

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day?

Poets meet to express themselves through spoken

BY AMANDA PALM
The Battalion

Nestled in the back of Barnes and Noble Booksellers in College Station, between stacks of psychology and science fiction books, hides a group of aspiring poets and their fans.

Poetry Night began in June 1998 with more than 30 people. Since then, the Thursday night poetry readings have drawn a crowd of regular monthly attendees.

Cale Harfoush, community relations director for Barnes & Noble, said other Barnes and Noble stores throughout the country host Poetry Night, but the one in College Station is unique because there is more freedom for the poets to express themselves. "None are the same as ours," he said. "From what I've seen, they are more regimented. They just don't do anything interesting. There's nothing else like this. Sweet Eugene's [Coffee House in College Station] has poetry readings periodically, but there really aren't a lot of places in town with a literary bend."

Harfoush said people are drawn to Poetry Night because Barnes and Noble provides a relaxed atmosphere for literati in training.

"We are completely laid back, and there is no pressure on anyone to read," he said. "People who just get up in front of the audience and can read as much or as little as they want."

Eric Anthamatten, a senior political science major, who has been writing poetry since high school and attends poetry readings at Barnes and Noble and readings at other locations.

Anthamatten said he participates in poetry readings because he likes to perform.

"The spoken word has been neglected," he said. "Performance is as important as reading. I go because I can incorporate acting and sounds to go along with the poetry."

Anthamatten said he enjoys seeing others' reactions to his poetry.

"I like to shock them, but I want to get up there and turn them on to poetry," he said. "I like having people listen, even if they don't agree with me. I like to see their reaction. Poetry can be so much more than just words."

The English Language and Literature Society at Texas A&M has in past semesters hosted poetry readings. They have held poetry readings on campus and at Sweet Eugene's. This fall, the group has held one reading.

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community relations director
for Barnes and Noble

Amber Agan, vice president for the English Language and Literature Society and a junior English major, said the group decides if poetry readings will appeal to the public.

"We usually don't even talk to the people at Sweet Eugene's," she said. "We just set the date and time, and everyone shows up."

"But the group decides whether or not to have them. We discussed having another one, but they weren't too excited about it, so we didn't schedule one for November."

Agan said the group hosts poetry readings to fulfill its mission statement.

"One of our functions is to host literary events," she said. "Everyone in the group is

interested in literature and poetry and the group decides the types of things we do."

Harfoush said he wants to make Poetry Night more creative and imaginative for the poets and the audience.

"We've had giveaways and games to make things even more fun," he said. "We had a game where the poet had to choose a word from the top of their head and then make up a new poem using that word. If we get a new poetry book in, I may hand out some copies."

When possible, Poetry Night hosts guest poets who read from their books and share experiences. Guests have included James Brandenberg, author of *The Pursuit of the Butterfly* and Jack Brannon, author of *The Vigil*. Harfoush said he hopes to have Glen Allen, author of *Huckleberry Men*, visit the bookstore in December.

Harfoush said he Poetry Night is successful simply because people enjoy poetry. He said many shoppers in the bookstore stop and listen.

"People enjoy the rhyme and rhythm of poetry," he said. "It's great. I feel that someone is opening up a little more to poetry and to reading and to literacy."

Harfoush said the poets are drawn to Poetry Night to gain experience reading.

"Writing poetry is such a solitary endeavor," he said. "I think the poets like to share their work and see how people react."

Poets find inspiration for their work from a variety of places. Anthamatten said he can turn anything into a poem.

"You can take the smallest inspiration and turn it into a poem," he said. "There's this homeless dude who wears a golden cape and pulls a cart — it's so poetic. Something as simple as the moon or as large as a political or social issue can become a poem. Poetry forces people to look deeper."



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