

A COMMON WEALTH OF POETRY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE POETRY SOCIETY OF VIRGINIA

NOVEMBER 2013



A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Our next regional meeting is scheduled in Newport News with a workshop by Michael Khandelwal from the Muse Writers Center. Please look over the insertion in this newsletter regarding revisions to our bylaws, which will be voted on at this Eastern Regional Meeting on November 16.

We need to look at the gaps in teaching and/or promoting poetry in our state. The Student Contest Committee is trying to find ways to make teachers aware of our poetry contest, but teaching poetry in Virginia schools has taken a backseat to other subjects emphasized by the Standards of Learning.

Jack Trammel, at Randolph Macon College, is undertaking the creation of materials to put on the website for K12 students. If you want to help with this project, contact me, and I'll pass your name on to Jack. If you have any ideas to encourage young people to write poetry, but cannot serve on a committee, send them to me, and I'll share them with Jack. This is a huge need.

The Adult Contest Committee is in the process of creating a separate flyer for our undergraduate contest categories. Look on the website for a link to it after November 1. Please send the link to any college students you know.

If you have ideas for improving our website, our offerings, or activities, let me know. My email is on the back of the newsletter and my phone number can be found in printed and electronic phone books. Don't be a stranger, even if you live far away.

Lastly, I encourage you to write for at least five minutes a day and try to make it the same time each day. It's a lot and it's a little. When we do this, we see that our muse knows where to find us. We must practice our writing.

Try changing the way you write. If you have not used forms, they can be very helpful to force you to look at your material differently, and a form can take you to places you have never been. I'm trying to do some of that myself. When writing becomes stale, make a change. Take a workshop or ask someone else to read your poem. Write a new poem and submit it to our contest. The open submission date is November 1.

Best wishes for new beginnings,

Guy Terrell

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PUBLISHING YOUR WRITING

By Joan Mazza

As writers, we want our words to be read, understood, and appreciated. Even when we write for ourselves, we imagine those words out in the world eventually.

In recent months, I've had about thirty poems accepted, bringing my total of published poems and forthcoming poems to 188 today, August 21, 2013. People ask how I do it, so I'm offering some suggestions and methods. My focus is on poetry, but my methods apply to fiction and non-fiction as well: finding markets, following guidelines, keeping track.

Of course, the first work of a writer is to write and revise, to learn the *craft* of writing, not just talk about writing. So this piece begins with the assumption that you have work that is well-crafted, and perhaps has been critiqued by others, and is ready to send out.

Finding Markets

Poet Allison Joseph offers a free Yahoo group with announcements of markets looking for work and contests. You can also join the group to receive announcements in your email. This is a generous service and available to anyone. Ms. Joseph is the editor at Crab Orchard Review.

Duotrope.com is an online database of markets for poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Full access to the site is \$5/month and well worth what they offer. The markets are updated and you'll get announcements of re-openings of closed markets and those that are closed or defunct. You can refine a

search to only those markets that meet your preferred criteria, such as print only and those that take electronic submissions rather than snail mail, which saves you the cost of paper, envelopes, and postage. The turn-around time is usually a lot faster, too.

Duotrope allows you to track your submissions on their site as well, at no extra charge. I don't use this feature since I have my own method and don't want to enter data twice. Duotrope offers an overview of the requirements for submission (when, how) and a link to the magazine's website. They let you know if there are fees or recent problems.

You can also use Google to search for individual literary magazines and their guidelines. Writer's Market or Poet's Market is another option.

Submission Guidelines

Each publication has its own requirements for submitting work. Some take only snail mail or only email. Some require you to fill out a form or use Submittable.com. They may have line or word count limits or ask you not to submit certain types of writing, such as

overtly sexual, political rants, or preachy writing.

Follow the submission guidelines *exactly*. Do not send work longer than the limits or more than the number of pieces they recom-

Keep your cover letter (if they ask for one) brief. Don't write a paragraph about how good everyone else says your work is or what it means. The work needs to speak for itself.

mend. Follow their formatting requirements perfectly (ID or no ID, WORD doc or PDF, etc.) or your work will likely not be read at all.

Keep your cover letter (if they ask for one) brief. Don't write a paragraph about how good everyone else says your work is or what it means. The work needs to speak for itself.

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Honors & Publication News

David Black's poem, "Pop-Eye," placed third in the Blue Ridge Writers' Chapter of the Virginia Writers' Club's annual contest.

Joan Mazza's poem, "Ode to Being Right," is in the current issue of *Edison Literary Review*, and her poem, "Growth Curve," is in the current issue of *Emerge Literary Journal*.

Charles Wilson's poems, "Lonely" and "Dream" are featured in this month's edition of www.thebluehourmagazine.com.

Joan Mazza has a guest blog post at Streetlight. Check it out at <http://streetlightmag.com/blog/>.

Publishing Your Writing—from page 2

If you have been published, a short list of those markets can appear in your bio. Do not try to do anything to GRAB the attention of the first reader, such as using artwork or fancy fonts or sending your work inside a high-heeled shoe. This will mark you as an amateur and only annoy editors.

Pay attention to the guidelines regarding simultaneous and multiple submissions. The former is when you send a poem or story to different markets at the same time. A multiple submission is sending more than one piece (such

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as three separate stories) to the same market. Usually, editors want you to wait to submit again until you've received a reply to your earlier submission. Some ask that you not submit more than once in a reading period. Follow their directions.

Editors want to know if you're submitting elsewhere (simultaneously) and to be notified immediately if your work has been accepted. As your work is accepted more frequently, you may want to stop simultaneously submitting. Trying to untangle multiple acceptances of a piece can be daunting.

You can offer first rights to your work only *once*. If you place your work on a blog or make it public on Facebook or otherwise put it online, most publishers consider that piece *already published*.

Usually, guidelines (and Duotrope) will tell you if a market pays. Most literary magazines will pay you with one copy of the issue where your work appears. Some will give you a subscription for a year as payment. Top markets that pay well are usually looking for recognizable names.

Support literary magazines where you want to be published by subscribing to them. I recommend RATTLE and POET LORE, for starters.

Tracking

Once you've written more than a few pieces, whether books, articles, poems, or essays, begin a system for keeping track. Authors who have been writing for decades may still use index cards, alphabetized by title. This works, but

it's slow and hard to retrieve information. However, it is better than having no system at all.

I have used various databases over the years (since 1986), including PFS First Choice, Excel and Access, and have imported them to newer programs as the technology changed. I'm now using Filemaker's BENTO and find it easy and very helpful. I have fields for the manuscript's number (usually 4 digits), title, alternate title, key words, line or word count, date written, where the piece has been sent with dates, where it is now, and where it's been published. With a few clicks, I can see if something is already sent out and where. When I get rejections, and I get them several times a week, I log in the information and send that group of poems right out again somewhere else. Sometimes I revise again before sending.

I back up my database and poems *every time* I make any changes. Being organized and carefully tracking your work is imperative if you want to be a serious writer. It's a whole different set of skills from writing and being creative, but it's absolutely necessary if you want to be published.

The Rest of the Story

Last month, a small part of Joan's article on "Writing a Poem a Day" didn't make it into the printed version of our newsletter. This happened when the someone at the printer's office added a "continued on" note I had omitted, not realizing it affected the end of the article. Here is the concluding paragraph of Joan's previous article:

As I said, by writing or making other art, we discover what works best to keep us creating and improving. For now, writing a poem every day works for me. For months, I wrote imitations of poems I liked and that worked too. You can try it for a week or try it for a year and note its benefits. By doing this or changing it, you might figure out a method to keep yourself writing instead of waiting for inspiration to strike from outside. That might be too long to wait.



Poetry by Henry Hart

The Battle of the Crater

Thunderheads creak in medieval battle gear
 over plantation sheds and tobacco fields.
 Crows pick guts from a snapping turtle
 quartered on the swamp road.

At the war park our uniformed guide
 follows a gold finch
 dipping over buttercups toward a barricade
 of spikes mildewed by summer rains.

“General Beauregard triangulated his guns
 on this bulwark,” he says.
 “Teenagers from Maine scrambled up dirt walls
 with bayonets in their fists.”

Look the other way from the redoubt’s red clay—
 the prospect is pastoral.
 Oaks tip their crowns to every breeze.
 Hay genuflects in waves.

Squat down in weeds and you’ll hear
 conscripts in gray and blue
 curse maggots hatching into flies, vultures
 carving *memento mori* on skulls.

By the tunnel where coal miners buried gunpowder
 kegs and “the smoky air rained
 dirt and rebel bodies,” a mockingbird tunes
 its voice to different sounds:

weed whackers cackling around monuments,
 cars wheezing down the park road,
 a ringtone playing *Let it Be*,
 clouds detonating on the horizon.

Note: “Battle of the Crater” & “Alba” are from
 Hart’s forthcoming book, *Familiar Ghosts*.



Photo courtesy of www.timherd.com

Alba

He didn’t say anything,
 just spat at the sidewalk,
 shoved black garbage bags of clothes and milk crates
 of books into the U-Haul,
 and drove to his other woman on the coast.

She sat in a chair on their new porch roof,
 stared at arabesques
 of bugs under the street’s one light,
 waited for stars to read her
 her rights, cauterize her cuts.

After the black turned blue,
 it no longer mattered
 that a whippoorwill called his name
 from the thorn hedge,
 his Doberman gnawed its chain on the zip-line.

She climbed down the fire escape,
 let the soft song
 of a brook guide her into woods.
 Where a spider caught the sun in its net,
 she knelt to sip her shadow.

Minnnows stitched together her face
 broken by the pool’s ripples.
 She tore up a Jack-in-the-pulpit—
 not for honey on its purple tongue,
 but for roots Indians used to poison strangers.

Fall 2013 Eastern Regional Meeting Plans Announced

The Fall 2013 Eastern Regional Meeting will be held on Saturday, November 16, at the Hampton Roads Academy Library, 739 Academy Lane, Newport News, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Noted poet and teacher Michael Khandelwal will conduct a workshop on imagery. Evocative poems are built from strong, concrete imagery. After all, the world is full of delights for the senses. In this two-hour session, participants will work together to refine all types of sensory images, especially those of sound, touch, taste, scent, and balance.

Pre-registered participants are asked to submit a sample poem which is representative of their work, but not necessarily their most image-packed poem. Please send these before November 12 to Michael at michael@the-muse.org with "Sample Poem for PSV Workshop" in the subject line, or you can send them to Christy Lumm when you pre-register. Please RSVP to Christy Lumm at clumm@hra.org with "PSV Poetry Workshop" in the subject line or call her at (757) 234-6256 (home) or (757) 884-9100 (work). Pre-registration is strongly recommended but not required. Participants should bring paper and a pen or pencil to the workshop.

Participants may elect to purchase a lunch platter from Jason's Deli for \$10, **but these must be ordered in advance**. Please indicate with your preregistration by November 12 if you'd like lunch.

Schedule of Events

10 a.m. Registration. Pay for lunch at this time.

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Workshop with Michael Khandelwal (with a morning break).

12:30 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Lunch.

1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Reading by Michael Khandelwal.

1:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Short PSV business meeting.

1:45 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Open Mic (One poem first round, and then open to additional poems as time allows).

Directions

From Hampton or Williamsburg: From I-64, take the Oyster Point Exit 256A. HRA is "tucked into" the exit buffer zone. Academy Lane is directly across from Canon Blvd. (City Center). Come into the clearly marked main door.

This workshop is free and open to the public.

Waiting for the Pies

by Davi Walders

This is the moment before the year draws its curtains and sleeps. Mums and garden greens drowse above the platter's turkey slivers, the last few cranberries.

The gravy bowl sits empty on pink damask among dolloped islands and crumbs. Candles yawn, butter slips into silver under dimmed lights. Dawn's chopping

blends into the past. The air hangs thick as chestnuts in a room basted with our gluttony. We eye each other above stuffed stomachs and flushed cheeks, waiting for the pies. Fat with years, not wisdom, we will soon stagger from dishes and detritus towards the couch, chairs, the living room hearth.

He will again ask, "Why do we do this?" and she, who now wears only elastic waist bands to this yearly event, will respond by unbuttoning one last button for old time's sake. The debate will pit sweet potatoes against mashed. Children grown, schooled, returned, will ask again when we switched from apple to pecan, why we still make pumpkin

when no one eats it. Conversation will focus on who says "stuffing," who "dressing," who takes ice cream, who sticks to Cool Whip. Ponderous issues will consume us until we doze in front of sparking logs digesting before heading home. Suddenly, we fall silent. For now, all we are required to do is to stare at goblets, watching their reflected rainbows

and small tears forming in the warm room. Free to shift rituals, reduce consumption, become reasonable and responsible, we continue to resist, remain committed to our recidivism. We float in cherished time, waiting for the pies, thankful for another year, the moment's sweet sameness, the rich blessings of the day and each other.

Autumn Harvest

by Nancy C. Allen

Wild geese gather to rest on the borderlands just before sunrise.

A sudden rush of wind ruffles the golden grain on the water's edge.

Lively crickets hum endless farewell tunes—summer has come to an end.

Acorns fall from the oak forest and scatter on the dusty roadside.

Autumn scampers come to feast—busy gray squirrels, graceful acrobats.

An ibis sparkle white—the sunlight glint off the water of the lake.

A swift gray heron flies past—on the way to the river to hunt.

Thrushes prepare to migrate beneath the joy of a warm autumn sun.

A reservoir of sunlight wake tall yellow-leaf oaks and maple reds.

Walking beneath the thick pines—warm against my face spectacular sun.

Fields of ripened corn whisper in the dawn—sunrise it's autumn harvest.



T H E P O E T R Y S O C I E T Y O F V I R G I N I A

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