

PenChant

To increase awareness and appreciation of the Literary Arts

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SEPTEMBER 2005

POETIC NOTES

by *samBdavis*

Some local writers have of late produced very little poetry. That is usually the way creative juices run: they pour out in oceanic gushes or dry up into empty salt flats. But having talked with a few people about their drought, I see many writers expect to sit down and crank out a finished poem in one sitting. When this doesn't happen, they simply stop writing, hoping an intact poem will sometime emerge from their subconscious. This rarely happens.

The poetic ego does not want to hear this but, as I tell my English composition students...REWRITE, REWRITE, REWRITE! Those who believe their poem should not be tampered with after it is on paper have a lot of mediocre verse lying about. Good poetry emerges after its author struggles with his or her limitations. My own writing evolves from several stages, and knowing first words are going to be crap frees me from the tension of achieving instant perfection. Thus, my writing comes

I liken it to the fine sandpaper used to smooth out rough edges of whittled art...

out like this: 1. Poetic notes, 2. poetic meaning, 3. poetic form, and 4. poetic sound. Some of these steps link together as I write, but if not it's a good system when all I have is an inkling of an idea.

"Poetic Notes" means getting down any idea you get WHEN YOU GET IT. Waiting for a later moment when you have a good pen, a pad of paper, and steeping earl grey tea usually means you will have lost the energy of that first thought. For instance, if I see a child struggling to save an escaped balloon, I scribble out in the vaguest poetic language the look, feeling, and conclusion of that event on whatever material I have on

hand—napkins, checkbooks, or a dirty window. These poetic notes give me just enough to flesh out later.

"Poetic meaning" comes in at that point. When I have more time, I look at those first jots, and determine what deeper meaning, if any, caused me to think this worthy of being a poem. Usually I have enough material written

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SEPTEMBER MEANS...

by *Vicki Bamman*

September means the beginning of school; beginning school means learning new things. One of the most basic things to learn is the alphabet. Pretty much everybody starts there. The alphabet is so seemingly simple, and so basic that we describe things as "easy as ABC."

The alphabet was a unique idea, arising only once, spreading across cultures and down centuries. The first tentative forms appeared around 2000 BC in Egypt. Linguist Eric Havelock says "Once invented, it [the alphabet] supplied the complete answer to a problem and there has never been a

need to reinvent it." Writing was developed independently three or four times: in China, Central America, and Egypt/Mesopotamia. But, Havelock notes, no culture or person ever dreamed up the alphabet independently. They inherited it, or adapted it from an established alphabet, or heard of the idea and made up their own on that basis. The alphabet has taken many forms, but all of them are based on the idea, and the ideal, that the sounds of speech can be captured by two or three dozen single signs, each of which corresponds to a spoken

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*"In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man."
— Sinclair Lewis*

The Kit Poem

I never understood why kits for homebuilt poems failed.
Mine came by Fed Ex well within the month and a half
the Hong Kong factory said to allow for delivery.

All the pre-cut words arrived intact, safe in their bubble-wrap
and exquisitely carved from an assortment of semi-precious stones—
plastic, I swear, may prove the end of poetry as we know it.

The newly minted epithets and classic figures of speech
were clearly marked in their color-coded bundles,
exactly as illustrated in the infomercial.

The art, I suspect, lies in arranging the parts,
the abundance of which assures a unique result,
unlike those mass-produced paint-by-number kits.

Two caveats: the manual, translated from the Chinese,
was so obscure I was forced to fashion my lines from scratch—
and the back-ordered meter never did show up.

I made my lines as clean and strong as I could—
epoxy holds the tourmaline Hyperbole,
and rivets secure the brass clichés I used as filler.

By jury-rigging the Antithesis with solder (not provided)
I smoothed the metrical link between the alabaster *Pit Bull*
and the blushing quartz *Chihuahua*.

The Intermediate Kit turned out so well (for a neophyte)
in its welded frame of left-over metallic allusions,
I sent off for the supplementary upgrade—

a dozen pre-cast Symbols and enough Irony
(in the handy aerosol spray) to allow two coats
on a well-wrought ode (sanded lightly, of course, between).

Unlike those magnetized words hung slap-dash on refrigerators,
my work makes a permanent statement up on the mantle
next to the plaque with the family coat-of-arms—

a conversation piece that's personalized
right down to the moral, chromed and superglued.
I take it down and dust it once a month.

—Kit Stokes

*"Literature nowadays is a trade. Putting
aside men of genius, who may succeed by
mere cosmic force, your successful man of
letters is your skilful tradesman. He thinks
first and foremost of the markets . . ."*

—George Gissing

Classifieds

Poetry and Prose Wanted: The editors of the literary journal, Prism Quarterly, are seeking quality writing for the pages of Prism. Information on deadlines and submission guidelines available at:

~ www.pwlf.com

~ www.pitchblackbooks.com

~ www.daybreakpoetry.com

Submit work for consideration today!

Willing to Work: One teenage boy available after school for yard work and odd jobs around your place. Hourly or flat fee—prices negotiable—contact Ian at 217-529-9244.

This space for 'rent': Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield is looking for Corporate Sponsors. If you know of a business that might be interested, contact one of the PWLF board members to discuss this fantastic opportunity.

Writers Sought: Do you write? Do you have something you want to say to the writing community of Springfield or the world in general? PWLF is looking for (more than) a few good writers to contribute articles, book reviews, sketches and cartoons to the monthly newsletter, PenChant. If you believe you are the writer we're looking for, please contact the editor of the newsletter: submissions@pwlf.com for information on how you can get your work published monthly.


For Sale: Black lacquer headboard for Queen size bed and dresser with mirror. Great condition! Comes with a two drawer nightstand. If interested, contact Siobhan at siom1@hotmail.com - price negotiable. Let's make a deal!



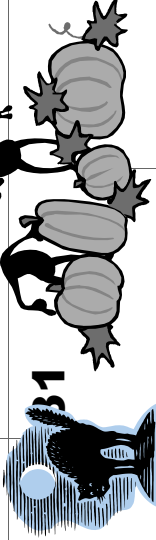
Does white space bother you? Send in something to PenChant and perhaps see your name in the byline.

September 2005

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|--|---|-----------|-----------|---|
| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5  | 6 | 7 IMO's Open Mic @ 7p.m. | 8 | 9 | 10 Job Conger @ the Vachel Lindsay Home 2:30 p.m. |
| 11 | 12 | 13 Fiction Faction —7 p.m. @ the Pitchford's | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18 | 19 PWLF Board Meeting @ 7 p.m. | 20 | 21 IMO's Poetry Night - Featured Reader TBA @ 7p.m. | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 Fiction Faction —7 p.m. @ the Pitchford's | 28 | 29 | 30 | |

October 2005

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----------|---|---|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | | | | 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Open Mic @ IMO's 7 p.m. | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17 PWLF Board Meeting 7 p.m. | 18 | 19 Open Mic @ IMO's 7 p.m. | 20 | 21 | 22 |
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| 30 | 31 |  | | | | |

POETIC NOTES

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down to help me recall details of the incident. From this I build first 'real' lines.

Once I get a handle on what I would like to say and start to say it, "poetic form" enters the scene. Short lines or long? Rhyme or free verse? Formal or loose? Each poem has its own shape, its own 'fingerprint', and finding what that is has always been the most fun (and most surprising) part of writing for me. And remember... I still don't think of it as a poem but a detailed outline. If I leave the poem for a while, I return because it is unfinished.

I encourage people to do something non-literary before going further. You may be too close to your internal emotions and do not realize what you feel inside has not transferred to the language you have used. Go biking, mop a floor, or take a long walk. When you separate your feelings from the material for a while, deficiencies become obvious when you return.

Once you reach this 'near-poem' stage, "poetic sound" becomes useful (I liken it to the fine sandpaper used to smooth out rough edges of whittled art): alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm help you contour the emotional content of the piece. I look over key words to see if another word with the same meaning might not 'sound' better with its neighbors. Do the words you used have other meanings that can confuse or dilute your intended meaning, or can double meaning words HELP your poem?

Having finished these four steps, you have a pretty good idea whether this poem is a keeper. If not, set it aside and return to it again. When people ask about their faulty poetry, I tell them 'there's no such thing as a bad poem-- only a poem which can be better than it is.' (ok, I lie a bit here: bad poems exist... because someone released it as "finished" when it was not).

As an example of this process I relate the following. I recently struggled to summarize a decade of fussing over words and ideas. I had a lot of fun with sounds and their relationships with one another, but as for the sub-

jects of these words-- love, hate, war, peace, etc—I had suggested insinuations about what these things may or may not possibly be, and assumed them as truths. Using a dry erase pen, I scrawled out a couplet on the car window, a thought I would likely lose by the time I got to work.

and how I hate to face those truths

I cannot alter or abuse.

I liked the sound, although it was not quite honest. It had always been easy to exaggerate, manipulate, or mislead "truth" in every instance mentioned above. I changed "those" into a definite "the" and took out the plural 'truths'.

and how I hate to face the truth

I cannot alter or abuse.

But, was there 'A' truth I hate to face? Yes, and it's one I can't deny exists. So I came up with the following lines, which by now were going to be rhymed because of the near rhyme in truths/abuse...I could no longer hear free verse. For some reason I went back to "those" instead of "the".

only death in life is true

and how I hate to face those truths

I cannot alter or abuse

as others daily do.

I now revealed a truth, and threw in my belief that many people have not faced their own mortality. But I hated "those" and "the", so I plopped in an indefinite "a", and the singular "truth" again, and it sounded right. The poem was nearly complete but for the word "abuse", which sounded better when 'truths' sat above it. I chose 'refute' instead, to tie in the long 'U' and 'T' sounds of neighboring words.

only death in life is true

and how I hate to face a truth

I cannot alter or refute

as others daily do.

I have since written a larger poem above these lines. Is this the finished version of the poem? I doubt it, but I think it is finished enough to call a poem. And this is enough to get many of you back to your writing. And rewriting. [back](#)

ON A POSITIVE NOTE

How often we define things by what they are - NOT. What a strange habit it is for otherwise articulate people to engage in such an odd and unenlightened form of miscommunication. A fire hydrant is not a truck, but it is vastly unclear what one is if you define it merely by what it is not. Writers who are challenged to write a positive definition or description of a thing might find it helpful to ask whether the concept with which they are working is more abstract than they want it to be. Abstract

concepts can, however, be defined in positive terms by virtue of the poet's greatest tool, the metaphor, and its smaller-caliber relative the simile. A rainbow is not like a cloud, but it is like a bridge of died silk mysteriously draped in an arch across the sky. The sky is that overarching substance opposite the ground from which fall the rains and snows in their seasons. A writer is a person who communicates through the written language. Each of these, concrete and abstract, is a beautiful thing. [back](#)



Poets & Writers Literary Forum

P. O. Box 5666
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Email: submissions@pwlf.com

If you are interested in contributing to the PenChant, please contact any PWLF Board member.

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

Poets & Writers Literary Forum of Springfield Calendar of Events

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

Sept. 10th—2:30 p.m. - Poetry in the Parlor

Job Conger is the feature

at the Vachel Lindsay Home

Sept. 13th—7:00 p.m. Fiction Faction

Sept. 19th—PWLF Board Meeting 7 pm

Sept. 21st—7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Surprise Feature at IMO's

Be sure to come for a special featured reader

We will begin with a brief open mic

Sept. 27th—7:00 p.m. Fiction Faction

Sept. 30th - Poetry Parnassus - *Contact Anita Stienstra*



SEPTEMBER

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sound. In English, we represent about 40 sounds with 26 letters.

Alphabets are sometimes referred to by the first few letters. In ancient German, the runic alphabet was called the "futhark" because it began with those letters. We refer to our alphabet as the ABC's in informal speech. The very word, alphabet, comes from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, alpha and beta.



There are three words based on our calling it "the ABC's": abecedarian, abecedarium and abecedary. The first and last of these are synonyms. As nouns, they mean a person who is learning the alphabet, or a beginner in any area—what we call a "newby"—or a teacher of beginners. As adjectives, they refer to something ar-

ranged in alphabetical order, or something primary, or rudimentary. Abecedarium—note the ending—is a first book in reading, or a primer. By extension, it could describe very basic books in other areas, such as the Dummies series of books, and the Idiot series and so on, that purport to tell you the basics of various subjects.

Besides the word "alphabet," we have alphabetic and alphabetical, which are synonyms, and the verb alphabetize. These are commonly used and need no definition here. "Alphabet" is used figuratively as a synonym for rudiments or fundamentals, to refer to the parts to be learned first. There is one "alphabet word" that we seldom use: alphabetarian. It means a person who is learning the alphabet.

(Resources used for this column include Alpha Beta: How 26 Letters Shaped the Western World, by John Mann, and the World Book Encyclopedia)

PWLF

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Something worth Writing About!