

# I Am the Poetic Kiss of Death

*by* Con Chapman

In the four years that I have been writing poetry seriously—and comically—I have persuaded editors to publish five of my poems. If I've got the math right, that's an average of 1.25 a year, just slightly more frequently than I have birthdays. I'd like to think this isn't too shabby a track record for a tyro just starting out, but I don't think I can continue at this torrid pace, in much the same manner that I expect Pedro Ciriaco, the red-hot rookie shortstop of the Boston Red Sox, to cool down soon. In his case, it's the law of averages.

*Pedro Ciriaco, rookie shortstop phenom*

But not in mine. I anticipate that the frequency with which my poems get published will dwindle and then come to an end entirely for one simple reason; I am the poetic kiss of death. If I keep writing poems and having them accepted, soon there won't be any poetry publications left—for anybody.

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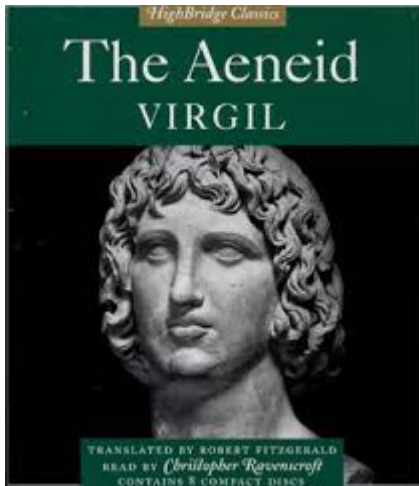
My poems have appeared in four different publications; three have died shortly after they ran my stuff. Coincidence, or something more sinister? You be the judge.



*Philip Larkin: "You sure you're a poet, old man?"*

*Light Quarterly* had been around since 1992, and had published John Updike, among others. Its subscribers included the libraries at Harvard, Brown and Columbia. Tough noogies. They made the mistake of accepting my *Lines in Contemplation of a Tragic Accident*, and the rest is history, or the end of their history. They're gone.

Then there was *Literary Dilettantes*. I actually won their *Parody of Epic Proportions* contest with *The Beerneid*, a parody of Virgil's *Aeneid*. For those keeping score at home, I hadn't won *anything* since 1962 when my Little League Team shocked the world with a 4-2 upset of the Optimist Club team to win the B-level city championship. Chicago Cubs fans like to say that any team can have a bad century, and I can sympathize; I only had a bad half-century.



*Virgil: Did he have something to do with it?*

But before my poem ever hit the shelves I received an email from the publisher saying “our art director had some personal issues to take care of, which is why the launch was delayed. She was able to start working on the issue but the demands in her personal life are not allowing her to finish for the foreseeable future.” (Note that she didn't avoid the gerundic, as Strunk & White recommend.)



*Strunk & White: “You're still confusing ‘that’ and ‘which.’”*

So just like that, I've got two literary homicides hanging over me. The circumstantial evidence would strike a cynical, world-weary cop as suspicious. “What kind of freaking rag shuts down just because its art director *has some personal issues to take care of?*” you can

hear him sneer as the glare of a bare light bulb shines down on my sweat-drenched face. "I don't know, they said they were legit," I say after he stops beating me with a rubber truncheon and the Yellow Pages. "They didn't even charge an entry fee."



*"Okay, let's take it from the top. You were mindin' yer own business, imitatin' Philip Larkin."*

Then I got two poems published in *The Poetry Ark*, an on-line anthology that was the product of a multi-round competition, like *Dancing With the Stars*, sort of a *Who Wants to Be America's Next Poet Laureate?* I tried to track it down as I wrote this post and I found a reference to it on the internet, but when I clicked on the link I got that "Internet Explorer cannot display the webpage" message, the same one I get when I try Nigerian websites hoping to get refunds for my kids' on-line purchases of high-tech baseball bats.

So that's three down, which leaves only *Spitball*, "The Literary Baseball Magazine," which published my poem "The Million Dollar Infield" earlier this year. I've got a hard copy of the issue in which it appeared, and I'm guarding it with my life. I need something to show the grammar police when they knock on my door and say "Are you gonna come quietly, or do we have to beat you in iambic pentameter until you wheeze like a Hallmark greeting card?"

