

PATHOS · HUMOR · HISTORY · CREATIVE NON-FICTION



CALLAHAN COUNTY

STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

(All submitters retain ownership)

American Life In Poetry

Column 229

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

For over forty years, Mark Vinz, of Moorhead, Minnesota-poet, teacher, publisher--has been a prominent advocate for the literature of the Upper Great Plains. Here's a recent poem that speaks to growing older.

Cautionary Tales

Beyond the field of grazing, gazing cows
the great bull has a pasture to himself,
monumental, black flanks barely twitching
from the swarming flies. Only a few strands of
wire separate us--how could I forget
my childhood terror, the grownups warning
that the old bull near my uncle's farm
would love to chase me, stomp me, gore me
if I ever got too close. And so I
skirted acres just to keep my distance,
peeking through the leaves to see if he still
was watching me, waiting for some foolish move--
those fierce red eyes, the thunder in the ground--
or maybe that was simply nightmares. It's
getting hard to tell, as years themselves keep
gaining ground relentlessly, their hot breath
on my back, and not a fence in sight.

American Life in Poetry is made possible by The Poetry Foundation (www.poetryfoundation.org), publisher of Poetry magazine. It is also supported by the Department of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Poem copyright ©2008 by Mark Vinz, whose most recent book of poems is "Long Distance," Midwestern Writers Publishing House, 2006. Poem reprinted from "South Dakota Review" Vol. 46, no. 2, by permission of Mark Vinz and the publisher. Introduction copyright ©2009 by The Poetry Foundation. The introduction's author, Ted Kooser, served as United States Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 2004-2006. We do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.

Rhymes For Sound:

Whirligig
Twig
Fig
Thingmajig
Big
Jig
Pig
Periwig

*The pen is mightier than the sword*

Writers And Poets!

The Eastland/Callahan County Newspapers announce that the Baird Star will be publishing submitted poetry and short stories. We will also be publishing a literary journal in the near future.

1. We ask for first-time publishing rights. All other rights will remain with the author.
2. There will be no payment, but you will get your works before the general public. We will be sending sample copies to other organizations, the literary world and libraries for their archives and your notoriety.
3. Short stories should be brief. Poetry should be no longer than 24 lines.
4. Each submission should be typewritten, single spaced, with author's name and contact information in the top right hand corner. You must include a SASE for the return of the submission.
5. Please address all submissions to:

Literary Editor
Eastland/Callahan County
Newspapers
P. O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448
email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

Submissions sought to:

Star
P.O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or liable material.

Reluctant Seed

Rain came knocking on the door last night
but I was fast asleep, lost in dreams.
It snuck into the garden and splashed the earth
a darker shade of brown, to accentuate tiny tendrils
bursting, and like a feather-footed caterpillar,
tip-toed along the forest and disappeared
over empty trees, pitter-pattering across black fields,
and the deer, who did not notice, curled together
deep in sleep, and grazing the whimsical paths
of spring, with bellies full, in a utopian place
where their fawns were safe and scampering
like happy dogs. Dream, like rain,
splits open the reluctant seams of seeds.

- Marjorie Bruhmuller
Quebec, Canada

Sweet William

Sweet William ws the blossom, that I found along the lane
Where fragrant flowers called as I walked by
Never toiling, never spinning, never joining in the games
Of others toiling hard before they die.

I wound you there Sweet William, while strolling
along the road
And ther you helped to brighten up my day
By lifting from my shoulders , such a hurtful heavy
load
And helping me to find a better way.

Your sweetness seems to com so naturally
While lifting your boquet from off the ground
Your purple flowers glow so beautifully
And help to spread your beauty all around.

I wish that I could capture, your beauty, and spread it
'round
So that the world could share your point of view
And when the world should take a look, Sweet Wil-
liams would abound
And lives so lost as mine could be renewed....
by helping all to do what all can do.

- Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas

Words You Can Use:

Eleutheromania: This refers to an enhanced longing for liberty and freedom.

Fremitus: This is a rumbling or a vibration of something.

Gaduin: You always wanted to know what is in cod-liver oil. This is one of the compounds.

Humerous: Medical professionals know this as the name of a bone of the upper arm. It is usually used in serious discussions concerning the body, not humorous ones.

Intrados: When you build one of those curved arches, this is the word for the inside surface.

BEYOND THE CULT OF YOUTH

Poetry Media Services

An interview with Brian Culhane, winner of the 2007 Emily Dickinson First Book Award for a poet over the age of 50.

By Tim Appelo
Poetry Media Services

Tim Appelo: Your poetry is grounded in the classics. On your way to writing about that subject, did you go through other distinct literary phases?

Brian Culhane: A Miltonic one in my 20s. His sonnets led me to write early poems that were gnomic and dense. One falls under the spell of these great presences. I wrote a long poem called "The Bridge" in allusive, crabbed lines on a metropolitan theme and handed it to my roommate. He said, "Didn't Hart Crane write a long poem called 'The Bridge?'" Stanley Kunitz was my thesis advisor. He'd scrawl on a poem, "This is Lowell. The worst of Lowell." I also had the good fortune to have James Wright as my teacher: a puffy face and slit eyes and big thick glasses—a minatory presence, even though he was a gentle man. I'd written an exam on a typical Wright question: "It has been said that poetry is no better than push-pin. Explain." Wright was quoting Jeremy Bentham, who argued that both poetry and push-pin, a child's game kind of like the modern pick-up sticks, are equally valuable if they produce the same degree of pleasure. On my exam, Wright wrote, "Cool-hane, no one will ever take your ideas seriously until you learn how to spell." I'd gone to Manhattan private schools when they didn't teach spelling.

TA: "The King's Question" refers to Croesus, who (Herodotus says) asked the oracle at Delphi what would happen if he invaded Persia. The oracle said he'd destroy a great empire—only he didn't realize it'd be his own, not Persia. But in your poem, Croesus's question is lost; we don't know what it was. Why?

BC: The past throws out to us lifelines, messages. What is left out is interesting. The poem imagines that we didn't ever hear that story, and that would make sense—Sophoclean dramas were all lost, except for a handful. Why did I change what we know from Herodotus's story of Croesus? Most of his history is taken from oral tradition, which can easily change in the retelling. Maybe Herodotus got the story wrong. Was that really the question Croesus had in mind? Is that what we would ask the oracle in our own lives? How many questions do we have in us, great ones?

Today, we're not writing questions and sticking them into the wall at Delphi anymore. In the Manhattan neighborhood I grew up in, the correlative for the priestess talking with the vatic utterances was the psychotherapist.

TA: I love that the shrink is knitting.

BC: That brings up Clotho.

TA: One of the Three Fates of Greek mythology, spinning the threads of life. Spinning your fate. Your fate seems to have been spun by libraries.

BC: I like libraries, and tend to do my best research when I'm not researching. I spent years in a library researching a dissertation on the epic. Once in a while I'd simply wander the library and pluck a volume, and become inspired—it was one of those aleatory combinations of time, place, and book. All first lines are accidents.

A: Many of your poems read like a scholar's reverie. You write in "Library":

That fable
Of an infinitely circular Library of Babel
Borges saw as self-referential: nooks
Corridors, dead ends, twisting stairwells:
Bibliographic cargo cults and infidels.

You go on to compare libraries in this poem to the supernatural cargo cults formed by remote Pacific islanders awed by World War II GIs dropping crates full of wonders from afar.

BC: I'm misconstruing, comically from one perspective, tragically from another. What we cast off, what washed ashore because of the wars we fought with machines, these people could make no sense of. I'm also alluding to the coming tide of change, which the islanders can't do anything about.

TA: How old or new is the work in your book?

BC: "Estrangement in Athens" is my first published poem, which makes it about 30 years old. About a quarter of the poems were written in the last four years. I'm happy that no book came to fruition until now. The book is a lot better for being winnowed. There's a pressure on poets to publish too early.

TA: Now that you've done this, does that change your practice?

BC: No. The muse is an intermittent visitor. If I could speed up the process, I would. Maybe when I'm 75 there'll be another prize—for the second book of a poet who's not published a second book until he's 75.

Tim Appelo has been an editor at Amazon.com and a contributor to the Washington Post and the Timeses of New York, LA, and Seattle. This article first appeared on www.poetryfoundation.org. Learn more about Brian Culhane, and his poetry, at www.poetryfoundation.org.

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