



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

Hello Poetry Family!

In June, the NFSPS Board voted unanimously to encourage the celebration of National Poetry Day on October 15th, or as close to the 15th as possible. The National Federation of State Poetry Societies, Inc. has long encouraged celebrating the day in some special way, honoring poetry, the poets who wrote, currently write, and those who will continue to write. Poetry is vitally important, and we are working to propose having October 15th recognized by the U.S. Congress.

Additionally, this October is particularly a perfect time to celebrate. Not only National Poetry Day on the 15th, but NFSPS will be sixty years old. Think about that for a moment. Sixty years old; what a great accomplishment, indeed. Please consider adding celebrations to your poetry events to mark this major milestone. It was on October 17th, 1959, NFSPS was organized by its founder, Mary B. Wall, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This past June, the 60th NFSPS Annual Convention was held, an amazing accomplishment in the history of an organization that has stayed true to our vision. That original NFSPS vision, on which it was founded, keeps up with the ever-changing times, while still retaining its unique identity. Sixty years is truly a reason to celebrate!

Conversely, as NFSPS marks its Diamond Jubilee Anniversary this October, I have a call to action for all of us to consider. We need to be actively involved. We need to individually, and collectively, take responsibility and play a vital part in keeping NFSPS alive and well as it moves through its 61st year of existence and beyond. An organization does not just exist on its own. Just as we need care and feeding, so does NFSPS. We need to remember that NFSPS is a breathing, living organization and it needs your care and attention to prosper and grow. Be a volunteer. Find volunteers. Encourage volunteers to be involved. Volunteer in your local, state, and the national society! You can volunteer in any capacity you feel comfortable. I am sure each and every one of you have something to give, something that you are really good at or a skill you hope to develop. Any and all help is greatly appreciated: from putting stamps on envelopes to becoming an officer in the organization. Think outside of your poetic box and dream up wonderful things you, and you alone, can contribute to this amazing organization. Not only do you help the organization as a whole, volunteering makes you feel good inside, not to mention the feelings of accomplishment you will get when you do something for the organization. Take ownership! Let's roll up our sleeves and think of even more creative ways to help grow NFSPS from the local level up!

Time—if I only had more time. I know many of us are busy. I am a middle school educator. I understand how full a person's schedule can quickly become. My school days start at 6:30 am with my drive to work and often end after 8:30 pm with my drive home. However, I make it a priority to find time to contribute to my passion for poetry. I am blessed with the opportunity to talk with students about poetry almost every day. Many of those students enter and win our contests. I am honored to meet with my local poet friends almost every Saturday. (The days I miss are most often because I need to attend a weekend school event.) I attend festivals and even hosted a small poetry fest at my house this summer. I attend The Columbine Poets annual Poet's Fest in Colorado, making the coffee and tea because I enjoy it! I attend NFSPS conventions. I was an officer in my state organization, then was appointed to Judge's chair for NFSPS by Jeremy Downes, NFSPS 30th President, because I volunteered. I love giving back to you because you have given so much to me. Even if you do not think so, I have received something from you. Thank you!

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NFSPS DESIGNATES OCTOBER 15 AS NATIONAL POETRY DAY IN THE USA

By Shirley Blackwell, Poetry Day/Poetry Month
Liaison Co-Chair

National Poetry Day and National Poetry Month are initiatives first proposed by the NFSPS decades ago. The Academy of American Poets seized on the Poetry Month idea and successfully pushed to have the month of April (the month of Shakespeare's birth) designated as National Poetry Month, leaving the notion of celebrating Poetry Day to languish in obscurity. With the exception of a few NFSPS affiliates (EG, WyoPoets, Poetry Society of Tennessee, and Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas) who celebrate on October 15—the supposed birthday in 70 BC of the great Roman poet, Virgil—many of our state societies are unsure about how or when to celebrate this day.

The United States does not yet have an official National Poetry Day. Some states and several countries celebrate October 15, others ride the coattails of an informal British group that designated the first Thursday in October as Poetry Day in the United Kingdom. The last attempt to officially establish October 15 as the United States' Poetry Day passed in the US Senate but failed in the US House of Representatives in 1982.

However, our Federation will not be deterred. At the Santa Fe Annual Convention this summer, the NFSPS Board passed the following measure: *Moved: that the NFSPS designate October 15 as National Poetry Day in the USA. . . that we observe it as near as practical to the actual day. . . that the celebration of National Poetry Day in the USA focus on the educational and cultural importance of poetry to the nation and on encouraging America's children and youth to read, write, publish, and speak their poetry.*

Because the imprimatur of the US Congress would lend great weight to this action, I have asked NM Senator Martin Heinrich and NM Representative Deb Haaland to sponsor Congressional action to officially designate October 15 as National Poetry Day in the USA. A confluence of factors—our Santa Fe convention, the recent establishment of a NM State Poet Laureate program, the fact that Rep. Deb Haaland studied poetry under Navajo Nation Poet Laureate Luci Tapahonso and is friends with Joy Harjo, our new US Poet Laureate—all auger well for getting this measure considered by the US Congress.

You can help. As soon as I hear whether my NM delegates will propose this legislation and what would be the title of the bill, I will ask our state society presidents to contact their own Congressional delegates. Please urge them to cosponsor or support the bill/resolution. Who knows? This could be a first step toward bipartisan cooperation.

In the meantime, let us vigorously celebrate October 15 as National Poetry Day in the USA (you know we had to make it rhyme), with the emphasis on education, culture, and our young poets. Please send me news of your National Poetry Day activities at poetry.day.month@gmail.com. Let me hear from you!

NFSPS MEMBER SOCIETY NEWS

POETS' ROUNDTABLE OF ARKANSAS' 2019 Poetry Day Celebration is October 19th in Little Rock at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies. John McPherson will serve as Poetry Day Chair, and Pat Laster will be the guest speaker. Pat is a poet, author, editor, publisher and workshop leader. Arkansas Poet Laureate Jo McDougall was the recipient of the 2019 Porter Prize Lifetime Achievement Award in Literature. The dinner and ceremony were held on June 20th at the Great Hall of the William J. Clinton Presidential Library. New PRA Board Members were inducted for the 2019-2021 term. Frieda Patton from Alexander is the new President. You don't have to live in Arkansas to be a member of PRA. Check out our website, poetsroundtableofarkansas.org to find out how to be a member and check out all the benefits including monthly contests. ~ *Laura Bridges, Reporter*

FLORIDA STATE POETS ASSOCIATION is gearing up for its annual fall convention (October 25-27), hosted by the Live Poets Society of Daytona Beach. FSPA is working with the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs to select a new State Poet Laureate and has submitted seven candidates as we await their decision. We plan to install poet Carol Frost and additional chancellors at the fall convention and other upcoming events. To create a strong bond between local chapters and the statewide association, FSPA offers a Speaker's Bureau that provides selected speakers from among its members for chapter meetings and state conventions. We are mourning the death of one of our previous chancellors, Lee Bennett Hopkins. ~ *Leslie C. Halpern, FSPA Secretary*

ILLINOIS STATE POETRY SOCIETY celebrated its Manningham contest winners during the July monthly gathering at Brewed Awakening in Westmont. Four students attended and read their winning poems. ISPS members collaborated with artists to create ekphrastic poems based on archetypal interpretations. Exhibitions are planned for October at Burning Bush gallery in Wheaton and Benedictine University next March. An evening reception was held on Oct. 5 at the Burning Bush gallery. The After-Words bookstore in Chicago hosted readings by ISPS and Poets and Patrons members on October 13 and included refreshments. Our new Manningham contest coordinator is Mary Beth Bretzlauf. The ISPS annual poetry contest is open to submissions until November 1. Membership is not required for entries. Visit our website, illinoispoets.org for further information. ~ *Susan T. Moss, President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF INDIANA celebrated our annual Spring Fling at the end of April to wrap up National Poetry Month. Not only did we celebrate and hear from our youth Manningham winners, but were guided in exercises of "Protest Poetry" and "Symbolism and Allusion." Preparations are now underway for the Fall Rendezvous to be held the weekend of October 18-20, 2019, at Canyon Inn in McCormick State Park. Registrations are available on our website and FB page with the Group Number for room discounts. Our Keynote Presenter will be Dr. George Wolfe, a poet and musician. His recent book, *Clapping with One Hand*, is an anthology of poems inspired by Zen, Mozart, and his experiences in India. There will be other presenters and workshops with the PSI poetry Contest winners announced and a celebration of our members who have published this year. At our Board Retreat this summer, we welcomed new members and gave deep thanks to those board members stepping aside. We have a "Traveling Bookstore" for the local societies to use during their festivals and public outings. It has all kinds of information about our poetry programs. ~ *Deborah Petersen, President*

MAINE POETS SOCIETY will meet Saturday, October 19, at the Emmanuel Lutheran Episcopal Church, 209 Eastern Avenue in Augusta. Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. and the meeting is expected to conclude around 2:30 p.m. A \$10 registration fee from all attendees will help defray the cost of renting the facility. An exception to this is that each member is welcome to bring a non-member at no cost. The morning session will include a brief business meeting and a mini-workshop led by Anne Britting Oleson on "Manifesting the Manifesto" narrative poems. Morning refreshments and dessert will be provided; however, attendees are asked to bring a bag lunch for themselves and their guest. Following lunch, there will be a half-hour open mic session. Each member and guest is welcome to bring a poem to share. In the afternoon, Kevin Sweeney, judge for the members-only contest about "place," will share the results of that contest and read from his work. For more information and to learn about the society, please visit mainepoetsociety.com or contact MPS President Jenny Doughty at jmdought@maine.rr.com. Please note that the Maine Poets Society also has a Facebook page. ~ *Sally Joy, Reporter*

MISSISSIPPI POETRY SOCIETY is getting ready for our annual adult and student contests. Both brochures will be

posted on misspoetry.net in late October or early November. The nominees for 2020 Poet of the Year have been chosen: Janice Canerdy, North Branch; Linda Owen, Central; and Brenda Finnegan, South. MPS will publish a poetry book for the winner of the POY Award. In branch news, North is busy planning the annual festival, to be held at Lake Tiak O'Khata (Louisville) in April. South Branch member Faith Garbin joined other poets on the evening of August 14 at the Mary C. O'Keefe Cultural Center in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, for a reading. The event, open to the public, was called, "An Evening of Poetry with Coffee and Sweets." We congratulate Stephen Curry and Doris Jones (both South Branch) for placing in one or more categories of the NFSPS Annual Contest. Other MPS members who placed are Brenda Finnegan (South Branch) and out-of-state members Barbara Blanks (TX), Gail Denham (TX), and Catherine Moran (Arkansas). Several others received Honorable Mentions. Being recognized in the NFSPS Poetry Competition is always an honor. ~ *Janice Canerdy, Secretary*

NEW MEXICO STATE POETRY SOCIETY hosted the 2019 National Convention, NFSPS' 60th, in Santa Fe. Our book sale room and fundraising auction were open and busy throughout the convention. A highlight was meeting in the NM State Legislature's Rotunda where the BlackBerryPeach Poetry winners and over 50 poets read. We presented a certificate to our State Senator and poet, Bill O'Neill, for his efforts in securing funding for a New Mexico State Poet Laureate. Special thanks to Ginny Gaskill, our Convention Chair, and the volunteers statewide who made this Diamond Jubilee celebration brilliantly sparkle. We are participating in a Speak with the Poets Project in recognition and celebration of the 2020 Woman's Suffrage Centennial. October 15th is National Poetry Day. The one theme of our project is the "Truth This" movement, spearheaded by Shirley Blackwell; NMSPS will issue an open call for (short) one-stanza poems to be published on our Facebook page. We are now sponsoring the Poetry in The Classroom Award, part of the Student Awards. We encourage all NFSPS members to reach out to students to submit to this contest. ~ *Iris Gersh, Vice President*

POETRY SOCIETY OF OKLAHOMA will be celebrating National Poetry Day at our October meeting. The theme for 2019 is Change; we will be discussing and sharing poems about this theme. October is also the month of our annual business meeting which this year includes the election of officers for

the 2020/21 term. In addition, we will celebrate, present awards and read winning poems for our National Poetry Day contests. Our October Workshop also hosts a delicious noontime buffet. Our past July Workshop was incredible! Keynote speaker was Maria Veres. She instructed and taught the group about "Loving Your Limitations." She also led us in various writing exercises including One-Minute Vignettes and Six-to-Ten Word Poems. Maria also gave us two writing assignments: "Paint Chip Poetry" and "Found Poetry." PSO received a very gracious note from Joy Harjo. Joy is the first U.S. Poet Laureate from Oklahoma and a Native American. Once again, PSO is pleased to welcome several new members to our poetry family! You can always check angelfire.com/poetry/ps/ and our Facebook page for current PSO information. We welcome all to "Come and grow at PSO!" ~ Patti Koch, President

OREGON POETRY ASSOCIATION's annual conference will be in Salem, Sept. 14-15. We published the 2018 issue of *Verseweavers*, containing our contest-winning poems, and *Cascadia 2019*, the anthology of the 40 winning poems from our K-12 student contest. OPA's website, oregonpoets.org, attracts 3000+ views per month and features a calendar of poetry events around the state, poems by contest winners, book reviews, board meeting minutes and other organization documents. OPA's Facebook page has 698 followers and our members-only group has 78 members. Our spring and fall contests received entries from Oregon and elsewhere. Our 2018/19 student contest was funded by the Collins Foundation. Several student winners placed in the Manningham Poetry Trust Awards, facilitated by the NFSPS. David Hedges was chosen for OPA's first Patricia Banta Award, which honors an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to Oregon poetry and to OPA's mission. With the Special Collections staff of the University of Oregon Knight Library, OPA maintains the Oregon Poetry Collection in Eugene, which can be used by holders of any Oregon library card. OPA currently has 296 members. ~ Bruce Parker, Reporter

PENNSYLVANIA POETRY SOCIETY on October 19 will celebrate our Fall Conference at Bethany Village, in Mechanicsburg, PA. At the same time a big party will take place to celebrate PPS' 70 years of nonstop existence. More information is available upon request or at nfsps.com/pa/ ~ Emiliano Martín, President

POETRY SOCIETY OF TENNESSEE has been busy for several months with active membership campaigns. The West Tennessee Chapter has been holding one-hour readings in a popular restaurant in the Midtown area with the public invited to participate or just listen. We're enjoying the campaign and plan to continue indefinitely. The East Tennessee Chapter has been very successful in recruiting new members with open mics and readings. Our 63rd Annual Festival and Contest is coming up in October. Go to NFSPS, State Links, TN to see our brochure for details on contest criteria and how to participate. We hope many will come to Memphis for the Festival, which will feature Budd Mahan of the Poetry Society of Texas as workshop leader. We'll certainly learn something helpful and interesting from him. Check out our blog, poemsamples.blogspot.com. It contains definitions and examples of the various poetry formats and provides help with formatting entries. We offer a monthly contest, September through May, and a summer contest. Full membership costs \$25, which includes a copy of our yearbook, *Tennessee Voices*, and allows participation in all our contests. At-large members are eligible to compete. Think about joining us, we'd certainly welcome you. ~ Florence Bruce & Lori Goetz, Officers & Reporters

UTAH STATE POETRY SOCIETY held our Spring Festival on April 12-13 in Provo, Utah. Keynote speaker was Aaron Abeyta, professor of English and MFA Poetry Director at Western Colorado University. His presentation "The Four Homes of Poetry," is available for download from utahpoets.com. Another Festival highlight was hearing that our Redrock Writers chapter president, Markay Brown, won the UTSPS book of the year manuscript contest with, *Planted in a Storm*. Markay has two upcoming book "concerts" for her soon-to-be-published book: one on October 26 at 2 pm in the Orem Library and the other on the first week of November in St. George (date and location to be posted to utahpoets.com). UTSPS has a President-Elect, Steven Leitch. He will be planning next year's Festival, scheduled for April 17 in Salt Lake City, and coordinating UTSPS participation in the 2nd annual Utah Poetry Festival on April 18 in Salt Lake City. Steven will take over as President after the 2020 Festival. Also coming up next year are the poetry workshops in southern Utah, Poetry in the Park (in Zion National Park) on March 6, and Redrock Writers Creative Workshop on March 7 in St. George. ~ Paul Ford, President

POETRY SOCIETY OF TEXAS' 50th Summer Conference was hosted by the Denton Poets Assembly in Denton, July 11-13. Chairman of the event was Richard Kushmaul. Presenting a variety of programs were Texas Poets Laureate Alan Birkelbach, Karla K. Morton and Carol Coffee Reposa, Oklahoma Poet Laureate Dr. Nathan Brown and, listed alphabetically: Dr. Bruce Bond, Michael Guinn, Beth Honeycutt, Christine Irving, Lynn Lewis, Georgina Ngozi, Robert Schinzel, Dr. Stephen Soris and Loretta Diane Walker. Terry Jude Miller, winner of the 2018 Catherine Case Lubbe Manuscript Prize, read selections from his book, *The Drawn Cat's Dream*. At Thursday evening's Reception, Steve Sanders and the Sea Dogs entertained in costume with "all things pirate" poetry. After Friday's Luncheon, a performance by poet and musician Paul Slaven combined poetry and music. During the Friday night Banquet, Elaine Davis played the harp. The Keynote Banquet Speaker was Diane Glancy. Winners of PST's "You Be the Judge" Contest were: 1st Place - Valerie Martin Bailey, 2nd Place - Barbara Blanks, and 3rd Place - Barbara Lewie Berry. Winners of the Prompts and Pathways Conference Contest were: 1st Place - Barbara Lewie Berry, 2nd Place - Christine Irving, and 3rd Place - Carol Thompson. ~ Nancy Baass

POETRY ARTICLES & NEWS

STATE SOCIETIES SHINE ON POETRY DAY AND MONTH

By Shirley Blackwell, NFSPS Poetry Day/Poetry Month Liaison Co-Chair

In the August *Strophes*, I commended individuals and subgroups who celebrated National Poetry Month/National Poetry Day. I promised to follow up with kudos for NFSPS state societies who had shared their unique ideas about celebrating NPM/NPD. My thanks go to the Arkansas, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Ohio, Tennessee, and Utah state poetry societies for submitting reports, but I have room here to discuss only a few ideas that could, perhaps, be used by other groups looking for fresh ways to observe these poetry "holidays."

The New Mexico State Poetry Society maintains a poetry calendar for any poetry happenings in the state, whether or not associated with the NMSPS. April's calendar supported 25 separate events to celebrate NPM, including the inauguration of a "Telepoem Booth®" in Santa Fe.

Writer/artist/NMSPS member Elizabeth Hellstern created her ninth Telepoem Booth® in Santa Fe as an interactive art piece. The 1970s-era booth contains a push-button payphone (Telepoem Booths® in

several other locations feature rotary dials) and a “Telepoem book” (directory) that lists poets by last name and genre. Visitors can dial any number in the book for free and hear a recorded poem read/performed by its author. Similar booths have gone up in several other states; if you want to join this growing “exchange,” contact Hellstern at elizabeth@telepoembooth.com. As you may have noted, Telepoem Booth® is a registered trademark, but you can google the term for more information and some great video. These art/poetry installations are often “co-created” by Hellstern and the communities in which they are placed.

Poets’ Roundtable of Arkansas (PRA) President Frieda Patton reported that, since 1948, October 15 has been designated as Arkansas Poetry Day and is the main poetry event in the state. PRA celebrated with a convention in Little Rock that included the reading of the Governor’s Proclamation of Poetry Day, a speaker, skits, contest announcements, etc. We should note, however, an unusual and clever practice of the PRA: it partners with the Arkansas State Fair to sponsor Best of Show contest awards for its yearly poetry contests. Isn’t that brilliant, and couldn’t we do it in other states?

Chuck Salmons, President of the Ohio Poetry Association, wrote that OPA sponsored one of the 30 poetry contests coordinated by the Ohio Poetry Day Association (a separate nonprofit group led by past NFSPS president Amy Zook). OPA also supplied refreshments and used its website, blog, and social media outlets to promote the day’s events. In 1938, Ohio became the first US state to establish a State Poetry Day, which is held on the third Friday in October. Does your state have a designated Poetry Day?

And remember, you can email your Poetry Day report to poetry.day.month@gmail.com while it is fresh in your mind.

POETRY READING IN THE U.S. CONTINUES TO CLIMB

By Ron Weber

Undeniable, indisputable, indefatigable and without a doubt, poetry reading in the United States has increased over the past five years. In fact, data released from the National Endowment for the Arts’ 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) confirms that 11.7 percent of adults read poetry last year. That’s roughly 28 million adults. You know, big people who have the freedom to decide what they do with their free time and their money!

Over the 15 years of conducting the SPPA, this is the highest share of the U.S. adult population on record for poetry

readership, according to the NEA’s director of research and analysis, Sunil Iyengar. Not surprising then, there was also a bump in 2017 poetry book sales.

This 2017 adult poetry-reading rate is a full five percentage point up from the 2012 survey (11.7 percent vs 6.7 percent). What I find wonderfully encouraging is that the jump in poetry reading is seen across most of the key demographic groups studied. The SPPA results disclosed the following for each of the respective demographic sub-groups.

Young adults increased their lead as poetry readers when compared to all age groups. The poetry-reading rate for 18-to-24-year-olds more than doubled, from 8.2 percent in 2012 to 17.5 percent in 2017. The next highest rate of poetry reading went to the 25-34-year-olds, 12.3 percent, up from 6.7 percent.

There were significant gains for women, going from 8.0 percent in 2012 to 14.5 percent in 2017. In keeping with previous years, women accounted for more than 60 percent of all poetry readers, while men’s poetry-reading rate improved to 8.7 percent from 5.2 percent.

Poetry reading by racial/ethnic subgroups also showed strong growth for the 2012 to 2017 timeframe. African Americans: 15.3 percent, up from 6.9 percent. Asian Americans: 12.6 percent, up from 4.8 percent. Other non-white, non-Hispanic groups: 13.5 percent, up from 4.7 percent. Poetry reading among Hispanics went from 4.9 percent to 9.7 percent.

In terms of education levels, there was a sharp increase in the poetry-reading rates for adults with only some college education. For those attending but not graduating from college, 13.0 percent read poetry in 2017, up from 6.6 percent. The rate for college graduates was 15.2 percent, up from 8.7 percent. Adults with graduate or professional degrees were at 19.7 percent, up from 12.5 percent. Sizable increases all!

With regard to location, urban and rural residents were fairly even for reading poetry: 11.8 percent for urban/metro and 11.2 percent for rural/non-metro residents.

In the summer of 2017, Poets House marked its twenty-fifth anniversary of its Poets House Showcase, which is an annual exhibit that features poetry published in the United States in the previous year. In 1992 the showcase displayed 800 works. Twenty-five years later the showcase displayed approximately 3,600 poetry collections, chapbooks, anthologies, and other poetry-related texts published in the United States over the past 18 months.

To paraphrase longtime executive director of Poets House, Lee Briccetti, the Poets

House Showcase is a living record of a golden age of poetry and a testament to poetry’s lasting influence and importance.

IT IS NOT EASY

By Emiliano Martín, Pennsylvania Poetry Society President

It takes poets of all kind to find the time and space to dream, pen down emotions whether from the pleasures we receive or sadness inspiring the poet to cry out about indifference in the face of human suffering or greed for power. And yet, the writing of a poem requires patience and love, practice with knowledge of the language and ideas from above, especially from the muse.

When that magic moment occurs and the poets feels it so, the pen’s ink is let go... it’s like taking off the body’s skin to display the inner soul, sharing with a lover the lyrics for a new song, meaningful message to be read by the whole world.

Yes, the music with its tempo must present after all. Writing poetry is not easy, it takes discipline and a big heart open to others who remain in their comfort zone being seduced by writing thoughts in free verse and in prose.

ANOTHER ROAD TO TAKE?

By Steve Abbott, Ohio Poetry Association, Editor of OPA’s *Common Treads* journal

I appreciated Ron Weber’s article in the October 2018 *Strophes* (“The Most Misunderstood Poem?”), but I could not disagree more with his conclusions. I haven’t read David Orr’s book exploring how people misread Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken,” but 30 years of teaching college English puts me in Orr’s corner.

To read a poem carefully and insightfully is not, as Ron perhaps suggests, to “nitpick” or “over-intellectualize.” Interpretation in extremis can certainly do this. More commonly, however, studying a poem acknowledges the nuance a poet has worked to create through careful writing and revising. To refuse to look carefully at a poem while accepting one’s immediate gut response disregards both the artist and the art.

It’s true that we bring our personal experiences to any poem. This means we sometimes fall prey to confirmation bias, the process by which we consider only evidence that confirms our preconceptions about the world. In the college classroom, this often meant that students familiar with or victims of child abuse interpreted Theodore Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz” as the poet’s father having beaten him. This required guiding a discussion of the poem’s diction, word choice, and tone to understand the poem as a fond memory of a child roughhousing with his hardworking father.

The language in Frost's poem demands similar attention. If we read the poem as a celebration of individualism (which confirms our American preference for that cultural concept), the implication of "Oh, I kept the first [road] for another day!"—with its exclamation point signaling the certainty that defines youthful ambition—gets overlooked. The poem then immediately undermines this confidence with the realistic and more mature understanding of "I doubted if I should ever come back."

It's human nature to seek connections between events and believe that our choices have somehow represented our unique identity, or that one choice was better or worse than another. The reality is that we have no way of knowing where any choice will lead.

"The Road Not Taken" is about life choices, about how every choice forecloses on possible futures and opens options for others. Frost accepted the complexities and mysteries of being human, and mortal, and eternally uncertain. He understood that no matter what choices we make, we cannot return to get a do-over or step into the same river twice.

Frost recognized that there will always be a thread of wondering and regret about the roads we didn't take; about the possible lives we could have lived. And we'll feel a twinge of sadness as we tell our stories "with a sigh, ages and ages hence" in an understandable but pointless attempt to access or explain the what-ifs in our pasts.

Taking the time to consider a poet's careful use of tone and detail, rather than settling for what we'd prefer a poem means to us, can make all the difference.

JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY: THE PLAY OF WORDS

By Al Rocheleau, Florida State Poets
Association President

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was one of the greatest men of letters of the eighteenth century. Grandmaster poet, essayist, playwright, and lexicographer, the estimable "Dr. Johnson" was so famous in his time that even his own biographer, James Boswell, became famous for displaying this man's character, his influence, and his life and times. Johnson's first and perhaps greatest contribution to literature and to the language itself was his early and ongoing work as a lexicographer, assembling the first comprehensive dictionary of the English language, compiled over seven years and published in two large volumes (2300 pages) in 1755.

The dictionary was the standard for the language for a hundred years, eventually giving way to Noah Webster's *Dictionary in*

the United States (first edition 1828), and the huge "last word" reference of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (first "official" edition 1895). Johnson listed primary sources for many words coming from Shakespeare, Dryden, Spenser, Congreve, Swift, Pope, and Samuel Butler, occasional references going back to the Classics and to Chaucer and covered many technical words from writings of the leading minds of science, history, and philosophy.

He worked from books and other writings dating primarily from Elizabethan times to the previous generation of the 18th century, although he also included prominent words from Latin, Italian, and French, as well as some words used in the writings of close friends and occasionally even from his own work. The dictionary was the first to contain etymologies and used detailed examples (accompanied by sources whenever possible). While mainly neutral in its political definitions, other "social" definitions clearly showed Johnson's pique when it came to such persons as tax collectors, social poseurs, reprobates, certain clergymen, and bad writers.

Since this was an era where there were no established encyclopedias, the *Dictionary* also provided copious articles on various subject words from physics, metaphysics, astronomy, zoology, and medicine. Among the great attractions of this dictionary are Johnson's own language and tone in making the definitions, and examples from other great minds that not only detail the definition of words, but stand alone as great quotations, along the lines of those one would find later in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (first ed. 1855). The *Dictionary* gives writers a fine pre-*OED* source for certain words (words no longer in use, still in use in some way, or needed for display within a period setting). Note the number of evocative words compounded from two object-nouns, or from an object-noun and an action verb. For poets, it may even supply, in their charm and uncanny illustration, creative epithets the poet may want to reintroduce (... or not!). And *oh my*, both then and now, good and bad, we love our epithets, don't we?

For instance, consider these handy appellations for the males of our species, common in other eras:

- **LOW OR STUPID:** arse, beetle-head, blockhead, booby, buffle-head, buffoon, clodpate, cuddy, dolt, fribber, jack-pudding, jumart, macaroon, merry-andrew, micher, mocking-stock, mome, ninnyhammer, nizy, oaf, pickle-herring, rascallion, scab, scatterling, scubberdegullion, whoreson, zany

- **INDECENT:** bedswerver, belswagger, chuckler, lecher, rake, rakahel, ribald, runnion
- **LAZY:** abbey-lubber, bed-presser, candlewaster, hedge-creeper, mushroom
- **GLUTTONOUS:** bellygod, borachio, copper-nose, smellfeast
- **DISHONEST:** cozener, growthead, guttler, loon, lown, mountebank, picaroon, pollar, prig, saltinbanco, shammer, sheepbiter, sinworm, skullum
- **CRUEL:** mohock, myrmidon, swingebuckler, sworder
- **SHALLOW:** ailing, barber-monger, fopdoodle, glozer, coxcomb
- **WEAK:** abject, caitiff, coistril, cotquean, crack-hemp, craven, footlicker, mawmet, pigmy, poltron
- **TEACHEROUS, SNEAKY:** bloodsucker, backbiter, backfriend, bumbailiff, cur, cuttle, findfault, moon-calf, trimmer

Each word has its own history (or, you can make one up!). Here is an example for **moon-calf:** *the abortive fetus of a cow or other farm animal.* The term was occasionally applied to an abortive human fetus. The term derives from the formerly widespread superstition, present in many European folk traditions, that such malformed creatures were the product of the sinister influence of the Moon on fetal development.

It is an adventure to track down the most provocative of these centuries-old words, many almost lost to us (but not quite), due to Dr. Johnson's diligence. One might also imagine what it would be like for someone of Johnson's era to deal with some of our own labels and definitions. The bottom line for any poet: *your* words, perfect in application and effective in sound and meaning, words that accurately reflect the person, object, or action on the literary cloth you embroider, aligning for your readers' visualization, experience, memory, and imagination.

Dictionaries, contemporary or not, help you along. Always have good ones handy.

THE LEAD PENCIL AS METAPHOR

By Ron Weber, article first published in
The Herald-Palladium Online, 8/29/19

Remember freshman English when we all learned what a metaphor was and how it enhanced writing and contributed to the figurative language of literature? Me neither. I tended to be the one foolin' around in the back of the room.

But somewhere along the line, it did sink in. It's when a word for one idea or thing is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them. For example, "the ship plows the sea," or "the lapping tongues of the lake ate away the shoreline." And it strikes me

that, as a card carrying member of the Lead Pencil Society, that thin stalk of yellow wood encasing a vein of graphite and topped with that ever-present pink eraser is just such a metaphor for what used to be in our culture, in terms of both pencils and people.

Ah, the lowly lead pencil. It never skipped, was always ready when you were to jot down the latest nudge from the Muse, and never stopped writing in the middle of taking frantic notes from the Prof in Creative Writing 101. However, you could always count on knowing when that might happen ahead of time by simply looking at it to see how much ammo, i.e., lead length you had left. And that little plastic pocket sharpener was a companion that provided piece of mind.

Ever notice the pencils they have now? They're made of plastic and are at least a third shorter than the original. They're still yellow but you have to rotate the precast pointed writing end in order to get the lead to peek out, and you never do know how much lead is left to twist out and use until it's too late and the last nub of lead comes tumbling out. Now what? You're sunk, unless you happen to have another modern "pencil wannabe" with you. Oh, and that plastic clip for attaching it to your pocket or a pad, if the material is thicker than a Kleenex, it breaks right off.

The good old wooden lead pencil. It was honest. It was forthright. It was unpretentious in warning of its own demise as the shrinking nub snuck closer and closer to the pink eraser, or your hand just couldn't grasp what remained as it softly whispered "Good-bye." One simply grabbed another sturdy wooden pencil or two and off you went, confident, secure and fully loaded for the next challenge.

Now I ask you, when was the last time a ballpoint pen was that reliable? Remember when, all of a sudden, (Aghast!!) the ballpoint would stop writing at a most critical time? Why, it just couldn't be, right? Impossible! After all, the clear ink tube in the pen showed it wasn't empty yet. Kind of like what some believe about our computer age: If it's on the internet, it must be true. I believe the ballpoint pen was one of the first confirmed warnings of the blatant dishonesty of inanimate objects.

So, boys and girls, family and friends, in-laws and outlaws, and ladies and gentleman of the jury, I submit to you that, metaphorically speaking, the lead pencil stands as a reliable and responsible example of what both pencils and people used to strive for in our culture. The ballpoint pen? A shallow trinket of early technology.

And now we have smart phones, driverless cars (Is a driver's license going to

be obsolete?) and microchips tinier than a cell of my epidermal tissue. Each chip probably having an intelligence quotient 80 points higher than my own... Oh, the humiliation! My car already locks the doors on me for no apparent reason. I bathe, I practice regular oral hygiene, I use deodorant, I wear clean socks and undies, but it still won't always let me in!

And don't get me started on iPads, Nooks, Kindles, etc. Reading books with these devices is tantamount to living with a mannequin. They're hard, they're cold, and silent. The only benefit to a mannequin is that it will never complain about the ceiling needing to be painted.

Always be careful about reading the fine print, there's no way you're going to like it. And do you realize that in about 40 years we'll have thousands of septuagenarians running around with tattoos, while rap music will be the Golden Oldies? Egad!!

HOW TO EFFICIENTLY AND POSITIVELY SHARE POEMS IN A CLASSROOM

By Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer,
NFSPS Youth Chair

If you're working with younger students and wonder how to best get them to share their poems, here's what's worked best for me. It works, in fact, for all ages, but it's especially effective for young poets.

Set the stage for sharing BEFORE students begin to write. Before I even give a writing prompt, I explain that writing can be risky, that poetry is a vehicle for exploring personal, emotionally charged subjects. Because of that, people may not want to share what they wrote. They don't have to. This sets many students at ease. My rule: Everyone must share something, even if it's only one sentence. Or one word.

I believe sharing is best done in a circle. If, after the writing time, the desks or tables are not in circles, push them back and sit on the floor.

Before you share, do a short invocation. I have students repeat these words after me (which I didn't write, and I don't know who to attribute them to): *Are you willing to listen with the ears of your heart to the other voices of yourself speaking?* This might be too cheesy for older kids. I think it's important to do it anyway.

Pass something around the circle to indicate whose turn it is to share. It can be a pencil, or a gourd, or a notecard. I explain no one needs to raise their hand, we will simply go around the circle. This cuts down on the time spent volunteering and calling on students.

Elevate the status of the listener. I have noticed that many students don't really listen

to each other while another student is sharing. This is due in part to the fact that they are nervous about sharing their own work and are focused on their own nervousness or on tweaking their own poem. In order to elevate the status of listener and deepen the listening process (which is, in general, seriously compromised in our society—most adults have a very difficult time listening to oral poetry), I have adopted the practice of naming "designated listeners." I picked up this tip from Mary Crow, Colorado's past poet laureate. For each reader, I assign a designated listener, ideally a child sitting directly across the circle. It's this person's job to reflect back to the writer what they heard—an echo of the writer's own words. I model this "designated listener position" first, so that they know what to do. The brilliant upshot of this process: listening becomes as important a job as reading. Other students, not just the designated listener, will also listen better, knowing that they will be called on to be listeners, too. If people start to interpret the poem or say, "I like the part where," I remind them that their job is simply to echo the person's own words. In this way, every student who reads feels as if they have been heard. They know that their words landed somewhere. It honors them without getting into what their poems mean or whether or not they did a "good" job.

Include gratitude. Another idea for responding to students work, either in place of the designated listener or in addition, is to have all the students say "thank you" to the student who just read.

If you have ideas you would like to share about any aspect of successful youth programming, please write to me and I will share it in the next newsletter! rosemerryt@gmail.com

WRITING STROPHES ARTICLES

By Jim Lambert, *Strophes* Assistant Editor

Some of the articles in *Strophes* over the years remind me of my experience as a volunteer tutor for adults who were preparing to take the GED test. It seemed that whoever created the study materials had a goal of making the students hate writing. They were told to write essays about things that would be of interest to no one, so I made it my goal to convince them that writing can be fun; writing poetry even more so. One of the students, a 50-something guy who wore faded jeans, a motorcycle jacket, and a three-day-old beard was my favorite. When I asked him to write about the thing that he loved to do the most, it was watching Rachel Raye's cooking show. I just wish I had convinced him to write it as a poem.

President's Message (continued from page 1)

I have jumped on the opportunity to make poetry important in my life and I make poetry a priority. In retrospect, I volunteered to be used where needed and now I am humbled, to have this great opportunity to be your President. It is not lost on me. At times, it is easy for me to avoid volunteering. It's easy to claim too many responsibilities and time constraints, work, stress and other obligations. However, when I think of the many rewards that are returned back to me, I easily get out of that 'slump'! When making poetry a priority, I adjust my schedule as necessary. I certainly can give 20 or 30 minutes to an hour of my time a few days a month. When I succeed in my chosen task, a feeling of ease, a feeling of doing good for the future of poetry overcomes me. I am so happy to give. Over time, I have realized when I take the time for poetry my motivational energy clock has been recharged and this increases my optimism, feelings of productivity and accomplishment.

I am grateful to all the volunteers, the volunteer Board members, and all who have helped NFSPS survive to be able to celebrate what I hope was Mary B. Wall's original vision. Just imagine what we could do collectively for the future of poetry. You have contributed so much, but if you can and are able to volunteer in any additional capacity, please don't hesitate to do so.

Your sister in words,

Julie Cummings, 33rd NFSPS President

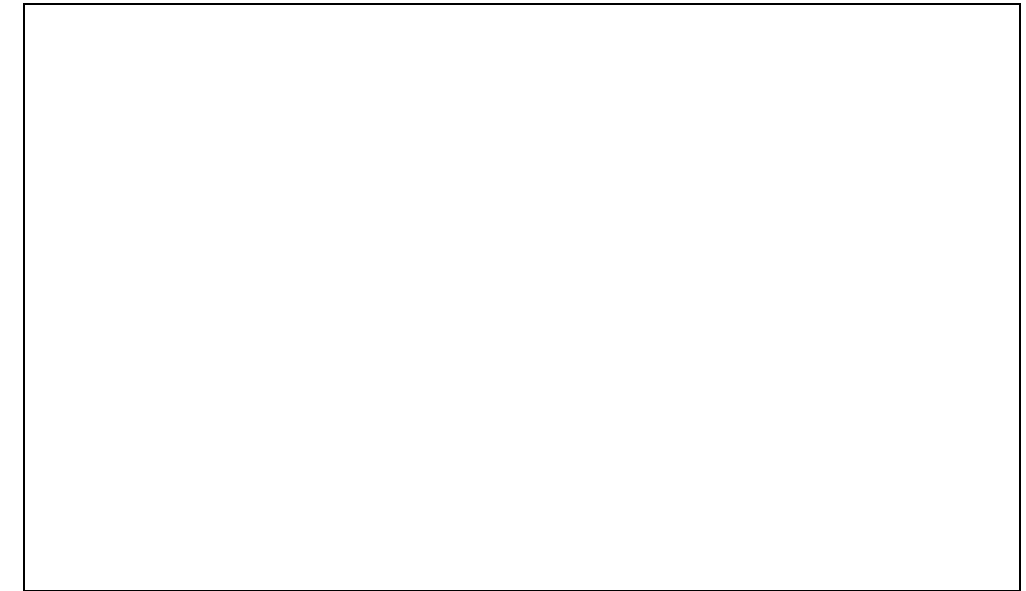
NFSPS PAST-PRESIDENT MESSAGE**DON JUAN'S SWAN SONG**

I used to be a wondrous lover.
There's still not much amiss,
'Cept with teeth in bedside beaker,
My lips can't pucker up to kiss.

Long time since I wrote that. Fun then, serious now. How do we separate the two? Why would we let such whimsy become the impetus of whatever we manage physically, mentally, and through the imagination? It does that on its own! No answer is needed. Hopefully, a light note helps us through more perilous times.

I wrote poetry in elementary and high school, but without Maxine Jennings being my first mentor, my words may have carried me down another path. Since then many more of you, too many to remember, have bolstered my strength in words, some of which may be remembered.

But whether forgotten or not, the journey has been more important: the great people along the way providing kindness, inspiration, and solace when needed. And the actual becoming part of everything. I couldn't have become a poet without you.



I'd like to say, "I did my way." (Sinatra) but I surely needed you, and you, and you! Please continue on as long as possible. I take every single one of you within my heart.

~ Clarence P. Socwell, 24th NFSPS President

POET BJ ALLIGOOD IS THE FIRST PLACE WINNER OF THE 2019 BLACKBERRYPEACH PRIZE CONTEST

The National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS) has announced the first-place winner of the 2019 BlackBerryPeach Poetry Spoken and Heard competition is BJ Allgood of Port Orange, Florida. The BlackBerryPeach Contest is a major NFSPS competition that challenges poets to present four original poems in print and spoken word.

Second place prize winner of \$500 is Ray Jimenez of Orlando, Florida. Third place winner of \$250 is Melissa Huff of Champaign, Illinois. Honorable Mention Award winners are: Jana Bouma, of Madison Lake, Minnesota; Paula J Lambert of Columbus, Ohio; and Radi Silver of East Orange, New Jersey.

A video of the convention performances has been posted on YouTube and vimeo. These can be found and viewed by searching for: BlackBerry Peach Awards 2019. NFSPS published the prizewinning entries including written and oral versions of four poems from each poet in a chap book. These can be purchased by contacting Joe Cavanaugh at jcavanaugh1@gmail.com or on Amazon.com.

I urge all interested poets to check out the guidelines on Submittable.com or the NFSPS website under contests, then submit their four best poems in January of 2020. You could be next year's winner!

~ Joe Cavanaugh, NFSPS 2nd VP and BlackBerryPeach Prizes for Poetry Chair

NFSPS 2020 BLACKBERRYPEACH PRIZES FOR POETRY: SPOKEN & HEARD

Awards: 1st Prize \$1,000, 2nd Prize \$500, and 3rd Prize \$250. This competition blends "stage" and "page" poetry, equal weight will be given to performance and poetics. A submission consists of four poems, each with a separate audio file, and a transcript of the four poems in a single electronic document. Submissions will be accepted between January 1st and March 15th, 2020, using Submittable.com. For the complete set of guidelines on how to submit, see:

nfspss.com/BBP3Guidelines.html

ENCORE 2019

NFSPS' anthology of 2019's top 150 prize-winning poems is on amazon.com for \$13. Buy two copies and get free shipping. All royalties support NFSPS.
~ Kathy Cotton, *Encore* Editor



WARNING ON SCAM EMAIL REQUESTS PURPORTED TO BE FROM NFSPS BOARD MEMBERS

A scammer is sending out requests to purchase gift cards while pretending to be an NFSPS board member such as our current president. NFSPS will never directly email a request for a donation or gift card be sent to an individual, no matter the purported emergency. If you do receive an emailed money request, simply mark it as "Phishing" or "Spam" and delete it. This is not how NFSPS raises funds. ~ Paul Ford, NFSPS 1st VP & *Strophes* Editor