

Millersville Professor Publishes Traditionally Influenced Poetry

BY EDWARD WHITELOCK
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CONJECTURE

I wonder
what would happen
if some fall
the leaves refused
to let their greenness
go?

Dr. Robert Ambacher, a professor of German and Humanities who has published six books of poetry during the past two decades, says that, for him, poetry does not have to be complicated or deliberately oblique. His poems are short, concerned with a single subject or thought, and in a more traditional style than most modern poetry, a characteristic that has harvested criticism from some readers.

"Some people complain that my poetry is too simple," he said, "too obvious." Ambacher added that the opposite can hold true. "I'm not very fond of most modern American poetry. I find it too intellectual, too vague. In my opinion, it lacks life."

Ambacher said that he finds his inspiration and favor in traditional poetry. He cited Robert Frost and Emily Dickenson among his favorite poets along with "too many German poets to name, from Goethe on." This traditional influence is felt deeply throughout his work and Ambacher added, "Maybe my poetry doesn't belong in the post-war period, it's too traditional. But I see no reason why I should write in a modern fashion if I am not comfortable with it. This is my voice, good or bad. I'm satisfied."

Ambacher said that his interest in poetry, specifically writing it, began in the late

1950's while he was in the army. He started writing poems then and admitted, "They were not good at all, terrible." He said he showed his poems to his brother who instructed him to read more poetry by other writers, so he did. "I still continued to write bad," he said, "but I was getting better."

Ambacher said that he was not pleased with his poetry until the late 1970's and early 80's. Still, he released five collections of poems beginning in the early 1970's. "When I look back now," he said, "I wish I hadn't done that. There were a lot of poor poems in those first booklets. I was too eager to put out collections, too eager to share my poems."

He is very happy, however, with his sixth book, *Selected Poems 1960-1985*, which was released two years ago. "It's the only collection I'm really pleased with," he said. "I tried to include only poems of merit."

Selected Poems, which is available in the student bookstore, has sold over 200 copies since its publication, said Ambacher, adding that he has sold nearly 600 copies of his earlier collections, which are no longer available.

Selected Poems contains work from Ambacher's previous five books, poems which he feels are his best.

GETTYSBURG: 1981
Some one hundred and eighteen
ordinary years of rain
have washed away the stains

once coloring this grass;
mementos, like spent minnie
balls and faded epaulettes,
lie in state like souvenirs stored
away in wooden cigar boxes,
leaving in these fields only one
unoccupied fallen down stone
fence staring at the other...

"This is one of my best poems," said Ambacher, explaining that it was inspired by a tour of the battlefield. The feeling in the poem, he said, is one of history gone by, "What was once a terrible place is now history." Phrases in the poem like one-hundred-and-eighteen ordinary years" or "stored away in wooden cigar boxes" demonstrate that the fields of Gettysburg are now nothing more than that. Everything is memories, all is in the past and nothing of that horrible time is left but the stone fences broken down by time.

DICK

Dick drained his life
from the bottom
of the bottle,
measuring his days
from one empty glass
to one empty glass;
on Friday nights
he set up the bar
like most men
return from battle:
he died on a Saturday,
still looking for the tavern
with the last free lunch...

"Dick is my father," said Ambacher. "he was an alcoholic and he left the family. I remember him and I couldn't help but

think, 'what was he?' There are no monuments to him, so I created this." Ambacher spoke of his father, and a man many people looked down on, as an optimist, always looking for that free lunch, waiting for his ship to come in. "He never thought much of his life but he kept his optimism."

This poem, said Ambacher, was written in a car on his way home from a visit to his brother's house in New Jersey. However, most of the poetry, said Ambacher, was not created so quickly. In most poems, he said, he would work a while each day for however long it took to complete the work to his satisfaction.

A prominent subject in Ambacher's work is his wife, Karen. *Selected Poems* features over a dozen poems titled simply "To Karen," tributes to the woman he has been married to since he was a graduate student.

TO KAREN

I need you more
than roses
need the rain,
I need you
like the Christian
needs his Christ
to come again

While his books have been well achieved, after thirty years of creating poetry, Ambacher feels that he is finished with the genre. "I haven't written since 1984 and I don't know if I will. I have to say that this is the best

I'm going to do and I see no point in adding just to add." Ambacher said that he feels his poetry has matured into a form that is pleasing not only to himself, but to others, a form that he cannot see himself improving on. "If my poetry is no longer getting substantially better, then I will use my time for other things."

Many people write poetry as a hobby or pastime. Not many, however, are fortunate enough to see this hobby appear in print and find favor among readers. Ambacher has, in his thirty years of pursuing this interest, seen this happen. "I'm pleased that there are a number of people who like my work and I hold no bitterness towards those who don't."