

Where Do You Get Your Poetic Inspiration?

by Con Chapman

Sometimes as I sit at my desk at night, my hands pressed to my temples, trying to come up with a poem that will be rejected by both *The New Yorker* and *My Little Messenger*, I recall an offhand remark by W.H. Auden that I read many years ago. Where, an interviewer asked, do you get your inspiration? What magazines do you read?



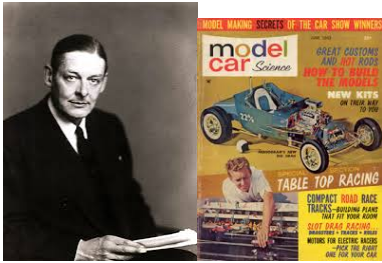
Auden: "I'm going to the john—has anyone seen my Scientific American?"

Auden, one of the great poets of the twentieth century, replied that he didn't read literary magazines. The only magazine he subscribed to, he said, was *Scientific American*, a publication that I had previously scorned as the trade journal of pre-med students and Nobel Prize winners.

Full Cry Magazine: The Coon and Tree Hound Hunters Bible

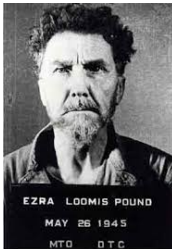
Dawn, as we say in Massachusetts, broke on Marblehead. I had been barking up the wrong tree, like a coon dog who has mistakenly chased a squirrel up a magnolia. If Auden could turn the grist of

quarks, gluons and DNA into poetry, I should have sought out a similarly unique and unlikely source of inspiration. No wonder I had writer's block! I was sucking up other people's writing like a shop vac when I should have been reading Full Cry Magazine, the Coon and Tree Hound Hunter's Bible, published in my little hometown in Missouri!



T.S. Eliot and Model Car Science

I started to do a little research and found that Auden was not alone. T.S. Eliot was apparently a life-long reader of *Model Car Science*, a magazine I subscribed to as a boy to see how plastic hot rod kits were supposed to look like when you finished them, instead of the mess of glue and paint that my fumbling fingers produced. “I look forward with great anticipation to each month's issue,” Eliot told Richard Ellman, his biographer. “I am currently working on a '49 Mercury, which I am going to chop and channel into one bitchin' street rod.”



Ezra Pound and Blood and Thunder; the Official Magazine of Women's Roller Derby

You might have thought it would have been wacko fascist anti-Semite Ezra Pound who was sniffing airplane glue, but in fact the

Modernist titan who told young poets to “Make it new!” subscribed to “Blood and Thunder,” the official magazine of women's roller derby. Scholars now believe that an understanding of roller derby is key to an appreciation of Pound's later work, such as Canto CXXI:

*And then around the bend here comes-
Joanie Weston, Bay Area Bomber.
Head held high, elbows fly—the jam is on!*



Joyce Kilmer (yes, he's not a girl) and Snowmobile Magazine

Even a poet as accessible as Joyce Kilmer looked far from the fields of *belle lettres* for his inspiration. A chance purchase of *Snowmobile Magazine* while on vacation in New Hampshire led to the creation of Kilmer's *Snow Cycle*, a poem that is still recited today by Ski-Doo enthusiasts across the country:

*I think that I shall never feel
Poems lovely as a snowmobile
Whose hot exhaust blows out the back
While rushing by on Kevlar tracks.*

So don't listen to your literary friends who ask you to subscribe to *plangent voices* or *Rage!* magazine or another one of those little literary rags with handmade paper covers and verse spilled all over their pages like Alpha-Bits thrown by a toddler.

Man up and send off the little card for a trial subscription to Texas Trophy Hunters Magazine. If you don't die from a rattlesnake bite, your poetry may improve dramatically.

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "poetry is kind of important."

