

The Cover Story

Second in a Series; Poets

by Jason Wells



Figure A6

In the spirit of the iconic U.S. commemorative series Famous Americans [On Front Cover A1 to A5], I present five poets who shaped my worldview. In November 2018 issue of the *Philatelic Missive*, I featured five authors, now I move on to the next set. Poetry is a little harder for me because I haven't read much in the way of poetry. But consider this, yesterday's poetry becomes today's accepted nuggets of wisdom. The first poet was the ultimate no-brainer. Dante Alighieri [Figure A6] wrote "The Divine Comedy", featuring three sets of epic poems: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. *Inferno* is known for its harrowing description of Hell and its "lost souls". *La Vita Nuova* (The New Life) is also a noted work. While born in Florence, Italy, he was exiled in 1302 for political reasons. Dante was featured on a U.S. Scott# 1268. Monaco, Italy, Vatican City, and a host of other nations have commemoratives featuring Dante.

I first read Dante in the 7th grade, when my English teacher pointed out that I had a "heaven and hell" fixation. Reading the poem at that age (surprisingly, not that hard a read for a 12-year-old) had a profound effect on my view of my fellow man.

T.S. Eliot (1888 - 1965) was both a poet and a playwright [Figure A7]. He is known for his bleak outlook on the human condition with such lines as "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" and "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper". The second line is considered by some to be the most quoted line of poetry of the 20th century. Born in St. Louis, T.S. Eliot renounced his American citizenship and became a British citizen in 1927. His career was spent teaching (secondary school and college) and writing book



Figure A7

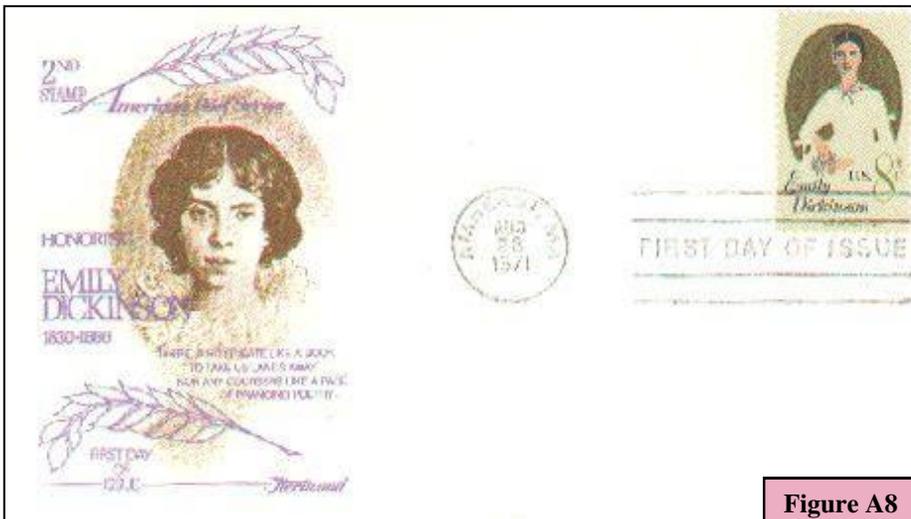


Figure A8

reviews. Commemoratives on Eliot include U.S. Scott #2239, as well as Nicaragua and UK. I tried to read "The Wasteland" about 30 years ago and found it to be quite challenging. 400+ lines with themes ranging from British society to St. Augustine to Hinduism, with sudden changes in perspectives, it was a bit much. Maybe I will take another stab at it in the near future.

A somewhat different poet than T.S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886) [Figure A8] led a reclusive life

in Amherst, Massachusetts. Possibly suffering from agoraphobia, she rarely appeared in public and was only

published sporadically. While mournful and elegiac with a preoccupation with flowers and gardens, she could be humorous and ironic. The only stamp I found featuring Dickinson was U.S. Scott #1436.

The only exposure to Dickinson’s poetry was from, of all things, a Sunday morning comic strip called *Bloom County*. If you came of age in the early 1980s, you were familiar the biting satire and humorous characters of *Bloom County*. One such comic showed the character Opus doing a hilarious riff on Dickinson’s “Autumn Rhapsody”. The memory always stuck with me.

I classify Bob Dylan (1941 - present) as a poet because of his 2008 Pulitzer Prize and 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature. Known as primarily a musician, songs such as “Like a Rolling Stone”, “Girl from the North Country” (a personal favorite), and “Tangled Up in Blue” (another personal favorite) are a fixture in the American cultural landscape. Born in Hibbing, Minnesota (near Duluth) Dylan has explored many themes, but people’s inability to accept reality and to embrace simple truths seems to be an overriding theme. Like Dante, Dylan has been honored by many countries with commemorative issues. One that stands out is Kabardino-Balkaria (a Russian republic located in the northern Caucasus mountains near Armenia) showing him at various stages of his career. I’ve come to appreciate Dylan in recent years, especially his early folk albums.



Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849) [Figure A9], born in Boston but Baltimore claims him as their own, completes our poet’s series. Poe’s poetry and short stories pioneered both the horror and detective genre of fiction. Poems such as “A Dream within a Dream” and “The Raven” along with short stories like “The Pit and the Pendulum” and “The Fall of the House of Usher” have haunted the world for generations. While he was mostly preoccupied with death and mourning, he also dabbled in science fiction. St. Thomas and Prince Islands issued a terrific souvenir sheet in 2009 in regard to his detective fiction. Other countries honoring him include the US (two issues 1949 #986 and 2009 #4377) and Hungary. I have found Poe fascinating most of my life and his work in many forms be it movie (The Pit and the Pendulum), music (Alan Parson’s Project’s “Tales of Mystery and Imagination”) and prose (“The Cask of Amontillado”).

[Editor’s notes;

(1) The first article in this series was published as the Cover Story in the Philatelic Missive of November (and December) of 2018.

(2) Jason’s selection of Edgar Allan Poe truly warmed the cockles of my heart. I have been a fan of his since my early teen years when I first read “The Raven” & “The Cask of Amontillado”. I went on to read virtually all of his writings while still in my teenage years. His writing is a gold standard matched by few.]