

Finding Fulfillment

by Nathan Geyrozaga

In Hastings Hensel's poem, "At the Grave of the Fabulous Moolah," a speaker, who is a poet and the writer of the poem, laments that creating poetry doesn't give him the glory, gratification, or recognition that he desires. He compares himself to "The Fabulous Moolah," one of the first popular female wrestlers and a pioneer of women in the sport. He contrasts the glory of pleasing crowds through wrestling to the lifeless experience that he thinks writing poetry is. Eventually, the speaker gives up and decides to retire from poetry. This poem, "At the Grave of the Fabulous Moolah," shows the uncertainty in trying to live a fulfilling life, with the moment of most uncertainty coming after the speaker decides to give up, and when he thinks about his future.

Jack Underwood, a poet, writer, and university lecturer, wrote an essay called, "On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects." In his essay, Underwood examines how uncertainty shapes people's lives, and the close relationship between poetry and uncertainty. He discusses how poetry uses uncertain language, and how that language, "reminds us that the concept of meaning belongs to only us, and not [...] to the universe itself" (Underwood). Before examining the reasons why people write poems, Underwood says that when we encounter moments of uncertainty, we often look upwards to God or a part of the universe to give us answers (Underwood). He states that, poetry, in contrast to this, "tends to lead us back indoors, to the mirror" (Underwood).

The speaker in the poem looks into himself and finds that he is "Sick of being called a poet for simply writing poetry / and wandering in graveyards on sunny Saturdays" (Hensel 1-2). He detests other people labeling him as just another poet, and it is this dissatisfaction with poetry and the audience that leads him to quit poetry for good. The speaker recognizes that "Poetry is a silly thing, so small" (Hensel 10), and he is disappointed that poetry does not fulfill his dreams of glory or leaving behind a legacy. In a society that increasingly idolizes mythmaking and larger-than life spectacles, introspective and subtle activities like poetry are becoming less and less important, which Underwood confirms when he writes, "The epistemic value of poetry has been shunted way down the pecking order" (Underwood).

The speaker in the poem realizes that writing poetry has become a difficult way to create a legacy that wouldn't be overshadowed by increasingly popular things like wrestling, leading to his internal strife about quitting and retiring. Instead of working harder to solidify a legacy by continuing to write poems or find fulfillment in another profession, though, the speaker simply gives up. He says it is "Better to sell insurance, or tend small herbs / in the garden, or watch children grow old, and the reruns on television" and resigns himself to not fulfilling his dreams through poetry (Hensel 19-20). Instead, he accepts his decision to retire from poetry and move on to more mundane parts of life that might not lead to the fulfillment he truly desires.

Another huge reason that the speaker chooses to retire from poetry is his comparison of the boring, ever-dwindling profession of writing poetry to the larger-than-life, spectacled fame of wrestling. He stands at the grave of Mary Ellison, who, through wrestling, created the persona known as The Fabulous Moolah. He deplores the fact that people will never cheer as hard, for or against him, as they would have for a wrestler like her. The speaker complains, "I will never equal that," and feels great uncertainty about continuing to write poetry (Hensel 18). When viewers read the speaker's comparison between himself and The Fabulous Moolah, we find that it is completely unfair. He compares himself to the end result of the persona of a famous wrestler, not the person that put in all the time and hard work to get there.

Today, many people face uncertainty in fulfilling their dreams or leaving a legacy, as well as uncertainty about giving up. The speaker in the poem saw creating a legacy and being famous as one thing, when in reality you can leave a legacy without becoming renowned. In addition, the speaker talks about giving up or quitting. Although it can be seen as weakness or failure, giving up is not always a bad thing. Quitting can be an opportunity to learn and grow, and knowing when to cut your losses and move on is an important skill to master. No matter what happens, though, the best thing to do when faced with uncertainty and failure is to always keep pushing forward and never fear the future.

Works Cited

- Hensel, Hastings. "At the Grave of The Fabulous Moolah." *Story South*, 2016. storysouth.com/stories/at-the-grave-of-the-fabulous-moolah/. Accessed 14 February 2025.
- Underwood, Jack. "On Poetry and Uncertain Subjects." *Poetry Foundation*, 1 May 2018. www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/146494/on-poetry-and-uncertain-subjects. Accessed 14 February, 2025.