

The Messenger

Volume 1991
Issue 1 *The Messenger, Winter 1991*

Article 18

Winter 1991

Why I Don't Write Poetry

Alan Mitchell

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Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Alan (1991) "Why I Don't Write Poetry," *The Messenger*: Vol. 1991: Iss. 1, Article 18.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol1991/iss1/18>

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Why I Don't Write Poetry

I don't write poetry because I have no rhythm. I have no sense of measurement or of too much or not enough, and I don't write poetry because I don't have enough ink to smear all my thoughts and loves across a page. Nor have I the time to pull reams from my shelves and drop them on my desk or lawn, and sit down to compose what Wordsworth did for his Abbey or Dylan did for his Hill. Neither do I have the might to push my pen against the grain, to stand it up on its tip, feeling the voice that is great without me. I will not admit that poetry is better than me and my own feeble tube of ink.

I don't write poetry because my lover is more rhythmic than I. She dactyls and hexes and stands above me, and knows of the natural beats that jump from her feet, and knows the difficulty I have with penned emotions, emotions I cannot free without her support beneath me. But she stands averse to lending or teaching me her rhythms, so I write awkwardly, stilted not by her, but by a rigid plastic.

I don't write poetry because poetry suffers glad fools who try to pen it down, who try to mix their heart's blood with ink, and fail like I would fail, because they cannot decide whether they love more the poem or its subject. I do not want to fail poetry; I do not want to fail my loves; I do not want to fail myself. I write prose because I will not fail the paragraphic structure, the rules of the semantic, the orders of Strunk & White. Three sentences, three parallels, three successes.

I don't write poetry because I never learned. I pretend instead that I am the noble writer of sublime prose, the slave or savior of the discursive style. And I can write like this for long times that run on and on, to express feelings like extended verses or enjambed lines of many words piled on top of many words, sticking, clinging together. Or fragmented ideas of mine. There is victory in such pursuits.

But my language is too often unconscious of itself, rarely palpable, rarely mute. So I continue to drag my pen over the page, knowing that to break routine is to be less than great, to be less than rhythmic, to be less than brilliant, to be less than a poet. I do not write poems because I will fail.

Alan Mitchell
RC '95