
RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

pany sees enough potential rewards to push ahead with its own money.

Reagan-era austerity may be harder on other projects, Finneran warns. Federal solar research outlays were slashed from \$633 million in 1980 to \$268 million in 1982. Washington plans to spend only \$73 million next year. That may mean fewer new ideas under the sun.

ARTS & LETTERS

Executive Poets

"Business and Poetry" by Dana Gioia, in *The Hudson Review* (Spring 1983), 684 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Business and poetry may seem to mix like oil and water, but in America they blend surprisingly often. Despite the seeming contradiction, writes Gioia, a poet and General Foods executive, the nation's businessman-poets have profited from their dual identities.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955), vice president of a Hartford insurance firm and one of America's greatest poets, became the best-known hybrid. T. S. Eliot wrote *The Wasteland* (1922) while working at Lloyd's Bank of London. Present-day examples include James Dickey, who had a successful career in advertising before he quit to write full-time in 1961, and A. R. Ammons, who was a glass salesman in New Jersey when his first book (*Ommateum, with Doxology*) was published in 1955.

Oddly, none of these poets ever wrote a word about his nine-to-five existence. A key reason, Gioia suggests, is that American poetry is intensely introspective; it is also inspired more by other poetry than by experience in the wider world.

Yet business did shape the writing of these poets. Unlike their counterparts in academe or Greenwich Village, who wrote colloquially, the hybrid poets tended towards the difficult and fantastic in language and grammar. "Sensible, no-nonsense talk in the office," Gioia speculates, may have convinced them that spoken English was no medium for poetry, and they may have drawn a special thrill from writing "extravagantly" on their own time.

There were some drawbacks. The workaday world consumed precious time and energy; the poets were isolated from their literary peers. But there were advantages as well. Financial security was one (all of these poets were successful in business). Their business interests also shielded them from many of the anxieties that brought on madness and sometimes suicide in other poets. A job, Gioia says, gave direction to the poet's life, "providing him with a sense of place and purpose in his society. It gave him attainable goals," whereas poetry demanded a perfection seldom achieved.

Business put poetry in perspective, making these poets realize that there is more to life than writing. Even so, all except Stevens abandoned the business world at the first opportunity.