Make it New

A Guide for 21st Century Poets

by Mike Barrett

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1. Introduction

Tching prayed on the mountain and
wrote MAKE IT NEW
on his bath tub
Day by day make it new
cut underbrush,
pile the logs
keep it growing
Ezra Pound, Canto LIII

The genesis of this book lies in an online poetry class I was developing. As I started to write content for each unit, the unit would grow into a chapter. Before too long I realized I was writing a book.

There are many poetry textbooks available; why write another one? Because even though we are into the 21st century, few poetry textbooks address Modernism, not even to speak of POSTmodernism. We are in post-post Modern age, the implications of which are currently being worked out. A poetry textbook ought to at least acknowledge where we are in literary history and discuss some of the techniques of modernism and postmodernism that got us here, for example, the use of sources in writing poetry. It is a staple of modernist practice, yet it is rarely addressed in introductory poetry textbooks. Its successor, the Foucauldian use of discourses in postmodern and post-post modern technique, is also discussed here. Beginning poets ought to learn a practice that's been in continuous use for more 100 years.

Another reason I wrote this book is because of my experience in American poetry. As I'll discuss later, as a member of the Chicago Poetry Ensemble, I helped establish the poetry slam. I have been involved in poetry performance since 1985. On the other hand, I was educated as a Poundian modernist, and have written extensively on avant-garde poetics, particularly Language Writing and Oulipo. I have also given papers on poetry, vision, and cognition. The slam and the experimental, though they share vital aspects, are very different practices–the former calls for "first heard best heard" presentation, the latter requires a body

of theory to account for its texts. The 21st century includes both these, and many other, poetries. This book ranges in the wide space between the performative and the experimental. It does not encourage the student to become one kind of a poet or another. This book helps the student to become a working poet by having her write poems.

Poetry is a huge tent. There is no scarcity of poetic content or form–there is room enough for every poet. John Cage meet Billy Collins; Billy Collins meet John Cage.

Telos

What there is no room for in the poetry tent is a gatekeeper. Gatekeepers are those who look at a practice not their own and say, "That's not poetry." One of the ways I reject this idea is to focus again and again on the idea of TELOS. "Telos" is a Greek word which means, "end, purpose, goal." I try to judge in terms of its telos, not necessarily whether or not it conforms to what my idea of good poetry is. What school the poem is an expression of does not matter; what matters is whether or not it achieves its telos. Poetry accommodates myriad purposes. Telos is the keynote of this book. For one, I provide the telos for a number of assignments, and within the assignments themselves, students have to set out for themselves what their purpose is within the assignment.

Students must have a telos in mind throughout their composition. They must know what their purpose is in writing. Note that this is a different idea than INTENTION relative to the semantic meaning of a poem. The poet does not determine the ultimate meaning of the poem, the interaction between language and reader does, but the poet ought to have an idea of what he or she is trying to accomplish. Students must also be able to tell whether or not they achieved their telos. This ability evolves over time. It is the result of having read widely, and engaging in the production and critique of poetry.

Organization

The book is organized as I organize my introductory class. It is the result of more than 40 years of writing poetry and 20 years of teaching. Students start by learning how to construct "deranged" poetry—that is, poetry that doesn't intend sense. This forces students to confront the material from which they compose poetry–language. It also represses, a bit, the drive to make big meaning and deep feeling out of poems. If poets first understand that poems are made out of language, not thoughts or feelings, they will be able to better express those thoughts and feelings when expression is their telos.

From deranged poetry, students move to found poetry as a way of mastering lineation and introducing sources in a poem. The fifth chapter covers imagery and the image poem, which teaches students the value of objectivity and economy—the direct presentation of the thing.

Subsequent chapters detail how to compose narratives, poems of place, political poems, collages, and sonnets. Students have by then been introduced to traditional forms, as well as the kind of poems that poets often write. These lessons provide students with foundational skills, tools for their toolbox. It ensures that they will never be victimized by writer's block because they'll know how give themselves a project in filling a poetic form.

The last third of the book offers lessons in putting the students' skills to use in constructing more complex and extended forms. Students learn how to write poetry sequences. They learn how to collaborate, perform, and produce poetry shows. The penultimate chapter introduces students to modernism through T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland." The chapter provides a line-by-line reading with accompanying exercises. The goal of the chapter is to provide students with a guide on how to write a long poem—in this case, at least 100 lines.

Roughly a chapter a week which yields two poems. Chapters end with two assignments: a mid-week assignment and a final assignment. The student constantly produces work. By the end of the semester, the telos for the last chapter, "Making a Book," becomes apparent–the student should have produced a chapbook's worth of material in the course of the

semester.

The Examples

The sample poems I have provided include contemporary poems, student poems, and canonical work. Canonical work is copyright free. and highlights the intertextuality involved in all poetry writing—we do not write in a self-enclosed vacuum but within a longstanding tradition. The canonical work, which includes some of my favorites, allows for close readings. Poets need to be New Critics before Post-structuralists; they need to understand the literal meaning of the poems. Close reading helps accomplish this. By the end of the semester, students will have received a primer of poetry in the English tradition. Students, when faced with difficult passages, ought to adhere to the foundational principle of confronting any text: Read Every Word. Even if it does not sink in, let the words do their work on neurons, even if meaning does not reach the frontal lobe.

Wherever possible, I have included student examples. These examples will expand over time. They demonstrate the on-the-ground response to these assignments

The Title

"Make it New" was the modernist credo. Pound used it as the title of his collection of essays published in 1934 and included it in Canto 53. Pound's sense was to make something new out of cultural tradition. This includes performance, collaborative, and electronic poetry. It also includes what Language Writers call "innovative writing." Innovation is not the same as novelty. Innovation means that something has been addressed that never has been addressed before with a new form. It is not novelty for novelty's sake—innovation must have a telos. Innovation in verse is not restricted to the 20th and 21st centuries—poets have always been innovating. Make it New means to be open to innovation, to be willing to throw off the inherited telos of poetry (whether social or personal) in order

to compose a new one.

Not all poets are called to be experimental, but all poets ought to be looking to improve and discover new forms to fulfill the telos they have set for themselves. William Butler Yeats is a poet who stands out in this regard. One hundred and twenty years of poetic tradition can be found in his work, from Romanticism to Modernism. For Yeats, poetry was an evolutionary practice he lived. This book is a modest beginning for students who want to learn how to live that way.

2. Deranged Poetry

Meaninglessness is the ultimate meaning.
John Cage

A mullatto
an albino
a mosquito
my libido
Kurt Kobain, "Smells Like Teen Spirit"

When I was an 11 year old, I started to write poetry and fancied myself "deep." The first poem I wrote was, "Dreams and Wishes," another was called, "The Unrecognized Hurt." Everything I wrote was about my deep feelings. This practice continued until I was in college and entered my poems in the college poetry contest. I didn't win and was crushed. When I read the winning entries, I could see how different those poems were from my poems. Maybe it was because I was an Economics major who read the canon but had never *studied* poetry. So began my poetry pilgrimage.

One thing I know now that I didn't know then: Poetry is not made of feelings or deep thoughts. It is made of language. This is your first lesson. In the same way that a painting is made of paint (seems obvious doesn't it?) poems are made of words. The content of the poem, what that language relates or refers to (its semantic meaning) is a consequence of language. I hate clichés, but the poem "is what it is." The meaning we paraphrase from a poem is immaterial--a poem is its language. Period.

So to begin class, you are going to do something very radical. You are going to spend the first two weeks without imposing meaning on language! You are going to play. You are going to assemble words in a variety of ways, but if you intend meaning, you are on the wrong path. You are to use language in compelling ways without a deliberate meaning.

Rationale

There are four reasons for approaching poetry this way:
First, as I've indicated, poetry is made of language, not thoughts and feelings, and you ought to be able to demonstrate this.

Second, it's a subversive practice in a culture that would have us accept the meanings of words and phrases as being a kind of product. "Fair and Balanced©," "Coke©," Xerox©,"--these are trademarked terms. Without commenting on the political orientation of Fox News, it's interesting to think a news organization *owns* a phrase. Language becomes product placement. One of the poet's jobs is to free language from forces that wish to restrict meaning. Think of your deranged poem as a place of DEMOCRACY where each word has its own clear voice.

Kuleshov

Third is the Kuleshov Effect. Lev Kuleshov was an early, groundbreaking Russian filmmaker. Kuleshov wanted to prove something about the viewer's role in creating meaning out of cinematic montage (more on montage later in the book). He spliced an image of a man staring into various scenes. First he showed soup, then a dead baby, then a beautiful woman. When he spliced those scenes together, he asked viewers to construct a narrative out of the montage. Invariably, people would say--the man is hungry, then he is sad, then he is enamored. Of course, the trick was that in reality the man never changed his expression at all. The emotions people saw were their own projections. This is the key point. No matter how "deranged" (more on this word next) the language in your poem is, readers will create meaning out of the words--it is in our nature to do so. But look what happens; instead of the reader being CONSUMER of the poem and meaning (determined by the authority of the poet), the reader becomes PRODUCER of the meaning. Each reader can produce different meaning.

Fourth, the 19th century French poet Arthur Rimbaud describes the "systematic derangement of the senses" the poet must go through in order

to become visionary. Derangement means to radically revision the world. For this first poem, you are to derange the common use of language through unexpected leaps and change of direction. See language in a new way; see the world in a new way.

Mimesis

Essentially, you are learning to break language from its "mimetic" function. The Greek word, "mimesis" means imitation. So poetry in its mimetic mode means that the poem refers to some meaning the poet wants to relate to the reader:

> My red heart hurts
> because she broke it.

The language says, "That woman has made me sad!" Boohoo. Let's just change a few words to derange this plaintive lyric.

> My read heat hits
> am cause orbit.

Now that's deranged. There is no specific intended meaning to be communicated. The poem is a series of dissociated words. There is no mimetic function at all--there is no reference, just words.

Visual Art

20th century painting also depicts the break from the physically mimetic. Jackson Pollock's (1912-56) paintings, for example, reflect the process of the painter. His canvases shimmer in an energetic arrangement of colors, lines, and brushwork that show the dynamism of the artist. The subject is not a reflection of the outer world, but the mark of the painter's making. The focus is on process rather than mimesis. In addition, paint is foregrounded. Work like Pollock's emphasizes texture, color, line and form–aspects of the painter's interaction with the material of painting.

Willem DeKooning (1904-1997), the Abstract Expressionist, used

the traditional techniques to abstract form from naturalistc subjects. There may be some gestures that can be deciphered, body parts, a doorway, a triangle, but, as in the Pollock painting, we are invited into the riot of color, plane, line and brush stroke. Yet the formal arrangement is not haphazard. It is planned derangement (more on this later).

Abstract Expressionism evolved out of collage techniques developed in the earlier Cubist paintings. Cubists painted in a somewhat "deranged" manner in that they saw their subjects in a new way. Painting is two dimensional and tricks the eye into thinking the rendered object is three dimensional. So the Cubist did away with the trick and used the accumulation of point of views, perspectives, to create their work. Painterly space is rendered in multiple viewpoints rather than one "authorial" perspective.

Cubism and Stein

The American writer, Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was one of the first, and remains foremost, of American experimental writers. Her 1912 book *Tender Buttons*, uses cubist technique to render clever and evocative prose poems (a prose poem is a poem that is lineated like prose--story or essay). Follows are passages from the first section of the book.

> A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.
>
> A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.
>
> GLAZED GLIITER.
>
> Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover. The change in that is that red weakens an hour. The change has come. There is no search. But there is, there is that hope and that interpretation and sometime, surely any is unwelcome, sometime there is breath and there will be a sinecure and charming very charming is that clean and cleansing. Certainly glittering is handsome and convincing.

> There is no gratitude in mercy and in medicine. There can be breakages in Japanese. That is no programme. That is no color chosen. It was chosen yesterday, that showed spitting and perhaps washing and polishing. It certainly showed no obligation and perhaps if borrowing is not natural there is some use in giving.

This is an example of deranged work. The objects are not reflected in language, but are occasions for language, "certainly glittering is handsome and convincing." There is no "programme" except the act of writing itself. Stein's poems are linguistic (not emotional or cognitive) contemplations.

Can you interpret the line, "Not unordered in not resembling"? Here's my take on it. Even though it is not mimetic "not resembling" it is still consciously ordered, "Not unordered". This is a critical idea. This passage highlights the difference between deranged poetry and free, or automatic, writing (when you continuously write off the top of your head). Deranged writing is not "surreal"–the surrealists used automatic writing to tap into the unconscious mind. Automatic writing mimes the unconscious, following a "first thought/best thought" formula. Deranged writing merely attempts to tap into a discursive field of words.

Not Surrealism or Freewriting

It is easy for me to retrace the leaps in free writing. Our subconscious mind works according to associated links and usually those links can be figured out, no matter how private. This is the crucial difference from this kind of work and work in the surrealist tradition. Deranged poetry should be deliberately constructed. You need to work at deranging. The poem results from a series of decisions. As Gertrude Stein writes in "Stanzas in Meditation," "propose repose chose."

Here's a selection from a poem by the American poet Clark Coolidge (1939-), "The Tab" that is a rich linguistic surface without any determined reference:

> mica flask moves layout hasty
> bunkum geode olive loin candle

mines repeating sky hot dregs, in cast
lank oiler blocks, hats sink
wig pyrite & hasty troll by the rim

The sounds and textures of the words give force to each line--what does the poem point to? The materiality of its own language. The focus is on the discrete elements where meaning disappears. In an essay on the force of words, Coolidge writes, "Words...light... sculpt their own particular spaces." The poem is one such place of language sculpture. It includes the accretion of words, sounds, meanings, shape images and linguistic packets of interesting "sound-stuff" and "word-stuff." This is the purpose of deranged poetry. Use language to undo meaning, rather than determine it. The Kuleshov effect guarantees that the audience will still be able to generate meaning from it.

Will Not Be Absorbed

The poet Charles Bernstein (1950--) in an essay/poem, "Artifice of Absorption," discusses a dichotomy between texts of absorption and texts of impermeability. Texts to be absorbed are hypnotic, accessible and captivating. Texts that are impermeable induce boredom, distraction, interruption. Bernstein's project is to write texts that "wake/us from the hypnosis of absorption." The project is an ideological one--instead of poetry that reinforces assumptions, texts of impermeability expose ideology to be interrogated.

The following passage from Ron Silliman's *Tjanting* can be read as an impermeable text, even though there are some units that have a mimetic function:

Not this.
What then?
I started over & over. Not this.
Last week I wrote "the muscles in my palm are so sore from halving the rump roast I cld barely grip the pen." What then? This morning my lip is blistered.
Of about to within which. Again & again I began. The gray light

> of day fills the yellow room wch is somber. Not this. Hot grease had spilld on the stovetop.
> Not that either. Last week I wrote "the muscle at the thumb's root so taut from carving that beef I thought it wld cramp." Not so. What then? Wld I begin? This morning my lip is tender, disfigurd. I sat in an old chair out behind the anise. I cld have gone about this some other way.

Pay particular attention to the use of parts of speech that require other grammatical elements that aren't included, "Of about to within which." And notice how the decision-making is foregrounded (like an action painting), "Not that either...What then?...I cld have gone about this some other way." Consistent with Bernstein's definition of an impermeable text, *Tjanting* continually interrupts itself.

Some of the most deranged poets were early 20th century Russina poets called Zaum poets. Besides making coat poems and dress poems, Zaum poets made poems out of parts of words. Here is an example of a Zaum poem using morphemes (parts of words that have separate meaning) from the previous few paragraphs:

> para de un ed order
>
> oil ite troll by s s s ure sub
>
> ing ic ing inter ter en yester

One of the Zaum practitioners, Velimir Khlebnikov, wrote a poem out of morphemes with the root "laugh." Here's a free translation of that poem:

> o laughers
> o laughenstein in laugh-gan-istan!
> laughingly laugh-tiferous outside the laugh-tarium
> laughhood laugh-icide you laugh-rageous
> en-laughers and laugh-orists
> laughettes
> laughettes
> laughitude em-laughy laughlaughs

laughives laugheringly
O laugh outlaughing the belaugherers
laughologists laugh
laugh-oons laugh
laugh-odils laugh
em-laugh out-laugh laugh-echusetts
laughumbria and laugh-ouri
laughland laugh O laughlaugh
Velimir Khlebnikov (free translation by M. Barrett)

The deranged poem should be a ludic explosion of linguistic energy. Instead of being from the depths of thought and feeling, the poem gathers energy in the surface of language. Instead of a broken heart, you'll start with a laugh.

How To Do It

1. No poetic words! No words like "pain," "hurt," "loneliness," "love," "dark," etc. And certainly no unicorns or dolphins swimming in the sky. If it's poetic at all, derange it more.

2. Sometimes you have to derange more than once--if the reader can trace back the association, you haven't gotten enough distance from an original intention.

3. No free writing or stream-of-consciousness writing.

4. Be aware of how you are breaking your lines up.

5. Link some lines together if they end with some sort of punctuation.

6. You don't want one meaning in each line; you want many meanings.

Try Substitution

Write 10 very simple sentences and then just associate and derange

individual words in order to get the deranged lines. Here's an example with three sentences.

> The cicadas are droning.
>
> The sitcom starts anew June 15.
>
> Kenny Smith made a tackle.
>
> *The cicadas are droning.*
> Three cycles air oneing.
>
> *The sitcom starts anew June 15.*
> Thus sit corn arts Agnew the junebug five.
>
> *Kenny Smith made a tackle.*
> Colonel myth spade ecclesiasastic.

This was constructed from a series of discrete associations on each word (not thought):

> Three cycles air oneing.
> Thus sit corn arts Agnew the junebug five.
> Colonel myth spade ecclesiasastic.

It's a start. I see a problem though--the rhythm is a little staccato because they are all end-stopped lines. An end-stopped line is a line that ends with punctuation. Let's loosen up the rhythm by using some words to combine the lines.

> Three cycles air oneing thus
> sits corn arts. Agnew junebug five while
> Colonel myth spade ecclesiasastic.

Try Poetry Algorithms

I'll take every three words from the beginning of this chapter and lineate (to lineate means to arrange lines of poetry).

was year started poetry myself poet I called Nothing another The

Good young practice I and in contest When winning had what

Maybe because Economics read of never depth time dedicated And

Not bad, but let's change some things to make it even better:

was year startled poetry myself I called Nothing "another the"

under good young practice and in contest when winning had what

is called "Maybe" because Economics read of never depth and

Truth be told, I deviated slightly from the algorithm in choosing the words. I kept an eye out for substantial words. I was making deliberate choices. Certainly you can break a rule as easily as you made it!

Try Steinian Cubism

Take an object and use it to generate language. Peer closely and gather language. The object is an occasion for language–not the subject of language. Like cubism, use multiple viewpoints. There's a black pen on my desk:

Vee black point spreads
mark could say if it does.
"That cap looks nice on you."

Mid-week Assignment
10 lines of derangement. Use any of the techniques we've discussed.

Weekly Assignment
20 lines of derangement (one poem or more than one poem).

The qualities of good poem:

a. It will resist paraphrasable meaning;

b. No poetic words;

c. No cliches;

d. Deranged leaps of thought;

e. A gathering of interesting words in new contexts;

f. The reader should not be able to retrace your thought process.

3. Deranged Rhetoric

Rhetoric, Narrative, Argument, Causation

Now that you have learned to compose a deranged poem, let's expand the range of your derangement. Let's define rhetoric as the arrangement of discourses (kinds of speech) in order to achieve some telos. So the telos of self-expressive writing is to relate some part of the self to the audience; the telos of argument is to move the audience to assent to a proposition or proposal. Two important rhetorical structures are narrative and argument. You will be deranging narration and argument in this poem.

Narration is describing events bound in time. In addition, as events are narrated, there is an assumption of causation, that is, one event causes the next and, if not exactly a cause, then related in some significant way. So a narrative usually goes, *first this happened* then *this happened*, then *this happened*. Here's one way to derange narrative--mix up the events or, better yet, get rid of causation altogether.

I'll start to illustrate this by referring to film examples, some of which can be found on Youtube. One of my favorite movie directors is Richard Linklater. Linklater has directed such movies as *Dazed and Confused*, *After Sunset*, *School of Rock*, *Through a Scanner Darkly*, and *Waking Life*. He's one of the few directors who can be truly artistic and entertaining. I will describe some scenes from a film he made as a graduate student, *Slackers*.

Trajectory, Deranged argument, Syllogism

The movie is a fine example of deranged narrative. The camera follows character 1 and tells character 1's story when character 1 passes character 2 on the street. Now the camera follows character 2 and tells character 2's story. Character 2 walks into a coffee shop where character 3 is at a table talking politics with friends. Now the camera follows character 3 as he walks home. Do you see how this works? Linklater is taking the expectations we have as an audience watching a film and is

directing against, or across, those expectations. I call this kind of narrative a Trajectory Narrative in which the narrative direction (I think of vectors) changes constantly.

Another director who deranges narrative is Quentin Tarentino. Think of *Pulp Fiction*. Take a narrative; set out multiple perspectives of that narrative. Now cut up all those narratives (and point of views) into smaller pieces. Now put those pieces in a hat and pull them out randomly. Use that random arrangement as the final cut of your film. That's a deranged narration.

Charles Bernstein's poem, "Of Time and the Line," is a trajectory narrative. There are a series of associational connections but no real causation, yet there is an energetic (and humorous) trajectory from one line to another:

> George Burns likes to insist that he always
> takes the straight lines; the cigar in his mouth
> is a way of leaving space between the
> lines for a laugh. He weaves lines together
> by means of a picaresque narrative;
> not so Henny Youngman, whose lines are strict-
> ly paratactic. My father pushed a
> line of ladies' dresses-not down the street
> in a pushcart but upstairs n a fact'ry
> office. My mother has been more concerned
> with her hemline. Chairman Mao put forward
> Maoist lines, but that's been abandoned (most-
> ly) for the WEast-West line of malarkey
> so popular in these parts. The prestige
> of the iambic line has recently
> suffered decline, since it's no longer so
> clear who "I" am, much less who you are. When
> making a line better be double sure
> what you're lining in & what you're lining
> out & and which side of the line you're on; the
> world is made up so (Adam didn't so much
> name as delineate). Every poem's got
> a prosodic lining, some of which will
> unzip for summer wear. The lines of an
> imaginary are inscribed on the

> social flesh by the knifepoint of history.
> Nowadays, you can often spot a work
> of poetry by whether it's in lines
> or no; if it's in prose, there's a good chance
> it's a poem. While there is no lesson in
> the line more useful than that of the pick-
> et line, the line that has caused the most ad-
> versity is the bloodline. In Russia
> veryone is worried about long lines;
> back in the USA, it's strictly soup-
> lines. " Take a chisel to write," but for an
> actor a line's got to be cued. Or, as
> they say in math, it takes two lines to make
> an angle but only one lime
> to make a margarita.

The poem moves according to a series of associations on the word "line" that leads us to the final lime in the margarita. Think of the trajectory narrative as a series of vector arrows that are all linked (the beginning of one is the end of another) but they point in different directions while moving.

Loose associations tying together dispart thoughts, as seen in the Bernstein here and, later, Koch, allow for humor. The same characteristics are found in the poetry of Frank Rogaczewski. This passage from "So What Else is New" displays humor trajectory narrative allows:

> What a difference a
> difference makes. My sister's
> salt water fish tank becomes
> a terrarium. Before you know it
> Lotto's been drawn
> and somebody
> else won. The first time the person
> on the street heard of T-cells
> they'd already been subverted
> into viruses quite
> retro and you're just
> not the same person anymore

what with cloning and all

Logic

Deranged argument works in a similar fashion to deranged narration. Again we are dealing with a rhetorical structure, argument, and disrupting the expectations an audience has about argument. Think about how an argument works--you marshall evidence and connect that evidence to a claim you intend to prove. The basic form of an argument is a syllogism. Aristotle defines a syllogism as, "a discourse in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from the things supposed results of necessity, because these things are so." Here's an example:

All humans have DNA.
Mike Barrett is a human;
therefore
Mike Barrett has DNA.

(By the way, this is deductive thinking--the conclusion is 100% true). The things supposed are: humans have DNA and Mike Barrett is a human. Because these things are so, Mike Barrett has DNA.

Here's how to derange this syllogism:

All humans have DNA.
Mike Barrett is a human;
therefore
there's a stink bug in my soup.

The logic of the syllogism, the supposed things moving toward a new conclusion, is deranged when the conclusion has nothing to do with the suposed things that came before. Here's another example:

I have seen 100 ducks today and they all are wearing green hats.
If I see another duck I conclude
that duck will be wearing a green hat.

(This is an inductive syllogism--the conclusion may or may not be true). Let's derange this syllogism:

> I have seen 100 ducks today and they all are wearing green hats.
> If I see another duck I conclude
> that Linklater is a vector in Tarentino soup.

There's a good reason to question the nature of narrative and causation. Quantum mechanics tells us that direct causation at the subatomic level is impossible to detect. At the sub atomic level we are left with probability clouds in a sky of uncertainty. The radical empiricists philsophers also questioned the efficacy of presuming anything based on "supposing certain things." David Hume, the 18th century British philosopher, once wrote , "That the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise." David Hume would certainly appreciate deranged narrative, particularly if it included my great grandmother Ruth rising in the morning instead of the sun.

The New York School, Lyric, Propositional Lyricism

A group of American poets who started writing in the 1940s who made great use of rhetorical derangement. Called The New York School, because the principal members lived in New York City, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, Kenneth Koch and Frank O'Hara, wrote complex, inventive poems that turned on the derangement of rhetorical structures.

Here's a selection from a poem by Kennth Koch (1925-2002) that deranges narrative, "To Various Persons Talked to at Once." The poem imagines a conversation among multiple conversants whose topics are not related:

> You have helped hold me together.
> I'd like you to be still.
> Stop talking or doing anything else for a minute.
> No. Please. For three minutes, maybe five minutes.

Tell me which walk to take over the hill.
Is there a bridge there? Will I want company?
Tell me about the old people who built the bridge.
What is "the Japanese economy"?
Where did you hide the doctor's bills?
How much I admire you!
Can you help me to take this off?
May I help you to take that off?
Are you finished with this item?
Who is the car salesman?
The canopy we had made for the dog.
I need some endless embracing.
The ocean's not really very far.
Did you come west in this weather?
I've been sitting at home with my shoes off.
You're wearing a cross!
That bench, look! Under it are some puppies!
Could I have just one little shot of Scotch?
I suppose I wanted to impress you.
It's snowing.
The Revlon Man has come from across the sea.
This racket is annoying.
We didn't want the baby to come here because of the hawk.
What are you reading?
In what style would you like the humidity to explain?
I care, but not much. You can smoke a cigar.
Genuineness isn't a word I'd ever use.
Say, what a short skirt! Do you have a camera?
The moon is a shellfish.
I can't talk to most people. They eat me alive.
Who are you, anyway?

You can image this poem as snippets of dialogue from numerous people that are randomly connected, perhaps while crossing a pedestrian bridge. This is the trajectory narative–each rhetorical element is a vector radomly connected to the other narrative vectors in the poem. Therefore we get, "Tell me about old people who built the bridge" next to "What is 'the Japanese economy'." Koch mines the humorous potential in derangement. This is an effective technique of deranged narration. Imagine the deranged conversation at a restaurant if you cut and pasted

fragments of multiple conversations into one place.

The John Ashbery poem, "Houseboat Days," is not just an example of narrative and logical derangement, it also provides a rationale, a telos for this kind of writing–it captures the flux and perceptual rush of being alive (you're right to say that's a kind of mimesis):

> The skin is broken. The hotel breakfast china
> Poking ahead to the last week in August, not really
> Very much at all, found the land where you began. . ."
> The hills smoldered up blue that day, again
> You walk five feet along the shore, and you duck
> As a common heresy sweeps over. We can botanize
> About this for centuries, and the little dazey
> Blooms again in the cities. The mind
> Is so hospitable, taking in everything
> Like boarders, and you don't see until
> It's all over how little there was to learn

This is the logic of consciousness. It is a narrative of neural connections in the capaciousness of the active mind. Ashbery continues:

> Once the stench of knowledge has dissipated and the trouvailles
> Of every one of the senses fallen back. Really, he
> Said, that insincerity of reasoning on behalf of one's
> Sincere convictions, true or false in themselves
> As the case may be, to which, if we are unwise enough
> To argue at all with each other, we must be tempted
> At times—do you see where it leads? To pain,
> And the triumph over pain, still hidden
> In these low-lying hills which rob us
> Of all privacy, as though one were always about to meet
> One's double through the chain of cigar smoke
> And then it. . .happens, like an explosion in the brain,
> Only it's a catastrophe on another planet to which
> One has been invited, and as surely cannot refuse:
> Pain in the cistern, in the gutters, and if we merely
> Wait awhile, that denial, as though a universe of pain
> Had been created just so as to deny its own existence.
> But I don't set much stock in things
> Beyond the weather and the certainties of living and dying:

The rest is optional.

In the poem, narrative details "you walk five feet along the shore and you duck" resides next to a "descriptive" proposition, "as common heresy sweeps over." The language of argument, "that insincerity of reasoning on behalf of one's sincere/convictions, true or false in themselves" never comes around to stating what is being argued.

Inside the poem, we have clues of its own telos. This kind of poetry, Ashbery suggests is like the mind, "so hospitable, taking in everything/Like boarders. This activity of the mind, its openness to experience (not its discriminations and judgments) is what the poem ought to mimic:

> To praise this, blame that,
> Leads one subtly away from the beginning, where
> We must stay, in motion. To flash light
> Into the house within, its many chambers,
> Its memories and associations, upon its inscribed
> And pictured walls, argues enough that life is various.
> Life is beautiful.

Although the poem goes on to render the proposition, "Life is beautiful," contingent, "Houseboats Days" demonstrates an important attitude of rhetorical derangement–keep the questions open and keep opening questions.

The following poem by Frank O'Hara (1926-66), "Why I Am Not a Painter," combines narrative and argument and captures the spirit of play in O'Hara's poetry:

> I am not a painter, I am a poet.
> Why? I think I would rather be
> a painter, but I am not. Well,
>
> for instance, Mike Goldberg
> is starting a painting. I drop in.
> "Sit down and have a drink" he
> says. I drink; we drink. I look
> up. "You have SARDINES in it."

> "Yes, it needed something there."
> "Oh." I go and the days go by
> and I drop in again. The painting
> is going on, and I go, and the days
> go by. I drop in. The painting is
> finished. "Where's SARDINES?"
> All that's left is just
> letters, "It was too much," Mike says.
>
> But me? One day I am thinking of
> a color: orange. I write a line
> about orange. Pretty soon it is a
> whole page of words, not lines.
> Then another page. There should be
> so much more, not of orange, of
> words, of how terrible orange is
> and life. Days go by. It is even in
> prose, I am a real poet. My poem
> is finished and I haven't mentioned
> orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
> it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
> I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

This poem is thought-provoking, fanciful, and confident. For those who look to poems for some deep emotional resonance, it has that as well:

> There should be
> so much more, not of orange, of
> words, of how terrible orange is
> and life.

The denoument of the poem deranges narrative expectations. There's a painting called "Sardines" with no sardines in it and 12 poems called "Oranges" with no orange in them. Can you figure out the way in which this poem is also a commentary on mimesis in art?

Before we move onto the section on how to derange rhetoric, let's look at a current practice that includes a milder form of rhetorical derangement. I call it propositional lyricism. A lyric is a poem written for a single voice. Typically, lyrical poems substitute esthetic values that

evoke beauty or emotion rather than logic and narrative. Propositional lyricism combines a sense of argument, narration, as well as lyricism.

Consider how Anne Lauterbach (1942-) composes poems in her book *And, For example*. She allows us to see enough logic and proposition, yet undermines those structures, as in this passage from the poem, "For Example (1)":

> If everything tends to become real
> then whose trial has ended
> on a scale of one to ten
> in which three is a dream
> on a floor
> no one can see.
>
> *Also, perhaps, maybe*

The passage begins with an "If-then" proposition, then undermines the logical syntax with a dream and then three qualifiers, "also, perhaps, maybe." Logic is suggested, but unresolved.

In the last section of the sequence Lauterbach hints that perhaps at the heart of relation, the desire for connections, is an emergent property that holds us to the world and each other. The lyrical moment resolves the undetermined logical relations:

> perception/at least/for a moment/for us
> in which/of the relation/from the great/between
> surfaces/of experience/in every/of their
> to their diction/to each/between surfaces
> in a forward/from which/by myself/into my innermost
> by my soul's/with love/in a region
> with my eye/above my mind/before the light
> with love/into an awareness/with love

In a way, propositional lyricism is the next evolutionary stage after rhetorical derangement. There is more meaning without giving logic the final say and the hospitable mind takes it in.

How To Do It

1. Try working a narrative that is trajectory; that is it moves in a series of vectors.

2. Remember, one event does not have to cause the next event that follows.

3. Think of the poem like Ashbery does, as a habitation of characters, dialogue, thoughts, actions, images and thoughts. All these elements do NOT have to cohere.

4. Watch *Slackers* in order to see how such derangement is done on film. *Pulp Fiction* also works well for an example of filmic versions of derangement.

5. Think about the way that evidence works to prove a thesis in argument. Now make an argument whose evidence is completely unrelated to the thesis, but as with this poem, make sure there are enough linguistic cues to let your audience know that they are in an argument.

6. Use the cut and paste technique to derange a narrative.

7. Try some propositional lyricism in which thought and image complete an argument rather than the claim, warrant, or support.

Examples for Your Assignments

Here's a logical syllogism:

> all elephants play the blues
> joe pellopi is an elephant
> therefore

Of course, "Joe Pellopi sings the blues." But how about if we changed the conclusion to, "I want my mommy." Now we have argumentive derangement. Let's do it again:

> if the store is red and the socks are green
> if the socks are green and the board is white
> if the board is white and my slacks are holey
> then the trinity took a shower and
> went to the farmer's market.

Once again, we have just enough structure to know we're in logic, then we disrupt it.

As I write this, there are four items visible on my desk: a bottle cap, a chewed up mouth guard, a pen and a watch. Let's put each of these objects into a trajectory narrative:

> The bottle contained some artificially
> sweet; no mouthguard
> even if there were
> a dog attached. "Here write this
> down," clock had stopped.
> There was nothing
> to drink . I conducted and
> stayed my appointment.

As you discovered with your previous poem; it takes some effort to derange a poem but it's not that difficult. Be open to language and the multitudinous possibility for meaning. Tap into the continuous present wherein lie myriad narratives and logics.

Here's an easy way to derange narrative. Write narratives and begin cutting, pasting, and transforming them to forge a deranged narrative. Here is one narrative:

> 1. Frank went to the store.
> 2. Frank bought cigars.

3. Frank asked Marilyn to marry him.
4. She said, "No."
5. Frank smoked a cigar.

Here is a second narrative:

1. Ask your mother for a nickel.
2. Put it in your pocket.
3. Walk to the store.
4. Buy yourselves five gumballs.

Here is the third narrative made by deranging the first two:

Ask Frank for your mother.
She said, "No. Put it in your pockets"
and smoke yourself five gumballs.
Frank went to his mother.
She said, "No. Put Marilyn in your pocket
and smoke yourself five nickels.
Buy Frank for his mother.
She said, "No. Put the smoke in your pocket"
and gumball yourself five Marilyns.

Mid-week Assignment
Use the cut, paste, and transform method (shown above) to create a 10 line deranged narrative.

Weekly Assignment
Write a 20 line poem of deranged rhetoric. You can use any of the techniques we have developed. The lines cannot include anything from your mid-week exercise.

The qualities of a good poem:
a. Constant surprise;

b. No poetic words;

c. No clichés;

d. Enough language to indicate we're in an argument or narrative.

4. Found Poetry

Here's a poem I found in a chapter of a poetry text:

> 'Fool' said my muse to me,
> 'it's a mistake to believe
> internal life is the only
> oral history.'
>
> Milton Lost when reading;
> good for a Dickinson poem.
> Contemporary poets often
> gather in array.
>
> In this chapter we, Doges,
> surrender the vast scale,
> compose the family library,
> listen closely.
>
> Get started; read the galaxy,
> an encyclopedia–
> the only authentic
> source for poetry

How did I find the poem? I picked out phrases and began to shape those phrases into an assembly. By the time I had gathered three or four of them, a theme suggested itself and guided my hunt for more language. And the telos of the found poem "Find the Source"? We'll leave it up to the readers to discern for themselves.

The principle of a found poem is very simple: find a text source and re-work that text source into a poem. As with all composition, telos plays a very important role. There should be a purpose, reason, goal for choosing the text you choose and re-working it the way you do. For example, if you choose an official document as a source, do you want to subvert it? Make fun of it? Point out its hypocrisies? Point out its justices? Turn it into a verbal sculpture? Have an idea of telos and your audience should be able to discern the purpose.

Finding Sources

What kind of text should you base your found poem on? Some suggest only using nonliterary texts, and that's a good place to start, but it should not be thought of as a hard and fast rule (the last two examples we'll examine do use literary sources). Some student poets have based their found poems on advertisements, government documents, directions for assembling a dvd-player, the drug and alcohol policy for their school. That's the beauty of a found poem–any text at all can become a field where the poet practices composition. And there's not any hankering after the exact right word; all the words you need are already there.

The writer, Annie Dillard's (1945-) collection of found poems includes one constructed from a book on activities for 19th century boys:

> INDEX
>
> Every Boy His Own Ice-Boat;
> Every Boy His Own Bubble Pipe;
> Every boy a decorative artist.
>
> How to Make a Blowgun.
> How to Bind a Prisoner Without a Cord.
> How to Rig and Sail Small Boats.
> Practical Taxidermy for Boys:
> Let us suppose an owl
> Has been lowering around, and that you
> Have shot the rascal. Do not
> Throw him away. What a splendid
> Ornament he will make for the library!
> He must be skinned and stuffed!

As you can probably tell, the poem finds humor in the activities that may have been exciting for turn-of-the-century boys. And though certainly technology and play have changed in the proceeding century, there is something that remins stereotypically male about these activities.

A student, April Day, constructed a rich poem from a woman's

magazine. Note how she reveals *her* telos with the *magazine's* words:

Labels
20 lines found poetry in December issue of *OK Magazine*

Tap into the new age!
SHOCKER!
Gossip abounds and
No secret is safe!
She's on the defense and he's a time bomb.
This girl is a magazine maven and
This guy's a flirt!
She's got another kid on the brain
And this mom has a new deadbeat boyfriend.
How to complete a smokey eye
And the Kardashian sisters are at it again.
Marriages are FAKE
Beauty gurus know it all.
The Jonas brothers eat cookies
And the Jolie-Pitts have stocking at their house.
Who wore it better while
Who played the role better?
Two and a half women versus
Two and a half men.
And amidst all this fun,
I wonder why we give so much
Of ourselves away.

Reznikoff

The poet Charles Reznikoff (1894-1976) made powerful use of found material. Reznikoff was a lawyer who wrote court summaries for legal publications. It is through this work he came to his two-volume found poem *Testimony.* Reznikoff renders the testimony of court cases from the nineteenth and early twentieth century with minimal mediation. The poems are a portrait of America, its social relations, vitality, and violence. Yet they are not limited to these themes. Here's a section from *Testimony* that is simple descriptive poem:

The bleating of calves

kept overnight at a slaughterhouse
to be slaughtered in the morning.

Here's a poem from *Testimony* in which the forces of social class and the law conduct a dialogue:

"I want to ask you
a fair question:
did he say
that he killed the woman?"

"No.
But if I say
he said that he killed the woman,
I am to get half the reward.
He is just as well off
to lay in jail
as to get out and get mobbed;
for if he gets out
he will be mobbed."

"It is pretty hard
to swear a man's life away
for a little money."

"Yes,
but this is hard times,
and I am pretty hard up."

There is an entire personal and social history in this poem. Reznikoff's poetry shows us a number of things about the found poem. First off, he is economic. There is not an extraneous word. Second, it is entirely spoken; there is no narrator. We hear the voices of the two characters. Third, and this is critical –the line breaks help to turn a nonliterary source into literature. The poet doesn't have to come up with words, but does have to arrange them. Lineation serves that arrangement. In the poem above, note the "no" and "yes" on their own lines to highlight their opposition as well as the line breaks that capture the pace of speech. Lineation, of course, is

important in all poetry but it is an especially critical element of the found poem

Reznikoff also uses court testimony from the trials at Nuremberg to create his long poem *Holocaust*. Its style is the direct approach he uses in *Testimony* with the same profound results.

Etching

The poet Ronald Johnson (1935-1998) found open form poetry in an old edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In his introduction to the poem, Johnson notes that the verb "to etch" means "to cut away." Johnson's poem *Radi Os* takes pages from Milton's poem and cuts away words until what's left is a series of open form poems. This is effective for a number of reasons. First, Milton casts a long, long shadow over poetry written in English (see Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* for more on this subject) and Johnson revises this great work as Blake, Worsdworth and Shelley did before him. Second, while blind, Milton's poem is astonishingly visual; at times it reads like a movie script. In form and content, Johnson's poem is about sight, about seeing his way to a new poem, an expansive poem within the visionary poem of Milton. Third, and we'll see it in the example below, Johnson is able to redeem parts of *Paradise Lost*, which has the fall (of Satan, Adam and Eve) as its major theme.

In the example below, we see this redemptory poetics at work. The passage he "etches" is from the second book of *Paradise Lost*. In this section, the devils debate in hell deliberating how to best answer their fate and deal with God. Golden-tongued Belial argues for a lazy forbearance. Johnson turns that speech into a meditation on sight and time.

(Note: Treat the next two pages as facing pages in a layout)

What if the breath that kindled those grim fires,
Awaked, should blow them into sevenfold rage,
And plunge us in the flames; or from above
Should intermitted vengeance arm again
His red right hand to plague us? What if all
Her stores were opened, and this firmament
Of Hell should spout her cataracts of fire,
Impendent horrors, threatening hideous fall
One day upon our heads; while we perhaps,
Designing or exhorting glorious war,
Caught in a fiery tempest, shall be hurled,
Each on his rock transfixed, the sport and prey
Or racking whirlwinds, or for ever sunk
Under yon boiling ocean, wrapt in chains,
There to converse with everlasting groans,
Unrespited, unpitied, unreprieved,
Ages of hopeless end? This would be worse.
War, therefore, open or concealed, alike
My voice dissuades; for what can force or guile
With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye
Views all things at one view? He from Heaven's height
All these our motions vain sees and derides,
Not more almighty to resist our might
Than wise to frustrate all our plots and wiles.
Shall we, then, live thus vile--the race of Heaven
Thus trampled, thus expelled, to suffer here
Chains and these torments? Better these than worse,
By my advice; since fate inevitable
Subdues us, and omnipotent decree,
The Victor's will. To suffer, as to do,
Our strength is equal; nor the law unjust
That so ordains. This was at first resolved,
If we were wise, against so great a foe
Contending, and so doubtful what might fall.
I laugh when those who at the spear are bold
And venturous, if that fail them, shrink, and fear
What yet they know must follow--to endure
Exile, or igominy, or bonds, or pain,
The sentence of their Conqueror. This is now
Our doom; which if we can sustain and bear,
Our Supreme Foe in time may much remit

What if the breath
Awaked, should
plunge us in the flames; or from above

if all
were opened

One day upon our heads

Each on his rock transfixed

all things at one view?

then, live

who at the spear

in time

Johnson's uses etching to shape a 20th century poem from a 16th century text without moving a word! All he does is cut until the poem emerges. He finds *Radi Os* in *Paradise Lost*.

As we'll discover in the next chapter, Johnson is using "open form" lineation to, literally, open up meaning and lyricism in Milton's original work.

Anagrams

The last example we'll look at in this section demonstrates, once again, how many ways a poem can be "invented" from a text. Like Ronald Johnson, Mike Smith finds new poems in the already-written poems of others. Smith does not etch the poem; he treats the existing poem as subject to anagram. In other words, he uses all the letters of the original poem to make the new poem. "Annagrammatic Ode to Emily Dickinson" is an example. Smith takes the letters from three Dickinson poems to write his poems.

241
I like a look of Agony,
Because I know it's true–
Men do not sham Convulsion,
Nor simulate, a Throe–

The Eyes glaze once–and that is Death–
Impossible to feign
The Beads upon the Forehead
By homely Anguish strung.

441
This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me–
The simple News that Nature told–
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see–
For love of Her– Sweet–countrymen–
Judge tenderly–of Me

475
Doom is the House without the Door–
'Tis entered from the Sun–
And then the Ladder's thrown away,
Because Escape–is done–
'Tis varied by the Dream
Of what they do outside–
Where Squirrels play–and Berries die–
And Hemlocks –bow–to God–

I.
I too run sick of silences, still language,
long take of shadow
seen on both house and bush, sun's maze
(heat, are, dip, and age)–tender eye
yoked to the ease of home.

Given: a poem is always confession,
the mete end always tease,

a concession. (I am more
than this I bleed.)

Entered, the world is a jail (isn't it?)
hooded, small. Beaten,

we burrow.
II.

Arrest of the heroic: to sap that hue
or thrust (ha) in the sounds of the quick...

You strived to tell them
(but handed the moment, the world posed)

then threw them fewer, your meteors,
tender dots tethered (my term,

my error) to the jutted edge of day.

(Oh, Your glint I envy most...)

The wisdom is simple, but varied.

It's won by reaching down.

Smith's poem is in dialogue with Dickinson. His poem speaks directly to her by using her letters. Indeed, the sound and the sense of the Smith poem corresponds to the Dickinson.

Like Johnson's poetry, Smith's poem relates to the source but is wholly original. Note also the use of richly sounded words, "sap," "thrust," "mete," "jutted," "glint." Smith reaches down to the foundation of Dickinson's poems, the letters.

We discuss in the chapter on innovative form the idea of constraints (or "prompts"). Smith's procedure seems to be a considerable constraint, but it prompts him to write an ingenious colloquy with Emily Dickinson. A constraint is not what you get out of, but something that you get into!

The Dillard and Reznikoff examples use macroelements from sources: large chunks of original text, though the language is carefully filtered. Johnson finds the poem in smaller sections of his source and does not move anything; he simply etches. Smith uses the source material on the micro-level, individual letters. Once again we are shown that it is not a matter of sources, but what the poet does with the source that matters. Found poems start in a source and move forward by engaging the poet's resources.

How to Do It

1. Choose sources with rich potential to become a found poem, look for interesting language;

2. Enact your telos, your reason for transforming the source;

3. Delete words and rearrange them, but do not add any of your own;

4. Effective lineation is essential for your found poem;

5. The Johnson technique is to etch an open form poem from a source;

6. The Smith technique is to treat the source as subject to being annagrammatized.

Examples for Your Assignments

"Our earth is rotating around its axis once a day. The two end points of its axis are called poles; the line circling the earth midway between the poles is called the equator."
(from a geography book)

Equate

The earth
is a line
with the end point
of day.
Poles circle around
midway

The axis is a circle.
Day ends at the end point.

This is called the earth.

"Be quiet, don't speak unless spoken to."

Be speak. Be spoken.
Don't be quiet.

Mid-week assignment
Below is Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution. Use this text to compose a 12-20 line found poem.

The Congress shall have Power

To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of

the United States; but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States;

To borrow money on the credit of the United States;

To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes;

To establish an uniform Rule of Naturalization, and uniform Laws on the subject of Bankruptcies throughout the United States;

To coin Money, regulate the Value thereof, and of foreign Coin, and fix the Standard of Weights and Measures;

To provide for the Punishment of counterfeiting the Securities and current Coin of the United States;

To establish Post Offices and Post Roads;

To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries;

To constitute Tribunals inferior to the supreme Court;

To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offenses against the Law of Nations;

To declare War, grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water;

To raise and support Armies, but no Appropriation of Money to that Use shall be for a longer Term than two Years;

To provide and maintain a Navy;

To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces;

To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions;

To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;

To exercise exclusive Legislation in all Cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten Miles square) as may, by Cession of

particulars, and the acceptance of Congress to become the Seat of the Government of the United States, and to exercise like Authority over all Places purchased by the Consent of the Legislature of the State in which the Same shall be, for the Erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, dock-Yards, and other needful Buildings; And

To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.

Weekly Assignment

Using a non-literary source, write a 20-30 line found poem. You can use the Johnson Method, the Smith method, or the Reznikoff method. In other words you can etch, anagrammatize, or manipulate in any way, source material.

The qualities of a good poem:

a. It is based on a compelling source;

b. There is an obvious telos to the reshaping of the source;

c. The poet has used lineation effectively;

d. The poet has not used any of his or her own words;

e. There is a good poem based on a text that is not a poem.

5. Lineation

Before we continue our work, let's learn about an essence of poetry–lineation. As we learned the first week, lineation is the practice of placing line breaks in a poem. A number of factors affect lineation, but the most important is TELOS: you ought to lineate purposefully, as a conscious decision.

Run-on, Enjambment, Syntax, End-stopped

William Carlos Williams's poem, "Poem," highlights the deliberation involved in lineation:

> As the cat
> climbed over
> the top of
>
> the jamcloset
> first the right
> forefoot
>
> carefully
> then the hind
> stepped down
>
> into the pit of
> the empty
> flowerpot.

Think of a way a cat moves--with deliberate, exact steps, confident and sure, just as a poem moves through lines. And think about the cat as a poem. Where does the cat step? Into an emptiness we fill with beauty.

This poem also highlights some technical aspects of lineation. "the top of//the jam closet" and "into the pit of/the empty" are both **run-on lines** or lines that use **enjambment**. Run-on lines, or enjambment, is when the poetic line ends before the syntactical unit. A syntactical unit

is a unit of grammatical construction that gives a sentence its semantic meaning. In the lines above, the syntactical units are "the top/of the jam closet" and "into the pit/of the empty flower pot." But the poem is not lineated according to its syntax. Williams reinforces the stealth and deliberate placement of the cat's paws through lineation.

There is no preferred method of lineation; the only criterion is that the lineation must fit the purpose of the poem. Walt Whitman's (1819-1892) poetry often uses long lines that break at the end of large syntactic units. They are meditative and celebretory and imitate the rhythms, particularly the psalms, of the King James bible. You can see this in the opening of "Song of Myself" from Whitman's opus, *Leaves of Grass*:

> I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
>
> I loafe and invite my soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
>
> My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
> Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
> I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
> Hoping to cease not till death.

Not only do these lines break at the end of syntactic units, they are also **end-stopped** lines; that is, they end in a punctuation mark.

Formal verse, Syllables, Projective Verse, Breath

If you write **formal verse**, you write poetry that follows a specific, predetermined form, like the sonnets you will be writing later. A sonnet is generally written in a kind of verse that calls for 10 syllables per line. So, when you write formal verse, you break your lines according to the form you have adapted. The form tells you how to lineate

Counting **syllables** is a trustworthy way to determine line breaks. A **syllable** is a sound cluster that includes one vowel that is

voiced. "Summer" for example has two syllables. "Barrett" has two; "lobotomized" has four. You will discover your preferred line lengths, perhaps six syllables, or eight, or ten or twelve. As long as it works in the poem you are writing, fine.

The poet Charles Olson (1910-1970) hypothesizes in his essay, "On Projective Verse" that the human breath, an organic *physical* fact, ought to have as much to do with lineation as does the ear and the syllable. His formulation is stated in the essay as follows:

> the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE
> the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE

The degree to which we take this as a prescription for lineation is up to the poet; nevertheless, it is an essential notion–the connection between the poet's body and the poet's line, as if the poem is an organic expression of being. Incidentally, Olson was a big guy with long lines.

> I pushed my car, it had been sitting so long unused.
> I thought the tires looked as though they only needed air.
> But suddenly the huge underbody was above me, and the rear tires
> were masses of rubber and thread variously clinging together

The shortest line in this passage (from his poem "As The Dead Prey Upom Us") is 13 syllables and the longest is 19!

His buddy Robert Creeley (1926-2005) was rather slender and wrote short, precise lines, as in this passage from the poem, "Myself":

> Walked by the sea,
> unchanged in memory --
> evening, as clouds
> on the far-off rim
>
> of water float,
> pictures of time,
> smoke, faintness --
> still the dream.

No line is more than six syllables and most are four or under.

Speech, Thought, Open form, Poem as field

When speaking of the line's relation to breath, it is important to relate the line to speech. We can use lineation to highlight the rhythms and eccentricities in the way we talk, expressing the poem's *spoken* reality. Charles Bukowski (1920-1994) was a poet of the spoken voice, his version of street talk. Though his poems can be thin, he shares an aspect with the much different Frank O'Hara–both poets use syntactical lineation to give their poems a *spoken* rather than *written* quality. Here's the last part of the Bukowski's poem, "A Radio with Guts" (compare the lineation to the Frank O'Hara poem, "Why I am not a Painter" we discussed earlier):

> I kept throwing that radio through the window
> each time I got drunk
> and it would sit there on the roof
> still playing–
> a magic radio
> a radio with guts,
> and each morning I'd take the window
> back to the glass man.
> I don't remember how it ended exactly
> though I do remember
> we finally moved out.
> there was a woman downstairs who worked in
> the garden in her bathing suit,
> she really dug with that trowel
> and she put her behind up in the air
> and I used to sit in the window
> and watch the sun shine all over that thing
> while the music played.

Clearly Bukowski lineates this poem to coincide with speech. The sense of the poem accrues with the syntactical units that have a colloquial feel, yet the grammar is rather complex. Can you find the enjambed line?

So far we have discussed the role of speech, syntax, syllables, and breath in lineation. We ought to include another aspect. Most poems are *read* before they are heard. Consider the pace of thought when lineating.

In this passage of "Exact" by Rae Armantrout (1947-) the poem moves through physical images and then "It" sets the physical to rest in contemplation through the last couplet.

> Over and over
> tiers
>
> of houses spill
> pleasantly
>
> down that hillside.
> It
>
> might be possible
> to count occurrences.

This is another example of propositional lyricism.

If we put all the elements of lineation together and add to them the graphic (visual) elements in constructing a poem, we have what it takes to define and construct poems in **open-form**. Open form is a field upon which the poet constructs her poem. Olson describes this open field in "Projective Verse":

> if he works in OPEN, or what can also be called COMPOSITION BY FIELD, as opposed to inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the "old" base of the non-projective.
>
> (1) the kinetics of the thing. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader. Okay. Then the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge.

Poems in open form are characterized by visual arrangement. Each unit of the poem is an exchange of mental energy between reader and poet through the medium of language and the white space on the page. The blank space is where the reader catches her breath. Compelling rhythms can be created through open form. Here's an example from Hilda Morely

(1919-1998), the ending of the poem, “One Thousand Birds”:

> The wings are
> still now
> & I rock from
> side to side
> with the faintest
> movement barely perceptible because I cannot
> breathe in this stillness
> & must set that power
> moving,
> those enormous wings
> flying again

All the resources of lineation we have been discussing are on display. The deliberate precision of Williams’s cat, speech rhythms, the pause of breath and the pace of thought. The blank spaces set up pauses to heighten the rush of the last line.

Stanzas, Couplets, Tercets, Quatrains, How It Looks

Whether we are working on open form or not, we must decide how we are going to group our lines together. When we group lines together, we group them into **stanzas**. The word stanza comes from the Italian meaning “room”. Consider each stanza a room of lines in the house of your poem. Stanzas are to the poem as paragraphs are to the essay

In this poem of mine, “Angles, Angels, Engels, and Eagles,” I wanted the reader to move quickly from line to line and thought to thought. Therefore, I needed as few stanzas as possible. There is one temporal division in the poem, “After such talk...” which provided the logic for the stanza break. Stanzas are not only part of the formal arrangement of poems, they are also part of the rhetorical arrangement of poems. (Incidentally, this poem is an example where the title comes first and the poem is composed to fulfill the title–the title came and the poem followed).

Two lines in this conversation:
the first (what words say)
like 15 lb test that slants
upward from an earthworm squirming
on a pond's bottom;
the second (what words mean)
the line's thin shadow
across the sandy bed,
given its shallowness
and position of sun overhead.
That is, if we ignore the vertex
at the rod's smallest eye,
ignore that the line ends wound
round the spindle,
and then imagine it and pond
stretching infinitely.

After such talk
we mostly remember
what should have been said:
a fence that crosses
two widening boundaries
or point on horizon
that draws parallel lines
together. A light marvelously
bright, invariably distant,
Madonna's sidelong glance
from Gabriel's gilded script.
Too often in love I've mistaken
indifference for adoration,
punctuated memory with, "See?"
Heart like a cherub in flight
on a stone arch, plump with faith
that stuffs the belly,
Buddha ripe beneath his tree, fat,
begging the question. This belief
works through machinations
that render simple facts numinous,
"like the German custom to write
history as if it had fallen
from the skies." A way
to produce surplus value

out of space that's mainly glutted
with shadow. Heavy. Resolved
in neither friends, editors,
or lovers. Each rolls away
as if following the shape
of the earth into the unknown.
Guessing where keeps one sharp-eyed,
not for freedom or revolution,
but details of chance, opportunities.
Ending, then, grounded,
while thrashing in sleep,
I wake in too many rays of sunlight
and wait to take on wings.

If a poem's stanzas contain two lines apiece, those stanzas are called **couplets**. Here are a few "Couplets on Wit" by the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744). These couplets stand alone. Each couplet has a setup and a punchline, making the stanzaic form an aspect of the poem's epigrammatic invention:

III
Some who grow dull religious strait commence
And gain in morals what they lose in sence.

IV
Wits starve as useless to a Common weal
While Fools have places purely for their Zeal.

V
Now wits gain praise by copying other wits
As one Hog lives on what another shits.

Couplets also accommodate longer, philosophical and contemplative poems because the couplet can accommodate and order syntactical elements. The couplet supports these long lines in this passage from Richard Berengarten's *The Manager*:

This morning every object in this house conspires against me. Where
are you, Come here, I shout at my wallet and folio.

My watch has gone into hiding. My keys are in the wrong jacket. My
coffee cup slips from shaking hand and smashes on the floor.

Even toothpaste and razor have disappeared from the bathroom shelf.
Outside a pale sun bleeps on a crisp October day.

There are 17, 14, 16, 13 syllables in the last four lines.

A **tercet** is a stanza with three lines. Dante (1265-1321) wrote *The Divine Comedy* in tercets, called **terza rima** where the first and third rhymes rhyme and the second line rhymes with the first and third of the next stanza. (We'll learn later this is a-b-a b-c-b rhyme scheme).

Here are the first two stanzas from *The Divine Comedy.* You do not have to know Italian to see how the stanza form and the rhyme scheme relate:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

The rough translation is: *In the middle of the pilgrimage of life, I found myself in a dark forest because the straight way had been lost.*
Ack! What a difficult thing it is to say how savage and harsh and stern this forest was, while thinking upon it renews the fear!

William Carlos Williams used what I call **drop-stepped tercets** in his late poem, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower":

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
like a buttercup
upon its branching stem-
save that it's green and wooden-
I come, my sweet,
to sing to you.

We lived long together
a life filled,
if you will,
with flowers. So that
I was cheered
when I came first to know

These open form tercets encourage a contemplative rhythm where images and thoughts to grow organically.

If the stanza contains four lines, the stanza is called a **quatrain**. Many of Emily Dickinson's poems are in quatrains like the first stanza of this poem:

THE BRAIN is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside.

There's another lesson to learn by looking at the way that Dickinson composes her quatrains. She only rhymes the second and fourth lines. Early in the semester, I discourage students from rhyming because too often *the rhyme leads the line*. In other words, the line is just filler to get to the ending rhyme word. By rhyming only two lines out of each four, much of the rhyming pressure is relieved. I would recommend, at the beginning, working rhymes this way, if at all.

A five line stanza is called a **cinquain**; a six line stanza is called a **sestet**. A seven line stanza is called a **septet** and an eight line stanza is an **octave**. You will meet the sestet and the octave again when you write your sonnets.

The last thing I want to say about lineation is this: the poem should, without reading a word, demonstrate its telos on the page. Even though I would recommend reading the poem outloud many times to ensure the lineation is a score for reciting the poem, do not forget that the poem on the page is a graphical element and how it looks should be an esthetic consideration. If you have 17 long lines and three short ones, you probably ought to reconsider the short lines. Of course, you can ignore

this advice if you have a very good telos for those three short lines.

What Have We Learned?

1. The different techniques for lineation: lineating according to syntactical units, or using enjambment.

2. The use of syllable as a line's measuring device

3. Find the line length that fits you, that you find most comfortable.

4. The relation of the line to breath.

5. The poem is a field of energy transfer.

6. Open form poetry.

7. Speech's relation to lineation.

8. Thought's relation to lineation.

9. The use of stanzas.

10. Discerning how the poem looks on the page.

Lineation Exercises

1. Recopy this poem with what you think is its effective lineation.

I'm nobody! Who are you? Are you nobody, too? Then there's a pair of us don't tell! They'd banish us you know. How dreary to be somebody! How public like a frog to tell your name the livelong day to an admiring bog.

2. Recopy this poem with what you think is its effective lineation.

> Heaven is what I cannot reach! The apple on the tree, provided that it do hopeless hang, that "heaven" is, to me. The color of a cruising cloud, the interdicted ground behind the hill, the house behind, there paradise is found.

3. Lineate two versions of the following poem. Have a telos to guide your lineation scheme. Make one of your versions open form.

> He startled woke to dark sun on his neck: a point, a pin a scene he scratched then scraped then, mothered, jumped into the world

6. Imagery

Image, Basho, Consciousness

After learning how to write poetry by deranging language and meaning, and learning how to use source material in order to write a poem, you are ready to use language to refer to things (in its referential function). But this does not mean that you will be using language to express your feelings or deep thoughts. This poem, **the image poem**, is more rigorous than that. The image poem renders the external world in language. There is no mediation of the writer's consciousness, no judgment about the "beauty" of things, just the things themselves.

I would argue that the ability to render image is necessary for a poet–in other words, I doubt that you can be a "poet" if you are not able to make images. Making images requires a perceptual and moral discipline that must be practiced. I'm going to discuss this practice, its philosophy, and application in this section.

The Japanese poet Basho (1644-94) wrote a haiku that, to me, concisely expresses most the essence of the image:

frog
pond

splash!

There are three components. There is a frog and a pond established in the first two lines. The third line brings the two together in a dynamic moment–the frog jumps into the pond.

This poem highlights two of the most important aspects of image poems that we will return to again and again:

1. It is economic. A complete narrative takes place in three words.
2. It creates a mental picture.

That is what an "image" is, a linguistic construction that creates a mental picture. Indeed, that is the ultimate litmus test of an image–does

it make an image in the reader's head? That's what I love so much about Basho's "splash." That splash is in the reader's consciousness. It is the splash of perception on the mind The poet and reader exchange images through language--mind to mind.

Empiricism, Abstract/Concrete, Subjective/Objective

The philsophical underpinnings of imagism can be found in the philsophy of empiricism. As you may recall from the chapter on rhetorical derangement, empiricism states that only experience counts as knowldge. As William Carlos Williams writes in the second stanza of his American epic, *Paterson*:

> —Say it, no ideas but in things—
> nothing but the blank faces of the houses
> and cylindrical trees
> bent, forked by preconception and accident—
> split, furrowed, creased, mottled, stained—
> secret—into the body of the light!

What does "no idea but in things" mean? In order to understand, we must know the difference between the **abstract** and the **concrete**. The abstract can only be apprehended in the mind. Its existence is mental. The concrete has an existence outside the perceiver's mind. It exists in the world. Which words in this list are concrete and which are abstract?

love
π
justice
√-1
dirt
lust
chrysanthemums
granite
anger

elm
infinity
lonesome
shirt

It is interesting that some are abstract because they engage pathos, or emotion. Others are abstract because they engage logos, or reason.

Another analogous distinction is the difference between **subjective** and **objective**. Subjective pertains to me, my attitude, my perspective; it is internal to me. Objective is external to me and is not changed by my perspective. Try jumping and then ask yourself, "Can gravity really be subjective?" Subjectivity transforms an object into an attitude.

Let's talk about an oak tree. You can have subjective reactions to the mighty oak–calling to mind childhod, tree houses, and a shady time scale. All are subjective responses. If you say the oak has a circumference of 287 inches and is 90 feet tall, that is objective. (Here's something that is not objective--that indeed is a mighty oak.)

Images in poetry are made through the use of concrete details that come to us through the body. Indeed, the body is object. As Jack Spicer writes, "Hello says the apple. Both of us were object." Lorine Neidecker expresses the relation betwen the body and the material the body perceives at the beginning of her poem, "Lake Superior":

> In every part of every living thing
> is stuff that once was rock
>
> In blood the minerals
> of the rock

Seido Ray Ronci's poetry makes a similar claim:

> The body tells
> its own story:
>
> the wind in the trees
>
> breathes
> a crow.

When Williams says "no ideas but in things" he means that the poem should be composed of particulars, sensory details that evoke a mental image. I'm sure that you've heard, "show don't tell" in a writing class. The image poem is a poem of continuous showing.

Let's look at another Williams poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow":

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Can you spot the abstraction in the poem? It's in the first two lines. The narrator announces the importance of what will follow. What follows is concrete. We have a domestic scene. The poem is visual and tactile–sensory. It includes texture "glazed," and color, "red" and "white". In this compositional field; elements are related to each other spatially in reference and in language. Why does so much depend upon these elements? Because there are no ideas but in things!

Objective Correlative, Ezra Pound, Presentation

The poet T.S. Eliot, in an essay on Shakespeare, highlights one of Shakespeare's greatest gifts–to render emotions and abstractions through externals. Eliot called the rendering of abstractions or internal states through particulars, the **objective correlative**. Think of a horror movie. Everything has to be rendered through visual and auditory details. Music, camera angles, light and shadow externalize anxiety and fear. In Shakespeare's play *King Lear*, Lear is raging out of his head. What is the objective correlative to his internal state? He is on the heath in the

middle of a furious storm. The violence outside expresses Lear's tumult. Just because we do not *broadcast* emotions or ideas in the poem, does not mean the poem is devoid of them. They must be rendered though the concrete.

Ezra Pound (1884-1972) writes in an early issue of *Poetry* magazine that an image "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." In order to write images Pound says, "Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something...Go in fear of abstractions.." In addition, the image poet must listen for the music in language; it is not description, but **presentation** put to music, "Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher spends on the art of music." The special nature of poetry is that the image is composed in the music of language.

Pound's most famous image poem is a concise vision of mortality. A crowd descends underground to take the Paris Metro:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> petals on a wet, black bough.

The use of the word "apparition" evokes the ghostliness of the faces. As the narrator watches these faces go down the stairs, through the black wrought-iron Art Noveau bannisters, he sees them as "petals on a wet, black, bough."

I've always argued that there really is no such thing as writer's block. If you are not inspired by Appollo or the muses to write, look outside and render what you see! It takes no inspiration, just sense and language. It is a discipline that can be practiced anywhere, anytime.

Buddhism, Ego, Manmade

Imagism has long been the practice of Japanese and Chinese poets. For some, it is a Buddhist practice, a way to diminish the ego so that the world can apear as it is. For others, it is a way of practicing poetry as

visual art. Here's a poem, "Crossing the Yellow River" by the 8th century Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei (701-761), translated by Sam Hamill:

> A little boat on the great river
> whose waves reach the end of the sky--
>
> suddenly a great city, ten thousand
> houses dividing sky from wave.
>
> Between the towns there are
> hemp and mulberry trees in the wilds.
>
> Look back on the old country:
> wide waters; clouds; and rising mist.

We receive an entire fluid, moving scene in these eight lines as well as a juxtaposition between the natural and manmade world. Where is the poet's ego in these lines? It has disappeared into the perceptual arrangement of details. The poet hands the world, not himself, to the reader, not himself.

It is not only nature that can be the subject of imagism, human construction is just as concrete. The image poem can take its energy from the urban world. In this selection from a poem, "And Their Winter and Night in Disguise," by the American poet George Oppen (1908-1984), the highway is just as significant as the ocean:

> The sea and a crescent strip of beach
> Show between the service station and a deserted shack
>
> A creek drains thru the beach
> Forming a ditch
> There is a discarded super-market cart in the ditch
> That beach is the edge of a nation
>
> There is something like shouting along the highway
> A California shouting
> On the long fast highway over the California mountains

Oppen shows that human construction is as important to render as the

natural world. The material reality of all objects make them appropriate subjects for poetry. Can you detect a political component in this image poem? Oppen finds California commodified as much as natural.

Moral Rigor

The poet Lorine Niedecker (1903-70) lived in relative isolation in Wisconsin and developed her poetry by combining personal details with precise descriptions of the material reality of her life in Black Hawk Island:

Along the river
wild sunflowers
over my head
the dead
who gave me life
give me this
our relative the air
floods
our rich friend
silt

For Niedecker poetry is the rich silt resulting from natural processes of filtration and distillation. The job of the poet Niedecker says, is to condense material reality.

Neidecker's collected works is entitled *This Condensery.* A condensery is a place where the water in milk is evalporated in order to make cream. For Niedecker, and I hope you recognize for all the poets we discuss in this chapter that the poem itself is the condensery:

Grandfather
advised me:
Learn a trade

I learned
to sit at desk
and condense

No layoff
from this
condensery

Niedecker's longest single poem is five pages long. Scholars have found 240 pages of notes for the poem. A condensary indeed.

A student, Jason Province, once turned in this as an image poem:

broken
yellow
pencil

Yahoo! I thought when I first read it. He got it. Not one word wasted. Try not to see that broken yellow pencil in your head.

Niedecker has what I've alluded to as "moral rigor" necessary to write effective image poems. What does this mean? We live in a day when most people are quick with judgment. It seems as if our default position is to say "good" or "bad"; "I like this" or "I don't like this." This reaction is often before we even discern with any sense of surety what exactly the thing we are judging *is*. "How beautiful!" we say to the sunset. The next time you see a sunset, before you judge whether or not it is beautiful (which is, of course, a subjective response) look closely and see how many different colors you can perceive. Try to name them all. You will be amazed at how you can increase esthetic pleasure through observation of particulars. But YOU have to get out of the way and open yourself up to experience.

I had the privilege of studying with a practitioner of this kind of writing, Ralph Mills, Jr, (1931-2007) and was impressed by how selfless Ralph was in pursuit of poetry–his own and the numerous poets he championed. Ralph's poetry reflects this selflessness in its acute perception:

broad
clouds, three-
pointed leaves

perpendicular

to brick
shuffle
in the air--
sky pauses
on an oblong
lagoon, trees
cut back at the verge,
skim of
water
unstirred--
& the rain
breaks--

Do you recognize the lineation used in the poem? By using open form, Mills is able to modulate rhythm and cadence as well as capture the movement in the scene. And each word is warranted.

The last poem we'll look at is a poem by Densie Levertov (1923-1997):

Pearblossom bright white
against green young leaves that frame
each tuft, black
pinewoods, graybrown buildings—
but rich
cream against strewn
feathers of cloud that float
slowly through new
blue of an April morning.

Levertov's effective use of color, light, and juxatposition. This poem also highlights another quality of the image poem, it often moves as a film would, exploring the visual scene. We start with a flower, then move to trees juxtaposed to buildings and then upward and outward to the sky. The poem is a film that plays in the mind, a projection of material reality.

How To Do It

1. Look around the room where you are right now and see if you can come up with at least 15 lines of imagery.

2. Get rid of any mediation in the poem. That is, do not place consciousness or judgment anywhere in the poem. Here are some examples:

"Beautiful sunset"–the sunset's beauty is a subjective judgment "seems to move"–the use of the word "seems" presupposes a consciousness it seems to, just let it BE!

"the leaves danced"–avoid **personification**, giving human attributes to nonhuman entities. Why? because you are interposing a human judgment. Just let the leaves be leaves without them being dancers!

3. So much depends upon your senses. Don't forget the auditory and the tactile–sensory details do not have to be exclusively visual.

4. Move through the poem as a camera would or

5. Compose the scene as a painter would.

6. Important words: concrete, particular, specific, detail.

7. The condensery! Be economic; take away any words that you don't need, particularly the articles "the" and "a". I'm particularly nuts about this–only use an article if you absolutely must.

8. Use the names for things–look them up if you have to. For example, "swamp oak" is much more preferable to "tree" because it is more specific whereas you can't spit in any poem without hitting "tree"!

9. You don't have to use open form, but give it a try. Try to tease rhythms

out of the field of language.

10. Always, always, be open to experience without ego or prejudgment, only then can you create an image poem. It is a moral as well as esthetic practice.

Mid-week Assignment

This assignment is in two stages. First, write 15 lines of imagery--it can be one poem or a series of poems. Choose as your object/s something that you can perceive right now, or something that you have perceived in the last 24 hours.

Do not use any mediation or judgment at all--just present the things you are presenting (broken/yellow/pencil). Then go back over the lines and delete at least 12 words.

Weekly Assignment

Keeping in mind all the strictures for this poem, present 20 lines of image poetry. It can be one poem or a series of poems. Before you turn it in, delete at least 14 words (or come as close as you can). No ego--just the thing.

Qualities of a Good Poem

a. There is no mediation;

b. There is no judgment;

c. There is no ego;

d. There are plenty of sensory details;

e. There is a direct treatment of the thing;

f. The poem creates a mental image for the reader.

7. Figuration

Figuration, Poesie, Metaphor

This chapter discusses a topic central to poetry writing–**figuration**. A figure departs from a straightforward, literal rendering of a thing (either abstract or concrete) in order to intensify the energy of expression. There are many kinds of figures. We are going to discuss and illustrate some of the more common ones you will use in your poetry writing.

If you continue your study of poetry beyond this textbook, a must-read for any intermediate student is George Puttenham's 16th century text, *The Arte of English Poesie* which discusses and shows examples of numerous figures used in the Renaissance literature.

The first figure we discuss is the **metaphor**. A metaphor describes one thing in terms of another. It is used to compare, amplify, associate, substitute. It makes new by bringing two things in relation that have not been put together before. In this way, the metaphor is at the very heart of language. Think about words. You see a tree you want to point out and you say, "tree." Is there anything inherent in the word "tree" that makes it signify the collection of carbon and cellulose that is a tree? No. Essentially, language is metaphorical. The Romantic poet Percy Shelley, in his essay, "A Defense of Poetry," argues that the originators of language, law and culture were poets because they brought new relations into being:

> Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is it marks the before unapprehended relations of things, and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them become through time signs for portions and classes of thoughts, instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse.

Shelley is saying that any innovation is metaphorical--it constructs a new relation. A hitherto unknown correspondence is revealed and the world

is thus changed. Any agent who accomplishes this, Galileo, Einstein, Jefferson, Georgia O'Keefe, Shelley calls "poet."

One of the reasons Shakespeare has endured is his preternatural ability to coin metaphor. Any passage from his plays or poems will contain multiple metaphors, "Out out brief candle, life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, then is heard of no more. It is a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury... signifying nothing." Metaphors constantly bloom in Shalespeare's lines.

Consider further the relation of metaphor to language. Look at a clock. It's got *hands* that *sweep* across the clock's *face*. Think of a plane. It's got a *nose* and *wings* and a *rudder*. Think of a hat. It's got a *bill*. A car has a *hood* and a *trunk*. We use metaphorical language all the time because language is metaphoric.

The Scottish Burns

Let's look at a poem by Robert Burns (1759-96) the Scottish poet. In this poem, he's comparing his love (as a woman) and his love (as a devotion):

O, my luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.
O, my luve's like the melodie,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I,
And I will luve thee still, my Dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun!
O I will luve thee still, my Dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only Luve,
And fare thee weel a while!

> And I will come again, my Luve,
> Tho' it were ten thousand mile!

Simile, Vehicle, Tenor, Hyperbole

Technically, any comparison is a version of metaphor; if we want to be precise in the gradations of metphor, this comparison is a **simile** because the things compared are connected by *like*. When we look at a comparison like this, the sign (my love) that you start with is called the **tenor**. What it gets compared to is the **vehicle** (a rose). His luv (which is itself a figure for his girlfriend) is being compared to a red rose. The luv is the tenor, the rose is the vehicle. Let's analyze this fuether. Why does it make sense to compare his luv to a rose? She is a Scottish lassie so we can assume that she has red hair, fair skin, and rosey cheeks. What else about a rose? It smells sweet, is soft to touch, and its beauty is fleeting.

This tells us something important about figures. When the vehicle is a tangible thing, there must be physical correspondence between the vehicle and tenor. There must be emotional resonance (try saying, "My luv is as dimpled as a golf ball") between the tenor and vehicle and there must be an intellectual or philosophical correspondence between the two (a rose is a symbol of beauty, purity, and affection). Burns also compares his love's lilting voice to a melody and ends with an example of **hyperbole** which is deliberate exaggeration, he would walk to her "tho' it were ten thousand mile."

The technical definition of a **metaphor** is that it makes a direct comparison. In H.D.'s (1886-1961) poem "Oread" she evokes the sea through the use of metaphors:

> Whirl up, sea—
> whirl your pointed pines,
> splash your great pines
> on our rocks,
> hurl your green over us,
> cover us with your pools of fir.

The poem is from the point of view of a mountain nymph; therefore, her

view of the sea is rendered in terms of what she knows-the sea is a forest and forest sea. In other words, she makes the sea of a forest.

Wallace Stevens in "The Idea of Order at Key West" interrogates the relation between the maker of metaphors and vehicles so transformed. There was a woman singing on the shore of the sea:

> She was the single artificer of the world
> In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
> Whatever self it had, became the self
> That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
> As we beheld her striding there alone,
> Knew that there never was a world for her
> Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

The power of her song is such that it not only reflects the music of the everchanging ocean, its efficacy creates the ocean. Her song becomes the ocean's self.

Just as in the poem by H.D., Stevens is contemplating the idea of subjectivity, how the perceiving subject filters experience through consciousness. This is an element of metaphor; it reflects the maker's mind.

In the poem "Boy Sleeping," by Ann Lauterbach, the narrator addresses the death of her sister and nature of time as she watches her nephew sleep. In the following figure-rich passage, the narrator struggles to find a proper vehicle for the tenor of memory:

> I remembered when a word
> First advanced like a dart at a target,
> A star creasing the sky, a lie
> Told to save the situation while damning it.
> I remember when the annual survey included nothing abstract
> Because the world was full of particulars, particular events.
> I remember a train ride from the suburbs, sun setting in the
> windows,
> Reminding me that I would forget, and so
> Reminded not to forget, although
> The dead woman in the sleeping boy's face
> Is a better example.

In this profound moment, the narrator is considering the multiple layers of time that exist in memory. Her first metaphor is the vision of the sun setting in a train window, which, once it is remarked, ensures that it will be remembered. The narrator then exchanges that metaphor for the image of her dead sister, flickering across the face of her sleeping nephew. Two time layers in memory, the gone projected across the here.

Analogy

An **analogy** is figurative language that sets up two ideas in a logical relation, most often using "as." Here's an analogy from a poem of mine that deliberately imitates the language of analogy you may encounter in a standardized test, "a fact is a fact as a timepiece is for keeping."

Marianne Moore's (1887-1972) poem, "The Paper Nautilus" (a sea creature whose shell grows according to the geometric form of a spiral) is full of images and figures:

> For authorities whose hopes
> are shaped by mercenaries?
> Writers entrapped by
> teatime fame and by
> commuters' comforts? Not for these
> the paper nautilus
> constructs her thin glass shell.

Moore sets up a dichotomy between things done for material gain and those done for some rander telos. The eggs that the Paper Nautilus lays are "souvenirs of hope."

> Giving her perishable
> souvenir of hope, a dull
> white outside and smooth-
> edged inner surface
> glossy as the sea, the watchful
> maker of it guards it
> day and night; she scarcely

eats until the eggs are hatched.
Buried eight-fold in her eight
arms, for she is in
a sense a devil-
fish, her glass ram'shorn-cradled freight
is hid but is not crushed;
as Hercules, bitten

by a crab loyal to the hydra,
was hindered to succeed,
the intensively
watched eggs coming from
the shell free it when they are freed,--
leaving its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.

I count at least eleven figures in this poem, all serving to describe and evoke the creature. There are multiple analogies as well as metonomy. An analogy is the last figure which renders the sea creature heroic, "as if they knew love/is the only fortress//strong enough to trust to."

Metonomy, Derangement, Blakeberries

Another figure that is frequently used in contemporary poetry is **metonomy**. Metonomy is when you substitute one thing for something associated with it. What do you think a baby's bottle is metonomy for?

Recently I was at a museum looking at Medieval paintings. One of the paintings was of a man on a pilgrimage to Rome. Often in the Middle Ages, people would go on pilgrimages to shrines in order to "work off" sins. One of the most popular shrines was on the coast of Spain, Santiago

de Compestela. The sign of pilgrims to Compestela was a scallop shell. In the painting of the pilgrim to Rome, the pilgrim had a scallop shell on his hood. As it turns out, the scallop shell became a symbol for all pilgrims. In other words, the shell becomes metonomy for pilgrimage.

During a recent stay in Canterbury, England I noticed a carving on the heavy wooden doors to the cathedral, itself a pilgrimage destination. What do you think was carved there? That's right, a scallop shell. Metonomy.

One way metonomy is used often in contemporary poetry is to derange. Indeed, in the examples on how to derange when you write a clear sentence, then derange each part, you are using metonomy, making substitutions. What makes it deraged is that the substitution is arbitrary, like giving a child a dictionary when she's hungry.

Start with "Dad told me not to play with fire" and then do deranged metonomy, "Cupcake told me not to carpet with fish." In one of my poems I considered the Middle English spelling of blackberries as "blakeberries." I was writing a poem about poetic visions and made a simple metonymic tranformation. The original line was, "I have eaten the blackberries." I thought about the visionary English poet William Blake and did some metonomy, "I have eaten the Blake Berries." (Sometimes when I perform I tell the audience about Blake Berries that grow in Missouri. "They give you poetic visions," I say." "They take about eight hours to kick in." I look at my watch and continue, "They should be kicking in right about...now." And begin the performance.)

Synechdoche, Beowulf, Kenning

Synechdoche is when a poet uses a part to symbolize a whole. When a captain yells, "All hands on deck," he is not calling for his crews' hands but all of their bodies The hand stands for the whole sailor.

In an early passage in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, the narrator describes the ship's sail from Geatland to Denmark:

> Then moved o'er the waters by might of the wind
> that bark like a bird with breast of foam,

> till in season due, on the second day,
> the curved prow such course had run
> that sailors now could see the land,
> sea-cliffs shining, steep high hills,
> headlands broad.

It isn't the ship that runs its course, but the "curved prow" the part of the ship that stands for the whole. There is also a comparison of the boat as a bird with "a breast of foam." Certainly when the prow arrived in Denmark, all hands were on deck!

The Anglo-Saxons, even before developing a written language, had a rich linguistic life, partially because of their prodigious use of figures. Their language was full of figuration called **kenning**. Kenning is a kind of riddle making. The body is a "bonehouse." The sea is a "whale's road." Can you figure why women were kenned as "peace weavers"?

Renaissance, Alchemy, Magic & Metaphor

Before we close this section, you should know a little more about the importance of metaphor. Before science was systemetized as an inductive process, it was a mixture of magic and experiment called alchemy. Essential to the practice of alchemy was metaphor.

Think of the goal of many alchemists: to transform materials into gold. Gold was not only valuable, it was believed to have healing properties. Metaphors transform. "My love is a red rose" transforms a woman into a rose. Alchemy was based on the idea that all things in the universe are connected through correspondent properties. Revealing a correspondence that hasn't been revealed is a kind of magic. You create a new relation in the reader's mind. You reveal a hidden correspondence in the world. That's the mighty power of the synthetic imagination.

Conceit

The last example we'll discuss is a poem, "Valediction: Of

Weeping" by the poet John Donne (1672-1631). In this poem, there are numerous figures: metaphors, similes, metonomy, synechdoche, as well as exaggeration (amplification). When a metaphor is extended it is called a **conceit**. Donne's poem includes the alchemical notion that these metaphors have an effect on the world itself:

> LET me pour forth
> My tears before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
> For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear,
> And by this Mintage they are something worth,
> For thus they be
> Pregnant of thee;
> Fruits of much grief they are, emblems of more,
> When a tear falls, that thou falls which it bore,
> So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.

The tears are coins, impressed with the lover's face and are quite valuable because of that mintage. The tears are then shown to be pregannt with her image, as well as the fruits from a grief tree.

> On a round ball
> A workman that hath copies by, can lay
> An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
> And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
> So doth each tear,
> Which thee doth wear,
> A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
> Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
> This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

The tears are analogues of a globe and so when they weep, they dissolve the world.

> O more than Moon,
> Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,
> Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear
> To teach the sea, what it may do too soon;
> Let not the wind
> Example find,

> To do me more harm, than it purposeth;
> Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,
> Who e'r sighs most, is cruellest, and hastes the other's death.

Apparently the narrator is traveling away from his red red rose by boat (all hands on deck). If they sigh too much, (here's the alchemical correspondence) they'll create such sea turmoil that he'll drown and she'll follow. Perhaps she would be better off walking along the sea's shore singing.

How To Do It

1. Know your terms and recognize them in poetry you read.

2. Remember the rule of three:
- There must be a physical analogy (when applicable) between tenor and vehicle.
- There must be an emotional analogy between the two;
- There must be an intellectual analogy between the two.

3. If the figure you use is familiar, even vaguely familiar, don't use it! A figure that has become familiar is called a **cliché** and clichés are the poet's greatest enemy.

4. Be intent on finding hidden correspondences in the universe and reveal them.

5. Use figures in the poem where you want to draw the reader's attention and increase the intensity. They are attention grabbers.

6. Eight hours before you sit down to write a poem, eat some Blakeberries.

Mid-week assignment
This is a little forced but give it a try. Write a 10 line poem in which you use AT LEAST three of the following figures: metaphor, simile, analogy, conceit, hyperbole, kenning, synecdoche, metonomy. Image poetry is a good place to start because you have a fund of tenors and all you need to do is find the vehicles.

Example:

> He was drunk and tilted at an invisible windmill; it
> turned out to be the concrete, hard as his resolve
> to get drunker, and equally as unconscious.
> His nose blurted, "Samson, Samson," and he
> smelled like uncorked grog.

Weekly Assignment
Write 20 lines that include at least 6 figures. It can be one poem or more than one poem. If the figures sound remotely familiar, don't use them. Fresh work!

Qualities of a Good Poem:

a. The figures are fresh;

b. The figures work their magic;

c. The figures are not strained (in other words they come naturally in the poem);

d. They heighten the energy of the poem;

e. The poem itself is coherent and compelling, not just an excuse to make figures.

8. Narrative

Narrative, scop, Sir Patrick Spense

Open any mainstream literary magazine and you'll find that the majority of the poems published are **narrative** poems. A narrative poem is a poem that narrates an event or series of events, like the prose poem "Drawing Jesus" by David Shumate:

> The first patient drew Jesus as a tall, slender man with three smiling heads, one eye in the center of each. Another sketched him as a stick figure wearing a yellow hat. The teenage girl from Alabama drew a white vulture wth a halo above its head. At the table by the window the Hungarian immigrant whose language no one understood drew a face with a scar running down his cheek, a ragged red beard, and the kind of wild eyes that frighten children. The old woman who has lived half-a-century in the asylum painted a picture of a dozen orange boxes and asked me to guess which one Jesus was hiding in. I pointed to the box with the bulge in the middle. The Hungarian started laughing. Then they all joined in.

Telling stories is one of the oldest purposes of poetry (though perhaps not the first: incantation and prayer–language as magic–is my bet). Tribes had a storyteller who constructed tribe memory through stories, called a *griot* in West Africa, and a *scop,* in Anglo-Saxon culture. Often, these narratives were metrical in order to facilitate their memorization. In a passage form the epic poem *Beowulf*, immediately after Beowulf has defeated Grendel, there is a feast and celebration. During this celebration, a few hours after Beowulf's triumph, the scop has already turned Beowulf's victory into a poem. Essentially, the poet was the tribe's historian.

Let's look at ways that poets turn stories into poems.

In the 13th century, the Scottish king summoned noblemen in order to have them escort his daughter, in wintertime, back from Norway as she was married to Norway's king. The noblemen, including their leader, Sir

Patrick Spens, knew it was a fool's errand, but they dutifully went and met their doom in the North Sea. An anonymous poet composed a ballad of this incident which has been sung for centuries. By examining some passages, we can discover the poem's telos and technique.

One element of the telos is indicated in the first stanza:

> The King sits in Dunfermline town,
> Drinking the blood-red wine;
> "O where shall I get a skeely skipper
> To sail this ship o mine?"

Right off, we have a narrative with two dimensions: the events and their politics. We detect the casual manner in which the king sends these men to their death. He sits in his castle, drinking wine ("blood-red" for he has their blood on his hands). This story is a critique of royalty.

We are introduced to Sir Patrick Spens, the protagonist of the ballad, "the best sailor/that ever sailed the sea." Spens reads the king's letter as his death warrant. He knows the mortal winter sea but obeys his King.

The voyage to Norway is successful. In Norway, waiting for the weather to clear, some in the court claim the Scottish crew is draining their treasury,"Ye Scottishmen spend all our King's gowd,/And all our Queenis fee." Prideful, Patrick Spens sets sail immediately. In an image foreshadowing danger, a crew member warns:

> "I saw the new moon late yestreen
> With the old moon in her arm;
> And if we go to sea, master,
> I fear we'll come to harm."

The poem then proceeds to narrate the struggle at sea and Spens' efforts at keeping the ship afloat, then, like a jump-cut in a movie, we see the consequence of the sea tragedy in Scotland:

> The ladies wrang their fingers white,
> The maidens tore their heair,

All for the sake of their true loves,
For them they'll see nae mair.

The poem ends with a last image of Sir Patrick Spens and his crew:

O forty miles of Aberdeen,
'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
And there lies good Sir Patrick Spens,
With the Scots lords at his feet.

What accounts for the poem's longevity? It tells a good story. It has action, suspense, foreshadowing, a climactic scene on the turbulent sea, and a bitter denouement. Its popularity in Scotland for centuries is due to these reasons and more. Scotland was long oppressed by England. Even though the king who sends Sir Patrick Spens on his mission is Scottish, he stands for a capricious and oppressive royalty which cared little for the heroic Scots. As such, in addition to being a good story, the poem becomes a source of Scottish nationalism.

Frankie & Johnnie

Let's now examine a version of a ballad written at the very end of the 19th century in St. Louis, MO. "Frankie and Johnny" narrates a real-life incident transformed into an American lyric, an urban folk tale and another in a long tradition of American murder-ballads.

The incident happened in St. Louis, MO where, on October 19, 1899 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reports a "negro," Al Britt, was living with a "mulatto" woman named Frankie, who shot Britt for cheating on her. A few days later, Britt died of his wounds. The opening stanza sets the tone of the story:

Frankie and Johnnie were lovers,
O, my Gawd, how they could love,
They swore to be true to each other,
As true as the stars above;
He was her man, but he done her wrong.

The exaggerated "O, my Gawd," tells the audience the story is about African-Americans. The refrain is a summary of the narrative that will follow–they are lovers, but the man is not true.

The second stanza gives a mini-portrait of Frankie, the wronged woman:

> Frankie was a good woman,
> As everybody knows,
> Gave her man a hundred dollars,
> To get him a suit of clothes;
> He was her man, but he done her wrong.

This stanza contains a key information: Frankie supports Johnny. Why is Frankie supporting Johnny? Perhaps their relationship was not just romantic but also monetary. It certainly is not because Frankie is a well-to-do socialite.

> Frankie lived in a crib-house,
> Crib-house with only two doors,
> Gave her money to Johnnie,
> He spent it on those parlour whores

Her crib was small. Apparently, Frankie is a prostitute and Johnny her pimp. A racist portrayal or keeping it real? We are on the social margins here, the urban underground.

Frankie goes to a tavern for a bucket of beer and the bartender reveals that Johnny's stepping out on her with "Nellie Bly" so Frankie plots her revenge, "Frankie went to the hock-shop,/Bought her a big forty-four." When Frankie finds Johnny and Nellie Bly,

> Johnnie grabbed off his Stetson,
> Said, "Oh, Gawd, Frankie, don't shoot!"
> But she pressed hard on the trigger,
> And the gun went roota-toot-toot;
> He was her man, but he done her wrong.

In a bit of parallel narration, Johnny's trip to the graveyard has the same rhythm as Frankie'a trip to jail and both trips have the same cause:

> "Bring out your rubber-tyred buggy,
> Bring out your rubber-tyred hack,
> I'll take my man to the graveyard,
> But I won't bring him back;
> He was my man, but he done me wrong."

And later in the poem:

> A rubber-tyred buggy,
> A rubber-tyred hack,
> Took poor Frankie to the jail-house
> But it didn't bring her back;
> He was her man, but he done her wrong.

The ballad's ending varies from version to version, Frankie is hung in the gallows, women are warned to stay away from "sporting men," etc, but the common thread is the refrain, "He was her man, but he done her wrong." The refrain is a plot summary and apologia.

Telos, Point of View, Omniscience

What about the telos of this poem? One could say it has moral– Don't cheat on your woman! But its popularity could be as easily ascribed to the sensationalism of the narration. Sex, jealousy and murder!

True, there is an element of blackface to the story in that it may support the stereotypical views of urban African-Americans. But that is not all. Sex and death are foundational themes in literature in this ballad has both. Urban characters who live outside the law are prevalent still in our culture: television programming, movies, and popular music still demonstrate the same fascination. No question that Frankie and Johnny were *street*. And, just like the "Sir Patrick Spens," the poem is compelling narrative which builds suspense, has a violent climax, and consequential denouement.

The elements that make the poems successful help us to understand how narative works. First, as with all the poems we have discussed so far, the narrative poem must have a telos. There must be some compelling

reason why you tell the story that you do. Just because something happens to a poet does not necessarily make it appropriate for a poem. There must be a telos.

The first decision that you must make is one of narration. Who tells the story and who is the story told to? Answering these questions indicates the **point of view** of the story. The point of view tells us us who the narrator is. There are five possible point of views:

1. If the narrator is a character in the story; that is the **first person point of view**. *I walked into a storm cloud/and got wet* is an example of first person.

2. If the narrator narrates *to* a character, that is **second person point of view**. *You walked into a storm cloud/and got wet* is an example of second person.

3. If the narrator narrates and knows everything about all characters; if the narrator is the god of the narrative universe, that point of view is **third person omniscient point of view**. "Omniscient" means all-knowing. *He walked into a storm cloud/and got wet/the cloud didn't care* is an example of third person omniscient (only an omniscient narrator would know how the cloud feels).

4. If the narrator narrates and only knows the thoughts, feelings, memories, etc of the main character, that is **third person limited omniscient point of view.** The omniscience is limited to one character. *He walked into a storm cloud/thinking about a salami sandwich/and got wet* is an example of third person limited omniscient narrator.

5. If the narrator narrates and only knows what can be externally observed, that is **third person detached point of view**.
"He walked into a storm cloud/and got wet" is an example of third person detached point of view.

The most frequently used point of view in contemporary poetry is

first person where the reader is led to assume that the narrator is also the poet, like in the poem "Bush's War" by Robert Hass (1941-):

> I typed the brief phrase, "Bush's War,"
> At the top of a sheet of white paper
> Having some dim intuition of a poem
> Made luminous by reason that would,
> Though I did not have them at hand,
> Set out the facts in an orderly way.

This first person narrative poem is self-referential; it is about its own composition.

There is nothing inherently wrong about first person narrative. Indeed it establishes an identity between the reader and the poet, like in the Frank O'Hara poem about the moment he heard that the blues singer Billie Holliday died:

> It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
> three days after Bastille day, yes
> it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
> because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
> at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
> and I don't know the people who will feed me
>
> I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
> and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
> an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
> in Ghana are doing these days
> I go on to the bank
> and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard)
> doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life
> and in the GOLDEN GRIFFIN I get a little Verlaine
> for Patsy with drawings by Bonnard although I do
> think of Hesiod, trans. Richmond Lattimore or
> Brendan Behan's new play or Le Balcon or Les Nègres
> of Genet, but I don't, I stick with Verlaine
> after practically going to sleep with quandariness
>
> and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
> Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and

then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue
and the tobacconist in the Ziegfeld Theatre and
casually ask for a carton of Gauloises and a carton
of Picayunes, and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

This poem demonstrates much of the power of first person narration. O'Hara establishes, through details and an easy colloquial speech, a rather initmate relationship between the reader and the narrator. He drops names as if we all share the same social circle. When he picks up the paper announcing Billie Holiday's death, we share his memory of how her voice had once stopped his own heart.

Not all poets can handle the Personism of Frank O'Hara, though, and if first person narrative is used too much, the poetry becomes egocentric and shallow–as if the experience happening to a poet was all that was necessary to make it the experience worth telling

I frequently use second person point of view in my poetry. It creates distance between the author and narrator even if the "You" that addressed is a version of the author. Here's an example from a poem that I composed from inspiration (exhalation and perspiration, as well). It wrote itself into my head as I was hiking down a mountain I had just climbed. By the time I got to the bottom, the poem was entirely formed. All I had to do was get to the trailhead, take out a pen and paper and transcribe it. It is in second person and is called, "The Ascent of the Law":

Say you're not Phoebus Apollo,
don't exhale the truth,
master your will or
know how far you'll drop
from the next misstep; instead,
you're aging, panting, bone-tired,
re-climbing the last eight hundred feet
to a summit you just left--
you forgot your knife

opened there on the craggy
peak; you meant to cut a piece
of jerky for yourself and dog,
best friend, who climbed, more nimbly,
with you; you stared at the blade,
then at him, as if you might slit
his throat to placate a god who
demands such sacrifices; instead,
you got up, whistled, and began
the descent, knowing by heart
three passes to cross before
reaching home: Juniper Ridge, Eagles
Aerie, Cloudland, and maybe it's the altitude
but like elegiac music, strings that play on
the gut, all the pain you've ever caused
anyone returns to you and the ego
that orchestrates such acts
congeals within you--something spoiled
that needs to be cut out, but you can't
because you forgot your knife
on the summit, so you call your dog,
turn around
and start to climb again.

In a poem about excising the ego, first person would have taken up entirely the wrong tone.

Plot

When I teach fiction writing, and this applies here, I tell students that all stories gain their plot from conflict. The nature of energy in any conflict is that the energy increases as the conflict unfolds. This is called the **rising action**. Of course the conflict does't go on forever; it increases until something has to give. The moment where something gives is called the **climax**. When the implications of the climax are worked out or shown, that is called the **falling action**. Each of the poems you've read so far in this section have tension, conflict and release.

We can find the narrative arc in this poem by William Stafford

(1914-1993), "Traveling Through the Dark":

> Traveling through the dark I found a deer
> dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
> It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
> that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.
>
> By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
> and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
> she had stiffened already, almost cold.
> I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.
>
> My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
> her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
> alive, still, never to be born.
> Beside that mountain road I hesitated.
>
> The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
> under the hood purred the steady engine.
> I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
> around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.
>
> I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,
> then pushed her over the edge into the river.

The tension is released by pushing the deer into the gorge–the falling action is it tumbling down.

Dramatic monologue, motivating incident, internal/external, tone

A specific type of narrative poem where the narration is in first person but is not assumed to be the author is called a **dramatic monologue**. In a dramatic monologue, the narration is assumed to be triggered by a **motivating incident**, that is, something that causes the character to begin the narration. If there is an external audience for the monologue, it is said to be an **exterior monologue**. If the audience is the speaker, in his or her mind, it is called an **interior monologue**. Hamlet's soliloquy is an interior monologue:

> To be, or not to be: that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
> No more; and by a sleep to say we end
> The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
> To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

By the way, how many figures can you count in this passage of Hamlet's soliloquy?

A dramatic monologue that is external is "My Last Duchess," by the Victorian poet, Robert Browning (1812-1889). Browning was proficient at revealing the psychology of a character through speech. We'll go through the poem and see if we can tell what kind of person the Duke is:

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
> Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
> "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
> Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
> The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
> But to myself they turned (since none puts by
> the curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

We are introduced to the Duke as he shows a painting of his dead wife to the visitor. He keeps the painting under wraps for its subject seems to elicit interest from male viewers.

> And seemed they would ask me, if they durst,
> How such a glance came there; so not the first
> Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
> Her husband's presence only, called that spot
> Of joy into the Duchess's cheek: perhaps

> Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
> Over my lady's wrist too much," or Paint
> Must never hope to reproduce the faint
> Half flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
> Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
> For calling up that spot. She had
> A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad,
> Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

It seems as if the duchess was a light-hearted creature who was easily moved, "too soon made glad." The tone would suggest that the Duke doesn't appreciate such characteristics.

> Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
> The dropping of the daylight in the West,
> The bough of cherries some officious fool
> Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
> She rode with round the terrace--all and each
> Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
> Or blush, at least. She thanked men--good! but thanked
> Somehow--I know not how--as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift.

The reason for the Duke's distaste of his wife's attitude is revealed here—she did not make herself enemy to all pleasures except her husband's status.

> Who'd stoop to blame
> This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
> In speech--(which I have not)--to make your will
> Quite clear to such a one, and say, "Just this
> Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss
> Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let
> Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
> her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse
> --E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
> Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt
> Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
> Much the same smile?

We learn that the Duke never even tells her what he takes as her character flaw because that would be "stooping" and he doesn't think Dukes should stoop. They are stooped to.

> This grew; I gave commands;
> Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
> As if alive.

What commands do you think he gave? Why did his commands stop all smiles? What is the subtle sign of guilt, the return of the repressed?

> Will't please you rise? We'll meet
> the company below, then. I repeat
> The Count your master's known munificence
> Is ample warrant that no just pretense
> Of mine dowry will be disallowed
> Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
> At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
> Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
> Taming a sea horse, thought a rarity,
> Which claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Now the motivating incident is made clear. The Duke is arranging for a purchase, not another sculpture, but another wife. I know the Count would like to make a good match for his daughter but he ought to think twice about this duke.

Another aspect of the narrative poem that both the Shakespeare and Browning monologues demonstrate is **tone**. Tone is the attitude the narrator has towards the subject of the narration. Hamlet's tone is contemplative, hesitant, haunted. The Duke's tone is arrogant, preemptory, controlling.

In addition, both these poems point to the importance of speech. Have your characters speak naturally, as expressions of their character. Speech or dialogue are excellent elements to include in your poems. Here's part of a dialogue poem I wrote. The motivating incident is that the narrator finds himself IMing with the divine:

Look Out Your Window

Corinna: What do you see?
Anichord: White oaks.

C: What?
A: Shimmering leaves, in profusion.

C: You do see?
A: Yes, the number clouds of your briefest thought.

C: You?
A: Chloros.

C: You?
A: Vein in leaf on a twig withering.

C: See what you do?
A: Die without you.

C: Do you?
A: Die within you.

C: You see.
A: Form for the formless.

C: You see what?
A: Logic in beauty
Ground in reason

C: Doing what?
A: Turns leaf into category
Category into table.

C: What do you see?
A: The table on which I eat and starve.

C: You see.
A: Only when you blind me.

C: Do.
A: Speak
Break
Grow

C: So, you do what you see.
A: I do what you say.

C: Say what you do.
A: Do. See. Do.
Do Say Do See Do.

Cinema

I will discuss one other kind of narrative poem here that is shaped by the 20th century's art form: cinema. A poem by Terrance Hayes (1971-), "Variations on Two Black Cinema Treasures," has its genesis in the book *Black Cinema Treasures: Lost and Found* which surveys the history of black cinema. Hayes shapes his poem from film synopses. The poem is in two parts. The first part is inspired by the 11 minute film, "Broken Earth." It is a dramatic monologue.

1. "BROKEN EARTH"
Year of Release: 1939
Running Time: 11 minutes
Cast: Clarence Muse and unidentified boy

I am the sick boy in the shack, when the camera opens
On the sunrise and wispy silhouettes of the plow
And the fool mule and my father working a row down

The middle of a rock field with a small shack in one corner
And a shade tree in the other where a crew of barefoot

Old black men stoop and sing "All God's Chillun Wear Shoes"
And call out *Hey* and *Hi* and the name of my father
Who goes on plowing into sundown, into the dark hour

When the mule will grunt no farther and the red eyes
Of the black men's cigarettes blaze and flicker in one corner

Of the field as I quiver in a wet skin in the hot small light
Of the lantern blazing and flickering in the shack.
I am a sick boy. I am as still as a kettle of water. I am waiting

To be rearranged by the hand of God, which is not the hand
Of God, but the strip of cloth pressed against my brow

By my father who has no medicine but prayer.
I don't know what I did to get here mumbling
"Pappy" and calling out to the ghost of my mother

As a choir sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" somewhere.
I don't know who it is telling me to open my eyes.

The opening moves like the sweep of a camera introducing the mise-en-scene. We have the characters in their locale: the hard working father, the crew taking a break, the boy sick in the shack. The poem is also dialogic; we hear multiple voices: the voice of the father, the voice of the men, the chorus of "All God's Chillun Wear Shoes" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," the song the boy hears as he drifts off to unconsciousness or death.

Because movies are only visual and aural, they are make sophisticated image poems. I conceived a poetry sequence as a series of short films called "Ant Traps: Seven Short Films." Here are the first three:

i. Hollowould

You open the door
step into marrowdark
Mimic fright and lowlife lust

(use red for that)

A bloodline runs out the alley
you follow until you face a door on Main Street
its window is photonic glass
You peek at the simulcast ten tee vees broadcast
There you are!

(closeup of the penis)

standing next to nothing

ii. Mister Headwill

You carry her cup
through clouds of crowds
at the bazaar.

You carry her
across traffic lawns
and old bones in hock.

Your heel is cut.
In your shoe you carry
the pebble you promised
Zounds! on the psalter.

You heal your cut with pocket salt.
You will flick the last pinch
into the cup you carry
and, stepping tenderly,

bring it to the queen.

iii. Arrested on the Charge of Fermentation

Flash the word:	**Decadent**
Flash	**Decay**
Flash	**Today**
shot one	Mushrooms grow in slow motion
track one	The noise cells make
shot two	Sterile doctor prepares for birth
track two	Cellular noise x 10^3
shot three	Closed circuit of you
track three	Sad song of decomposition
shot four	3D-animated ganglia motherboard

potassium Byronic bonds Econometrics of algae allegoricide two pi max frequency equals twice temperature sex a piece of clay sketch of Shelley iconic play

voiceover *Nervespeed is 20m/second. How long does it take then to travel from shame years old to the nownow passing you by?*

Flash **Less time than you think**

Writing narratives, as film, requires an thought experiement--does the narration unfold as a movie in your mind? Can you visuall the whoe thing? If you can, then you have suceeded.

How To Do It

1. Try writing a narrative poem with nothing but unmediated imagery (as we learned in the last chapter).

2. Have a telos for telling the story you want to tell.

3. Choose a point of view that is appropriate to the story you want to tell.

4. There must be tension, suspense or conflict!

5. Try telling someone else's story.

6. Tell your own story in second person.

7. Don't hesitate to change details in the narrative. In other words, the purpose is not to be true to reality but to make the best narrative you can.

8. Try using cinematic technique–concentrate on visual details, description, and dialogue.

9. Avoid, at the beginning of your practice, science fiction, fantasy (vampires, the middle earth, etc), genre storytelling.

10. As always, concentrate on your use of images, fresh language, with effective lineation.

Examples

Here's an example that is similar to the first assignment. I take a brief narrative and convert it into nothing but images and dialogue.

Example: Joe Pellopi walks to the store with his dog and buys a package of absestos-ridden Ho-Hos. He eats one and says, "Carcinogenic, but delicious."

paw foot step, the pocket
jangles

paw foot step the
pocket jangles

"Sit. Good Boy.
Sit." Tail on concrete

thumps. Cellophane
glimmer and palm change,

the wry smiles of
cashiers, palm change.

"heel" a cell
turns cancerous

a tooth turns
sweet.

Mid-week Assignment

Take any brief narrative (an action that leads to resolution) and convert that story into a series of images. First write a synopsis of the story (a

synopsis is a summary); it should be about a few sentences then you are to turn that story into a poem USING NOTHING BUT IMAGES AND DIALOGUE. At least 12 lines.

Weekly Assignment
Write a narrative poem of at least 24 lines. You can use any point of view or plot you like. Remember to have a telos that is apparent and strong. Why are you telling this story in poetry?

The Qualities of a good poem:

a. A strong telos;

b. A point of view that makes sense relative to the story;

c. The story is shown through images;

d. The tone is appropriate to the story;

e. The language is fresh;

f. The lineation is effective.

9. Poem of Place

That spot you stand on
think of it
in the Renaiaissance
Ice Age
Those Halcyon days of amino chains
when the steamy rain down did rain
think of it
as the bottom of a hole in time
think of where you are
that spot you stand on.

Space-time Manifold, Multidimensionality

One of my missions is to remind my students that time, *per se*, does not exist. The reason can be found in physics. Newtonian physics would have us believe that space has three dimensions that "run" along a "timeline"; that is, time is absolute. When Einstein developed his theory of relativity, he demonstrated (and has since been proven by experimental evidence), that time is not separate from space. We do not live in time, but in four dimensions called the **space-time manifold**.

The most suprising aspect of this discovery is that time is relative. In other words, the passing of time depends on your frame of reference. If I went on a space ride on a really fast rocket that approached the speed of light, relative to you, time would move more slowly for me (although I would experience time as I experience it now). This has been proven by some very ingenious experiments. It shows us that time is NOT absolute; in fact, to speak of it as being separate from space makes no sense.

So why is this a mission of mine? Because we live as if time were absolute. Ask anyone what time it is. I'm sure they'll give you an exact answer: "2:11pm". Ask the same person where North is, I suspect it would take more than a few moments before they ventured an answer.

And, as evidenced when I do this in class, often they will be completely wrong about the directions. As the theme of the poem that opens this chapter indicates (it was part of a performance I did for a show called, *Where You Are*) if we think about our experience in terms of spacetime, our experience becomes richer. We should be mindful of where we are. We should have an intimate connection to place. Walt Whitman explores this idea in his poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" when he addresses future humanity who will look out over the same vista that he sees:

Others will enter the gates of the ferry, and cross from shore to shore;
Others will watch the run of the flood-tide;
Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east;
Others will see the islands large and small;
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high;
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring in of the flood-tide, the falling back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

If you are connected to a cell phone or computer or ipod most of the day, place is calling you out of the womb of technology. If you are like many of my students through the years who are from rural Missouri and hunt, fish, and work outside, well, you already know what I'm talking about.

In a nutshell, the **poem of place** takes its inspiration from a specific place. It is characterized by **multidimensionality**, that is, it renders place in ore than one way. Spacetime, Einstein tells us, has four dimensions; you ought to try to achieve at least that many dimensions in your poem of place.

Let's look at a poem by William Carlos Williams that begins to demonstrate how place gathers dimensions in a poem. The poem is called, "The Attic Which is Desire":

the unused tent
of

bare beams
beyond which

directly wait
the night

and day—
Here

from the street
by

*****
* S *
* O *
* D *
* A *
*****

ringed with
running lights

the darkened
pane

exactly
down the center

is
transfixed

So where is the place? We're in an attic. Note the figure, "the unused tent/of//bare beams". The stick construction of the roof is compared to the internal structure of a tent. The narrator is looking down the center of the attic and outside sees an old-timey advertisement for "soda" which is central and pierces the perspective.

At first glance this seems like a very effective image poem. This

gives us an important part of the poem of place–it MUST include images. Why is the poem called, "The Attic Which is Desire"? To answer this question you must open another dimension of the poem. Here's my reading: what is a house compared to here? How about a person. If a person is a house, what part is the attic? The head. And the attic? The mind. What are the windows? The eyes. OK. What do we see when we look out at the world? Things that excite our desire, like an advertisement for soda. So Williams takes a place and turns it into a meditation on the way we seek fulfillment for our desires. That's adding dimensionality.

Here's a thought experiment I try all the time. Consider where you are. How many different dimensions can you use to render the place you are? Go deeper, and you are into the stratifications of the geologic definition. Think of the place 10 years ago, 100 years ago, 100,000 years ago, 100,000,000 years ago. Think of found material the place can gather–deeds, titles, maps. The narrative of how you got to the place. The history of those who came before. Consider all the discourses that can be gathered in the place–geologic, geographic, social, spiritual, etc. There is no an end to the number of dimensions and discourses that can be gathered around a place.

Before we go further, I'd like to talk a bit about the word "discourse" and how I use it. I use it in a sense influenced by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-84). Foucault uses the term "discourse" to describe a written and spoken practice that determines relations between culture and the phenomenal world; discourses create the idea of knowledge, distribute power, and direct social energy. Discourses are epistemological and social practices. To say "multi-dimensional" can also mean "multiple discourses."

Consider the techniques you've learned that can be used in a place poem–found, images, figure, and narration.

Objective Dangers, Sources

I write poems of place because place is important to me. I take long hikes and know miles and miles of trails in Missouri by heart because

I've tramped down them so often. Hiking and mountain climbing are important activities for me and both depend on an intense relation to place. About 20 years ago, I climbed Mount Rainier in Washington. It was a technical climb, that is, we used ropes and equipment to make it to the top. A couple of definitions are necessary to understand the title of the poem. When you mountain climb, you face dangers that have nothing to do with you or you decisions. Rockfalls, ice wall collapses, sudden storms are called "**Objective Dangers**." If the climber makes a mistake of judgment, that is called a "Subjective Danger." The poem I wrote of my experience climbing Mount Rainier is called "Objective Dangers":

i

George Dockery was killed
in a rockfall on Curtis Ridge
June 15, 1969.

There must have been cracks
filled with water in rocks
frozen to the summit.

A sun's summer angle
could melt the ice
and yield stone

to the downward slope.
He didn't see
crystals diffuse,

pumice dampen,
on a gully
where fate

has its own geology.

ii

Rainier,
cast from lava flows

and fire-broken granite

from the subduction
of Juan de Fuca,
stillborn in earthquakes

tonight

is a shadow
beneath a turning dome
of constellations
and unnamed light.

iii

What we control
we carry:
rope, ice axe, carabiners,
friends and crampons.

We step through blue light
of serac colonnades,
over crevasses
exposed by the season,
toward a summit warmed
by volcanic steam.

The Indian Sluiskin
told the first white men
who climbed it,
"Takhoma
will sweep you off
into space
like a withered leaf."

But roped with others,
and pinned to the mountain
by crampon points
and ice axe blade

there is no freefall

back,
back into the world,
only peace, brief,
the rest
between each step.

The sources I used to write this poem include a book which recounted all climbing deaths on Rainier, "George Dockery was killed..." A history of the region, "The Indian Sluiskin..." A geologic survey of the Cascade Mountains, "from the subduction of..." as well as images from the climb, "we step through blue light of serac colonnades" and narration, "what we control we carry..." The poem ends with a more spiritual aspect of the climb, coupling it with my desire for a more natural, spiritual life.

A word about source material. Consider what found materials would work for poems of place. Maps, local histories, newspaper accounts, letters, geological surveys, oral histories, are all appropriate sources. Remember, these places gather texts as well as histories. Think of ways to access these texts when writing your poems of place.

Tinturn Abbey, Wordsworth

I have so many place poems that are inscribed onto me. One of the most deeply inscribed is William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) poem, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above **Tintern Abbey**". A few things to note before you read. Wordsworth is revisting a vista from which he can see the ruins of a medieval abbey and the river Wye. As he views the sight he considers how nature has functioned for him through the years. Note all the dimensions in this poem which is, to my mind, one of the highlights of the literary tradition of Romanticism:

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect

The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

The poem begins with a composition of place in time. Wordsworth senses these particulars which put him in a meditative moood:

> The day is come when I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
> 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
> These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
> Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
> With some uncertain notice, as might seem
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
> Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
> The Hermit sits alone.

Wordsworth lists what he sees, what he hears, and considers the power of the moment's solitude.

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
> And passing even into my purer mind
> With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
> As have no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
> Of kindness and of love.

The narrator recalls how the sensory details he experienced never left him in the weary and hurried world. Indeed, he claims that this natural scene

has affected him in a moral way--they have made him a better person.

> Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,—
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

And even greater than the moral lift this experience provides, we enter the philosophical dimension. These moments in nature, most particularly, this place, has brought him a divine mood. His body becomes soul and the mysteries of the cosmos are revealed.

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
> In darkness and amid the many shapes
> Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
> Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
> Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
> How often has my spirit turned to thee!

His memory of this landscape is an inexhaustible fund of spiritual and moral strength.

> And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
> With many recognitions dim and faint,
> And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
> The picture of the mind revives again:
> While here I stand, not only with the sense

> Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
> That in this moment there is life and food
> For future years.

Wordsworth recognizes as well that this moment will provide a fund for inspiration in the future--that spot he stands on. He adds another time dimension, from the future he moves to his far past.

> And so I dare to hope,
> Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
> I came among these hills; when like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led: more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads, than one
> Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
> (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
> And their glad animal movements all gone by)
> To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, not any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.—

In his youth the narrator had a passionate relation to nature. It was animalistic and just engaged his appetite. Its power came from the sensual and nothing else. Compare this to the moral and philosophical dimensions his present relation entails. In the next line he looks nostalgically back but does not resent the passing of time.

> That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
> Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompense. For I have learned

> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still sad music of humanity,
> Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Though he has lost his youthful exuberance he has gained a deep philosophical insight, a sublime sense of the spirit that moves actively through all living things and includes the mortality that is the cost of being alive.

> Therefore am I still
> A lover of the meadows and the woods
> And mountains; and of all that we behold
> From this green earth; of all the mighty world
> Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
> And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
> In nature and the language of the sense

Here we have a summation for the multidimensional way that nature functions for the narrator.

> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.

As the poem begins its closing movement, we discover the audience for this ode--there is someone with the narrator. We assume it is Wordsworth's sister Dorothy.

> Nor perchance,

> If I were not thus taught, should I the more
> Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
> For thou art with me here upon the banks
> Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
> My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights
> Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
> May I behold in thee what I was once,
> My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her;

(I think of this line often as I hike--yet another voice in my mind says, "yes until nature hands you your death warrant.)

> 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy: for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.

Again, to the natural world of blessings Wordsworth opposes the human social world which is dreary and deadening. Then follows the peroration in which the narrator looks into his and his sister's future and prophesizes how the imagination will be a repository continually filled by his relation to the natural world.

> Therefore let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
> And let the misty mountain-winds be free
> To blow against thee: and, in after years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured

> Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
> Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
> Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
> If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
> If I should be where I no more can hear
> Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
> Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
> That on the banks of this delightful stream
> We stood together; and that I, so long
> A worshipper of Nature, hither came
> Unwearied in that service: rather say
> With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
> Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
> That after many wanderings, many years
> Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
> And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
> More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

These aspects of Wordsworth's poem point to dimensionality that a poem of place can accommodate. We have philosophy, personal narrative, imagery, ethics and sublime language.

Charles Olson, Polis

I am fortunate to have studied with two poets whose poems of place have helped shape the content of this chapter, John Matthias and Michael Anania. Matthias's poems have explored the British countryside, ley lines, trading trails in America, the Compestela pilgrimage path, 1950s Ohio. And though his poetic output is more expansive than one kind of poem, his place poems are powerful exemplars of this kind of work. The same is true of Michael Anania, particularly his work *Riversongs* which, through the use of multiple discourses, explores the Missouri River valley. Both Matthias and Anania can be seen as poets (at least in these kinds of poems) related to the branch of American poetry related to Charles Olson.

The American poet **Charles Olson** (1910-1970) wrote a long, influential work called *The Maximus Poems*. The poem takes Gloucester, MA for its site of invention. The material that comprises the poem includes myths, maps, personal correspondences, shopping lists, journals. The poem contains meditations on place, history, America, and being itself. The main character in the poem is Maximus, the letter writer. Letter 27 captures the themes, open form lineation, and speaks directly to our concerns for this poem. The poem starts with an invocation of the specific site:

> I come back to the geography of it,
> the land falling off to the left
> where my father shot his scabby golf
> and the rest of us played baseball
> into the summer darkness until no flies
> could be seen and we came home
> to our various piazzas where the women
> buzzed
>
> To the left the land fell to the city,
> to the right, it fell to the sea

Just like Wordsworth, Olson demonstrates how memory is a place that holds place.

> I was so young my first memory
> is of a tent spread to feed lobsters
> to Rexall conventioneers, and my father,
> a man for kicks, came out of the tent roaring
> with a bread-knife in his teeth to take care of
> the druggist they'd told him had made a pass at
> my mother, she laughing, so sure, as round
> as her face, Hines pink and apple,
> under one of those frame hats women then

Olson goes on to comment on the nature of this memory as its rendered in language.

This, is no bare incoming
of novel abstract form, this

is no welter or the forms
of those events, this,

Greeks, is the stopping
of the battle

It is the imposing
of all those antecedent predecessions, the precessions

of me, the generation of those facts
which are my words, it is coming

from all that I no longer am, yet am,
the slow westward motion of

more than I am

The self is a sum of these moments in spacetime, composed in the neural network.

There is no strict personal order

for my inheritance.

No Greek will be able

to discriminate my body.

Without an ancient ethnic mythos to define self, the American is continually in the act of definition. Self is a place as well, the spot you stand *in*.

An American

is a complex of occasions,

themselves a geometry

of spatial nature.

I have this sense,

that I am one

with my skin

Plus this—plus this:

that forever the geography

which leans in

on me I compell

backwards I compell Gloucester

to yield, to

change

Polis

is this

So the city--the collection of selves in place--is the very nature of our social being, and is changed by our presence. For Olson, we cannot be separated from place. It is our personal and political identity.

This reminds me of Aristotle's notion of psychology. For Aristotle, psychology is not the study of the mind, but a study of how the mind interacts with other minds. Psychology is the study of the self in polis, which is, after all, the ultimate place of the self.

How To Do It

1. Remember, start with a place. It should not be imaginary, but real, a place you have experienced.

2. Your goal is to use as many dimensions as possible.

3. Use narration.

4. Use imagery.

5. When possible, use source material.

6. Think also of geology and geography (and many others) as discourses to use in your poetry.

7. Compose your poem using different dimensions as the textural and textual elements.

8. As in the practice of the image poem, once you learn how to write poems of place, you will never suffer from writer's block. Choose a place and write.

9. As always, sensory detail will create a picture for your audience.

10. As in all poems, think of wider contexts, complex forms, to hold your disparate material together.

Examples for Your Assignments

Here's a very simple place poem that was first used by the poet John Matthias. It's called a Homing Poem. In a homing poem, you take a trip via 3-6 images in one section and return home in the second section by listing those images in reverse order.

Homing Poem

i.
wooden shank A-frame
a roof eaten by fire
Nursing home and two lanes
nicotine

ii.
nicotine
Nursing home and two lanes
a roof eaten by fire
wooden shank A-frame

Mid-week Assignment
Write a poem of place of 12 lines using at least two discourses, techniques or time layers. For example:

Discourses: geographic and personal narrative or descriptive and meteorlogical;

Techniques: image and narration or image and found;

Time layers: present time and 600 B.C.E. or present and 20 years from now.

Weekly Assignment
Write a poem of place of at least 24 lines; you are strongly encouraged to use multiple discourses.

Qualities of a good poem:

a. Renders place;

b. Uses multiple discourses;

c. Has an apparent telos;

d. Fresh language;

e. Draws for the reader that spot you stand on.

10. Collage

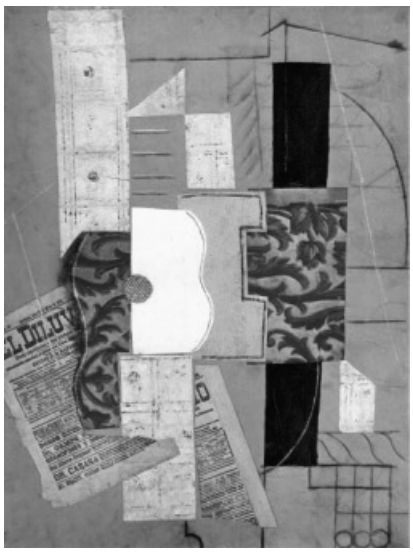
Collage. Cubism

One of the foundational techniques of literary Modernism is the use of **collage**. Collage is an artistic practice where an artifact is constructed by assembling material from multiple sources into a unified work. In a collage, each element is recognized as being from the original source as well as being part of the new composition. The practice of Cubism in visual art provided Modernist writers with a helpful analogue; **Cubists** composed their paintings by arranging multiple planes. As Clement Greenberg writes in his essay, "Collage," Cubists were crucially concerned in:

> and through their Cubism, with obtaining sculptural results by strictly nonsculptural means; that is, with finding for every aspect of their three dimensional vision an explicitly two-dimensional equivalent, regardless of how much verisimilitude might suffer in the process.

As part of the evolution of this concern, Greenberg argues, Cubist painters turned to collages in order to increase the dimensionality of a two dimensional form. In a collage, "the actual surface becomes both ground and background" (Greenberg). Typically, the material used to make the collage retain enough of their original form (a newspaper clipping for example) to serve these two functions at once, ground and background. They retain enough of their original context to be recognized as material while, at the same time, being given an entirely new context by the artist.

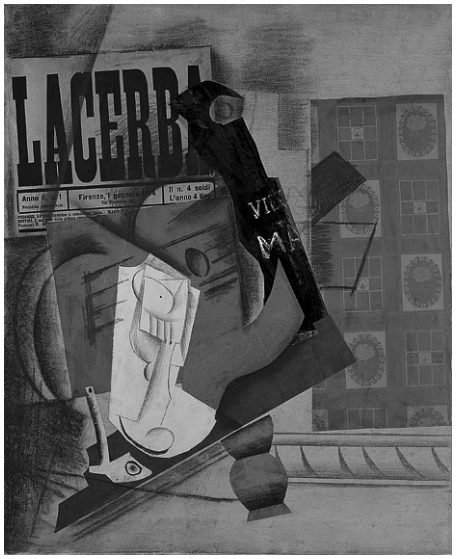
. Here is an example by Picasso:



:

Here are here newspaper clippings, a program, wallpaper, guitar pieces and other cut-outs arranged on lines drawn on the blue background. The signs are arranged to be esthetically pleasing as well as sculptural .

Here is another Cubist Collage, “Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Vieux Marc” by Picasso:



Again, in this Picasso collage, we can see suggestions of the original images but the new assemblage emphasizes balance, edge, and the harmonious arrangement of planes.

Montage

The collage technique can also be related to a film technique. In film editing, a **montage** is a technique where a series of different shots are juxtaposed to signify activities accompanying a singular theme. Lev Kuleshov used montage to illustrate the Kuleshov Effect. In montage the separate film shots are discontinuous, but the viewer views them as unity of theme. In other words, the various scenes are aspects of one grand scene. The viewer is able to discern the relation among the discontinuous elements or makes one up if there's nothing to discern. *South Park* aficionados will recognize this technique through "The Montage Song":

> The day is approaching to gve your best
> that's when you need to put yourself to the test
> and show us the passage of time
> we're gonna need a montage (montage)
> a sports training montage (montage)

The training montage *South Park* satirizes here was made famous in *Rocky* when Rocky Balboa trains for his fight with Apollo Creed--we watch a variety of training acts spliced together to show Rocky's intensity and progress.

The montage elements modernists brought to their composition were textual, dialogic, imagistic. The texts came from a range of sources– advertisements, Broadway musicals, opera, Ovidian myths, the documents of John Adams, high culture, low culture and everything in between. For our purposes, we are using the collage poem as a way to practice all the skills we have acquired in our poetry writing.

Student Examples

When you wrote the found poem, you were restricted to using only nonliterary sources as fodder for your poems. For the literary collage, you are not restricted; indeed, in your practice and finished poems, you ought to explore using literary sources as long as you do not use, generally speaking, more than three lines consecutively from any one text. As Picasso included fresh lines of paint in his collages, feel free to add your own words for they are just as valid as anything found. Two very successful student poems that were responses to the collage assignment were constructed from some Emily Dickinson poems.

The first is a poem by Terri Craig that uses her own words in "Death into Life," coupled with the work of Emily Dickinson:

I heard a fly buzz when I died
I could not see to see
Death came when least in mind
yet set my spirit free

good-bye to the life I used to live
and the world I used to know
and kiss the hills for me, just once
now I am ready to go

Patient till paradise
rewards the liberty to die
when spoken by a distant bird
inebriate of air am I

Hope is a thing with feathers
that perches in the soul
flesh no more, matter wondrous precious
fits to make me whole

I may say death gave no warning
but I felt a funeral in my brain
"My imagination" to myself I thought
to convince me not to strain

but death came like a thief in the night
in that moment I was not ready
but now the true makes me take flight

looking in my grave once piteously before
Death came along, opening a door

for I heard a fly buzz when I died
for God's mercy I pleaded and cried
like relief and release on a mighty afternoon
God revealed I shall be saved on that day of doom

Here is a student poem by Whitney Hazlett that also uses Emily Dickinson. Like Teri Craig, Whitney fits lines from many different Dickinson poems into hers and preserves the Dicksonian rhyme scheme:

I'll tell you how the sun rose;
A fashionless delight.
The day came slow, till five o'clock,
Like breaths of topaz, packed a night.

The purple could not keep the east,
Till when they reached the otherside.
Put gently up the evening bars,
He glanced with rapid eyes.

And she pours soft refrains,
He did not know I saw;
He hurts a little, though,
She looks at him in desperate awe.

There's a certain slant of light,
That kept so many warm.
It struck me every day,
Between the heaves of storm.

When everything that ticked has stopped,
When floods have slit the hills.
I wonder if they bore it long,
Or would they go on aching still.

The heart asks pleasure first,
But I shall never tell!
For each ecstatic instant,
I simulate the breath so well.

The little toil of love, I thought,
His laughter like the breeze,
So you could see what moved them so,
Among the pensive trees.

Two worlds, like audiences,
In crayon or in wool.
Let's take our hands and squeeze real tight,
And deem ourself a fool.

These poems are fine examles of the care with which collages are assembled. I recall when I read poems like these the archaic term for a carpenter who has achieved a significant level of skill. Such a craftsman was called "a joiner" because of the skill with which he joined material in making a building. Craig and Hartnell are clearly joiners.

Students have constructed collage poems from song lyrics, comics, essays, textbooks, manuals...many different sources. They also add their own lines in the composition.

Here is a collage by Stephanie Berry which she composed from material for this class and her classmates' work:

There is a place,
Opposite of time
That antigreets the past;
Virtually now
"I'll try and visit every day during the week"
Though I must go, endure not yet.
Or do I just suffer?
So why is this a mission of mine?
Heighten the energy;
Don't forget
Though I do remember
Assembling
This seamless composition
Before we proceed,

There is no judgment;
There is no ego;
It will be interesting.
You should do this in one sitting
That is what you are called to do,
So why is this a mission of mine?

Remember, as always, you must have a **telos** in mind as you construct your collage. There should be a reason why you use the source material you use and there ought to be a reason why you put the material together the way you do. The collage poem teaches you a technique that is indispensable as you work on longer poems and sequences.

How To Do It

1. Have a telos for the sources you choose and how you arrange them.

2. Do not use any more than three consecutive lines from any one source.

3. Use enough different sources so that the material takes on a *new* meaning when placed into your composition.

4. Do not be afraid to add your own language to the poem. Consider the Picasso collages–the material is set into a relief that Picasso has constructed with background colors and sketching.

5. Remember, this is all about composition: how you arrange the material, how you aseemble it. A collage is an assemblage.

6. Keep in mind all the elements of good poetry writing you've learned thus far: economy of language, freshness of diction, effective lineation.

Mid-week Assignment

You should do this in one sitting. Gather material from this class--textbook, introduction, how tos, your work, your classmate's work, and assemble a 20 line collage from the material. The easiest way to do this is to open up a word processing program then move through the course materials copying and pasting into the word processing program. When

you have a whole lot of material, begin shaping it into a poem. It will be interesting to see how you will do on this--as you and your classmates all have access to the same material.

Weekly Assignment
Assemble a collage of 30 lines based on any material you want to use (even literary sources). You can also write new lines to connect disparate sources. Remember, not more than three lines consecutively from any one source.

The qualities of a good poem:

a. The sources are chosen deliberately;

b. There is a telos;

c. There are not more than three lines consecutively from any one source;

d. There is a seamless quality to the quality of the stitching together of the elements;

e. The poem demonstrates the qualities of all good poems.

II. Sonnets & Meter

Now we are ready to go old school on poetry.

Old School, Materiality, Consonants, Vowels

In your work on poetry so far, we have talked again and again about effective language and how to employ it. When I comment on student poetry, I pay very close attention to the **materiality** of language. What is a word's materiality? It is its physical substance–as a rush of air over or through the throat, tongue and teeth. A word's materiality is its sound-stuff.

What's the difference in materiality between "crash" and "lullaby"? Certainly their sounds are different; "crash" is harsher and "lullaby" more mellifluous. Consider further, the psychological materiality of these words. "Crash" evokes a feeling of violence whereas "lullaby" evokes a gentle stillness.

Consonants and **vowels** define a word's materiality. Simply put, a consonant requires a closing of the mouth or teeth at some moment during its speaking. Make a "p" sound. Note how your lips close and then expel the air. Make a "t" sound. Note the position of the tongue behind your closed teeth. Make a "k" sound. Note the closing at the back of the throat (consonants from the back of throat generally have a harsher sound). Vowels require no opening or closing of any part of the mouth. That's why the doctor with a tongue depresses wants you to make a vowel sound, "Open up and say ahhhh...." Also note the difference between a long and short vowel sound. For long vowels like the "a" in "ate," the tongue nears the roof of the mouth while in a short vowel sound, the tongue stays in the middle of the mouth, "apple."

Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance, Syllables

There are terms for the poetic use of consonants and vowels:

alliteration–repetition of initial consonant sounds: “dig that dingy dog.”
consonance–repetition of consonants in close proximity: “ask the extra ax if it is sharp enough.”
assonance–repetition of vowel sounds in close proximity: “ though the rowers rowed the boat didn’t go.”

Now when we put consonants and vowels together in a word, we compose the word’s materiality. The basic building block of a word’s sound is the **syllable**. The syllable is a sound cluster that includes one spoken vowel (silent vowels don’t count). Take the word “vowel”. How many vowels are pronounced? Two, the “o” and the “e”. Therefore, there are two syllables, “vow” and “el”.

Accentual-Syllabic, Stress

Let’s look further at the word “vowel.” English is an **accentual-syllabic** language meaning that one syllable in a word gets a primary **stress** or **accent** (emphasis). Which syllable of “vowel” gets emphasis when we speak it? Is it VOWel or vowEL. I hope you can hear that the first one is correct. What I do to test the proper accent is to exaggerate the syllabic pronunciation to discover which syllable gets the stress. Let’s take the word “exaggerate”. How many syllables? There are four spoken vowels, so there must be four syllables: ex-ag-ger-ate. Now which syllable gets the primary emphasis? Try all four:

EXaggerate
exAGgerate
exagGERate
exaggerATE.

Do you hear that the second option is the correct one? exAGgerate.

Just think how hard it is to learn Chinese. Chinese has five different tones: 1. high and level; 2. rising; 3. falling; 4. starting high then falling with a sharp upward ending; 5. flat with no emphasis. Imagine writing a poem where you had to be matching tones all the time! Languages like classical Greek and Latin are not accentual-syllabic;

instead of stresses, meter is a pattern of syllabic duration.

Rhyme, Prosody, Anglo-Saxon Meter

Words that **rhyme** share an identity of sounds after an initial difference: "carried/married, find/kind."

Because English is an accentual-syllabic verse, **formal verse** or **metrical verse** is based on a pattern of stresses. You will learn about these patterns in a bit, but first we've got to first discuss the idea of metrical verse. Up unto the late 19th century, with a few notable exceptions, all poetry was metrical. If it did not have a metrical pattern, it was not considered a poem. The poet was a master of **prosody**, that is she had control over the various metrical patterns available and was able to skillfully manipulate those patterns to achieve her poetic telos. This was the case for a few reasons.

First, regular patterns of meter are easier to remember. When English poetry was developing, the majority of people were illiterate. To be memorable meant to be easily memorized. Up until a few decades ago, high school students had to memorize the first lines of the foundational English poem, "The Canterbury Tales."

Second, many poems were written to accompany music so would naturally fall into a musical pattern, like this poem by Thomas Campion (1567-1631):

> When to her lute Corrina sings,
> Her voice revives the leaden stringe,
> And doth in highest notes appear,
> As any challeng'd eccho clear ;
> But when she doth of mourning speake,
> Ev'n with her sighes the strings do breake.
>
> And as her lute doth live or die,
> Led by her passion, so must I,
> For when of pleasure she doth sing,
> My thoughts enioy a sudden spring,
> But if she doth of sorrow speake,
> Ev'n from my heart the strings doe breake.

Third, in English's Germanic roots, the oral poetry and sagas like *Beowulf* were constructed in a strict metrical pattern: two hard alliterative accents, a caesura, then two more: "the dog digs .. no bone is borne."

The most common meter after the invasion of the Normans in 1066, is adapted from the Italian Renaissance writers Petrarch and Dante and first popularized in English by Chaucer (1342-1400) in his poetry, plays, and particularly, the *Canterbury Tales*–ten syllables per line with every other syllable being accented. Here are the famous first lines in the Middle English (note that the "e"s at the end of a line are pronounced) that were often memorized by disgruntled high school students:

> Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote
> And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
> Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
> Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
> Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
> The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
> Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
> And smale foweles maken melodye,
> That slepen al the nyght with open eye-
> (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages);
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
> And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes
> To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
> And specially from every shires ende
> Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende

Controversy, Vers Libre, Rhythm

In the 20th century there was a break from the strict meters of formal verse. Influenced by the French Symbolist poets at the end of the 19th century and their 20th century descendants, poets in English began writing in *verse libre* or "free verse." Not all poets agreed with such a break. Robert Frost famously said that writing verse without meter was

like playing tennis without a net. T.S. Eliot argued that all verse was formal, even if not written according to meter. He said that there is no such thing as *vers libre* only "good verse, bad verse, and chaos." Can you detect a logical fallacy in Eliot's statement?

I try not to editorialize on such issues in this book, but here are my two cents. All good poetry has **rhythm**. Here I'll define rhythm as using the materiality of language to establish a linguistic and cognitive melody (as regards the cognitive part, remember our discussion of **propositional lyricism** in the section on narrative and argumentative derangement?). There is no need for restrictions on verse. Eliot's right in the sense that the poem is either effective at achieving its telos or it is not. The goal is not to be bound by poetic ideology.

I've experimented the last decade with putting songs into poems. Here's an example from a poem based on Martin Heidegger's philosophical work *Sein und Zeit*. It's meant to accompany the tune of "Freré Jacques":

aletheia
aletheia
mitda-sein
mitda-sein
augenblich & mister dicht
augenblich & mister dicht
dang zeit dong
dang zeit dong

I like to hum this on the way to philosophical assignations.

Beware the Gatekeeper Poet, Variable foot

Actually this discussion reinforces one of my cardinal principles as a poet, critic, and teacher: If someone tells you, "This is the only kind of poetry that counts as poetry." They are full of *rhymes with hit*. As I've mentioned earlier, poetry is a huge tent that welcomes any kind of practice. That does not mean that you have to like them all or write them all. But be wary of anyone who wants to make the tent smaller or puts a

guard at the tent flap.

Before we move onto to the technical terms for writing metrical verse, I want to discuss our friend William Carlos Williams's idea of "the variable foot." It is a much discussed term whose definition has not been quite settled. Williams explained the variable foot as a meter that could capture the American idiom by being flexible within regularity. My understanding of it is as follows. Just as jazz musicians take a standard melodic line and play variations of that line, varying the length, pitch, order, while still referring to the foundation, so does the poet with the variable foot. It is a flexible rhythmic unit that refers to a melodic line. The variable foot is variation within a larger pattern. Listen to Thelonius Monk "Straight, No Chaser," or John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," to hear what I'm saying.

Foot, Iamb, Trochee, Spondee, Anapest, Dactyl

Later, we'll look at the use of syntax in rhythm, but you need to learn enough of meter to write sonnets because that is our immediate goal. Recall that all words are made up of syllables and in multisyllabic words one syllable receives a primary emphasis or stress. Recall also that meter is the regular distribution of stresses. The basic metrical unit is called the **foot**. A foot is either two or three syllables long. Here are the primary feet used in poetry:

●**Trochee–**an accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable. TAtum; such as in words like *detail*, *power*, *early, angel.*

●**Iamb**–an unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. tumTA; such as in words like *about*, *because*, *invite, decide*.

●**Anapest**–two unaccented syllables followed by an accented syllable. tumtumTA; such as in words like *understand, comprehend, anapest*.

●**Dactyl**–an accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables. TAtumtum; such as in words like *Ecuador, loveliest, strawberry*.

●**Spondee**–two accented syllables in a row. TATA such as in words like *heartache, football, breakdown*.

These are the basic feet you'll need to hear in order to recognize

and write metrical verse. Before we go on to learn how to put those feet together, it's interesting to note where the vocabulary for the meter comes from. The ancient Greeks were meter devotees. Different poetic topics required different meters. In addition, regions were known for specific meters. Many words from prosody have their origin in the classical Greek.

Monometer, etc, Iambic Pentameter

Now we'll learn the names of the lengths of lines in metrical verse.

- **Monometer**–a line of verse with only one foot per line.
- **Dimeter**–a line of verse with two feet per line.
- **Trimeter**–a line of verse with three feet per line.
- **Tetrameter**–a line of verse with four feet per line.
- **Pentameter**–a line of verse with five feet per line.
- **Hexameter**–a line of verse with six feet per line.
- **Heptameter**–a line of verse with seven feet per line.

Note that the number of syllables will differ per line depending on the dominant foot. For example, dactylic hexameter will have 18 syllables per line, where iambic hexameter will have twelve syllables per line.

For our purposes, the most important line to recognize and internalize is **iambic pentameter** because that is the prevailing line of most English metrical poetry and the sonnet. Except for trochaic meter, most other forms of verse are difficult to write because of the nature of English. A poet like Edward Lear (1812-1888) used off-meter for comic effect. He uses anapests at the end of each eight syllable line:

1.
There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!--
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!"

10.
There was an Old Man in a tree,
Who was horribly bored by a Bee;
When they said, "Does it buzz?"
He replied, "Yes, it does!
"It's a regular brute of a Bee!"

Rhyme Scheme, Rhetorical Pattern

In writing sonnets it is important to follow a metrical pattern, a **rhyme scheme**, and a **rhetorical pattern**. The metrical pattern is iambic pentameter. Here's how we determine rhyme scheme: take the last word of the first line and label it *A*. Every word that rhymes with it gets *A*. If the last word of the next line does not rhyme with *A* it gets the label *B*. All other end words that rhyme with it get the label *B*. Imagine there is a poem with the last words of each line as follows:

cat
meat
fat
greet
fink
think
dink
pole
mole

The rhyme scheme will be:

A B A B C C C D D.

cat *A*
meat *B*
fat *A*
greet *B*
fink *C*
think *C*
dink *C*
pole *D*

mole *D*

The sonnet is a poetic form which has its roots in Italian versification of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The word "sonnet" comes form the Italian "sonnetti" meaning "little song." The sonnet has 14 lines with loosely defined rhyme schemes. Two of the prevailing rhyme schemes for the sonnet are: the Shakespearean and the Petrarchan. The Shakespearean is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG as in the poem:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
> In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west;
> Which by and by black night doth take away,
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
> In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
> That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
> As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
> Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
> This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
> To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

The last words are:

behold *A*
hang *B*
cold *A*
sang *B*

day *C*
west *D*
away *C*
rest *D*

fire *E*
lie *F*
expire *E*

by *F*

strong *G*
long *G*

Petrarchan, Shakespeare, The Turn

The **Petrarchan** sonnet has a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CDECDE. The first set of eight lines are called the **octave** and the set of six is called the **sestet**, although the rhyme scheme for the octave is fairly standard, there are variations of schemes for the sestet as evidenced by the following poem by the Elizabethan poet Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586):

> Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot
> Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed;
> But known worth did in mine of time proceed,
> Till by degrees it had full conquest got:
>
> I saw and liked, I liked but loved not;
> I lov'd, but straight did not what Love decreed.
> At length to love's decrees I, forc'd, agreed,
> Yet with repining at so partial lot.
>
> Now even that footstep of lost liberty
> Is gone, and now like slave-born Muscovite
> I call it praise to suffer tyranny;
>
> And now employ the remnant of my wit
> To make myself believe that all is well,
> While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

shot *A*
bleed *B*
proceed *B*
got *A*

not *A*

decreed	*B*
agreed	*B*
lot	*A*
liberty	*C*
Muscovite	*D*
tyranny	*C*
wit	*D*
well	*E*
hell	*E*

As evidenced above, sonnets contain 14 lines and have a rhyme and rhetorical scheme. In other words, the sonnet is a type of argument and the parts of the argument are the groupings of the rhymes. Let's first look at the Shakespeare sonnet. It is one of my favorites (perhaps for subjective reasons).

The narrator is talking to his lover and asks her to see him as various things–metaphors all. Each part of the argument is triggered by a direction to see the narrator as some other thing (a walking talking metaphor):

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> In me thou see'st
> In me thou see'st
> This thou perceiv'st

There is a metaphor in the first stanza that deserves special discussion. The narrator is asking his lover to see him as the season of fall. The branches of trees which are empty of leaves are transformed into "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang." A choir loft is wooden like tree branches, and like a ruined church, for there are no longer members to sing songs, as there are no longer birds in the late fall tree.

So in the first section, the narrator is saying to see him as fall. In the second section to see him as the ending of a day. In the third section see him as the end of a fire. No we get to the final couplet and we experience the **sonnet's turn**. In the turn of a sonnet, the problem that has

been posed earlier in the argument is reversed or twisted in a surprising way. In this sonnet we go from "boo hoo pity me I'm old" to "love me hard because I'm not going to be around forever!", "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,/To love that well which thou must leave ere long."

Similar to the Shakespearean, the Petrarchan poses a problem in the octave and then offers a solution or transforms the problem in the sestet. In the octave the narrator of Sidney's sonnet is offering a narrative on how he fell in love with his beloved. Do you recognize the extended metaphor (conceit) where he compares her conquest of his heart to an army beseiging a town? He answers the octave with the hopeless sestet– now that he is conquered, all he can do is write sonnets to describe his pain.

Scansion

In order to master metrical poetry, it is essential that you learn how to **scan** verse. Scanning verse means to find its prevailing meter through the use of diacritical marks. Whereas some meters are very easily detectable, others are not. Scanning is an inexact science, but you should err when scanning on the side of words as they are spoken.

When I scan, the first thing I do is find the stresses and mark them, then divide the feet with a slash mark. Let's take the first four lines of Shakespeare's sonnet and scan them:

That ´time/ of ´year/ thou ´mayst/ in ´me/ be´hold

When ´yel/low ´leaves, /or ´none,/ or ´few,/ do ´hang

Upón/ those ´boughs/ which ´shake/ a´gainst/ the ´cold,

´Bare /´ruined ´choirs,/ where ´late/ the ´sweet/ ´birds ´sang.

A couple of things should be immediately apparent. Although this is predominately iambic pentameter, there are a couple of spondees and a missing syllable, called a **catalexis**, in the fourth line. These differences

point to a very important point about metrical verse and scansion–if poems were strictly metrical, they would be monotonous and like nursery rhyme. Substituting for the prevailing metrical foot offers variation in tempo, rhythm, and can provide emphasis like the spondee that ends the fourth line.

Natural Speech

Now you know how meter is made, how sonnets are constructed in rhyme scheme and rhetoric, and you also know how to scan verse. There's one more thing to mention before you move on to writing sonnets. The examples that I've used are two of my favorite poets, Shakespeare and Sidney. The language may sound very formal to you, but it approximates speech from the Elizabethan Age. When you write your sonnet, you should try to capture natural speech in meter. Your language should be the way we speak today, not how the Elixabethans spoke. This also means that you should avoid inversions, like Yoda-speak, "write a sonnet you must," or archaic language like "hath" and "lo." Also keep in mind that the best rhymes are those that do not draw attention to themselves. The first time I read "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning I didn't notice, explicitly, his use of rhymes. That is exactly how rhymes should function–they should enhance, not dominate verse.

Here is a sonnet written in the 1950s by the poet John Berryman (1914-1972) that fits a contemporary diction into an old form:

> Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
> Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
> Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
> "What a big book for such a little head!"
> Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
> And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
> Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
> I never again shall tell you what I think.
> I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
> You will not catch me reading any more:
> I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
> And some day when you knock and push the door,

> Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
> I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

Except for the "shalls" Berryman uses colloquialisms like "and all of that" and "you may whistle for me." The poem achieves a melding of the formal and spoken, which should be a hallmark of your sonnet. Here's a sonnet from a contemporary American poet Henri Cole which uses vocabulary and images from contemporary America:

> My father lived in a dirty dish mausoleum,
> watching a portable black-and-white television,
> reading the Encyclopedia Britannica,
> which he preferred to Modern Fiction.
> One by one, his schnauzers died of liver disease,
> except the one that guarded his corpse
> found holding a tumbler of Bushmills.
> "Dead is dead," he would say, an anti-preacher.
> I took a plaid shirt from the bedroom closet
> and some motor oil—my inheritance.
> Once, I saw him weep in a courtroom—
> neglected, needing nursing—this man who never showed
> me much affection but gave me a knack
> for solitude, which has been mostly useful.

Cole achieves a blue-collar feel in this formal poem. Do you also see how Cole's rhymes, though clear, do not call attention to themselves?

I'll end the unit with a sonnet by a student poet, Sidney Neeb:

> Selfishness is thinking of your worries
> Blind to the woes of those suffering near
> It's flying into a fit of fury
> When, inadvertently, friends knock over beer.
> Selflessness means forgetting your troubles
> And accepting those of other fellows
> Running to the kitchen on the double
> Grabbing paper towels for the carpet.
> Artistry is expressing these two things
> Bringing to light the truth of human being,

Ideas, like Eberbach's culturing.
The mind's magnet grasp to self, fracturing
Transcending the ego, transcending fear,
Not yelling at friends when they spill the beer.

How To Do It

1. Practice makes perfect. The more sonnets you write, these easier they'll get.

2. Avoid rhymes that are too easy. For example, never rhyme "life" with "strife" no matter how many MCs do it!

3. Remember:
- 14 lines
- iambic pentameter
- Petrarchan or Shakespearean rhyme scheme
- a rhetorical arrangement

4. 10 syllables per line with every other syllable accented.

5. Try to make the speech as natural as possible.

6. Read Shakespeare's and Sidney's sonnet sequences as a way to internalize the sonnet form.

7. Certainly, be able to count syllables and find the stresses in any word or spoken sentence.

8. Pay attention to language's materiality when writing. The easiest way to do this? Read your poem out loud. I generally read and re-read my poetry out loud as I write it. By the time I finish working on the poem, I often have it memorized from reading it out loud so many times.

9. Flip things around rhetorically, transform the idea in the last couplet or

sestet.

10. Don't be afraid to sweat! This is laborious writing, but it is an important part of the tradition of English poetry. Every poet ought to be able to write a competent sonnet!

Mid-week assignment

This is the easy part. You are to write a nonsense sonnet. Your sonnet doesn't have to make any sense at all, just as long as it fits the form of a sonnet. Iambic pentameter in every line, a sonnet's rhyme scheme. I'll show you how it's done and keep time to give you an idea of how long it takes.

Example

2:35pm--*Choose a rhyme scheme. Petrarchan abba abba cde cde*

pat
bob
rob
sat

bat
sob
cob
rat

start filling in:

> and one and two and three and four hi pat
> a bag a stiff the pen black mark hi bob
> acclaim alive in comes on walls hi rob
> all those good crazy pals you need pete sat

2:40pm 10 lines left

> to dinner came his friends three be for bat

from all some are your dad the swede me sob
this sonnet is not driving me hi cob
ask him about his can his fan his rat

2:44pm 6 lines left

heck
last
end

her pride is not as bad as her to heck
the wedding party did there sex at last
I'm better friend I have not got the end

2:49pm 3 lines left

Beck
fast
spend

a bit of candy pains my teeth like Beck
a person fits a slot like meat too fast
one penny dollar coin I ate to spend

2:52pm Finished

It took 17 minutes to finish the sonnet. Let's put it all together.

and one and two and three and four hi pat
a bag a stiff the pen black mark hi bob
acclaim alive in comes on walls hi rob
all those good crazy pals you need pete sat
to dinner came his friends three be for bat
from all some are your dad the swede me sob
this sonnet is not driving me hi cob
ask him about his can his fan his rat
her pride is not as bad as her to heck
the wedding party did there sex at last

I'm better friend I have not got the end
a bit of candy pains my teeth like Beck
a person fits a slot like meat too fast
one penny dollar coin I eat to spend

Weekly Assignment

Write two sonnets that make sense. It takes a bit of effort, but you need to be able to produce formal verse.

Qualities of a good poem:

a. It fits the sonnet structure;

b. The rhymes are not too obvious;

c. There is a rhetorical structure;

d. There is a turn at the end;

e. The speech is natural and contemporary.

12. Political Poetry

One of my favorite scenes from the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* occurs after Beowulf returns home after defeating the monster Grendel and his mother, the old sea hag (played by Angelina Jolie in the movie version!). Beowulf's king, Hygelac, asks him about the trip and after narrating the battles Beowulf digresses and offers this analysis. I'll paraphrase:

> Well, you see Hygelac, Hrothgar has promised to marry his daughter Ingeld to the Swedes to make peace; she's going to be a peace weaver. But remember 25 years ago when the Danes kicked the Swedes' butts, slayed them and took their armor? At the wedding, there will be warriors from both clans and when they've drunk enough beer, one old Swedish warrior will egg on a young man. "You see that Dane over there all happy and dancing? You see the armor he is wearing? That's your dad's armor. That Dane took the armor off of your dad's bloodstained body after he killed him. Are you going to stand for that? Are you going to take that?" That is what the old Swede would say. The young warrior, now all pumped and beered up will attack the old Dane and the rest of the warriors will join in and the wedding party will be awash with blood and Ingeld will go home with the Danes after the most violent wedding reception.

What I enjoy about this is that it fits into a hero epic but it really is a piece of geo-political analysis. It shows Beowulf to be as astute at international relations as he is at beating Grendel with Grendel's own arm.

Ideology

Indeed, *Beowulf* is a poem derived from the oral history of the Danes and the Geats. It is a political account as much as it is a literary account. In this way, undeniably, *Beowulf* is a political poem.

In this section you are going to be writing political poems. In order to do so, the first thing you must learn about and understand is a

concept called **ideology**.

For the poet/s of *Beowulf* it would be natural to put political ideas about other tribes in the poem because that is how the culture saw its day-to-day existence. Its values were reflected in the poem. This is true in all cases. Everything you write is political, whether it is a love poem or an image poem of a bee. Why? Because we perceive through the lens of ideology.

Ideology is difficult to define. Here's my definition, and it takes a while. First off, the assume all aspects of culture (except for one category) can be traced back to some material need. Nutrition, clothing, shelter (needs of the individual body), reproduction, social interaction (needs of the species) are those basic material needs.

Now over time, systems accrue, institutions evolve, in order to take care of those basic material needs. The accrual of systems and values, the evolution of institutions into their present state, assemble ideology.

Let's take Valentine's Day, for example. Obviously, the material need is reproduction but ideology tells us that it's really about love (what is that?), romanticism, lovey-dovey, smoochy-smoochy interactions replete with flowers and candy. Let's look at shelter. What is the ideology of shelter in America? It is the value of home ownership where you get a job, work hard, buy a house. What does it take to buy a house? Take out an enormous loan that will last for 30 years in some cases. Then think about what happens to that loan. It gets bundled with other loans, sold as a security. Insurance companies insure the efficacy of those loans, then others take bets on whether that loan will mature or not. In our economy, that loan, let's say for $100,00 might generate $10,000,000 worth of value in derivatives and market bets. Sound familiar? That kind of economic ideology led to the economic collapse of 2008. It all started with our need for shelter.

Ideology isn't right or wrong; it just is. Of course, people often believe that their ideology is the *correct* or *true* one. Think about wars. Often wars are fought over ideologies (WWII being an example). Ideas organize people and machines to kill each other and each side claims truth.

This does not mean that all ideologies are as equally valid. Ideologies can be subject to testing. Let's say your ideology holds that Mike Barrett doesn't exist, or never did. Well, that's just plain wrong!

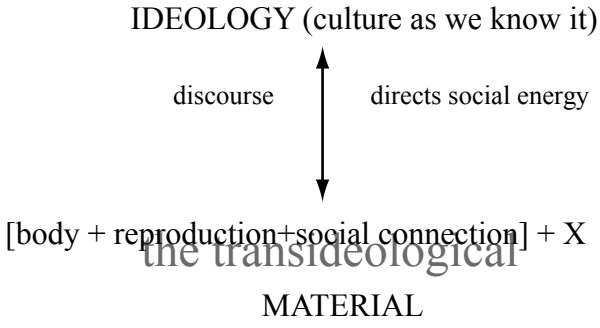
Materialism, X

Earlier I said that there is one category that is not about material needs. I call it "X" and X accounts for spirituality and religion. Humans seem to be meaning seeking and reluctant to accept the idea that everything has only a material cause. We reach for something beyond ourselves and material reality. That reach is for something that transcends the material and is the basis for religion and spirituality. Though adherents will die for the truth that they affirm, the foundation of faith cannot be proven; that's why it's called religious *faith*. Religions and spiritual beliefs provide totalizing ideologies that often explain the material. Consider how some Biblical literalists will argue, against evidence, that the universe is 6000 years old, which is no different than the eternal universe postulated by the Hindus. Try telling either that their view is not a valid claim and you will understand how much passion the ideology of "X" creates. So we develop ideology to account for X. Perhaps there will be a time that the ultimate nature of X will be revealed.

I teach about ideology in my composition classes and always struggle to define it for students. I had some friends over for dinner once and sought their help in definition. One friend said ideology is, "what THE MAN tells you to do." Of course, the question then to ask is, "who is the man?" Often it is answered that THE MAN is the composed of capitalists who have a deep economic interest through their ownership of the means of production. I then asked another friend. He answered, "Ideology is the force that supports the status quo." This makes sense as well; ideology keeps things the way they are because things the way they are have been to a point successful because *they are*.

Neither definition is fully satisfying because there is judgment in

both. I settled on a definition that goes something like this. You take all the energy each person has to achieve the basic material needs necessary for the species to continue. Add all that energy together from a population and call it "social energy." Simply put, ideology directs social energy. Want shelter? In America the energy is directed to home ownership. Have a deep spiritual need? That energy is directed to a number of religious practices.



Here's a simple graphic that describes ideology as I define it. Note that material reality is "transideological." We may interpret air in different ways, but it is what it is in spite of our interpretations.

Polis, Psychology

There are two reasons why I think it is important to discuss ideology before you learn how to write the political poem. First off, POETRY AS A RESULT OF IDEOLOGY IS ALREADY POLITICAL! Think of where we get the word "political" from, the Greek word "**polis**" which means "city." We are social creatures and need others to survive. Politics is a way to describe how we have decided to be together. As we discussed in the chapter on place, the father of psychology, Aristotle, believed that psychology was not about an individual's way to come to know him or herself in a healthy way, but was a way to be healthy with others.

Second, once we understand ideology as such, we are free. Never free from ideology, but free to choose which ideology we want to live under, which set of values will rule our life, which culture we will build through poetry.

The American poet Thomas McGrath (1916-1990), in an essay, made a distinction about political poetry that serves our purposes. Now McGrath knew firsthand about the consequences of politics. First off he served in the Army in World War II. He was a committed lefty and persecuted in the McCarthy Era because he did not name names when he was called before the Congressional Committee on un-American Activities. He lost his academic job and was blacklisted from appearing in literary magazines.

Tactical, Strategic

McGrath determined that there are two kinds of political poetry: the *tactical* and *strategic*. Tactical political poetry is poetry that's meant to suade people to adopt a specific position on a specific issue. Strategic political poetry is not addressed to a specific topic, but is meant to change the consciousness of the reader. In our terms, strategic political poetry is meant to change ideology.

An interesting example from the 17th century is the poet John Milton (1608-1674). Milton was a supporter of the Puritan cause in the English Civil War. When the Parliament was victorious, they reformed the state church and tried to force the reforms on all dissenters. While Milton supported the reform, he believed that no earthly power could mandate what a person's conscience dictates, so he wrote a poem, "On the Enforcers of Conscience," which ends, "When they shall read this clearly in your charge:/New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large." In other words, he's arguing that the reformers have become as bad as those they reformed. That is a tactical poem. It is about specific legislation on a theological issue that concerns Milton.

Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, is a strategic poem. *Paradise Lost* tells the story of the revolt in heaven that leads to

the damnation of Satan in hell, and then Satan's subsequent attempt to get revenge on God by ensuring the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It certainly engages some of the political and theological issues he writes about in "The Enforcers of Conscience," but his scope is so vast, the narrative so compelling, and the writing so sublime that the reader can be changed by the experience of reading the poem. Not necessarily changed to adopt Milton's view of providence (ask William Blake about that) but changed to a new vision of the human relation to the divine. To be sure, the issues that Satan has with God, Adam and Eve, can be interpreted politically as reflecting the historical events of the 17th century, but the poem does not stop there. Stopping at the end of one issue is tactical. Not stopping, moving forward to entail much more is strategic.

Ethos, Pathos, Logos

During the Victorian Era of literature, social issues were foregrounded in poetry, like the poem "The Cry of the Children" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861). "The Cry of the Children" is a screed against the practice of child labor. Aristotle tells us that we can persuade an audience through three means: **ethos**, **pathos**, or **logos**. Pathos is persuasion by manipulating emotions. Ethos is persuading by setting yourself up as a moral exemplar. Logos is persuasion using reason. Note how Barrett-Browning uses pathos to highlight the horrors of child labor:

> Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
> Ere the sorrow comes with years?
> They are leaning their young heads against their mothers---
> And that cannot stop their tears.
> The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
> The young birds are chirping in the nest;
> The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
> The young flowers are blowing toward the west---
> But the young, young children, O my brothers,
> They are weeping bitterly!---

> They are weeping in the playtime of the others
> In the country of the free.

Browning juxtaposes the seemingly idyllic lives of offspring in the natural world to the weeping children who must work.

> Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
> Why their tears are falling so?---
> The old man may weep for his tomorrow
> Which is lost in Long Ago---
> The old tree is leafless in the forest---
> The old year is ending in the frost---
> The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest---
> The old hope is hardest to be lost:
> But the young, young children, O my brothers,
> Do you ask them why they stand
> Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
> In our happy Fatherland?

In this stanza the juxtaposition is the old, who experience sorrow as a consequence of their long time on earth, and the children who have not had a chance to live before being overxome with sorrow.

> They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
> And their looks are sad to see,
> For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses
> Down the cheeks of infancy---
> "Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary;"
> "Our young feet," they say, "are very weak!
> Few paces have we taken, yet are weary
> Our grave-rest is very far to seek.
> Ask the old why they weep, and not the children,
> For the outside earth is cold,---
> And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
> And the graves are for the old.

We see the children here with their "pale sunken faces"--they are ready for the grave.

> "True," say the young children, "it may happen
> That we die before our time.
> Little Alice died last year---the grave is shapen
> Like a snowball, in the rime.
> We looked into the pit prepared to take her---
> Was no room for any work in the close clay:
> From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her
> Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'
> If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
> With your ear down, little Alice never cries!---
> Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
> For the smile has time for growing in her eyes---
> And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
> The shroud, by the kirk-chime!
> It is good when it happens," say the children,
> "That we die before our time."

The last part of the stanza is the kicker--the children believe it is a good thing to die. The idea that the children should be grateful for death gives you an indication of the horror of their lives. Barrett-Browning is effective in using pathos–after a portrait of these children suffering, longing for death, and later in the poem, even questioning a God who would have them live in such oppression–who would deny that child labor is wrong?

You should recognize this as a tactical poem. Barrett-Browning is calling attention to a specific issue. She also wrote strategic political poetry. Her poet/novel *Aurora Leigh* is one. The poem engages a number of social issues of her time, including reform and the "woman issue" while at the same time engaging theology and esthetics. The role of the poet, strategic and tactical, is addressed by Barrett-Browning when Aurora Leigh discusses the dual tasks of the poet--to see things close up and at a distance:

> But poets should
> exert a double vision; should have eyes
> To see near things as comprehensively
> As if afar they took their point of sight,
> And distant things as intimately deep

As if they touched them
(Book 5 183-88)

For Aurora Leigh, this means to represent the fullness of the present:

Nay, if there's room for poets in this world
A little overgrown (I think there is)
Their sole work is to represent the age,
Their age, not Charlemagne's--this live, throbbing age,
That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires
(200-4)

While other Victorian poets were recalling the Britain of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, Barrett-Browning attempted to challenge her age and its injustices in her poetry.

Whitman, Democracy

In considering the poems to use for this chapter, it was very easy to find literary examples of dissent, but quality literature in support of an issue is harder to come by. Certainly it would be easy to find jingoistic ra-ra-ra homeland poetry, (like "America, F--- Yeah" from *Team America*) but remember, our first goal is to write good poetry. There is a 19th century poet who wrote what I consider strategic poetry that celebrates the best part of America. That poet is Walt Whitman (1819-1892). When we get to the last chapter of the book, we'll talk more about his collection *Leaves of Grass*. It was a lifelong project that ushered in modern American poetry. It is a sprawling pean to the natural man in an industrial democracy. Here is Whitman singing the praises of democracy:

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear'd, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair'd in the adamant of Time.

Whitman opens a space in poetry to accommodate the boldness, diversity, and grand energy that is America. Note Whitman's use of long lines and though there are iambs, it is definitely not formal verse. This highlights another aspect of the political poem. Recall that all art has form and content. Content is what it means. Form is how it means. You certainly can endow form with political efficacy, as Whitman does. Whitman's form says, "I am a new man in a new country and age. Your puny and quaint lines of iambic pentameter will not hold the bold new verse of America! This is the new verse form of the new heroic, democratic age!"

Subversive Form

In the first chapter, we looked at Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* as an example of deranged poetry. There is a way to read the poems as politically subversive as well. Gertrude Stein was a lesbian in an era where sexual mores were much more conservative than our present day (mostly). You could read *Tender Buttons* as text that is linguistically subversive because it is sexually subversive. If you want to be political, remember, that how you write can be as political as what you write.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was an African-American poet who was part of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement. Consider this passage from his poem "Let America be America Again" in relation to the Whitman poem:

> Let it be the dream it used to be.
> Let it be the pioneer on the plain
> Seeking a home where he himself is free.
>
> (America never was America to me.)
>
> Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
> Let it be that great strong land of love
> Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
> That any man be crushed by one above.
>
> (It never was America to me.)

For Hughes, "America" is a promise unfulfilled. For African-Americans America was never an ideal place of liberty.

> O, let my land be a land where Liberty
> Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
> But opportunity is real, and life is free,
> Equality is in the air we breathe.
>
> (There's never been equality for me,
> Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")
>
> Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
> And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

Hughes then widens his scope so that he is not just speaking to the African-American experience, he speaks to all Americans who have been oppressed.

> I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
> I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
> I am the red man driven from the land,
> I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--
> And finding only the same old stupid plan
> Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.
>
> I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
> Tangled in that ancient endless chain
> Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
> Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
> Of work the men! Of take the pay!
> Of owning everything for one's own greed!
>
> I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
> I am the worker sold to the machine.
> I am the Negro, servant to you all.
> I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--
> Hungry yet today despite the dream.
> Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!
> I am the man who never got ahead,
> The poorest worker bartered through the years.

> Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
> In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
> Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
> That even yet its mighty daring sings
> In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
> That's made America the land it has become.
> O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
> In search of what I meant to be my home--
> For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
> And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
> And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
> To build a "homeland of the free."
>
> The free?

It is the oppressed, Hughes notes, who built America and they will be the ones to realize the "forever about to be" that is America's promise of liberty.

> O, let America be America again--
> The land that never has been yet--
> And yet must be--the land where every man is free.
> The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--
> Who made America,
> Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
> Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
> Must bring back our mighty dream again.

There is a conscious echo of Whitman in this poem, as if Hughes continues the project of modern American poetry that Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman began.

War Poems

One consequence of ideology is war. The horrors of World War I were captured by poets, among them Siegfried Sassoon, David Jones, and Wilfred Owen (1893-1918). Before the war, Owen was a rather conventional poet, but after four months on the frontlines in France, during the worst part of the war, he was hospitalized for combat stress and began

to write powerful poems. Eventually, he was recalled to France and was killed seven days before the end of the war. In his most famous poem, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" (translated from the Latin as "sweet and lovely it is") he uses narration and imagery to powerfully evoke the riot of sensory and emotional trauma of a mustard gas attack:

> Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
> Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
> Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
> And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
> Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
> But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
> Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
> Of gas shells dropping softly behind.
>
> GAS! Gas! Quick, boys!-- An ecstasy of fumbling,
> Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
> But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
> And floundering like a man in fire or lime.--
> Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light
> As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
>
> In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
> He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
>
> If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
> Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
> And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
> His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
> If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
> Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
> Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
> Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,--
> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
> Pro patria mori.

In this poem, Owen uses all the techniques we have learned: word sound, imagery, narration, figuration (can you find the twelve figures in the

poem?). The ending underscores ironically what the narration has already shown–it is NOT sweet to die for your country. In fact it is a lie, "vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues." This is more than tactical; it can apply ot the horrors of any war.

The war poem by Randall Jarrell (1914-1965), "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" is imagistic and figurative. On B-17 bombers in World War II there sat a revolving womb-like metal ball where a short airman would be in somewhat of a fetal position to man two 50 caliber guns. It was a dangerous place. Note the way Jarrell uses birth and abortive imagery to narrate a mission:

> From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
> And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
> Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
> I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
> When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

Often, a political poem exposes the psychology of power structures, those who benefit from power and those who are oppressed by power. In this poem by Adrienne Rich (1929-), "Rape," Rich exposes how rape affects all women and, the poem argues, benefits males by keeping females fearful of male power:

> There is a cop who is both prowler and father:
> he comes from your block, grew up with your brothers,
> had certain ideals.
> You hardly know him in his boots and silver badge,
> on horseback, one hand touching his gun.
>
> You hardly know him but you have to get to know him:
> he has access to machinery that could kill you.
> He and his stallion clop like warlords among the trash,
> his ideals stand in the air, a frozen cloud
> from between his unsmiling lips.

The rapist Rich states is prowelr, brother, cop, and father--the product of patriarchal identity.

> And so, when the time comes, you have to turn to him,
> the maniac's sperm still greasing your thighs,
> your mind whirling like crazy. You have to confess
> to him, you are guilty of the crime
> of having been forced.
>
> And you see his blue eyes, the blue eyes of all the family
> whom you used to know, grow narrow and glisten,
> his hand types out the details
> and he wants them all
> but the hysteria in your voice pleases him best.

The cop-prowler-father-brother, the signifier of patriarchy is the one the rape victim must "confess" to.

> You hardly know him but now he thinks he knows you:
> he has taken down your worst moment
> on a machine and filed it in a file.
> He knows, or thinks he knows, how much you imagined;
> he knows, or thinks he knows, what you secretly wanted.
>
> He has access to machinery that could get you put away;
> and if, in the sickening light of the precinct,
> and if, in the sickening light of the precinct,
> your details sound like a portrait of your confessor,
> will you swallow, will you deny them, will you lie your way home?

This poem is a difficult poem to accept as a male, yet if you consider it carefully, Rich has a powerful point. The specter of rape has a chilling effect on all females. It is the ultimate expression of male power over females. Also note, this poem was written in the late sixties. Things certainly have changed since then. One important development, I believe it's standard procedure now to have, if available, a female officer interview the victim so that the details will not sound like "a portrait of your confessor." So the machinery has changed since the poem was written, though not completely overturned because rape remains a serious problem.

The following lyrics are from Gil Scott Heron's (1949-2011) spoken word performance of "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Heron uses quotations from advertisements to juxtapose revolution with

shallow commercialism:

> You will not be able to stay home, brother.
> You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out.
> You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip,
> Skip out for beer during commercials,
> Because the revolution will not be televised.
>
> The revolution will not be televised.
> The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox
> In 4 parts without commercial interruptions.
> The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon
> blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John
> Mitchell, General Abrams and Spiro Agnew to eat
> hog maws confiscated from a Harlem sanctuary.
> The revolution will not be televised.
>
> The revolution will not be brought to you by the
> Schaefer Award Theatre and will not star Natalie
> Woods and Steve McQueen or Bullwinkle and Julia.
> The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal.
> The revolution will not get rid of the nubs.
> The revolution will not make you look five pounds
> thinner, because the revolution will not be televised, Brother.
>
> There will be no pictures of you and Willie May
> pushing that shopping cart down the block on the dead run,
> or trying to slide that color television into a stolen ambulance.
> NBC will not be able predict the winner at 8:32
> or report from 29 districts.
> The revolution will not be televised.
>
> There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down
> brothers in the instant replay.
> There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down
> brothers in the instant replay.
> There will be no pictures of Whitney Young being
> run out of Harlem on a rail with a brand new process.
> There will be no slow motion or still life of Roy
> Wilkens strolling through Watts in a Red, Black and
> Green liberation jumpsuit that he had been saving
> For just the proper occasion.

> Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, and Hooterville
> Junction will no longer be so damned relevant, and
> women will not care if Dick finally gets down with
> Jane on Search for Tomorrow because Black people
> will be in the street looking for a brighter day.
> The revolution will not be televised.
>
> There will be no highlights on the eleven o'clock
> news and no pictures of hairy armed women
> liberationists and Jackie Onassis blowing her nose.
> The theme song will not be written by Jim Webb,
> Francis Scott Key, nor sung by Glen Campbell, Tom
> Jones, Johnny Cash, Englebert Humperdink, or the Rare Earth.
> The revolution will not be televised.
>
> The revolution will not be right back after a message
> bout a white tornado, white lightning, or white people.
> You will not have to worry about a dove in your
> bedroom, a tiger in your tank, or the giant in your toilet bowl.
> The revolution will not go better with Coke.
> The revolution will not fight the germs that may cause bad breath.
> The revolution will put you in the driver's seat.
>
> The revolution will not be televised, will not be televised,
> will not be televised, will not be televised.
> The revolution will be no rerun brothers;
> The revolution will be live.

Gunpowder

In Julianna Spahr's poem, "The Connection of Everything with Lungs," also juxtaposes the facile images from media with the material damage done by bombs and fighting in the Middle East in the wake of the terrorist's attacks on 9/11. In this passage, Spahr uses personal narrative with diverse media images which all conspire to direct our social energy:

> While we turned sleeping uneasily a warehouse of food aid was
> destroyed, stocks on upbeat sales soared, Australia threatened first

> strikes, there was heavy gunfire in the city of Man, the Belarus ambassador to Japan went missing, a cruise ship caught fire, on yet another cruise ship many got sick, and the pope made a statement against xenophobia.
>
> While we turned sleeping uneasily perhaps J Lo gave Ben a prenuptial demand for sex four times a week.

The allusion to the specific war is certainly tactical but the mixture of personal, historical and social provide a new way to look at the way we understand reality as it happens in a media-mediated world.

It is important, and I think all the samples show, is that you cannot just rant and rave in a poem and expect it to be an effective political poem. When I was an undergraduate, my poetry professor, John Matthias, used a very interesting analogy to describe the efficacy of political poetry. "Take gun powder," he said, "and put it in a long line around the room and light it. What happens? It fizzles around. Now take that gunpowder and pack it tightly in a paper container. Put a wick in and light it. Now there will be an explosion." Matthias's point was that it is not just political energy that makes an effective poem, it is the form that contains energy that makes an effective political poem. Stay away from clichéd political issues. Stay away from yelling like a pundit on cable news station.

Economecca

The last poem I'll cite is one that I wrote soon after 9/11. In graduate school, I had written a long sequence called "Babylons," which took place in the Middle East and the midwest of America. It was set in Iraq and Chicago. I finished the poem in 1993. I believed that America's relation to Islam was perhaps one of the most important issues that would confront us in a post-Soviet Union world. The poem ended with a scene of urban destruction and the line, "Two choices: stay in that ruined place and build/or read the desire to stay as a sign: time to leave." The ending reflected a profound unease with late capitalist America.

I was scheduled to attend a conference in New York City at the end

of September, 2001. I had arranged to deliver a poem at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and wanted to make it pertinent. I wanted to write a strategic political poem that also attempted to do some healing and put Islam and America together in a peaceful way. I thought of the poem as an answer to the dilemma posed at the end of "Babylons." Before the poem, here's what happened to me on the way to the plane. I'm a bearded burly man and while waiting in line I was rehearsing the poem, having memorized it. So underneath my breath I was going over the poem. There was a senior citizens group going to an opera tour of New York City. I chatted up one of its members who told me, "Well, I'm glad you spoke to me because I was about to report you to the authorities as a threat!" I delivered the poem 9/30/2001. It is called, "A Pilgrim's Tale.":

Late afternoon, the American sun
pulled gravity down on me, so I lay

on a bank of the river Commerce
and fell asleep. I began to dream.

In Empire City I saw a temple. The dome
rested on the Five Pillars of Islam

and revealed the Six Unifying
Principles of Design. I moved among

those pillars and gazed at that dome
as a field of folk surrounded me. They called:

emphasize prayer daily five times emphasize
Ramadan Ramadan Ramadan balance

give alms repeat give alms repeat give alms
until repetition becomes rhythm.

Journey to Economecca pilgrim,
if you can, Economomecca.

There is no variety. There is no
variety but God who is various.

The pillars then caught fire spreading
across tongues in the field of folk:

one mouthed *security;* one sounded reveille;
one quoted Boccaccio; ladies in black

mourned Neanderthal Man and
a chorus sang Dark Age boasts while

the technocrats chanted *Mastigophora*
Mastigophora Mastigophora.

The dome shrieked and cracked.
Before collapsing it became

an enormous bird which beat
its wings and rose then

exploded into a sky of rain falling
to quench flames burning on tongues

in the field of folk. When the rain quit
the folk had become prairie grass. I heard

the wind move through them saying *shalom*
shalom salaam salaam salaam shalom shiloh

shylock sublime sha-lime. The field
was now empty of human construction.

I opened my mouth and out dropped
permanent lies: The Plague of 1348,

Last Things, The Will, Fire of 1666,
Napoleon and Mrs. O'Leary's Cow,

Local and Transnational Control,
The Cunning in my Body (enough

to kill ten bad men), Faults, Failings,
and the fall falling cold of early winter.

> The lies dropped until there was no more
> history in me but the mind's last version.
>
> When that too was cast out, I awoke.
> I stood and started walking to Empire City.
>
> It was now time for me to set out
> on my journey eastward.

"A Pilgrim's Tale" chooses one of the options I had set for myself eight years earlier.

How To Do It

1. Understand the difference between tactical and strategic political poetry.

2. Use all the resources of poetry we have learned including found material, imagery, narrative.

3. Stay away from political topics that are included in "current events." It is almost impossible to add anything new or substantial.

4. It's all ideology, but that's ok. Choose the ideology you want to live out.

5. Remember you are as much a product of polis as your psychology is.

6. Use ethos, pathos, and logos but logos is the most trustworthy.

7. Your content can political, but so can your form.

8. Use your passion and energy effectively in complex form. Pack your gunpowder tightly.

9. A narrative or image will often suffice.

10. As always, be thoughtful.

Mid-week assignment

Write a 12 line political poem that uses nothing but images—no judgment, no mediation, no critique, no pathos—nothing but images. As we learned, those images could pack a punch. Just think about the images of a battlefield, or a sick ward in a poor country (although those two topics are too obvious). Consider, for this exercise, a way to deliver political contact with nothing but external details.

Weekly Assignment

Write a 24 line political poem. Read the examples in the chapter carefully; I always prefer strategic poems, but the choice is up to you.

Qualities of a good poem:

a. It has a political telos;

b. It is not an emotional diatribe;

c. It is effective in moving the reader through technique;

d. The language is compelling;

e. It doesn't completely alienate those who may disagree--remember, it is easy to preach to the converted.

13. Poetry Sequences

You have learned to write a variety of poems so far. As I've mentioned, there should be no such thing as writer's block–writing poetry is a matter of practice, filling a form. You have learned all matter of forms. Now you will take the next step, learning how to shape and execute a series of poems. We turn now to the serial poem or poetry sequence.

The Muse, Serial Poems

First, in order to learn how to write a sequence of poems, we ought to consider the nature of poetry and the poet's relation to it. Some have a figure of the poet as the prophet who receives "transmissions" from the divine. I once heard a poet claim that the nature of poetry was to speak truth. Sounds like self-glorification to me. What poets really have is a unique relation to work. Poets write poems. They do not wait until the breeze of the universal spirit blows over them; they write. Let's call the muse "work." Composing sequences is a very effective way for poets to stay busy. I conceive it as creating projects–I rarely work on one poem. For the most part, I work on a series of poems. Writing a poetic sequence, or the serial poem, is giving yourself a project.

This is does not mean that the poet should give up their vatic (prophetic) function. When I read the psalms, or the poetry of William Blake, John Milton, Jack Spicer, I am reading poetry by poets who believed they *were* receiving transmissions from the divine. My main point is that the Muse always rewards the poet who is already working at her desk.

How do you begin? Think about the form and content of a piece of art. You can base your sequence on the former, latter, or both. For example, say that you really enjoyed writing sonnets. So give yourself a project–*I'm going to write 15 sonnets*. Or you can concentrate on the

content–*I'm going to write 15 poems about growing up in Chicago.* Of course, you can do both–*I'm going to write 15 sonnets about growing up in Chicago*. As with everything else, though, there ought to be a rationale, a *telos* for how you relate the form to the content.

Some Examples

We'll look closely at some of the traditional sequences English poetry, but first let me list a few ideas for sequences taken from my bookshelf:

Lyn Hejinian–*My Life* a series of oblique, prosaic, autobiographical sketches;
Ron Silliman–*Tjanting* deranged poetry that builds according to the Fibonacci series of numbers;
Jena Osman–*The Character* a series of poems based on the periodical table of elements;
Ray Ronci–*The Skeleton of the Crow* a series of poetic koans;
Ronald Johnson–*radi os* poems etched out of *Paradise Lost ;*
Horace–*Odes* a classical Latin form by the Roman Master;
Ezra Pound–*The Cantos;*
Charles Olson–*The Maximus Poems*;
Susan Howe–*Pierce-Arrow* a sequence using manuscripts from C.S. Peirce, the American philosopher;
Jack Spicer–*Letters to Lorca* a series of letters to, and loose translations of, the dead Spanish poet

...and that's just at a quick glance. The sequence (along with the long poem we'll study later) is a mainstay of modern and contemporary American poetry.

Here are a few sequences I've written:

Response poems to the *Tao Te Ching*;
A poetic translation" of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*;
21 tanka (a Japanese form of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables per tanka);
A series based on *King Lear*;
Once I had a bunch of cards I made up for a performance, so I wrote a poem on each card;

> A narrative where the character goes from A-Z in the course of 14 poems;
> Twice I went on a vacation and wrote a poem a day during the trip–to California and to China;
> Currently I am writing poem in the white spaces of Carl Jung's *Liber Novus*; I have finished volume one–it will take another volume to complete it.

Sidney's Astrophil & Stella

So those are sequences that have been found at hand. Let's look at some traditional examples. We encountered Sir Philip Sidney in the unit on sonnets. As you may recall, he was a 16th century poet and a courtier. A courtier was a person who was attached to Queen Elizabeth's court, often in search of an assignment or favor. One way courtiers gained favor was to demonstrate their rhetorical skill. That rhetorical skill was on display in speech and poetry which would circulate the court. Sidney's sonnet sequence was called *Astrophil and Stella* in which a young courtier, Astrophil, attempts to woo and gain the married Stella, who is intent on keeping Astrophil at a distance. There are 108 sonnets and 11 songs in the cycle. The best that Astrophil can do is get a chaste kiss ("stop you my mouth with still, still kissing me") and a promise from Stella that he has her heart (though he can't tell anyone and will never get her in bed!).

The subtext of the poem is a Platonic struggle: Astrophil's reason fights with his sense and appetite. Reason tells him that his love will always be unrequited. Yet his sense and appetite still want to capture Stella's celestrial body. Stephen Greenblatt, in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* makes the claim that the first poem in the sequence ushers in a new idea in the western intellectual tradition–self-expression as poetic telos.

> Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show
> That she (dear She) might take some pleasure of my pain:
> Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
> Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain;

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain:
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn'd brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite--
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

The second poem below demonstrates the Platonic dialogue that goes on within Astrophil in which reason argues against loving Stella until reason gets a look at her and falls in love as well.

I rather wish'd thee climb the Muses' hill,
Or reach the fruit of Nature's choicest tree,
Or seek heav'n's course, or heav'n's inside to see:
Why shouldst thou toil our thorny soil to till?
Leave sense, and those which sense's objects be:
Deal thou with powers of thoughts, leave love to will.
But thou wouldst needs fight both with love and sense,
With sword of wit, giving wounds of dispraise,
Till downright blows did foil thy cunning fence:
For soon as they strake thee with Stella's rays,
Reason thou kneel'dst, and offeredst straight to prove
By reason good, good reason her to love.

The third is my favorite and contains the postmodern literary trick of self-referentiality--the poetic fiction comes to recongnize itself as poetic fiction.

Stella oft sees the very face of woe
Painted in my beclouded stormy face:
But cannot skill to pity my disgrace,
Not though thereof the cause herself she know:
Yet hearing late a fable, which did show
Of lovers never known, a grievous case,
Pity thereof gat in her breast such place
That, from that sea deriv'd, tears' spring did flow.

Alas, if fancy drawn by imag'd things,
Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
Than servant's wrack, where new doubts honour brings;
Then think, my dear, that you in me do read
Of lovers' ruin some sad tragedy:
I am not I, pity the tale of me.

Shakespeare's Love Triangle

Shakespeare's 154 sonnet sequence has a narrative not as easily paraphrased as Sidney's. Shakespeare's sequence starts with a series of poems that attempt to convince a beautiful young man that he ought to procreate because if he doesn't, his beauty will die with him. This is followed by a series a of poems which argue that though temporal beauty will fade and die, the beauty in poetry will last, "as long as men can breathe and eyes can see./So long lives this and this gives life to thee." It is a bold pronouncement for a poet but here we are four hundred years later reading the poem! Then the dark lady of the sonnets shows up. She is younger than the narrator and a sexual predator. Indeed, there is an indication in one of the later sonnets that the dark lady and the beautiful young man of the earlier part of the sequence, "both being away from me," have hooked up.

The first sonnet here is from the first theme. The narrator is trying to convince a handsome and narcissisitic young man that he ought to reproduce.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.

Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

This sonnet demonstrates the narrator's new idea: the genetic reproduction of beauty pales in comparison to the way that beauty is preserved in the poem:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

When the dark lady of the sonnets appears narrator is careful to avoid sonnetized-clichés and embrace the reality of his lady love.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Dreamsongs

You have encountered John Berryman earlier in the sonnet section. His magnum opus is the 385 poem sequence called *The Dreamsongs*. There are 18 lines in each Dreamsong with a variety of end and internal rhymes. The meter is a kind of fractured sprung rhythm, where stresses accrue, attack, and release. There are three main characters (and numerous supporting roles) in the poem. There is a narrator, who seems to be Berryman, Henry, a character who often takes Berryman's traits, and Mr. Bones, a vaudeville character in blackface who provides comic relief. The poem is dialogic, that is numerous voices bounce through the stanzas. There are bits of news, biography, and literary commentary. Berryman once said that he wanted to put Henry through extreme circumstances, like a character in a Russian novel, and include humor and jokes to break the tension that builds. It is an awesome work of literary and psychological insight and chronicles madness that was always on the margins of Berryman's life. He committed suicide by jumping off a bridge into the Mississippi River in 1974.

The first Dreamsong reproduced here introduces us to the meter, Henry, and his problems (the sycamore tree scene is taken from an incident in Berryman's life). The convoluted argument and tortured syntax are on display, as well as dynamic verbal energy.

#1

Huffy Henry hid the day,
unappeasable Henry sulked.
I see his point,—a trying to put things over.
It was the thought that they thought
they could do it made Henry wicked & away.
But he should have come out and talked.

All the world like a woolen lover
once did seem on Henry's side.
Then came a departure.
Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.
I don't see how Henry, pried

open for all the world to see, survived.

What he has now to say is a long
wonder the world can bear & be.
Once in a sycamore I was glad
all at the top, and I sang.
Hard on the land wears the strong sea
and empty grows every bed.

I like to recite part of Dreamsong #14 to my sons and students when they complain about how "boring" certain work can be. The humor and wide range of literary allusion can be read in this memorable poem.

#14
Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.
After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,
we ourselves flash and yearn,
and moreover my mother told me as a boy
(repeatingly) "Ever to confess you're bored
means you have no

Inner Resources." I conclude now I have no
inner resources, because I am heavy bored.
Peoples bore me,
literature bores me, especially great literature,
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes
as bad as Achilles,

who loves people and valiant art, which bores me.
And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag
and somehow a dog
has taken itself & its tail considerably away
into the mountains or sea or sky, leaving
behind: me, wag.

Dreamsong #104 is an example of a kind of sonnet that shows up in Sidney and Shakespeare as well--the personal audit. The narrator conducts an accounting of his life and shares the report with the readers.

#104

Welcome, grinned Henry, welcome, fifty-one!
I never cared for fifty, when nothing got done.
The hospitals were fun
in certain ways, and an honour or so,
but on the whole fifty was a mess as though
heavy clubs from below

and from—God save the bloody mark—above
were loosed upon his skull & soles. O love,
what was you loafing of
that fifty put you off, out & away,
leaving the pounding, horrid sleep by day,
nights naught but fits. I pray

the opening decade contravene its promise
to be as bad as all the others. Is
there something Henry miss
in the jungle of the gods whom Henry's prayer to?
Empty temples—a decade of dark-blue
sins, son, worse than you

Poor Robinson

A poet from the same period as Berryman is Weldon Kees (1914-1955). Kees was a painter, fiction writer, film maker and poet. His dry, sardonic poetry did not gather much attention in his lifetime. He wrote a series of poems published in the *New Yorker* with a character (like Henry). Kees' character is Robinson, a kind of "man who wasn't there" for post-WW II America. ("Last night I saw upon the stair/A little man who wasn't there/ He wasn't there again today/Oh, how I wish he'd go away..." from the poem by Hugh Mearns). The first poem here highlights Robinson's existential loneliness.

Robinson

The dog stops barking after Robinson has gone.
His act is over. The world is a gray world,

Not without violence, and he kicks under the grand piano,
The nightmare chase well under way.

The mirror from Mexico, stuck to the wall,
Reflects nothing at all. The glass is black.
Robinson alone provides the image Robinsonian.

Which is all of the room--walls, curtains,
Shelves, bed, the tinted photograph of Robinson's first wife,
Rugs, vases panatelas in a humidor.
They would fill the room if Robinson came in.

The pages in the books are blank,
The books that Robinson has read. That is his favorite chair,
Or where the chair would be if Robinson were here.

All day the phone rings. It could be Robinson
Calling. It never rings when he is here.

Outside, white buildings yellow in the sun.
Outside, the birds circle continuously
Where trees are actual and take no holiday.

Kees draws his objective correlative to highlight emptiness, absence--a photograph of his first wife, the mirror that doesn't reflect, the blank pages--these are the absences that present Robinson.

This poem shows the room when Robinson is at home.

Robinson At Home

Curtains drawn back, the door ajar.
All winter long, it seemed, a darkening
Began. But now the moonlight and the odors of the street
Conspire and combine toward one community.

These are the rooms of Robinson.
Bleached, wan, and colorless this light, as though
All the blurred daybreaks of the spring
Found an asylum here, perhaps for Robinson alone,

Who sleeps. Were there more music sifted through the floors

> And moonlight of a different kind,
> He might awake to hear the news at ten,
> Which will be shocking, moderately.
>
> This sleep is from exhaustion, but his old desire
> to die like this had known a lessening.
> Now there is only this coldness that he has to wear,
> But not in sleep.—Observant scholar, traveller,
>
> Or uncouth bearded figure squatting in a cave,
> A keen-eyed sniper on the barricades,
> A heretic in catacombs, a famed roué,
> A beggar on the streets, the confidant of Popes—
>
> All these are Robinson in sleep, who mumbles as he turns,
> "There is something in this madhouse that I symbolize—
> This city—nightmare—black—"
> He wakes in sweat
> To the terrible moonlight and what might be
> Silence. It drones like wires far beyond the roofs,
> And the long curtains blow into the room.

The curtains dramatically begin and end the scene. The whitewashed, wan mood Kees draws is juxtaposed to the rich life that Robinson experiences in his dream life.

Poetry and Suicide

Kees' disappearance in 1955 is a literary mystery. His car was found parked on the Golden Gate Bridge with the keys still in it. Kees suffered from depression but had discussed moving to Mexico. Most believe he committed suicide, like Berryman, by jumping off the bridge.

I began this section by talking about how the poet ought to see herself as a worker rather than a fragile receptacle for the Truth. The fate of Weldon Kees and John Berryman speaks to this issue, as does the fate of Sylvia Plath, Hart Crane, Paul Celan, Anne Sexton and other writers and artists who died at their own hand. There may be a connection between depression and creativity, but it's important to note

that depression is a serious condition that requires treatment. Clinical depression is a disease and not a requirement to write poetry. You do NOT have to be dark to be deep. In order to be a poet, all you have to do is to write poetry.

How To Do It

1. Conceive of your sequence or serial poem as a way to give yourself an assignment, a project.

2. Create a sequence using form.

3. Create a sequence using content.

4. Make sure your telos matches form and content.

5. Create a sequence using characters, like Astrophil, the Dark Lady, Stella, Henry, Mr. Bones and Robinson.

6. Your sequence is an important way to keep writing poetry; which is the ONLY requirement for being a poet.

Mid-week assignment & Weekly Assignment

The specific kind of sequence you will be writing for this unit is akin to the Robinson poems and the Dreamsongs. You will do this project in two sections. For the Mid-week assignment, you will write two of the poems. For the weekly assignment, you will write 5-6 poems. Here are the specific directions:

1. Name a character and use that character in the poems. It is better if the character is not exactly you.

2. One poem should include dialogue, perhaps the conversation could be with you.

3. One poem should be an image poem.

4. One poem should include a mild conflict.

5. One poem should include the word “assignation.”

6. One poem is anything you want it to be as long as it has your character.

Qualities of a good poem:

a. Each poem is complete within itself;

b. The poems relate to the other poems in the sequence;

c. The character is well-drawn and complex;

d. There is an arc to the poems;

e. They have compelling language.

14. Collaboration

As I go through these topics I say to myself at the beginning of each chapter, "This is my favorite!" Well, this is my favorite chapter. I always collaborated in my own poetic career and in teaching poetry. In this chapter, I am going to discuss collaboration on the macro level (how poetic movements depend on collaboration) and on the micro (some specific examples of collaboration). In both cases, I will be including anecdotes from my own experience to illustrate the power of collaboration.

The Lonely Voice

Most people picture the poet alone, under a tree, notebook in hand, no one around but the breeze and the muse. But if you look at a cursory history of literature, you will see that major movements in poetry are almost always made by groups of poets. Poetry of the Tang Dynasty in China, 16th century Devotional poetry, and Romanticism in 19th century England, were sparked by poets who read, encouraged, and promoted each other. Poetry is a social, as well as individual, enterprise.

Why is this? Let's recall what we learned about ideology in the chapter on political poetry. There must be material channels of cultural transmission–ways to reproduce the words and generate audience. This occurs through word of mouth, publication, public readings, and networking. These are social, material channels that require cooperation. In the next few paragraphs, I'll sketch out a few literary movements and then we'll see what principles we can glean from these historical precedents.

The Host

The frame for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is that there are 30 pilgrims traveling to Canterbury. They stop at a tavern, and the host of the

tavern volunteers to be their guide. He also suggests that they play a game in which each pilgrim tells a tale on the way and the way back. When they return to his tavern, they will vote for the best story and the teller will have dinner paid for by the rest of the group (note how it is a clever business arrangement by the host). And so begins the classic piece of literature (do you remember what else Chaucer introduced to English literature?).

Ezra Pound, il miglior fabro, An Unfortunate Turn to the Right

I believe that this character, The Host, shows up time and time again in literature. The Host is a person who is at the center of literary activity, a promoter, manifesto-writer, an editor an encourager. In many literary movements, you can almost always find The Host somewhere in the cast of characters. This is certainly true for literary modernism and its host Ezra Pound (1885-1972). Ezra Pound arrived in London in 1908 as the "London Correspondent" for *Poetry* magazine. He came came in immediate contact with a number of English writers like Wyndham Lewis, Richard Aldington, T.E. Hulme and Ford Maddox Ford. Pound was brilliant, arrogant, and energetic. While in London he helped establish two literary sub-movements (under the umbrella of Modernism), Imagism and Vorticism. He encouraged and promoted the work of the Irish writer James Joyce, as well as the American poet H.D. He brought together fiction writers, painters and sculptors. In addition, he organized readings, wrote manifestoes,and continued to compose his own work. Indeed, when Hugh Kenner wrote his monumental work on modernism, he named it *The Pound Era* (I believe the era can be just as accurately called *The Stein Era*).

In addition to his own monumental sequence *The Cantos*, Pound had a direct influence on another seminal work of High Modernism, T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Eliot's original title was *He Do The Police in Different Voices*. He showed the manuscript to his friend Pound who had earlier recognized Eliot's genius and had obtained publication for "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Pound took his pencil to the manuscript

(including the awkward title) and the result was *The Wasteland* which Eliot dedicated to Pound with the inscription, "il miglior fabbro," a quote from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which means "the better craftsman." Indeed it's impossible to speak about Modernism in fiction or poetry without mentioning Pound.

What happened to Pound after he helped launch literary modernism? It's not an inspiring story. Resigned to the waste of human life in World War I, Pound blamed the excesses of capitalism and the financial practice of lending money on interest. This led him to a deep-seated and paranoid embrace of Fascism and anti-Semitism. He moved to Italy and during the war was paid by Italy under Mussolini for a series of Anti-American broadcasts which blamed the war on a Jewish conspiracy for world domination. When the war neared its end he was captured by American troops and placed in custody. For days he was held in a six foot by six foot exposed steel cage until he had a mental breakdown. He was brought to America and tried for treason. He was found to be unfit for trial because of insanity so he was placed in St. Elizabeth Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Writers agitated for his release, which was finally granted in 1958. Upon release, he moved back to Italy where he lived until his death in 1972.

The Harlem Renaissance, New York City

One of America's literary, and intellectual, movements had its center in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. The movement is called the Harlem Renaissance. During the first quarter of the 20th century there was a mass migration of African-Americans from the Jim Crow south to the industrial north. This led to a major influx of African-Americans in urban areas. When African-Americans returned from fighting in WW I, they found America as racist as ever with a resurgence in the KKK, lynchings and race riots. Led by figures like The Host, W.E.B. DuBois, who helped found the NAACP and edited and published *The Crisis*, there was a creative outpouring of art among African-Americans. This blossoming of art, music, drama, poetry and fiction

centered in the Harlem neighborhood in New York City and is called The Harlem Renaissance.

Writers such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston, among others, were active in this movement.

Many of these writers were represented in Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro*, the preface to which made note of the importance of place:

> Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another.

Locke alludes to the vital energy that is created and maintained when diverse minds turn their attention to creation and collaboration. Inspiration grows by being recycled.

In the early 1960s, New York City was also the center of the work of the Umbra Poets, and then in the late 1960s home of the Last Poets, two distinct African-American poetry movements held together by political, cultural, and esthetic bonds. New York City coninues to be an epicenter of coalescing poetry communities.

Language Writing, The Grand Piano

The critical importance of place in developing poetry communities is apparent in the development of Language Writing. Language Writing as a literary movement had two epicenters, New York City and San Francisco. It's interesting, though, in both places, Language Writing followed, and interlapped with, other well established poetry communities–the poets of the New York School in the former, The

Berkeley Renaissance in the latter.

The literary practice of the Language Writers in San Francisco was characterized by highly theoretical left wing esthetics, opaque, discursive writing, and relentless organization. The movement began in the early 1970s. Recently, the practitioners composed a "collective autobiography," another inspiring interation of collaboration. The collective autobiography is named *The Grand Piano*, after a coffeehouse in San Francisco which hosted a reading series and became the nexus for these poets. *The Grand Piano* is written by 10 language writers and combines memory, esthetics, theory, poetry and politics. Often, after a movement is established, the original members may find themselves arguing over the "authentic" history. These writers adhere to the roots of community by sharing the responsibility of providing its history. And, as I'll discuss later, it gives them a chance to continue to collaborate, which brings its own joy.

The Chicago Poetry Ensemble, Poetry Slam

The last example of the devlopment of poetry community is based on my own experience in Chicago in the 1980s. I had just returned home from teaching creative writing to urban youth in West Oakland, CA (if only my treks through San Francisco had taken me to the Grand Piano). I wanted to find poetry in Chicago and happened onto a flier advertising an open mic at a place called The Get Me High Lounge. What poet could resist such a place? At first there were only a handful of poets there sharing the bar with addicts, jazz musicians, and neighborhood drinkers. The Host in this case was the M.C. of the reading series, Marc Smith. Marc was brutally honest and called for poetry that made an immediate connection with the audience. It was a rough crowd and any pretension was brutally heckled out of the poet.

After a few months, the bar filled and "media people" took notice, publicizing the wild gathering of poets at the Get Me High Lounge. There was a political component to the developing community. America was in the second term of the grandfatherly conservatism of Ronald Reagan. Anarchists, party members, and other dissenters used the open mic venue

to register their opposition to the Reagan agenda.

Marc recruited a number of the poets, myself included, to form The Chicago Poetry Ensemble, whose aim was to develop a collaborative poetry and perform the results of that collaboration. The first gig we had was called "Circus Chatter," a polyvocal staging of poems and narrative centered on the circus. We performed it in the spring of 1986 at a venue called The Deja Vu. The owner of the Deja Vu liked what he saw and offered Marc a regular gig at a historic jazz club in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood called The Green Mill.

At the Green Mill, Marc started off the evening with an open mic, then there featured poets would read; the Chicago Poetry Ensemble performed afterward the feature. The evening ended with the Poetry Slam. Audience members judged the recitation of poets who had signed up for the competition. After some time, the Slam portion of the show became its focus. Since that time, the Slam has become an international movement with slams all over the world. Thousands of poets have stood at the mic to slam. The Slam helped to spark the spoken word revolution and has made poetry collaboration, through slam teams and ensembles, an important practice of poetry.

The Principles

If we look at the local histories of these movements, consistent themes emerge:

1. None of these groups waited for cultural acceptance by the mainstream verse culture. They made culture by organizing themselves.
2. They encouraged each other's work by reading it and providing feedback.
3. They organized readings so the poets had a venue to bring their work to the public.
4. They started presses and magazines to produce the poetry. Simply put, they took over the means of production.
5. They collaborated on writing projects.

All except #4 are pretty easy to do, though it certainly helps if one

energetic person takes responsibility to become The Host!

Renga

Now that we have discussed some historical antecedents of poetry collaboration, let's look at three ways, among many possibilities, of collaborating in the production of poems. The first we'll look at is the *renga*. Renga is a Japanese word which means "linked poetry." It was a common poetic form in Japanese between the 13th and 19th century. While practicing renga, a group of poets gather, choose a form and then take turns writing self-contained stanzas to fulfill that form. The most powerful aspect of a renga is that the individual ego is assumed into the group. The poem is not an individual expression,; it is a communal expression. Although renga is a Japanese form, you do not have to choose haiku or tankas as the form. Choose whatever form works for your group.

Have an idea in mind how many stanzas you want to write and how long you allot (either in one day or a number of days) that you will be working on the renga. You can choose to do it at a slow pace, like via email or texting, but there are many benefits to choosing one place, stocking it with food and drink and your fellow poets, then having at it. The splendid sense of isolation will emphasize the group dynamics. And you'll discover how powerful the act of collaborative poetry writing can be.

In 1969, the Mexican poet Octavio Paz formed a renga group in Paris consisting of himself, the English poet Charles Tomlinson, the French poet Jacques Roubaud and the Italian poet Edoardo Sanguinetti. Since French was a common language, they wrote in French. The form they chose was the sonnet–each of them writing a stanza. The result was then translated into the language of each poet and published.

In 1998 Tomlinson was again asked to be part of a renga circle in Japan with the poets James Lasdun, Makoto Ooka, Hiroshi Kawasaki and Mikiro Sasaki. I will quote the first round to give you an idea of how it works:

I
October: the departure of our swallows:
Their aim is Africa, but this year sees
An English pair among the Japanese,
Learning new tunes, new names for flower and tree,
Before cold comes and mono no aware
Charles

II
Mono no aware can always be found anew –
Look! Even through the heart of the pathless oceans,
beautifully opening a path go forth the fish
Makoto

III
A path. A clearing. A habitation…
And how rapidly what seemed pure
Obstruction yields a window then a door…
Careful though: what you thought you came here for
May have already changed
James

IV
The children were playing store
Holding an umbrella, one of them said
This makes a good rain-listening machine
Hiroshi

V
On top of a bamboo leaf
a small rain-frog, and on top of that
its soul, the size of a raindrop, sighing
upward
where clouds are breaking
Mikiro

Note how each stanza stands on its own and at the same time fits with the stanzas above it and below. This is the social nature of renga. Your own work is part of a larger, collective, work.

The Exquisite Corpse

The Surrealist poets (surrealism is an art movement in Europe starting in the 1920s that emphasized the uncanny, the random, and the absurd in the construction of art) had a number of collaborative projects. One of them is called, the exquisite corpse. In the practice of the exquisite corpse poets collaborate on a work in which crucial parts are concealed from them. Andre Breton, the Surrealist, recalls that the exquisite corpse was, "an infallible way of holding the critical intellect in abeyance, and of fully liberating the mind's metaphorical activity. fill in lines without knowing." One way to accomplish this is for one poey to write lines of poetry, fold the sheet over vertcally so that only half of each line is visible. The second poet then completes each line. There are many of variations of this technique, including multiple poets work on collage together, assigning parts of the poem to different poets, or directing poets to fill in parts of speech to an already existing structure.

The contemporary American poets Denise Duhamel and Maureen Seaton have collaborated on a number of exquisite corpses. Here is a political one, "Exquisite Candidate":

> I can promise you this: food in the White House
> will change! No more granola, only fried eggs
> flipped the way we like them. And ham ham ham!
> Americans need ham! Nothing airy like debate for me!
> Pigs will become the new symbol of glee,
> displacing smiley faces and "Have A Nice Day."
> Car bumpers are my billboards, billboards my movie screens.
> Nothing I can say can be used against me.
> My life flashes in front of my face daily.
> Here's a snapshot of me as a baby. Then
> marrying. My kids drink all their milk which helps the dairy
> industry.
> A vote for me is not only a pat on the back for America!
> A vote for me, my fellow Americans, is a vote for everyone like me!
> If I were the type who made promises
> I'd probably begin by saying: America,
> relax! Buy big cars and tease your hair
> as high as the Empire State Building.

> Inch by inch, we're buying the world's sorrow.
> Yeah, the world's sorrow, that's it!
> The other side will have a lot to say about pork
> but don't believe it! Their graphs are sloppy coloring books.
> We're just fine—look at the way
> everyone wants to speak English and live here!
> Whatever you think of borders,
> I am the only candidate to canoe over Niagara Falls
> and live to photograph the Canadian side.
> I'm the only Julliard graduate—
> I will exhale beauty all across this great land
> of pork rinds and gas stations and scientists working for cures,
> of satellite dishes over Sparky's Bar & Grill, the ease
> of breakfast in the mornings, quiet peace of sleep at night.

You can see in the poem how the collaboration may lead to surprises that are contained within a wholly coherent form."

In the next chapter we'll learn about collaborating in performance by writing, and combining, already written poems. Before we move on to that chapter, it is worth discussing, albeit briefly, the nature of being human. Even though our economic system would take as its basic premise that "every man is for himself," biology, anthropology, and sociology just don't bear that principle out. It is indisputable, we are social creatures. As a species we have thrived because of our ability to cooperate--and cooperation is facilitated by language. Though poetry is, to some degree, an individual undertaking, if we look at it closely, we can see how social it is. From the language we inherit from culture, poetic forms from the past, from the teachers who teach us, and the audience who reads or listens to our work, poetry is a social activity.

It's a Blast

If you are serious about poetry (or just passing this class), form a poetic community with what you have at hand. Find others who write poems and read each other's work. Read other's work, traditional and contemporary, with your poetry buddies and discuss them. Talk about language; talk about form; talk about rhythm. Explore poetry with others;

support their work as they will support yours. As evidence from the opening survey of this chapter, poetry has such a prominent place in our culture because poets gather and work together for their own sake and the sake of others.

On a final, and personal note, I can't express what I've felt in collaboration Late night talks in college about the symbolists and the power of the verbal object, the twice weekly rehearsals for the Chicago Poetry Ensemble, work with students and other poets, it has all been a kind of joy. Yes, it's serious cultural work, but it also fulfills our basic human need for social interaction in shared enterprise.

How To Do It

1. Find like minded poets.

2. Organize sessions where you read, and comment on, each other's work.

3. Organize sessions where you read and discuss other people's work.

4. Organize readings.

5. Publish your own work and the work of your friends.

Mid-week Assignment

You should be in groups of three or four. For the mid-week assignment, you should each write one stanza of your renga. The default form is the Japanese Tanka which is five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. Don't feel completely constrained by the syllable count; if a line differs by one syllable, don't fret. If you do not want to use the tanka form, that's fine with me. Choose a form as a group (let's say no more than five and no less than three line stanzas and no more than 12 syllables per line and no less than five).

If you want to choose a theme before you begin, fine. Just make sure it is not an obvious and cheesey theme like "love in the spring." Or you can let the first participant construct the theme by writing the first stanza and then

move on from there.

Weekly Assignment

At least four stanzas apiece. So if your group has three members, the total number of stanzas will be 12; if your group has four members, the total number of stanzas will be 16. Remember, each stanza must be a "stand alone" stanza while at the same time being related, associated with the stanza that came before and the stanza that came afterward.

The qualities of a good poem:

a. It will be both diverse and unified;

b. The form will be standard among the participants;

c. The theme taken up will not be cliched;

d. There is discernible energy from the result of collaboration;

e. As always, the language is compelling.

15. Performance

Remember the scop in *Beowulf* who, after Beowulf defeats Grendel, entertains the crowd with well-crafted lines accompanied by his lute? The scop was the tribal poet and oral historian. He has already crafted a poem about Beowulf's victory and delivers it to an appreciative audience.

Two things are notable about this scene. First, that there was an expectation of entertainment and that was the scop's job. Second, the scop was able to "improvise" a poem about events that had happened just a few hours earlier. This first aspect has been forgotten by many poets. Poets ought to entertain their audience. As William Carlos Williams once said, "if it ain't a pleasure/ it ain't a poem." This second aspect, the improvisational, has been kept alive by MCs everywhere who engage in freestyling.

In this chapter, you're going to gain some practical advice about reading your poems outloud. You'll also learn a little about how to put yourself in a position to improvise. Then you'll learn how to collaborate in performance. Finally, you will learn how to organize and publicize poetry readings.

Performing Poetry

The following principles of reciting your poetry are based on experience, from giving and attending hundreds of poetry readings over the years. They are not written in stone, but are practical and effective:

1. If you are reading solo or with a number of poets, find out well beforehand how long you are expected to read and choose your poems so that you stay within the time limit. It is rude to go over time, no matter how much you think the audience is digging you.

2. Within your time allotment, make sure that your pieces have some shape–a mixture of poems in terms of length and tone. Start strong and

end strong.

3. It goes without saying, no matter how experienced you are, practice practice practice. If you can memorize your poems, the better your performance will be, though, even when I have poems memorized, I always work from a program so I have something to refer to if I get stuck.

4. Do not put the text between yourself and the audience. Recite to the audience, not the text.

5. Keep eye contact with the audience. I do this by using a hand to gesticulate and move down the text so that when I look at the audience, I will return to my place in the poem.

6. Slow down; you are always speaking faster than you think you are.

7. Never give too much preliminary information. I can't count the number of times I've been at a poetry reading and the poet introduces each poem with anecdotes, information, and wry commentary so that the prelude is longer than the poem itself. Give the audience an idea of who you are by introducing yourself but *get to the poems*. If your work is esoteric, provide enough information so that the audience can hold onto the poem, but not so much that you are crowding them out of their attention.

8. Vary your pitch, tone, and pace to match the language of the poem. It will keep your audience attentive.

9. Enjoy yourself. It is very cool to perform your work to an audience. Be the vehicle for your poem. Show the audience you enjoy being there.

10. The foundation is practice. Practice enough so that you are not "poet delivering poetry" but become the vocal medium for your work. Respect your poetry by being prepared. Respect your audience by being prepared.

Difficult Audiences

What happens when your audience is inattentive or hostile? Let's start with an inattentive audience. If you are prepared, then don't compromise. Raise your voice to see if that works. Add intensity. Find any portion of the audience that is listening and delivery the work to them. Use humor; bring their inattention to their attention.

A hostile audience is much more rare and alcohol is usually involved. Back in the days of The Get Me High, fights would break out among poets and audience. I never would endorse that. Twenty-three year old Mike Barrett may have had a different principle. If you have any incendiary poems, then deliver them if you choose to fight fire with fire. Humor works to turn a hostile crowd as well as an inattentve one. Ignoring trouble rarely works, unless it's obvious that you hold the attention of most of the audience.

Finding Opportunities

How do you get a poetry gig? Remember collaboration? That is one way. The more involved you are in the poetry community, attending workshops, readings, etc, the more likely you will be asked to read. When you attend readings, find out who hosts or sponsors and introduce yourself. You don't have to ask directly, "Can I get a reading?" Ask, "How do you choose readers to read?"

The easiest way to get your poetry out in public is to find out where the open mics are. Get there early and sign up, though it is rarely a good idea to sign up for the first few slots. Anywhere in the last third or so of the open mic session works. Then make your attendance at the open mic consistent. That way, you'll meet other poets and be on your way to forming a poetry community. Whenever I travel, I make sure to check the town where I'm staying for open mics and if it works out, I read. It's fun and I've heard and met a number of poets this way. One night in Galway, Ireland, I attended an open mic. Long story short, I ended up in

a underground gaelic club improvising verse with Gaelic poets and a jazz saxophonist from South Africa. Always say, "yes," when asked to read!

If the town is big enough to have an "alternative weekly" newspaper, it will list open mics. Check local coffee shops and bookstores. Say you are going to Sacramento. Conduct a google search on "Sacramento poetry open mics." (By the way, at the time I wrote this, there were a number of venues in Sacramento offering open mics).

Improvisation, Hip-Hop, Mnemonics

A few years back, I spent Monday evenings at a local night club which hosted "Mad Real Mondays," which gathered hip hop and graffiti artists. The evening began with an open mic, then featured MCs. The evening ended with freestyling. I would do a spoken word piece during the open mic section. I was given the first spot (the worst of the open mic spots) because my verse was definitely the redheaded stepchild. Nonetheless, I had a wonderful time on Mad Real Mondays. Though I had listened to hip hop before, I gained immense respect for the skills of MCs, particularly during freestlyling. To be able to compose spontaneously and rhyme is a major feat. I talked to as many of the MCs as I could to discover their technique in freestyling for I had experimented with improvising poetry. One of the MCs told me, " A human talks around average about one hundred words per minute. Break those words down to around maybe six or so in every line. When you're on the first word of any line, you are working the sentence to the end word. That end word is in a network of rhymes. Basically," he said, "I've got a rhyming dictionary in my head."

This is why battling may be easier than freestyling; you already know the topic. When you battle, you know, rhetorically, what every line is going to do–it's going to be an insult completed by a rhyme in a network of rhymes. Note also the analogy between the foot in poetry and measure in music. Rapping distributes syllables over beats in a measure as metrical poetry distributes syllables over feet. I imagine that there is one word that most MCs would use to describe how they learned to rap: practice.

The same goes for improvising poetry. Try to do it off the top of your head, you'll find yourself in difficulties. Indeed, improvisation is really not "speaking off the top of your head." It's slowing time down enough in your mind to formulate a line while speaking the previous one. The more you practice, the better you get because the more time you have. Try an experiment. Read a text outloud until you can discern the difference between your reading comprehension of a line and its vocalization. It is in that interval that improvisation grows.

Once I put on a multimedia poetry show that culminated in 10 minutes of improvised poetry. I have no recording of the event, but I recall that the poetry held the audience and passed the internal censor that shuts down bad verse coming out of my mouth. I'll relate my technique and practice schedule as a case study. If you choose to improvise, you may develop your own technique for generating poetry on the spot.

First, taking my cue from medieval and renaissance techniques for remembering information, I developed a very simple mnemonic devise. It was based on the four directions. Each direction had a topic that was broad enough to be developed in myriad ways. I visualized a compass with the center being myself in the present time. That me gave five points to develop: north, east, south, west, the present. (I have since used this mnemonic device to memorize a number of speeches). For two months before the performance I would randomly choose five words out of the books I was reading and write them on an index card arranged according to the mnemonic as follows:

Amelia
post mousetrap
outline

Practice

With the mnemonic device, I had themes for each direction and specific words to use in developing those themes. I also knew how I would tie up the poem–by bringing it back to the present moment. Just as MCs are not starting from scratch when they freestyle, they have a structure

they are filling, I created a structure to fill when I improvised. I would record the results of my practice sessions and critique those results. As the performance neared, I grew confident because of the practice. During the performance, I gave the audience members exercises to generate words and used those words to improvise. This was a way to include the audience in the construction of the poems. Just as I was halfway in, a street busker with a violin began playing outside so the music became part of the poem. One of the keys to effective improvisation is to be open to the logic of the moment. Follow the directions that the present provides. If you're nervous, then you'll be closed. Paradoxically, being open to the moment of improvisation means to have practiced long enough to attend to the here and now rather than the concern of "what am I going to say next?" Be open, but only after you've practiced long and hard.

Another way to become adept at performing improvised poetry? Make a habit of spontaneously breaking into poetry.

Organizing

As we learned in the previous chapter on collaboration, working with other poets is immensely rewarding. Once you have established or are part of a poetry community, you can begin to think about producing poetry events yourself.

The first thing you need to do is gather a group of poets. You could do a solo show, but the more people you involve in the development of the show, the more audience you will have.

Venues

Once you have a group of poets, you need to find a venue. Bars, coffee shops, and music venues are possibilities. Rooms at the library, art galleries, schools and churches are also candidates. When choosing a venue, come up with a number of audience members that you might realistically expect. This number will help you choose an appropriate venue. Once you have that number, develop a short list of venues you are

considering. Contact the venues and ask who does the booking. When you contact that person, give a brief summary of your plans and let them know how many people you will be expecting. Find out if the room has a rental price. If it is a bar, coffeehouse, etc, discover if a cover charge is required, and if so, how much the venue retains and how much you retain.

Cover charges can be a hard sell for a poetry show, but if it takes place at a club, it may be somewhat expected. If you know anyone in a band, offer the band the last slot in the event, after the poetry. Cover charges are expected for bands. Some of the things to consider when choosing a venue: can you arrange the seats so that the poets are clearly visible? Does it have a sound system? If not, can you secure microphones, speakers, and amplifiers? If it has good acoustics, you won't need a sound system.

What you need to remember is that the promise of an audience is your most persuasive selling point. If you tell a private venue that you are expecting, say 50 people, and they usually get 15 for their events, they will be persuaded to book your event.

If you want to keep things simple, out of your group, choose the dwelling with the biggest single room. Empty it of furniture and put it on there. Or, if you're like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland from the 1930s, find an empty barn and turn it into a theater!

Publicize the show through fliers, listings in entertainment guides. Write press releases and send to the entertainment editors of local newspapers and television stations. Tell your family and friends. Coming from Chicago, I completely understand the economy of "pulling in favors." If any one owes you a favor, get them (and their friends) to come to the show. It's true, unless the show really sucks, if it is packed, the audience will feel like they are part of something that is "happening."

Developing the Show

Once you have the venue, set a date and now begins the fun part, putting the thing together. I've produced shows for more than 20 years and have discovered a few basic principles. First you'll need to choose

a theme. It can be abstract, concrete, general or specific. Avoid clichés, as always, and chose a theme that will generate multiple ideas. When working with the Chicago Poetry Ensemble, we developed shows from themes like sound sin nature, "Animal Songs," Einstein's theory of general relativity, "Six Voices in Time," and on community, "Trust Fall." Since that time I've produced pieces that started with DNA, "Code-A-Cell," cinema, "Screenplay," and cognition, "Activision."

The overall arc of the piece will develop during rehearsals but choosing a topic broad enough to develop will enable the poets to write toward something. Once you have written some pieces, rehearsals begin. Typically, they start out as workshops where the poets bring their work and help each other hone the texts. In addition, if you keep timing the length of the pieces, you'll know how much material you'll have and how much you'll need. I recommend keeping the time to an hour or less.

Polyvocalics and Genophonics

When shaping the program, consider a mix of solo numbers as well as group pieces that are polyvocal arrangement of texts. Those polyvocal pieces add another texture are exciting, and increase the energy. Working in a few pieces that include music, film, or visuals also work to add variety to the show.

The main goal of polyvocal pieces is to hear the mixture of voices– when they come together and when they break apart. Look up "slam teams," or "poetry ensemble," on youtube to see some examples. I'll provide a couple of examples below.

The first piece is called "Amerimix" and is taken from Chicago Poetry Ensemble tribute to the late poet and political activist, John Sheehan. John was a member of the ensemble and we were celebrating the publication of his poems. The entire piece was called "The John Sheehan Suite," and was a polyvocal performance of John's poetry (with other material). As you read the transcript, imagine places where the voices overlapped and the pace of the vocalization that would make music out of the words and voices:

Mike: Walt Whitman sez:

Dave: I resist anything better than my own diversity
And breathe the air and leave plenty after me
and am not stuck up, and am in my place
Divine I am inside and out and I make holy
whatever I touch or am touched from...

Rob: this southeast texas
the roots of my parents
my boyhood home
was not cowboy texas
but creole gumbo texas

Karen: We
Americans
Yankees
Dixieland Black
Hunkies

Jean: We
Shakespeare Dante
Homer Aquinas
eggplant Parmesan
creole gumbo

Anna: None of us whites
come from Irish bogs
or English fogs
from Russian steppes
or Bavarian thickets
we spring bright and brilliant
from the shining Parthenon

Voices: We
rust piles (Karen)
salt piles (Rob)
gravel (Dave)
wrecked cars (Mike)
huddling the harbor

Jean: for better or worse Gary's my home
and I'd rather live in this left-over city
than any suburb I know

Mike: My globe misprints Gary as Gray
what is Gary anyway?
(Dave): America

Rob: this hodgepodge
garden farm
lakemill
duneswamp
tangletrack
polyglot
dumping ground
hinterland

Mike: Sometimes my mind says America is not the place
to stay
what is America anyway?
(Dave): Gary

Karen & Anna: Potawotomi
Miami
Ottawa
Illinois,
Menomenee
Dutch Sheehan
Irish Jew

Rob : A Pious old Irishman
turned to my wife benignly
(Dave): and when she turns around baby
that's revolution at its best
and said,
"I love all negroes."
She ungratefully shot back,

Karen: "Why you son of a bitch
I can't stand half the motherfuckers myself."

Mike: Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable
is the French name
of a Black man

Jean: Voodoo Mama
off-beat Oddyseus
wild Dionysius
Pilgrim Maid

Dave: Vietnamese or Congolese
Viennese or Japanese
Pekingese or Siamese

Anna: We
minstrels and mountebanks
sages and clowns

Karen: We
a Klean Kristian Kommunity (KKK)

All: Discipline
empire
bloodshed

(Karen): we need some green
(Anna): taste the salt
(Mike): give half your bread

Rob: consider the Potawotomie
the Comanche the Cambodians
and the poor folk of Chile
and the kids growing up

(Dave): an ordinary street name
among the sparrows of Gary

they can see trees and squirrels and birds
and every manner of god-given beauty
in the trash-lined dunes and swamplands

Mike: touched by the divine

my dwelling, Gary,
rusted, holy and green

Although the transcription does not do the sound justice, trust that if you arrange multiple voices speaking the alphabet in an artful way, it will sound great.

When I produced the show, "Code-A-Cell," the human genome had just been completely deciphered by the Human Genome Project. As you may know, the human genome is completely made up of four basic building blocks, adenine(A), thymine(T), guanine (G), and cytosine (C). In other words, the entire human genome can be represented as a string of these letters. For the polyvocal portion of "Code-A-Cell," myself and three other writers chose one or two syllable words beginning with each of those letters. Then we took a series of sequences from the human genome as used that as a score to arrange our recitation of those words. We interspersed this throughout the show and the conclusion included the audience developing their own words then reciting those words together with a sequence we provided.

What follows are two of the easiest ways to arrange voices with this polyvocal. The first is in "around" (like "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore"). The second is when each voice is responsible for only one letter.

If we were to take a short sequence, TGTGTTTTAG, arranged in around, the transcript would look like this:

#1 tune garden tune garden tune tune tune tune ass garden

#2 try going try going try try try try always going

#3 three gift three gift three three three three away gift

#4 time george time george time time time time alert george

If we were to take a short sequence, CAGCGGCTTC, and give each voice one letter to speak for, the transcript would look like this:

#1 tune tune

#2 always

#3 care care care care

#4 george george george

Each semester, I help my students produce a poetry show and often we use this technique (which I call "genophonics"). It is very easy to master quickly and provides an easy way to practice polyvocalics.

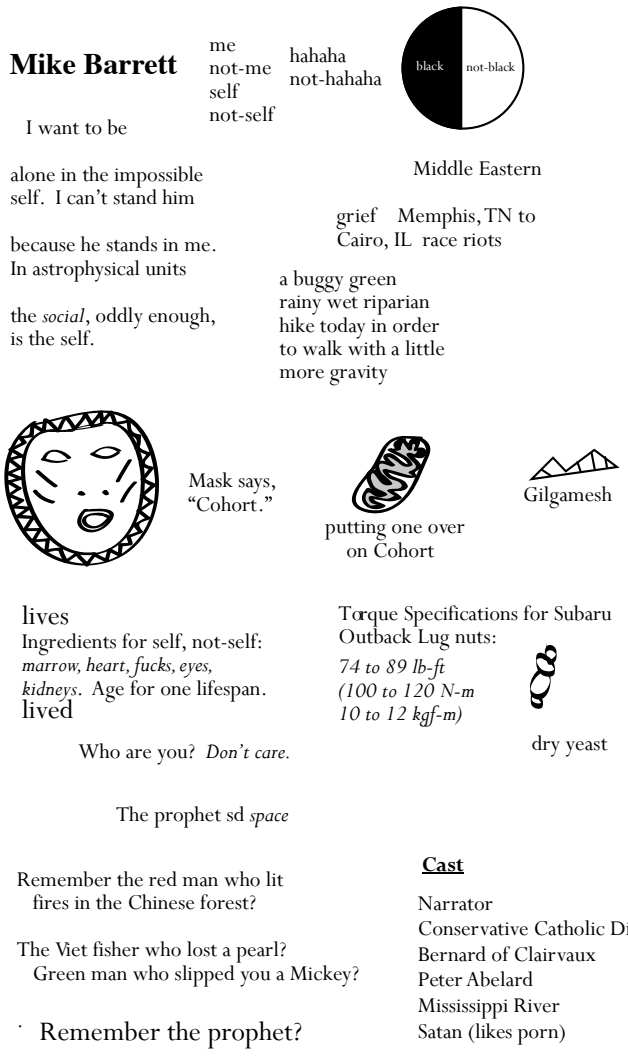
Practical Advice

The more you practice polyvocalics, the better you will become at it. You must give yourself over to the performance though, no self-consciousness. Invariably, when students first try, they end up giggling. That means they are entering the learning curve. At first, it is essential that you wait for your cue and then concentrate on, no matter what your colleagues are saying, your words. After you have mastered that, you can begin to explore ways that your voice plays with the voices of those with whom you perform.

Programs

I want to encourage you to give something else to your audience– an artifact. Provide a program of the performance. An artifact orients the audience to where they are in time. If they get momentarily distracted and look at the program, it draws them back into the show. And it gives them

something to carry into the future–reenacting parts of the performance in their mind's eye. Edward Tufte, a philosopher of visual information, has been a key inspiration and guide on this matter. What follows is the front piece of the program for "Recto Verso" The frontpiece (which follows) shows the arrangement, and bits of texts and images of the pieces in the order that they are performed.



from *Recto Verso*
poems written in the white spaces of Carl Jung's *Liber Novus*

This was used for a 12 minute performance at the Green Mill in Chicago.

Include the Audience

The final principle is that when you put on poetry shows, you are helping to build poetry community and culture. It is not about your ego, but drawing the audience into the creation of art. That is why I always try to figure out, however briefly, a way to include the audience, and their voices, into the show. Sometimes I give them prompts and cues (another use for the program) when to deliver their part. When the audience is involved, in the moment of the performance, then poetry is fulfilling its social function by encouraging the creative spirit.

How To Do It

1. Gather a group of poets (include artists from other genres as well).

2. Find and book a venue.

3. Choose a theme.

4. Write toward that theme.

5. Work collaboratively to polish the individual pieces and arrange them.

6. Develop polyvocalics.

7. Create a program to tell the audience where they are in the show and where they are going.

8. Include the audience in creating the material for the show.

9. Rehearse repeatedly.

10. Get people in the seats through publicity, word of mouth, and pulling in favors.

Mid-week Assignment

Your mid-week performance is to record your reading of one of your poems. Choose a poem that will accommodate a stirring reading. The easiest way to do this is to make a powerpoint presentation of the poem and record a narration. When you design your page (forget that nonsense about 10x10x10 powerpoint presentations--that's effective if what you have to say is only 10 lines), set the design to "Portrait" and "Letter Size" to display. Make a text box (from the Insert submenu, then textbox). Paste your poem into the textbox (it may take you more than one slide). Then choose "Record Narration" and record your reading of the poem. Play the slide show a few times to make sure that it works. Make sure that you check the "Use Timings" dialogue box so that the slides and your reading will be in synch. What we get as an audience when we play your power point presentation is a copy of your poem and your reading of it.

MacIntosh Computers

Recording vocal tracks are fairly easy using Garage Band. Go to New Track then choose Real Instrument. Press record and do your stuff. Using the Share Icon, save your track to disk and it will convert the recoding to an MP3 file which we should all be able to hear.

For the Ambitious

If you are super-ambitious and technically adept, make a poetry video and post it. If you do music and want to do spoken word to music, go ahead (no singer-songwriter stuff NO SONGS). I have some poetry videos I've posted to youtube in the Course Introduction material. The Most important thing is to prepare a recording of your poem for your audience--

the rest of the class.

Weekly Assignment

You have two weeks to complete this. Organize a poetry event with one or more of your classmates. Develop a reading list (if it's for two people a 20-30 minute show will work) and include at least one polyvocal arrangement--you can always do genophonics if you like. Secure a venue--it is perfectly appropriate to do it like a salon, that is in your living room. Invite friends and family. Name the theme and give it a title. Create a program and make the show happen (offering snacks and beverages ensures that your audience will enjoy themselves).
Any of your friends or family write poems? Invite them to read with you. Give them parameters such as how long you would want them to read and what order you'll go in.

Working together is always a joy but if logistics prevent any collaboration on the show, then put together a one person show. You should have enough poetry material for at least a 10-15 minute reading. The organization of the event applies still in all ways. Do not think of this as an onerous assignment. Do what I always do when I put together shows--make it a party.

In the Weekly Assignment Workshop area you'll need to post a two paragraph narrative of the event. In the first paragraph, describe what you did. how long you read, what polyvocal you used, etc. In the second paragraph, tell us how it went. Describe your insights as well as the audience's reaction.

In your posting, attach some proof that the show went on: a program, audio recording, photograph, a short bit of film (ideal, but it should be 30 seconds or less) that shows the poet and audience.
Get work on this right away and trust me, even if it's you in front of your family and a few friends, it'll be a blast.

The qualities of a good performance:

a. There is an audience;

b. The poets read intensely and soulfully;

c. There is collaboration and polyvocalics;

d. There is a theme and title to the reading;

e. An effective program;

f. Everyone has fun.

16. Collage²

This chapter is going to be different from previous chapters for two reasons. First we are going to begin with a lengthy introduction to a literary period, Modernism. Second, as opposed to the other chapters where the writing assignment is at the end, the first part of the writing assignment is going to be spread throughout the chapter.

Modernism

Virginia Woolf once wrote, "On or about December 1910, human character changed." Woolf notes that the first quarter of the 20th century was the culmination of myriad social, economic, cultural changes that we now identify as the Modernist period. Although what follows is a cursory discussion of a very complicated topic, it will provide enough context to understand Modernist esthetics.

What had changed culturally? I will provide a quick survey of some major thinkers and events how they helped to bring about this change in human character.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* and *Das Capital* provides an incisive critique of capitalistic society. Culture, he says, instead of being the best that has been created by a society, is really ideology that distributes power to the capital owning class at the expense of the working class. It covers over the basic antagonism, class struggle, that permeates every aspect of our social and economic lives.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) Freud surmised that what we know as the "self" is not a stable perceiving subject but the negotiation of drives, conscious and unconscious, that shape our actions. Indeed, what we think or say or dream should not be taken at face value but as representations of those drives. Consider Freud as an economist where the economy is mind.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) Einstein's 1905 paper on relativity showed that time is not absolute but relative; that is, the rate of time moving changes according to the system it's observed from (and this has been proved empirically). For example, let's say that you and I had clocks that were tested to move at exactly the same rate. Then you got on a rocket ship that approached the speed of light. When you returned we'd discover that I had aged substantially whereas you had hardly aged at all–even though time "felt" exactly the same to both of us.

F.H. Bradley (1846-1924) Bradley's philosophy was that Truth can never be wholly apprehended. Different perspectives gather different attributes of truth (can you see the relationship to Cubism?). The best we can do is to gather multiple perspectives in assemblage in order to come to knowledge.

World War I (1914-1918) WWI, or The Great War, or The War to End All Wars had many causes. The most prevalent was that the Ottoman Empire was collapsing and European powers and Russia were involved in a "great game" to divide its spoils. It was a war fought with modern weapons and 19th century military tactics by doddering European officers. Its brutality is nearly incomprehensible. Nine million soldiers were killed and Europe was tattered, an entire generation of its young men wiped out. So much for the progress of history. History became the nightmare from which Europe was trying to awake.

Anthropology and Primitivism With European powers having colonized much of the world, an interest in the indigenous cultures ensued. Painters and sculptors borrowed images from "primitive" art and the fledgling discipline of anthropology sought to understand the development of cultures over time, cultures of the world as well as European cultures.

Cinema By the turn of the century, cinema was established as a form of entertainment and document. By the 1920s in America, nearly half the population went to the movies at least once a week. Mass culture, mass

entertainment,is produced and distributed by mechanical means. Art in the age of mechanical reproduction had begun.

Formal Aspects of Modernism

Let's put these ideas together. It would seem that the basis of a "stable" culture, unified by shared history and a belief in progress of reason, was exposed as a fiction. Time is relative. Truths are contingent, or at least contingently knowable. Humans have the will to destroy all civilization. Humans now could see themselves as the end point of a primitive culture that had advanced technologically but really hadn't become less "primitive" in desires or actions.

What were the consequences for the esthetic features of literary Modernism given these cultural fractures? I'll list some of the major attributes.

Multiple Viewpoints A layering of perspectives in a literary work, not one of which captures the ultimate truth of the situation.

Image As we discovered in the chapter on the image, the literary movement of Imagism had its advent in literary Modernism and owes some of its shape to the views of the French philosopher Henri Bergson who asserted that in the flux of created reality there were nodes where meaning condensed, just as the image gathers emotional and physical depth.

Consciousness One of the distinguishing features between Modernism and Romanticism is that Romanticism's focus is on the imagination, a cognitive force field that connected to the primary energy of created manner. Modernism focuses on consciousness. Consciousness is the flow of sensation, memory, and thought. It is full of fissures, is connected associationally rather than logically, and is multiform. Consciousness itself can be seen as a collage of biology, sociology, and psychology.

The City Urban landscapes prevail in Modernist work reflecting the reality of economic and social conditions in the 20th century.

Allusiveness The text of a Modernist work contains myriad of elements, often including historical texts. This emphasizes intertextuality among all works of literature; that is, the way in which literary texts exist in a field of past and future texts.

High and Low Culture Reflecting the breakdown in culture evident in society is the idea that high and low cultural elements exist side by side. You can find ads, movie allusions, blues, jazz, alongside classical music, opera, and Shakespeare in a Modernist text.

Montage/Collage In film editing, a montage is a technique where a series of different shots are juxtaposed to signify activities accompanying a singular theme. In montage the separate film shots are discontinuous, but the viewer views them as pointing to a continuity, a unity of theme. In other words, the various scenes are aspects of one grand scene. The viewer is able to discern the relation among the discontinuous elements or makes one up if there's nothing obvious to discern.

Nostalgia There is a sense of loss, disappointment and despair in Modernist works because the collage elements do not cohere and the assemblage of a new culture will remain fragmentary despite the artist's most energetic gestures.

In poetry the work most typical of the Modernism sketched above (and remember there are Modernisms, the Modernism launched by Gertrude Stein being different in many ways from the one described above) is "The Wasteland" by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965).

I'm going to first sketch out the cultural foundation of the poem. Then we'll go through the poem highlighting motifs and relations. A motif is a pattern of imagery in a text. Frequently, I will give you an assignment to write a series of lines on the spot. At the end of the chapter,

I'll give you directions on what to do with those lines (though I imagine you already know what you will be required to do).

Veggie Tales

The first thing that we need to cover is the idea of vegetative myths. The evidence is pretty convincing, but with the tracing of universal myths, ideology always intervenes. But here's how it goes. In Europe, particularly among German philologists, during the 19th century, there was intense scholarly interest in developing lines of similarity among myths of all cultures. The culminating achievement was James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* which synthesized the myths and ritual practices of numerous cultures. In hindsight, it can be read as a text that supports European imperialism and the idea that the Christian story is the apotheosis of such myths. Nonetheless, even as a hybrid of fiction and nonfictional anthropology, it is a utterly fascinating read.

Sacrifice

A vegetative myth is a story about a ritual enacted to ensure that the earth continues to supply humans with what they need to sustain themselves. At the center of vegetative myth is the idea of sacrifice. Something (or someone) must be sacrificed to make right the relationship between humans and the earth. Let's look at the story of Abraham and Isaac. Jehovah asks Abraham to sacrifice his first son to demonstrate his fidelity. Why the first son? There is a tradition of offering the first fruits of a crop to the presiding deity. Jehovah demands the same from Abraham. Just as Abraham is about to enact the sacrifice, an angel stays his hand and directs Abraham to sacrifice a ram caught in a nearby thornbush. This is narrative reflects cultural movement from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice.

Another ritual Frazer writes about is before the spring planting. A human, often a stranger, an interloper, is chosen as a sacrificial victim. After the sacrifice, the body is either ritually shared (as a meal) among the

population or the body is rendered into pieces and buried in the cropland to ensure a fruitful season.

One ritual Frazer describes has been made into a film called *The Wicker Man*. In this ritual, the community has a celebration and the first stranger that enters the village is crowned king of the festival. The stranger is feted and and leads the parade, only to be sacrificed by burning in a wicker cage along with other sacrificial animals. The earth itself demands a sacrifice in order to serve humanity's needs.

A popular short story that used to be taught in high schools is Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." The story takes place in a rural town somewhere in the Midwest. Everyone in town is talking about the yearly lottery. We are meant to understand it as a good thing. When someone mentions that other towns are getting rid of their lottery, an old man says, "Lottery in June, corn be high soon." So Jackson shows the relation between the growth of the corn and the lottery. The big day comes and the head of every family goes to the town square and picks from a box. One man gets a card with a black mark. Now all his family picks from the box and the mother gets the black marked card. In the town square, every one gathers and the woman's son is the first to hit her with a rock. The rest of the town follows suit. In "The Lottery" we are in the realm of vegetative myths. A sacrifice ensures fertility.

Look at the most popular brand of cornstarch. On the packaging is an Indian woman who has a human head, but body of corn. She's the spirit of the corn. In places where forests were cleared to make room for planting, the spirit of the area was a green man. Recall any green man who presides over vegetables? Yes, it's the Jolly Green Giant. Now for a plate of delicious frozen peas and corn!

The Passion of Christ as Vegetative Myth

Let's think about how the passion of Christ narrative fits within this vegetative myth. First fruits get sacrificed, son of God. Remember having someone be the king of the festival only to be sacrificed. A week before his crucifixion, Christ is celebrated as he enters Jerusalem on a donkey

and the crowd throws down palms on the road, more signs of vegetation. Christ claims that he is the "bread of life" and "fruit of the vine." Think about how we get wine. Take grapes and crush them in order to transform them into something that symbolizes life. During the last supper, Christ shares bread saying, "this is my body" and wine saying "this is my blood." The enacted sacrifice is meant to ensure that humans's souls can can be saved. Certainly these are all signs of the vegetative myth. As someone who was brought up Roman Catholic, I was not surprised when I read Frazer discuss cultures sharing the body in meal of the sacrificial victim. Christians call that communion.

One of the most prevalent themes in Frazer's book is the idea of the king's relation to the landscape. If the king is vital and potent, the kingdom is. If the king is advanced in age and can no longer fulfill his duty, the whole land suffers. Frazer discusses tribal leaders in Africa who continue to take wives as a sign of their vitality. In some, if the youngest wife is not satisfied sexually by the leader, it is time for him to step aside.

These myths are a very important aspect of "The Wasteland." Besides Frazer's book, Jesse Weston's, *From Ritual to Romance* is also foundational to the poem. Weston's book has an interesting thesis. In order to understand the thesis, you'll need to know a little about the language we speak. English is a branch of the Germanic language which, along with most other languages of Europe, and some languages from the Middle East, Central Asia and India, is an part of the Indo-European linguistic branch. The group that spread the Indo-European language are called the Aryans. The Aryans brought their language from the steppes of central Asia west to Europe and east to India. Not a huge amount is known about this group, but we do know they must have been effective conquerers to spread their language so far.

Rig Vedas

We can derive some ideas about their culture from the Rig Vedas, a cycle of poems and texts from India that date back, at least to 1500 B.C.E. The theme of sacrifice runs through the vedas. It is clear that that much

of the sacrificial imagery in Western culture has its antecedent in Aryan ritual practice. By the way, many of the scholars who traced the myths of the Aryans were German philologists. Who else used this notion of the Aryans as the original race that conquered and brought civilization to the world? Yes, Hitler and present day white supremacists. Remember, no matter what topic you discuss, you cannot escape ideology.

Weston's thesis is that vegetative myths were transmitted from India west to Europe by gypsies through the use of tarot cards. Certainly, if you look at a deck of tarot cards you can see the prevalence of phallic, uterine, and vegetable imagery throughout. Furthermore, Weston argues, the stories of Arthur and his knights were the European transformation of these myths. It is a persuasive argument. For example, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" is a tale about a green man who shows up at King Arthur's court and challenges the knights to a game of "you chop off my head and next year I'll chop off yours." The challenge takes place during the Christmas celebration. Anytime a green man shows up (Ho Ho Ho) we are in the realm of the vegetative. The search for the Holy Grail and Lance is interpreted as searching for the keys to fruition–the phallus and the womb. (Interesting to note: The Gospel of Nicodemus, where the grail imagery is found is also rife with anti-Semitism...ideology).

Another Arthurian legend, the legend of the Fisher King, also involves vegetative imagery. In this story, the Fisher King has been injured because a boar gored him in the "thigh." For "thigh" read a little lower and to the left, where no one would want to be gored. So this Fisher King is bedridden and impotent. Therefore, the land becomes a wasteland until a hero is able to complete a task, solve a riddle, and restore the king to his youth and the land to its fruitfulness. By the way, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* reworks these tales, comedy ensues.

Now we know enough to begin to tackle Eliot's poem. Eliot looks at post World War I Europe, in general, and London, in particular, and sees it as a wasteland in need of a heroic undertaking to make it fruitful again.

I have copied the poem and will, in italics explain the sections as we move through them. In addition, I will give you periodic writing assignments that you will need to complete on other sheets. Those will be

underlined. Later on you will turn those lines into your long poem.

Let's start with ten lines that use at least 12 important words (not "the" "a" "of" etc) from the material given about Modernism and vegetative myths above.

THE WASTE LAND

"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:
Sibylla ti theleis; respondebat illa: apothanein thelo."

The prophetess here explains that she seeks death because of her decrepit condition.

For Ezra Pound
il miglior fabbro.

The poem is dedicated to that notable literary host, Ezra Pound.

I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Why is April the cruelest month? First off, consider the difficulty of waking yourself up after a long slumber. How about a five month slumber? Who is April cruelest to? How about the dead who are buried with no chance at growing again in the spring. Emily Dickinson wrote a poem on a similar theme where the robins, bees, and flowers were mocking the narrator during spring.

Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten, 10

And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

Here we have the first instance if multiple voices. First the voice of the buried, then the voice of a hybrid European (not Russian, speaking German, from Lithuania). Going down into earth into winter, going south.

Write 5 lines of imagery that takes place in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

The waste is emphasized here as well as the idea of fragmentation. The narrator is waiting for a savior.

Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind,
Wo weilest du?

This is from an opera based on an Arthurian tale of Tristan and Isolde. The opera is composed by Richard Wagner.

"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Od' und leer das Meer.

In the wasteland nothing can grow. Earlier we needed water but here water but it brings death. Someone seems to have drowned and is stuck in spiritual limbo. The last line "waste and empty is the sea" is spoken by Isolde as she watches the ocean for Tristan to return.

Write four lines of water imagery.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Now we have an explicit connection to the tarot deck. If Madam Sosotris is so clairvoyant, how come she couldn't avoid getting a cold? If you are "stuffed up" you certainly aren't clear. We get our first glimpse of the drowned Phoenician sailor who shows up in many guises. We are introduced to a Shakespearean motif. The Tempest, *which includes*

a shipwreck, contains a song, "full-fathom five thy father lies. Those are pearls that were his eyes." In a constellation of images, like consciousness, we move from the sailor to the drowned man who has pearls for eyes. Do you know why Madame Sosotris does not see any hanged man? The hanged man is a symbol of Christ who, because this is a wasteland, is nowhere to be found.

Make up a character with some sort of allegorical significance and describe that character in 5 lines.

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
> Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
> To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
> With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.

This is a powerful section. That narrator sees a crowd walking over London Bridge (flowed, as in water). Immediately the mind goes to a scene from Dante's Inferno. *When the narrator first comes upon Hell, he cannot believe how many people have died and says, "so many. I had not thought death had undone so many." Essentially, the narrator is seeing the scene in front of him as taking place in Hell rather than London.*

Render an urban scene in five lines.

> There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying "Stetson!
> "You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
> "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
> "Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
> "Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
> "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
> "Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
> "You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frere!"

We have the Phoenician sailor again who is also a merchant. There is an illusion to Sirius, the constellation that marked the flooding of the Nile. There is also an allusion to the vegetative myth of burying corpses. The passage ends with an allusion to Charles Baudelaire's book of poems, The Flowers of Evil *whose introductory poem ends with, "You! Hyprocite reader, my double, my brother." We are no different, the poem says, than any of these characters.*

II. A GAME OF CHESS

The relationships between men and women are shown to be nothing more than a game in this section.

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid - troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carved dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,

"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

This scene of rich description show us a woman who seems to be upper class, or at least attempting to be. Her perfumes are "synthetic" and the senses "drown." For all the description and movement, she is static. There is an allusion to the Greek myth of Philomel here. Philomel was raped by her sister's husband, Tereus who then cut out her tongue so she couldn't name her rapist. The gods took pity on her and turned her into a nightingale which chirps his name. The phrase "upon the sylvan scene" is an allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost *which is how Adam and Eve are described as we first see them in their innocent and natural locale. Their innocence is contrasted to this scene.*

"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
Nothing again nothing.
"Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"

I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"

In the wasteland, communication between two people break down where nothing can be said or understood. Note also, we have a return of the

Shakespeare motif of the drowned man.

Write six lines of dialogue between two people who are having trouble communicating.

But
O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag -
It's so elegant
So intelligent

High culture into low culture! The quote from Shakespeare leads to the speaker quoting some lyrics from Broadway show tunes.

"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?
"What shall we ever do?"
The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

Decisions are very hard to make in the wasteland. This reminds me of Eliot's character J. Alfred Prufrock.

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said -
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.
But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
160
The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same.
You are a proper fool, I said.
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot -
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
170
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

This passage is a bravura example of the collage technique. In England, when it's getting near closing time at a pub, the barkeep shouts out, "Hurry up please it's time." Of course, there's a double meaning here; the second meaning is it's time for the hero to come and restore the wasteland. There are two women here talking about a third woman, Lil. Think of it as The Real Housewives of the Wasteland *section. Lil's husband is coming home from the Army and Lil looks like a wreck. The speaker implies that if Albert doesn't want Lil, the narrator will offer herself. One of the reasons Lil looks so bad is that she's had five chldren and nearly died in childbirth. So she went to the pharmacist to solve the issue of an unwanted pregnancy. Of course, in the wasteland, a pregnancy can only end in abortion. To underline the shallowness of the speaker, after running down her friend so severely, she ends by saying, "Oh yeah, but one time they had me in for some ham and damn it was good ham!" As people say goodnight in the pub, we return to drowning, "Good night ,*

ladies, good night sweet ladies." This spoken in Shakespeare's Hamlet *by Ophelia who will soon end her life by drowning.*

III. THE FIRE SERMON

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.

There are no heirs to inherit the city. No one to take over the dynastic line. The nymphs have departed. There is no evidence of human interaction left.

By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.

We have an image of the Fisher King as well as another allusion to The Tempest. *The first three lines refer to the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites*

White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear

The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water

This section moves like stream of consciousness, from imagery of graves to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" to a pop song. My advice: Carpe Diem. Do not be afraid to live!

Find three lines of found material from an advertisement you have seen or heard.

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

This last line is from a poem by the French poet Paul Verlaine about Parsifal and his search for the grail and the lance (Parsifal cures the Fisher King in some versions of the tale).

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

We're back to Philomel and the nightingale.

Onomatopoeia is when the words imitate the sound they are referring to like "crash" or "zoom" or "twit twit twit". Your assignment here is to add three lines of onomatopoeia. Make it the sound of anything you want to include in the poem.

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French

To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

Now we have the Phoenician sailor as the Smyrna merchant. He's got some documents and speaks a bastardized version of French. He asks the narrator to meet him at the Cannon Street Hotel. Could it be for a gay liaison? Possibly. In the wasteland there certainly is no procreative sex. What about the currants in his pockets? Could it be one of those little packets of jam we get at breakfast joints? Yes, but also think of it as pun. What kind of person has currants in his pockets? If it's a drowned man, then those are ocean currents in his pockets.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest -
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

First we need to know who Tiresias is. He was a Greek Theban prophet who, through a series of circumstances was turned into a woman. He lived fully as a woman. Then through circumstances he returned to manhood. Flash forward to Mount Olympus where Zeus argues that females have more pleasure in sex than males, a proposition Hera denies. Zeus says, "Well, I know someone who can tell me definitively who has more pleasure." He brings Tiresias to Olympus and asks him. "I've been both," he says. "Women have more pleasure." Hera is angered and blinds him for giving up the secret. Zeus can't undo what Hera has done but makes up for it by giving Tiresias the gift of second sight, prophecy.

This is what Tiresias sees. A bored woman waiting for her "boyfriend." He's a self-centered ass. After a dinner out of tins, he makes his move. She doesn't say "no" even if she doesn't encourage him at all. He has his way and leaves. She kinda thinks, "well that's done." Remember Tiresias and the idea of female pleasure. She has absolutely none from this encounter.

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,

The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

In his footnotes, Eliot alludes to a book, The Proposed Demolition of English Churches. *In other words, this nostalgic scene will never have the possibility of being repeated because the church is demolished.*

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

The dog imagery occurs as we leave London along the Thames.

Time for three more lines of onomatopoeia.

Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

When Elizabeth was queen there was hope that she would marry the Earl of Leicester. She didn't which left the kingdom without a direct heir.

"Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

Include some found material from a text you have lying around your house use at least four lines.

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised 'a new start'.
I made no comment. What should I resent?"
"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.

This last couplet could be a description of the poem itself, an attempt to put together "nothings" that can connect with nothing. There is also a gnostic notion here that the city is a fallen body (like James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake*). We have now moved down to the southeast coast of England.*

The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

The last lines are a passage from St. Augustine's Confessions *which is a classic text of religious conversion. We are now in the Middle East working our way further east. We will end in India, the originary point of Indo-European sacrificial myths.*

IV. DEATH BY WATER

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

Here is the culmination of the drowned man. Those are pearls that were his eyes. And as Charles Baudelaire reminded us, that is you reader, double of the sailor, the drowned man's double.

V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

This passage is an explicit the passion narrative. First the Garden of Gesthemene and then, while Christ is in the tomb, everyone else is dying, with a little patience.

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water

In the Rig Veda some of the most important rituals are enacted to make sure that there is annual flooding of the Ganges and Indus rivers. The flooding begins by spring monsoons that begin in the Himalaya mountains and descend from there. Here, so far, there is only dry sterile thunder, not the kind that brings torrents of rain and washes over the wasteland.

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you

Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
- But who is that on the other side of you?

This alludes to one of my favorite New testament stories. It is after the crucifixion and before Christ reveals himself. Two of his followers are traveling the road when a third comes with them and strikes up a conversation. They have such a good time in his company they invite him to dine with him and when he breaks bread, he reveals himself as Christ. It always reminds me of a story I read in a book on mountain climbing. Two climbers were attempting a summit of the most technically difficult mountain in the world, K2. They made it to the top and on the way down they were hit with a vicious storm. They had to bivouac for the night. A bivouac at that altitude is a recipe for death. In the middle of the night a third climber came and joined them. His presence cheered them. They made it to the morning and worked their way to base camp. When they arrived there they brewed three cups of tea. Startled, they looked at each other, and realized there were only two of them.

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

This starts with a vision of conquerers who sweep over the wasteland. We move onto the "falling towers" which symbolize the various centers of civilization progressing from Jerusalem to contemporary London.

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings

And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

This passage reminds me of the Goya painting, "The Witches Sabbath."

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

We have more onomatopoeia here with the cock crowing. This reminds us of Peter's denying Christ during the crucifixion narrative.

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder

What follows is the essence of the poem. The passage is based on a story in the Upanishads (Indian texts later than the Rig Vedas). Three disciples asked the Hindu god Prajapati (who created man) what is the most important thing to do in life. He answers with a thunderous "DA." Each disciple hears something different: Datta (give alms), Dayadhvam (sympathize), Damyata (control). Do you see the modernist idea of multiple perspectives here?

DA
Datta: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aetherial rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

Let's think about these more closely. Give what? Give yourself over to life. Live intensely. Dare to eat a peach. Eat a whole damn peck.

Sympathize with yourself first and foremost. The idea of a prison confirms a prison. If you are looking for a key you have built a prison. "Mind-forged manacles" William Blake says. "Prisons are built with the bricks of law."

Control is a matter of skill, craftsmanship. Most importantly, the skilled sailor responds easily, like a martial art of "soft " forms taking the energy around her and directing it.

<u>What is the key for you? What is the prison as you see it? What does control mean? What would the thunder say to you? At least 6 lines.</u>

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam ceu chelidon - O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine a la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

The Italian is from Dante's Purgatorio (at least we're out of hell). In a self-reflexive moment, the poem is talking about itself, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins."

Shantih shantih shantih

The last three words are Sanskrit, like an "amen" at the end of a prayer– peace that surpasses understanding. Perhaps the poem suggests that the redemption of the wasteland lies outside of language and culture--it passeth understanding

How To Do It

1. Take a line from the poem and transform it three times. Somewhere in your poem place those three lines.

2. Title your poem as an anagram of the title The Wasteland or any phrase from the poem.

3. With the three lines that you have transformed and the preliminary work you have completed earlier during the exercises, you have more than 50 lines of poetry. Your goal is to write a long poem of 100 lines.

4. You know how to do collage; your are doing it with a number of lines that you have already completed.

5. This note is perhaps the most important:

The telos of Eliot does NOT have to be your telos. Eliot's project was an attempt to recreate a social order out of past materials. It may not have worked, but the project is deeply re-actionary, that is, it attempts to preserve a past rather than envision a future. The irony, of course, is that his form was very innovative. What would you liken the current culture to? It doesn't have to be negative or pessimistic, though there are always enough evidence in current culture to base a pessimistic view on. What you should take from Eliot is using this poem to look at a wide range of material to shape. I believe we are in postpostModern age; one my students have dubbed PoPoMo. What will a long poem look like in this age? What kind of sources will be at work? These are the questions you should consider.

6. Remember that you don't have to include the preliminary material you generated in the order that it appeared. This is a collage, so put it where you think it is needed.

7. Write new material to give context to the material you have already written.

8. If there are any sources that you think would give the poem a PoPoMo texture, add them. Texts, software code, facebook messaging, etc. Be forward looking.

9. Don't constantly be counting lines. Finish the poem where you satisfied and then play it as it lays.
10. Edit, edit, edit.

Mid-week Assignment
Post the preliminary lines you have written thus far.

Weekly Assignment

The Qualities of a Good Poem:

a. Effective use of collage;

b. Powerful imagery;

c. Tackles a large scope;

d. Links elements together thematically;

e. Is some substantial in length;

f. Fresh language;

g. Intellectually ambitious;

i. Reimagines the long poem for the PoPoMo age.

Follows are the footnotes that Eliot provided for the poem. Though the footnotes provide an informational role, they also should be considered as part of the poetical text for there is humor, irony, double meanings playing off the poem itself in these notes.

NOTES ON "THE WASTE LAND"

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of theincidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance (Macmillan). Indeed so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean The Golden Bough; I have used especially the two volumes Adonis, Attis,

Osiris. Anyone who is
acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem
certain references to vegetation ceremonies.

Macmillan, Cambridge.

I. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Line 20. Cf. Ezekiel 2:1.

23. Cf. Ecclesiastes 12:5.

31. V. Tristan und Isolde, i, verses 5-8.

42. Id. iii, verse 24.

46. I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack
of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own
convenience.
The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose
in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God
of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in
the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor
and the Merchant appear later; also the "crowds of people," and
Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves
(an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily,
with the Fisher King himself.

60. Cf. Baudelaire:

"Fourmillante cite;, cite; pleine de reves,
Ou le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant."

63. Cf. Inferno, iii. 55-7.

> "si lunga tratta
> di gente, ch'io non avrei mai creduto
> che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta."

64. Cf. Inferno, iv. 25-7:

> "Quivi, secondo che per ascoltare,
> "non avea pianto, ma' che di sospiri,
> "che l'aura eterna facevan tremare."

68. A phenomenon which I have often noticed.

74. Cf. the Dirge in Webster's White Devil .

76. V. Baudelaire, Preface to Fleurs du Mal.

II. A GAME OF CHESS

77. Cf. Antony and Cleopatra, II. ii., l. 190.

92. Laquearia. V. Aeneid, I. 726:

> dependent lychni laquearibus aureis incensi, et noctem flammis
> funalia vincunt.

98. Sylvan scene. V. Milton, Paradise Lost, iv. 140.

99. V. Ovid, Metamorphoses, vi, Philomela.

100. Cf. Part III, l. 204.

115. Cf. Part III, l. 195.

118. Cf. Webster: "Is the wind in that door still?"

126. Cf. Part I, l. 37, 48.

138. Cf. the game of chess in Middleton's Women beware Women.

III. THE FIRE SERMON

176. V. Spenser, Prothalamion.

192. Cf. The Tempest, I. ii.

196. Cf. Marvell, To His Coy Mistress.

197. Cf. Day, Parliament of Bees:

"When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
"A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
"Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
"Where all shall see her naked skin . . ."

199. I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia.

202. V. Verlaine, Parsifal.

210. The currants were quoted at a price "carriage and insurance free to London"; and the Bill of Lading etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft.

Notes 196 and 197 were transposed in this and the Hogarth Press edition, but have been corrected here.

210. "Carriage and insurance free"] "cost, insurance and freight"-Editor.

218. Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest:

> '. . . Cum Iunone iocos et maior vestra profecto est
> Quam, quae contingit maribus,' dixisse, 'voluptas.'
> Illa negat; placuit quae sit sententia docti
> Quaerere Tiresiae: venus huic erat utraque nota.
> Nam duo magnorum viridi coeuntia silva
> Corpora serpentum baculi violaverat ictu
> Deque viro factus, mirabile, femina septem
> Egerat autumnos; octavo rursus eosdem
> Vidit et 'est vestrae si tanta potentia plagae,'
> Dixit 'ut auctoris sortem in contraria mutet,
> Nunc quoque vos feriam!' percussis anguibus isdem
> Forma prior rediit genetivaque venit imago.
> Arbiter hic igitur sumptus de lite iocosa
> Dicta Iovis firmat; gravius Saturnia iusto
> Nec pro materia fertur doluisse suique
> Iudicis aeterna damnavit lumina nocte,
> At pater omnipotens (neque enim licet inrita cuiquam
> Facta dei fecisse deo) pro lumine adempto
> Scire futura dedit poenamque levavit honore.

221. This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had in mind the "longshore" or "dory" fisherman, who returns at nightfall.

253. V. Goldsmith, the song in The Vicar of Wakefield.

257. V. The Tempest, as above.

264. The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren's interiors. See The Proposed Demolition of Nineteen City Churches (P. S. King & Son, Ltd.).

266. The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in turn. V. Gutterdsammerung, III. i: the Rhine-daughters.

279. V. Froude, Elizabeth, Vol. I, ch. iv, letter of De Quadra to Philip of Spain:

"In the afternoon we were in a barge, watching the games on the river. (The queen) was alone with Lord Robert and myself on the poop, when they began to talk nonsense, and went so far that Lord Robert at last said, as I was on the spot there was no reason why they should not be married if the queen pleased."

293. Cf. Purgatorio, v. 133:

> "Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
> Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma."

307. V. St. Augustine's Confessions: "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears."

308. The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken,
will be found translated in the late Henry Clarke Warren's Buddhism in Translation (Harvard Oriental Series). Mr. Warren was one

of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident.

309. From St. Augustine's Confessions again. The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.

V. WHAT THE THUNDER SAID

In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe.

357. This is Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii, the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec County. Chapman says (Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America) "it is most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats. . . . Its notes are not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled." Its "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated.

360. The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted.

367-77. Cf. Hermann Hesse, Blick ins Chaos:

"Schon ist halb Europa, schon ist zumindest der halbe Osten Europas auf dem
Wege zum Chaos, fährt betrunken im heiligem Wahn am Abgrund entlang und singt dazu, singt betrunken und hymnisch wie Dmitri Karamasoff sang.
Ueber diese Lieder lacht der Bürger beleidigt, der Heilige

und Seher hört sie mit Tränen."

402. "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata" (Give, sympathize, control). The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the Brihadaranyaka-Upanishad, 5, 1. A translation is found in Deussen's Sechzig Upanishads des Veda, p. 489.

408. Cf. Webster, The White Devil, v. vi:

> ". . . they'll remarry
> Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider
> Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs."

412. Cf. Inferno, xxxiii. 46:

> "ed io sentii chiavar l'uscio di sotto
> all'orribile torre."

Also F. H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 346:

"My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside; and, with all its elements alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In brief, regarded as an existence which appears in a soul, the whole world for each is peculiar and private to that soul."

425. V. Weston, From Ritual to Romance; chapter on the Fisher King.

428. V. Purgatorio, xxvi. 148.

> "'Ara vos prec per aquella valor
> 'que vos guida al som de l'escalina,
> 'sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor.'

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina."

429. V. Pervigilium Veneris. Cf. Philomela in Parts II and III.

430. V. Gerard de Nerval, Sonnet El Desdichado.

432. V. Kyd's Spanish Tragedy.

434. Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The Peace which passeth understanding' is a feeble translation of the content of this word.

17. Making a Book

You have reached the end of the book and your introduction to poetry. This chapter is an ending and a beginning. What ends is your internship in the poetics of telos as has been brought to you throughout the previous chapters. What begins is the rest of your poetic journey. Instead of milestones on this journey, there are books. This chapter will briefly explore the idea of the book in poetry, citing some historical examples (as well as personal favorites), and will end with a brief peroration.

William Blake

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English visionary painter and poet. Blake had a small coterie of followers in his lifetime but mainstream success eluded him. Since his death, he has become an influence on many poets including William Butler Yeats and Allen Ginsburg. Blake did not write individual poems; he wrote books. For him the book was the material transmitter of his prophecies. He was also an artist, and illustrated (or illuminated) these books. They can be viewed in the online archive at www.blakearchive.org.

Blake's method for assembling these books was presented as a vision in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

> I was in a Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.
> In the first chamber was a Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a caves moth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave.
>
> In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones.
> In the third chamber was an Eagle with wings and feathers of air; he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite; around were numbers of Eagle like men, who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

> In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire raging around & melting the metals into living fluids.
>
> In the fifth chamber were Unnam'd forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.
>
> There they were reciev'd by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries.

Blake's method is made into an allegory in this passage. Blake engraves on long sheets of copper plate, washes the plate with acid to eat away at what is not engraved, then he makes prints and watercolors those prints. The result is the form of books that Blake made through his lifetime. Think of them as the first graphic novels.

For Blake, the book was indistinct from the poetry—he thought, composed, and produced in terms of books. Because his unique way of engraving obviated the need for letterpress printing, he viewed his technique as liberatory which provided artists and poets a way to produce their own work at reduced expense. The book for Blake was an instrument of liberation.

Wordsworth

By the time William Wordsworth died in 1850 he had become an establishment poet—far from the radical poet who embraced the French Revolution as a young man (read Robert Browning's "The Lost Leader" to discover the younger poet's reaction to Wordsworth's late-life conservatism). Yet Wordsworth had been saving his greatest poetic salvo for after his death when his epic *The Prelude* was published. *The Prelude* was a work that Wordsworth had started as a young man and had worked on intermittently since. It is a personal epic that traces "the growth of a poet's mind." As with all of Blake's works, *The Prelude* from the start was conceived as a book project. Even though Wordsworth was far removed from his best poems when he died, *The Prelude* is a monumental achievement that only saw the light of day upon Wordsworth's death. He saved his best book for last.

Jack Spicer

Jack Spicer (1925-65) was a poet and part of the collaborative literary movement, The San Francisco Renaissance which was happening contemporaneously with the Beat Poets on the west coast. Lake Blake, Spicer believed that his poetry was akin to taking dictation from the Logos. Spicer wrote in Language Poetry:

> The poet is a radio. The poet is a liar. The poet is a counterpunching radio.
> And those messages (God would not damn them) do not even know they are the champions.

For Spicer, the poet is a receiver of messages, a radio (like drunk Bukowski). Even though the messages may be from the Logos, because the poet is human, his radio is not perfect, and like all messages, noise is part of the transmission. The Logos becomes the Lowghost. Interestingly enough (I don't know if Spicer would have known this, but he could have) it had been discovered that certain galaxies and far distant stellar structures produce radio waves that can be picked up on earth. Spicer is right; the universe is broadcasting radio waves.

Another similarity between Blake and Spicer is that as Spicer matured as a poet, he would compose books instead of individual poems. Spicer's books include, *After Lorca*, *A Book of Music*, *The Heads of the Town up to the Aether*, *Language* and *Book of Magazine Verse*. As we discussed in the chapter on sequences, there is a sense of unity within each of these books because the book itself becomes a site of invention.

Walt Whitman

We've already been introduced to Whitman through his "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" in the chapter on poems of place and his exaltations of democracy in the chapter on political poetry. I want to discuss his lifelong book project here, Leaves of Grass. The first edition of the book was published in 1855, the last in 1881. In the interim, it went through seven

editions. Whitman was constantly struggling with what poems to include, what poems to edit out and in what order the poems should go. He likened the book to "a great city to modern civilization." Whitman conceived of this book as the repository of all his significant poetry—truly a life's work that constantly shaped. The individual sections, were named and provided subcategories, or neighborhoods to the city he was constructing, "Inscriptions," "Children of Adam," "Calamus," Drum-Taps," etc. Like *The Prelude*, *Leaves of Grass* traces the growth of the poet's mind, concerns and telos.

Some Practical Advice

The chapter on serial poems lists a number of book-length poems. Wordsworth's Prelude is booklength, as are the illuminated books of Blake. Spicer and Whitman's books include individual poems collected in a larger section and book.

Obviously, the first collection you are constructing is the result of working through the contents of this textbook. This will give you enough poems to make a "chapbook." Chapbook derives its name from "chapmen" (dealers, traders) who would sell small, inexpensively produced books (often 24 pages long).

Use the process of collecting the poems as an opportunity to edit. No matter how many times I read my own work, I edit along the way. Time is an excellent critic and you have gained some distance from your early work which will allow you to improve it. In addition, the work you have done this semester is cumulative; hopefully you have been improving with each assignment. Now you know ways to improve those first poems you wrote. Edit as you organize.

Here are a few principles for organizing your poetry chapbook:

1. Start strong—it is essential you have a strong start to manuscript. It gives the readers incentive to continue reading.

2. End strong—your last poem is often the last text that your readers

will encounter. Make it a strong one. I think of the last poem as an opportunity to give your readers something to carry with them as they leave the poetry and return to their lives.

3. Think of groups—most poetry books organize the poems in sections. There are two ways to think about this. The first is to construct each subsection so that it constitutes an arc, that is, a narrative, argument, a developed theme. The second is to consider each subsection as a collection of like objects. Either way is effective depending on the nature of the poetry. You can name the subsections or not. I like capital Roman numerals to designate each section (and Arabic numbers or small Roman numerals for sections within a poem).

4. Title—certainly give your collection a title, and the information presented on titling applies here. Do not title it sweeping and obvious like My Deep Thoughts or Intense Poetic Language. Poets sometimes choose the title from the title of a characteristic poem, like John Ashbery's Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror or Houseboat Days or Sylvia Plath's Ariel. These titles capture something essential about the poet's spirit in those books. Berryman and Pound named their books after the title of the poems they were writing, The Dreamsongs and The Cantos. Getrude Stein's title Tender Buttons speaks of a kind of linguistic fetishization of objects. Lyn Heijinian's A Border Comedy indicates the kind of poetry she makes from the marginalia of texts produced in daily discourse. A good title should not be too general and capture the spirit of the collection. Remember Emily Dickinson? "Tell it slant," she said. Always good advice.

5. Provide a table of contents.

6. If you have dedications, acknowledgements or an epigraph, make them as brief as they need to be.

Peroration

In a way, this book captures two approaches that have engaged me since I began writing—Pathos and Logos. Put simply, Logos is intellect, thought, reason. Pathos is emotion, passion, appetite. I began writing poetry because I had BIG feelings and DEEP thoughts. Over time, I learned that neither guarantees a successful poem, effective language does. I hope this book helps the poetry student learn how to manipulate language and structures of meaning so that their poetry fulfills their telos.

What about those BIG feelings? My career writing, teaching, and performing poetry has been fueled by the intense passion I have for the tradition and practice of the poet. What do you need to become a poet? The desire to become a poet. Does that passion drive you to write poetry? Abracadabra. You're a poet.

What about those DEEP thoughts? I spent three years reading the British physicist, Roger Penrose's, 1096 page book, Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe. Penrose doesn't stint on the math. I used the principle I teach to my students when reading difficult poetry: Read Every Word. I read the book as part of the project I am on as a poet (once again acknowledging the highfalutin ideology of this stance)—I want to explore reality. I want to understand the human telos. Do you want to write poetry in order to tackle the big issues? Do you engage language in that tackling? Abracadabra. You're a poet.

Now go and write books of poems.