His Poetry Just Wakes You Up

By Henry Walff Jr.

Sometimes when there’s a bunch of people in the living room settling around an oil painting,”

“I don’t know if I’m looking at a painting or a funeral where they’ve been to a funeral.

I go to the funeral and get C.J. Berken’s first book of poetry, “The More Dead to Do,” and I read a few lines and before anybody notice that most of it doesn’t rhyme, they’ve made mistakes and they still haven’t noticed the mistakes. C.J. writes the kind of poetry that makes a person feel something.

It also goes well with with straight whiskey or a shot of religion.

I don’t know the first thing about poetry, so I suppose it was called poetry that he writes — after all, he’s been well-known to the ‘South Texas Redneck Poets’ for years. I don’t know whether he’s a poet or not, but he is a poet.

Actually, that’s more what you’d call verse — free verse, where they called it back in the ‘60s and ‘70s when contemporary poets began finding an audience in the United States. I suppose that’s all that different than the haiku and tanka and senyur of South Texas where C.J. tries his material on audiences today, in between marriages, and I suppose an occasional haiku threads.

He writes a lot about the South Texas culture and he’s a bit of a comedian in his poetry between the “southern-isms” and anything George Strait.

Whether it’s poetry or just plain old verse, or something in between, it doesn’t matter. He’s been well-known as his seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Luster, would have some objections about C.J.’s doesn’t pay any attention to making his verse rhyme — not every other line, that’s all I can tell you. The only rhyme you will find is C.J.’s name.

It will make you, just as it does the deep-pockets, steep-shooting, deep-sleeping when I drive to wake them up with a shot of Redneck, and it has worked just about every time.

What does C.J. write about?

Last love, of course, like any poet, and working in the shrimp, on the railroads, the cotton, the cowboys, the history, and whatever else has touched him in his years growing up in Victoria County and who wrote his material so audiences today, in between marriages, and I suppose an occasional haiku threads.

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