

# Very Like A Whale

## Ten Questions (2): Nate Pritts

February 28, 2008 at 6:46 pm ([Ten Questions 2](#))

And it's Nate Pritts! He says lots of great stuff here, but this has stuck in my mind since I first read his responses: *Ultimately, the manuscript is a big poem*. Maybe way way obvious to everyone else, but truly a light bulb moment for me. Thanks for that, Nate, and everything else. Nate's responses to the [Ten Questions on publication](#):

### **1. Describe your publishing trajectory. Where did it start? Where is it now? How long have you been at it?**

The word trajectory would sort of mislead people into thinking I knew what I was doing, like everything that happened has done so according to some kind of plan I laid down. Not true. I had the first inklings of ambition toward publication of my poetry when I was an undergrad. I was in a workshop with some grad students who were running the school's literary magazine & they asked me to submit a poem I had read in workshop. It's a little more complicated than this – mostly because one of them in particular was sort of full of himself and I took great pleasure in the fact that he liked my poem since I didn't really dig any of his – but it sort of developed from there. In fact, I got kind of obsessive about submitting. I used to pore over Poet's Market books, or go to any university library to look through the stacks, making lists of places I might submit to. Again, there was nothing remotely targeted about this – it was more like carpet bombing.

This pretty much continued from about 1995 to about 2000. I slowed down for a few reasons – partly because I had just finished my MFA, was about to start my PhD and no longer felt quite so strongly that I had something to prove. I mean, I realized that I had been submitting my poetry for publication partly from a genuine desire to enter into a larger conversation about poetry but also partly from a desire to show people that I was good enough (I almost typed “better than them” but boy that makes me sound a little rough). I didn't stop submitting in 2000 – I just became a little more focused in how I submitted, really trying to cultivate relationships with editors and publications, knowing the field better and so knowing better where my work fit in. Also, I started writing differently, in sequences that lent themselves to chapbook publication & I was lucky enough to get a few of those out there.

Now, with my first book having come out this past summer ([Sensational Spectacular](#), 2007) my second slated for this fall (Honorary Astronaut, 2008), the internal pressure to make my poetic statement through journal publication has lessened even further. I've become much more focused to the point that I submit 1) to the same handful of journals over and over again, 2) to certain “big-name” journals without much expectation of acceptance and 3) when asked by editors.

Let me say, too, that part of this is a time issue. For various reasons, I'm not writing as much these days and as a result simply don't have as much to submit. This almost makes it sound as if I'm saying journal publication is a kind of minor league that leads to the big leagues of book publication and this

is far from how I really feel. But I think about journal publication much differently these days than I did even 3 years ago.

## **2. What would you do differently if you had to start all over again?**

I'm not sure I'd do anything differently. I think maybe I would try to worry less about publication, but I think part of my worrying about it is what led me to be so persistent and I do feel as if that persistence paid off – because it ensured I kept at it, got better, etc.

## **3. Why did you start seeking publication? Why do you continue?**

I've sort of provided an answer to this in #1. I continue because I feel more strongly about poetry than I do about almost anything else – and publishing my work is a way to make sure my voice is heard in this great conversation that we're all having.

## **4. Does your relationship with your work change after it is published and if so, how? How does the concept of publication affect your writing in general?**

After my work has been published, when I'm looking at it online or on the printed page, I feel somehow less critical of it, from a nuts and bolts perspective, and more critical of it, from an aesthetic project standpoint. It's almost as if I'm seeing a poem by someone else. I take it for what it is and assess it that way – rather than the constant working to make it more effective in any of a thousand different ways. So I guess what I mean is that, initially, I am able to meet it from a detached perspective that actually helps me to see it fresh. This gives way to treating it the same way I treat any of my poems.

Trying to answer these questions makes me realize I don't have any kind of complex inner relationship to my work – and these questions almost imply that I should. So what's wrong with me? I write a poem and I really like it or I sort of like it or I think it isn't that great – but my sense of “my work” isn't holistic so much as it is provisionally developed on a poem-by-poem basis.

## **5. Talk about putting a chapbook together. How have you done it in the past, how would you do it differently now? Why are chapbooks a good thing or not a good thing?**

Chapbooks are probably another of those case-by-case things. Some of my chapbooks have been defined by the project. *Winter Constellations*, a chapbook from horse less press, and (*sonnets for the fall*), a chapbook from Parcel Press, both present a complete project, though those two link together to work towards something larger. I guess what I'm saying is that, for me, a chapbook is usually something different than a small version of a book. Even my newest chapbook, *Shrug*, or one of my oldest, *Hellbent*, which are on the surface loose collections of unrelated poems, still have inherent and crucial aesthetic underpinnings.

So, practically speaking, I think a chapbook can be anything – a unified sequence in its entirety, a collection linked by thematic issues or chronological composition. But, as with a full length manuscript, I think something needs to anchor the book. It's my preference that the chapbook form itself works to deliver compressed bursts, and that these bursts are, in action, a form of thought: scattered or unified, lax or rigorous. Chapbooks are about as close as we can come to inhabiting a

boiled-down consciousness different from our own. (\*see [this](#)).

**6. What's your advice to someone putting together a full-length poetry manuscript for the first time? Share your thoughts on the importance (or not) of narrative arc in poetry manuscripts.**

Narrative arc may be more important to certain manuscripts than others. Certainly I think some kind of arc is necessary to my work and would probably be helpful to most people.

The best advice I can think to give would be to be ruthless. Don't include any B-sides to pad out the document. Just because you wrote it doesn't mean that it belongs in your manuscript. Ultimately the manuscript is a big poem. A truly effective manuscript, one that takes advantage of the multivalent properties of the endeavor, is not just a jumbled collection of things you wrote, but should be a unified aesthetic statement.

**7. Do you personally market your publications? If so, why and how, and do you enjoy it? If not, why not?**

I do market my own [publications](#) and I do it for several reasons – the biggest of which is: if I don't do it, why should I expect anyone else to? This comes from necessity; since [the places](#) that have [published my work](#) don't have large marketing and publicity departments, it's up to me to [get the word out](#).

On another level, this comes from the fact that I am suited for it; I edit my own magazine, [H NGM N](#), and have experience [promoting it](#) and the works published there. And it's what I do [for a living](#).

And, actually, I do enjoy it – because I know my efforts have put my work into the hands of people who might not have seen it otherwise. But I am made a little uncomfortable by it for all the reasons people usually mention. I guess there's a stereotype that self-promotion is kind of gauche. To me, it's a natural extension to the whole process. You write poetry because you feel compelled to; you submit it so that it can reach a wider audience and so you can enter a larger conversation; you promote so people know.

**8. Complete the following sentences: Big-name poetry publishers are..... out of touch with what's truly exciting about contemporary poetry.**

**9. Small- and micro-presses are...** too uncertain of the vital role they play & need to be more aggressive in seeking innovative ways to distribute & market poetry.

**10. Describe the ideal relationship with a publisher and the relationship with a publisher from hell.**

The ideal relationship with a publisher would involve trust – they demonstrate their trust in you as an artist by committing to you – through some kind of long-term contract, through marketing efforts, through etc. Consequently, you trust in them to do right by you & your work, thus freeing you to keep doing what you wanted to do in the first place: write.



Nate Pritts is the author of the chapbook, [SHRUG](#), released this week by [Main Street Rag Press](#). He is the author of two full length collections ([Sensational Spectacular](#), BlazeVOX and the forthcoming *Honorary Astronaut*, Ghost Road Press) as well as several earlier chapbooks (most recently [Spring Psalter](#) as an insert in *Cannibal #3*). The editor of H\_NGM\_N and a frequent reviewer for *Rain Taxi*, Nate works in advertising as a writer and interactive developer. He lives in Natchitoches, LA, with his family. Find him online [here](#).



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February 28, 2008 at [9:04 pm](#)

[...] February 28, 2008 · No Comments We are publishing a volume of poetry, *Honorary Astronaut*, by Nate Pritts this fall. Here, he answers ten questions at verylikeawhale. [...]

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