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The Art of Writing Poetry

Joan Myers

Before you attempt to write a poem you must feel the need and the desire to create. A poem is usually a highly subjective piece of art; you must feel genuine emotion so strongly that it is easy to communicate your mood to the reader through the medium of poetry. Yet you must not let emotion overbalance the design of the poem. Design should have order and beauty, qualities which are achieved through the use of meter and form.

As a creator you should approach the writing with a feeling of being in tune with the elements. A cold, grey twilight brings somber, grey-hued thoughts; a sun-filled morning creates a golden, sunlit mood. A sense of foreboding is best produced

by night, realism by day. Soak the mood into your soul; revel in it. Allow your emotions full indulgence, feel them with the whole of your being. These are moments when you can compose—small spots of time that occur sometimes frequently, more often not. At this instant you see words before you as clearly as cut crystal.

When these ideas occur, it is best to set them down before they can flee as quickly as they appeared. Many great poems have been written at such moments. Often the power of an idea awakens a composer in the still of the night as a completely worded poem flashes into the mind of a poet, formed from some previous vague, nebulous idea.

Your poetic work should not be created without inspiration. The quality of genuineness becomes strained if ideas are forced, and the whole poem becomes grotesquely disfigured with an overbearing sense of the desperate groping for words. Poetry is not, like handwriting or some other physical skill, something which can be practised until perfected. Your form and meter may be flawless, but if inspiration is lacking, the work becomes a marionette-like arrangement of words and syllables with nothing more behind it than is behind the empty stare of a puppet.

Use in your poem words which are forceful in their telling. A word which you never thought beautiful can become so in a poem. Witness the vivid imagery in Carl Sandburg's poem "Fog:"

The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over the harbor and city
on silent haunches,
and then moves on.

The beauty of his poems lies in the simplicity of the lines. It is the mark of the inexperienced poet to embellish his poem with archaic or superfluous words which detract from its dignity and simplicity. So it is with any great art whether it be poetry, song, or sculpture: simplicity of word in poetry, melody in song, line in sculpture.

The creative possibilities in poetry should offer a challenge to spur you on. There is nothing more creative, more subjective than poetry. Poetry offers every artistic gratification, for there is music in a poem and art in the pictures poetry paints. Perhaps our poems will never be ranked among those of the masters of this art, but you will find satisfaction in expressing your ideas, thoughts, and emotions through this literary form.