

Aug. 26th—7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Open Mic at B&N



A WORD OR TWO FROM VICKI

Sometimes I just like to flex my vocabulary and show off. Other times I am surprised by the fact that people I am talking to don't know the meaning of a word that I consider ordinary. Most of us writers have had that experience.

Recently, there was a scandal when a Washington DC bureaucrat used the word "niggardly". That may show the danger of having a vocabulary and using it. It certainly shows the danger of talking to people who don't know what a word means and don't bother finding out, especially if it sounds like another word they know.

Here's a good

word: ineluctable. It looks like someone meant to write unelectable and spelled it wrong. I almost said it has nothing to do with elections but that's not quite accurate. Considering the political scene, certain things are ineluctable: negative campaigning among them.

Ineluctable means something inevitable, something that cannot be escaped or avoided. The dictionary doesn't give this information but it sounds to me, maybe because of the short "u" in the middle, like a word with a negative implication of something we'd like to avoid but can't: thus, the ineluctable heat of summer, the ineluctable arrival of the holi-

day season, the ineluctable deadline, but not 'the ineluctable arrival of my vacation'!

Mishmash is an interesting word, and one that is safe to use around children and the ignorant. It looks like a modern word, one made up in response to the need to describe a confused jumble or heap of things. Modern life is such a mishmash sometimes. The word actually goes back to around 1450! It has meant a "confused or disordered heap of all things together" since at least 1585. I guess life has always been a confused jumble.

Perhaps a mishmash is ineluctable.