

AN EDITOR SPEAKS . . .**MADelyn EASTLUND DISCUSSES POETRY, TITLES AND RULES**

Madelyn Eastlund, editor of *STROPHEs*, newsletter of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, is past president of NFSPS. She is a widely published award-winning poet and editor-publisher of *Poet's Forum* and *Harp Strings Poetry Journal*. She lives in Beverly Hills, Fla. "Lyn" is a member of Gingerbread Poets chapter of Florida State Poetry Association. Highlights of her views about titles are excerpted here from our recent e-mail survey.

When I get poems that are totally in capitals, if the poem is chosen for Harp-Strings Poetry Journal I only capitalize each first letter. To me, a title in all capitals SHOUTS! Takes center stage. I prefer the poem to take center stage. However, if it is the poet's style to use a phrase as the title and only use a capital for first letter of the first word, I respect that "style."

There isn't any rule on how to title. Why should there be? That's the poet's prerogative. . . . One of my favorite contemporary poets whom I enjoy publishing only capitalizes the first letter of the first word. As an editor what interests me is the poem. Is it a good poem? Do I want to read it again—and again? No matter how good a title, and no matter how the title is set up, if the content of the poem isn't worth publishing or giving a contest award—what good is a "perfect title" set up?

"The title isn't a quote."

I don't use quote marks when publishing a poem even if the author had the title in quotes. The title isn't a quote. It's the name given the poem. . . . There are those that still think, by the way, that when you write in traditional forms (such as the sonnet) you "must" capitalize every line. There are others that say, *writing in the 21st century we are modern poets and it is WRONG to capitalize every line*. Have you read Ted Kooser's *The Poetry Home Repair Manual*? It's an easy read—very conversational in tone—but more—he doesn't teach form—he doesn't teach "rules"—he shares some downright good common sense. . . . Well. . . I am quoting (I highlighted it in Kooser's book): *"Part of the joy of writing, or of practicing any art, comes from the freedom to choose."* As I read, as a retired creative writing teacher, I kept nodding as he commented on many things I also commented on to my students—just common sense.

He has a companion book that I am reading right now, *Writing Brave and Free*. . . it has a section "Rules?... We Don't Need no Stinkin' Rules!" I like this quote: *"Writing is a capacious activity that allows for a lot of individuality. Nobody's wrong, and nobody is necessarily right."* . . . I love this quote: *"What you may take for rules are really some tools."*

Let's free ourselves of petty little rules. . . . Spend the time writing a poem that will take center stage.

More about Madelyn Eastlund's publications can be found in the "Recommended Reading" section of this newsletter

Bard Talk: What Might Shakespeare Say about the Verb 'TO BE'?

An interesting point I discovered--or maybe it was human error by a brilliant editor--deals with the verb "To Be" as William H. Marshall, professor of English at University of Pennsylvania, used it in the index of "The Major English Romantic Poets" [Washington Square Press, 1973]. When using this literary sacred cow verb in titles by the major Romantic Poets George Gordon, Lord Byron [1788-1824], Samuel Taylor Coleridge [1772-1834], John Keats [1795-1821], Percy Bysshe Shelley [1792-1822] and William Wordsworth [1770-1850], variations appeared with a capital first letter and lower case first letter. For example, in these titles I have underlined the verb "to be" as its various forms appeared:

It Is a Beauteous Evening [Wordsworth]
When I Have Fears that I May Cease To Be [Keats]
Great Men have been Among Us [Wordsworth]

Perhaps Shakespeare, whom I paraphrase here, was dangling the answer like a carrot before a horse when he penned this immortal line: To Be or not to be--that Is [or is it *is, are, was, were, has been, have been, will be, shall be, might be or should be?*] the question! **WSP**

Bardlet Talk: Ask Yvonne Nunn, Dean of Cyber-College of Online Poetry

Q, As a new student in one of your online poetry classes, what advice might I get from you that will help me start writing award-winning poems instantly?

A. Avoid the use of verbs that end in "ing" if you possibly can, and omit adverbs ending in "ly."

(Yvonne Nunn has taught numerous award-winning poets in her online "Bardlets" classes, including Jeanette Oestermeyer, Pissonneteer, Page 2, and Helen E. Rilling, Story Stanza Prose Award, Page 3. For information about upcoming online poetry classes, or to ask questions for Bardlet Talk, contact Dean Yvonne Nunn at ybyrdnunn@yahoo.com

