

You Are a Poet

His (Donald Hall's) idea is that form in poetry involves three kinds of fun (which he calls sensualities), all linked to the earliest weeks of our life. The first is the baby's enjoyment of sounds, meaningless or not, which in the baby could be called mouth-fun or mouth-sensuality, and which in Milton becomes vast sonorities of vowels and consonants. The second sort of fun we see in the baby's kicking motions, especially when the baby is glad, and we could call that leg fun or leg sensuality, which continues as the adult's delight in dancing, and which informs those strong beats we notice in every line of Yeats. The third sort of fun is the infantile pleasure of appearance-disappearance. A baby sees its mother's face vanish, and loves to see it reappear again, and vanish and reappear. That is very like the way the sound in a rhymed poem disappears, and then suddenly reappears again at the very last moment. Such sensuality could be called in the baby the pleasures of peekaboo, or hiding and finding; and in adults it becomes the delight in rhyme and internal rhyme that we notice in every line of Marvell.

Donald Hall suggests that whenever we feel a given poem has "form," we are actually registering the presence of one or more of these forms of infantile fun.

Robert Bly in American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity (282-283)

Born to mouth-fun, leg-fun, peekaboo. You are a poet. Are you alive? Are you listening? Are you speaking? You are a poet.

Speaker's meanings, new arrangements of words in fresh contexts that shift the meanings of words in the very instant we are speaking them, are forthcoming each day from each and every one of us. Blessed be. And sometimes more poetry comes from the afflicted, the retarded, the oppressed, the children, the 'innocent' than comes from the more privileged and sophisticated adults because the privileged think too much, think too much of themselves, and may be afraid to make a mistake.

To be the poet that you are, to be all the poet you can be, may be easier than being a musician because anything you chose to speak or put on the page can be a poem if it establishes some kind of groove, whereas musicians can "solo" but almost always thrive and groove best on collaboration with other musicians to grow and change and co-evolve. Poetry can have its feedback loops and eventually a self-confident poet may lose confidence and interest if no one at all is taking in their communications and sending back thank you notes. But Emily Dickenson kept most of her poems in a drawer and didn't seem to require acclaim to persist. Tom Hardy wrote novels when no one would publish his poems, but kept writing poems and when he had enough money started publishing them 30 years later. Who knows how many Toms and Emilys are out there stashing unique poems away for posterity.

I think it will help children, and anyone writing poetry for the first time, to know that all they have to do is get out of their own way, i.e. be a poet. The following chapters each say in a different way: each person is a poet; be who you are.