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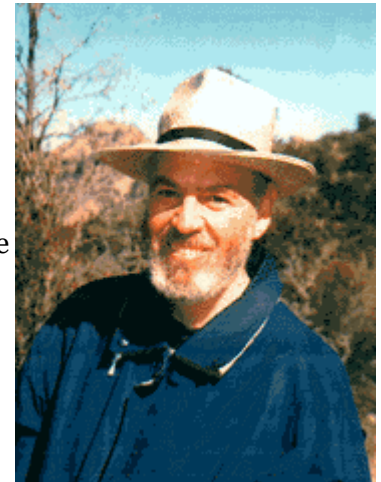
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## **Poet, Dean Blehert**

(born in St. Paul, MN, in 1942), taught literature and creative writing for two years at Cornell University. He left academia in 1969, since which his jobs have ranged from cab driver to professional counselor to computer programmer and, primarily, a poet--since 1991 his full-time activity.

Dean Blehert has had seven poetry books published, most recently Kill the Children and Other Disconnections (Argonne House Press, 2001) and Please, Lord, Make Me a Famous Poet or at Least Less Fat, a 400-page mock textbook full of parody and satire on the poetry scene, past and current. He also publishes his own subscription poetry letter, Deanotations (Dean's poems with his wife's drawings) which has come out every two months since August, 1984. Currently Deanotations has about 300 paid subscribers, and has often been praised for its quirky viewpoints and slightly offbeat humor.

Deanotations has readers in most of the 50 states and in Canada, England, Germany, Israel and Australia. He's had poems published or accepted for publication in New York Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly Review, Crosscurrents, Bogg, Visions, Lip Service, Gold Dust, Dark Horse, Modern Haiku, Carousel, Light, The Lyric, Krax, Orphic Lute, Brussel Sprouts, Stroker, Implosion, Haiku Headlines, Reston Review, Carousel, View From The Loft, The Listening Eye, Gyst, Plains Poetry Journal, Minimus, Potomac Review and many others. Issue 55 of New York Quarterly ran his article, "Shrink-rapt Poetry", in its State of Poetry in America series. He's been featured at readings in Calif., New York, D.C., Texas, Maryland, Florida, Arkansas, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio,



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Minnesota, Tennessee, Illinois, Iowa and Virginia. He lives with his wife, Pam, a painter, in Reston, Virginia.

A recent review of "Deanotations" in KRAX (a literary magazine from England) said:

Every two months Dean does a large broadsheet of his own poems; these range from punning two-liners, clerihews, pithy homilies to eight or nine stanza witty cynicisms. Some poets would take five years to produce stuff up to the standard of one of these. I don't know how he keeps it going.... On the writing level alone -let alone producing and mailing the thing. Sure there are some corny bits but I don't think he has time to stop for bad days! Who could you read monthly and still want more? This is marathon man standard.

He's had poems published or accepted for publication in New York Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly Review, Crosscurrents, Bogg, Visions, Lip Service, Gold Dust, Dark Horse, Modern Haiku, Carousel, Light, The Lyric, Krax, Orphic Lute, Brussel Sprouts, Stroker, Implosion, Haiku Headlines, Reston Review, Carousel, View From The Loft, The Listening Eye, Gyst, Plains Poetry Journal, Minimus, Potomac Review, Mandrake, Daybreak, Pivot and many others. Issue 55 of New York Quarterly ran his article, "Shrink-rapt Poetry", in its State of Poetry in America series.

He's been featured at readings in Calif., New York, D.C., Texas, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Florida, Maryland, Washington and virginia and has read his works to classes in several D.C.-area high schools and colleges.

Comments on his latest book:

"Dean Blehert is a radical innovator in contemporary poetry. He has discovered pleasure. His poems are - how contrarian - both fun to read and wonderfully perceptive about the follies of modern life. I hope he represents the cutting edge of poetry for the new millennium. But if not, we can console ourselves by rereading him." Dana Gioia [Note: Dana Gioia is a nationally known poet and a leader of the formalist movement in poetry.]

"Dean Blehert... is quite simply the finest satiric poet working in America today." Satire Magazine  
"What a banquet!! -- a feast of wit, wild and wonderful incredibly clever!" Lyn Lifshin [Note: Lyn is the most published living poet in the United States.]

"Dean Blehert is a provocateur of poetry and poets. He plays the Devil's Advocate to expose tedium and cant. He is doing what every modern poet should be doing -- publishing themselves, distributing their work successfully, and earning a living as a modern poet." Thom the World Poet [Note: Thom is a modern troubadour-poet and one of the founder of the annual Austin International Poetry Festival.]

"Blehert's Poe Parody is one of the most brilliant and hilarious spoofs I've ever seen. I laughed my ass off, and read it over the phone to a girl I was about to marry. When she didn't laugh, I knew the relationship was doomed. Sure enough, a short while later..." Peter Ludwin [a much-published Seattle poet]

What follows is a somewhat more casual and rambling account of himself. It is included here for those who would like a more complete account.

I suppose I "began" writing, but it seems to me I've always been a writer - or at least always looking about at things and wanting to say something clever or otherwise interesting about them - and have the adults express amazement, the other kids laugh, etc. At age 7 I began to focus more on writing after the shock of discovering that reading could open up worlds of pleasure.

I learned to read early (pre-school) and liked it, mildly, but was surprised one day when I picked up a Hardy Boys novel to find "real" stories and characters as entertaining as the bang-bang radio shows to which I'd been addicted since about age 4. Not long after, (maybe age 8) I tried to write my own Hardy Boys novel - got about 8 pages into it and gave up. I was impressed - wanted to give others what these books gave me.

Around age 8 or 9, I was home sick, and my Dad brought me three comics, one of which was a "Classic" comic (The Corsican Brothers), which I found delightful - read it over and over. (Among other things, it contained the novelty for a Hardy Boys fan, that one of the good guys gets killed - the noble sadness hooked me. Somehow I figured out that this comic and all the other titles listed on the back were BOOKS and began to seek them out in the Public Library, finding War and Peace still too much for me, but Robin Hood and The Three Musketeers exciting. (Oddly enough, I've never read The Corsican Brothers - except in comic book form. Maybe I didn't want to be disappointed.)

In short, I became a voracious reader and, increasingly, wanted to do what these writers did. Later I came under the spells of Tolstoy, James Joyce, Kafka, Nabokov and other "heavyweights", and widened my ambitions.

Note that my ambitions were sparked by novels - yet nearly all my writing consists of poems. That's partly laziness: I didn't feel I knew enough to write a novel. I'd sit down to write and find myself writing (what passes for) poetry. A bit of mystery there: I'm not lazy (I've written good sestinas, for example - not a lazy artist's choice), nor do I lack attention span. And I love a good story. Perhaps I'm impatient: prefer to speak for myself, not via character or situation. Perhaps I'm more infatuated with the rhythms of speech than with characterization. All I know is that in the past 40 years I've written about 35,000 poems and no novels (and only 2 or 3 stories). My own reading of choice is NOT poetry. I'd rather read a good mystery story than any poem ever written, with the possible exception of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra or King Lear, both of which I enjoy more as poetry on the page than as dramatic performances.

But I write...poetry. (Though opinions vary.)

As for having a specific reason for writing each book - no. I don't write books. I write poems and later organize them into books based on theme, tone, what others have enjoyed, etc.

Authors:

For many years (approx. ages 15 though 30) I read in a sort of fervor, seeking out universes large enough and rich enough to live in. I'd find someone "GREAT" and read no one else for months, finding all others too inferior (in comparison) to be worth the bother. The authors who enchanted me in this way (all of whom I still admire greatly) include Tolstoy, James Joyce, Kafka, Shakespeare,

Nabokov, Boswell/Sam Johnson, Jane Austen, D. H. Lawrence and Biely. Oh - and Walt Kelly (do cartoonists count? Wordy ones should.)

In those years, I had nothing but disdain for authors who didn't live up to my adored standards. For example, after reading and rereading Tolstoy, I found Hemingway a claustrophobic experience. Conrad, James, Faulkner, Thomas Mann and many other icons of the academic circuit suffered similarly. I made myself read them, but found reasons to dislike them. (I'd probably give them kinder attention now. I browsed through some Hemingway recently and thought "Not so bad" - to my surprise.) After initial distaste, I enjoyed Proust and Dostoyevski. It's hard for a Tolstoy fan to enjoy Dostoyevski - so many friends, hearing "Tolstoy" - immediately respond, "Oh, but Dostoyevski is so much more passionate!"

At around age 30, I lightened up. About that time, I became more tolerant of congenial companionship, with less insistence that any book I read offer all the answers or the plenitude of a universe comparable to the agreed-upon universe we share. I began reading (as I had at age 13) everything: James Bond, Perry Mason, Miss Marple, Sci. Fi. classics, etc. Gradually I focused on authors who pleased me most, and they constitute most of my current reading, among them Sue Grafton, Ed McBain, Elmore Leonard, Lisa Cody, Tony Hillerman, Dick Francis, James Ellroy, Michael Lewin, Robert Parker, Patrick O'Brian, Louis L'Amour, Erle Stanley Gardner, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Dorothy Sayers. These "genre" writers (mostly mystery) seem to me the secret classics of the century - a few not so secret.

When I pick up the "literature" of our time, I find it hard to get into - brilliant much ado. Or maybe I AM lazy. Now and then something "heavy" comes my way, and I read it dutifully, a bit of Atwood, for example. And I recently found Musil's *Man Without Qualities* - as much of it as I've gotten through - a remarkable work. But I'll set it aside instantly at sight of the next Sue Grafton.

Other than novels, I read bits of everything. As a poet, I feel it a duty to read poetry, but it is seldom a pleasure (most so when I read poems by personal friends - maybe my friends are the best poets?). My own poetry is not very "poetic", relies more on humor and wit than is fashionable, and lacks a certain murky aura that seems indispensable in award-winning poetry. My favorite poets are Shakespeare (in his plays), George Herbert, John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Pope, Swift, Kipling, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Auden, Yeats, Frost - the usual suspects (except Kipling) for someone who read most intensely in his early '60's college days. Browning can be fun. Oh yes, I love Chaucer. Add D. H. Lawrence, Whitman and John Shade. Also Bukowski. Of current authors, I enjoy Lyn Lifshin, Miles David Moore, Hilary Tham, Russell Salamon, David Ross (died in 1994), Peter Ludwin, Alice Pero, Michael Schaffner, Shirley Windward, Celia Brown, Thom The World Poet - all people I know, perhaps a factor?

Among philosophers, I like Wittgenstein and, especially, L. Ron Hubbard, who writes a mean story, too.

Who has influenced my own writing? I have no idea. No doubt all of the above.

Mundane details of writing:

I don't work on a schedule. I write when I feel like it, which is often, and when I've cleared away other tasks (like cleaning the cat box and answering mail). Sometimes I grab a nearby notebook (or take one with me for a walk) and write in it. Other times I sit down at the computer to write and revise.

Sometimes I write at poetry readings while listening to other poets - maybe in answer to what I hear. Sometimes I jot a note for a poem in a notebook, then work it out on the computer. I can write any time, any where. this was not always the case. I was much more sensitive to distractions in my college days, for example, and depended more upon "inspiration", by which I meant, not an idea, but a certain airy exalted feeling accompanied by a rush of words and ideas, 8 or 10 poems flowing off the pen or flooding my mind as I walked among trees and houses. Such exaltation would occur about every four months, then peter out in bad puns and abortive efforts. Then for months I'd "have nothing to say". Later I learned to create "inspiration", to be in charge of it.

I think the key is to be in good communication with others. It's not "something to say", but OTHERS TO SAY IT TO. You meet the "one" who can understand, who really listens and empathizes, and suddenly discover that you have a great deal to say and can say it with more eloquence and wit than you knew you had. If a writer keeps his communication lines to others open and clean, it is easier for him at any time to direct his writing to such a reader (imagined, postulated).

More simply, art is high quality communication, and in any communication, the least important element is the particle sent across from one to another. Other elements are far more important to the quality of the communication: Someone really there and communicating as himself with strong positive intention to reach another and create an understanding - the components of "inspiration".

I often meet my readers at book signings and other poetry readings, I interact with them through e-mail, and a sampling of my poems and essays are available to readers on a web-site, <http://members.aol.com/blehert>, along with paintings by my wife, Pam Coulter Blehert. Also, Pam and I put out a bi-monthly poetry letter containing my poetry and humor (with her illustrations), which goes out to hundreds of subscribers for \$10/year (\$5 for students). We've published this since 1984 (89 issues so far). A free sample issue is available on our web site or by sending SASE to Dean Blehert, 11919 Moss Point Lane, Reston, VA 20194.

I haven't done much with the Net yet. I used to be "technical" (a programmer, a network consultant), but have gotten very rusty. Fortunately, my wife, who used to be technically challenged, has become a guru - installed all the latest, created our Web page, etc. I've done a bit of research on the Web, but generally would rather read books. I don't much care for computer screens - prefer paper (sorry, trees). I do use e-mail more and more. As for on-line forums - never touch the stuff. I suppose I'll resist it, then deign to have a look and become desperately addicted.

I was born in St. Paul, MN, 1942 (Apr. 4. Wife's birthday is Apr. 5. We married on Apr. 3. April has the cruelest mouth.) Went to U. of Minn. - majored (double) in English and math, 4 years grad. school at Stanford (picked up an MA more or less incidentally while working on Ph.D. on "The Involutated Novel" - focused on Nabokov, Kafka, Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Melville, Becket, L. Sterne. Never finished the thesis. While still working on it, I was an Assistant Prof. at Cornell U., 1967-'69. Dropped out of Academia at end of '69, mainly because in summer of 1968 I found other things I preferred to do (details on request, see address above).

Since that time I've been a poet, a cab driver, a professional counselor, a courier service, a programmer, a consultant (helping research and write responses on federal procurements of computers) and...a poet. For a few years ('71-'73) I was crew aboard a ship with ports in Europe and

North Africa - interesting time. I've lived in Minnesota, Northern Calif., New York (upstate and NY City), L.A., the D.C. area and the Tampa, FL area.

I love movies, would probably love pop music if the Beatles were still putting out albums, love Bach, Beethoven and Bartok, do lots of crossword puzzles, like to go for walks, talk, make love, write, eat, perform (even won a couple of DC poetry slams with my rather low-key poetry), travel. I find victims and beautiful sadness boring, drugs worse than unnecessary (including most of those prescribed - and ALL psychotropic drugs) and psychiatry (the field, not necessarily each individual in it) a "discipline" which, if surgically removed from the legal, educational and cultural institutions of our time, would lead to a remarkable recovery. (An article of mine on the subject appeared in issue 55 of The New York Quarterly.)

I think we are unlimited, immortal spiritual beings capable of being much more than these flesh machines and that art is how we play and create games to play.

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