

"AN ENGLISH TEACHER'S SONNET"

by Brian McKenney, c.A.D. 1957

(and here, only lightly edited from the original)

The daily-gathered compositions glare
At me each evening. And I, in haste,
Always in haste, with red-rimmed eyes go stare
At words misspelled, misused, & oft erased.

I brood and curse, and write in furious ink:
"Your thots are fine; how do you spell this word?"
Or, "Mechanics all right, but you don't think,"
And, sometimes, "<Name>, this sentence is absurd!"

And then the pen slams down. A bite to eat, a sip of wet,
begins to soothe my savage breast. And now
The pen begins to write comments on yet
Another theme. I dig, I sweat, I plow.

My pen slows to a halt - - ideas are gone;
But in my head are lines, so I write on....

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I found this Sonnet in a little booklet I bought at a Public Library Booksale several years ago. Inside the booklet were some "ephemera," i.e., miscellaneous inserted papers not part of the book itself, put there apparently by a teacher, who may also be the writer of the Sonnet. Nonetheless, he wrote, or typed, I believe on the same page as the Sonnet:

"... [And] a surprising number of teachers here in [his town] who have admitted to me that practice teaching was a disillusioning and discouraging experience for them. They seem to unanimously agree that I have benefited much more from my experience regardless of the difficulties I did encounter. Therefore, I conclude that I have been most fortunate to have begun teaching on the basis that I did, unfavorable as it may appear to someone who has not weighed the advantages and disadvantages. I have embarked on the adventure of teaching in a unique and exciting way. And I truthfully think that I will be the better teacher for having begun in this unorthodox way...."

I don't know what that "way" was, nor remember if it was explained in the other found papers; I doubt if it was, or I would have noted it somewhere with the Sonnet.

With relevance, there was a program shown on a local "public access" channel in 2004 in Southern California that I watched for a few moments, because it touched upon the

matter of "teaching" and its effects. The woman speaker presented said that, at least in the "science" classrooms, the students were not learning what was taught. She said that a significant amount of instruction simply was not learned sufficiently to show any proficiency in test-answers, etc.; the students were "not getting it." She seemed mystified about it all, and was searching for better ways to teach students. It hasn't gotten much better since.

Unfortunately, in the adventures of "channel surfing," I went on to watch some other program, un-fulfilling as it probably was, although now I would rather have stayed there with the teaching-related program.
