

Poetry Series

**Michael Harmon**  
**- poems -**

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# Michael Harmon()

I began writing poems in my 6th grade class, when I was in love with my teacher, and discovered that appearing not to pay attention would land me in detention with her after school. However, my muse has been fickle: she stays for one year, then stays away for two.

Writing poetry seems to be like any other art, if you want to get better at it:

- 1) learn the discipline of the art;
  - 2) study the masters;
  - 3) read contemporaries;
  - 4) experience life;
  - 5) find ways to tap into your unconscious;
  - 6) respect yourself and others;
  - 7) compose works;
- and,
- 8) NEVER, NEVER, NEVER believe that EVERY poem you write is good, let alone great.

For me, good poetry has 4 M's: Music, Myth, Magic and Mystery; take away any of these and the poetry is less than it could be. Each of those terms begs the question, though, and I can't give simple answers at this point.

So, yes, I do believe there is good and bad poetry. However, good poetry is not always easy to identify; for example, sometimes I may miss important aspects of a poem. In contrast, bad poetry tends to be easier for me to identify; for example, it lacks one, or more, of the 4 M's, or displays an emotional immaturity (if the poet is an adult, that is, adolescents and those younger I would give special dispensations) , or a lack of command of the English language on the part of the poet.

As corollaries:

My advice for anyone who wants to use end-rhyme (which I often use) : be where you're going before you get there.

Also, I do sincerely believe that, no matter who the audience ultimately turns out to be, first and foremost, one should write for oneself. If it gets disseminated to a wider audience, great.

I like what Howard Nemerov said when he was asked what one of his poems

meant: 'You never ask a poet what he means, you tell him.' (Mary Kinzie, A Poet's Guide to Poetry, The University of Chicago Press,1999)

I also like what Wallace Stevens said: 'All poetry is experimental poetry.'

Received a B.A. in English Literature from Long Island University in 1973. Moved from New York to Arizona in 1980, when I was 28. Received a B.S. in Computer Information Systems from Arizona State University in 1983.

Married and divorced twice, I have three sons, who also reside in Arizona.

Self published three chapbooks (one with two other poets) .

Favorite poems: 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' (W. B. Yeats): 'Wynken, Blynken, and Nod' (Eugene Field) (although I changed 'mother' to 'father' when I used to read this to my boys at bedtime, lol): and 'Orpheus Alone' (Mark Strand) .

Others in the top ten: 'Ears in the Turrets Hear' (Dylan Thomas) , 'The More Loving One' (W. H. Auden) , 'Human Condition' (Thom Gunn) , 'The Black Swan' (Randall Jarrell) , 'All In Green Went My Love Riding' (ee cummings) , 'Merlin Enthralled' (Richard Wilbur) .

Other poetic influences (besides the poets above) : William Empson, E.A. Robinson, John Crowe Ransom, Theodore Roethke, Karl Shapiro, A.R. Ammons, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Conrad Aiken, Galway Kinnell.

Favorite painters: Van Gogh, Edward Hopper, Georgia O'keefe.

Favorite book: One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish (Seuss) .

# Book Of Leaves

It was an autumn project every year  
when I was still too young to wonder why  
I could not understand the reason for  
collecting leaves to paste them in a book.

We took a long drive to a country place  
where a book of leaves began when you were young.  
The desperate colors, amazingly profuse,  
graced the ground and limbs where leaves clung.

The air above the branches was ablaze  
in daylight. The leafy gloom below was deep.  
Callow judgments underneath the trees  
would yield the leaves I felt I had to keep.

Before we had arrived, the wind had blown  
a million crisping ones into a pile.  
You watched me run and eagerly leap in.  
And as you watched, I wanted you to smile.

And as your son, I needed you to laugh.  
But driving back, your male silence forebode.  
The point at which our lives were cut in half  
was no more than a few years down the road.

My book of leaves, untouched, continues to grow.  
It opens by itself, and then it shuts.  
Why do my thoughts always drift towards you  
when some new sadness burgeons in my guts?

Michael Harmon

# Remorse

1

A job worth doing is worth doing well  
echoed down from parents like a knell.

2

When nine, Joe goes to summer camp.  
Athletic, agile, quick, he is a champ

at many sports. Though shy, he makes some friends,  
a heavy, large-eyed boy no one defends

among them. Other boys decide to call  
him "chubs" and "bug-eyes", and love to watch him fall;

being neither athletic, agile nor quick  
he often trips in games. They think he's thick

because he's fat (meaning they think he's dumb) .  
He looks to Joe for equilibrium.

But assailing Joe for a poor choice of a friend,  
they hector him; Joe yields at the end.

Let's do a good job on him, the rest all say,  
and make a hell for "bug-eyes" on the last day.

3

The last day of the camp is finally there.  
Joe and his friends are waiting in their lair.

They taunt the heavy, large-eyed boy beyond  
the bounds; they hear their laughter correspond

to tears falling from large eyes. He turns

to Joe, screams "NO! ", and runs away. Joe burns  
the look, the tears, and scream into his head,  
wipes his grin off and wishes he was dead;  
he called a friendly boy "bug-eyes" and fat.

4

And since that day, when Joe remembers that  
from time to time, he journeys down to hell.  
Some jobs are not worth doing, even well.

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