



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

An educational and literary organization dedicated to the writing
and appreciation of poetry in America.

Strophes

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Julie Cummings
33rd NFSPS
President

Dear NFSPS Poets:

Audre Lorde, one of my favorite poets, once wrote, “Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.” This comes from her essay, “Poetry is Not a Luxury.” I whole heartedly agree, poetry is not a luxury. It is necessary in my life and I trust it is necessary in yours. Even when I am exhausted, physically and/or mentally, for whatever reason, I cannot step away from my daily writing practice. I have made this part of my daily routine and it is now my daily necessity to continue to build that foundation.

I may change the time of day I write, the amount of time I spend writing, and I may not even write a poem, but I exercise the practice to ensure that I do write something every single day. The thanks for this learned behavior is to my 3rd grade teacher who taught and explained this important commitment to the “skeleton architecture” of my life and my love of poetry.

Why would I want to thank my 3rd grade teacher who claimed my first attempt at a poem was not a haiku? It was because I just knew it was. That belief has been affirmed and I know now that it was exactly a haiku. I’m just grateful I knew what I knew and that I wanted to prove her wrong, and more importantly that I didn’t shut down and quit writing. I have been writing and reading poetry ever since.

Often when someone shuts down your words, criticizes your poetry, or even exhibits distaste for your writing style, it is easy to be offended and shut down your emotions and maybe even stop writing. Don’t! As Audre Lorde said, “a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.” Do not let anyone stop your foundation building with the words from within you.

Listening. Listening is very important. Listening to your own poetry and the spoken word of others has so much life. Listen hard. Listen intently. Listen with purpose! I encourage each of you to read your poetry to others and to be an active listener when others read you their words. Be it at an open mic, in a critique session, or even after you’ve read someone else’s poem aloud to the silence! Listen for something in their poems that resonates with you and comment on that line, that one word, that terrific title, or wonderful ending. Listen and comment—what is it that makes your bones stronger, your marrow melt, your spine sing with anticipation? Seek it out and spread the joy of poetry.

Speaking of spreading joy, I am pleased to announce that David Rothman accepted my invitation to be the next Honorary Chancellor of NFSPS. David is the Director of the Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Western State Colorado University and teaches at Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver. He is co-Founder of the Crested Butte Music Festival, Founding Editor and Publisher of Conundrum Press, and served for six years as Headmaster of Crested Butte Academy, an independent school in Colorado. He was also a Colorado Western Slope Poet Laureate. I am proud to call him my friend, and if you were honored to hear him at the NFSPS convention in Denver, you know his passion for Poetry and Poets is intense. I am in awe that his skeletal architecture of poetry is so robust, and while it is not necessary, he would, if asked, use his framework to support us all.

So, thank you, Mrs. B for making me want to find out exactly what I needed to do with my words. Thank you, Audre Lorde, for helping me be rebellious in my youth so I could discover that I might be able to use my skeleton to find meaning in what has become an often-crazy world we cannot explain except through poetry. Thank you, David, for accepting the position of Honorary Chancellor of NFSPS. Thank you, poetry family of NFSPS for allowing me to listen to everything you write so I can create meaning from it and learn from you. I am eternally grateful.

Your sister in words,

Julie Cummings, 33rd NFSPS President

In Memory of Jim Barton, Arkansas Poet

By Dennis Patton, Poets’ Roundtable of Arkansas
President

Jim was one of those people you were close to if you met him. He had a way of making you feel comfortable. He was easy going and had an infectious personality that permeated a room when he walked into it. Of course, you know all this. What I would like to do is share with NFSPS this poem that Jim wrote a few months ago. It is Jim thrilling us with his poetry the way he always did.

A Question Before I Go

How many years, months, weeks,
how many days, or hours
until the mosses cover my tracks,
the vines tug down what I have built,
the rooster grass and the simeonweed,
the greenbriar and the bull nettle
erase each trace of who I was,
where I was,
what miniscule part
I played on this earth?
Rock becomes dust,
scatters on the winds.
How much simpler
is it
to deconstruct a man,
to unbirth a child,
to loosen a luminous spirit
into the vast black sea
of God’s breath?
Tell me:
Does a heartbeat echo
in the stone halls of time?
Does a soul leave tracks
in the wind?

Could any of us say it better than this?

Editor’s note: James (Jim) N. Barton passed away July 5, 2018. He was the 32nd NFSPS President.

NFSPS 2019 CONVENTION DIAMONDS CROWN THE POET IN THE CITY DIFFERENT

The New Mexico State Poetry Society will host the 2019 NFSPS 60th Anniversary Annual Convention in Santa Fe from June 23 to 26, 2019. Convention and hotel details at: nmpoetry.com/convention-nfspd-2019.shtml. The two convention hotels are now booking reduced-price rooms. Mention “2019 NFSPS Diamond Jubilee” for the reduced convention rates.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE POETRY SOCIETIES, INC.

Organized October 17, 1959 ~ Mary B. Wall, Founder
Honorary Chancellor: David J. Rothman

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STROPHES

Strophes, the newsletter of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc., is published four times a year: August (*June 25th) ~ October (*August 25th) ~ January (*November 25th) ~ April (*February 25th). News items and information on contests may be sent via regular mail or email, which is preferred, by authorized members of NFSPS member state societies to:

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* Submission Deadlines

Strophes is available without cost to all paid-up members of NFSPS member state societies when mailed/shipped in bulk to the president or other designated person, who is responsible for ordering the number needed by the submission deadline for each issue. Individual subscriptions are \$4.00 a year to cover handling costs. Special orders are mailed separately. To order a single issue: specify the issue ordered, include a #10 SASE and \$1.00 per copy.

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Memories of James (Jim) Barton, 32nd NFSPS President

By Eleanor Berry, 31st NFSPS President

Jim's enthusiastic, optimistic vision of NFSPS as a federation of societies of all the states remains to inspire us—along with our memories of his deep, warm voice and laugh. And his heartfelt, beautifully crafted poems on the pages of past issues of *Encore* and in his books are all still with us. Here is a short one, celebrating the quintessential fruit of the summer, from his book *For the Animals Who Missed the Ark*:

Blackberries

Sweet summerkisses
whose lipstick stains
the soul, lingering ghostlike—
half taste, half memory,
through barren months, until
in Spring, juices flow anew,
and love-songs sweep
from field and fencerow,
through thorny thicket
gathering dark clouds
of migrant butterflies,
blue pilgrims, winged
worshippers, keepers
of a flame that blazes black
life's sweet blood, sweet memory,
sweet summerkisses.

He has left us much.

NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS

POETS' ROUNDTABLE OF ARKANSAS' Poetry Day 2018 will be hosted on October 13th. Featured speaker will be Pat Durmon of Norfolk, Arkansas, author of four poetry books: *Blind Curves*; *Lights and Shadows in a Nursing Home*; *Push Mountain Road*; and *Women, Resilient Women*. Her poems have been published in several journals. She is the recipient of numerous honors and awards. See her blog at: patdurmon.com. She taught school in Jonesboro, Arkansas, before obtaining her Ed.S. degree in counseling. Her writing reflects her various careers, miracles she notes in the ordinary, her depth and playfulness. Pat currently facilitates two ongoing and open groups. She also speaks at Home Poetry Readings in her surrounding area. She is a native Arkansan and lives in the Ozarks with her husband and two dogs. Make plans to attend this conference honoring past Arkansas Poet Laureate Rosa Zagnoni Marinoni who established the first Arkansas Poetry Day in 1948. For conference questions contact Amanda Partridge at themandabird@gmail.com or 501-993-6593. Arkansas Poet Laureate Jo McDougall says, "I think we should celebrate ourselves as poets. We tell stories

in poetry about the human condition. . . . We remind ourselves and our readers of our culture, our rituals, our roots. We refresh the tribe with language. I think that's important." ~ *Laura Bridges, Reporter*

GEORGIA POETRY SOCIETY held its quarterly meeting in July at Young Harris College. A workshop on strategies for opening and closing poems was led by Chelsea Rathburn and James Davis May, both assistant professors of English at Young Harris College. Rathburn's poetry has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Atlantic*, *Ploughshares* and other journals. May was the Poetry Society of America's 2016 Cecil Hemley Memorial Award winner. His poems have been published in *Copper Nickel*, *The New Republic*, *The Southern Review* and elsewhere. GPS member Karen Paul Holmes read a selection of her poetry from her two full-length poetry collections. She teaches writing classes at the John C. Campbell Folk School and has been published in journals and anthologies including *Prairie Schooner* and *Tar River Poetry*. Robert Perry Ivey led an afternoon workshop, "On Setting and Sentiment." Ivey is a Lecturer at Gordon State College, the author of two chapbooks, and recipient of the Academy of American Poetry's John B. Santoianni Award. The yearly anthology of the GPS, *The Reach of Song, 2018*, was unveiled. Visit georgiapoetrysociety.org for information about contests now open for submissions through November 15, 2018. Information on purchasing *The Reach of Song, 2018* can be found on the web site. ~ *Ann Kuykendall Gillespie, Reporter*

FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION'S Fall Convention and officer elections are on the schedule as we celebrate in Daytona Beach. We'll have sand in our shoes for a beach workshop and participate in surrealism and existential poetry issues. The speaker's bureau is a year old and thriving with mini-workshops all over Florida. Janet Watson who broke new ground as our youth coordinator has stepped down. Carolyn Scully (along with backup by the Greater Orlando Poets) has stepped up to take over this very important position. It includes overseeing student contests which are sponsored by Lee Bennett Hopkins. See our website for a picture of the chapter stuffing envelopes with announcements to go to Florida schools. ~ *Alice R. Friedman, Secretary*

ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY thanks Tom Moran for his leadership role as Manningham contest chair. Ida Kotyuk, as the new chair, is learning the basic procedures with help from Caroline Johnson

and Tom. ISPS is happy to announce that our society has two members on the NFSPS board: *Encore* Editor Kathy Cotton and *Strophes* Associate Editor Jim Lambert. Preparations continue for our November 3rd Gala and anthology launch. The ISPS haiku chapter has become involved with the Haiku Society of America which supports our efforts to get haiku out into the world. The monthly Brewed Awakening reading in a Chicago suburb remains a popular venue for featured readers and provides an open mic. Our annual poetry contest is accepting entries. Check illinoispoets.org for details of the annual ISPS poetry contest with submissions from September 1 to the November 15 deadline. We have larger prizes this year and more categories. ~ *Susan T. Moss, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF INDIANA'S Annual Fall Rendezvous will be held October 5–7 in Marshall, Indiana. We will be sharing and celebrating the winners of our Poetry Contest. The winners will be announced on our Facebook page as well as our website. Registration forms may be downloaded from these sites. The winners will have their poems printed in our *Ink to Paper* anthology available on Amazon.com by year's end. We had set priorities this year, including "Growing Membership." We became quite involved in this mission in our local discussions, during Spring Fling, through electronic discourse, and other venues. We are attempting to take advantage of each opportunity to offer a variety of topics and sharing of enthusiasm in hopes of reaching a larger audience. As an example, our Agenda for the Fall Rendezvous will feature Jessica Reed, author of *World Composed*. She is a physicist who received her MFA in Creative Writing. She brings to us a different way to see the world with an enthusiasm to share the inner stirrings through our words. We will have presentations on "How to Promote Poetry in your Community"; "How to Publish your Chapbook—Step by Step"; and words of wisdom from our Premier Poet, Michael Erdelen. ~ *Deborah Petersen, President*

LOUISIANA STATE POETRY SOCIETY'S *Lyric Louisiana* anthology of winning poems in recent contests has been printed thanks to LSPS Corresponding Secretary Sandra Nantais. *Lyric Louisiana* has been resurrected after several years of down time. Members will be able to purchase copies by mail: the anthology will also be available at the Fall Festival in Baton Rouge. The festival will be October 27th at the Comfort Suites on O'Neal Lane. Carolyn Files's poem, "Siege of Vicksburg," won an honorable mention in the non-rhyming

category of the 87th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition. Her name will be listed in the 87th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition Collection. In recognition of this HM, Carolyn will receive a nice discount on her purchase from the Writer's Digest Shop. ~ *Carolyn Files, President*

MAINE POETS SOCIETY gathered on Saturday September 15 at the Emmanuel Lutheran Episcopal Church in Augusta for their all-day meeting. In the afternoon for the members-only contest, Linda Aldrich, Portland's Poet Laureate, judged poems on place or displacement. Our next meeting will be Saturday, April 27, 2019, at the First Universalist Church in Auburn. Attendees are asked to bring a bag lunch. Guests are welcome and may bring a poem for the open mic segment of the morning session. A \$10 registration fee from all attendees will help defray the cost of renting the facility. Carol Bachofner will be the judge for the April contest, a persona poem of 30 lines or less. To enter, one must be a member in good standing prior to the deadline (March 27). Membership forms are available on the website. Further details about the contest can be seen there also. For more information and to learn about the society, please visit the website: mainepoetsociety.com or contact MPS President Jenny Doughty at jmdought@maine.rr.com. Note that the Maine Poets Society also has a Facebook page. ~ *Sally Joy, Reporter*

MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY is busy getting sponsors for its annual spring contest. Full details will be available in November on misspoetry.net. The submission deadline will be March 1, 2019, for all categories except the student contest, which has a December 1, 2018, deadline. In the fall the MPS Poet of the Year for 2019 will be selected, based on the judging of poems submitted by the three branches. MPS will publish a book of the winner's poems. MPS members have been busy writing, publishing, and holding branch meetings and workshops. Here is a sampling: books published by seven members; publication of seventeen members' poem in the 2018 MPS *Contest Journal*, publication of several MPS members in the contest journals of the Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wyoming State Poetry Societies; poetry program for a retirement home, Central Branch. For details on these accomplishments, see the current MPS newsletter, *The Magnolia Muse*, on the MPS website home page, right column. Southern Ladies, for a great opportunity to use your

writings to raise money for a charity, go to G.R.I.T.S. (Girls Raised in the South): <https://sites.google.com/site/marybethmagee/writes/home/botr-press-llc/good-grits-anthology>. ~ *Janice Canerdy, Secretary*

MISSOURI STATE POETRY SOCIETY held its annual convention on September 14-15 in Festus, Missouri. The keynote speaker was poet, professor, and editor G.C. Waldrep. ~ *Carla Kirchner, President*

Editor's note: MSPS' brief state society news report has been included as submitted.

NEW MEXICO STATE POETRY SOCIETY joined with Casa San Ysidro in Corrales for an educational and inspiring event. Poets read in honor of Acoma poet Simon Ortiz. Participants included Iris Gersh, Gayle Lauradunn, Bonnie K. Rucobo, and Bernadette Perez. Our Albuquerque Poet Laureate, Manuel Gonzales, and his daughter Sarita inspired the audience with their readings. The presentation in July had the purpose of educating people on Native American literature, on Simon Ortiz's work with Dr. Ward Minge, and on the generational work that influences Casa San Ysidro. Poet Kevin Higgins from Galway, Ireland, read in Angel Fire, NM, along with Aaron Trumm and Kristian Macaron. Kevin Higgins and Nate Maxson read at Jules Nyquist's Poetry Playhouse in Albuquerque and at both SITE Santa Fe and Albuquerque Sunday Chatter. NMSPS honored long-time member Susan Paquet by including her name in the Land of Enchantment I Poetry Contest category (Contest #50) for 2020. A certificate was presented by Iris Gersh and Bernadette Perez at Susan's Celebration of Life Party. We awarded the new Albuquerque Poet Laureate, Michelle Otero, an honorary membership. We have worked with all our Poet Laurates over the past years. See details in this *Strophes* [on page 1] regarding the NFSPS 2019 convention that we are hosting. ~ *Bernadette Perez, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA is having its annual business meeting this October and celebrating National Poetry Day. The theme for 2018 is "Change" and we will be discussing and sharing poems about change. This is also a time to celebrate, present awards and read winning poems for our National Poetry Day contest and give out door prizes. As always, our workshop hosts a delicious noontime buffet. The "Poet's Retreat to the Country" (hosted by former PSO President John Coppock) was met with much excitement and enthusiasm. We were told to bring a notebook and pencil or pen, a good sense of humor, good walking shoes, and sunscreen

if we wanted to explore the mile of trails. He also stated that there would be food to eat (homemade mango and homemade peach ice creams) and food for thought provided with a broad discussion of several haiku, using them as examples of interesting poems when perceived through multiple intelligences. Attendees will then compose their own poems for us to discuss. PSO is pleased to welcome several new members to our poetry family! Fun times ahead... Check out our website at angelfire.com/poetry/psoc/ and our Facebook page for current PSO information. ~ *Patti Koch, President*

PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY at their Fall Luncheon in Mechanicsburg, hosted by its Keysner Poets chapter, will hold an election for a new President and Vice President to take hold of the organizational reins. Members attending the luncheon will also be able to participate in two workshops presented by Carol Clark Williams (York, PA) and by Maria James-Thiaw (Camp Hill, PA). ~ *Steven Concert, Treasurer*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE's West Tennessee Chapter will start their 2018/2019 meetings in September at the White Station Public Library. We had our summer reading in August. Winners of our annual contest were announced; everyone was encouraged to bring poems to read. Our new year beginning in September will emphasize programs which will be interesting to experienced poets as well as new poets. We are going to be offering Associate Membership for those who are not familiar with poetry but are yearning to learn to write it. On tnpoetry.org we have lots of information for upcoming events. Click on the "News and Events" tab to see links to Student Contest Rules and to Russell's Monthly Critiquing Sessions. The 62nd Mid-South Poetry Festival contest winners will be announced at our Poetry Festival at Southwest Tennessee Community College in October. We will start with a meet and greet fellowship at a member's home. On Saturday October 6, Jerri Hardesty, CEO and Editor in Chief of the nonprofit, New Dawn Unlimited, Inc., will be conducting our workshop on performance poetry at Southwest Tennessee Community College. Our prizes will be awarded in the afternoon. For details see tnpoetry.org or e-mail Festival Director JoAn Howerton at ladyjoan1946@gmail.com ~ *JoAn Howerton, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS' Summer Conference was held July 12-14, 2018, at the Marriott SpringHill Suites in Waco. Conference Chairman Sandi Horton welcomed attendees who were given an

anthology of the poems they submitted earlier. The theme, "Building Bridges Through Poetry," was addressed in various ways by program speakers Susan Maxwell Campbell, Dwight Gray, Joyce and Michael Gullickson, Anne McCrady and Elizabeth Dell. Christine H. Boldt led a panel discussion on how to interest communities in poetry featuring Susan Maxwell Campbell, Anne McCrady, Dwight Gray and Barbara Terrell Goerdel. Todd Hawkins, winner of the William D. Barney Memorial Chapbook Competition sponsored by the Fort Worth Poetry Society, a chapter of PST, read selections from his chapbook, *What Happens When We Leave?* Charlotte Renk, winner of PST's 2017 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize, read selections from her book, *The Great Turtle Heart*. Winners in PST's "You Be the Judge" poetry contest, voted by attendees, were: 1st Place, Claire Phillips-Latham; 2nd Place, Barbara Blanks; and 3rd Place, Barbara Lewie Berry. Open mic sessions were conducted in the evening by Kay Bell on Thursday and Friday, and a highlight of the Friday night Banquet was musical entertainment by the Horton Duo. Many attendees participated in the creation of a souvenir CD at a recording booth set up by Steve Sanders's Sea Dog Studios. ~ *Nancy Baass, Reporter*

UTAH STATE POETRY SOCIETY hosted the ninth annual Poetry in the Park workshop in conjunction with the Zion National Park Forever Project and Z-Arts. It was led by Shanan Ballam, who teaches creative writing at Utah State University. On March 3rd our Redrock Writers chapter hosted their annual Creative Writing Seminar with presentations by Shanan Ballam, Dr. Cindy King, Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Dixie State, and Lara Candland who has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and has appeared in many journals. UTSPS held its annual convention April 20-21 in Provo, Utah. We were treated to talks on how to orally present poetry by Natasha Sajé, English professor at Westminster College, and "Letters to the Dead, the Living, and Anyone Else Willing to Listen" (ie, framing the poem as a letter) by Lance Larsen, English Department Chair at Brigham Young and former Utah poet laureate. At the Festival, outgoing president Bill Asplund passed his role to Paul Ford as incoming UTSPS president. We will gather on October 13th to celebrate the publication of UTSPS member Geraldine Felt's *Dancing with Monarchs* manuscript which won our Book of the Year contest. UTSPS is again soliciting members' poems for our annual *Panorama* anthology with expected

publication in the late fall of this year. ~ *Paul Ford, President*

WYOPOETS: Fall is the perfect time to relax, take in nature, and write. Luckily, WyoPoets has a contest opening October 1st for all poets writing in English: the 2019 Eugene V. Shea National Poetry Contest. Refer to our contest notice in this *Strophes* issue [on page 8]. ~ *Angel Mizner, Strophes Correspondent*

POETRY ARTICLES & NEWS

FORT WORTH POETRY SOCIETY PUBLICATION FUNDRAISER

By Michael Baldwin, Fort Worth Poetry Society Treasurer

The Fort Worth Poetry Society, a chapter of PST, has offered to help the Fort Worth Symphony League by publishing an anthology of poetry and art about classical music. All profits from sales of the anthology will benefit the musicians of the Fort Worth Symphony. Copies of the anthology may also be made available at reduced price to other symphony organizations for fund-raising purposes, so other cities' symphonies may benefit from sales of this anthology as well. Deadline for submissions is October 31, 2018. Look for detail on the FWPS website: <https://fortworthpoetrysociety.wordpress.com/2018/07/23/call-for-submissions/>.

Maine Poets Society Runs First State-Wide Contest

By Jenny Doughty, MPS President

We ran our first-ever state-wide (ie, not members-only) prize poem contest this year. The judge was former Maine Poet Laureate Betsy Sholl.

I'm happy to report that this was a great success. We had a total of 95 entries, including many who were not members and some with distinguished records in the poetry community in Maine. We were very honored by being allowed to present the prize at the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance Literary Awards evening in June. We will certainly repeat the contest next year, and we feel as a board that we have learned a lot from the exercise.

Three members of the MPS board did a preliminary screening of the unnamed copies, and agreed on the best thirty for the shortlist, which was sent to Betsy Sholl for judging. She chose the winner from that list.

Other states may well be better organized than we were, but if other state societies have not tried this before, I would say it is well worth the effort. We discovered the hard way that you need to be very careful about the rubric, which we had to change almost immediately after we publicized the contest. We decided to keep the entry fee

low at \$5 a poem, to make it accessible to as many people as possible. We put a lot of work into contacting libraries and colleges for publicity, and we have ideas about how to do that even better in 2019.

Society Website Update with Little Financial Strain

By Paul Ford, Utah State Poetry Society President and NFSPS 1st Vice President

UTSPS is working to update our utahpoets.com site's design to be:

1) *mobile-friendly*. The technical term for this is "responsive" which is when a web page is designed to adapt to the screen on which it is being displayed. As of May 2018, 63% of all web page views are on mobile devices rather than computer monitors. This statistic is from the article, "Mobile vs Desktop Usage in 2018: Mobile takes the lead." This article is available at: <https://www.stonetemple.com/mobile-vs-desktop-usage-study/>

2) enable authorized society officers to update web pages that they have permission to edit without them having to know web page coding (ie, HTML - Hypertext Markup Language).

The bulk of the website redesign and development effort is being performed by a student team in a digital design class at Utah Valley University in Orem. The benefit of engaging a college class in helping design and implement an updated website is that the students are very mobile-oriented! Also, they are much more affordable than IT professionals. We expect good things to come of this work.

The Music of Meter: It's All About the Beat!

By Valerie Martin Bailey

If you are a poet, you should know about meter. It helps you better understand the writings of classic poets of the past, and it makes you a well-rounded poet. Even if you think you will never write metered verse and will be a free verse fan forever, you should at least have some basic knowledge about meter. You may find that you enjoy the challenge of writing excellent form poetry. Meter in Greek means "measure." Meter measures lines of poetry based on stressed and unstressed syllables. When we speak, we put the emphasis on certain syllables in each word. In poetry, a unit of stressed and unstressed syllables is called a *foot*— a *metric foot*.

The universe pulses with rhythm. Put your finger on your wrist and feel the rhythm of your heartbeat, the basic rhythm of life. Everyone loves *rhythm*, but some of us balk at the word *meter*, but they are the same. Rhythm, or meter, in both music and

language is how we emphasize certain sounds. It's the flow of stressed and unstressed notes or syllables. So whether you say stressed / unstressed, accented / unaccented, emphasized / un-emphasized—it's all the same. ***It's all about the beat!***

There are so many variations of meter that we could never cover them in one article. The discussion of meter can sound complicated, but it is fairly easy to learn, especially the basics. You can do more research online if you are interested. Just remember that language itself has rhythm, and when words are put together in a pleasing pattern, poetry takes on a musical flow. There is more to proper meter than just getting the same number of syllables in a line. There needs to be a sense of pattern, and pattern repeated. When a judge comments that your meter is rough, it means you either have not determined a metrical pattern for your poem or you have deviated from the pattern in one or several lines.

Humorous poetry *usually* rhymes and sticks to a strict meter. Having said that, I've written humorous free verse poems that have won contests, and I've heard others read hilarious free verse. It is definitely possible for humor to be written in free verse, but rhyme and meter are more commonly used for humor. Margaret Mayberry's hilarious rhyming poem titled "The Poetry Police" is a rebuttal to the whole "strict" meter claim. I will concede that a poet can pull off the extra beats by reading them as "grace notes," as a "diddy-da." But remember while this can be done verbally, that does not help with the written poem submitted to a judge who will not hear you read but will judge by what is on the page.

A sonnet is written in a strict metered form and is almost always iambic pentameter. This means there are five metric feet of iambs. Some people find it easier to think of it as having ten syllables with the accent on the second syllable. Most poets don't have a problem with writing ten syllables. Their meter becomes rough when the proper syllables are not stressed. This ruins many otherwise excellent sonnets or other strictly metered forms. The syllable count is not the end of it—you must make sure the second syllable is stressed throughout the sonnet or any other iambic form. In the case of the sonnet there is always the proper number of lines and the rhyme scheme to consider as well. There are variations on the sonnet, and speaking of variations, Shakespeare himself did not always adhere to the "rules." If you read his sonnets, you will find that he takes liberties that most modern sonneteers wouldn't dare take. There are exceptions to most rules, besides Shakespeare didn't invent the

sonnet, he just made it popular and wrote more of them than anyone else. Some claim that Francesco Petrarca invented the sonnet and others claim that an Italian, Giacomo Da Lentini invented it, and Petrarchan perfected it.

So far, we have only discussed one type of meter, the Iambic—ta TUM. The other common meter is Trochaic meter that puts the accent on the first syllable of the metric foot—TUM ta. Then there is Anapestic—ta ta TUM, Dactylic—TUM ta ta, and many other variations. In writing metered poetry, think of music. Just as music has a certain number of beats to the measure, so does poetry. Try clapping the beat of your poem as you would with music to see if it has a rhythmical pattern. The clap helps you hear when you are off rhythm. The musical quality of poetry should not be a singsong sound. In reading your poetry out loud, always read as naturally as you would read un-patterned prose. If you have written in the beat accurately, it will make itself felt as an underlying rhythm. Consider one of the most regular five-foot Iambic lines in the language: "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day." ("Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," by Thomas Gray). You don't read the exaggerated meter. "The **curfew tolls the knell of parting day.**" You read it naturally and the underlying meter is felt as an undercurrent that gives it a graceful, musical flow.

When determining meter, think syllables, not words, and think of syllables as notes that get more or less emphasis. In music, a *time signature* specifies how many beats are in each measure and which note value gets one beat. A 4/4 signature means four beats to the measure (or bar) and a quarter note gets one beat. In the same way, the meter of poetry is determined by metrical feet instead of measures, and syllables instead of notes are given emphasis according to accepted pronunciation. These stressed and unstressed syllables determine the beat or rhythm of the words making up the poem. It should be regular but not so excessive that you cannot help reading it in a singsong manner. Whether your poem is free verse or metered, always read it aloud to see if there is any point in the poem where a word combination or a fault in the meter makes you hesitate or stumble. If there are stumbling points, you need to revise so you can read it as naturally as you would un-patterned prose.

Poetry Rewriting Hints

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Exercises to help tighten your poem

1. Look at your poem and cull out the "plurals" and "generalisms". Singular words are often stronger than plural. General words

such as "fields, forests, winds" don't invite the reader into the experience the way specific words do, such as "cornfield, Scotch pine, north wind". Watch out for general terms such as "old people", "the fan", "car"; give them a personality: "Old Homer", "the Mighty Mouse fan", "the orange Volkswagen".

2. Pull out every other line of your poem—first the even, then the odd—and see what happens. (If this is a form poem, ignore the rhyme scheme for the moment, the idea is to check for redundancy that you may have allowed to creep into your otherwise brilliant work). This works particularly well on a computer, where you can create a new file and play with the poem all you want while still preserving the original version. It can be done on paper, too, using the old cut and paste method. Just be sure you have some extra copies.

3. This hint also works well on the computer: if your poem is in the first person, try rewriting it with "she" or "he" or a person's name. If it is in the third person, try it with "I". Which is stronger?

4. Another variation of the above: if your poem is in the past tense, try putting it in present tense, or vice versa.

5. Do you have more than three separate themes going in your poem? Pull out the theme introduced last, and see if the poem isn't stronger. Save that theme for another poem. Try it again with the remaining two themes, is the poem stronger with less?

6. This is the opposite of #5. Do you have two short poems on similar themes, or on contrasting themes that could be merged into one poem? Sometimes you will need to create a new stanza, tying in the two themes. Experiment, you may end up with a unique third poem that is better than the two separate short poems.

7. Look closely at the first and last stanzas of your poem. Often our first stanza was simply a "trigger" and is unnecessary. Often we go too far and "tell" rather than show in the last stanza, thinking we need to explain just one more time, when the stanza above "shows" and is a more powerful finish. Be merciless, chop off the first and last and see what that does to the poem.

8. Search your poem for compound sentences. Run through the poem and read only the first half of each compound sentence. Is the last half necessary? Should it be a separate sentence?

9. This is the opposite of #8. Do you have three simple sentences that could be combined into one sentence? Watch out for a machine gun effect—too many short sentences. Sometimes varying simple and

more complex lines can give the poem a wonderful weave.

10. Look for parenthetical phrases (usually set off by commas). For example: “I wonder, by the way, who will be named director?” Take the phrases out where they are not essential to the meaning of your sentence.

11. Avoid the temptation to put an asterisk at the end of your poem, explaining the historical significance, or identifying a slightly unusual word. The poem must stand alone. If it does not, clarify it, but don’t try “telling” what it means, that will always weaken the poem.

12. Take questions out of your poem. Make them statements and see if the result isn’t stronger. Only break this rule when you have looked at it both ways, and argued long and hard with yourself.

13. See how many “ings” you can take out of the poem without damaging it. Usually short (preferably one) syllable words are stronger than longer words. Look at each small word in your poem, especially “the” and “and”. Take out all unnecessary small words.

14. Read your poem aloud. If it jars the ear, or makes your tongue stumble, rework the spot. Then, read it aloud again. Think it sounds smooth? Have SOMEONE ELSE read the poem.

15. This is another good computer exercise: if there is a particular stanza in a poem that is bothering you, try placing it in the poem in a different spot. Put it after the first stanza, move it to the second, etc. If there is a particular sentence that is bothering you try the same method, moving the sentence around, from line to line.

16. This is a variation on #15 above: if a sentence is bothering you, try reversing the order of the sentence. Try changing passive sentences into active ones.

17. Look at all the adjectives—words that describe nouns and specify the size, color, number and the like. How many do you have in your poem? While we like the specific rather than general in a poem, avoid overused and obvious adjectives (blue sky, golden sunsets, green forests, for example, don’t lend anything to a poem). Be arbitrary. Remove one half of your poem’s adjectives and see if the poem still reads well.

18. Look out for laundry lists of words! If you use more than one to describe something, decide which one is stronger and eliminate the others.

19. Play with the structure of your poem, especially if it is free verse. If it is in stanzas, try putting into one long stanza on the page. If it is all together, see if breaks

improve the presentation. Look at your line breaks. Are they natural breath pauses? Is the word at the end strong?

20. Look at spacing, do some words need to be placed apart or together for emphasis? Look at how the line scans across the page. If it is in long lines, break it up into shorter. If it is in short, try merging some lines—now how does it look?

21. Look at your title. Is it consistent with the poem? Does it add or detract from the overall quality of the poem? Don’t repeat your “best line” (why weaken a good thing?) and don’t repeat first or last lines, work on the title. **ONLY BREAK THIS RULE WITH VERY DELIBERATE THOUGHT!** Put three titles at the top, sometimes this helps overcome our becoming too committed to one, read the poem with a different title to different audiences, and ask for comments. Listen to what discussion is generated and decide which title gives the best “ah ha” factor.

22. Look at your “big” theme within the poem. Does it need more? Should you be expanding on that theme? Sometimes what bothers you is the unsaid thing, have you been TOO brief?

23. Look for words which have double meanings and insert them in place of your first word choice. Poetry should have a little mystery. This doesn’t necessarily mean a more complicated word; it could mean substituting a simpler word.

24. Check your similes. Can they be turned into metaphors? Check for alliteration—maybe you can substitute a word to bring more music to the poem.

25. Create a little DRAMA. If your poem could be made more powerful with a slap rather than “he seemed upset”, make it a slap. Take risks. Poetry is one of the oldest forms of storytelling; you don’t have to stick to the truth.

26. However, in creating under #25, make sure your poem is consistent, true to place, season and time. Sometimes what bothers you is the lilac blooming in September, the sweet sound of the crow. Watch your times, your light, watch out for changes of voice or position within the poem.

The point of all these rewriting exercises is to help you think about the poem—the structure, the words used, the placement of lines. This usually can eliminate the mother hen attitude we take towards our babies and make us more receptive to change inside our masterpieces. We can all make our poems tighter, stronger, so they are the best they can be.

The Most Misunderstood Poem?

By Ron Weber

I think it’s safe to say that Robert Frost is arguably one of the most, if not *the* most, familiar and recognized writer and poet of the 20th Century. And it seems as though most who are not even fans of poetry know his name and are more likely than not to identify him as an American poet. Of course, those of us with an abiding affinity toward verse can even name a few of his poems (“Fire and Ice”, “Mending Wall”, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”, “Two Tramps in Mud Time”), but the most famous is “The Road Not Taken”.

The Road Not Taken and its signature lines have become part of the culture and have been seen and heard almost everywhere: coffee mugs, appliance magnets, speeches, advertisements (Menton, Nicorette, AIG Insurance, Monster.com), musical performances and even television episode titles; e.g., Taxi, The Twilight Zone, and Battlestar Galactica. However, according to David Orr, poetry columnist for the *New York Times Book Review*, many of us got it wrong.

In his book, *The Road Not Taken: Finding America in the Poem Everyone Loves and Almost Everyone Gets Wrong*, David Orr claims many of us misread the poem and misunderstand it. It’s an interesting and even provocative take but I find myself more often disagreeing than agreeing.

To most, The Road Not Taken is a tribute to the courage and triumph of self-assurance and the challenge of personal responsibility. But Orr takes the view that “the literal meaning of the poem’s own lines seems completely at odds with this interpretation.” He seems to nitpick the meaning and juxtaposition of words and lines in what strikes me as an over-intellectualizing and pedantic over-analysis of the poem.

He fails to acknowledge that poetry is both figurative and literal language. If, due to the many frames of reference and contexts life experiences have provided to you, you interpret a literal line, phrase or stanza in a figurative sense and it touches you, then that’s valid. Poetry is, after all mostly figurative language and interpretation focused in such a way as to be evocative.

I disagree with Orr’s premise. His position is: “The poem isn’t a salute to can-do individualism; it’s a commentary on the self-deception we practice when constructing the story of our lives.” He writes that millions know the language of the poem without understanding what that language is actually saying. Balderdash! (*continued on page 8*)

The Most Misunderstood Poem?

(continued from page 7)

In poetry the language and understanding in what the poem says to you as an individual is what gives it value and meaning. English grammar and definition is not necessarily English literature and poetry. Whatever we hear, read and feel is paramount to poetry, no matter how it may be put.

The millions who Orr feels get the poem wrong actually do understand. Like all poems, they understand what that poem is saying to them. The value and validation of poetry lies, I believe, within each of us personally as we react to it. Orr's book is, I think, unique, which makes it an interesting read. Carpe poetica!

NFSPS BlackBerryPeach Prizes for Poetry (BBP3): Spoken and Heard Publications

Poet Rosemerry Trommer, 1st place winner of the 2018 BlackBerryPeach contest is featured on a new YouTube video. Check out the 30-minute video that includes all 2018 BBP3 winners by searching YouTube for "2018 BlackBerryPeach Poetry Awards" or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxnY2QgNhZg>

NFSPS is pleased to announce the release of this BBP3 video created by Zach Damberger during the 2018 convention in Denver. Headliner of this video is 1st place winner Rosemerry Trommer of Placerville, Colorado. BlackBerryPeach is a major NFSPS competition that challenges poets to present their original poetry in print and spoken word.

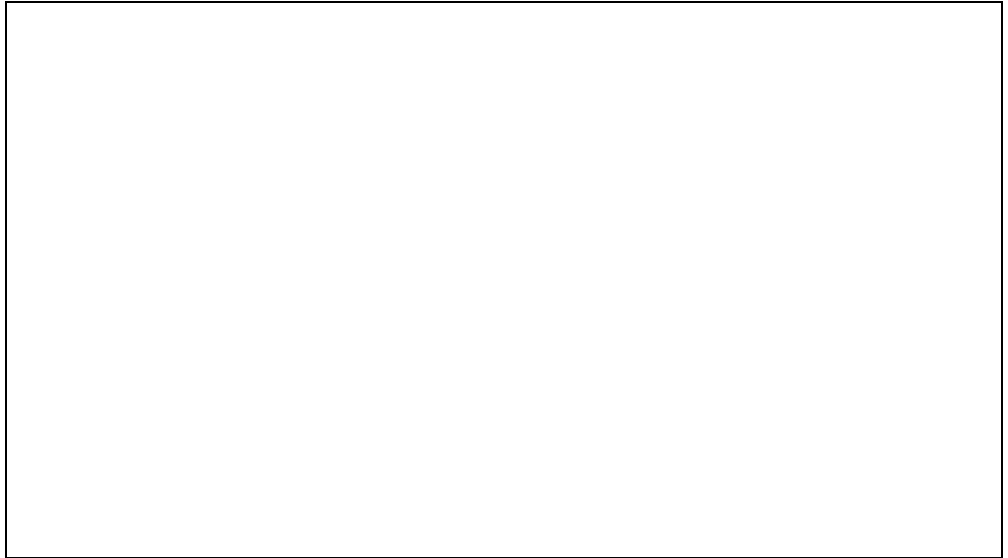
NFSPS 2nd Vice President Joe Cavanaugh, chair of the contest, stressed the importance of reaching out to all poets by recognizing spoken poetry in its many forms as a powerful poetic genre. The 2019 competition will open on January 1, 2019, until March 15, 2019. He urges all interested poets to check out the guidelines on Submittable.com or on nfspss.com under Contests and then submit their four best poems to be a part of next year's competition and one of the award winners.

The 1st place winner receives the grand prize of \$1,000 and will be invited to perform at the NFSPS national convention in Santa Fe, New Mexico in June 2019. The 2nd place prize winner receives \$500. The 3rd place winner receives \$250. All prize winners will be invited to perform as part of the Awards Ceremony at the convention. A video of the convention performances will be posted on YouTube while NFSPS will publish the prizewinning poems in a 6" by 9" book that will be for sale at the convention and will be available on Amazon.com.

POETRY CONTESTS

MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY

Details will be available in November on misspoetry.net. Submission deadline: March 1, 2019, for all categories except the student contest, which has a Dec. 1, 2018, deadline.



PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY

October 15th will kick-off PPS' 67th Annual contest. Deadline (postmarked) is January 15, 2019. There are 12 open categories with \$865 in prize money. Non-members who join PPS by November 30th can take advantage of an additional 4 PPS-only categories with \$200 in prize money. A contest brochure is available for download from: nfspss.com/pa.

REDROCK WRITERS' CHAPARRAL POETRY FORUM CONTEST

Entries to be postmarked Sept. 1 to Dec. 1, 2018. See redrockwriters.org for the Adult Chaparral Poetry Contest Rules under the Chaparral Poetry Contest menu. Questions? Contact the Contest Chair: Marie Tollstrup marieet@infowest.com.

WYOPOETS ANNUAL EUGENE V. SHEA NATIONAL POETRY CONTEST

The 2019 contest opens October 1st and closes December 15th, 2018. This contest is open to all poets. Poems must be original and unpublished at the time of submission. Rules and entry details for the 2019 contest will be available at wyopoets.org/contests.html.

CONTEST BROCHURE EXCHANGE

To make it easier for members to find contest information from member-states, NFSPS has created a webpage that lists individual state poetry societies that run contests. This page includes a link to download contest brochures which are provided in a .pdf format. In order to be listed, at least some of the contest categories must be open to all and not limited to just state society members. Contest links can be found at nfspss.com/statecontests.html. This page will be updated as new contests become available. ~ *Steven Concert, NFSPS 4th VP*

ENCORE 2018

NFSPS' anthology of this year's top 150 prize-winning poems is on amazon.com for \$13. Buy 2 copies and get free shipping. All royalties support NFSPS. ~ *Kathy Cotton, Encore Editor*



NFSPS ELECTED BOARD 2018-20

At the 2018 June convention in Denver, elected board members posed for group photo:



Left to right: Linda Harris, Secretary; Lucille Morgan Wilson, Treasurer; JoAn Howerton, 2nd Vice Chancellor; Shirley Blackwell, 1st Vice Chancellor; Julie Cummings, President; Polly Opsahl, Chancellor; Steven Concert, 4th Vice President; Paul Ford, 1st Vice President; Charmaine Pappas Donovan, 3rd Vice President; Joseph Cavanaugh, 2nd Vice President.

SPRING 2019 POETRY WORKSHOP

Here's your chance to visit Zion Park on its 100th anniversary before the crowds and shuttles begin in Southern Utah. The 10th annual Poetry in the Park workshop presented by UTSPS and Zion Park Forever Project will feature award winning poet Kimberly Johnson, English professor at BYU on Friday, March 1, 2019. Overnight lodging is available at winter rates for those wishing to attend Poetry in the Park on Friday at the Zion Park Lodge from 9am to 3pm. Johnson's PIP workshop will focus on Paying Attention to details to improve your poetry. Experience a guided nature walk or explore Zion Park on your own, bring a picnic lunch or dine at the Redrock Grill upstairs at the Lodge, this will be a time to remember. Details at poetry-in-the-park.com. Also REDROCK CREATIVE WRITING SEMINAR can complete your weekend on Sat, March 2 in nearby St. George for a separate fee. Details at redrockwriters.org.