

EDITORIAL

I became a member of *PSR*'s Editorial Board by, of course, being a poet myself. And as any poet, I have my stockpile of rejections, many from magazines that have previously accepted my work. Recently, one such journal wrote back (after the annoyingly requisite five months) about an eleven-line poem I had submitted. The editor liked it, but he didn't care for the second line.

There are many ways to run a journal, as many ways as the editors that create the multitude of little mags that paper our universe. Some editors are mute. If they don't like a poem, they reject it outright without comment. Some editors like to throw bones, and say things like, *Interesting. Try us again*, but reject your work anyway. Some editors feel the writer's word is sacrosanct, and that input from the editor is inappropriate. This particular editor in question said he might or might not accept it, depending upon his take on a different second line.

I have a friend, an excellent poet, who for me echoes the work of Robert Frances, only better. This friend abhors the world of critical editors. He once sent me a batch of new poems, I assumed for my feedback. When I commented on a couple of lines that didn't sit easy with me, he raged, *I know what I'm doing!* This shut down any further communication for a good long while. He rarely sends his work out anymore, ranting that the world of academe has ruined creative writing, and has especially ruined him. *It turns great writers into people who use words like 'pedagogy'*, he says. More often, I suspect, the rejection of his poems feels like someone is criticizing his very soul. So he has taken, what I call, the Salinger approach. He has cut himself off from the world of professional writing. More the loss to the world of literature. I mean this sincerely.

As I suspect is the case with many of us, he is not the only good writer who has gone into hiding. The best poet I ever knew was abused so badly as a child, that the mirror of her drunken mother follows her wherever she goes. She does the job of rejecting her own work before giving the pleasure to any anonymous editor. She's never published a book, and only early in her life did she send out poems for small journal publication. She gifted me a personal ream of her work 25 years ago. It's still one of the favourite reads on my shelf. But I

can't tell anyone else to go to a bookshop and buy it. And it makes me sad.

It's vexing when an editor of a magazine rejects your work, especially when they've accepted it before. Back to my earlier story, the editor of said magazine wasn't rejecting my poem. He just wasn't accepting it. He didn't give me clues as to what wasn't working for him. He just implied I should *try something else*. This can be confusing. When you write a poem, you balance all the forces of nature. In the most magic of times, you open up, and you are a conduit for the universe to whisper through you. Whatever emerges doesn't feel has come from 'you' at all. If someone compliments me on a piece that has arisen from one of these magical moments, I honestly don't feel I can take credit. I don't feel 'I' am its author. My body was simply the method used to give it form.

Every artist knows what I'm talking about. So that when I went back to try and revisit the moment of the poem, it was like wandering in a fun house after hours in the dark. I tried, I prodded, I flattered, I nudged. All to no avail. Interested in seeing my poem in print, I *manufactured* a different second line, and sent it off. I was almost relieved when three days later the editor replied, *Nope*. I went back and tried again. This time, I donned my *clever* cap. Surely a smart-ass second line would grab him. I pressed send again. *Nope*.

With this third rejection, I honestly got hopeful about the world. I was so grateful to know there was an editor out there who could smell a fake, and cared enough to play badminton with one small, lone writer. This is a publication that has come out quarterly for the last thirty years, has an enormous readership, and the editor still cares enough about *every word* to dig ditches until he unearths a gem!

I went to sleep. I let it go. So be it, my poem would not be published. Days went by. Weeks. One morning I woke, opened my hands, and the light I carried rose up. There it was. *The line*. It was so simple. And it did not come 'from me'. I don't mean I plagiarized it. I mean I woke, and it had landed on my tongue.

You can't cajole the real thing. You can't flatter it, you can't tease it, and it will not lie down easy for blackmail. You have to get quiet. You have to let it go. When I sent the poem back to the editor with the new line, I knew. *Of course*, he responded. And he took my poem.

Every artist knows these moments are rare. We know that most of what we ‘make’ is more manufactured *by* us, than comes through us. If we are honest, and unless we are Picasso, only a tiny percentage of our trials unearth as gems. That editor’s willingness to hold the space and not recant made me a better writer. I had to work for it, though I couldn’t ‘make it happen’. I couldn’t force it.

Whenever I receive a submission to *PSR*, I don’t read it on the computer. I never allow myself to read the bio of the contributor before I read the poems. I want to meet the poems as themselves, without any history mucking up the works. I print the poems out, and they sit until I can get quiet enough to be with them. There are often lines that irk me in a poem I may otherwise like. And like that editor did for me, I would like the luxury to dialogue with the poet, to offer the space, and especially the time, for something else to happen for the poem, so the piece may actualize into its fullest potential. But sadly, unlike that other magazine, *PSR* has less man/woman power, and far less resources. We are deluged by work that pours in from all over the globe. There is simply not the time. There is only the possibility to yea or nay a piece. But I would like writers, and also readers, to know that every word that comes across this desk is always championed first, and evaluated later.

I once received a rejection slip that said, *This almost made it*. What the heck does that mean? I offer this to those of us who have given up putting out our best selves for display. I offer it to that small voice inside all of us saying, *I’m not any good. No one will like it. I don’t matter*. Sometimes we need to invoke an invisible circle of our personal champions to remind us that one editor’s response to your work is only that – someone else’s opinion. It is not THE TRUTH. It has not been uttered as a testament from on high by the Gods.

When my little poem was published, I typed the title of it into Google. It came up on someone’s blog who had referenced the poem, and said, *I wish I had written this*. I wish I had too. But how much more meaningful that the universe penned it instead. Take the plunge. Send us your best selves.

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