

14 November 2002

To: Steve Young
Poetry
fax 312-255-3702

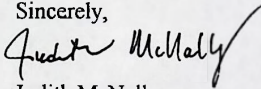
From: Judith McNally/Norman Mailer's office
phone: 718-858-0892
email: jmwordcraft@yahoo.com

THREE PAGES INCLUDING THIS NOTE

Dear Steve Young:

I've heard from Mr. Mailer and am attaching to this fax his poem, "On Reading Poetry Magazine's 90th Anniversary Issue." He sends it with the understanding that as we discussed, the editors will expedite its consideration and make every effort to let us know within ten days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith McNally". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

Judith McNally
for Norman Mailer

On Reading Poetry Magazine's 90th Anniversary Issue

Of the ninety-odd poems chosen, some were too mannered.
 It is not wise nor courteous,
 nor elegant, not decent
 (when you get down to it.)
 to bury a poem under polysyllabics,
 or spew it forth as a kaleidoscope of wacky words

worse, indulge an obsession ingrown at the root.

(Like, why did you leave me?)
 (Or, why won't you leave me alone?)

Such preoccupation is the vice of the spoiled child
 who is bright enough to become a poet.
 (Especially if courses are taken in prosody
 and their offspring is printed in serious magazines
 whether deserving or not.)

But, now I am
 functioning as the critic again.
 Hearing close to gone,
 joints too warped to walk with light
 and eyes that retreat
 beneath spirals of macular retina
 vibrating in.

I am not unhappy then if some blessed few call me a great writer.
 (There are times when I agree.
 Those are the most agreeable times.)

Let me be so unwise, however,
 as to find five good poets among the ninety-odd in the Anniversary Issue,
 five I've never met
 but for their presence on the page
 and I am felled by modesty.
 For three of them, three at least—
 come up with thoughts finer than any I have known.
 They see into the privacies of flowers,
 and work close to the bark of trees
 I did not know enough to touch.

They listen to the breath
of many a silence I did not encounter.

Yes, modesty returns to me with these three poems,
Modesty! You gray shroud of judgment
who sits across from me.
You are, of course, curses, a fine poet
full of perception I never had
nor grace nor time nor wit.

So I close this tight-knit tract of poems from Poetry Mag
written by poets belonging to the club
without the need to wonder
why I do not like to read
a line more talented than my own.

Theft, you fiends, I say to the good poets.
You are playing with the remnants
of what is still entitled to be called
the outreaches of my soul.

Fool, they reply. You live in the fallen ramparts
of purposes that cried for no more than one feather
of judgment
when you longed to be mighty enough
to wield a sword.

How I hate poets who are very good.
They are meaner and wilder
and more incisive than the worst sound
of the worst wife in one's ear.