Is literature “useful”?  


My first reaction: What a stupid question!  
On further review, the ruling on the field stands: It’s a stupid question!  
Is a sunrise “useful”?  
Is a baby’s first smile or love’s first kiss “useful”?  
Kirsch and Stevens pretty much agreed with me, although they put it much more eloquently if less succinctly (they may be getting paid by the column inch).  

“To reduce literature to its usefulness is to miss the sheer pleasure of word and sound that makes it literature in the first place,” Kirsch notes. Stevens goes a step further: “Literature may not be in a strict sense useful—may even, by its nature, mock usefulness as a category.”  

It’s “as useless as a spun sugar snowflake,” she says, “and as practical as a Swiss Army Knife.”  
Reading good stuff has enhanced, enriched, and illuminated my journey through life. Does that feed the bulldog? Nope. Useless, then, by utilitarian standards.  

But it, in Kirsch’s words, literature equips us to live “the second life of inwardness and imagination.” He goes on: “For those who do not believe in the reality of that second life, no amount of insisting on the usefulness of literature will justify it; for those who live it, no such insisting is necessary.”  
I’ll give Stevens the last word: “I suspect none of us storytelling apes would survive for long without it.”  

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*60’6” FROM HOME  
MARSHALL J. COOK  
EDITOR-IN-COACH  

In this issue  
War and poetry  
Nixies and Nokkens  
Godzilla  
A singing mockingbird (maybe)  
Authorpreneurship  
A craic o’ Irish  
Lily (staff neptis)  
Lily (honorary staff pupadoodle)  
Double-dactyl duck doggerel  
Dumbo  
and so much more!*
Is there anyone who doesn’t know who wrote *To Kill A Mockingbird*—and that it’s Harper Lee’s only novel, which won a Pulitzer Prize, and that since that time Lee has been as reclusive as Boo Radley, her memorable character?

Lee once said that people seem to think she’s Scout Finch, but she’s actually Boo Radley. Over the years she turned down all interviews with a succinct reply: “No,” or, “Hell, no.” But nothing stopped people from writing about her. I’ve done so a time or two.

A few years back, it appeared that Monroeville, Alabama’s, own Boo Radley had come out of hiding, at least in print. Marja Mills, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, unexpectedly gained access to first Alice Lee, and then Nelle Harper (her given name). Mills says she earned the sisters’ friendship and trust and agreed that certain information would be off the record. She wrote an article about them, followed by her memoir, *The Mockingbird Next Door*, this last summer.

Having always admired Lee’s propensity for privacy, this memoir seemed like fiction to me, that Mills had imagined a relationship with the author. Nelle Harper knocks on the backdoor and calls, “Woo, hoo,” in a raspy voice (cigarettes and booze). Or she telephones asking, “Are you pouring, Hon?”

But the shared meals, fishing in a private place, and trips to the laundromat were real.

Wait a minute—maybe they were real but were supposed to remain private. In a letter made public shortly after the book’s release, Harper Lee stated that she never authorized Mills to reveal anything about her private life.

“Rest assured, as long as I am alive any book purporting to be with my cooperation is a falsehood,” she stated, adding that when the reporter showed up in Monroeville, Lee soon discovered her mission. “I immediately cut off contact with Miss Mills, leaving town whenever she headed this way.”

However, a close friend of the sisters says that Nelle might feel that way now but did not at the time. He witnessed Nelle insisting that certain personal things be on the record, that she wanted to clear up myths and speculation about her and her family. He believes someone later advised her to oppose the book. Another friend believes it was Alice who wanted the family story told, not Nelle Harper.

Mills states that both sisters gave permission; Penguin Books stands by the author. Attached to the publisher’s statement was a letter from Alice Lee written in May 2011, shortly after Nelle Harper’s first repudiation of the book. Alice wrote: “Poor Nelle Harper can’t see and can’t hear and will sign anything put before her by anyone in whom she has confidence. Now she has no memory of the incident.”

Harper Lee referred to this same letter in her statement, pointing out that Alice was 100-years-old when she wrote it. Meaning, it seems, that Alice didn’t know what she was saying.

Sadly, that might be true for both women. Felled by a stroke in 2007, Nelle Harper, now 88, has hearing loss and macular degeneration. She and Alice, 103, reside in separate assisted living facilities.

Harper Lee will pass from this life, but her name and her one novel are immortal. As Atticus Finch told his children, “It’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”
Top Ten Reasons Why Golf Is Better Than Sex...
Thanks to Barry Bishop

#10... A below par performance is considered damn good.
#09... You can stop in the middle and have a cheeseburger and a couple of beers.
#08... It's much easier to find the sweet spot.
#07... Foursomes are encouraged.
#06... You can still make money doing it as a senior.
#05... Three times a day is possible.
#04... Your partner doesn't hire a lawyer if you play with someone else.
#03... If you live in Florida, you can do it almost every day.
#02... You don't have to cuddle with your partner when you're finished.

And the **NUMBER ONE** reason why golf is better than sex.....
#01... When your equipment gets old you can replace it!
The Irish Book and Music Celebration filled the Irish American Heritage Center (IAHC) in Chicago the first weekend of October. I was fortunate to be one of 17 authors invited to participate. I sold books, make a presentation, and joined an author’s panel.

My wife and I arrived in time to set up our table on the second floor of the IAHC and meet other authors.

IBAM commissioned a young Irish artist, Barry Finnegan, to create a drawing during the Celebration. He specializes in large charcoal drawings of faces. He displayed drawings of Willie Nelson and Robin Williams completed prior to the event. For the IBAM celebration, with a theme of legends, he drew an amazing portrait of Samuel Becket.

My table was right next to the entrance to the gallery, which meant a lot of traffic.

Saturday afternoon I made a presentation about my novel, *Murphy’s Troubles*, and ‘authorpreneurship’ which I define as the art of attracting readers.

One of the other authors selling books on the second floor suggested I take a handful of books with me to the presentation and let attendees know I had some available for sale and signing. After my presentation I sold every book I brought with me and had to send one customer to my table to purchase another.

Mid-afternoon on Saturday I participated on an author’s panel with Frank Delaney, a professor of Irish History from DePaul University, and Colum Kenny, Professor of Communications at Dublin City University. I tried hard not to be intimidated by the prestigious panel members.

I was shocked when Frank Delaney agreed with one of my comments and expanded on it. It was both intellectually stimulating and a pleasure to participate on the panel.

On Sunday, I was waiting to listen to Frank Delaney’s presentation on why reading James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is good for you. He came and stood next to me and said he was pleased that I read a small quote from Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* during the author’s panel. He said he knew McCourt and is still friends with his wife, who lives near him in Connecticut. His brief comment has made a lasting impression on me. He could have ignored me standing in the back of the room, but he didn’t.

My book received a rave review by Frank West in the October edition of the *Irish American News*, which was distributed free on Saturday at the Celebration. The timing couldn’t have been more propitious and I’m certain influenced book sales. I also placed copies of my book review from *Inkspots* on the table for customers to read.

I learned that people will pick up the review and read it before picking up the book to read the blurb. Watching this behavior proved to me that people select what to read/purchase by what others recommend more than by their own interest in the book. This is interesting psychology of an innately social species.

I made two excellent contacts. First I was invited to return to Chicago and make a presentation to the IAHC Great Irish Book Club, which is scheduled to read *Murphy’s Troubles* in 2015. I was also invited for a TV interview with Avila Book Talk, an independently produced TV program of author interviews.

Finally, I met a number of wonderful authors who shared their experience of various author events. I’ve learned that in many ways we are modern day bards, traveling from event to event, sharing our work and the most extraordinary lifestyle in the world.

Cliff Carlson, IBAM Celebration organizer, invited me back for the 2015 event—I’ll be there!
Thoughts on government

Thanks to Barry Bishop

In my many years I have come to a conclusion that one useless man is a shame, two is a law firm, and three or more is a government.

John Adams

A government that robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul.

George Bernard Shaw

Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.

P.J. O'Rourke

I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts.

Will Rogers

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you.

Pericles (430 B.C.)

No man's life, liberty, or property is safe while the legislature is in session.

Mark Twain (1866)

The government is like a baby's alimentary canal, with a happy appetite at one end and no responsibility at the other.

Ronald Reagan

The only difference between a tax man and a taxidermist is that the taxidermist leaves the skin.

Mark Twain

We hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office.

Aesop
When I was pretty young, my dad introduced me to the Godzilla films, my first film series. I love this franchise to this day.

On November 3rd, which happens to be my birthday, the film that started it all, Gojira, will celebrate its 60th anniversary. The film was released in Japan just nine years after the bombing of Hiroshima. A movie monster icon was born, a giant radioactive lizard with dorsal fin spikes, scorching atomic breath, and a roar made by scraping a glove on a double bass.

The film is still scary all these years later.

More than a monster movie, Gojira is also a metaphor for the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima. Godzilla is not the hero in this film, as he came to be for the rest of the series. He causes massive death and destruction. To think that it's a man in a suit; The special effects make you forget you're watching a man in a monster suit.

The Godzilla franchise is divided into three series. The first era, the Showa series, ran from 1954 to 1975. The second film, Godzilla Raids Again, saw Godzilla face Anguirus, the first of many monsters he would fight. In the third film, the King of the Monsters faced King Kong in one of the best films in the Showa series. The climactic fight is fun and well done, and the plot with the humans isn't boring, as is the case with a lot of the Godzillla films. The human characters aren't always interesting in Kaiju (Japanese for giant monster) films; the best parts are the monsters, the reason we watch Kaiju films.

The Showa series also brought us allies of Godzilla, such as the giant Pterodactyl-like monster, Rodan, and Mothra, who both had films of their own as well. The series also introduced us to Godzilla's arch rival and one of his best opponents, King Ghidorah. Other notable enemies include Gigan, Mechagodzilla, my favorite of Godzilla's enemies, Hedorah, and Megalon.

As the series progressed, it got a bit sillier and had a overall different tone from the original film. It got too silly in my pick for the worst Godzilla movie, All Monsters Attack, starring a kid who dreams of being on Monster island and befriends Godzilla's son, Minilla, who talks in the dream sequences. Made mostly of stock footage from the other films, this one is stupid and childish.

My favorite show, Mystery Science Theater 3000, riffed two of the Showa films, Godzilla Vs. Megalon and Godzilla Vs. The Sea Monster, two great episodes of the show, because the series had gotten pretty silly at that point. One of my favorite Godzilla memories is watching Godzilla Vs. Megalon on VHS with my dad and seeing Godzilla slide on his tail to kick Megalon and laughing so hard at it.

The second era, the Hensei series, ran from 1984 to 1995. The Return of Godzilla was a sequel to the original film, ignoring the continuity of the other films. This era recaptures the dark tone of the original film, showing Godzilla as both a force of destruction while being the hero.

He faces some really cool enemies in this era, such as Biollante, Battra, SpaceGodzilla and Destoryah, who was the last enemy Godzilla fought in this series. In Godzilla Vs. Destoryah, Godzilla dies. It was hard for me to believe that one of my childhood heroes had died.

Three years after Godzilla Vs. Destoryah, Tristar Pictures released an American Godzilla film, one of the worst movies I have ever seen. Matthew Broderick does not work as the lead, Godzilla looks like a giant iguana, the effects are awful, it's directed by one of my least favorite directors, Roland Emmerich, and it has none of the elements that make Godzilla special.

In one of the later Japanese Godzilla films, they refer to the American Godzilla as ‘Zilla,’ saying that it wasn't even Godzilla. I think that fits well.

The Big Lizard continues, next page
The third era, the Millenium series, running from 1999 to 2004, saw Godzilla return from the dead. It's my least favorite of the three eras. While I really like *Godzilla 2000*, the first Godzilla film I saw in the theater, the other films from this era fall flat for the most part. *Godzilla: Final Wars* remains one of the series’ weakest films. Godzilla faces almost all of his foes. It should be fun, but it gets boring, because the tedious human plot is mostly action as well.

This year had another American Godzilla film, and luckily, it's a lot better than the Roland Emmerich movie. The acting is pretty good, the effects are fantastic, the climactic battle is massive and epic, and Godzilla looks really good, especially considering that this is the first time he has been completely CGI and not a guy in a rubber suit.

Many have complained about Godzilla wasn’t in the film much, but I think that's what makes it really good, because when we get to see the King of the Monsters, it's an event. The MUTOs are some cool enemies as well. It probably won't make my top 10 movies of the year, but it makes me very happy as a Godzilla fan. It's a good tribute to my favorite movie monster.

Happy 60th Anniversary, Godzilla!

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Extra Innings #61

Madison, Wisconsin November, 2014

This month’s All-Star Lineup:
Rex Owens, Madonna Dries Christensen,
Sandy Rafter, Ed Pahnke, Esther M. Estabrooks,
Jake McLaughlin, Richard Mallard,
with Jan Kent as The Word Whisperer
Poetry from Bonny Conway, Sandy Rafter,
Norma Sundberg, Marshall Cook, Gary Busha,
Lucilla Maclaran Spillane, Richard Mallard,
Joseph Clark Evans (“Josephus Orangeblossom”),
and The Writer’s Poet, Craig W. Steele
Staff neptis: Lily Cook (see page 23)
Staff mascot: Lily the pupapoodle (see page 18)
Staff attorney: Justin Case
Staff tax accountant: Lew Pole
Internet Gleaner: Barry Bishop
Web Weaver: Kerrie Jean-Louis Osborne
The Masked Man: Brace Beemer
Stuntman: Yakima Canutt
Coach-in-Chief: Marshall J. Cook
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Next Deadline:
Monday, Nov 24, 2014
In September, with leaves already coloring, I went on a 4-day writers' retreat at the Crystal Falls House in Stark, in the narrow part of New Hampshire, north of Mt. Washington and just south of a wind tower farm. There, mere feet below the retreat-home's grand picture windows, a brawling falls cascades over granite bedrock, water surging from recent rain.

Before opening laptops, 11 of us head out to inhale crisp air plus scent which the falls waft from spray. The current appears rapid for swimming, but words crowd our heads at the sight. Here we will create, energized by good company, plus free time to structure as we please. From Thursday afternoon till mid-Sunday, we can pursue in-progress writing, create new projects, or simply absorb glorious surroundings.

In the spacious common room, talk is minimal. We brought what we plan to work on, or start new pieces. For this occasion, I looked up lore on water creatures—not the trophy-trout fishermen crave—rather water nixies, naiads, and other fay from folklore. Many beings are harmful, though pixies often help humans.

Old tales tell of nixies and nokken; creatures infamous for luring folks into quicksand or whirlpools. Tolkien may have used such legends to create Gollum. The Germans dubbed such beings shape-changers, appearing to men as females to lure, then drown them, a trait sometimes assigned to mermaids—Disney's pretty Ariel aside. Other creatures, skilled at playing enchanting music, caused trees to dance on their roots and made waterfalls run uphill. Even millwheels might stop spinning, so humans feared the uncanny power of magic, while nineteenth century poet Sebastian Evan penned:

Where by the marshes boometh the bittern
Nekkar the soulless sits with his ghittern;
Sits inconsolable, friendless and faceless,
Awaiting his destiny, Nekkar the soulless!

A bittern is a bird known for its booming call, while a ghittern is a guitar. I don't know the background for Nekkar's woe, but he's in a predicament! Ballads often skip whys and wherefores, assuming listeners know details or can fill them in.

Here's another caution, and since Robert Burns is near incomprehensible in Scots dialect, I Anglicized the following to convey what I believe he meant.

When thaws dissolve the snowy hoard
And floods up to the jingling board
Then water kelpies flood the ford
Thus night-time travelers are allured!

The 'board' must mean a cart or carriage floor, (though why it jingles I can't say) putting travelers at risk of drowning or being gobbled by kelpies. However, wise persons carried halters stamped with the sign of the cross, and if that was slipped on, the creature became compelled to lift heavy loads, like mill-stones. Reputedly the following landowner used such captives to build a vast castle. Angry kelpies declared:

Oh! It's sair butts and sair bones
For raisin' the Laird o' Morphee's stones;
But that old fool will ne'er thrive
As long as one kelpie keeps alive!

--More kelpies and pixies on next page
By contrast, pixies tend their business unless given strong drink, so I wrote:

Beware--Take care!

Don't you get a pixie tipsy or he'll be no good at all,

And if one comes nigh a pool, quite likely he will fall.

But no one wants a pixie drowned; such pleasant little folk:

In mischief, yes, but harmless, while death's a cruel joke!

So if you find one happy just from dozing in the sun

Likely he's tuckered out, doing kindness for someone,

Or if he hasn't, still it's true, how pixie folk are rare:

You spotted some in sunbeams, but were they truly there?

Be wary though, for nixies crave your pelf!

Take care thus; keep close watch on yourself!

This is the nixie lure:

“Come seek us where our voices sound

For we cannot sing above the ground.”

These web-toed girls cast a glamor to entice humans into watery caves, which soon become sodden graves. Seductive maids also dwell behind waterfalls and prove all too kind toward gentlemen encountered! But do they keep such lovers, or swiftly grow bored and drown them?

Those tempted should consider:

Who dwells behind the waterfall--

Perhaps a fairy or dark gremlin?

Will the creature prove some beauty,

Or femme fatale leave you tremblin?

Indeed, men's safety lies in never attempting to find out! And wives, always prove loving toward your husbands, even if the latter prove imperfect. Oddly though, fairy women rarely lure human men, save for the infamous Belle Dame Sans Merci, as narrated by John Keats. Can it really be that females are nicer?

The Writer's Poet

Syllability

Craig W. Steele

Syllables are the rhythmic beating hearts pumping life into our words; without them all the written arts would lie stillborn within the womb.

Syllables are the waves that crest before pummeling a sandy beach.

And who would care to pace the shore without the din of roaring surf?

Syllables are unyielding winds of change buffeting the blackest clouds, with lasting power to exchange our dark ages for enlightenment.

Syllables are measures of a writer's worth, legacies unto the world, as we strive to leave poor Earth enriched by our ability with words.

The Lego Ship

Bonny Conway

Legos were his bag of trips

adventures for the making

he could be in real estate

sell cheap houses for the taking

his castles became famous

especially with the cat

one big swipe of her sharp claws

the king's house was laid out flat

best he loved the pirate ship

in dry dock on the table

he even dressed like Blackbeard

his hero from the fable

for the cat a bowl of rum

appeased for wearing patches

before she leaped overboard

she marred the deck with scratches

the ship will not be scuttled

has been run aground to stay

just in case the grown-up man

has not really sailed away.
Harsh pictures and headlines about civil wars and wars between nations appear on our television screens and in our newspapers far too often. As a poet who is disturbed by such news and wishes in my writing to touch others, I feel compelled to write poetry about war. Yet, I find the task quite difficult.

Poets have written historical accounts of long ago wars, tributes to leaders, eulogies for the deceased, eyewitness accounts, protests, commemoration of certain battles, and prayers about war. I read the poems carefully, but so many differing beliefs about war flow into my mind until I am overwhelmed and don't know what to think or write.

We view the destruction of lives and property and hear the heart-wrenching tales of both the military and civilians -- those with bodies maimed and burned, limbs lost, kin left behind, and homes and family destroyed. We cringe at the knife a terrorist holds in the face of one of our citizens. Not one of us can doubt the horrors with which we are confronted. I know I abhor violence, but for me, the writing of a coherent poem seems to require that I at least start to sort through the complexities surrounding war.

Do we feel war should be condemned? I look first at my own family. My father was employed by the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company, which supplied the majority of Army combat boots in WWII. Before my father was drafted (later than others because he had two children), he worked for two years on those boots. My mother and father would not have liked for him to have a different job. On a personal level, in stringent times, my father's work (and many other war occupations) provided money for family necessities as they enriched and empowered the companies. But my parents and others also looked beyond themselves at their contributions to stop the evil of Hitler's power and ambitions.

There are justified wars where killing is explained as a reluctant but necessary action. As defined by William Ellery Channing, such a war consists of repelling lawless ambition and defending invaded liberty and essential rights. Yet, the label of a “just war” has been assigned many times with impunity. Many civil and religious leaders often have been slow to condemn war policies and, historically, many of the latter viewed Manifest Destiny, or westward expansion, as a divine imperative regardless of the necessity to war against Native Americans and Mexicans to obtain property and power.

War has many faces which lead to conflicting paths of thought: In our country we look to a strong defense system for our protection, and our government is always preparing for war. Recall in the 1960s Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's defense strategy and reasoning related to stopping nuclear war with "mutually assured destruction capability." The greatest preparation and highest level of destruction would be utilized to prevent war, a theory based on the mutual fear expressed on all sides of being annihilated.

I ask myself if I have enough knowledge to correctly write about and understand feelings of animosity and acts of violence from religious believers of a faith not my own? Can I always know the details of my government's political and economic decisions which alienate citizens of other countries?

I look at learned personal prejudices which may ignite the flames of violence. As an easily influenced child, I remember watching movies with friends and screaming at the "Injuns" -- all heathens -- who scalped the white settlers and at the "dirty Japs" who shot down American planes.

-- Discussion continues next page
I could write a poem about peace, often seen as a corollary to war, but is it? Isn't obtaining peace a process, and what peace would I choose: that of identifying evil people and either condemning or saving them, going to church and praying, finding and spreading my own peace through meditation, condemning pornography and video games and capital and corporal punishment, which might or might not increase brutality in general, becoming more aware of and "fighting" against economic and social inequalities and injustice?

Of concern to me, too, as a poet, are images of war. I know that I am influenced by pictures I have seen. I have never experienced war directly, but I will never forget photos of helicopters being attacked and plunging to the ground in Vietnam as the crews tried to evacuate the wounded who reached upward with their bloody hands, nor the photo of children, particularly a naked and burned Vietnamese girl crying, as they ran down a highway after their village had been napalmed.

There is a lump in my throat when I view pictures of soldiers without arms or legs. I still bow my head at the memory of the flag draped coffins of those killed in battle being returned, too many dead, to their country. My words will never capture the chaos and terror. Do I want to, and how can I, express the horrible in my poem?

We are reminded by Vietnam War veterans how challenging it is to write about war and be against loss of life and lack of humanity while maintaining a degree of patriotism and recognizing the great sacrifices and heroism of those in military service. It is problematic to find words that describe the struggles of war without glorifying it.

I wonder, too, whether the logical ordering of thoughts long before I begin to write, the structuring that seems to be called for in examining a complicated topic, will Inhibit the natural flow of thoughts and emotions I usually feel when writing poetry. I don't want to write in a stilted manner and want to feel the thrill of creating an evolving poem.

All of these issues and questions run through my mind like a quickly rising stream in a storm. Perhaps they will become clearer poem by poem. At this stage, I conclude that it might be best to turn to the writer's familiar adage: "write what you know." I do know of my mother's struggles and feelings while my father was overseas in WWII, and that will be a war poem, simple but complex, too, that I can write.

In Memory of the Last Soldier
Lucilla Maclaren Spillane

The small boy played
a soldiers’ raid
with his armies on the floor
and did not think that one day
he would go off to war.

The strong youth went
where he was sent,
learned how to fight in war;
stood firm beside his comrades,
amidst the battle’s roar.

The soldier man
sleeps where he can,
wherever man sleeps in war;
a troubled sleep of nightmare dreams
def friends who went before.

Soon he will sleep
the dreamless sleep,
in the sand beside the shore;
none left to cry or see him die
for those who went before.

published with permission of the author from her new volume of poetry, Another Seeing. See details in the Bullpen Briefs, page 17.
Duck Doggerel
Richard Mallard

A daunting dose of deplorable double-dactyl

Curse you George Enell! The darn thing about double dactyls is once you are infected you begin to see antepenultimate words everywhere. Oh God, there goes one now. What are these two dactyls and why is this form of poetry/doggerel so much fun? Think of it as a limerick on steroids. Invented, if you believe wiki, in 1951 as a verse form by poets Anthony Hecht and Paul Pascal. It is a humorous word puzzle to solve by fitting the right words into a strict form. It is a game to be played between eccentric wordsmiths. When you know the rules, the challenge gets interesting.

Here are the rules. A dactyl is a six syllable Long-short-short. A double dactyl is two of them, Long-short-short Long-short-short. “Higgledy Piggledy” is often used to kick off a double dactyl.

A double dactyl is made up of two stanzas of four lines each. Often this is a single sentence. The first stanza contains the double dactyl subject of the poem; the second stanza contains a single double dactyl word, usually an adjective describing the subject. The fourth and eighth lines end in a rhyme and on a stressed syllable. Here is an example:

Higgledy Piggledy
National Temperance
Swooped down upon us
Sans warning one day.

For innocent ladies all
Neo-Victorian
With hatchets and prayer books
Had planned it that way.

Like its cousin the Limerick, Double dactyls are meant to be fun. Once you write one you’ll be hooked. Once you’re hooked, you’ll see and hear them everywhere. You’ll be in on the game.

The Reverend George Enell was the ultimate rhetoric teacher and word dealer at our college. He lamented that his name was not in double dactyl form like his colleague Seth Arthur Fessenden. Up to the challenge his students immortalize him in his own double dactyl.

Higgledy Piggledy
Enell-the-Reverend
Renegade Preacher of
Pomp and élan,

Exalted “How Neat!” when his
Omni-verbosity
Yielded a lecherous
Double entendre.

And finally, I offer this:

Higgledy Piggledy,
“Coach” of the Odyssey,
Scribbling teacher of
Grammar that’s swell.

Exclaimed to his students
Hyperfactotumly,

“Write from your soul
And you’ll always do well.”
A Halloween poem
Many of your older readers will remember, as I do, the days when Halloween was a night of mischief that would probably land youthful perpetrators in jail today. It was simply part of the 10/31 tradition as recently as the 1940s.

This was passed along to me by Kathy Cahill, a friend who lives in Dodgeville. Her father, Joseph Clark Evans, who grew up in Lebo, Kansas, wrote it under the pen name Josephus Orangeblossom, for reasons Kathy cannot figure out. Mr. Evans went on to obtain a PhD in French languages and literature and taught at Colorado State University for 32 years. He has since passed away. Kathy and I believe it is too good not to share, especially interesting to old-timers who remember the “good old days” with outhouses and the Halloween tradition that went with them. I’ve used it on my website "High and Wry."

Bill Spevacek

A Lebo Halloween
It was October thirty-first
In nineteen forty-one.
The evening of that goblin day
Was filled with evening fun.
The Lebo lads, who would be boys,
As per a long tradition,
Took pleasure in an olden form
Of building-demolition.
The Baptist bell did dearly tell
On older people’s nerves,
As privies up and down they fell
In parabolic curves.
Young Billy and a happy band
Of stealthy local boys
Had left behind them on the land
The best of local toys.
Upended on the land they lay,
By craft and by design,
The best the finest carpenters
Had built from finest pine.
Against the youthful ravagers
There was but one defense:
Cement foundations were the key,
A terrible expense!
The evening’s work, the evening’s fun,
Had been a breeze for Bill,
Until at number twenty-one,
He took a sudden spill.

The reason for this tragic turn
Of all-consuming fate
Is something that I now will try.
To lucidly relate:
The night was dark, there was no moon,
To light him on his way;
A recent rain had lubrified
The thirsty local clay.
Not far from Lebo’s urban core
In those far days there stood
The busy J. Frank Warren Store,
That served the common good.
And out behind the Warren Store,
So restful in the gloom,
Stood ready for all customers
That rustic powder-room.
The boys they pushed, and then they shoved,
They felt the wall give way.
On terra firma, so they thought,
They all would surely stay.
But then arose a sudden cry,
A cry that echoes still.
That cry did rise in wild surmise:
“Has anyone seen Bill?”
The answer came from down below,
In tones not too polite:
“Gimme a hand up to the land,
And do not take all night!”
Bill scampered up from out the pit
And he began to run.
He did not want his mom and dad
To know what he had done.
But Billy had already paid,
The moment Billy sinned,
And that is why all Billy’s pals
Were keeping him downwind.
The boys who pushed the privies,
No more shall they roam,
For there now is plumbing
In every Lebo home.
It was October thirty-first
In nineteen forty-one ...
The evening of that goblin day
Was filled with evening fun.
— Josephus Orangeblossom
Autumn Angst
Norma J. Sundberg

A remembrance of Fall fading in the North, reflected here in the South. I hadn’t seen it on our walks but spied it through my living room window one day, displaying itself, standing out boldly against the green that lingers all year round here.

A young deciduous tree flaming red-orange leaves against a backdrop of pine trees, holly bushes, cones and pine straw a contradiction of sorts yet, a reminder, a memory of Autumn in another place, another year.

Today I looked out to see the leaves had blown away, in the last gust of wind, only a few clinging stubbornly to branches here and there, grateful to have seen it in its burst of glory before the cold fingers of Winter creep in.

Oh moon
Marshall J. Cook

you slut you give your beauty to just anyone who happens to glance at your naked luminescence. They don’t appreciate you, not like I do, go nights without even noticing you don’t even miss you when you’re gone. But then, who could ever deserve the moon?

Starry night
Marshall J. Cook

Scraps of stars litter the earth, shattered on the brittle dawn. I hurl myself toward earth’s embrace miss and fly toward slivers of stars streaming to earth broken on the dawn.
100th Anniversary: Death of the Last Passenger Pigeon

Sandy Rafter

Martha:
bluish nabbed wings of dusty hue
flutter away in death, swooping,
sweeping, searching for her mates --
far away from hunters, tormentors,
poisoners, and zoos.
Aloft and spirit free at last
she settles in a tree,
spotting one her own
through the glass.
Eyes bright, mouths wide,
the visitors extoll the stuffed breast
of museum display.
A small boy spreads his arms
and flies about the room.
Martha's own body stands preserved
after being frozen, skinned, and dissected.
The eager viewers mourn only one species.
Frogs, Turtles, and a Whistle
Gary Busha

If I am quiet
will you let me keep
the green frog dream
the one in which you
and I walk along the bank
while our feet knife through
the marsh grass

across the highway
a toothless farmer makes another
turn in the manure spreader.

In the distance we hear a train
whistle sound urgent as motorists
scurry across the tracks before the
Illinois Central pulling 116 empties

that whistle shakes out
the frogs along the stream like the snap
of wet laundry in a strong wind
You must let me keep the turtles
and the clean shape of their
black backs in the August sun

while they slide
off the flat rocks along the bank
I can see their yellow undersides
and the red speckles on their claws
If you take the green frogs
the turtles will vanish too
and the train whistle will face
like the sound of a collapsed accordion
and then all that is left is you

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Reprinted here by permission of the poet. Read more about Gary in the Briefs, next page.
Would you pay money for this? Part I
“Psycho--- from memory”
A Brooklyn-based cooperative calling itself Ten Bones Theatre Company incorporates lines suggested by members of the audience during performances. It also gives one viewer a horn to honk three times at random during the performance. Each time the horn blows, the actors must improve a scene. They perform “wherever alcohol is served.”

They are currently offering a recreation of Alfred Hitchcock’s classic 1960 thriller, Psycho. Visit www.tenbones.org. From “Above and Beyond,” The New Yorker, Oct. 6

Would you pay money for this? Part II
The latest in iPhone technology: the Phoney!
Tim Fite has created a totally new concept in iPhones. Forget the iPhone 6 or the 6 Plus. Fite’s Phoney has no circuits, no wires, and no buttons. You can’t access the Internet on it. You can’t even make or receive a phone call. It’s a fused glass rectangle that does nothing but take up space.

It’s all part of Fite’s latest project, “iBeenHACKED,” what the New Yorker calls “a satirical meditation on the encroachment of high-tech devices into modern life.”

When not fighting to reclaim all our lives from being absorbed into cyberspace, Fite is a musician and artist who has released nearly a dozen albums, as part of the hip-hop group Little T and One Track Mike and then as a solo artist. iBeenHACKED is funded through Kickstarter. The Phoney comes in two sizes, miniature ($40) and regular ($200).

from “Talk of the Town,” Margaret Talbot, The New Yorker, Oct. 6
-- Briefs continue, next page
Permission granted!

Madonna Dries Christensen writes that a friend (the artist who created the cover for her new novel, Patricide) asked her to write a forward for his memoir-in-progress. She was kind enough to remember something I’d written on the subject of memoir and asked if she could quote me.

Of course, and I’m flattered. First she wrote:
Writing memoir is both difficult and fun. Difficult because many elements are lost to time; fun because hindsight and perspective come into play. What might have been a traumatic experience to a child can become amusing when time veils the hurt or humiliation. For the most part, none of us recall verbatim conversations, so memoirists take literary license to create scenes, dialogue, and inner thoughts to describe how it probably was or might have been.

Here’s the quote she’s using from me:
Try not to write about the experience. Re-create it, just as you remember it. You don’t have to comment on the experience or draw any particular lesson from it. The experience contains its own significance and needs no further justification. Don’t worry about being accurate. All memory is creative, subjective, and selective. Let yourself create.

Purely Personal Part I

Return to World War II

I’ve been asked to lead a discussion of my World War II novel, Walking Wounded, set in Madison, Wisconsin, at the Madison Senior Center next February 10 and again at Emily Auerbach’s Book Talk (sponsored by UW-Madison Continuing Studies) on April 14. I’ve led many discussions for Book Talk over the years and find that crowd to be the best book discussion group ever. I expect I’ll learn an awful lot at both sessions.

In fact, I just led a wonderful Book Talk discussion on Rex Owens’ fine novel, Murphy’s Troubles. They were very kind to Rex, so I guess I’ll show up on April 14 for my turn in the barrel.

Purely Personal Part II

It’s not the feather! You can fly!!!

Huge thanks to friend and regular E.I. poet Bonny Conway for sending me Dumbo, along with a book depicting his adventures with Timothy the Mouse and the circus. Bonny says I have to share it with Lily, and I will be happy to do so.

Best lead in the Sunday New York Times of September 28, 2014
“The Wilds of Education”
by Frank Bruni
When it comes to bullying, to sexual assault, to gun violence, we want and need our schools to be as safe as possible.

But when it comes to learning, shouldn’t they be dangerous?

Why he was Raymond Chandler
and we’re not
From The High Window
“I’m an occasional drinker, the kind of guy who goes out for a beer and wakes up in Singapore with a full beard.”

or later, in a description of a fistfight--
“He snorted and hit me in the solar plexus. I bent over and took hold of the room with both hands and spun it. When I had it nicely spinning, I gave it a full swing and hit myself on the back of the head with the floor.”

and in puppy news...

Meet Lily, Janice Kaat’s pupadoodle!
Dear Coach:

It's been a miracle season for the Red Sox here in Boston, and who better to share the good news with than Coach! You've been following the career of one of the team's finest young talents since his earliest years.

Yes, Timmy Lawson has finally (finally!) been on a winning team. The 2014 Lexington Red Sox captured the title this spring. (In the attached photo, Tim is in the front row wearing the baseball necklace.) Could it be because it's the first season the young man's mother was in the stands cheering for him rather than in the dugout as coach? Perhaps. Everything has its season and mine as his coach is over. He turned 11 in October. His first birthday, of course, coincided with the grown up Red Sox winning their first World Series in ... forever as it had felt like for me, a lifelong Sox fan.

He is having a very different childhood indeed, having been blessed with not one, but THREE titles in his most tender years.

So, Coach, I just had to share this recent photo of Tim Lawson after seeing his kindergarten photo in the 5th anniversary issue of EI over breakfast this morning before getting to my day's writing tasks. For now, I still earn my living as a writer. Your influence in my career is mentioned in my website, modest as it is. (My career and website, that is, not your influence!)

Can't wait for 10-year anniversary issue but know that reading each issue in between will be pleasure enough. Just as is watching little Lily get bigger and bigger. Children do that, right in front of our eyes. Thank you for writing, editing, publishing, and most of all -- continuing to inspire the many writers you've touched over the years. All the best,

Betsy Anderson Lawson
UW '89

E.I.’s editor feels the love as anniversary congrats pour in

I just want to say THANK YOU FOR WRITING!!! I love getting my copy of Extra Innings and print it out to read at my leisure. Nifty stuff, and I take delight in your delight in Lily Keep up the great work. Love and best wishes,

Pernetta [Deener]

Hey Mr Cook,

That was an awesome newsletter and loved the many jokes or I should say statements of humor. The picture of Lily did top it all. As I too experienced the Pacific Ocean a couple of weeks ago standing in the surf and watching glow fish at night. Awesome sight to see. Have a beautiful fall. Sincerely,

Diane Reinke


I took two online classes with you, attended Write-by-the-Lake three times, and attended the Taos Writing Conference four times. In less that a month, I'll be at a writing workshop with John Dufresne. And we have an active local writers' group. So I'm still a student.

Jim Herod

Marsh: I do not want to focus on my age, or I would rage

At how the time has passed me by, and no matter how I try

I cannot change my date of birth, but for what it's worth

I think you will agree, there's nothing better than being eighty three.

Bill Stokes

-- Letters continue, next page
Marsh -
WOW - Lily is getting to be quite the adventurer - I have fond memories of Cape Ann from long ago - a beautiful place. I was also surprised how tall she is getting to be - time does fly, for sure!!!
Have a great weekend, and congratulations on the 5th anniversary of Extra Innings!!

Pat [Laux]

Hey, Coach,
Congrats on E.I. 60. So glad it's not "30." And, by the way, Lily has much better looking legs.
Take care of yourself, my friend.

Larry [Tobin]

Note: In old timey journalistic parlance, “30” at the bottom of a page of copy indicated “end of story.” A pound sign “#” (what young 'uns insist on calling “hashtags”) served the same purpose.

Loved the anniversary issue. You brought it all together -- the people and past and contributions -- in a very pleasant to read way. The issue was good. Love the picture of Lily, but wish I could have seen more of her delighted, awed face -- a natural reaction to ocean walking.

[Sandy Rafter]

Coach:
Nice job on this issue. I enjoyed your looking back piece. It doesn't seem like five years since it began.

MDC [Madonna Dries Christensen]

I enjoyed reading your five year EI. A grand picture of Lily and you. It was fun reading your rundown of the Issues. As far as sticking with you through it all, I wouldn't of had it any other way.

Janice Kaat

I first want to comment on the newsletter! WOW! Totally AWESOME...Love the Lily picture. ...
Have you ever entered Extra Innings or your previous newsletter in contests? I really think you should if there is a category for this??

Norma Sundberg

Note: Never have been much on entering contests, with newsletters, writing, or anything else.
Nothing against them, just not for me. Besides, how could anyone categorize EI?

I enjoyed the anniversary issue of Extra Innings. However, who won the caption contest?

Annette Van Veen Gippe

Note: See Caption Contest explanation following the letters column.

Dear Marshall,
What a wonderful land I have just visited. The land of Extra Innings, filled with magic from the fifth anniversary issue, and now we will continue beyond. I thank you so much for allowing me to be a part of your world. Lily in the sea makes me want to dip my toes in a clean ocean. Poem quotes from the famous poets make me want to get pen and paper and write one of my own, trying to improve with each line. About the young adult book, Seedfolks, I feel I must read that myself, and also get your favorite book you mentioned that you presented to Kim. All in all, just a great time, on this dreary day, to be able to connect with so many wonderful writers, all put together by the Great Coach. Thank you for all of your efforts. Very Sincerely,

Bonny Conway

Congratulations, Marshall, on 60 great issues of Extra Innings. I'm happy that I've been able play a tiny part in the whole. Thanks, too, for publishing my "jest for pun" in this issue. I'll be sending you another story shortly. Sincerely,

Ed Pahnke

Note: True to his word, Ed has a new edition of "Hahnke Pahnke" on the next page.

CONGRATULATIONS, Marshall.
60 issues.
That's a HUGE accomplishment.
Here's to the next 60 (and beyond!)

Hilde Adler

Thanks to all who wrote, and thanks to everyone for reading this monthly attack of silliness.

Coach
What about that caption contest?

Way back in Issue #59 (September), I ran this cartoon and challenged you to write a caption for it. I did not, however, offer my usual lavish but remarkably immodest prize, one of my own books. Perhaps this explains why only one person had entered by deadline. Didn’t make for much of a “contest,” so I just skipped it next issue.

The entry came from the mysterious S. Dardanelles, a previous contest winner, who offered these three captions:

* “Henry, stop writing in that book and tell me how you're going to get it on the bookshelf.”
* “Fred, some day you'll learn you don't have to finish the page to turn over a new leaf.”
* He liked to crawl into the book with his new bed and get away from it all.

Annette Van Veen Gippe sent this entry, which reached us too late for the September issue:

* “Dear, can we talk about the epitome in the room?”

I relented and repented my ways, declaring S.D. the winner and sending her a copy of my wartime love story, Walking Wounded, as a prize.

Shall we try it again?

In honor of the impending season--

A copy of Walking Wounded for the best caption received by November 24th.
mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Hahnke Pahnke
Ed Pahnke

And they’re off and running...

Having arrived in New York from England, Lord Cedric Hardwick boarded a train and headed West for a frontier adventure. Late Nineteenth Century steam powered trains chugged along somewhat faster than a horse, but it took Lord Cedric a week to get to his destination, a ranch in Wyoming.

Shortly after arriving, Lord Cedric, a paunchy, thirtyish man, dressed himself in his shiny cowboy boots and brand new cowboy outfit, marched outside and approached a cowboy standing by the wooden rail fence surrounding the coral.

Six feet tall and muscular, Buck Thorne, the guide for the journey, wore a wide brimmed felt hat, scuffed leather chaps, and a blue denim shirt and trousers,

“Cedric,” he said.

His lordship gave Buck a withering look for ignoring ‘Lord.’

“I figure a couple of days here before we set out will give you time to get used to your horse, Shamrock,” Buck continued.

“Rubbish.” Lord Cedric looked down his nose at Buck. “As you ‘Yanks’ are wont to say, I am raring to go. I am an excellent rider, born to the saddle. I am certain I can teach you a few things about horsemanship.”

“Have if your way, Cedric. I’ll have one of the boys saddle Shamrock for you.”

A few minutes later, a rangy cowboy with a scruffy beard led the big, prancing and snorting black stallion out. Buck grabbed hold of Shamrock’s halter.

“There he is, Cedric, your horse for the guided tour,” Buck said, “You sure you won’t change your mind and wait a day or so for you and him to get used to each other?”

“Posh,” Lord Cedric said. “Let us mount up now and be off.” He grabbed the reins, put his foot in one stirrup, swung his leg over the saddle, and slid his other foot into the stirrup.

“Steady, Shamrock.”

The moment Buck released his grip on the halter, Shamrock surged ahead, galloping and bucking and rearing. Lord Cedric was indeed off – off Shamrock’s back and sprawled on the ground in a heap, amid a cloud of dust.

He had found out the hard way that ride goeth before a sprawl.
Amazin’ Anagrams

PRESBYTERIAN:
When you rearrange the letters:
BEST IN PRAYER

ASTRONOMER:
becomes
MOON STARER

DESPERATION:
A ROPE ENDS IT

THE EYES:
THEY SEE

GEORGE BUSH:
HE BUGS GORE

THE MORSE CODE:
HERE COME DOTS

DORMITORY:
DIRTY ROOM

SLOT MACHINES:
CASH LOST IN ME

ELECTION RESULTS:
LIES - LET'S RECOUNT

SNOOZE ALARMS:
ALAS! NO MORE Z’S

A DECIMAL POINT:
I’M A DOT IN PLACE

THE EARTHQUAKES:
THAT QUEER SHAKE

ELEVEN PLUS TWO:
TWELVE PLUS ONE

JAN KENT IS
THE WORD WHISPER

Flip at your own risk
In the English alphabet there are 26 letters. Nine of these can be flipped from right to left and still be correct. Of those nine, four can also be flipped top to bottom.

So my dream license plate would read, if my car were in front of yours, “AMAM OY.”

If I were behind you and you were looking into your rearview mirror it would be “YO MAMA.”

In Memory
Drop kick me, Jesus through the goalposts of life
End over end, neither left nor to right
Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights

Drop kick me, Jesus, through the goalposts of life.

Rest in Peace,
Paul Craft
August 12, 1938 - October 18, 2014

And now
THE STAR OF OUR SHOW...
Lily plays it her way