

WPA

Board of Directors

Thomas Hubbard
Clarice Keegan
Paul Nelson
Alexandra Oliver
Dan Peters
Lorri Lambert-Smith
Ed Stover
Michael Dylan Welch

Check out the website
for their photos & bios.

Future Board meetings
September 16
November 10-tentative

In This Issue

Poet Laureate update
Word! interviews Kelli
Russell Agodon, II
Jean Musser on
Traditional forms
Notes on the Annual Mtg.
R.D. Shadowbyrd
"Intergenerational
Magic"
Michael McGee,
"A Poet's Life"
Roger Hancock
"Presidential Poets"
OLIO

Editor's comments

In this last year, I've suggested themes or prompts for subjects of your submissions to this newsletter.

One suggestion for the last issue was not acted on. I hope to revive it: What is the role of the poet in today's democratic society?

The impetus for this revival comes from Paul Nelson's article, the beginning of which appears below. He discusses our new Poet Laureate position and in the process, raises questions such as, first of all, what defines what poetry is, and secondly, can a person remain true to what poetry requires and still function in a state-sponsored role?

I look forward to submissions that address one or both questions.

Maggie Kelly

Editor

(In the next issue this space will have a message from the new President of the Board, a position that will be filled at the September meeting.)



Washington to have its first Poet Laureate

by Paul Nelson

The State Legislature had been lobbied for years to sanction the post of state Poet Laureate. Washington now has such a position. The legislation that established this can be viewed on-line at: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2007-8/Pdf/Bills/House%20Passed%20Legislature/1279-S.PL.pdf> There had been opposition to the bill over the \$30,000 funding for first biennium expenses, but the bill became law on April 19, 2007. The first Poet Laureate has yet to be appointed and WPA will be involved in the nomination/selection process. The poet chosen as the Laureate will compose poems for state occasions and otherwise be dedicated to furthering an understanding of poetry.

An understanding of poetry requires, first of all, identifying what constitutes poetry. Two notions of what poetry is have been on my mind this summer. The first, from Vancouver (B.C.) poet, Lionel Kearns is: "Poetry is the articulate struggle to be, in

(continued on the next page)

(Poet Laureate, continued)

this world, yourself, in spite of everything...” The other goes back 60 years to Kenneth Rexroth. In his poem *A Letter to William Carlos Williams* he said, “a poet is...one who creates Sacramental relationships that last always.” Given these notions of poetry and the poet’s task, some fear that a poet’s being appointed Poet Laureate by a governmental body could compromise that poet’s ability to be critical of that government.

Veteran educator and poet Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr. was unanimously nominated by “a supposedly bipartisan, poetry-savvy screening panel” but then rejected six-to-one by a legislative county committee on Long Island. The objection to the nomination of this former Marine centered on the publication of his book, *Iraq and Other Killing Fields: Poetry for Peace*.

A short list of the most prominent and accomplished poets in our state would surely include Sam Hamill. Sam told me, via email, “No one, and I mean NO ONE, would have laureled Walt Whitman in the last century and yet the greatest traditions of 20th century Amurkin poesie rise directly from his shoulders...” Sam also told me that two other legendary poets with Washington connections, Gary Snyder and Denise Levertov, had been approached regarding their interest in the federal Poet Laureate position and both kindly passed.

But there might be a young boy or girl in Kettle Falls, Aberdeen, or some similar town, who, as the result of the work of the state Poet Laureate or perhaps of meeting that person, has an epiphany that he or she can use poetry to articulate the struggle to be their deepest selves in a world that seems to value that attribute less and less.

The WPA is committed to the selection process and the development of ongoing funding for the position. We’ll need your help raising funds and ensuring that

Washington Poets Laureate can remain true to their own deeply-held convictions while furthering the cause of poetry in Washington.

We again thank former WPA Board Member Karen Bonaudi for her efforts on behalf of this appointment and we’ll keep you posted on developments. _____

Paul Nelson, founder of Spoken Word Lab (SpLAB), presents workshops at Hugo House and other venues, and is a member of the WPA Board of Directors.

NOTE: Application form and guidelines, plus additional information including role of the poet laureate and compensation, is posted at www.arts.wa.gov.

Soul of a Poet

by Roger Hancock

Poetry is the song of the heart molded by the mind.

Writing poetry exposes the emotional depth of the poet—exposing one’s fears, tears, and glee—which in turn unlocks the gates of inspiration. The poet must then open the gates with his talent and skill and mind, taking the inward song of thought and modeling it into a poem.

Roger W Hancock’s website is at www.PoetPatriot.com.



“The masters said that a painter’s job was to paint the forces creating the scene. Do you paint the leaves or the wind with your poems? What you leave out is more important some days than what you put in.”

This consideration for writing poetry was found in Doug Johnson’s newsletter, *Cave Moon Press*.—cavemoonpress@hotmail.com

Interview with Kelli Russell Agodon Part II

by Maggie Kelly

Do you have a particular "way" of writing-- e.g., first thing in the morning, every day, etc.?

Lately, I've been going to "the office," this funky coffee shop near my home. I write there for about three hours a day. I'm also creating "office space" in the local library, the used bookstore, and anywhere else I can set up my laptop.

My favorite time to write poetry is at night in my writing room at home when my family is asleep. I'll write from around 8 p.m. until midnight. Also, at night, I'm usually so tired my internal editor is asleep; I don't question anything I write. I'm more likely to generate new material at night and explore ideas I may be hesitant or critical of in the daylight hours. Daylight hours tend to be about revision, finding unfinished poems and trying to make them work.

My poems come easier if I type as opposed to write, maybe it's because I'm a faster typist than freehand writer. When I type, I'm less likely to censor myself.

On average, how many editings or re-writes does a poem go through ?

Good question! Most of my poems, no one will ever read because they never get to a place where I'm ready to share them. They sit in a file labeled "In Process," and they may or may not leave there!

When I feel a poem is close to being done, it's been through many revisions and I'll bring it to my poetry group. I don't have an accurate count of how many drafts a poem goes through. Some will be revisited only a few times while other poems I'll see more, like the mudflats I drive by daily. Those mudflat poems are kept in the back of my mind much of the time. They're my daily poems, lines I carry with me on walks until I get it right. By the time I'd feel comfortable sending it out to a publication, it's been poked and picked at quite a bit.

Occasionally, there will be a poem that just comes in one sitting. I call those poems "gifts." Most poems come in to me in bits and pieces. I'll get a good start or outline and then I'll fine

tune it to expand what William Stafford called the "golden threads" weaving throughout my poem. After that, I try to use the content to help me decide the form. I always read it aloud to see where my voice naturally pauses to create line breaks.

Once I feel there is nothing else I can do to a poem to make it stronger, it will be moved to my "Completed" file. From there it may be added to a manuscript I'm working on or sent out to a journal. Though probably only one poem out of every ten or fifteen I write will ever move to my "Completed" file. Thankfully I write a lot of "in-process" poems.

Part I of this interview, which covers Agodon's background, can be found in the Summer 07 issue of this newsletter which is on the WPA website.



LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The next issue of the newsletter will be posted in December. The deadline for submitting articles is November 26.

In that issue there will be the first part of an interview with Mani Rao, prolific poet from India. It is also anticipated that we will have a couple of book reviews and suggestions about starting and sustaining poetry reading groups.

On page one are suggestions for contributions from you, the reader. In addition to those, there are some questions you are invited to consider:

- 1) How do you overcome a "dry" spell in which the muse seems to be on vacation? (Kelli Russell Agodon, for example, listens to jazz and reads her favorite poets.)
- 2) Are there any writing exercises that you consider particularly useful?

Queries are welcome on any poetry related topic. Send them to newseditor@washingtonpoets.org.

The virtues of traditional rhyme and meter

by Jean Musser

Editor's note: This is the text of remarks Jean Musser made at the WPA Annual Meeting at which time awards were made to annual poetry competition winners. Musser was judge of the Aden competition.

The list of traditional types of poetry is long and varied, ranging from something as simple as the monosyllabic poem with lines composed of a single foot as in Robert Herrick's "Upon His Departure Hence," to the complexities of the sestina.

Although free verse is now the dominant form of poetry, the traditional forms are still alive and well. However, the difficulty with these forms, which require following specific patterns, is in getting so caught up in the machinery of rhythm and meter that you can lose the soul of the poem itself.

When I was judging poems for the Carlin Aden awards, I looked for the following things:

1. fresh and original language
2. a sense of intensity and compression as though taking a whole pillow and stuffing it into a match box
3. use of contemporary language such as "over the hill" rather than "o'er the hill."
4. good powers of observation: having a good ear and use of the five senses

5. conveying a certain amount of emotional or spiritual energy
6. demonstrated mastery of the form selected

William Carlos Williams wrote that people die from the lack of what is found in poems, and Yeats said he liked to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate normal speech.

As for the outstanding poems in the contest, the first place winner wrote a very moving and original sestina which is clearly one of the most difficult of the traditional forms, yet when it is done well, it sings. Ronald Wallace wrote a very fine book of sestinas called *Tunes for Bears to Dance To*.

Two other traditional forms are well worth your investigation. The first is the sonnet of which there are several varieties including the English, the Spenserian and the Petrarchan. Bart Baxter's book *Sonnets from the Mare Imbrium* includes all of these. The second is the villanelle which, at its best, can be the most graceful and musical of the traditional forms. I would compare it to a chamber orchestra with solos. It contains only nineteen lines with only two rhymes in six stanzas of tercets. The first and third lines recur alternatively at the end of the other stanzas. Dylan Thomas' villanelle, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," shows how far a great and deeply felt poem can take you.



WPA holds Annual Meeting and readings of award-winning poems

On June 10, WPA held its Annual Meeting in the Bellevue Art Museum's conference room. The business meeting that afternoon was led by Ed Stover who called for various reports that included, among other information, the fact that WPA membership is increasing, that over 400 persons attended Burning Word Festival, and that existing Board vacancies will be filled after a nomination and interview process. He noted that new appointees will be confirmed after the selection of Board President during the September 16 meeting. It was noted that any interested persons can nominate themselves and in doing so, should contact a Board member to do that. Three Board members with expiring terms were returned to the Board by a vote of the membership. The financial books were available for examination by any member. After a short recess, each judge of the poetry contests offered opening remarks (see Jean Musser's, above) followed by the announcement of winners who read their entries. Check out "Poetry Contests" on the WPA web site for a list of all the winners.

Intergenerational Poetry Magic in the Borderlands

Part Two: Fantasia and Beyond . . .

by R.D. Shadowbyrd

Ever fall in love with a quotation? My current flame, courtesy of Erica Wagner, novelist and literary editor for a major London daily, is “creativity is a conversation.” I’m partial to statements apparently simple on their surface which can yet incite conjecture. But, being familiar with Wagner’s context, there’s no question as to her point.

Wagner asserts the importance of individual originality is often overstated as most artistic works are – consciously or not – communal accomplishments and, excluding only the most blatant plagiarism, there’s no shame to this nor should there be reluctance to discuss it. Artists and writers inspire, inform and influence one another; it is the natural course of events. But mass culture appears compelled to mass produce “heroic” individuals – a mania culminating in the so-called “great man” theory of history, positing that a succession of major personages construct history. The opposing view, rather than having individuals creating history, is that converging waves of events periodically place people in positions of great visibility and opportunity.

While contemplating the foregoing at Snohomish’s Wired & Unplugged Coffeehouse, I realized I was probably seeing the next great venue, largely due to influence from the north. One of the organizers is Jack McCarthy, the internationally recognized geriatric novelty slammer. McCarthy had heard about the incredible Bellingham scene while based in Boston and became a fixture after migrating to Washington. On a night Jack was appearing in Texas, I counted several Bellinghamsters in Snohomish. Fantasia magic may prove contagious.

The sixty-plus Malcolm H. Kenyon, retired professor and master of many trades, with deepest roots in the Fantasia community, features a take-no-prisoners presentation (visiting Fantasia confirms poetry’s a *performing* art).

Probably the best Washington poet you may not have heard of, Kenyon writes of his home

venue, “Fantasia attracts the freakishly gifted – it is not an accident but a selection process. The young poets there avoid the banal major culture’s valueless conformity, congregating instead with creative weirdoes four or more deviations off the mean, talking through the medium of metered or cadenced language. They are original because they haven’t had time to be spoiled... no one has told them they have to write a pile of sonnets, sestinas, ghazals and villanelles before they’ve the right to something modern and unique to themselves. Any person, regardless of age, who’s participating in such a community is getting a postgraduate education in their art.”

Kenyon estimates twelve to fifteen near-genius IQs among Fantasia twenty-somethings. A few guesses as to who these might be: recent WWU grad Graham Issac is engaging, witty, and *very* funny. At twenty, Jessica Lohater has produced solid poetry and delivers incandescent performances. Her recent infatuation with slam conjures the Martin Amis line about literature being “the war on cliché,” should literature win back Jessica’s soul, look out... At twenty-one, Carole Lince and Kim Von See are clearly brilliant, they’ll only improve, it’s already difficult to imagine how...

R.D. Shadowbyrd has been a published and performing poet for more than forty years...

Foetry dies; Ramke survives

You might recall our having mentioned the now-defunct Foetry website that leveled charges against “wrong-doers” in the world of poetry. In 2005 one of those charges disrupted the life of Bin Ramke who was already beset with personal problems. An interesting story about Ramke appears in the Sept/Oct 2007 issue of *Poets & Writers*. Ramke writes “poems obsessed with the moments of their own making” according to this article.

A POET'S LIFE

by Michael McGee

"God alone knows what our real business in life is."
"Uncle Vanya" - Chekhov

"When the moon rises and women in flowery dresses are strolling, I am struck by their eyes, eyelashes, and the whole arrangement of the world. It seems to me that from such a strong mutual attraction the ultimate truth should issue at last.
Czeslaw Milosz

Being a poet means having a strong mutual attraction to the whole arrangement of the world and the word. It also means deciphering truths from what might seem gibberish to others. Once someone told me: "You have a eunuch voice" which shocked me until I realized the person was saying "unique."

There are different kinds of callings. Recently, I worked at Brown & Haley candy company, home of Almond Roca. Just as in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, the machines ran us, dominated our lives. We were tagged with the areas we worked: Annex, Blum Line, Roca Line, Hayssen Bagger. Some employees lost fingers. One of my tasks was to stir 25-pound blocks of butter into a boiling stainless steel cauldron as it splashed and frothed before my eyes. Our bodies ached and we wore white hair nets. Each time they laid us off I would throw my hair net into a tree out of sheer joy and relief, hoping it would make the fodder for some bird's nest, and that I would never again have to come back down to earth in such a place. This was a calling I didn't want to answer.

When I worked in England, one of my jobs (besides barman, pot washer at Scruffy Murphy's and picker at Churchill's Sandwich Factory) was to run a snooker hall on Mapperly Plains, not far from where D.H Lawrence lived. Snooker is a game so quiet it is played in whispers out of concentration and respect. Snooker players moved to a slow-motion dance in moth-light, ghostly dust rising from the table covers. This had once been a miner's hall. They now carried snooker cues into their darkness.

I also did a tour of duty doing advance work for the oldest circus in England, Billy Smart's Circus. We travelled by caravan from Littlehampton to London and encamped in Clapham Common, which sounds like a form of V.D., but was in fact a large park or "green." As I made rounds to businesses and smart shops giving away tickets people would say: "OOO, BIL-LY SMART. I went as a child. Didn' gnaw it still xstit'." I lived in a small caravan like a gypsy. In fact, I lived with gypsies. I remember entering Galway through a procession of gypsy caravans under canopies of laundry as I arrived at the old Spanish Arches near Claddagh Quay, the fishing village. We were all "travellers."

As Homer once said: "Yo Ho, Yo Ho. A poet's life for me!" Homer, after all had a eunuch voice.

Michael McGee is a widely-published poet who reads at venues such as Poets West; he is a former WPA Board member

Presidential Poets

by Roger Hancock

History records that a few American presidents wrote poetry. George Washington wrote two poems. One was an unfinished acrostic using a name, the subject of a youthful infatuation. Thomas Jefferson displayed the greatest appreciation for poetry, of any president, maintaining scrapbooks for poetry clippings. There were, however, four presidents that loosely earned the title "poet."

Our sixth president, John Quincy Adams was the first, having written secular verse, hymns and versified the Psalms. Quincy translated *Oberon*, Christoph Martin Wieland's epic. Adams, in *The wants of Man* wrote, "For life itself is but a span, And earthly bliss -- a song," which was published in the Albany Evening Journal, September 3rd, 1841. Adams once expressed, "Could I have chosen my own genius and condition, I would have made myself a great poet."

(continued on the next page)

(**Presidential Poets** continued from previous page)

John Tyler was the first to be married while serving as president. "Shall I again that Harp unstrung/Which long hath been a useless thing/ Unheard in Lady's bower?" is from a poem reflecting upon his second love. During hard-times Tyler resorted to poetry. "Oh child of my love as a beautiful flower/ Thy blossom expanded a short fleeting hour," was written when his daughter died at three months. Tyler's poetry, though unknown, was a source of delight to those within the circle of his private life.

Self-educated, Abraham Lincoln had written a collection of poetry. His *My Childhood-Home I See Again* consisted of three cantos. "Where many were, how few remain Of old familiar things: But seeing them, to mind again The lost and absent brings," is from the first. In three letters, Lincoln had sent his poem to his friend, Andrew Johnston, who asked permission, then published the first two cantos. Titled, *The Return* with the divisions as "Part I – Reflection" and Part II – "The Maniac," Lincoln's poem was printed in the *Quincy Whig*, May 5th, 1847.

Writing about General Lee's defeat in *Verse On Lee's Invasion of the North*, "In eighteen sixty three/ with pomp, and might swel/ Me and Jeff's Confederacy/ went forth to sack Phil-del./ The Yankees they got arter us/ and giv us particular hell/ And we skedaddled back again/ And didn't sack Phil-del."

Jimmy Carter is known as the first president to write a novel; however, eight years before, he was the first president to write a book of poetry. *Always A Reckoning and Other Poems* was published in 1995. Among the mixed reviews was Michiko Kakutani who said of the poems, "... well-meaning, dutifully wrought poems that plod from Point A to Point B without ever making a leap into emotional hyperspace." Three titles from the book are "Peanuts," "A motorcycle sister" and "My first try for votes."

James Madison wrote three poems as an undergraduate at Princeton, proving to himself he was not a poet. Teachers and parents encourage our youth saying, "Anyone can become president." Even a poet can become president, or is it; even a president can aspire to be a poet?

Roger Hancock is a member of Striped Water Poets.

OLIO

The new season for the Distinguished Writers series begins for the Puget Sound Poetry Connection. The line up includes:

Sept 14: Sara Williams, novelist, a murder mystery.

Oct. 12th: Lana Ayers, poet of Kirkland, WA,

Nov 9th: Eric McHenry, author of "Potscribbler Lullabies", winner of the 2007 Kate Tufts Discovery Award.

Dec. 14th: Ann Spiers

SIXTH STREET GALLERY, 105 W Sixth Street, Vancouver, Washington 360/693-7340 Friday **September 21st** Shy Poet Night, an open mike evening of poetry (shy or not) from 6 PM until the poets run out of words.

Open Mike Poetry hosted by Christopher Luna 7:00pm Thursday **September 13**, 2007 (and every second Thursday) Cover to Cover Books 1817 Main Street, Vancouver 514-0358 or 694-9653

WPA member Christine Swanberg is featured in an interview in the 2008 *Writers Market*. She works as a mentor to poets and can be reached at pobiz@core.com.

Schedules for It's About Time reading series, are on their website at: www.itsabouttimewriters.homestead.com.

Sam Hamill, Dunya Mikhail, Bill Ransom, Roy Seitz and Sarah Zale - featured readers on the effects of war & reflection on losses and prevention of future wars. **9/27** at 7:00. Tickets- <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/18376>. Students with ID free. Minnaert Center for Performing Arts, 2011 Mottman Rd SW, Olympia.

LitFuse 2007--Susan Rich, Kathleen Flenniken, Cody Walker, Paul Nelson will teach, inspire, start a fire -- also letterpress experience; watch *Voices in Wartime*; **November 3-4** in Tieton, WA (15 minutes west of Yakima). Details at the Tieton Arts & Humanities link at www.mightytieton.com or litfuse@mightytieton.com.

Charles Potts is the subject of an interview to be published soon on-line in *Envoy*. His books, collectively known as *Valga Krusa*, first published in 1977, are reissued and will be launched in October in Northampton. Look for Potts in September in Pocatello, and Salt Lake City. He can be reached at potts@thetemplebookstore.com.

Several notes came in saying that the annual WPA/OPA picnic was well-attended and fun for all. Kudos to Christopher Luna for his organizational/promotional efforts.