

THE MONTH FOR POETIC LICENSES

How can we celebrate National Poetry Month in April? Let us count the ways.

First, there's the popular multi-tasking approach. As you wait at an intersection, recite a half-remembered line or two from high school English class. "So much depends upon the red light changing" can be soothing. And "Whose car this is, I think I know; but he's inside so here I go" can be invigorating.

Or opt for still greater efficiency. As you speed walk "lonely as a cloud" or "go gentle into that good night" for a movie, simply do this: Stop for 30 seconds and recall that poetry exists. Prove this by naming three poets (living and dead both count).

There, your civic duty is done, and you didn't miss a workout – or even the previews.

Or honor National Poetry Month by doing what so many do, and compose a few lines yourself. It's a well-known fact that more people write the stuff than read it, so why be left out?

On the other hand, reading other people's poems is also allowed in April.

Starting May 1, you're off the hook. We all are, from sea to shining sea.

Poetry is supposed to be like bread, for everyone. But if it's so essential, how come it's "ode" no more than a month of the year? Why do we avoid it otherwise?

Actually, there are some good reasons why regular, normal people steer clear of it. Poetry has become downright confusing. Literary leaders, listen up. Explain this: Why doesn't Yeats rhyme with Keats? They're both poets, aren't they?

And if Stevie Smith is really a girl, how do we know that Billy Collins isn't?

Plus, is it true that when the raven spoke, he actually said, "Whatever," but when Poe quothed him, he took poetic license? Speaking of which, are you aware of the shocking numbers

of poets who are practicing without one?

Where are the literary police when we need them? They could at least send a meter maid (maybe a couplet of them).

And isn't it time to loosen up with those definitions? For example, if a villanelle were a female villain, you'd get a lot more readers. And dump that term, blank verse. Sure, you lure people in with it, but then they're completely disheartened when they find all those words on the page.

And one more thing: What's with this April fixation – poem after poem moaning about one month? Has this ever been analyzed? Have

poets been offered any help? Perhaps a fund could be set up to pack them all off to a fun-filled spa for 30 days – teach our poets to relax, lighten up, and take the angst out of April. Maybe Hallmark could sponsor it.

Until the above concerns have been addressed, I can guarantee that no one is going to even think about poems the other 11 months of the year.

However, I offer a one-step solution. English teachers of America, try this: Forgo all other poetic forms and teach the limerick. Period. The limerick is "poetry lite." It's reliable, easy, democratic, and encourages convivial creativity, not that secretive hide-it-in-a-drawer nonsense.

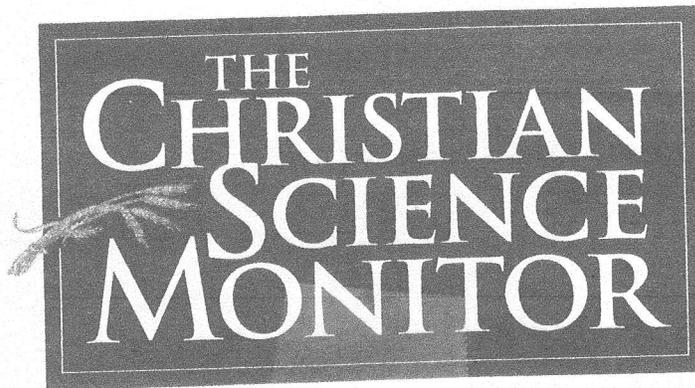
Here's one to get you started:

There is one spring month set aside
To honor the poems far and wide
That, though nobody reads,
Everyone still agrees
We'd be lesser if we were denied.

Hey, it could be verse. And anyway, now it's your turn. Try a slam-dunk limerick. But hurry, these April days are slouching toward 30 at a rapid pace.

Marya Smith

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THE
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*'To injure no man,
but to bless all mankind'*

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