

As Poetry Month Ends, Prosaic Types Get Their Turn

by Con Chapman

BOSTON. It's getting close to 5 p.m. on April 30th, and Nyles Farner is watching the sweep second hand of his watch like a cat about to pounce on an absent-minded mouse. "Twenty, nineteen, eighteen," he counts down, as Eve-Elise O'Bannon-Krim scoops up flyers and chapbooks she's been offering at a folding card table in City Hall for National Poetry Month, which ends tonight at midnight.

"I'm going," O'Bannon-Krim says with exasperation as she throws trinkets such as Dylan Thomas beer cozies and Edna St. Vincent Millay hair scrunchies into a cardboard box.



"Do not drink light beer in that dark night . . ."

"Don't let the revolving door hit you in the butt on the way out," Farner snaps at the harried woman before turning to this reporter and saying "April can't end soon enough for me."

Farner is a member of the Jourdain Society, named after the character in Moliere's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* who discovers that he has been speaking prose all his life. "Prose is all around us,"

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Farner says with a trace of bitterness. "We couldn't make it through the day without prose, but poets get all the chicks."



"We're all out of the Sylvia Plath, but I have a cute Elizabeth Bishop model."

And so the Jourdain Society has floated a proposal to have May named "National Prose Month," with the same sort of once-a-year lip service treatment that poetry gets during April. "There are lots of writers who wrote poetry when they were young, then grew up and turned to the more mature form of prose," notes Professor Alton Birdsell of the New England College of Penmanship, a graduate school that produces more than half of the nation's handwriting instructors. "H.L. Mencken was so embarrassed by his juvenile poetry he was buying up copies of it the rest of his life."



"Here's a little something I call 'Owner's Manual: 2006 Pontiac Torrent.'"

The Boston City Council and the state legislature have both dragged their feet on the proposed proclamation, saying there is no public support for prose and that government shouldn't use scarce resources to honor something that "everybody does every day," according to Angelo DeNunzio, a state representative from East Boston. "What's next?" he asks sharply. "National Breathing Month? National Sit on Your Couch Month?"

But Farner and his colleagues are undeterred, and have persuaded the owner of the Cock 'n Bull Pub on City Hall Plaza to give them equal time for a "Prose Slam" where budding prose stylists can sharpen their skills before a live audience and help fight their prosaic image.

"Can I buy you a drink?" technical manual writer Mike Jebso asks a willowy redhead who has wandered into the bar unaware of the evening's scheduled program.

"Are you a writer or something?" the woman asks, looking down at him from an imposing height with the aid of 3 and a half-inch spike heels.

"Sorta," Jebso says. "I wrote the owner's manual to the Toshiba Portege Z-30, and I . . ."

"Sorry," the woman says as she picks up her purse. "I think I see a friend over there."

