

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

At their first conference, the undergraduate tells his teacher that he discovered himself to be a poet two years ago, when he was sixteen. He was more sensitive than other people. Since then he has written more than a thousand poems, all of them unspoiled by revisions — that would destroy their originality and sincerity. When the teacher asks the name of his favorite writer, he names himself, although he does claim to love Shakespeare. The teacher picks up one of the recently completed poems, in which the word "limpid" is misused and "ebullient" is used oddly, as if borrowed temporarily from a thesaurus. He asks the young man what he means by the words. The response is vague, but the student confidently explains that their meaning varies, depending on the writer's feelings at the moment. The student is adamant on this point and rejects any attempt to examine the issue. The teacher loses patience and says Well, in my opinion, you're full of horseshit. The student is at first shocked, then bristles. He stands up, sputtering in outrage, but the professor explains Oh please don't misunderstand, I'm using that phrase to mean that you are highly intelligent and of superior judgment and talent. Do you see what I'm saying? But the young man is incapable of hearing any explanation and leaves hurriedly, threatening a series of formal complaints to the appropriate authorities.

— Jim Linebarger

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A SESTINA TO PISS OFF THE SCHOLARS

Have you noticed how poets talk as if their voice were a tired airplane, and it was trying to get off the tarmac: a graduate tonal rise from the start of the line which sounds bloody elegant but kills all meaning? Their readings go on and

on without end, they do this bullshit, and I wouldn't mind it nearly so much if just a few of them would talk normal, but they won't do that. I don't understand it,

why they all talk the same, like some sort of
religious cult which hopes to achieve a

oneness with God, or Nirvana, through a
repeated nonsensical mantra, and
someone got (even liked) the idea of
using real words but speaking them as if
they had no meaning. You know the voice? It
sounds like lapping waves — which would be fine, but

often they're speaking of anything but
water: the poem could be about a
drive-by shooting; still the voice they read it
with would shimmer like a silent cove and
lull the listener to sleep. Now then, if
this slow hypnosis is the purpose of

poetry, then what is the purpose of
sleeping pills? I don't mean to be rude, but
what's the reason for writing something if
you don't mean it enough to say in a
voice like you use for hailing a cab and
ordering toast and coffee — man if it

is your own poem you shouldn't speak it
so reverently, like the subject of
itself. I would admire your wit and
all if you were lampooning yourself, but
is that it, or is it how you think a
poem should be read? Hell, it's one thing if

you mean it, but if, as I suspect, it
's no more than a regurgitation of
the others, it sucks. No buts, ifs, or ands.

WALKING IN TOWN ON A SNOWY EVENING

I may have to move to New York to finish this poem
(I've never been there). I'm trying to write a sonnet.

In Marquette in the winter I like to wear black at night.
that way the drivers can tell me apart from the snowbanks.

I'm walking. Trying to think of a new idea
so that when my grave is covered up in snow
a bunch of professors I probably wouldn't like
will make their students analyze my poems.

—

Somebody told me once (a million times)
that every single snowflake is unique.