

**MANIFESTO** (written and revised (many times) beginning 2014)

Somewhere in the following essay- you will agree that the following quote (is it Mallarme) must be included: “The poet should not describe, but invoke.” Sort of like Archibald Macleish- but then- this and “The poem should not mean but be”- are ridiculous under the cold light of day. How can the poet avoid describing? Or in the Macleish poem- “meaning”. The sentences, while not BEING true, point Towards a truth.

I state this at the end of this essay- I will state it again here: **“Actually, every poet is also inviolably perfect and wonderful in his/her unique way.**

This bears repeating- because I am going to offend many in this essay!

I find in most current American poetry: no mystery, no magic- no music! I like poetry that is surprising- there is very little **surprise** in poetry these days.

Emily D , with her wry sense of humor, does not speak of Helen of Troy, but “Helen of Colorado”; her hummingbird is a startling “route of emanescense”; she wants poetry that will make your hair stand on end!

A character in Mcnurtry’s “Lonesome Dove” would say our poetry’s got no “sand”, no “grit.” Do we want “normal” poetry? Poetry “as usual”? I have never thought of that as poetry?

Read Rimbaud’s “Bateau Ivre” or the sainted Emily? Our poetry lacks electricity...charge- it’s sly. I like “charged” poetry.

**Everybody is (me included) seems to be saying “Look at me, look at me.”**- taking literary “selfies”- writing a poem about him or herself as if taking his or her photo by holding up a camera at arms length on a stick.

It is good that poetry is accessible to so many. But that has led to everybody and his/her cousin as a poet. To find the good poem is like trying to eat one fish from a school. Somewhere in the early 2000's there arrived via internet web sites like "A Poem a Day" and the "Writers' Almanac" (Garrison Keillor's tin hear for poetry despite his beautiful story telling and voice (he doesn't know what real poetry is) and daily offerings from the Poetry Foundation (Poetry Magazine). It seems the American style is to make poetry a business, and some of these venues do this because they have a lot of money or are trying to raise it.

Having to find a new poet every day- offers up loads of execrable crap, stuff from collegians, state poet laureates, mostly, as I have said above- mostly prose. Emily D is turning over in her grave at this desecration- truly defamatory of the rare and beautiful art of poetry.

Flannery O'Connor states: "Flannery O'Connor: "The idea of being a writer attracts a good many shiftless people.- those who are merely burdened with poetic feelings or afflicted with sensibility."

## **Prose**

So much poetry today is really prose- poets cut lines off a la William Carlos Williams or Ezra Pound- without those poets sense of rhythm. Just try running lines of much modern poetry together and see if it makes any difference. There's too little music; by music I mean a propulsive beat as in a musical piece. Wm Carlos Williams started a movement in American poetry when he wrote his poem:

"So much depends/ upon the red wheelbarrow/ glazed with rainwater/ beside the white chickens"

He, following Ezra Pound, did not have the measured music of iambic pentameter but he did end lines using the rhythm of natural speech- where we pause, usually at the commas or drawing of a breath as we recite.

Many persons have tried to copy him without ending the lines so effectively- and many now, seem to have no sense of where a line should end.

If you are going to chop lines off willy nilly, trying to follow the pauses of natural speech- I hope you have something to say! Williams made a point out of describing a wheelbarrow or a plum-that is saying that an object of little consequence and just sitting there in the rain is important- since he was the first- this was refreshing- THEN! The living (as of this writing) poet Gary Snyder does it well.

**Lack of passion.** Much current poetry lacks passion- is effete, demure and wan- everybody seems to be channeling Elizabeth Bishop without her wit. Poems like Mary Oliver's "The sweetness of dogs" are saccharine, not witty.

It's as if folx decided they did not want to be heroic or Miltonic or Shakespearean or Keatsian any more and will only use normal speechifying. But then having nothing to say and saying it in a mild way dressed up with a bit of cuteness- is really sad.

Look at poems in the New Yorker magazine, Poetry Mag or the American Poetry Review?- no passion. I call it "acadeemic" (to rhyme with "anemic") Most seem slicked over with a veneer of superficiality. To me the word that describes it is "smug".

**Diction preference:** I prefer poems with **juicy words**, like, kempt or incarnadine or, to quote Hart Crane- "spindrift". Wallace Stevens uses fancy words a lot.

But I also find the plain spoken William Stafford to be wonderful. He may be awfully garrulous and prosy; but he has so much to say. He is electric in that sense, although has little diction or music. **EXAMPLES OF Stafford or Dunn**

**Political poetry.** Few write political poems-Diane di Prima, Marge Piercy, Ntozake Shange and Alice Walker, they do, slam poets do. I

sent this Manifesto to Ms. Piercy- and she responded correctly that I hadn't read her poems- so I include her out of guilt and I do respect her work. Shelly was a wonderfully political poet. Most writers have not been part of a movement- they are not activists- and their writing shows that.

The poems of Langston Hughes speak so cogently of our present situation. You would think U S Poet Laureates would be political but...Robert Frost read a poem about imperialism and taking Indian land at Kennedy's inaugural.

How could any one be a "poet laureate" under trump without excoriating him?

Looking back at the "romantic" poets- one sees passion- and- in the case of Byron and Shelley- political radicalism. The "modernist" poets at the beginning of the last century, show a passion in their rebellion against the "romantic" poets-especially Browning - but now? Passion has now flown the coop. Our poetry lacks the nobility in the Augustan, Romantic , Victorian and a few modern poets.

Even fewer take on the mystical as Coleman Barks does translating and channeling Rumi.

The **great poem** The great poem- say, Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning", or in Hart Crane's and Dylan Thomas' work- has music and meaning- who tries to grab that ring now. Who tries for "grandeur"? The confessional poets- Berryman, Sexton, Lowell, Plath- they went deep.

To me, the greatest English lyric is George Chapman's "Shine out faire sunne" from "The Masque of the 12 Months". Shakespeare, move over (and Chapman may be the competitor poet in the sonnets).

attributed to George Chapman (1559? - 1634) , a song from "The Masque of the Twelve Months".

"Shine out, fair Sunn, with all your heate,  
Show all your thousand-coloured lighte!  
Black Winter freezes to his seate;  
The graie wulff howls, he does so bite;  
Crookt Age on three knees creeps the streete;

The boneless fish close quaking lies  
And eats for cold his aking feet;  
The stars in isickles arise:

Shine out, and make this winter night  
Our bewtie's Spring, our Prince of Light!"

This song sticks out like a sore thumb in the Masque- the rest of it rather plain but this bit seems surreal, as if written by Rimbaud or Dylan Thomas...one has to wonder.....does one have the time to go through all of Capman? His plays? His translation of Homer? I wish he had written more like the above!

**The issue of obscurity:**

I applaud John Assbery (sp) for trying to make something new- but his thoughts are such gibberish, it doesn't "light up". He's a rebel without paws, or a rebel without a clawse?

And still I have warmed to Ashbery- his use of the throwaway, casual phrase- his desire to epater le bourgeoisie- his humor. He's very Heraclitus with the theme of impermanence- and yet never seems to go deeper- always seems clichéd, has no poetic diction. In theme, reminds of Frost! Besides, he went to a terrible prep school- Deerfield!! Basically, he writes in prose- not verse.

The way he plays with meaning is impressive- his awards cast doubt on all prizes. He is a , like Warhol, creation of the N Y critics,

**Poets as persons:** Don't get me wrong – I love poets as persons.

Lest you think I am too harsh- I like Gilbert (rip) Snyder, Wilbur (rip) , Ryan, Howe, Dugan (rip;), Matthews (rip), Stafford (rip), some of Delmore Schwartz, (We poets end in sadness? Not necessarily), Padgett and Knott (rip) Both William Stafford and Stephen Dunn write rather prosely- but they have so much to say, it doesn't matter.

As I write this, Billy Collins and Mary Oliver are America's most popular poets. Collins deservedly- Oliver- a lightweight, one note pony. I know it sounds sexist, and I don't mind the feminine touch-the observation of small matters- but the number of state laureates that are "Dear Diary" women just seem too ordinary? (See critic Logan on Oliver, or Dove, or Gluck)

Jackk Gilbert and Robert Bly (see two letters below) are my favorite moderns since the last great vatic poets Plath or Lowell. (I got instructive letters from Gilbert and Robert Bly) . I liked Merwin's early poem "Drunk in the Furnace" but he seems to have dried up. Wilbur is always exciting.

**Risks** I realize sending this out I may not endear myself for future publication- these are sweeping statements- if it does not apply to you- you may excuse yourself (we will meet soon)

Then too it's partly sour grapes and jealousy because I do not get published- if I did I'd probably change my tune and scratch bax with the rest of them. How about a prize for Dave?

And one more thing- you can teach about poetry but you cannot teach IT! (Of course Bill Knott taught for 25 years at Emerson College). (Gotta make a living somehow).

I will not be giving "workshops" on the "poetic experience".

**Readings:** Something about poetry readings also is to me, a poet, annoying- I know it's ego affirming - but poetry is the shyest and most reclusive of the arts- best discovered on a page- like finding an orchid in the woods. To have some one, like myself, bleating/ blatting it into your face? Poetry readings, and I've organized at least 6 and read in at least 20, are pretty boring. Unless it's an interesting poet. At many readings I've been to, the audience sits in rapt, stuporous silence (what was that poem about?)

**Awards** I love the great outlaws- who did not give a shit about publication- Dickinson (see her poem “Publication”) , Rimbaud. People misunderstood or unrecognized- as in “he died a pauper”. Awards are almost universally suspect.

Was it the French composer Satie? Who said “It was good that he refused the award- but that he received the award in the first place? That is what was disgraceful!! Touche.

The association of poetry with money is particularly odious. O yeh- I’d have to refuse the money.(???) (dave fantasizes winning a money prize. Leave it to amurika to turn poetry into a business- a “Poem a Day” Writers’ Almanac or Poetry Foundation and Magazine production line. Poetry is NOT an industry. Poetry is too special for that.

I can’t say any reading ever inspired me except if I’m reading or that one at the 92<sup>nd</sup> St Y with Auden and Moore. Jack Gilbert read at Goucher College, as well Seamus Heany- and those were two good readings. Maybe Alan Ginsberg reading at the Md Institute College of Art ( Joe Carderelli organized exciting readings there, concentrating on beat poets).

A personal note: By 2014 I had all but abandoned poetry- naturally because I was working on my memoir and prose, but also seemed to be somewhat running out of juice (old age) I contemplated turning down any offers for publication, at least as to poetry. But then, I got no offers (lol).

Of course I don’t think I *could ever* abandon poetry!!!!!! I actually LOVE poetry! Just not the poetry I see.

**Here’s a poem a day?** Somewhere in the early 20 teens there arrived via internet hideous web sites like “:A Poem a Day” and the Writers’ Almanac and Poetry Daily (as if poetry was a car show room) .Garrison Keillor’s tin hear for poetry despite his beautiful story telling and voice (he doesn’t know what real poetry is) and daily offerings from the Poetry Foundation (Poetry Magazine)- is, similarly, in the American style of making poetry a business and at the rate of having to find a new (or classic) poet every day-

offering up loads of execrable crap, stuff from collegians, state poet laureates, mostly, as I have said above- mostly prose. Emily D is turning over in her grave at this desecration- truly defamatory of the rare and beautiful art of poetry.

**Response from poet Allen Itz (a friend who publishes an ezine “Here and Now” in Texas- has published several of my poems AND this Manifesto) :**

“Aa poem a day forum, i've done over 3,000 consecutive days. good poetry is great when it happens, but the objective is greater than that. the objective is learning the craft and discipline of writing, doing it every day, fulfilling the purpose and job of writers which is to write. too many "poets" I know have been writing the same damn poem for 20 years. i consider them failures. you should try the poem a day sometime, dave. perhaps you'll be less judgemental of what everyone else does, perhaps even find a grander definition of poetry than that cramped, academic, passionless thing you follow now.

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[David Eberhardt](#) "cramped, academic and passionless"- chuckles- that's a keeper- am adding to my manifesto (have collected many fine? comments- how many people do you see who even care abt poetry? i don't

[David Eberhardt](#) i am glad to get any response- how abt yu? even the negative means some one cares abt poetry- i think yr comment was a bit more negative than it needed to be- hurling insults like throwing up

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[David Eberhardt](#) don't u think i have a point tho? poetry should be, in part, a craft- not just barf- i actually read a poem a day and the writers almanac and poetry foundation- they have set the bar so low- are they in it for the money? there's no standards- look at ted kooser's american life in poetry- read the poems? they are mostly prose- just becuz you scribble stuff all the time does not make you a poet

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[Allen Itz](#) write a poem a day and you will find the good ones. but first you have to set your ego aside, accept that you will write a lot of bad poems and that from that collection of bad poems an occasional good one will appear. also understand that the pas...[See More](#)

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**Dave replies? My poetry takes longer than a day to write- I can't tolerate dreck. A pome a day? Don't have that much to say!!**





[Allen Itz](#) i enjoy receiving comments, but i don't change anything in response to them. i do what i do.

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[Allen Itz](#) all above is as a writer, as a reader i want a narrative that explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly tells a human story. i don't care about flash, or even much about writerly talent. i've read whole series by really terrible writers who grab me with their characters and their stories. Harold Robbins comes to mind.

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[David Eberhardt](#) a low bar in my book- as a contrarian, you must find fault- "if you chase the passion...every poem is a good one"????me i value readers and the immortality that is surely mine (lol)

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[Allen Itz](#) you continue to see determinations of good or bad as the province of the reader. but everything that serves its purpose is good. if the purpose of a poem is to serve the creative passion of the writer and that passion is served then it is good in the view of the only critic that counts, the writer.

There being no objective standard for good or bad in poetry, we must choose whose subjective opinion we will count on. i give precedence to the opinion of the creator, with the understanding that no opinion has any great importance or relevance to anyone but the the one who proclaims it.

My reply- the “sublime” as in Brahms Second Piano Concerto or J W Turner- it’s just a preference.

**Actually, every poet is also inviolably perfect and wonderful in his/her unique way.**

### **Postscript**

Sometimes I wonder if this screed isn’t written about my own verse? Well, not really. I have generally followed my likes, not dislikes.

Often I try to figure out why I am not published more widely. I think editors may dislike my verse as old fashioned- maybe too macho, too monumental, of too obscure and inaccessible?

Has any one actually asked for my verse? True it has been accepted by a few reviews and on line zines.

### **Critics:**

Few write about poetry with a critical eye- it seems forbidden- but wouldn't it be fun to have a dialogue about what we like or dislike?

The critics: I enjoy William Logan and Clive James and James Wilson (see letters below from Logan and Wilson).

In the horrible criticism department, in the Oct. 19 issue of the New Yorker- a review of poet, Robin Lewis by Dan Chiasson: "Poems can provide the effaced interiority of these caricatures, but also the backlog of silenced persons is daunting and the history is by no means safely concluded"

A bit of Ms Lewis' poetry is quoted: "And then you were fourteen, and you had grown/a glorious steel cock under your skirt."

I see Emily retching/recoiling- how entirely dreadful?

Mallarme is quoted in Yvor Winters, "On Modern Poetry": "The pure work implies the elocutory disappearance of the poet, who cedes the initiative to the words, mobilized through the shock of their inequality; they light each other with reciprocal reflections like a virtual train of fires upon jewels, replacing the respiration perceptible in the lyric inspiration of former times or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase".

And do we see any of this in current poetry? Verrrry little!!!!!!! (Of course the Mallarme is over the top rhetoric- just fairly incomprehensible!(only the French) ) (“**And the farmer took another load away**”)

**Responses to my “Manifesto” so far- best one first: (b the first on yr block)**



[David Taylor Nielsen](#)

10:07am Oct 17

I take no offense. My best poems are about underwear, but there is no subject that is closer to me. ;)

William Logan-I have received several comments from this great critic:



[William Logan](#)

3:33pm Jun 21

Thanks, Dave. I disagree with little that you say, but among those things: (1) I wouldn't call Bly or Oliver or Coillins "treasures"--to me the last two are lightweights; (2) Every generation for the past six or eight has thought that the following generation was composing prose (or, to make this more nuanced, that what they were writing wasn't poetry, in which case we can go back a few centuries; (3) Pound has a fine ear for rhythm, and I'm surprised that you can't hear it; but, yes, we seem to be in a goofball time, where attitude is more important than content. Still, I admire poets like Michael Hofmann, Henri Cole, Angle Mlinko, Gjertrud Schnackenberg (the first three books, and I return to Hecht, to Merrill, to Justice, to Heaney, among others. / Cheers, Wm

James M Wilson:  
Dear David,

Thanks for sharing this and for the kind notice on amazon.com, which I just noticed after I sat down to write you.

There aren't many of us who care about poetry, and unfortunately fewer people care about poetry than write and publish it. I hope someday it will become once more a popular and civilizing art, where free men will go to learn the truth about what it means to be human.

I do think, in partial departure from your position, that rediscovering poetry as an occasion for refined rhetoric and language rather than as the burning locus for the expression of our passions would advance this goal. As Jacques Maritain writes, art that sets out to affect us is part of the great lie. Art that seeks to manifest the well made, that's something we all can get behind -- in truth!

Following from Aaron Fagan whose poem I had criticized for being prose- I need to take his words to heart.

“I welcome criticism when it is clear and well-reasoned. Logan is a brilliant critic. I only wish I could feel as strongly about his poems.

Unlike Logan's prose, your manifesto is lazy: clouded, confused, and cliched. The poor grammar, typos, and shifting trains (to nowhere) of thought make the (at times) engaging ideas impossible to follow or fully appreciate, which I wish I could. So you might consider paying less attention to my side of the street and a little more to your own.”

-----  
Aaron Fagan  
[aaronfagan.com](http://aaronfagan.com)

[Christopher T. George](#) You're a Facebook poetry vandal,  
David. Keep up the good work. grin emoticon

Letter to NY Times Sunday Boor Review of Feb, 2005- “Dull Poets Society:

What has happened to American poetry? “Critics” write nonsense about nonsense. Not graceful Edward Lear nonsense. But turgid, intellectualized, affected nonsense.” (DE see Ashbery or Rae Armantrout)

Eric McHenry takes four dull poets, judging from the lines he quotes, and finds them memorable.

“Sunlight, the language/ of melanocytes. Diglossic/ skin chromatic kin. Come/ together reluctant collage” he cites as “terrific” in a typical selection. Will anyone among the poet’s few hundred (DE p;robably more like 15) readers remember this 10 min utes after reading it? Will Mchenry remember it in a few months?

Our poetic establishment is in the grips of fraud or delusion. Whistleblowers are needed.’

Richard Greene

[October 26, 2015 at 3:02 pm](#)

From: “Dan Cuddy”

“I think what you need at the beginning of the Manifesto are examples of poems that you find to be prose. It ruffles feathers but maybe 3 examples of what you consider inferior poems. Maybe pair each of the inferior poems with one that you do admire. Dan  
· thanx – there are so many examples i could choose- just abt every day from the writers almanac or the poetry foundation- but yes- good idea