

Gerald Locklin and the *Wormwood Review*

***Do you recall your first poem(s) ever in the *WR*?**

Wormwood Review took one that was entitled “Johnny Rigoletto,” a retelling of the opera, and he [Marvin Malone] claimed that was the first one that ever got into print.

***After Malone took that first poem, what made you submit more poems to him?**

I read the magazine cover to cover and knew at once it was the perfect mag for my stuff, and the perfect mag in which I could be reading the best work by the best poets of that era. And very soon I had also decided that Marvin Malone was the best editor of that period, with the best taste, the best literary and scientific background (he was a world-class pharmacologist—professor), and the strictest yet also kindest teacher of young poets who submitted to his magazine. To me he became a father-substitute for my own father, who was away in World War 2 during my infancy—I was born in 1941—and who returned after the war from serving in the boiler room of a naval vessel in the South Pacific, so weakened by diabetes that he died fifteen years later, at the age of fifty of a diabetic-related heart attack, a week before I graduated from high school at the age of 17. So my father never had the chance to instruct me in the things that a father often instructs his sons in during their young adulthood.

***What did you think of the *WR* at the time (early-to-mid 1960s)?**

I thought it was filled with the best poems by the best poets writing at that time—many of whom are still writing today. And since I soon became the poet whose poems he most often published, other than Bukowski, who of course was Number One, my confidence as a writer was given a tremendous boost, and that is usually the turning point at which a young writer becomes a prolific one. Eventually he published literally hundreds of my poems. He was my ideal reader and not only a literary mentor, but a human one as well. He was tough, but gentle.

***Did you change your view on the *WR* over the years?**

Never! And I still haven't!

***Did Malone accept all your submissions?**

No, but I would often send him fifty at a time and he would accept a large number of them. And he was generally correct in rejecting the ones that were not my best work.

***What made the *WR* so special for you?**

Its humor and its humanity and its clarity and its intelligence and its breadth of subject matter and styles, and its avoidance of pretense, role-playing, and phoniness, the remarkable honesty of its writers, their willingness to entertain, the spoken quality of their diction and rhetoric, their fearlessness and, mainly, their accessibility.

***Is there any other little mag that published so many of your poems?**

No, but *Poetry L.A.*, edited by Helen Friedland, probably published more by me than by anyone else, and especially encouraged my ekphrastic poems that used paintings as their starting points. She was a gracious lady and a dear friend. She was a surrogate mother or aunt to me in many ways, because my own aunts and mother had absolutely rejected what they had read of my poems and stories—except for my Aunt Pat, who continued to type my stories for me until near her death, even though she found them sometimes a bit risqué for her taste. She was the least religious of my Irish Catholic maternal side of the family, though—the only one who never attended Sunday Mass—and I am sure now that she must have had a bohemian youth, because painters had painted portraits of her. My family knew I wanted one of them, but it disappeared as soon as she died. Similarly, one of the reasons that my earliest books, like *Sunset Beach*, are rare and expensive now, is that my relatives had pre-ordered many copies of it to give to their friends, but as soon as they read it, they destroyed their copies and urged me never to write anything that sexual again. Actually, it was a very tame, tentative collection, by a young and relatively inexperienced writer—they must have turned over in their graves at the way I've written later in life.

Don't get me wrong though, they loved me very much and lavished their support of me for other things—a very good education, for instance, and support of my athletic career: the basketball and football and baseball, etc. which were my obsession throughout my high school years. I reached my level on incompetence when awarded a football scholarship at a school where the level of athletic talent was beyond my own. Injuries and a new obsession with literature and my own writing played their part in my athletic failure also though. And I've later come to realize that the death of my father a few weeks before I went away for early football practice probably played more of a role than I had realized as well. I was my parents' only child, and my father was my biggest fan. Sports may have seemed less meaningful to me after I was not playing to win his approbation. I loved him very much, and I hope I retained a few of his good traits.

***What do you think of the other poets Malone published in the *WR*? Did any of them left a lasting impression on you?**

Oh, yes indeed: Bukowski, of course, and Billy Collins, and Ron Koertge, and Charles Webb, and many of my own students who had work accepted and published by Malone: Nicki Manning and Patricia O'Connor Cherin, and other women such as Lyn Lyfshin and Ann Menebroker, and true originals such as Mark Weber and Paul Fericano—there are just too many to mention. There really weren't any bad writers slipping past Malone's standards of excellence.

Edward Field was the greatest early influence on my work though. Charles Stetler and I discovered his books such as *Stand Up, Friend, with Me* and *Variety Photoplays* in the early-mid 1960s, before I'd even begun to appreciate Bukowski. And I consider Edward Field, now in his 90s, our greatest living poet, and the greatest influence on my own work.

***Did you like Malone's editorial views?**

Absolutely. Our only difference of opinion was when I started writing a lot of art poems, and he refused to even recommend my seminal book *The Firebird Poems*, because I had dedicated it to the many women who had supported my literary career—and less noticed for it—and he felt I was trying to win their praise. Actually, I had always had a Jungian Anima as well as a dominant Animus—or the Animus I perhaps had to assert in order to retain it, growing up surrounded by so many women. It has never carried over into sexual preference: I'm simply heterosexual, though not, I hope, homophobic. But I can appreciate great art as much as I cheer loudly for the Lakers and the Yankees.

***What was Malone like?**

Malone was a very strong-minded person and he could be very cantankerous and ornery at times, but he was a real father figure for me. I would tell him things I wouldn't tell anybody else. I was afraid to meet him the first time, he meant so much to me personally; I had friends who were surrogate fathers along the way, and Malone was one of them. And when he died surprisingly around 1995, that was shocking. I had to start all over again finding places to send those hundreds of poems that I would usually have ended up sending to him. I knew that the magazine was good enough that there was permanence about it. I knew it might only be in a few libraries, but it was good to be in a few of those libraries, archived. A lot of writers will say they don't care about posterity, but I think we do because it's part of the life force. I certainly like to think that the stuff is someplace with a chance of future readers.

***How would you define the WR in a few words?**

I've already said more than a few words above regarding its defining qualities.

But I will add this as well: The Spirit of DADA re-emerged and lived on in the pages of *Wormie*, and it can still be found in mags such as *Slipstream* and *Nerve Cowboy* whose editors were obviously influenced by their early exposure to either *Wormie* itself or to the writings of such as myself who had been learned our DADA from the greatest American Dadaist: Marvin Malone. And if anyone has never heard of Dadaism, there was a fine book by Robert Motherwell that defined and gave examples of Dadaism and Surrealism. I studied it carefully while writing the chapter of my dissertation on Nathanael West's *Dream Life of Balso Snell*.

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