“National Poetry Month”

It’s a thing and I’m not cynical about it, nor snide, nor dismissive, nor judgmental. I do wonder why it’s national. If there is anything not bound by the rules of law or markings on a map, it’s poetry. Poetry bends its knees to a higher authority - form and image and rhythm and beauty. It knows no boss or dictator or critic that it consistently respects - despite what you learned with your Norton open to page 277. Poetry only knows the love that you have for that piece that breaks your heart every time, or makes you laugh when you didn’t think you would again, or because she wrote it and that means everything. Poetry is only personal, it is only what you like, and doesn’t actually care why. You don’t have to explain yourself to poetry. All else is commentary, as Dad used to say. Just noise.

But, as a friend said, how do we ensure that poetry goes on and that it is still...good?

Good like how? I asked.

Good like...Gerard Manley Hopkins. Like Emily Dickinson. Like Maya Angelou. Like William Butler Yeats. Like Pablo Neruda.

Good? Oh, you mean popular?

No, he bristled I mean good.

Good for you? I pressed. What makes them good?

And he proceeded to explain form and beauty and meter and other things and when he took a breath, I asked him how he liked his steak cooked. He frowned and said “medium-well, with a sprinkle of gorgonzola atop. I told him that this sounded good, but I prefer mine rare with mustard-butter. One man’s steak....

How will poetry go on? You. And you. Reading, writing, sharing, crafting, editing, reciting, submitting, publishing. Any or all of those. Scribbling in composition books, shouting on the streetcorners, picking up the dropped mic and whispering into the ether. Telling second graders to write a poem about...something. Anything.

And National Poetry Month? Yeah, well. I must admit that it has enough gravitas and receives sufficient notice that only good can come from it. I made my first attempts at poetry when I was thirteen. Many would say that I’m still making my first attempts. I have no aspirations nor misconceptions that I am a poet, and have very little respect for the proprieties of gentlefolk, but I like to mess with words, and when you find something you like to mess with, well, who’s hurt by that? Anyhow, here you go....
“Freezer Burn”

Some state our world will end in great white balls of pointless fire. Still others, idiots mostly, claim that it will merely fizzle. And if the curtain falls tonight, ‘twas I, in righteous ire, that gobbled up the Breyers, with a Hershey’s syrup drizzle.

I pushed great gobs of happiness into my gaping maw not thinking a New York minute on a lactose-intolerant gut, for this evening’s news led me to believe they play “win, lose or draw,” and no one cares a future whit about emanations from my butt.

I imagined that you wouldn’t mind, being already fast asleep, while I stealthily loaded the dishwasher, and started on up to bed, sans my usual thud-and-peep, when, teeth brushed and fresh pajama’d, under the covers…I farted.

In truth, I launched a crepitation so obtrusive that it woke you, and you looked at me with a drowsy smile and sniffed and so did I, and oh my god – I kid you not – this was no simple methane joke. I most heinously blamed the dog with a rolling of my eye.

I’m sorry about that my darling, no harm intended; this time tomorrow we and the pooch will be splats of charcoal, our lives an ether-dream. One must be around to feel the nostalgic pang of regret, or sorrow, so never mind I licked the last sweet spoon of Rocky Road ice cream.

They say that blame is for fools and little children, ah, well….
So if by happenstance the madmen’s work remains undone, I paved with good intentions my own slippery road to hell with a coupon I left on the counter, two-fer the price of one.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com
"Ode to a Rising Sun"
by Tom Sheehan

Out of the edge of earth, 
out of choice darkness mixed with silt 
and angry acids that form of fire, 
out of secret caverns rocking in the deep, 
out of stone moving liquefied 
which is but a sea we float on, 
out of distance, 
out of death-wracking night, 
out of fear of childhood, 
out of nightmares and terror shrieks, 
out of ignorance, out of shame of thoughts 
sitting like pebbles on the soul, 
dark black pebbles, 
out of the songs of frenzied air, 
out of the mouth of monster bird 
cast from an angry god’s hands, 
freed from the moon at endless wait, 
escaping from a debtor’s prison 
partly in rags and partly in pain, 
heaved upward like a mason’s block 
to the next tier of gray waiting, 
on the hilltop comes the sun.

Before it, pell-mell fleeing, 
scudding down alleyways, 
across corners, stoops, half granite 
walls where houses used to be, 
through windows and mirrors 
and the wildest of laces
where night collects itself
in a host of aromas, the shadows
go quickly before the miracle
hunting them down, at chase,
at wild pursuit, leaping one wall
to the next, one huge lunge
across barriers, time, as if breath
will expire too quickly again.

I listen. The sizzle starts:
limbs grating each other. Horns
and klaxons announcing.
Clocks unwinding. Linens cracking
their sheer porcelain deposits
only odors can tell of.
Percolators, motors, engines,
dynamos, all huffing and puffing
and snorting Orion away.
Pulses and electricity
beating at the lines, the mad energies
of beginnings.
Being heard, being sound,
being echoes and static-filling air waves.
Being noise, 3 A.M. surprises,
movement and energy and time happening
to inertia and all its cached parts.
Being lifebelts to jet darkness.
Being chance. Being opportunity
all the way into something new.

Hardness gathers in the sunlight, artifacts of mining and distillery, elements from miner’s foot and glazier’s thumb, copper tubing, greened-up brass, old galvanized iron tongues still wagging, PVC like a saint among water carriers hardly getting dirty like Din Din Din, porcelain dishes and ewers with light cherry trimmings faint as postage stamps, buckets and ladles catching at breaths before sudden plunges down Earth’s throat, bring morning’s water to a thousand hands.

At Earth edge the worm shudders, recoils, goes gelatin. Earth shakes with a robin’s sprint across a quick lawn, as if drummers’ batons beat on. He spears the tubed, eyeless thing, soft telescopic escapee just now plowing into loam. Warning signs are warm.

Bridges, high arcs measuring new light, fields and fields of steel and concrete, I-bars and T-bars and girders and purlings and struts and bolts and nuts and plates by the high acre, and expansion joints as devious as grill work begin to stretch their backs, spread a little more to east or west or north and south, begin to stuff themselves into corners barely up for stuffing, cast off their chilled auras, breathe outward under the new caress, touch of secret places, mouth of morning touching where it touches best. Steel stretches into sunlight. You can hear it flex its muscles.
Windows, like incorrigible children.
Talk back: skyscraper faces, greenhouses.
Across the street a woman’s room leaps
with the explosion. She could be nude
behind that glow! A car’s windshield
becomes a moving target, throws flares
at the enemy. Chrome answers too,
tracer streaks of gunships, firefights,
strafing upward from an inversion of light
and war and outside forces and death
of darkness; hallway corners, dank and drear
and wet with blood, give up the fight.
Under stairs, attics, old coal bins webbed
and smelling of gas under a spider’s
collection of glass and flies and moths
silent for eternity, throw in the sponge.

Windows answer like gunshots, bomb blasts.
Corps upon corps of morning glass, cohorts
of the inner anvil, armies, legions of light,
great stationary convoys basking split seconds
in the arc of an eternal flame.

But then, I get warm.
A bird, retreated on a dark bough,
umbrellaed under leaf canopy,
glad for morning, worm sights,
a level of breeze he can climb on,
part fingers of his wings on thermals,
hellos me all the way inside out.
He is crisp and clear and singular. He is unique and melodious and real, the torrents of his heart pounding on the slanted shelves of air, his notes as sure as rungs on a ladder of resonance lifting the aria to an unknown strata, flinging it over the slow river slowly filling up with silvering of day, cascading song and joyous light and energy of a mountain breeze, being emptied of all its goodness.

In the morning mountains, like sundaes piled high with sweet textures, explode. I catch the mouthy shrapnel they throw into the battle dawn wages. It is rare beauty on the fly, beams and sunshine flares and streams and colossal stripes of golden air coming through clouds hanging loose as line-hung blankets. Mountains are the first to get the sun, heaving upward white cones of snow as brilliant as stars, as sure and as steady as old men who know all answers and give off such illumination.

But you there, at the crossroads of this day, looking across the inviolate stretch of gray light we suddenly find between us yet joining us, must find ignition as spectacle born in the rigors of yesterday’s soul. You, too, know the upshot of this new coming,
the bird, the fire, the breath as deep as stone. 
You, too, must linger where the sun warms first, 
the first warm spot of the day, the bay window 
broad as an ax sweep, a piece of porch tilted 
under a pine, door stoop white as first thoughts, 
a path between corrupt oaks and sleek birches, 
a blanket where your hand falls to rest, 
the place in your eye reserved for sudden starts 
when you think all about your being is still dark 
and the nightmare is the bark of wild dogs 
crawling down the banners of your mind 
like spiders of light on the move.

When it all goes down, when the bet 
is paid off and all markers set straight, 
the sun comes at singular entry, warm shot, 
its two fingers of life into my glass.
“I as a Verb”
by CjF

I'd like to laugh again
To stand upon the damage
And not to cry
I'd like to say I – again
Fiercely.
To put my being
Back into the world
I'd like the fear to pass
The shame to pass
To have the shame
Washed
Washed away
To never forget that place
Of disagreement
Of sadness
Of bereavement
When confusion persists.

I in relation to you
One being
In relation to that which brought us

I in a world of them
I in relation to suffering
I as a verb
I in relation to brutality
I in relation to the one

Without you
There can be no i.

I as a verb.

Then I slept last night
Beneath tall trees
Never culled.
I as a verb
Tree as a verb
The root of our tongue
We as a verb

We rocks appear — to, not
Move.
Because we
Move too fast
Expecting unending growth
Within a we
Which
Has resources
Encouraged slowly over billions of years.

We as a verb.
Rocks included.
I, I, I
We – as – a – verb
There are so many things
I
As a
Noun
Cannot carry
Alone
But the seas, now She and I
We sing
Of the breeze,
Whose identity is Chosen day to day.

We – are – in need – of no cash
Only the common
We as a verb

Apex predator as noun
Begin your withdrawal
Now
Sweaty you are with effort
Hollow – no sense of hunger
Nor of want
Just to be high again
To feed upon your own.
Begin your withdrawal
Now
Calculate the common

Consider I is not a noun.
"Story"
By Dr. Lisa Baron

You can write your "now" story
You are not your old story.
You can spin a piece of who you were and who you hope to be..
Choose the colors, fabric, thread, and spin away,
There is no seamless life….

West Moss
Editor, Story Doctor, Manuscript Consultant

West is an award-winning writer. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, McSweeney’s, Salon, The Saturday Evening Post, The Blotter, and elsewhere. She teaches writing at Gotham in NYC, and at the university level.

"West is genuinely interested in people and writing, and is willing to share her experience and dedication to the craft of writing." — Robin Caine

Email for more information at scoutandhuck@gmail.com

“Who gave these idiots microphones?”
Tuesdays at 10:00PM
The Blotter Radio ‘Zine
www.wcomfm.org
Chapel Hill & Carrboro, NC
"On Becoming A Woman"

Likes and dislikes have nothing
to do with it.
Puberty happens.
The red-stained Kotex happens.
She’s wearing some guy’s pin.
It pricks a little
but that’s not where she’s really bleeding.
Her mother says
“you’re a very lucky person”
or something to that effect.
But her hands smell
no matter how long
she washes them under the tap.
And there’s that matter
of disposing of the tampon,
wrapping it in tissue,
tossing it in the garbage.
Through all the pain,
she hung around the house
remembering sad occasions,
taking pity on herself.
And her mother insisted
it was proof of something.
Like the force of nature.
And she was in its way.
"The Writer and the Apple"

The problem with comparing people to fruit
is that apples and pears are
either too green, just right, or overripe.
They’re either edible or not.
They don’t pretend otherwise.

Same with flowers.
Lovely sure
but behooved to cycles
not feelings.

And don’t get me started on the weather
or sky formations
or gems or mountaintops
or anything that lends itself unwittingly to metaphor.

Even comparing people to other people
is akin to cumquats to flatirons –
and, believe me, I’ve tried.
I’m still trying.

Lately, I’ve taken to writing about people
as if they were no more, no less,
than themselves
I just wish it didn’t make me so hungry.
as the saying comes and goes.
Call it a day.
Something we’re familiar with.
Something there’s so many more of.
"the body and the evidence"
by John Sweet

four days of rain in
the kingdom of nil and
maybe you start to understand rothko

maybe you start to admire
the convictions of arbus

every death should be
your last one

every moment should matter,
but it's not going to happen that way

measure out time for kay in
small, brittle chunks

the space from yves’ death to
her first suicide attempt
and then the emptiness until
she finally gets it right

and will you hold the mirror up
if she asks for proof?

will you steady her hand
while she pulls the trigger?

this is finally an
explanation of god i can
understand
The Dream Journal
real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we’d love to read them. We won’t publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com

December 24, 2017
There are 6 levels of Hell. Hell is in a building on a really nice college campus that houses a sex club that gets progressively more depraved with each level. By Level 6, people are picking up random sex partners to put in "jars." I don’t know what that means, but James Franco is there and he selects some ugly, deformed partners. I am too afraid to see the rest of Level 6.

December 28, 2017
I am by the river. I see two giant river otters playing with German Shepherds. A fish is on the ground gasping for air, so I pick it up and throw it back in the river. Before it hits the water, it spreads its fins and catches the air, flying back up (it is a flying fish) and its fin cuts my lip.

LH - cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS:

Tom Sheehan, in his 91st year, just published his 37th book, Alone, with the Good Graces and soon comes Jock Poems for Proper Bostonians, both from Pocol Press, and just received the first copy of his 38th book, Small Victories for the Soul VII, from Wilderness House Literary Review. In submission process are Beneath My Feet this Earth Slips into the Far-end of Another’s Telescope and Poems Found from Fallen Pages. He has multiple works in Rosebud, Literally Stories, Linnet’s Wings, Frontier Tales, and many sites/magazines. He served as a sergeant in the 31st Infantry in Korea 1951-52 and graduated from Boston College in 1956.

CJF mailed us this poem - no return address, no further information other than “Greensboro, NC - Sometime 2018.” Well, we’ve fallen in love before with less to go on than that....

Dr. Lisa Baron is a writer, therapist, professor and workshop designer and facilitator with a private practice in Chapel Hill, NC. Her best training continues to be growing up in a big family, and raising three children of her own.. www.LisaBaronLCSW.com


John Sweet of Upstate NY writes, “Hello, hope all is well in these dark and troubling times. Unpublished poems in attachment for yr consideration. Nothing straight-up political, I’d say, no "I hate the fucking president" wankery, but I’ve always been of the mind that all decent art is political to a certain extent. What you choose to address/avoid in yr art is a statement in and of itself, you know? In any event, writing about “the times” tends to date things, I think, so it’s best to keep the work more wide open.... Things here quiet, unseasonably warm, unseasonably cold, relentlessly grey and occasionally uneventful. Been limiting myself to exposure to the news, it seems to make my outlook a little brighter, and makes my head feel less like it's going to explode. Thank you for your time, best of luck, peace, strength,”
EVEN OMEGA. The end of civilization. The end of the world. The end of everything. But hey, you still gotta eat.

From the warped and twisted mind of slipstream-absurdist author Joe Buonfiglio comes

**THE POST-APOCALYPTIC DINING GUIDE,**

a bizarrely humorous tale of an attempt to save a society gone to hell when evolution jumps the tracks.

Who knew the end of the world could be so much fun!

Find it on Amazon!

---

Now Arriving from Blotter Books

*and the author of ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES*

Rick Kingsley’s younger half-brother Aidan ran away three years ago. During those years, “ghost trains” – old long-gone streamliners – began reappearing, sometimes even rescuing people in danger. A being called “the Wizard” started entering peoples’ dreams, but offering real-world psychic powers. Rick has inherited, from a mysterious recluse he’s never met, a vast fortune and an estate, “Haw Court.” And the world seems speeding ever closer to apocalypse, with global-warming fires, floods and tornadoes increasing both in numbers and size; along with human evils: “religious freedom” and Stand Your Ground laws, rampant bigotry online and in person, right-wing sabotages against society, topped by Trump’s Presidential bid. Now, on the eve of the election, Aidan’s coming home. His return may bring Rick to a possible confrontation with the Wizard himself – with the lives of Rick’s family and friends, and his own, at stake.

Marty Smith’s **MASTERS IN THIS HALL**

from Blotter Books

Print copy $30 / Available at: wileequixote.com