

## CONNECTION CRITIC DISCOVERED POET LAUREATE

By William Nicoson

You remember T. L. Ponick. He used to review theater and music for The Connection Newspapers from the mid-eighties to mid-nineties. He's reviewed music for The Washington Times since 1994. But more important, he publishes, in Reston, The Edge City Review, a literary journal he founded in 1994 which now appears three times yearly.

In one of ECR's first issues, Ponick published a long poem entitled "The Big Bang" by Joseph Awad, then little known in establishment literary circles. The poem was well received and is scheduled for book publication later this year. Last week Awad was chosen Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The 400 members of The Poetry Society of Virginia chose Awad as one of three finalists, and Governor James Gilmore, after studying examples of the work of finalists, named Awad as Poet Laureate.

The Virginia Laureate receives no salary and is assigned no duties during a year in office, but the honor signals that his or her work is at least worth reading, maybe even outside Virginia. Poets, alas, hope for little more than publication and recognition. ECR offered Awad publication, and recognition followed. Ponick's astute critical faculties, apparent years ago to Connection readers, have now been officially confirmed.

The name "Edge City" might be taken as a signal of suburban literary focus, but Ponick tells me no reference to Joel Garreau's book of that name was intended. To me the name indicates that ECR situates itself on the edge of the citadel of the literary establishment: seeking out and publishing work of high quality by writers either new or ignored by conventional literary journals as well as work by established writers.

"The Big Bang" is a case in point. It's a lengthy poem conveying religious experiences verging on ecstasy in an alliterative rhythmic rhetoric reminiscent of Gerard Manley Hopkins. To the literary-journal market dominated by academic taste, the poem would likely be anathema. But Ponick knew worthy verse when it came over the transom.

ECR is one of a handful of independent literary journals free of support and guidance by universities and foundations. Literary reviews launched by entrepreneurs seldom last beyond five issues at most. In this institutional sense, ECR is clearly situated on the edge -- the edge of financial failure. But Ponick is preparing ECR's eleventh issue for publication and is confident of long-term survival. He himself contributes essays on literary topics, usually revealing deeply conservative roots, such as his arch and derisive welcome to the first issue of "Workplace", a "journal of academic labor" (see the ECR web site, [www.edge-city.com](http://www.edge-city.com)).

ECR has no place in its pages for free verse or confessional ramblings. But Ponick's conservatism is not hobbled by puritanism or martinet formalism. A year ago ECR gave us the

provocative wit and alliterative gusto of Alice Marie Tarnowski's "In Praise of Quirky Ladies":

"So here's to quaint virgins,  
independent matrons, quirky ladies –  
survivors of life's wear and tear...

and to perceptive men  
with wit and grace who dare  
to eat the soft, sweet fruit that lies within  
the barb-wired, bristly Prickly Pear."

*William Nicoson is a former theater and music critic and a former publisher of Connection Newspapers.*