

What about Your Evers?

For a while now, I've been thinking about the never to be understood nature of a poetry legacy. And, I've been befuddled and a touch beguiled as well by legacy's first cousins - renown, greatness, accolade, fame. I sometimes wonder aloud: For poets, what are these golds? Are they really holy grails, and if so, why? They seem to capture and rule us so. Why do they enthrall, tempt and tease? How come we are so daunted and ruled by their ever-present haunt? And why, if the special longevity implied by legacy is so powerful, do we rarely if ever discuss it?

But even before and beyond the whys, there are the stark realities, the most sobering being such very low odds of achieving longterm notice. In fact, there's lots to be said for simply giving up. Why bother when such a huge number of poets are vying for page space? Is it even possible any more to leave behind a lasting poetry shimmer or trail? Or, said slightly differently, the chances of enjoying a legacy seems to be something that our forebears – with fewer peers – had a much greater crack at than we do today.

There are also the how questions. How is a poetry legacy achieved? How should it be built -- deliberately, accidentally, forcefully, shyly, constantly, unapologetically -- or at all? Should its achievement be something to strive, live or die for over a lifetime of writing? Or, is building a legacy best done by neglect? Is the best way to ensure lasting recognition to never strive for or care about it? Ultimately, is the best way to live forever in the poetry pantheon to die blazingly young?

Our evers are foggy things; questions abound about poetic monuments. But, while this piece is fated to wonder more than arrive, the wander may useful to those of us who care to explore.

So here are a few more questions that I've never heard discussed in a poetry group. My apologies (but not really) if they are awkward or uncomfortable for you.

Is a focus on legacy something that's of interest to you as a poet? Has it become more or less of an urge with your passing years? If it isn't of concern to you, can you describe why it's not -- perhaps by describing the other factors that motivate you to write? If legacy *is* of interest, how does that interest/passion influence what you do as a poet -- how you focus your work, how you present it, how you share it, curate it, and

protect it? And beyond writing compelling poetry, do you consciously, intentionally and deliberately set your mind to fostering your legacy?

Speaking of fostering, are there formulaic or more informal ways to up the odds that your poetry will outlive you? Does appearance in certain journals or at certain readings give your work a better chance at a longer run? Or, is your process entirely and whimsically cavalier, based purely upon chance and upon the wonderfully and cruelly unpredictable fates?

Outside of all this, maybe the notion of legacy bores you or is distasteful. If so, why? Is the notion of legacy too troublesome, not worth the bother? Or are you shy about your work, not comfortable promoting or boasting about it? Do you shun limelight? Are you more trusting of the future's assessment than of today's?

Finally, one way to consider the nature of legacy is to look to those poets who you believe have a grand one. Who among our writing ancestors became venerated icons, and why? Were they risk takers, maybe prophets? Did they speak for or ignore their times? Were they popular while living, and if so did such fame endure or diminish with time? Did

they speak up for the otherwise unheard? Did they blaze a new syntax? Were they self-promoters? Looking back over our shoulders is surely one way to view legacy.

Looking ahead is as well. It's true: Carving out a niche isn't easy and this fast and shrinking world super-challenges the very notion of uniqueness. But, a future swirly with intensity and prospect also offers buckets of yet to be imagined prompts and cajoles. Surely, there will always be space for – and a need for -- legacy-charmed poets.

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- Hiram Larew