

On Puppets & Poetry by Cliff Burns

My wife, Sherron, is an accomplished visual artist and puppeteer.

One of the things she talks about is the question of whether to use people (live actors) or puppets in a given performance.

She insists puppets aren't merely substitutes or stand-ins for human beings. Using human actors means, to some extent, there's always going to be a sense of verisimilitude, that whatever universe the author/artist might be exploring, there are fundamental rules at play, the characters involved recognizable, even if their motivations and worldview are completely alien to us.

I feel that similar parallels can be drawn when it comes to expressing an idea through a short story or *via* poetry. If the theme or notion can be better transmitted or conveyed through prose, a more traditional approach to storytelling or description, I say *go for it*.

Because the moment you employ either poetry or puppetry you are telling your audience "you ain't in Kansas anymore". Both puppets and poetry distort or exaggerate or enhance some aspect of existence, our perception of the world. They approach their subject matter or theme at an oblique angle, refuting naturalism, invoking metaphor and symbols and allusion to create an

entirely new paradigm, where reality as we've come to know it is transfigured, stripped of its comforting trappings, rebuilt from scratch to new and exotic specifications.

Blithely using puppets in a staging of "Hamlet" instead of human actors might have a certain novelty appeal, but does it offer any fresh insights into the play or heighten its dramatic appeal?

Similarly, does writing a sentence about a rainy afternoon in the foothills and then inserting line breaks and stanzas do any service to poetry or the subject addressed?

But when you take the words from that original sentence and *bend* them like a guitar god bends the strings of a Stratocaster, you can create *magic*, transport the Reader elsewhere, someplace where the laws of gravity don't hold sway and the imperatives of time no longer apply.

Now you're playing with the stuff of dreams, navigating the unconscious, operating without tether or safety net.

The Readers/Audience are intrigued, but also unsettled. They know there are different rules at play and *nothing* is predictable or certain.

Even comprehension might be fleeting, solidity giving way to the abstract.

From the moment the curtain rises, or the first line is uttered, the spell takes hold—Earth Prime is no more, the familiar fading to black.