

A Letter To The Editor

Dear Mr. Soandso,

In response to your question: how do I use poetry in my work and everyday? I would like to say that words come easy to me. Yet I am slayed by slamming teens, who know me better than I know myself. I will sit in the comforting dark of a full auditorium and shed real, grownup, tears when confronted with their rage and their joy – which is also my own – because they are so well versed in it. They call it social justice poetry, but this is called poetic envy. They say the point is not the points, the point is the poetry, but pointed silver bullet poetics hit me right between the eyes. I try to return their gaze, but these cats are too cool for school, for old-school, like myself. Being the mother of a teen is humbling like that. Being a poetry-team mom just adds to the humiliation, as youngster's youth doesn't add up, it just makes you look old – but oh, the pride!

One night I dreamt I entered a poetry slam together with my son. The rules were such that you would pay to play by having your eyeballs slashed, a la Buñuel, as you entered

the stage. As if words would flow more freely as dark redness would flood your mind. Pour like vitreous humor from a cow's eye. Funny, not funny. It didn't occur to me, or to us, to Just. Say. No. It is not called the gift of the gap for nothing. It was an exchange: the gift of sound for the gift of vision. You don't know what you've got till it's gone; and why sing, if not for your supper and for the beauty of the world? When I reached out in the darkness to touch my daughter's hair, my hand was electrified by her blonde on blonde, like a current running from my fingertips to my visual cortex. I have been told the blind can feel color. But what is color, but names, words? And what are words but ready-mades?

Being an artist turned writer, words and images can get in each other's way. You have to pick your battles early and often: is it better to sit in the studio and think about writing or to sit at home by the keyboard and think of painting? You can try to outsmart yourself and bring your laptop to your studio, but like you can lead a horse to water but not force it to drink, you Still. Must. Wait. For. It. Of course there are times it all comes together - when words flow like watercolor and brushstrokes fall into place like syntax and grammar - but that is usually in your

mind's eye when you're singing in the shower. The residue is just hair clogged in the drain, and that, at least, is something; all you really need is an end to pull at and it will unravel from there.

The idea of ideation - that thought is manifest in material and vice versa - is what propels the whole thing forward. If this is too abstract for you, let me give you an example:

When we were younger my sister and I quite enjoyed horsing around in our backyard, with a bunch of friends from up and down the road. We would tie our blonde hair into a ponytail and put a loop of twine in our mouth. A chimeric equipage, horse and rider both, we were still kids about to learn the facts of life. It was around that same time my dad, the doctor, pulled me aside to inform me that although he considered himself a cultural Christian he did not believe in an afterlife and had no faith in an interventionist God.

Another pony girl's dad, the minister, then pulled us aside to ask if we were interested in some boxes of old hymn books? He had too many since kids in our day were now too cool for Sunday school. We enthusiastically said yes, as

you should never look a gift horse in the mouth. We put them to good use by building fences for our showjumping competition, which became instantly much more realistic, as we could now subtract scores for brushing the wall and knocking down books. It was an improvised implementation of rhythm and rhyme into our everyday and now I know from experience that God's word can take you higher, even when you are losing your religion. In a godless universe you must become your own divine creature.

Figuratively and literally.

Sincerely,

Yours.

(2015)

(4:20)