a skeptic's guide to modern poetry

David Jaffin
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POEMED ON A BEACH

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For Dr. Hassell A. Simpson,
Professor Emeritus of English
at Hampden-Sydney College

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder

– Wallace Stevens, "Nomad Exquisite"

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Preface

The people you will be meeting in the coming pages all have one problem in common: Despite minds open to the modern, they have failed to "warm up" to modern poetry. Some of them struggle with contemporary forms of expressing meaning; others simply miss the music in poems that lack a metrical beat. Fortunately, they possess enough curiosity to drop in one day on a poetry reading, just to see what it is they have been missing.

This short guide aims at addressing their issues with a practical set of interpretive approaches and tools so that (a) you can appreciate how poetic practice seeks to reproduce the experience of living in these times, and that (b) you can begin to enjoy witnessing the current age from a poetic point of view. Maybe you will even warm up to contemporary poetry so much that you decide to take part in a poetry circle such as ours here on the beach, so that you can enjoy it even more—even perhaps by applying this poetic way of seeing in your own life.

We "regulars" from the poetry circle have come to realize that modern poetry is a worthwhile endeavor because:

- It is the ideal window through which to look at the whole canon of poetry, which takes us all the way back to the dawn of history. Since poetry is an artistic record of the times, there is no better way to get both a grip on the modern and a feel for what past epochs were really like.

- It is a fascinating way to explore the creative channels of the mind and to open up your own creativity in the process. Poetry shows us how to use tools like myth and metaphor to think through problems and to find innovative solutions.

- It is a vehicle for understanding your own language, which will ultimately help you to use it more expressively yourself. Poetry is language used in its most concentrated form with the goal of taking it to the limits of what it can express.

- It is a descriptive medium which visualizes thought, leading to clearer understanding of ourselves, our predicaments and aspirations. As such, poetry can open up paths to managing relationships, working out conflicts, and setting goals.

We know, too, that becoming involved in a poetry circle is especially worthwhile because:

- It is a way of learning about language and literature without having to be particularly knowledgeable about either. Everyone in the circle will have an insight or a favorite poet to share.

- It is a forum for interacting with people on a meaningful level without having to put yourself through confessional therapy. The poetry itself does the soul-baring.

- It is means of testing your own interpretations while observing how one and the same poem can speak to others across a broad band of individualized impressions.

- It is a demonstration of how other people can apply these poetic ideas to life in ways we may have never considered. Can poetry enrich us in insight, in outlook, in sensitivity, in rhetorical prowess, or in some other way?

Finally, if you are already part of a poetry class, club, or circle, we welcome you to use this book as a guide to asking penetrating questions and fine-tuning your strategies of analysis and interpretation. Supplementary materials for your group are available for download. (Please see the *Note to Teachers* at the back of the book, p. 212).

Warren Fulton
David Jaffin

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A library for Leroy
by the sea

where the
mind of book

s free-float
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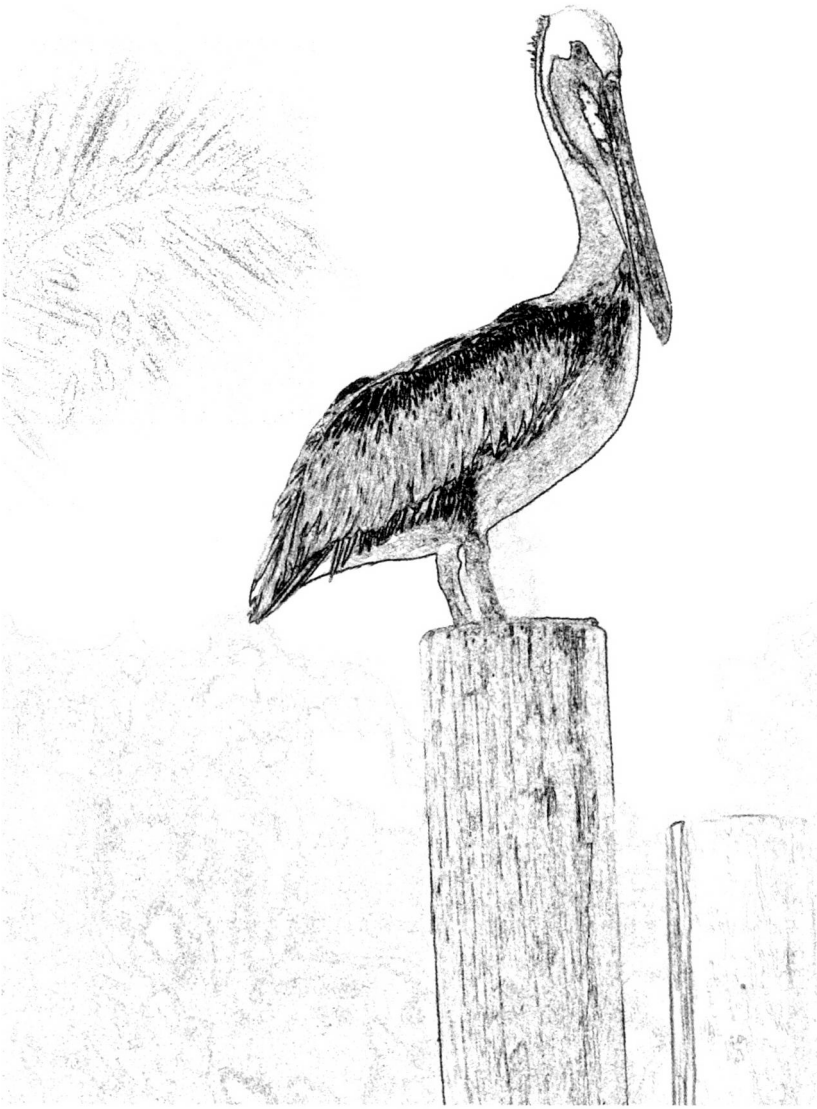
and flow of
all those

self-enclos
ing shore-

finds.
(from *A World Mapped-out*, p. 337)

Photo credits: The pelicans on the inside pages are compliments of Edith Hanna. Cover photos by Elisabeth Lahner.

We are grateful as well to all the other members of our circle for sharing their unique personal perspectives on the poems.



Introduction

The sea breeze has picked up, taking the scorch out of the afternoon sun for the beach umbrella crowd and putting some zest in the salt air for hordes of skimboarders, kitesurfers, waveriders, and even a few swimmers. Up at the pier, tables full of tourists watch the sailboats gliding in the distance, as dolphins arc through the shallows and gulls arch overhead. A perfect day, one would think, for anything but a poetry reading at the local library.

In fact, the conference room is packed and Leroy, our librarian, is hauling in a few extra chairs, just in case. A number of us are regulars. Carol, my wife, teaches German at Gulf Coast U and loves the late Romantics, especially Heine. Helen is a well-read Francophile Greek who grew up in Alexandria, Egypt. Her husband, George, has sent his apologies this time. He runs several business ventures from their winter home here in Florida and is tied up this afternoon in an on-line conference. Jennifer, a year-round resident of the island, runs an agency for vacation rentals. For the last couple of years, since her husband died, she has tried her hand at writing poetry, more for her own peace of mind than for public dissemination. Over her desk which looks out on the Gulf, she keeps a small shelf of books by American women poets like Marianne Moore, Elisabeth Bishop, and Sara Teasdale. But her favorite is Emily Dickinson, who must be a poet's poet since she is also a favorite of the speaker today.

It is difficult to say if Dudley is one of our regulars or not. He is certainly a devoted library patron, a familiar face at lectures, where he likes to chill out in the air conditioning. He's sitting behind me with his younger pal Chang, who keeps him busy with boat maintenance jobs.

We regulars have discovered that the pleasure Aristotle said was the chief end of poetry is something you have to work at. The pleasure he was referring to, of course, is not the kind the people out on the beach are enjoying today; it is the intellectual satisfaction one derives from gaining an enhanced awareness of what it means to be human. Since, even for simple island dwellers like us, being human today is far more complex than it used to be, contemporary poetry, as T. S. Eliot warns,[1]

1 In his essay on "The Metaphysical Poets."

is more "difficult"—that is, "more allusive, more indirect"—and thus requires more involvement and investment on the part of the reader.

Our resident poet on the island is not the type who writes pieces for Sunday supplements, although his work is accessible for any and all who put their minds to it. His poetry is not the sentimental kind you find on greeting cards, although it does feature the familiar scenes from Florida postcards: seascapes, sundowns, palms and birds. His themes are not trivial, but neither are they esoteric. They are topics you could bring up at any cocktail party: people you know, books you've read, music you've heard. Things you've often wondered about.

Nevertheless, there is a certain intimidation threshold for people approaching modern poetry. "Will I understand it?" they wonder. "Will I be up to the intellectual challenge? Or maybe I just won't feel it, proving that I lack artistic sensibility." These fears usually prove unfounded. The real barriers are mostly to be found in the novelty of ideas and how they are expressed. Like a new language, contemporary poetry simply needs to be listened to a while before the ears become attuned. Our job as regulars is to reassure, encourage, and offer a firm supportive arm through this initial wobbliness. As in a ski course, if one is still on one's feet after the first session, the worst is over; then one can begin to gain confidence and to exult in the feeling of breathing the rarified air of the peaks and surveying the whole world in a whole new way.

Maybe to calm novice nerves, maybe to overcome his own stage fright, our poet is standing at the door greeting people as they come in. From his New York accent overlaid with vague Teutonic resonance, we hear that he is not a native of these shores. He introduces himself as David Jaffin. Through his poetic powers of observation, he doesn't miss a beat in the banter of getting acquainted. Right away he notices that the lady at the door has smuggled a dog into the library under her windbreaker: "Don't worry, I won't bite; I'm a dog lover myself. My dachshund was a very learned animal who liked nothing better than to devour books. Did you know the library offers book readings for dogs? It's very therapeutic, not only for the dogs."

The dog smuggler, whose name is Rebecca, smiles and introduces her pet. David graciously shakes a paw, then turns to her husband. "Hello, I'm David Jaffin. Is that a Notre Dame shirt you're wearing? That was my favorite team when I was growing up in Scarsdale. It never occurred to me that some might consider it strange for a New York Jew

to support Notre Dame, but I was a loyal fan, even when I went off to college in Michigan. You're built like a linebacker yourself." Michael confirms that he still coaches a junior team. We also learn that he is a corrections officer who once was able to recite most of "The Face on the Barroom Floor," but has since forgotten all but a few lines.

While Jennifer offers Rebecca one of the few chairs left, David and Michael stand to the side and talk about sports. David, now in his seventies, reveals that because his sports were tennis and ping-pong, he's always maintained that speed trumps brute strength in football. With the official poet-receptionist thus engaged, his wife and deputy Rosemarie rushes to welcome the next shy neophyte who has just stuck her head through the door.

Her ambiguous look is one I've seen before. Half of it is a self-hesitancy that asks, "Am I in the right place?" The other half is a bold curiosity about us that asks, "What could a group of beach poetry readers possibly look like?" She's about to find out that we are a fairly well-stirred sampling of society from four continents. She will fit right in, and add South America to our continent tally. Silvia is her name, a Colombia-born physical therapist who often incorporates dance elements into her treatments. She gets the last seat in the front row, the one right in front of the speaker.

It won't be long now. David is gravitating toward the lectern and Rosemarie is handing out photocopies of today's poetry selection. Silence breaks out all over the room as each new recipient of the precious papers is instantly plunged into awe and perplexity. Outside our inner circle of regulars, no one has expected this.

Three pages of what at first looks like grocery lists in hieroglyphics. Three long columns of short, paired, unpunctuated items have apparently been sputtered out on an ancient typewriter, complete with inserts and write-overs by hand, without the benefit of antique correction fluid. Clumps of the columns have been demarcated by numbers and rows of hyphens, setting off what one can assume are individual poems. The lines appear liquefied, as if they are melting. One's instinctual reaction is to hold the sheet flat away from the body so that they don't drip right off into one's lap.

The new members are fingering through the pages, trying to figure out how this kind of poetry works. I turn next to me to help Rudiger, our neighbor on the south end of the island, whom we've brought along for the first time. We believe he has potential to join the regu-

lars. A brilliant semi-retired chemist from Munich, Rudiger still flies all around the country doing consulting work, but most of his free time these days is devoted to writing philosophical treatises. He's recently finished a monograph on the fulfillment of the Revelation, but now both science and enlightenment have all but drained from his face.

The numbers tell us where the poems begin, but from that point on we have to re-learn reading. Instead of our accustomed left-to-right eye movement, the stubbed lines of just two or three words lead us straight down the column with dizzying effect. Once the eye falls off these tiny ledges of line, there are no commas to slow, no periods to halt the vertical drop. And yet the reader must arrest the fall long enough to pick up the fragmented sense and somehow patch it onto the line below, where the process continues.

The sensation recalls one of our most persistent urban legends in Florida beach communities. Every spring break the tale is told of a bombed-out-of-his-mind student who loses his balance on his tenth-story hotel balcony and wakes up the next morning unhurt in the sand. What saves him is the regular interval of awnings spread over each successive balcony on the way down. Eight soft mini-landings before the final plop deposits him on the ground without spilling more than a few drops of his drink: a sudden coming to rest like the full stop that finally comes at the end of these poems.

But our poet has begun reading now, and the melodious, rhythmic flow of his steady, self-assured voice produces a quite different Florida sensation. It is the familiar ebb-and-flow of waves lapping the shore. As they break, their tips curl over in white, snail-like crests:

White-snailed
surfac

ing the
smoothed wa

ter's even
ed flow of

times reced
ing.

(from *Thought Colors*, p. 68)

sibilant
an s-sound as in "surface" (twice)

Can you count the sibilants in each stanza?

What sound effect do the sibilants suggest?

He reads it again, and the by the second run-through, we have heard how the lines do not abruptly break off and start again, but gently join and subtly merge into one another, producing a smooth stream of sound and sense. In its acoustic manifestation—particularly when intoned by the author himself—the poem unrolls as fluidly and fluently as the tides.

So why this disjointed visual presentation? Why do some endings detach themselves from their participles (surfac + ing, even + ed), whereas "snailed" and "smoothed" are left intact? "Water" is another element that breaks off at the end of a line. What logic of syllabification is at work here? This question has hooked the analytical mind of Rudiger, who confronts the poet with these anomalies.

"So if I understand your question, you want to know a rule, a rule that defines how I am supposed to place the words on the line? I think there is such a rule, but it doesn't come from a rule book. It is dictated by the sense of what the poem itself needs to say. My task is to discover that inner rule every time I write."

So the poet wants poetic license; that seems fair enough. Helen, who has studied the French symbolists, takes up the defense: "It all depends on what sounds he needs to produce an effect, as here the effect of waves. You can hear the waves in the flow of the lyrics."

But Rudiger is a scientist with a keen nose for nature's symmetry: "If you want to imitate the 'water's evened flow,' why don't you have even lines? These lines are all different lengths."

Childhood memories of the Mediterranean sounding on the breakers of Alexandria's ancient harbor run deep in Helen's blood. She has now turned her photocopy sideways and is holding it up in front of her. "Look, the verses end at different points, forming a wavy line. That's the coast," she says. "The flow is constant, but the coastline is uneven."

Silvia asks David to read it a third time. She wants to listen for the wave effect. This time he accentuates the surging motion of the sea by pausing ever so slightly at the end of each stanza. The "wa" in "water" was drawn out just long enough for me to get a picture of the smooth wash blanketing the sand before it recedes. I also hear some splashing in the distinct phonetic motif of sibilants (three in the first stanza, one each in the middle two, and two more in the last).

Jennifer, the amateur poet, catches David off guard with another perceptive question: "Is this a haiku?" Haiku is a Japanese verse of 17

syllables. It would be laid out in three lines:

White-snailed surfacing
The smoothed water's evened flow
Of times receding.

This is a pleasing arrangement of the words, with "surfacing" and "receding" balanced in the opening and closing. The longer middle line, with its open vowel sounds "ooh" and "ah," followed by long *e* and *o*, reproduces the stretching of the wave for its high-water mark. The three-line reading brings out the sequence of waves breaking, spreading out over the beach, and then receding.

But David was not consciously trying to produce a haiku. He explains that his creative work demands finding the right words with just the right combination of sounds. Once he has found these combinations, he doesn't want to force them into a set formal pattern like a haiku or a sonnet. He wants a form with as much formlessness as possible, in short "free verse." With its uneven lines across and expandable length down, the format of his poetry allows him the freedom to cluster words and parts of words in such a way that invites the reader to contemplate the clusters as semantic units unto themselves and to anticipate possible ways of completing their sense. An example of this reclustering of word elements is "smoothed wa," which reminds us that wa- is the elemental substance, the soul of a wa-ve, or Helen Keller's miracle-working Ur-syllable. Or that it is unstable and mutable, that it can ooze right off the sand and seep back down to the sea.

This is the picture of evanescence summarized in the last word "receding." It is here at the end that the poet introduces his metaphor, the "idea" the picture depicts. Water recedes from the shore as time slips away from our lives. It is a poetic idea that has fascinated poets from Ovid [1] to Shakespeare, all the way down to our contemporaries. It's an idea that will fascinate forever:

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end ... (Sonnet 60)

Both the sonnet and "White-snailed" compare a picture of waves to

1 This entertaining Roman poet living around the time of Augustus wrote the *Metamorphoses*, a collection of stories from mythology. His simile of the wave is discussed in the sidebar on page 186.

time, or "our minutes." But the metaphors are different. Shakespeare, who lived on a rocky island, saw the white-capped waves coming in from the sea and ending on the "pebbled shore," where they died. Our poet, who resides on a sandy island, sees the white-snailed waves coming alive when they hit land and then gradually dissipating, receding into the sea from which they arose. It's also helpful to contrast how both poems connect the wave picture to the idea of fleeting time. The sonnet makes the connection with a direct comparison: "like as ..." This kind of direct metaphor is called a simile. Our twenty-first-century poem simply puts "water" and "time" in parallel, leaving it to the reader to establish the connection:

waters – are flowing in
times – are flowing out
therefore, waters = times

During the discussion of 17-syllable verse, Rudiger has been counting and now seems satisfied with the result. By dividing the poem into 4 stanzas, he announces, David has in fact almost "evened the flow" of the waves. Each two-line stanza contains 4 syllables, not counting the elusive syllable that slipped off the end of "wa-." I wonder how successful Rudiger will be in statistically verifying all the slippery syllables awaiting us in the next selection.

Predator

That

snake slow
ly unwind

ing its bo
died length

Tongued
loud in ven

omous glare.

(from *Wind phrasings*, p. 350)

past participle
the third form of verbs which can act like an adjective

Our first poem had three past participles: "snailed," "smoothed," and "evened." In English, most concrete nouns can be used as verbs, but "to snail" is very unusual. We can compare "white-snailed" to Walt Whitman's use of "scallop-edged" to describe waves.

Can you find an unusual participle (or two) in this poem?

Another sinuous line of a poem, not a wave but a snake. The poet comments that he writes a lot of poems about animals, including dogs. Rebecca, still clutching her Chihuahua, requests a dog poem next time instead of one about snakes. "Florida," she says, "has too many real snakes. I don't need a poetic one to give me nightmares."

"Oh, but this one is just as real as all the others," replies the poet and reads the lines again, this time with the sadistic relish of a performer bent on giving his audience nightmares: Poe[1] reincarnated, ululating "Ulalume." Again, I'm struck by the difference between the smoothness of his reading and the dismembered appearance of the poem on the page.

"It's not a haiku," whispers Rudiger, who has counted 18 syllables this time. We notice that poem no. 2 is slightly different in other ways. We now have five stanzas, but the first and last consist of only one line each, leaving us with the same total of eight lines. Unlike the previous poem, whose first stanza incorporated the poem's title, "White-snailed," this poem bears its title, "Predator," apart from its text proper. The actual body of the poem begins with "that." This opening word is capitalized, as is the first word in stanza four, "tongued."

(1) That ...
(2) Tongued loud ...

So the page in front of me is saying there are two "sentences." The first one shows the snake stalking; the second, preparing to pounce. This, however, is inconsistent with the unbroken sound stream David has just delivered in his reading. Orally, the poem issued forth in a single sentence, with "tongued" the main verb: "The snake, rearing up, tongued." And how did it tongue? With its eyes!

Normally, we could count on punctuation and capitalization to resolve the problem of how many sentences we have. But here, the capital *T*s are telling me "two," while the lone full stop testifies to "one." Should this discrepancy worry anyone? To be honest, it violates my deeply-held principles of communication. Granting that a poet has license to flout conventions, as a language teacher, I believe that conforming to norms of marking main sentence features supports basic understanding. And, as a former tennis player, David ought to know

1 Edgar Allen Poe (1809-49), wrote both poems and short stories that enjoyed a wide popularity. Via his influence on the French symbolists, he has had a significant role in shaping the modern lyric.

about keeping the ball in bounds. So, not just to set the record straight, but also to protest, I ask the poet if he forgot a period after "length."

"Well, Warren, when it comes to punctuation, you have probably figured out by now that I'm a minimalist. In my effort to reduce everything to its bare essentials, I've almost done away with commas, and I often toss out periods and question marks, especially when everyone can see that another thought begins with the capital letter."

Now that we have it on authority that there are two "thoughts," I want to ask him why he feels a period at the end is necessary, since everyone can see that it's the end, but I'm wary of pushing the issue. We are here to discuss poetry, not punctuation. Anyway, he's right: In the readings I've attended over the years, I've learned to see the method in his madness. Following his capitals, the poem does break down into two verbal actions, both expressed in what must be participles. The snake is:

(1) slow/ly unwinding (present participle) ...
(2) Tongued loud (past participle) ...

The two thought units are set off by l-sounds, which provide a kind of poetic punctuation:

(1) slow/ly → length
(2) loud → glare

Helen, who calls "free verse" by its French name "vers libre," says she doesn't think a period belongs after "length." Looking over at me, she comments: "It would spoil the effect of the snake continuing to unwind." She reads the whole first sentence aloud:

That / snake slow / ly unwind / ing its bo / died length

She pauses ever so briefly at the end of every stanza, as David did when reading the first poem. In doing so, she enunciates each final syllable as if giving it a kiss. With its distinct *-th*, "length" is elongated. "You hear it? The snake is still stretching out when the second sentence begins."

Silvia answers for me: "I hear it!"

From the medical records she deals with, Silvia knows terms like "body weight" and "body size." "But what," she wants to know, "is 'bodi*ed* length'?"

I decide to give her the grammatical version: "*Bodied* is the past participle of the verb *to body*."

"Body is a verb? What can you body?"

"This is what poets do all the time with their imagination. Shakespeare says that they explore the whole universe with their 'mind's eye' until they come across things that no ordinary person has ever seen before. For you and me, these are 'airy nothings' that can only be 'bodied forth' by the power of poetic imagination. Once the poets breathe life into these fanciful forms and pull them out of the air, they put them down on paper by giving them verbal expression. Now everybody who reads poetry can experience them."

And as imagination bodies forth,
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them into shapes ... (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

"So it's an imaginative word?"

"It's a concrete word for an imaginative process."

Helen takes "bodied" to the next level: "So if the snake unwinds his *bodied* length, the poem might be implying that he also has a *disembodied* dimension. That explains what's going on in the second sentence. The snake extends himself even further by sticking out his tongue and emitting venomous words. What comes out is a disembodied extension of his bodied length. It's the second phase of the attack, verbal abuse."

Rudiger objects: "Why do you call it a 'he'? In German, all snakes are feminine."

Carol shoots him a venomous look, and raises another objection: "Venomous words? I thought the glances were venomous."

"The snake's tongue is 'loud in venomous glare.' Words can glare at you just as glances can." Helen is familiar with the French symbolist technique of describing what we hear (loud speech) in terms of what we see (venomous glare). Her insight about words glaring at us could also be reversed: a glare can shout. But in talking about "venomous words" aiding in the attack, Helen has raised an interesting question about what kind of snake we are dealing with here. One that senses malice, verbalizes it, and puts it into action?

I can see that Silvia is still stymied by "bodied." I explain that poets often prefer participles to main verbs because the participial phrase is more compressed: "A participle is half verb, but also half adjective, so

it can just be tacked onto a noun. This helps them focus on *describing* what's going on without having to *report* it. Unlike scientists or journalists, poets avoid flat propositions when describing something. For example, a non-poet might say:

The snake has slowly unwound its body and is now fixing on its prey.

But this distracts from the close-up descriptive mode by framing the event as a report. In the end, a reporter's perspective often shifts the speaker into the narrative or didactic mode. We move away from the snake itself and step back to view the wider context. That's why David has described the same event by means of participles: the snake unwinding and the snake tongued."

David just looks across at me as if to ask: "What exactly is a participle again?"

"Of course, poets make these decisions instinctively. They don't analyze how to compress their descriptions by using a vivid present participle like 'unwinding' or adding on a past participle like 'tongued.' It's all second nature to them, like finding the right sound clusters."

David says that his subject can be anything, real or imagined, but that nine-tenths of his inspiration is expended on putting that subject into words. "Sometimes what I want to express is not original at all; it can be something quite mundane like the form of a wave or the motion of a snake. But I'm trying to *say* it in a new way that makes you the reader *see* it in a new way."

Jennifer is wondering about the opening stanza. This prominent position is occupied by a single word, "that," an unimportant pronoun that goes with "snake." She says she would never dream of giving such a utilitarian word like "that" the whole spotlight of the opening. "That what? What's that?" Everybody seems to have an idea about what "that" is doing up there all by itself—everyone, that is, but the poet, who simply nods in quiet contemplation of all the explanations given.

Rebecca thinks that the speaker has just seen the snake and that he's too shocked to be able to stutter more than a "that ..." before needing an instant to catch his breath.

Helen sees the "that" as a demonstrative pronoun pointing to something at a safe distance: "It's not 'this snake here,' but 'that snake over there.' When you see a snake, your primary concern is how far away it is. But then the distance starts to narrow as the snake slowly unwinds.

By the end of the poem, the snake is eyeball-to-eyeball with you."

Carol adds: "Not only does 'that' point to something away from you, the word itself is a small, ugly, bunched-together pronoun standing for 'snake.' It represents the snake in the coiled position. At first, we don't realize what it is, but then the next two stanzas show the 'that' uncoiling."

Helen is an avid movie-goer: "If it's like in the movies, you first have something curled up in the dark you can't quite make out. That indefinable 'that.'"

Silvia tries to imagine the sound track: "Yeah, you just hear one long scary chord."

"T-h-a-a-a-t." Helen imitates an oriental snake motif, like the shark signature in *Jaws*. "One long beat, followed by two ('snake slow'), followed by three ('ly unwind'). Now this slow, threatening prelude unwinds into a faster pace as the snake closes in for the kill."

"The word 'unwinding' reminds me of Emily Dickinson's snake," says Jennifer. "She describes it as a 'whip-lash unbraiding.' That sounds like a quick, snappy movement."

"Unwinding" is the most descriptive word in the poem. Its fluctuating string of *un-*, *-ind-*, and *-ing* recalls the Latin word *unda* (wave), from which we get "red*unda*nt." Both "unwinding" and "redundant" produce a wave-like rhythm through duplication of the n-sounds, forcing the tongue to undulate. The most famous snake in English literature, Milton's [1] serpent in the Garden of Eden, "floated redundant," i.e. in a back-and-forth wave motion. Of course, *that* was the snake with the big mouth, the one who "tongued loud" enough to unseat mankind from paradise. Not just any snake, but *that* snake.

Rudiger, having grasped the purpose of uneven lines in the previous poem, has a counter-hypothesis to offer. He thinks the "that" is the head of the snake and the last line is the tail. The whole poem is an image of an oscillating reptile, moving in the same hypnotic coils as the waves in "White-snailed."

Jennifer takes a stab at answering her own question: "I like Helen's interpretation. It matches the sound structure of the poem. At first, we only hear the snake hissing with the sibilants in 'snake slow,' but by the end, the snake is roaring in our ears, 'tongued loud.' Of course, a snake can't roar, but if it's within striking distance glaring right at you

1 John Milton (1608 - 74), author of the great English epic, *Paradise Lost*. His vivid description of the snake (gliding "with indented wave") is in the middle of Book IX.

it might seem more like a lion."

So the snake reminds Jennifer of a lion. Is the poet drawing a link between deadly reptiles and wild mammals, or does our snake exhibit attributes even higher up the evolutionary ladder?

Now Michael speaks up, someone who has seen his share of the violent side of humanity both on and off the football field: "This isn't really about a snake at all, is it? Snakes don't get up angrily from the table and yell in your face. Snakes don't abuse you verbally. They may be poisonous, but they can't kill you with poisonous looks. The really vicious predators out there are human beings."

We are all impressed. Michael has finally broken through to the metaphorical level where the technique of personification is at work. If the animal itself is willfully malicious as opposed to naturally dangerous, the poet is comparing snake venom to human hate. This is what Helen was hinting at when she attributed "venomous words" to the snake, thereby putting it in the same class as Milton's serpent, who was endowed with "tongue of brute and human sense." Or, if we read the poem like Jennifer, the snake only *seems* to roar and glare. In that case, we are the ones who project our own fearful reactions onto animal instincts. In both readings, the snake is personified.

This leads our group into a brief digression on close encounters with snakes. Everyone who has spent much time in Florida has made their very personal up-close acquaintance. Chang recalls learning the English word "slither" and deciding at that moment that English was as descriptive as Chinese. David gets us back on track by announcing a poem about something you never see in Florida.

Icicled fear

Icicled-
fear.

piercing
sword-

blood-
cold.

(from *A Birth in Seeing*, p. 145)

kenning
a poetic compound formed by connecting two nouns, like "sword-storm" to mean "battle"

Kennings were frequently used by poets in Old English and Old Teutonic. One of the many Norse kennings for "sword" was "blood-icicle." Is this ancient kenning the inspiration for this modern poem?

Six words, fired off like six shots. And then the same thing again, as if the poet were re-enacting a crime. Whereupon the room goes quiet as we all just stare at our photocopies. Was that all? Maybe it was just the introduction, like the first ten seconds of one of those homicide investigations Carol watches, when you see it being done but not who did it. But for this most difficult poem so far, it is clear that the one responsible, our poet, is not going to offer much help. He's smiling over at Michael and asking him cheerfully if he's "getting into" the poetry.

For Michael, whose experience with modern poetry is limited to exactly three examples, this must be the moment when he decides he's had enough. But suddenly those old barroom ballads bubble up from his memory, and out comes an ice-cold sober analysis that once again earns murmurs of approval from us regulars: "It makes perfect sense to me. First, you are struck by fear, then by a weapon. Then, you bleed. Finally, you are out cold and you turn cold. End of story."

A whole tragedy in three acts? Each act a stanza, each stanza two words? Could that be what is going on here? The storyteller trying to break a speed record? A punctuation minimalist turning into a plot minimalist?

Which puts me back on my hobbyhorse. Since no one else is commenting on Michael's story angle, I decide to take the conversation down to its lowest denominator, the solid, non-speculative ground of punctuation. "David," I ask, "why is there no hyphen in the title, but in the first stanza, which repeats the title, a hyphen suddenly appears?"

He assures me that the title role has to go to unhyphenated fear, but that the hyphen definitely belongs in the first stanza where "fear is fully knit into the fabric of action." In other words, when the poem popped out of his head, it had a hyphen, but when the title popped out, it lacked one. I guess if you ask one of these modernists when he hyphenates and when he doesn't, you deserve to hear another speech about why poets can't be bound or even bothered by that hobgoblin of little minds, consistency.

"I was just asking because I sense that there is something going on here with hyphens. We have three stanzas, each one with a hyphen that ends a line, sticking out like a dagger. Three miniature swords piercing out of the poem." For someone who does not even hyphenate wa-ter at the break of a line, a sudden epidemic of three hyphens has to be some kind of calculated visual message.

David grins. "Ah, Warren, you're seeing daggers, the handles toward

your hand, perhaps? Can these hyphens be sword blades? Of course. Could the abrupt lines be sword thrusts followed by three shocked silences? Certainly. Do words like 'ice' and 'pierce' have sharp edges? You bet. What I want to do with the all the typographical elements—symbols, spaces, and words—is to place them in such a way as to create new impressions for the reader that stimulate—even irritate—the imagination. If I laid everything out so that nothing jars or provokes, what you would end up with is plain prose, and a reader like you would not get the kind of interesting picture you just described: the body of the poem bristling with tiny daggers, as if it were a pin cushion."

So he wants to project new images in our *imag*inations. OK, for a reader like me, hyphenated terms like "icicled-fear" and "sword-blood" conjure up another impression, the primitive feel of Old English poetry. There's a passage in our first English epic, *Beowulf*, where the hero is fighting the monster Grendel's mother and picks up an old sword, a "blood-icicle," made by giants. Her neck pierced, the "water-hag, damned thing of the deep,"[1] falls over dead. But her life-blood was as poisonous as the acid that ran in the veins of the alien in the Ridley Scott sci-fi flick:

> Then the blade began to waste away from the battle sweat [= blood], the war-sword into battle-icicles [= deadly icicles]. That was a wondrous thing, that it should melt, most like the ice when the Father loosens the frost's fetters [= chains], undoes the water-bonds [= icicles].[2]

In this world of warrior heroes, blood is battle-sweat or wound-sea, a war-sword is a blood-icicle or wound-ice, icicles are water-bonds or water-ropes. Death is sword-sleep. Each of these formulaic kennings is a two-noun metaphor, a poetic comparison, a tiny poem within the poem. David's metaphor compares fear to a sword, ice-brook tempered like Othello's and ice-steeled. The main point of comparison is that both can pierce our being and turn our blood cold. If a sword is a "blood-icicle," then fear is a cold, piercing blood-icicle. It's as cold as sword-blood, or sword-blood-cold. It is fear that has "icicled" and attacked. While in *Beowulf* a real sword turns into an icicle that dis-

1 Michael Alexander, *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1973.

2 Talbot Donaldson, *Beowulf*, Norton, New York, 1966.

solves in blood, in our modern poem the figurative sword, fear, hardens into an icicle that freezes the blood.

The blood-icicle metaphor is illustrated by the sword-like shape of the poem. Rudiger, who has been counting again, points out to our group that the first line of each stanza tapers from three syllables down to two, and finally to one: "blood." He asks David if all his poems are cut in contours resembling waves, snakes, or icicles.

"The outer form or shell of a poem is only one way to produce an image. One of my favorite poets is George Herbert,[1] who occasionally used such silhouette figures as one of his visual tools to show the hidden realities behind physical forms. His poem 'The Altar,' shaped like a communion table, has served for centuries as a model for those poets who seek to explore the endless possibilities of printed patterns. This has led to a whole school of 'concrete poetry.' But for Herbert, the visual was just one dimension of his art. He was a great lover of music and recognized that the poet is a painter who primarily paints in sounds."

Silvia agrees: "The sounds come first. The lyrics have to fit into the music." For the guitarist Silvia, poetry is something both sung and danced. It has words that move your soul and a beat that moves your body, whereby message and metricality are in perfect mind-body sync, as in Joe Arroyo's salsa classics. Poetry is meaning merged with music.

Silvia has introduced a key third element, language, into David's remarks on sight and sound. The poet is a wordsmith, a crafter of lyrics. But is she right about the lyrics fitting into a predetermined musical scheme? That may be true of traditional metrical poetry, but with free verse, isn't it the other way around, with the music growing out of the unique phrasal arrangements? David has said that he doesn't want to be pressed into standard molds like haiku or sonnet but to fashion his own original sonic textures out of language. And isn't it language as well that generates the colors and forms that make up the images? Language seems to be the basic material the poetic artist shapes; sight and sound are but functions of speech. Although poems appeal to our eyes and ears, the poet is in essence neither a painter nor a musician, but someone who works in words and creates in human language, the most valid of all media to reproduce and record human experience.

1 George Herbert (1593 - 1633), one of the "metaphysical" poets.

I. Form & Feel

It is the way a poet works with language that lends the poem its form and feel. How the words are laid out and structured reveals a form; how they sound when strung together produces a feel. Form, then, is how the poem looks; feel, or style, is how it sounds. Ideally, form and feel should suit each other, as the epic form suited Milton's "grand style" or the short lyric proved the perfect vehicle for Emily Dickinson's introspective wit.

In traditional metrical poetry, genre templates like the epic, sonnet, or ode set the formal framework; with free verse, poets are at liberty to create formats that match their own styles and temperaments. Walt Whitman, the first real master of free verse in English,[2] had a vigorous, unbridled style with lots of exclamation marks—what he called a "barbaric yawp." In lines that seem to roll and tumble along from their own energy, rhythmic patterns are measured out in natural breathing breaks. Much of the rhythm is accentuated by repetition, as here with "words," "those," and "they":

> A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,
> Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea,
> They are in the air, they are in you.

Whitman's style strives to express the inexhaustible, pulsing rhythms of nature: the motions of the earth, sea, and human body. In lengthy catalogues of nationalities, sounds, animals, rivers, trees, mountain ranges, American regions, body parts, laborers and their tools, he embraces and celebrates the whole physical world. Perfectly in sync with this passionate, "fierce-throated" style[3] is his form: a furious procession

2 Walt Whitman (1819 - 92), a contemporary of Emily Dickinson.

3 "Fierce-throated beauty" was Whitman's description of a locomotive, but the epithet can equally apply to his poetry. Whitman saw the train as "type of the modern—emblem of motion and power" and even invoked the engine as his muse: "Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music."

of what he calls "upright lines," the rush of curves, angles and dots that make up his songs. The effusive, expressionistic kind of lyric with longer, irregular lines packed with heightened emotion goes all the way back to the ancient Greek poet Pindar[1] who in lofty language lavished praise on the victors of the Olympic games.

Our contemporary poet, David Jaffin, has also developed an outer form that suits his own inner voice. And, like Whitman's, the free verse form is every bit as individualized. Each poem is a fingerprint on the page, an unmistakable trademark of how the poet works with words. And there is no mistaking that it is a very different kind of poetic personality at work here. Instead of long, sprawling lines to sing songs of the rolling earth in big gulps of breath, Jaffin slows things down by abbreviating the lines, cutting them off abruptly at places we would never expect, and grouping them in delicate pairs. Instead of "upright lines" that propel us forward a whole lungful of sense at a time, we encounter jagged shards of sentences that have to be pieced together, forcing us to stop and think.

David Jaffin calls his lines "fragile," meaning on the one hand they break off easily, and on the other, they carry no excess weight. This "slenderness" of form, as he describes it, goes hand in hand with his slimmed-down style, where only the bare bones of his message are sketched. Taut structure, terse style. Everything is economical, reduced to the essentials. The vocabulary is culled from the everyday, the tone is informal, the sentences are brief and trim, simple but sometimes eccentric in their pithiness. All of these are typical elements of the classic style: reflective and ordered, compressed and controlled, succinct but edgy. "Horatian" it has been named, after the the Roman writer Horace; [2] we moderns might call it "Dickinsonesque."

Not that Emily Dickinson did not know moods of exuberance: She even wrote a poem about exhilaration.[3] But in her poem, exhilaration is not a brash, blustering wind, but a force more "like a breeze" that gently lifts us up and lets us "soberly" descend back to earth. Her poem itself is neat and orderly, just eight fragile lines in all.

Here's another eight-line piece in the sober, restrained, classic tradi-

1 Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1949), p. 230. Pindar is still famous today for his *Victory Odes*. Horace compared his style to the unstoppable momentum of a river that has overflowed its banks.

2 Horace, who lived in the first century B.C., wrote a handbook for poets, the "Ars Poetica" (Art of Poetry).

3 *Fr* 1157

tion of Horace and Dickinson. In it, Jaffin describes the form and feel of the fragile line:

Fragile line

s
of inter

twining
thoughts A

slender
ness of bran

ched design
s.

(from *Dream Flow*, p. 78)

dangling *-s*
The 20th-century poet E. E. Cummings closed his short piece "Sunset" with a description of a "tall wind" raking the sea as the sun casts its last glow. Wind and wave now awaken dreams, the last word of the poem. But the final *-s* in "dreams" is detached and left to dangle on a line of its own, a curling S mirroring the shimmer of the sea and the slow, winding transition of daylight into dream … -s.

Right away we notice a pattern from "Predator": two sentence units, each with a participle instead of a main verb. This is description at its leanest. By using participles, which describe nouns in terms of vivid actions, the poet can cut back not only on verbs with all their auxiliaries and inflections but also on those decorative adjectives that more Pindaric writers like to pile on for padding. Rendering them into prose, we can construe the sentence ideas as:

(1) Thoughts are intertwining in fragile lines.
(2) Designs have branched into slender forms.

Both units are perfectly parallel:

(1) fragile lines	intertwining	thoughts
(2) slenderness	branched	designs

But "branched design/s" is not only linked with "thoughts" via parallelism, but also with "fragile line/s" via two devices: rhyme (acoustic) and dangling *-s* (visual). These produce a bookend effect, whereby the closing of the poem echoes the opening and in doing so rounds out the whole work.

The links "thoughts=designs" and "designs=lines" reveal the metaphor: The poet's ideas and their branching interconnectedness become visible in the designs of the lines. Like intertwining branches

weaving their way s-like along the slender, fragile lines of verse, the thought-designs have been bodied forth for all to see. The poem—every poem—is a web of finely wrought ideas, a product of the mind. This contrasts sharply with Whitman's vision of his "leaves of grass" as a sounding out of the physical world, and every poem a raw act of nature, a "journeywork of the stars."

The Pindaric/Whitmanian and Horatian/Dickinsonesque styles reflect two very different moods or tempers: on the one hand the exuberant and the emotional, and on the other the thoughtful and meditative. Every poetic personality will lean to one of these poles: either an inspired songster letting it loose or a careful craftsman keeping it lean and mean. It is only natural that, when voiced, emotions blossom into upright lines bursting with energy, while ideas tend to germinate into fragile lines dripping with reflection. Both Pindar and Horace wrote odes, but they adapted the forms to match their styles. Now we speak of either the "Pindaric" or "Horatian" ode, each characterized by a Pindaric or Horatian style. Of course, emotions and ideas are not a strict either-or. An emotionally edged poet will also think, but spin the sense out and charge it with sensibility, while a Horatian tends to distill and compress ideas. An intellectually biased poet like Dickinson will also express emotions, but keep them reined in and analyze them, while a Pindaric will tend to ride the flow of feeling.

Cardinal Newman[1] defined style as "a thinking out into language," a verbalization of thoughts. In fact, says Newman, the way we think and the way we speak cannot be separated, as we think in words (*logoi*) and word in thoughts (*logoi*). The Greek word *logos* encompasses both "speech" and "reason" because they are both the same faculty. This view of style cautions us that whenever we open our mouths, we are revealing in the style of our language the designs of our thoughts, and that not all of it is poetry. It is precisely the view that is expressed in "Fragile line": Our thoughts become manifest in the branching designs of our utterances. Poetry is only achieved when the designs of our thoughts take on a truthfulness, a "rightness," that goes beyond mere life-likeness. Poems will take on a life of their own, when what we speak becomes, in the words of Wallace Stevens,[2] pure "abstraction

1 In his lecture on "Literature" in *The Idea of a University*.

2 Wallace Stevens (1879 - 1955), a New Englander from Pennsylvania who spent a lot of time here in Florida. While many readers have found Stevens' work mysteriously beautiful, others feel it is mystifyingly abstruse. One way he defines true poetry is: "sounds passing through sudden rightness" ("Of Modern Poetry," see page 92).

blooded, as a man by thought."[3]

"Poet," as Helen's husband George never tires of reminding us, is another Greek word. It means "maker, creator, designer." The poet-designer shapes true and pure living lines of thought; the resulting design is his personal style, as individual as his own mind.

The exuberant Pindaric style will unleash ideas in a torrent: The more words used to think out the ideas into language, the longer they will be elaborated, leaving the reader to gather, order, and summarize them. The Horatian style will condense ideas: The fewer words needed, the sketchier the representation of those ideas will be, leaving gaps for the reader to fill in and to expand on. This can be tricky for those not yet familiar with a poet's way of handling words, or for those unaccustomed to dealing with a whole range of possible meanings at once.

As we proceed with the next set of poems, we regulars will have to focus on helping our new participants find the units of sense in the fragile Horatian lines and piece them together in meaningful ways. Often, this piecing process will produce multiple meanings, so-called "plurisigns." For uninitiated readers like Michael, who are used to extracting straightforward facts from official reports, statistics, and Internet news, David's highly condensed fragile lines might prove to be a stumbling block. For example, our first poem today opened with two participles: "white-snailed" and "surfacing." But it's not the surfacing that is white-snailed, nor is it the water's flow. Both participles modify a word that is not even mentioned in the poem, namely the waves. The intended effect is surprise, but some might simply be puzzled: What is going on here? Or peeved: Why is the writer breaking up and parceling out what he wants me to know? These are natural first reactions, but so far the neophytes Michael, Rebecca, Rudiger, and Silvia have accepted the poet's challenge and shared our group's delight in sorting through these fractured phrases and the manifold ambiguities they open up.

I notice that Jennifer has also invited a friend along today. So far this first-time visitor has been content to observe, but I expect that as the group loosens up, so will she.

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3 Wallace Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" ("It Must Be Abstract" VI). Stevens is another modern poet who likes unusual participles. A poetic thought must be "blooded," i.e. acquire flesh and blood, in the same way that a person is "bodied" forth by the animating power of mind.

1 Etched on a Page

When a poet bodies something forth on paper, what we see is not only the black shapes of the lines themselves, whether they look like waves, snakes, or icicles, but also the white clouds of the surrounding spaces. Every word is cushioned by a space before and after, every sentence by a pause. These breaks beat out tempi; spacing creates pacing. Pauses and spaces also invite reflection on what has come before, as well as anticipation of what comes next.

As we turn to the last poem in the first column of our photocopies, a hush of expectation comes over the room.

Cushioned
These

clouds
softer felt

in the ease
of space.

(from *That Sense for Meaning*, p. 143)

anastrophe
poetic inversion, a reversal of the normal order of words

Instead of:	"the clouds felt softer,"
anastrophe gives us:	"the clouds softer felt."

"Ease of space," Jennifer luxuriantly draws out the sibilants. "I like the placid feel of that. It sounds like 'age of peace.'"

But the friend she has brought along today, an athletic-looking woman in a safari jacket, disagrees: "It sounds more like an ad for a jumbo washing machine."

David winces. His worst fear is of lapsing into some kind of cliché.

"It's not the ease of convenience or commodiousness," snaps Jennifer, "but the ease of repose. The poet is ... cushioned."

"He's taking it easy," muses Rebecca. "He's lying in the sand on a summer day, looking up at the clouds."

"How can that be?" Jennifer's friend protests loudly. In her outfit, she looks somewhat like an Everglades alligator hunter. "How can he lie on the ground and pinch the clouds? Where does it say that? It sounds more as if he's floating through the air."

"It's easy if you're a poet," says Jennifer, who is the only one in our group who has actually tried her hand at verse.

"Floating on clouds?"

"No, feeling them. You sense them so intensely and intimately, you can just reach up and touch them."

Helen, who had emphasized the distance in "*that* snake," now sees the close-up quality of the demonstrative "these." "*These* clouds—the ones right here—these clouds are so near I can touch them."

"Then how come I *felt* them, in the past tense?" asks Carol. "If they are here and now in their nearness, why aren't I *feeling* them?"

Knowing David's propensity for participles, I theorize to myself that *felt* might not be the simple past at all, but the participial "clouds [having] felt." One of the ambiguities of a language as economical as English in the hands of a poet bent on economizing.

"Maybe you're not feeling the clouds themselves," surmises Rebecca. "Maybe you're just stretched out on the grass in the sun with your eyes closed and suddenly you feel the shadow of some clouds passing overhead. They feel colder and weightier than you imagine how they actually feel in the sky."

Jennifer likes Rebecca's lazy-day setting: "Yes, the shadows are even more substantial than the clouds themselves. The ones up in the ease of space were softer, fluffier than the sudden palpable darkness passing over your skin."

Helen spots a metaphor: "Not the sky, but your life has clouded over. Maybe the clouds have blanketed everything, turning the whole world gray and damp, like the clammy morning fog on the beach. These ground clouds felt softer when they were part of the sky."

Carol, whose side of our bed is piled high with pillows, has a different version of what constitutes a lazy day: "What if 'these clouds' represent something more physical than the clouds of life? The title of the poem is 'Cushioned.' What if the poet is cushioned in a bed, feeling really comfortable? The pillows are so soft they remind him of cushy clouds."

"I don't think the poet is coo-shun." Now Silvia has entered the fray with her lilting accent. "I think the cushioning is the air." Air-cushioned walkers and braces are her daily tools of the trade in rehab. "Air is the best agent to absorb shock, much better than pillows, foam rubber, or plaster casts. Air fills all the space and always fits. You can inflate the air chambers to adjust to any degree of swelling."

"So if your patients can be cushioned by air, why can't the poet be too?" inquires Jennifer.

"Air surrounds the clouds on all sides. The clouds are completely cushioned. They feel softened and more agile in the free ease of space."

It finally dawns on me how Silvia has been reading the poem: "So the clouds weren't feeling softer to the observer's touch; the poet is just imagining the clouds' own feelings." This is another of the ambiguities of *feel* that English allows and that poets or comedians can exploit:

- How does the shoe feel?
- Pretty worn out and a little kicked around.

Rudiger, who travels extensively for both conferences and life-enrichment, has spent a lot of time tramping through the Holy Land. He now has a third lazy-day scenario: "It's like floating on the Dead Sea. You're completely buoyant because of the heavy salt content. You feel softer and lighter in the ease of the sea."

"You feel as light as a cloud," I say.

Rosemarie looks up from her page: "Not wandering 'lonely as a cloud,' but feeling light as a cloud."[1]

Rudiger's head is full of the cloud symbols in Revelation. For him, clouds have a distinct theological as well as chemical profile: "It is a completely ambivalent existence up there, caught between heaven and earth. Of all the objects we're familiar with, clouds are maybe the most otherworldly."

"Especially here in Florida," says the Englishman in the back row. "Your clouds are perfectly ethereal, especially when whirled around the aureole of a sunset."

"It's a shame then," says Helen, "that English doesn't have a more ethereal word than 'cloud.' It rhymes with 'loud,' the opposite of 'soft,' and has the harsh sound of 'clod,' which, when you think about it, is the complete opposite of a cloud. In Greek, *sunnefo* sounds like 'softer,' only softer." She pronounces the Greek word as if it were whispered by an oracle.

"Maybe that's why David used it here." Jennifer is studying her photocopy. "Notice that 'softer' is the only word in the poem that's not one of those choppy monosyllabics."

"What kind of Slavics?" The alligator hunter leans over Jennifer's sheet, as if it held an answer the other copies were somehow not privy to.

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1 William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" and many other poems about nature.

Meanwhile, Helen's comment has triggered two side conversations that David, as moderator, is trying to sort out. The one behind me erupted between Michael and Chang, the free-lance software designer/developer from Taiwan. Chang was exasperatedly repeating "you win?" to Michael, first leading me to think they were following a live horse race via BlackBerry. Then I realized that he was only trying to teach Michael the correct pronunciation of *yún*, the Mandarin word for cloud, which Michael had innocently asked about. For a moment, David relishes the upward-striving intonation of *yún*, but soon he is taking contributions from Silvia and Carol, who think *nube* and *Wolke* capture the true essence of cloudness.

On the far side of the room, the couple sitting next to Helen, who I later find out are tourists from the London area, have been informing her that not only does English possess a rich profusion of poetic terms for clouds, many of them were actually coined by their Victorian namesake, Gerard Manley Hopkins[2] (no relation), who constantly watched the skies for inspiring formations. He dubbed them "silk sacks," "torn tufts," and "tossed pillows." Or, their favorite, "meal-drift."

"'Meal-drift' is a poem unto itself," admits Helen. "Flour drifting in the sky like our sand dunes. But it doesn't count as a word. As we know, it's a kenning."

While these two off-topic cross-currents were playing themselves out, the whole room could hear Jennifer answering her friend's questions about "softer":

"Why isn't it one syllable like all the others? Why not just 'soft'?"

"Softer is softer than soft!"

"But why 'softer'? Softer than what?"

"Than ever!"

"That's exactly the way they talk about sheets and pillowcases on TV: 'whiter than white and softer than ever!' I still think it sounds like a washing machine ad."

Rudiger, I notice, has circled the word "softer" on his photocopy. Next, he has drawn a wider circle around the whole poem. "Softer" is dead-center, right in the bull's eye.

Since the discussion has hopelessly splintered, Rudiger and I go one-on-one on the poem's structure. "Three stanzas." Rudiger's analytical mind is dissecting the poem. "In the central stanza, three words." The

2 Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 - 89), a British poet noted for his extraordinary sense of musicality.

middle word, 'softer,' is flanked by two harder words, 'cloud' and 'felt.'"

"And the central stanza," I add, "is cushioned between the soft 'these' and 'ease.'"

"Precisely. The whole poem is like a layered cushion. And this time, not a pin cushion."

"The title 'Cushioned' has the same sound structure as the middle stanza. The hard *cu-* like 'clouds,' the soft center *-sh-*, then the hard *-ed* like the final *-t* in 'felt.' Cu-sh-ion-ed! Imagine your head hits the pillow: Cuh! Then the air seeps out: Ushh! As you are softly lowered: Yan! Finally, you land: Duh!"

But before we have a chance to report our findings to the group, David has called for order and is moving on to the second column. In this poem, we're still suspended in space, but this time they're words that are being cushioned, not clouds, in inner, not outer, space.

A Pause
between

words the
space of

what's ans
wering it

self from.

(from *Eye-sensing*, p. 3)

refrain
a phrase repeated at the end of each stanza

In Poe's "The Raven," the refrain is the sole word "nevermore." In the modern poem to the left, there is no real refrain. Instead, each stanza (except the third) concludes with a preposition. This refrain-like tag changes: "between" → "of" → "from," each time shifting the wordings into new spatial relationships.

David looks up from his paper expectantly. He has read the poem twice, and elicited nothing but stunned silence. A pause ensues, a space of what's not answering.

As a regular, it would be incumbent on me to take a first shot, but I can't seem to get a bearing on this pirate poem with its renegade syntax, all its final prepositions defiantly flapping in the breeze and the ghostly antecedent of "it" stowed away somewhere far below deck. What's "itself"? What's answering itself from where? Is it perhaps the space of ...? Of what? The frustrating thing for someone like me whose brain is grammatically hardwired is that while I cannot make out what rules are governing this so-called "sentence," I can also see that it somehow—in defiance of all the rules known to man—does

make sense. In fact, no one else in the group seems to be the slightest bit discomforted by the convoluted grammar. It's obviously another example of what David, in another poem,[1] has called "malleable grammar," a convenient slap-on coating that obediently conforms to the edges of what he wants to say, like air cushions. New forms of thought require new rules of slap-dash flexi-syntax. I begin scribbling a few transformation sequences.

"What inspired me here was listening to the adagios of Haydn's symphonies." David has often mentioned that Haydn is his favorite composer. "This pause between words is very much like those spaces between his classically concise statements. The pauses reflect upon each idea—even deepen it—thereby completing the musical thought."

"The meaning isn't in the music itself, but in the pauses?" asks Rebecca.

"The musical phrase puts forward a premise. The pause opens up a moment of reflection for this premise to answer or to fulfill itself."

"Isn't it the listener who enters the pause?" asks Helen. "Isn't the meaning injected by the listener's own reaction to the music?"

"It's not a matter of reading something into it, or reading between the lines. We listeners actually become one with the music. Once it becomes ours, we can hear our own music answering itself." The idea of the audience merging emotionally with a poem sounds like Wallace Stevens,[2] whom David has often cited as his main poetic influence. But the idea of a poem responding to itself in the "pause between words" sounds almost mystical. Maybe the grammatical puzzle pieces I'm missing are also being supplied from these in-between spaces: a grammar of the gaps?

Breaking another longish silence, a gravelly voice pipes up from the back corner, someone who has been quiet thus far. It's Dudley, a bearded marine mechanic whose uniform both on and off duty is a T-shirt and swimming trunks. During his first drop-out period, he spent over a year in Thailand, "waiting for a wave" as he puts it. He chose Southwest Florida for his second drop-out phase because it reminded him a little of Southeast Asia. His beach trailer is rumored

1 "Grammar's" in *These Time-Shifting Thoughts*, p. 147.

2 In "Of Modern Poetry" (see page 92), Stevens describes the poet's audience as listening not to the poem, "but to itself, expressed / In an emotion as of two people." By imaginatively partaking in the poet's music, the partaker actually becomes a part of it. In another poem ("The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm"), a slightly different metaphor carries the same message: "The reader became the book."

to be filled to the rafters with well-thumbed paperbacks. "It's like the Om in Buddhism," he says, referring to the sacred syllable that is intoned to induce meditation. "When you chant Om, you vibrate in the same frequency as the cosmic pulse, the music of the spheres. You are in tune with the universe. Then, when the tone ceases, you step into the infinite silence, the thoughtless inner space of a trance. The perfect trance that imparts ultimate awareness."

"All religions seek silence for insight," says Tony the tourist. "Many go up the mountain to find it."

"Where there's also plenty of empty space to stare into," adds Wendy, his wife.

"But some monks meditate by giving themselves up to the music, immersing themselves in the rhythms," Jennifer notes. "Those dervishes in Turkey, for example."

"The Sufis," says Helen. "Their whirling dance transports them into ecstasy."

Silvia is remembering a book she's read, a novel by the Brazilian Paulo Coelho. "It was about an ecstatic dancer. Actually, she studied engineering and worked in a bank."

"Exotic dancer?" smirks Dudley.

"Ecstatic. Her name was Athena."

"The Greek goddess of wisdom," Helen reminds us.

Jennifer's friend breaks in: "She was a witch, *The Witch of Portobello*. We read it in my book club. She dances to hide her own empty spaces, the holes in her life. But she learns that music can only exist by virtue of the rhythmical intervals, the breaks between the drumbeats."

"Yes," recalls Silvia. "She learned that lesson from a master of cal... —of elegant handwriting."

Helen helps her with the accent: "Cal-*líg*-raphy."

"Right. He was a calligrapher who lived in the desert. Anyway, he taught her that the adjoining spaces give the words form and fulfillment. Without the spaces, the words would just be bunched together in one long chain of letters. You couldn't make them out."

David, who has a doctorate in Cultural History, tells us that in the early age of writing, texts were meant to be read aloud. The art of reading silently developed rather late, probably not until around the seventh century. Before that, to conserve valuable papyrus, the copyists deleted the separations between words, rendering manuscripts extremely difficult to decipher.

An expert Powerpoint user, Carol points out that the spaces above and below the line are almost as important for word recognition as the spaces between words. "That's why, when making a headline for your presentation, you should never put the words in capital letters. Words in caps all have the same rectangular shape. But in lower case, the word 'shape,' for instance, has a unique recognition pattern; the *h* juts out near the beginning and the *p* dips down toward the end."

David invites us to revisit the poem, this time focusing on the spaces. I notice that his short, fragile lines tend to bring out the individual word shapes; moreover, his technique of mid-word enjambment, of spilling syllables onto the following line, may help to highlight word boundaries. Instead of nonstop word strings, the writing flows in a "grateful vicissitude" of sound and silence, speech and space. A dialogue begins: both the pauses and the words are "between." The pauses are born and broken in words; the words are measured and resolved in pauses, thus generating rhythms and echoes of meaning. This comes very close to Carl Sandburg's first definition of poetry: "Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break the silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wavelengths."

Rudiger summarizes: "I like this poem. It shows us that the essence of something is not just its consistence, but its whole context. Everything is plugged into a far-reaching nexus of dependencies. Part of that network is the surrounding space. In chemistry, we know that the actual amount of matter inside an object is minute. The mass is concentrated in the tiny nucleus. The vast space around it is hollow, but at the same time alive with electrons that complement or balance the central mass. Likewise, we like to see ourselves as atomic, autonomous individuals. In reality, though, we are tightly bound up with our environment."

Jennifer adds: "Especially with other people."

But Silvia has the last word: "We also have to learn Athena's lesson. Instead of avoiding the pauses in our lives with mindless excess activity, or bridging them with waiting, we should try to utilize them as quiet moments of reflection. They will give us answers."

I have now finished my transformations. What took David seven brief lines and three pauses to explain requires a series of sixteen steps:

Words raise questions.
A question can answer itself.
The words answer themselves.

The words are *what answer themselves.*
They raise a question *which answers itself.*
For short, this question which answers itself is "it."
"It" is that word-based question which answers itself.
That which answers itself answers itself from a space.
"It" is a question, not the space. The space is wordless.
What answers itself is now answering itself from the space.
Therefore, the space is the one "from which *it is answering itself*" (**A**).
A can be reworded as "the space it is answering itself from" (**A**^{1}).
What's answering itself impacts the space from which it answers.
Therefore, the space is also "the space of what's answering itself" (**B**).
A^{1} = **B**. Or, the space it is answering itself <u>from</u> = the space <u>of</u> what's answering itself.
These two definitions of "the space" can be compressed to "the space <u>of</u> what's answering itself <u>from</u>" (**C**). This is the only "ungrammatical" operation in the sequence.

A poem
is like a

well Stoned
at the side

s firmly bas
ed deeper

even than
eyes can reach

emptied to
the echoing

escaping as
the incense

of the priest'
s offering

needs.

(from *Thought Colors*, p.128)

enjambment
breaking a sentence or clause off at the end of a line, so that the thought is incomplete and runs over to the following line; the lack of congruity between lines of poetry and complete thoughts

From "Modern Love" by George Meredith:
What are we first? First animals; and next
Intelligences at a leap; on whom ...

The opposite of an enjambed line is one that is end-stopped. An end-stopped line will coincide with the end of the clause or sentence:

Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.

In David Jaffin's "A poem" (to the left) not only are most lines enjambed mid-thought ("is like a ..."), but even mid-word (side/s, bas/ed, priest/'s).

As he reads "A poem" through twice, the poet enunciates the three *ed*-tagged participles, "stoned," "based," and "emptied," followed by three *-ing*s: "echoing," "escaping," and "offering." Because this selection is the longest so far today (8 stanzas), David suggests starting with the first half.

I'm grateful for him taking this approach, because, as usual, I'm hung up on a technicality. For the life of me, I can't figure out how "needs," all alone down in the last stanza, connects with the rest of the poem. It doesn't seem to go with either "priest's" or "offering." And "escaping as the incense needs" doesn't work, either. Sometimes, sifting and sorting through these fragile lines, I feel like an archaeologist clenching one tiny piece of poetry-pottery at a time with my tweezers, examining it from all sides through my monocle, and trying to mount it on the page in just the right place.

David tries to get the ball rolling. "Looking at the first four stanzas, what do you see?" Well, I see that our poet of cloudy images and blank spaces has actually come out and made an absolute assertion: "A poem is like a well." This use of a full declarative sentence in poetry usually signals a shift from the descriptive to the narrative or didactic mode. In other words, when poets stop singing about waves and clouds and start storytelling or teaching, the first clue will be a statement like this: subject and full predicate with a main verb. And here, putting all his cards on the table from the outset with a straightforward simile, it is obvious that David plans to teach us something.

"What I see is that once again, you have written a poem in the shape of the subject," notes Rudiger. "At the same time you say 'A poem is like a well,' you also demonstrate exactly how a poem can look like a well."

"How is a poem like a well?" I ask.

"It satisfies your thirst," Dudley barks right back.

"It's deeper than eyes can penetrate," says Jennifer. "It takes you to a depth beyond the range of your own senses."

"It's held together by stones," muses Helen. "The words that form an outer wall. But the real purpose of the poem and the well is what is drawn out of the shaft."

Michael agrees: "Yes, and the well is judged by the quality of the water drawn."

"By its purity," says Rudiger. "A poem will be judged on the merits of the thoughts extracted. Are they pure or polluted?"

The picture of a poem-well was gaining contours. Typically, one would think of a well not as the poem itself, but as the source of ideas for a poem. Alexander Pope [1] advised poets to "drink deep" in the Pierian spring of knowledge. The Nobel-prize laureate Seamus Heaney, a modern Irish poet and *Beowulf* translator,[2] advised dipping down so far into the well until you've "broken the skin on the pool of yourself" for inspiration. This leads me to my next question.

"What is at the bottom of the well?" Is it the pool of your own subconscious? Or is it exactly what you find down in the last stanza of this poem, your fundamental needs? Perhaps it is both: your subconscious needs made conscious by drawing them up to the light.

Helen goes back to what she said about the poem's purpose: "It's what you go to the well for and what you take home with you. It's the experience of a dramatic encounter with language and life."

Jennifer is looking for a particular kind of experience: "It's deeper awareness."

Rudiger tries to specify: "A special awareness of a special kind of truth. One that doesn't come from schools or books."

Tony Hopkins qualifies even further: "It comes from intimations of the eternal and the beautiful. It sees into the heart of things. It unlocks the inscapes of things."

And Silvia: "It's the music."

It is natural that a group of poetry readers would see the well's purpose from a reader's perspective, from their own thirst for poetic meaning. But my first suspicion is that Jaffin, like Heaney, sees the poem from the writing event: not as user, but as crafter. Writing is the act of digging the well. Deep down at the bottom of all our humanity is the need to express ourselves. That's why poetry usually appears in civilizations long before plumbing and running water.

We have now been asked to look at the second half of the poem: "emptied to / the echoing."

"A well is emptied?" I am thinking out loud.

"Only if it's drained dry," replies Michael.

"If we get everything out of the poem it has to offer." Helen still assumes the primacy of the reader benefit.

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1 In his *Essay on Criticism*. Pope (1688-1744) was the absolute master of the sparkling, witty "heroic couplet" in iambic pentameter. Example: see page 52.

2 In his 1974 lecture to the Royal Society of Literature. Heaney's celebrated sonnet "A Drink of Water" treats this "well of inspiration" theme.

Then Dudley's smoke-cured croak again, a two-a.m. voice at two in the afternoon: "We can be filled only if the well is emptied." So the well gives us its life? Could be. Water from the well is life, as in Jeremiah's fountain. But no water in the well is life, too, as in Joseph's pit.

"The sound is released from the depth in echoes," says Jennifer. "The echoes are like words answering themselves from the empty spaces."

"Gushing up from the deep," adds her dangerous-looking friend from the book club.

"The words are the stones," Jennifer goes on, still under the spell of the previous poem. "The echoes answer the words from the dark, infinite emptiness."

Helen seems spellbound, too: "They answer the words in infinite reverberations, revealing what the words themselves can't express."

"And then the echoes escape from the well." I am now looking at the next stanza.

"Escape, like from a security complex?" asks Michael, who has spent over a quarter century in prison administration. "Is that what the stone walls are for?"

"The echoing answer isn't locked away," explains Helen. "It's more bottled up, like an expanding vapor, yearning to spread. It can't be contained by the wall of words."

"Then, once it escapes, it dissipates in the air like incense," I continue.

"Incense doesn't dissipate," says Silvia, who grew up Catholic. "At least not symbolically. It ascends all the way to heaven like a prayer."

"You mean it stinks to high heaven?" growls Dudley from the back row.

Rudiger rushes to her defense: "In Revelation, incense is a symbol of collective prayer. The golden censers burning in heaven contain the prayers of all the believers on earth."

"This symbol is actually much older, at least a millennium older, going all the way back to Psalm 141." David, who, when he's not poetizing, writes and lectures on the Hebrew Bible, explains that before Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, he went to Gibeon where he burned incense and offered a prayer. As a young king facing an uncertain reign, he prayed for the gift of discernment, that he might make choices that would benefit the people. God answered that because he put his people's needs above his own desires, he would receive the wisdom to govern.

"Gibeon?" Rudiger breaks in. "Where the ancient cistern is located?" Rudiger describes the huge water reservoir cut into the rock at Gibeon during the early Iron Age. "A long spiral staircase was dug to access the subterranean pool in times of siege. It's every much as impressive as the elaborate series of tunnels that Solomon himself started building to secure a water supply for the capital Jerusalem." Rudiger recalls the solitary echoes of his footsteps as he descended to Gibeon's water chamber, buried in the bedrock far beneath the spot where the king-priest had once sent up an incense-sweetened prayer on behalf of Israel.

Deeper / even than / eyes can reach / emptied to / the echoing /
escaping as / the incense / of the priest' / s offering / needs.

"After he built the temple," continues David, "Solomon constructed a golden censer directly in front of the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies. While the priest burned incense inside, all the people outside in the courtyard were united in prayer. The perfumed smoke rising from the censer signified the prayers arising from the whole congregation."

All the needs of the people poured out from the recesses of their souls and channeled directly to God: *ad aethera fundo*, from the lower world to the world above. The poet-priest offers up the poems welling up from deep inside himself, not only to fulfill his own need to create, but in his sacerdotal role as spokesman for the people, their personal representative voicing their communal needs.

"So, are you saying a poem is like a prayer?" asks Silvia.

"I would agree that both poetry and prayer are pinnacles of human expression. There is no more noble way for the human soul to articulate itself. But what I believe I said was 'a poem is like a well.'"

"But what issues forth from the well, from the depths of our needs, could be easily be a prayer." Jennifer is trying to understand David's second metaphor, how the echoing is like incense. "Some poems may be like prayers because they start with words, but ultimately move within the realms of silence, echoing our own deep-felt needs, but at the same time answering a higher power."

2 Expressed with a Voice

The outer form of fragile lines will be filled with an inner voice, the writer's style. In reading David, a modern Horatian, we can expect to hear a compact, no-frills style, one which selects words carefully, weighs them, and radically prunes any superfluous lushness of language. The thoughts that intertwine each other will be the barest of branched designs, unadorned by draping vines or unduly decorative flowers. The garden will be a well-trimmed showcase of finely distilled thoughts, elliptical phrasings, and syntactical shortcuts. The poetic process of selecting, weighing, and pruning can also be a topic of the poems, as seen in the next three examples. And while he selects, weighs, and prunes, we his readers are left, as usual, to extrapolate, elaborate, and speculate.

Poem number 7 on our photocopies seems to pick up the theme of words as stones. Here, however, they are not walled in a well, but strung into a necklace.

True-telling stones

It's just
the right

word strung
to their co

loring find
s A necklace

of true-
telling

stones.

caesura
a pause occurring within the line signaling completion of a thought

Normally, a distinct pause is heard at the completion of a clause or sentence. In end-stopped lines, it will fall at the line break. But a caesura falls somewhere mid-line, as here after the dangling *-s* in "find/s." A capital letter follows, indicating a new sentence. This caesura is significant, as we might otherwise read "find/s" as a verb: "Their coloring finds a necklace."

(from *Wind phrasings*, p. 318)

Obviously, David has found another metaphor for a poem. But a necklace, a piece of jewelry? How can something so profanely ornamental be an appropriate symbol for what he has called the noblest

articulation of the human soul? I put this to the poet as a provocative challenge: "So a poem is a trinket whose function is to beautify?"

"A necklace could have that function. If we were looking at a painting by Matisse or Klimt, you might say, 'This necklace is part of the artist's decorative scheme. He's using the colors to embellish and dazzle.' But Vermeer also surrounds his subjects with seemingly insignificant items from their everyday lives. These simple trinkets, though, have a very different function. They open up the personality of who is being portrayed. I remember the Vermeer in Berlin, for example, the 'Pearl Necklace.' The light streaming in from the window diffuses through the whole room. The walls are pure white. The subject's face is awash with radiance; her gaze is fixed on the distant horizon, on infinity. But she's holding both ends of a ribbon wrapped around her neck, where she's wearing a necklace of gleaming white pearls. The purity and perfection of the pearls are closed into a circle, an endless chain of light that catches the brightness from the window and mirrors her distant stare. In this moment of silence, the only motion in the entire scene emanates from the light, a light that draws the woman—just for this moment—into eternity."

"But how do we know," asks Jennifer's friend, "when we read your poems, if we are looking at Klimt or Vermeer?"

"In my poems, you experience the same aesthetic of simplicity and compression as a sparsely furnished interior by Vermeer. Muted colors, cool, clear, and classical. It's a Haydn quartet, plainly stated and tightly disciplined. No extravagance, no excess. Short, sweet, and, sober. If you read Dylan Thomas,[1] you will ride off through the rich Welsh countryside on a rhetorical romp of the senses. You'll be carried away by a fierce-throated Russian rhapsody, intoxicated by energy and passion and pathos. The blaze of colors will knock you off your feet. Then you'll realize you are in a Klimt painting and not a Vermeer."

"So your necklace is not made up of glittery, shiny Florida shells, but cool, smooth stones from a stream." Rebecca is starting to think in metaphors.

"Exactly," replies Jennifer on the poet's behalf. "The stones are true-telling, strung into a rounded sense of unity. Their colors have been carefully chosen and assembled into a meaningful composition. This is their function, not decoration."

1 Dylan Thomas (1914-53), Welsh poet, essayist, and playwright.

"Maybe the necklace is a composition that goes around and round, like a rondo?" suggests Silvia.

"The poem itself is a rondelle," notes Helen. "It starts and ends with the title."

"That's not all that's spinning around in this poem." I am back on my grammatical hang-up. "In the title, we start with a plural, the stones. In the first line, though, we're talking about 'it,' the word—singular—which we assume is the same as a stone. In the second stanza, we're back to a plural, 'their.' *It*'s the right word strung to *their* coloring finds? Then, once we've established the plural 'finds,' we're back to the singular necklace, and finally the plural 'stones' that we started with."

"There's no contradiction. What you have is two parallel levels of documentation." The self-assured voice behind me belongs to Chang, the cybernation wizard. "We see this all the time in process engineering." He made his first two fortunes in company buy-outs. Now, he's rumored to be working on his third, but not particularly hard. His more-boardroom-than-classroom tone compels me to turn around in my seat to face him.

"A flowchart delineates a series of steps. Now, what we have here is a single frame in the chart, one step. Our process step involves putting words together in a color sequence. We can call it the assembly step. This is documented as 'True-telling stones ... strung to their coloring finds.' In other words, 'true-telling stones' are the input; the output is a color pattern, 'coloring finds.' That's fine, but we still have a problem: We haven't got the slightest notion of what these two terms mean. That's why when I do flowcharts, I diagram the frames on a diagonal instead of a horizontal." He draws an arrow in the air, cutting on a downward slant. "That gives us room for the annotation boxes. They fit neatly in these spaces created above and below the diagonal. The annotations will define exactly what the two process terms refer to. In the first box, the poet annotates the input term. What is a true-telling stone, anyway? Answer: 'It's just the right word.' All our right words have been imported from the previous step—let's call it the selection step—which was obviously *finding* the words with the required colors. That's why in the assembly step these words are now arrayed in 'coloring finds.' In the second box, he annotates this strange-sounding output term. What exactly is a coloring find? Annotation: It's a necklace, a spectrum of colors produced by the true-telling stones."

Michael and Dudley are nodding as if they considered it perfectly

plausible for a system diagram to churn out poems as easily as circuit boards. "The problem with a purely linear flow is that you can't work definitions into your process. They have to be brought in from a second level. So when you read a frame like this poem, you've got to take in the two levels simultaneously." Chang finishes with a flourish, one sweep down the diagonal, then both palms cupped over his imaginary sidebars.

Helen is used to dealing with technical jargon. Over supper, her husband George loves to recount his day's meetings in a vivid play-by-play of tactical moves and counter-moves. "So you think the definition 'It's just the right word' has been interposed in the middle of the process statement 'True-telling stones are strung to their coloring finds.'"

"Not really interposed. The definition and the process are still on different planes. But because both hit you at once, that multidimensional effect has been captured quite realistically."

"OK, the definitions are like hypertexts or footnotes embedded in the poem. And there's a prior process step, selecting the right words?"

"We can postulate a prior step in which the words were selected on criteria of coloring."

"The wavelengths they emit."

"Without the right light frequencies, you can't make the right color combinations."

"The combinations that tell truly, the true-telling stone arrangements." Helen turns around to David. "How do you find *le mot juste*?"

"The same way Flaubert[1] did, I suppose: By sorting through the stones, hearing which combinations of material forms resonate just right to reveal the hidden realities beneath, looking to see which of these colored tiles blend into the right design. Word choice is the very essence, the flesh and bone, of creating meaning.[2] Every word may have its own dictionary meaning, but the meaning I am striving for is a product of unique word groupings.[3] It derives from sensing which are the right stones for a new semantic architecture. First comes hearing, then seeing, then meaning."

"But where do you get the stones in the first place?" Jennifer is curi-

1 Gustave Flaubert (1821 - 80), French novelist who wrote *Madame Bovary*.
2 Cf. "A Poet" in *Eye-sensing*, p. 14, Ahadada Books, Tokyo and Toronto, 2008.
3 "There are no good or bad words; there are only words in good or bad places." Winifred Nowottny, *The Language Poets Use*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 32.

ous how a fellow poet gets his inspiration.

"I sincerely don't know."

"They just come to you?"

"The stones are there, the raw materials, but not their coloring finds."

"So you have to find the colors that match. Your task is to place the right words into the right combinations."

This reminds me of the anecdote Frank Budgen tells about his friend James Joyce. One evening he asked Joyce if he was making much progress on *Ulysses*. Joyce replied that he'd worked all day on the novel, and in that time had produced all of two sentences. So Budgen asks him if he spends all his time searching for the right words. "No," says Joyce. He already has all the words. What takes time is putting them in the perfect order.

"That's not the way Flaubert did his composing," says Helen, who has read the master of French realism in the original. "In his letters he tells about the long, laborious word searches. The right word didn't just drop into his lap."

"He wasn't a poet, but a novelist," says Rosemarie, who used to teach French. "A poet," she adds, looking up at her husband, "also works hard at his craft. Albeit along a very different trajectory."

David beams. Everyone knows she is his bottomless well of inspiration. The love poems he started writing during their courtship could fill several volumes, and they still keep coming.

Helen leans forward to Rosemarie's left ear: "Are you sure he's a poet and not a *romancier*? It sure looks like romance is his primary interest."

Words too heavy
As treasur

ed ship sunk
to the bot

tom of its
tarnish

ed with
gold.

ellipsis
omission of words

An "aesthetic of simplicity and compression" can omit words either for economy or for effect. Often, the missing words are only understood verbs like "is" or subjects like "you." But occasionally, missing words have to be supplied from the context: "[a] treasured ship sunk to the bottom of [the sea]."

(from *Sunstreams*, p. 154)

Rudiger is checking the back of his photocopy, thinking that perhaps the continuation of "Words too heavy" has somehow seeped through the page. His helpless look translates to: "You mean this is it?"

If I didn't know better, I would also suspect that various parts of the poem had done a runner on us. The ship sank to the bottom of [the sea], its [brass fittings] tarnished with gold [crustaceans]. Or as [the] treasur[e-fill]ed ship sank to the bottom, [the site] of its [wreck seemed] tarnished with gold [coins leaking from its ruptured hull]. But before I can ask David if he'd been taking verbal austerity measures or just been trying to conserve his antique typewriter ribbon, Jennifer's friend has blunted the sarcasm behind my question: "It looks as if some of the gems are missing from this necklace."

"What's missing?" Dudley sounds like a used car salesman who has just received a frivolous complaint.

"Some words are missing. Obviously!"

"What words are missing?"

"I don't know. They're missing."

"And where do you think they've gone?"

This gets some laughs, punctuated by a thoughtful silence. Then it is Michael who hits upon the simple answer submerged beneath the surface: "They've sunk."

At this, the silence deepens. "Some words are too heavy," he explains. "So down they go." For the third time this afternoon, I am bowled over by this man's logic and lucidity. I wonder if his analytical talent wouldn't be put to better use in the crime squad.

Dudley is rasping now like George Jones on his last tearful set of the night: "Look at the spaces, all the empty spaces." He is staring at the poem as if it were an aerial photograph. "It's a debris field we're looking at, like the one when *Captiva Dawn* went down in '96. I'll never forget it. Littered all over the Gulf, pitiful bits of flotsam ..."

"And jetsam," adds Jennifer.

"Not jetsam." Having immersed himself in the lore of Gerard Manley Hopkins' shipwreck poems, Tony considers himself a semi-expert on salvage terms. The poet's father was in marine insurance, which sparked his interest in nautical disasters. "Jetsam is what the sailors jettison overboard to lighten their load. If you recover it, it's yours. But the salvor has no rights to flotsam, floating remnants from a sunken vessel. When the body of the *Titanic*'s bandleader was found drifting in the Atlantic, his music case was returned to the White Star Line."

Tony's wife Wendy does not seem to be paying much attention to his remarks. She is absorbed with scribbling notes in the margin of her photocopy.

"If this poem is just flotsam, how can we make sense of it?" inquires Rebecca, still clutching the warm bundle under her jacket. A pair of perky ears stick out.

"It may be like reconstructing a puzzle," Carol ventures. "For example, the *-ed* endings have detached themselves from their participles. We might be looking for something treasured, or shipped, or bottomed. And who's to say if the ship is treasur-ed or tarnish-ed?"

"Each line is a floating plank from the ship." Rudiger has discovered another pattern poem.

"Or treasured or tarnished with gold?"

"That would depend on one's attitude to money," says Helen.

"Or if it's the gold that's treasured or tarnished."

Rudiger objects: "As a non-reactive metal, gold doesn't tarnish. It only acquires a film."

"It gets dirty," interprets Helen. "Loses its luster. A metaphorical tarnishing. What good is the gold at the bottom of the sea?"

Dudley grins: "So some Florida dude like me can scoop it up centuries later and win the lottery." Dudley the treasure-hunter? Is that what he's been outfitting Chang's motor yacht for?

"Why is everyone so concerned about the gold?" asks Silvia. "What about the loss of human cargo?" She has obviously taken the first word "as" to mean "when," not "similar to," tricking her into seeing the poem as a tragic tale.

I step in quickly: "The poem is not really about a shipwreck at all. It's about a failed poem. The sunken ship is only a metaphor for an unbalanced distribution of weight. If the words aren't weighted just right in relation to each other, the whole poetic construction capsizes and scatters its content, its gold freight, across the ocean floor."

Rebecca is another novice who has yet to make complete sense of the shipwreck of words. "Is the gold worthless, then? I don't get it. If these overweight words are too heavy for a poem and sink to the bottom, then why are they described as golden?"

David sees her question as directed to himself. "Every word is golden, a repository of meaning, a potential for telling truth, a precious true-telling stone. But even if words are inherently precious, they aren't to be used preciously. Ordinary words rightly weighted will combine

to realize extraordinary thoughts.[1] Words used preciously to gloss over the poverty of underlying thought will result in false preciousness. Gold ore becomes goldbrick."

Jennifer follows up: "So you prefer ordinary, everyday words to poetic floweriness?"

"I want ordinary words used in extraordinary ways. What I want to avoid at all cost is serving up the dross of daily usage,[2] perpetuating the trite fluff that passes for proper communication nowadays. The words themselves need to be redeemed from cliché and reinstated in fresh dress to help us see the world we know in ways we've never known. The whole language needs purging. New realizations matter-of-factly revealed; novel perceptions succinctly stated. What the poet strives for is a lightness of expression to bear the weightiness of thought, not heavy doses of diction to disguise a lot of lightweight ideas."

"Does that mean new realities?" Jennifer wants to know.

"New realizations of the reality we know. Just as I seek to put ordinary words in extraordinary combinations, I want familiar subjects illuminated in an unexpected light. Above all, I want the reader to be startled by the familiar."

Ah, David wants to sing the common, but not the commonplace:

That your first theme is Human Life,
Its hopes and fears, its love and strife—
A theme no custom can efface,
Common, but never commonplace.[3]

Tony is now talking about "The Loss of the Eurydice," a shipwreck ballad by the most illustrious of his clan, Gerard Manley Hopkins. "The poem is full of poetic omissions, but with a totally different effect than we have here. Here, we view the wreckage strewn over the seascape after the sinking, and the gaps paint a picture of the destruction. But Hopkins recounts the action as the ship goes down, and his jumps of discontinuity testify to the excitement of the moment. Sometimes

1 This is close to Gerard Manley Hopkins' appeal for poetry to employ the "current language heightened." For "rightly weighted words," see David's poem "Osprey," *A Voiced Awakening*, p. 91.

2 Cf. "Of Richer Ore," *These Time-Shifting Thoughts*, p. 91.

3 From "On the Future of Poetry" by Henry Austin Dobson (1840-1921). The opposite point of view was expressed by Walt Whitman, who boasted of celebrating the commonplace.

it's altogether difficult to piece together."

"As this poem is," adds Jennifer's off-island friend, thumping on her sheet. "Totally disjointed."

Tony quotes a passage from "Eurydice" as an example of ellipsis:

O well wept, mother have lost son;
Wept, wife; wept, sweetheart would be one ...

"It takes a moment to figure out he means that it's well that the mother weep, all mothers who have lost a son, as the wife should also weep, and the sweetheart who wanted to become a wife someday."

"Missing words always cloud the message," interjects Jennifer's friend. "They force the reader to guess."

Behind me, a half-suppressed mutter from Dudley: "They force the reader to think."

Ignoring the interruption, Tony goes on to cite the most extreme example of Hopkins' blank spaces from "The Wreck of the Deutschland." One of the nuns on board is about to perish in the sea. The level of drama crescendos, as her last words descend into incoherence:

But how shall I ... make me room there:
Reach me a ... Fancy, come faster—
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she ... there then! the Master ...

Hammering an urgent rhythm from out of the gaps, Tony hasn't just delivered the lines, but acted them out. David is moved. "I didn't grasp the literal sense of that, of course. But I think we see very clearly from this passage what I was getting at earlier with the in-between-ness of words. It's what the words don't say in their wordless spaces that enrich the meaning of what they do say. The intensity of the situation between life and death underscores this interplay. The greater the stress put on the words, the louder the silences reply. By the way, can you recite the whole poem?"

"Most of it. Never mind if I drop a line; a friend will carry on. You see, Wendy and I are in the local Hopkins Society. You should hear the declaiming at the pub after our official proceedings. When some of us get going, we're hard to stop. But it's all part of our long tradition. Hopkins called his verse 'oratorical,' poetry intended to be performed, not studied."

"What about you, Wendy?" asks Helen. "Have you learned any Hop kins by heart?"

"Actually, I'm more into limericks. I produce them on special occasions. In fact, this must be one such moment, as David's poem has inspired me today. May I?"

David signals to proceed.

"Ponderous pomposity
Overweight verbosity
Doesn't float
Drags the boat
Down with great velocity."

Out-lining

Not a word

too many
As a tree

stripped
leaflessly

out-lining.

chiasmus
an inverted order of elements

outlining (line 1)	matches	outlining (line 7)
not a word (line 2)	matches	leaflessly (line 6)
too many (line 3)	matches	stripped (line 5)

The center of this recessed panel structure is the tree.

(from *Wind phrasings*, p. 53)

After a well, a necklace, and a ship, we now seem to have a metapho for a poem that takes us back to "Fragile line," where we saw that a poet's verses are like tightly interwoven branches of thought. If we take the present poem as a commentary on "Fragile line," we might hear David saying here that the outlines of these thought-branches ar not to be lost in the foliage of word-leaves. Wordiness ("overweight verbosity" as Wendy called it) needs to be stripped away to display the clear design of the whole, as well as the finely branching lines of expo sition. David, as we have learned, is stingy with words. His scrupulous paring and pruning, though, is a long-standing guiding principle of the Horatian tradition:

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found. (Alexander Pope

Out-lining yields spare, cleaned-out lines. Bare branches with fewer leaves, more fruit of sense: That's plainly David's rule of green thumb.

But our group today has not yet made the association between words and leaves. In contrast to "Fragile line," parallelism does not establish the metaphor. It's not:

a word too many
as a tree stripped

But:

not a word
leaflessly

Silvia, who also had trouble drawing the connection between the ship's freight and the poem's verbiage in our last selection, has just accused David of advocating tree extermination. For Silvia, a South American, the threat to the rain forest is the crux of climate change.

I explain that "not a word" in line 2 goes with "not a leaf" (leafless) in line 6. "Therefore, if the leaves are the words, the tree is the poem."

"Why do you jump around like that?" Jennifer's friend feels her common sense has been assaulted. "How are we supposed to skip from the top down to the bottom to find what goes with what?"

I hold up my fingers in a V-for-victory sign, then turn them sideways. "Two fingers, each with three sections divided by my knuckles. See? The poem starts at the tip of my forefinger and runs down through the vertex of the V along my middle finger." I use my right forefinger to connect the two left fingertips. "The two outside finger sections are the same: 'out-lining.' The two middle sections between my knuckles also belong together: no words and no leaves. Likewise, the third line from the top, 'too many,' provides the reason for the third line from the bottom, 'stripped.' The two halves of the poem reflect each other, like a mirror image. And in the center ..."

Dudley finishes for me: "And in the middle of the garden was a tree, the tree of life." This is the second time this afternoon that he has attributed a life-giving quality to poetry. First it was the well, now a tree. Is he on to a recurrent theme in David's work, or just putting his own spin on it?

One of the great benefits of a live poetry reading is that you can always bounce such questions back to the source. "David, would you be telling us that poetry is like the tree of life, a fundamental source of

nourishment that human life depends on?"

A cryptic smile. "If you are asking if poetry was part of the prelapsarian garden, I would say it had to have been, since those first three chapters of Genesis are exceptionally lyrical."

"So Adam and Eve sat reciting verse under the tree of life?" asks Helen. "That's quite a pastoral picture of early mankind."

"I don't know about the tree of life, but they probably had a lot in common with this tree of poetr-ee." Tony forces an uneven rhyme by stressing the final syllable.

"How so?" Jennifer takes the bait.

"Both the tree and the first couple were leafless."

"Stripped leaflessly," I read.

Carol adores Thomas Wolfe:[1] "Naked and alone we came into exile ..." The opening bars of *Look Homeward, Angel.*

But David thinks she's trying to quote Job: "You mean 'naked into the world.'"

"No," says Rudiger. "They got their fig leaves when they went into the exile of the world. They were leafless *before* that."

"Leafless but not yet naked," continues Helen, "because they weren't yet in hiding. Nakedness means nothing to hide behind. But they only felt the need to hide after they lost paradise."

"Yes, after they picked that *pomme* from the poetree." Now Tony is punning, a trick he probably picked up from the master of wordplay himself.[2]

Jennifer refocuses: "A poem is leafless, too, when it has nothing to hide behind. When it's fully exposed, stripped down to its core essence."

"As all of us on Judgment Day," booms Dudley in his best voice of doom.

"A real poem shows us naked reality." Helen feels truly at home with Flaubert and the tell-it-like-it-is realists.

"Our own naked condition, perhaps?" surmises Rebecca.

"Yes, because the true poem is as exposed as we are, a bared soul." Jennifer has just stacked on a new layer of metaphor, one that Dudley was already hinting at. The poem is like a tree is like a person. The same idea of personified leaflessness comes to mind from a Shake-

1 Thomas Wolfe (1900-38), Southern novelist who wrote in a lyrical, Pindaric style.
2 Cf. Joseph J. Feeney SJ, *The Playfulness of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, Surrey, 2008.

spearean sonnet. The poet looks at himself and sees just skin and bones; his arms hang like the leafless boughs of a tree, "bare ruined choirs / where late the sweet birds sang."

Silvia is still struggling with the first layer of metaphor. "If the words are leaves, how can a leafless poem say anything?"

Rudiger, sitting next to her, attempts to answer her question with a question: "Maybe by its outline? As in the title of our poem, Outlining."

I come back to the wordless silences from "A Pause." "The poem carves new designs out of space. These are the outer lines of thought, out-lines, that transcend word boundaries and thus are no longer enclosed or enclothed."

David verifies my take on outlines: "True. It is precisely the nakedness of space that clothes my poems."

A palpable body of words in a cloak of silent space. I ask him if he would agree with the twentieth-century American poet Archibald MacLeish, who started his "Ars Poetica" by defining a poem in terms of four key attributes: mute, dumb, silent, and wordless.

A poem should be palpable and <u>mute</u>
As a globed fruit

<u>Dumb</u>
As old medallions to the thumb

<u>Silent</u> as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be <u>wordless</u>
As the flight of birds

"Of course MacLeish uses words, as every poet does. But his definition of poetry—the outer lines that demarcate what poetry really is—this is something that does not come across in the four adjectives, but in the images: a piece of fruit, a medal, a window ledge, or a flight of birds."

I want to explore how the poet uses verbal materials to generate such immaterial out-lines, but one of the drawbacks of a live poetry reading is that before you have formulated your question in just the right words, the conversation has moved on. Carol has picked up the idea of out-lines as the outer limits of expression and asked David if he is

consciously trying to expand them.

"Poetry is always the frontier of language, guiding it forward in new directions. It's the responsibility of poets as language guardians not only to push these frontiers but also to fortify them: forge new usage and popularize it, like Dante. How do we do that? By successfully demonstrating how language can help us see farther and discover more and gain real ground in our efforts to make sense of existence."

For a linguist like me, this is all paradoxical. How can a language guardian be a vanguardist? How does one both consolidate and innovate, fortify and amplify accepted codes of usage? How can you make more sense by pushing sense to its breaking point? And how do you lead a language revolution without the expressed endorsement of everyone who speaks that language?

Now, with her stowaway squirming, Rebecca has asked for a doggie break. Dudley has seconded and ventured forth into unconditioned air for a smoke. Helen is trying to reach George by phone. Tony is reciting "Spring and Fall" for Jennifer and her friend, whose name, I find out, is Laura. Rosemarie is explaining Archibald MacLeish to Silvia. David and Leroy are conferring about moving the unused flipchart and pinboard to gain more space for chairs. David says he doesn't need the data projector, either, but is told that the four o'clock group has requested it.

Chang has launched into a mini-presentation on Artificial Intelligence. He says that words constitute a system of physical symbols, and that science has been pouring research funding into teaching computers how to manipulate them. Our last three poems, however, have shown that above and beyond the verbal code, there is a metalanguage everyone uses that is not simply made up of ever more complex symbols in a faster state of manipulation. The existence of a poetic language may spell the end of the machine's dream of intelligence.

That language might be found in a necklace of stones, in a gap between words, or within the out-lines of bare branches. Or in the feel of polished metal, the silence of moss-covered brick, or the flight of birds. Or, as Thomas Wolfe put it: "a stone, a leaf, a door." Wordless images that activate instincts, feelings, and emotions in parts of the brain that confound computation. Suddenly, my technical questions on imagery and my practical doubts about experimenting with language have exploded into a speculative enigma. Is poetry a kind of metalanguage that follows its own set of rules, the intuitive grammar of the mind?

II. Image & Emotion

Archibald MacLeish took his title "Ars Poetica" from Horace's longest poem, a Latin treatise on poetic practice. After enumerating the standards of style, Horace moves on to the art of suiting style to a particular mood or feeling the poet wishes to convey. How can the listener's heart be touched in just the right way? Horace concludes that it is not enough for poems to be beautiful, they must be pitched to the right emotional key, in total harmony with the responses that nature herself evokes. Endowed with keen emotional intelligence, humans resonate naturally to the stimuli of genuine smiles or tears. The key is authenticity. A poet who rehashes second-hand experience or one who merely pretends to be sensitive will only succeed in alienating the audience. To put their experience in the sharp focus of feelings, poets must experience sharply themselves.

These are valid guidelines for any kind of personal interaction, but for a poet they are indispensable laws. A poem must ring true. David has drawn up a simple self-check to follow whenever he sits down to write. He asks himself three questions:[1]

1. What is it that I experience?
2. What is unique and true about that experience?
3. What is the language of that experience?

The first step underlines the primary mission of a poet: to chronicle human experience. More than a millennium and a half after the "Ars Poetica," the Renaissance poet and courtier Sir Philip Sidney[2] reiterated Horace's maxim that this chronicling task, this mirroring of life, served both to delight and teach. Poetry can accomplish both aims because it is the platform for describing our experience which is most in touch with the subjective nature of our mental states and most in tune with our different perceptual modalities.[3] It appeals to our musical and linguistic senses by satisfying our primeval urge to sound out feelings,

1 Cf. his 1980 interview with Tony Frazer in *Shearsman*.
2 In his *Defense of Poesie* (ca. 1583).
3 perceptual modalities = ways people pick up and process information

thus producing pleasure. At the same time, it engages our emotional and imaginative senses to teach us what is ultimately meaningful. When this succeeds, it becomes one of the most important ways we have of knowing. It becomes, in Sidney's words, "the first light-giver to ignorance," outshining science, philosophy, and history.

The second step demonstrates how poetry moves from the individual to the general level of experience. While all poetry starts with concrete sensory events in the life of the artist, the poet scrutinizes this unique experience, identifies what is true about it, and universalizes it in creating a poem. Sidney, citing Aristotle, says that the poet sets it down "as it should be," while the historian is only concerned with telling it "as it was." In other words, the poet chronicles experience as it is subjectively ideated; the historian is charged to recount objectively ("as it was"). This documentary function of historical writing was reasserted in the nineteenth century by the German historian Leopold von Ranke. History, said Ranke, taking Sidney one notch higher, will "show how it *really* was." Not to be outdone by a chronicler of facts and figures, David Jaffin has taken Ranke's claim and trumped it with one of his own: Poetry will give "the *feel* of what has really been" (italics mine). This feel opens for us the curtain on an ideal reality, revealing "how it should be." By evaluating a life event, isolating its significance, and translating this truth into feeling, poetry becomes more than just another means of knowing. The poem becomes the most intimate means of knowing what is *worth* knowing.

The final step, interpreting an experience in words, explains why some of us readers have difficulty with the style of contemporary poets. If language is the system we have to define experience, a poet on the lookout for the unique or in search of new ways of perceiving the ordinary will need to deploy a totally different kind of language. The speech patterns familiar to our ears will have to be wrenched into unfamiliar combinations to accommodate new poetic perspectives and perceptions.[1] Often, these experiential subjects lie totally beyond the range of lexis and can only be put across by pictures or images. Sidney called poetry "a speaking picture,"[2] a vehicle with both verbal and visual impact. This dual nature of poetry makes it the most powerful way of presenting what is worth knowing.

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1 Eliot says the modern poet must go so far as "to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." (Cf. "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Essays*, p. 289.)
2 Probably quoting Simonides of Ceos, a Greek poet of the early fifth cent. B.C.

The history of art offers parallels.[3] Each time a group of painters discovers a new way of seeing, their whole vocabulary and grammar have to be reinvented. The Impressionists needed a new vocabulary of stippled brushstrokes to depict the plastic quality of light. The Cubists needed a new geometric grammar to delineate the underlying regularities of form. Should we be shocked, then, if modern poets, these "guardians on the frontier of language," stray beyond the fringes of what our language allows and foray into uncharted territory?

To be honest, those of us brought up on pre-modernist poetry will always be shocked by our norm-shattering contemporaries, even as we accept their rationales and learn to appreciate their visions. We just have to keep our heads, sit back, watch the show, and remind ourselves that they *want* to shock. Jolting us out of our comfortable, commonplace thought modes is central to their poetic calling to impress faithfully upon our awareness the alienation, outrage, and restless agitation of the modern age. They are called and tasked to stamp us with the disquieting feel of what is it is that is worth knowing about our world.

But the following poem returns from the fringe, and takes us back to the normalcy of expository speech. As we saw with the well poem, complete sentences signal a shift into the didactic gear. This time the poetic experience will be transmitted not in sketchy lines, but in a pair of eloquent speaking pictures.

repetition
one of the main devices used by poets to create rhythm and establish continuity. Repetition can be used in different ways, as seen in the next poem.

polyptoton
the repetition of the same word in different grammatical forms, usually for emphasis. The shift from "know" to the gerund "knowing" is made twice: in the two opening and two closing stanzas of the following poem.

anadiplosis
a "doubling back" effect in which the last word from one line or stanza is repeated at the beginning of the next. In this poem, anadiplosis from the first idea (It is not our / task to know) to the next (If knowing means) reinforces the cascading flow of short lines. By emphasizing "know," the poet also puts into relief the key word "feel" in the third stanza.

3 "As is painting, so is poetry." – Horace, "Ars Poetica"

Not Ranke, but more or even less

It is not our
task to know

If knowing means
more than the

feel of what has
really been.

The bird sings to
its voice.

The fish swims
for light and

We know nothing
better than their

knowing this. (from *That Sense for Meaning*, p. 56)

With a bit of logical legerdemain, the poet carries the "more or less" of the title over into his discourse structure. In the second stanza, we read "more than ..." In the penultimate stanza, we can take "nothing better than" as "less than." But the "more" of the second stanza is negated by the "not" in the first, so that the opening and the closing are equivalent: No, we do not know more than the inner certainties of instinct and intuition. So how are we to understand the title? A natural parsing puts "more" and "less" together in relation to Ranke. But how can our natural insight both exceed and fall short of Ranke's historical record?

David is playing with the notion of knowing, but he is also playing with us. We have Ranke's way of knowing, our way, and the animals' way. The title challenges us to "rank" them, and in doing so to de-rank Ranke. But, by sleight of hand, he slips another way of knowing into the mix, the poet's ideal or "noble" knowing[1] how things should be:

1 See Wallace Stevens' Princeton lecture "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," which deals with the ennobling force of the poetic imagination.

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.
(Wallace Stevens, "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird")

He pulls off this trick by suggesting two different identities for "we." Are we the people as opposed to the animals, or are we the poets as opposed to the historians, the Rankes? But he is not finished with his heuristic game. As Stevens has fun with *no*ble k*no*wing, Jaffin teases us with the line "We k*no*w *no*thing," hinting at a yet another, higher plane of knowledge.

To help us in our ranking, our poet sets up contrasts. The main contrast is between our knowing (first stanza) and "their knowing" (last two stanzas). The poet tells us twice that what we know does not surpass what they know. Can he mean that we do not know more than a bird or a fish? Hardly, because the knowing here is not quantitative; it has to do with a quality of knowing that the poet calls a "feel," the subject of the central three stanzas and the central idea of the poem. We were not intended to know any *more* than this feel. We know nothing *better* than the singing bird or the light-bound fish. Their knowing is somehow akin to ours, or, as Stevens says: "the blackbird is involved / In what I know."

The second contrast is suggested by the first part of the title: "Not Ranke, but more." This contrast pits Ranke's reporter's knowing against "their knowing," his "what really was" against the feel of what really was, a historical-documentary kind of factual knowledge against an instinctive-subjective knowing. This latter type of knowing links nature (bird and fish) to the mysteries beyond nature (voice and light), the physical to the metaphysical. The feel of traveling these conduits to the transcendent offers more than Ranke can.

We note that Jaffin does not resort to fuzzy philosophical formulations like "conduits to the transcendent." Instead, he employs plain parallel images: hearing a voice and seeing a light. Both voice and light summon the reader into their own immateriality, as a bird singing to its voice and a fish swimming to the light. The voice calls, the light leads; both beckon to us. This imagery is the language he has found to memorialize the experience of sensing a reality beyond. Fortunately, he has not put this burden on the English language; this poem is as

clearly stated as a creed. No disconcerting stretch of usage, no grammatical aberrations, no ellipsis; only a few illusions.

Before we leave this poem to rejoin our group, we have to decide what to do about the last part of the title: "or even less." Instead of the contradictory "more and less than Ranke," we could parse "more" with Ranke and "less" with an understood unknowable way of knowing. We know more than Ranke, but even less than the ultimate reality the voice and the light are pointing to. This is not *knowing* as the bird and fish know, but *being known* by the Creator we have in common with them.

3 Revealed through Experience

The poem as a speaking picture consists of word and image. In our first session, most of our group's effort was expended on sifting through the words, assembling their fragmented units of sense in various ways, and making choices between their plurisigns. But just before the break, we considered the MacLeish definition of poetry as something essentially wordless and mute. If a poem soars as wordlessly as a flight of birds and sings us with its incantatory caw into a new state of knowing, at some stage, and soon, we students will have to move beyond deciphering what the words are saying and on to visualizing what these wordless images depict. Our goal will be to find a way of letting both words and images coalesce and synergize in our minds. To what heights, to what new levels of knowing will they lift us?

We continue with the last two poems on the first page. This one introduces another strange bird, but one who does not appear to be very uplifting. In fact, it is more like Hopkins' wild wooddove,[1] Stevens' pensive parakeet,[2] or Poe's stately raven: never flitting, forever sitting.

Pre-established Presence

At the top

of these pole
s pre-estab

lished pre
sence of birds

staring out
their unseen

in-knowing

stillness.

(from *A Voiced Awakening*, p. 90)

consonance
the repetition of consonant sounds, such as the "n" in "u*n*see*n* / i*n*-k*n*owi*n*g / still*n*ess." Both "p" and the sound of "b" in "birds" and "estab" are formed with the lips. The first three stanzas are dominated by these so-called "bilabial plosives."

alliteration
consonance in initial positions, such as "these *p*ole / s *p*re-estab / lished *p*re"

assonance
the repetition of vowel sounds, such as "Pre-*e*stablished Pr*e*sence"

1 Hopkins' wild wooddove of peace "comes to brood and sit."
2 In "The Bird With The Coppery, Keen Claws," Stevens describes a judge-like bird who sits upon a rock, "broods there and is still."

The first half of this poem serves up some appealing local color for our coterie of on-islanders. We all are well acquainted with this wise pole-sitting pelican in his age-old pose. Not only an everyday sight, he is an icon of our costal habitat, a totem of our close coexistence with nature. David has produced an island watercolor.

The last three stanzas are a kind of character study held together by the chiastic "staring *out*" (A-B) and "*in*-knowing" (B-A), then finished off by the one-word envoi [1] "stillness." This is one of David's favorite words. Here, it has a summary function that I point out to the group. "With that one word, the final stanza really pulls the whole poem together. Stillness is ambiguous. The pelican is both motionless, sitting on the pole as we see him in the first half , and noiseless, staring out in inner quietude, as the second half portrays him."

"It also goes back and picks up the leitmotif from the title," observes Carol, who loves doing word puzzles. "Look at the third stanza. The two lines open with detached syllables: 'lished' and 'sence.' These sound like 'still-' and '-ness' read backwards."

"Backwards?" mutters Rudiger. What manner of unscientific methodology will these poets think of next?

"Yes, I hear it," exclaims Silvia. "*Litz* and *sen*. Still-ness."

"That's assonant rhyme, playing with like vowel sounds," says Jennifer. "A subtle symphonic technique, all the more muted in unaccented syllables like 'lished' and 'sence.' I notice, too, that the final syllable '-ness' is in consonance with 'unseen' from two lines before. These put a sort of bracket around 'in-knowing / still-.' The bird's quiet, unseen introspection balances his staring out."

Jennifer's friend Laura, though, does not buy the wise-old-bird act. "They're not staring into space or mulling over a dilemma. They're watching and waiting for a big catch. It's instinct, not introspection."

"But *some* birds are thinkers." Tony pokes Wendy in the ribs.

Rebecca thinks that the pelican's beak pouch contributes to his thinker's look. "It's like he has this double chin, making us see him as a plump meditating monk."

"That could be why the last word is whispered as a prayer," says Silvia. "Stillness."

"Saying grace at mealtime," cracks Michael.

Wendy recalls a limerick: "A voracious fish scooper, that pelican. 'His

1 envoi = in a ballad or sestina, a short final stanza used to draw together sounds and ideas from the previous stanzas

bill can hold more than his belican.'" Making teeth out of her fingers, she snaps at her husband.

Tony comments that, for Hopkins, the pelican was a symbol of supreme charity and self-sacrifice. "According to legend, in times of need, the pelican would use its beak to cut open its own breast to save its young from starvation."[2]

Helen, whose front porch overlooks the beach, describes a flight formation of four pelicans she saw yesterday. "It was pure aerial acrobatics. George and I sat there for several minutes, completely entertained."

"They're our beach showbirds," quips Tony, making another pun on what we call "snowbirds," residents of northern climes like himself who migrate here over winter.

Laura, I notice, has bird-wing insignia stitched on her sleeve: "A pelican in flight is poem in itself. Any words we might stutter in admiration could not do justice to its natural grace."

"So why don't you try to capture that sort of music?" continues Helen, now turning to David. "Wouldn't that make a more engrossing storyline than a bird sitting on a pole doing nothing?"

As David clears his throat, Jennifer rephrases the question: "In fact, Marianne Moore[3] has a wonderfully vivid poem about a pelican. The bird glides and dives right in front of our eyes. He quivers aloft, almost suspended, then swoops down on his prey like a missile. Wouldn't you have fun, too, with those kinds of antics?"

"Studies in motion," David explains, "are a different kettle of fish altogether. It's an exercise I've set myself from time to time, but not in order to create special effects, like Duchamp's 'Nude Descending a Staircase.' When I deal with motion, as I do for example in a series of train poems,[4] it is the reader who moves, not the subject. The houses, trees, and people appear as if they are flying by, but in actuality are standing still. All of them are mile markers of passing time, like the tiny dots on a watch dial. As motion is parceled into time by objects slipping one by one into the past, so time is measured out in words. That's why we speak of *tell*ing time; only words have the power to tell

2 This is the heraldic motif of "the pelican in her piety," as seen for example on the Louisiana state flag.

3 Marianne Moore (1887-1972) – a Pulitzer-prize-winning American poet of nature and friend of Wallace Stevens, who wrote two essays on her work.

4 See "On the Train to Dortmund," "Grand Central to Hardsdale," and "This Train" from *The Telling of Time.*

it. How do we tell time? In short lines studded with rightly colored words beating to the unsteady metronome of a swaying train. The poem enables us to realize what an extraordinary ride we are on. Were it not for the poem, we would be left with an assortment of disconnected moments, blurred snapshots through the train window, but no real sense of being transported to another place, of departing and arriving."

Chang poses a clarification question, a habit he has picked up from project meetings with engineers: "So would you say that without your poetic time code our screens would just be a blur of unprocessed data? The code allows us to adjust the scan rate, so we can watch events unfold in real time?"

"Not in real time, but in time realized. In telling time to our minds, words allow us to make sense of the moment as it is experienced. Each special moment. And as high-speed photography has shown, motion is made up of a sequence of moments."

"And this poem is just such an instant?" asks Jennifer. "A still life?"

David hesitates. "The still life in painting is another kind of exercise. But one that has never really taken us anywhere. The Dutch painters present us with a bowl of fruit. This was the special effect of photographic reproduction before photography. Yes, I recognize it as a bowl of fruit. But is that art or mechanical drawing? The painter has simply aped the outer form. So all the realists managed to do was corrupt reality.[1] Some expressionists then started to play with the forms of things, again purely for special effects. Kokoschka, for example, liked to twist and distort, producing curious portraits and pasticci. But even his wildest contortions were reworkings of flat forms and shapes. Another dead end for painting. What I am attempting in my work is to complete what still-life painters originally set out to do: to penetrate the clothing of form, the physical, exposing the heart of an inward reality, the metaphysical."

Yet more clarification, this time from Helen: "Is that what you are getting at with 'pre-established presence'? The bird isn't just 'is,' he is established there for all time, past and future?"

"He is where he is meant to be. But what is the meaning for us of his 'meant to be'?"

"OK, what is the meaning for us?" demands Jennifer's friend Laura.

1 David is paraphrasing Wallace Stevens: "Realism is a corruption of reality." – *Adagia.*

"The poem says it," Jennifer replies. "It's an in-knowing stillness, unseen for us, but that we sense behind the poem's image, a pelican perched on a pole."

"A knowing that lets us in, that admits us," I suggest, remembering Ranke. "An in-knowing that is more than knowledge, but the feel of what really is. The poem admits us to that feel."

A bullfrog blaring from the back that could only be Dudley: "It's what Martin Buber called 'the inexpressible confirmation of meaning.' A sensed stillness that reverberates in answer to a prayer."

David continues: "Wallace Stevens used to say that poetic imagination is not an escape from reality, but a means of conferring meaning and order on it.[2] It does this by metaphor, by showing us how something we don't know well resembles something we do.[3] Since the mind is the very seat of our perceptions, and since the mind, the most powerful force on earth, is driven by imagination, the poetic can awaken and intensify our awareness of the real.[4] This is the way the poem helps us live our lives."[5]

Night animals
looming

in fear
Eye-staring

sounds of
the moon'

s watch-sen
sing.

(from *Intimacies of Sound*, p. 169)

onomatopoeia
the use of words that sound like what they mean, such as comic-book noises ("wham" and "whoosh"), or the "buzz" and "hum" of insects

pictogram words
the equivalent of onomatopoetic words in the visual realm, i.e. words that look like what they mean, for example the interjection "O," a pictogram of a rounded mouth exclaiming "O"

2 See Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West."

3 "Poetry is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance." – Wallace Stevens in "Three Academic Pieces" (1)

4 Poetry, says Stevens, "must be the finding of a satisfaction": It must be an "act of the mind" matching the "rightness" of reality. (→ "Of Modern Poetry") Thus, "in the act of satisfying the desire for resemblance it touches the sense of reality, it enhances the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it." (→ "Three Academic Pieces")

5 "[The poet's] role, in short, is to help people live their lives." – Wallace Stevens in "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words"

On his second read-through, in almost a reprise of "Predator," David maintains eye contact, playing the role of some creepy night animal peering over the podium. His mouth extends in a feral grin as he sounds out "looming," "staring," "sensing." He seems to be borrowing a page from Tony's playbook to help us hear the poem as speech performed, not printed.

Looking over at my neighbor, I notice that Rudiger has marked each stanza with a number. It's the syllable count: six, five, four, and three. The last stanza breaks down to two plus one.

"Can we read the last line as what night animals do? Sing to each other?" I'm thinking of the bird singing to its voice.

"Maybe they're singing out of fear," Silvia says.

"It says 'sounds of / the moon.' So maybe they're howling," suggests Rebecca.

"We should be able to hear the sounds," Jennifer hints. "Poets use words to mimic what they hear."

"Cuckoo-echoing," quotes Tony. "Echoic language. Our grandson does that for everything. The door chime is a ding-dong and the dog is a woof-woof."

Helen says: "Your grandson must be a budding poet, because naming is the first task of poetry. As a spokesperson of language, a poet is above all a namer. That's why creating a name for something by copying the sound it makes is 'onomatopoeia,' the poetry of naming." According to Helen and George, the Greeks had a name for everything.

"So your grandson is an onomatopoet," explains Jennifer, "when he labels doorbells or animals with their own sounds."

"I don't hear any howling or cuckooing," snarls Laura, the wild game hunter.

Carol helps: "Ming, ring, sing. Or the assonant cry in 'night' and 'eye.' Or the cooing ooh-ooh in 'loom' and 'moon.'"

"Or listen to the whi*n*ing, hu*mm*ing nasals," Helen goes on. "*N*ight a*nim*als / loo*min*g / i*n*. Stari*n*g / sou*n*ds of / the *moon*. Se*n* / si*n*g."

Wendy hears it ever so faintly: "These aren't the blatantly omomatopoetic words our grandson uses."

Silvia is spooked: "No, the sound effects aren't blaring out at us, but creeping up on us out of the dark."

Jennifer agrees: "David uses consonance and assonance to conjure up the jungle sounds. That way, they remain in the background."

Dudley sees this as a production technique: "Spector's wall of sound

as a security perimeter from *Jurassic Park*."

This makes me think of the swarms of wildlife in the mangrove swamp behind our house. "Even on warm nights, Carol and I like to leave the window open to take in all the animal calls. Sometimes we are awakened by a low growl followed by a blood-curdling scream."

"We have occasionally spotted crocodiles back there," Carol adds.

Wendy pronounces "fear" as a screech, then rhymes: "Eek, I hear a shriek in this poem."

"I think that's a big part of where these sounds are coming from," I say. "Fear produces a watchfulness, a 'watch-sensing' that something is 'looming' out there and about to strike."

"The animals are afraid," says Michael. "They smell danger. And fear is contagious. That's why our pupils expand when we read this. We stare into the dark, nerve endings on edge, like the animals."

"Eye-staring." I think of Milton's "darkness visible," teeming with nightmares.

"The poem sharpens our senses," Helen concludes. "As readers, we become attentive to every sound, every movement."

"We begin to imagine things." Is Dudley mocking or trying to unnerve us?

"I see something!" cries Chang, pointing to his sheet. "I see two eyes staring at us from inside this poem. Do you see them, too?"

"Yes," says Tony. "The double-o in '*loo*ming.'"

"And another pair of eyes staring in the m*oo*nlight," adds Carol.

"Good. That means I'm not seeing things. You know, in Chinese, our words are characters called logograms. Many of them contain pictures, going back to the legendary Cangjie who was commissioned by the emperor to devise a writing system. He took a lot of patterns and shapes from nature—a tree, a running stream, a mountain—and made them into symbols. Over the millennia, they have been stylized quite a bit, but some of these ancient characters still contain recognizable pictures. We call them pictograms. For example, the character for 'sing' is *chàng*, not my name *Chāng*, but *chàng*. Inside the word, though, I can see my own name. And inside the pictogram for my name, I can see two splendid suns that remind me I am 'prosperous.' They look much like our poem's double-o, except that the double-o here forms a moon, not suns. Next to my name is an open mouth emitting notes, just as the suns emit light. When reading Chinese poetry, we have this added dimension of pictogram drawings enclosed within the poetic images.

If the poet talks about a man serenading his sweetheart, I take in that surface image, but I also am cognizant of the buried images, a singing mouth and the shining suns. Two levels of visual experience. With this sonar-like vision from the Chinese, I habitually look for pictures inside words. This is the first time I've come across any in English."

A few seconds of silence as our poetry circle ponders the question: Are there pictogram words in English or did David invent them? Next to me, Carol, I see, has spelled out "b-e-d" with its three circles shaped like cushions and the vertical lines forming a head- and footboard.

"In English, there's a word-character very much like *chàng*." Rosemarie has turned around to face us. "It has three miniature pictograms. First, there's a letter that looks like a smile with one side of the lip raised. Then, there's your open mouth singing. Finally, there's a letter depicting a person with outstretched arms, shouting or singing for joy."

"JOY!" Rebecca gets it.

Thank you, Rosemarie and David. You have just exonerated the English language and vindicated its claim as a worthy vehicle for poetry.

I am wondering if these pictograms can have the same echoing effect as the sound textures we identified. "Don't we see the double-o picture repeated in the hyphenated participles? I mean, if we were as sensitized as Chang to buried images, we might see the hyphens as nose bridges on eye glasses." My hyphens again! I was seeing them earlier as daggers.

"There's definitely an eyeball theme," Jennifer says, "but I see it coming from 'looming' and 'moon.' There are a hundred pairs of eyes peeking from behind cover on the ground caught in the reflection of the Cyclopean orb in the open sky. They are staring each other down."

"The moonlight spooks them." It's Michael again. "Makes them skittish. They jump at moon sounds and moon shadows."

"The moon is shining like the giant illuminated face of a Swatch." Tony's reading of "s watch-" provokes chuckles. "Is that another pictogram?"

"I think not." David puts three clipped stops after each word, bringing our flight of fancy back down to earth. "This one was just a warm-up for number 12 on your photocopies, which you will find on the second page. As we read it a couple of times, please focus your heightened senses on the images, both visual and acoustic."

But barely heard
This sil

vered light
The sheen

of unspoken
voices e

choed but
barely heard

through the
winds of this

silencing
night.

(*These Time-Shifting Thoughts*, p. 122)

nocturne
a dream mood poem set in the reveries of night. Also, a similar genre of music and painting.

Keats, Shelley, Swinburne, Hopkins, Auden, Eliot, Poe, Longfellow, Sandburg, *inter alios*, have written famous nocturnes. This one is by Whitman:

This is thy hour O Soul,
thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art,
the day erased, the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing,
pondering the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

Rudiger turns to us and gasps: "Geheimnisvoll!" This notation for a musical score means "mysterious."

"Yes, it's mood music," Carol replies. "But what mood? Hazy impressions stir feelings, feelings that are even hazier."

"The feeling of the indefinable beyond?" I ask. The feel of "what has really been"?

"The feeling of night, the last word in the poem." Silvia explains: "It's a nocturne. The words and the feelings they evoke are indistinct because they are primarily musical."

Wendy objects: "For a work that is primarily musical, it does have a rather odd title: 'But barely heard.'"

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter." Rosemarie quotes Keats.[1] His "Ode on a Grecian Urn" celebrates the power of poetic imagination. The sweeter unheard melodies are those we can only imagine.

"Yes, but barely heard melodies aren't sweet at all. They are just drowned out by noise."

Tony disagrees: "I think 'barely heard' would have the same effect as

1 John Keats (1795-1821) – This English poet, along with Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, and Coleridge formed the core of the Romantic movement. His great nocturne is "Ode to a Nightingale."

the inaudible music of the pipe player on the Grecian urn. If we can barely hear, we strain our ears, and stretch our imaginations to the point of perfect sweetness. We partake in the poet's creativity."

"Could 'barely heard' be another musical notation like *geheimnisvoll*?" Carol wonders. "*Leise. Piano piano. Pianissimo.* The composer's instructions for the whole piece?" Carol glances up at the maestro. Having accompanied him and Rosemarie to Haydn concerts in Vienna and Munich, she knows all about his affinity to classical music.

"That would fit," I say, reading David's raised eyebrows as a yes. "The words are played so softly, we can barely make them out. We just pick up vague outlines: light, echoes, wind. But no concrete images, no birds roosting in trees or animals crouching in the dark. If I could steal a musical notation from painting, I would use *sfumato*." This is the "smoky" effect Leonardo achieved by thinly layering glazes, blending borders, and progressing from dark to light in discrete increments. The technique produced an atmospheric sense of depth and mystery.

Silvia is an amateur musician: "This is the same technique pianists use when they play a nocturne. They do it with layers of resonance. One, they use the pedals. Two, they sound dark chords with their left hand. The result is a strange shading, like a fog shrouding the whole piece. I also play a couple of Chopin's nocturnes on guitar, but I can't get this shading out of the strings. Not even Philip Hii can manage it, although he sometimes makes you believe Chopin wrote for guitar. Whatever he lacks on the finger board, he makes up for on the melody line. Very delicate and beautiful."

At this point, David comes in: "Because of its two voices, the nocturne form in music has definite parallels for poetry. As Silvia has said, Chopin's nocturnes consist of the melody carried by the right hand and a chain of broken chords rumbling over on the left. The right-hand part is the singing voice. It's lighter and more fluid, a *bel canto*. This voice uses words to tell the story. The left-hand part is the chorus of nature. It has no words, only the sounds of wind, water, and brooding darkness. Together, they produce a duet."

Rudiger isn't listening. He is engrossed in diagramming the poem. The only mysteries his chemist's worldview allows are those hidden in the future, and he may have those covered as well with his analysis of the Revelation.

David proceeds: "Now, while I agree with Warren that a *sfumato* effect can be attained in poetry by avoiding particularized images, I

don't think we should use that term in reference to a nocturne. In Italian painting, *sfumato* is used to create a timeless landscape enveloped in almost a halo. A mist, where light and dark have mixed. But in a nocturne, light and dark disperse from different sources and maintain their own voices as they interact. The singing voice is light while the voice of nature is dark. This is the contrast that a poet writing a nocturne has to make. In painting, it's called 'chiaroscuro,' from the Italian words for bright and dim."

"In fact, this is what you've done, isn't it?" I am looking at the first and last lines of the poem. "'This sil / vered light' is balanced with 'this / silencing / night.' They even rhyme. Silver light – chiaro. Silencing night – scuro. Chiaroscuro."

Jennifer is not convinced: "You're looking at light and dark words in the text, but chiaroscuro is more than that. It's the combined result of both voices in David's nocturnal duet. I think the text itself is only the right-hand voice, the words softly sung and barely heard. The left-hand voice, then, must be the mood generated by the deep inscrutability of the night. The dark, echoing chords send chills down our spines. The mood is eerie and unsettling. Chiaroscuro comes from a clear voice *and* a dark mood working in tandem."

David mediates: "You're both getting there. But let me give an example, another nocturne. It's a short piece called 'Chiaroscuro' by the poet Wallace Stevens. The poem is set on a dark, rainy night. A traveler makes his way through the deserted streets, when the ghostly glimmer of a streetlight ignites a memory: a warm room full of fragrances, a light, and a woman. It's not a flashback in the narrative; more a split screen. The bleak trek in the rain runs parallel with the bright memory of the warm indoors. They coexist in the mind."

"So, it's like a stereo sound track," concludes Helen. "Consciousness on track A and memory on track B."

"Or reality and imagination," I say, knowing that Stevens saw these as opposing, but complementary, forces, since imagination creates its own reality.

"Or logic and feeling," adds Chang, reminding me of Whitman's day/night dichotomy in "Song of Myself":

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

"That's how the mind works," Chang continues. "Dual channel task-

ing. Left brain, right brain. Left for logic, right for rhythm."

"How the mind *works* is how the poet's mind *words*," I say to myself. Prof. M. W. Croll thought that seventeenth-century stylists strove "to portray, not a thought, but the mind thinking."[1] Their poems, then, are word-thoughts caught in the act of working themselves out. Or as Stevens says: "The poem of the mind in the act of finding."[2]

Jennifer is still trying to pinpoint the two voices in David's poem: "We also have two competing tracks in 'But barely heard': the unspoken voices and the wind."

"Who or what are unspoken voices? Isn't that an oxymoron?"[3] asks her friend Laura.

"The unspoken voices are illuminated. That makes them the right-hand, singing, story-telling part. They are the poet's memories, voices of the past. The wind is nature's voice, the dark chords of the nocturne."

"Maybe the silencing night is Lethe, forgetfulness," proposes Helen, returning us to Keats. "'Silencing' is an active participle; the night silences like the silencer of a gun. That would be an interesting duet: memories and forgetfulness. Perhaps that explains why memory's voice is barely heard, only in an echo."

"The echoing is somehow central." Rudiger has finished his calculations. He announces that the center of the poem is the "o" in "e / ch*o*ed." Thirteen syllables precede "choed," and exactly thirteen more follow it. "We've seen that the outer rim of the poem is formed by the silvered light and the silencing night. I'm thinking that the whole poem might radiate from the echoing *o*."

Rudiger is right. The construction is chiastic, as we observed in the poem "Outlining."

this silvered light	A
the sheen	B
unspoken voices	C
>echoed<	
barely heard	C
the winds	B
this silencing night	A

1 In *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm*: Essays by Morris W. Croll (Princeton, 1966), p. 210.

2 This is the first line of "Of Modern Poetry" by Wallace Stevens (see page 92).

3 oxymoron → page 142

I show this scheme to the group: "The bottom half of the poem echoes the top half."

"That's another feature of the nocturne," says Silvia excitedly. "Chopin's nocturne no. 20 begins just like that, with an echo. Actually, an echo of an echo of an echo." She strums the prelude: "Dum – da-da. A-BB. But then, da-da – dum, BB-A. Chiastic. That's the first echo. And then the whole thing again, *pianissimo*."

"Is the Moonlight Sonata a nocturne, too?" asks Rebecca.

David concedes that the first movement could be called that. "Beethoven called it a *fantasia*. But one of the music critics of his day gave it the name 'Moonlight Sonata.' The shimmering quality of diffused moonlight, as Wordsworth and Coleridge knew, excites the imagination. What Coleridge called the 'accidents of light and shade' in moonlight or what we have called the chiaroscuro of a nocturne, has the power to unleash sustained paths of imaginative associations in the mind of the reader,[4] in other words to induce dreams. That's why *fantasia* is also a good name. It would be a good name for my poem, as well."

Instinctively, my right fingers twitch. They are grabbing for the remote to lower the volume on Dudley: "So it's a dream film set without the dream content. You drop us into an enchanted forest, into this moonlit 'Transfigured Night,'[5] and call up dire memories and visions for us to do battle with. Totally the opposite of Freud. My analyst listens to my dream and helps me sort it out. You put me on the couch and slip me a hallucinogen. In the end, I dream your dream. I smoke your pot."

Laura turns around to Dudley. Propping her elbow on the back of her chair, she displays her well-toned physique. Her pocket-pocked flight jacket looks more like a flak jacket. "I have the same problem as the gentleman with the beard. In this simulated nightmare, we are as helpless as when we dream at night. We can't take action because we don't know the nature of the beast. We can't even move because we don't know what's out there. We are completely at the mercy of murky

4 See Section XIV of *Biographia Literaria* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Coleridge and Wordsworth agreed on a strategy to use moonlight (or the glow of a setting sun) in their poetry to create a landscape which was on the one hand true to nature, yet at the same time imbued with "the modifying colors of imagination." This plan was first implemented when Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner."

5 A poem by the German Richard Dehmel (1863-1920) made famous by the musical nocturne it inspired.

intimations and inaudible voices that paralyze the body while pumping up the imagination to level red."

"You both make it sound as if your imagination is a fearful thing." David steps away from his lectern. "But poets would say, and have said repeatedly through the ages, that imagination is the great good in all of us. Shelley said that in order for us to become truly good, we have to 'imagine intensely.'[1] Stevens said that in its striving to abstract the ideal, our imagination elevates us. It is the 'necessary angel' of humanity, without which we would be unable to set goals, work for improvement, search for truth, or just put ourselves in someone else's place. But like every other human faculty, including our intelligence and our emotions, imagination can be applied to the good, wasted on the trivial, or perverted for evil. As for my role, you're both right, I want to help you exercise your capacity to dream. I want to seed it and feed it. Shelley said 'poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination.' I want to enlarge it as far as it will go, past the confines of the physical word into the reality our reason cannot even locate."

Michael follows up: "Uh, David isn't talking about making you imagine things. 'Imagining things' is letting fear take over. It's when you give up and shut down your mind. But I think he's talking about poetic imagining. That's different. It's taking control of your imagination so you don't get hamstrung by fear."

Rosemarie is next. As a therapist, she takes a distinctly non-Freudian approach. "We all need this poetic imagining for our mental health. In fact, one symptom of depression can be a lack of imagination, an inability to seize upon an option and envision a way out. The human imagination not only allows us to shape our futures, as David was saying, but also to bring understanding and meaning to our memories. This includes the power to overcome disillusionment or even tragedy. The classic example is the poet Dante,[2] who is going through a bad time, a mid-life crisis of lost direction and lost prospects. He awakes in a dismal forest, a prisoner of his own despair. There seems to be no way out of his dark night of the soul. Gradually, though, he finds his voice as a poet—the singing voice of our nocturne. And by the power of imagination, he creates the greatest poem ever written, an imaginative journey through the whole universe. On his journey, he comes face-to-face with the ghosts of his past; he imagines talking to them in

1 Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) in his "Defense of Poetry."
2 Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) – author of Italy's greatest epic, *The Divine Comedy*.

hell. And putting the past to rest, he finds a way forward for the rest of his life."

"Quite a trip," says Dudley. "I've read it, but only the first book, the infernal one. And you're right. It's probably the second greatest single poem ever written."

"And what's number one?" Rebecca asks.

"Well, as a collection, you can't beat the Psalms. The original David."

"Have you ever read Maie Casey?"[3] Laura inquires. "She not only wrote stylish poems, but also stirring accounts of her life."

"I'd love to read her. Do they have her books here at the library?"

"No, but I can lend you one to get you started."

"Have you read 'Transfigured Night?'" Carol asks. She has studied it in German.

"No, I was referring to the tone poem by Arnold Schönberg. The weirdest damn dreamscape I've ever landed in."

"Then you might not realize that both nocturnes—the poem and the tone poem—are about redemption. You're right, it does begin in a gloomy German forest. The dark voice of nature is moaning. The woman is ridden with guilt over her pregnancy. The child she is carrying is not her husband's. But something in her confession works a miracle of forgiveness that completely transforms all three people, the man, the woman and the child. The husband is made into a child again, the child becomes the husband's child, and the wife is freed of guilt. The man looks up into the moonlight and exclaims:

Oh, look how bright the cosmos is aglow!
How everything is bathed in radiance!

So we see the final triumphant note is sounded by the transformative voice of the imagination."

3 Maie Casey was an Australian poet and aviator who wrote extensive memoirs about her service in World War II.

4 Recalled from Emotion

*Imag*es from the experienced world are the fuel for *imag*ination. As such, they power that intergalactic vehicle of the mind which can take us anywhere, even into a world beyond experience, either the preternaturally real or the purely *imag*inary. The Romantics, whom we encountered in our last selection, also explored these images from nature, but were less interested in how we experience them than in how we react to them. In other words, they sought to articulate feelings.

Wordsworth, one of the leading figures of the Romantic movement, defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."[1] He then described how a poem is composed, a three-step process that sounds very much like David's. The starting point, however, is not the experience itself, but the emotions the experience sparked:

1. The emotion is recollected.
2. The emotion is quietly contemplated.
3. The original emotion is recreated.

Comparing Wordsworth's method to David's three questions, we see that whether the poet is aiming to capture internal emotion or an external experience, Horace's criterion of being true to nature remains paramount. Both procedures aim at finding language to reproduce what the poet has deeply felt and critically examined.

The Romantic emphasis on the emotional center of poetry has persisted into the modern age and is immortalized in Ezra Pound's[2] famous dictum that "only emotion endures." What usually remains with us from poems (or people) we have bonded with is a distinctive "feel." The next selections, then, will take us, via imagery, from a vivid life experience to the feel of that experience as it is "recollected in tranquility" by the poet.

As we turn to the next poem, we notice that it bleeds all the way to the bottom of the page. In fact, all three columns on page two are streaked with long trails of David's irregular two-liners, winding like raindrops down a window pane. Have we perchance graduated to a

1 In his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

2 Ezra Pound (1885-1972) – a modernist American poet who worked toward creating concrete, dynamic images.

new level of sophistication?

David reads the title of the next selection: "For our son Raphael." He stops and folds his arms on the podium. "Our elder son Raphael has been a great pleasure over the years, especially since he's remained so close to us, even as he's grown up. That has to do with his dependency. He was a special-needs child, and by nature has always been extremely attached to us. The difficulty I have in dealing with Raphael is that I can't relate to him intellectually. I can't share my thoughts with him, as I'm sharing them with you. I can't share my poems. But as with any other disability, people learn to compensate. It is well known, for example, that visual impairment usually leads to higher auditory acuity. Likewise, someone who is mentally disadvantaged is often emotionally gifted. That's true of Raphael. He has developed ways of communicating, not only with us, but even with strangers, that somehow circumvent the need for a lot of abstract talk."

As David reads the eleven stanzas twice, I reflect on the wide spectrum of human communication, with all our ways of "responding" to each other, ranging from language, both words and pictograms, to non-verbal signals and semaphores, all the way to the parasensory pulsing described here. "Responding," the first word in the middle stanza, is positioned right at the heart of the poem.

For our son Raphael
Some

thing more
than blood-bind

s walking a
lone at night

your steps e
choing my dis

tant thought
s the clouds

responding
through their

tonalities
of cause we

listen the
woods awaken

to our darken
ing pulse

Something
more than that

blood-binds.
(from *Wind phrasings*, p. 256)

pathetic fallacy
the scientifically invalid assumption that nature has feelings or might even sympathize with our moods, i.e. that rain falls when we are sad or the sun comes out when we are happy. Most songwriters and poets, especially the Romantics, are vulnerable to the pathetic fallacy.

Rebecca steps gingerly into the arena: "This is in some ways like the last one."

"In what ways?" asks her neighbor Helen.

"Well, I think it's another night piece, a nocturne."

Silvia agrees: "Yes, we can hear the two voices, the human thoughts and the responding thunder."

"The human heartbeats and the whole chorus of nature," Tony adds.

"The duet of light and dark," Rebecca observes, thinking. "And the human voices are 'unspoken.' They speak through telepathy."

"My dis / tant thought / s." Helen reads. "The poet's thoughts are distant, but not distant from Raphael. He is thinking distantly, as in the Greek prefix 'tele-,' at a distance. Tele-pathy is feeling from afar."

"A local area network." Just the right word, courtesy of Chang.

"But they also communicate in rhythm," says Carol. "The boy's strides are in step with the poet's thoughts. Their pulses are beating time together."

"It's more than the pulse, though," Rebecca believes. "Something more than blood binds."

"Isn't it the whole chorus of nature that connects them?" speculates Jennifer. "The clouds and the woods?"

Again, Silvia concurs: "Yes, it's David's nocturnal duet. They think; the clouds respond. They listen; the woods awaken."

I find these exchanges striking: "We can hear the duet, first in the juxtaposition of 'thoughts' and 'clouds,' then in the echoing verb sequence: list*en*, awak*en*, dark*en*."

"Which is something else we heard in the previous poem, echoing." Helen points out the echo that encapsulates the whole poem: "Something more than blood-binds." Is the binding force a kind of echolocation, as in dolphin pods?

"First the thoughts echo the steps." In her head, Silvia is putting the poem to music. "Then the clouds echo with their dark arpeggios, their broken chords, tonalities of cause."

"What are 'tonalities of cause'?" Wendy wants to know.

"Tonalities are the way the notes are arranged around the tonal key," explains Silvia. "They cause harmony."

"Thunder causes harmony?" Wendy is dubious.

"They cause reactions deep inside the listener." Helen takes us back to Socrates' worry that poetry's music could be dangerous for human consumption. "Reactions that may be harmonious, but could also incite the passions."

"Especially if Schönberg is playing." Dudley is referring again to "Transfigured Night," a passionate piece deprived of a firm tonal center. The music seems to wobble and lurch in an unsteady Dionysian dance.

Rudiger the scientist thinks we are missing something: "Tonalities of cause are sounded by the clouds because clouds are natural agents of cause. The whole natural order is governed by cause and effect."

"That makes sense," says Silvia. "Tonality is expressed in seven tones, like the seven days of creation. So tonality of cause is the music of creation, nature's own symphony."

"And the tonalities—plural—are nature's musical responses to the footsteps through the forest." Carol returns to rhythm as a means of communication. "Look at the present participles: The people are walking. Their steps are echoing. Thump-thump. The clouds are answering in tone clusters. The woods are stirring. Now the people's pulses are throbbing. Thump-thump-thump-thump. People and nature synchronized."

"Their heartbeats are so synchronized," I add, "that David talks about 'our pulse'—singular—as if their two circulatory systems had fused into one." Blood-binds, with the hyphen as a pictographic bond.

"Their pulsing bloodstreams bind them, but the something more that binds is the music." For Silvia, music is a vital tool in her therapy. "The whole magical nocturne unites them. David is musical, and so is Raphael. Both of them are extremely sensitive. But Raphael can't put his sensitivity into words. That leaves music as their common language."

"OK," says Tony, "but what is the music they hear? Is it the nocturne of the woods and the thunder, or are we talking about those unheard melodies from Keats, music of the imaginative sort? Not imagined, but imaginative."

"I think the nocturne *is* an unheard melody," Jennifer says. "We can only hear it through the poem. The imaginative music of a nocturne is

like the radiance of the moonlight. It touches and it transforms, as we are transformed by poetry."

"We can see this transformation in the poem," Helen notes. "The dark voice of the night darkens the pulse of the men. The night has permeated their blood."

"But the reader is also transformed by the power of the nocturne." Jennifer insists.

"Are you saying we are different people for having read this poem?" I ask.

"If we have felt how the figures in the poem respond to each other by their mutual responsiveness to the music, and if we have felt that music ourselves, we can take that unique sensitivity with us and live with it. The circumference of our imaginations is a little wider, allowing us to see and sense with broader scope."

"If I could just come in here briefly before I go ..." Jennifer's guest, Laura, is now standing and straightening her jacket.

"You're going?"

"Yes, I told Corrine I would meet her a few minutes before class." Corrine Thwing is the Creative Writing instructor at the library. "Until we read this selection, I had the wrong impression of your work, Dr. Jaffin. I thought you were manipulating conventions of reality to recast familiar metaphors. My fluffy pillowcases fly through space instead of clouds. Stones engrave words instead of words engraved on stone. Incense comes from the well instead of water. Turning everything on its head to amuse and astound, like the surrealists. This poem is completely different. It has a clear message expressed in coherent language. It moves from a concrete setting through a clear narrative marked by identifiable events and interaction. Even human interaction. What I missed before was any kind of personal involvement on your part. I mean, this is the first poem in which you have used the first person pronoun, *my*. The aesthetic distance you kept in those first pieces has been replaced by a vivid close-up portrait, the poet unmasked. I thought you were using the poem to hide behind, like the intellectual mask T. S. Eliot wore. But I have seriously misjudged what you are trying to do."

David, for once in his life, appears taken aback, so it's Rosemarie who replies: "We like to start with shorter descriptive poems to get everyone used to David's style. This kind of poem is full of complexities, including the personal voice of the narrator."

"Nevertheless," Helen says, "I don't think we need to know the narrator personally to follow his narration. I don't think we need to know his personal background, either. I think the poem works perfectly well without knowing his story or Raphael's." There are murmurs of assent throughout our group. "We all have experienced moments of telepathic communication with parents, children, and siblings. We all know the power of music as well. Socrates said that it can penetrate to our very souls and take possession. Music is universal, as is this poem."

"I agree. It's personal experience universalized." Jennifer has just escorted her friend out and is now settling back in her seat. "But we also felt that in the previous nocturne, even without the personal pronoun."

"The personal pronoun *my* is a clear deictic,[1] but the *your* is out of focus, as is the *our*." As in the last poem, I am having difficulty finding my way through the *sfumato*. "All in all, the reader is a little disoriented. Who, for example, is taking this walk? We can read it in at least five different ways. The phrase 'walking alone at night' has feet but no face. The nearest person it could be referring to is *you* as in 'your steps.' The poet is thinking distant thoughts, so we don't know at all if he is physically present on the walk. Since whoever is walking is walking alone, it would be logical to assume that the *you* is unaccompanied. Or is it father and son alone? Or father and mother alone? The *you* might be Raphael, it may be Rosemarie, it might be both. It could even be you the reader. It might be Raphael because the poem is dedicated to him. It might be Rosemarie, because she obviously belongs to the *we* in 'our son.' But is she part of the *we* in 'we listen' or 'our darkening pulse'? Because the poem deals with thought sensing, we have a lot of candidates for the telepathic network, but we don't know exactly who is walking through the woods."

"You are being a little ambiguous yourself, Warren," Helen chides. "Are you riding your old grammatical *cheval de bataille* to expound the cause of clarity, or are you just kicking up more dust clouds?"

"I guess I'm just trying to prove what we already know: That even when a modern poem seems to follow a 'coherent narrative,' it can still bristle with question marks."

1 deictic = a word whose meaning is completed by what it points or refers to (this/that, later/earlier, come/go). Do we know who exactly the poet is pointing to when he says "you" or if he's pointing only in one direction?

Why then this gnawing fear

Why

then this
gnawing fear

as at the
roots of

autumn'
s bareness

Exposing
the naked

ness of our
designs and

leaving but
solemned

stars to dis
tance the hea

vens from our
grasp Are we

not fleshed
from the stuff

that makes
life from Is

not our God
creating the

realms of will
to overcome.

ratiocination
reasoning with oneself in question-answer

On stage, we often see ratiocination as the driver of a soliloquy ("To be or not to be?"). In novels, it often operates in "interior monologues," where we can overhear the heroine thinking.

"To be or not to be?" is the fundamental existential question. In close second place, however, after we have decided to take the risk of life, comes the question of why death makes us afraid. The poem opens not just with "Why?" (the first line) but "Why / then?" This tells us that the why has already been engaged by rationality, that this ratiocination has been going on for some time.

The why-question addresses a gnawing fear, one that strips away our budding hope like the chill of autumn. Two doubts take the place of hope. As usual, the poet expresses ideas, including doubts, in images. Can you spot these twin images of doubt? How are they connected to the central image of autumn?

The poet answers the existential "why then?" with two rhetorical questions. They are "rhetorical" because they do not really expect an answer in return. In fact, they are framed in such a way that their premise has to be assented to:

- Are we not ...? (Of course!)
- Is not our God ...? (Certainly!)

Each of the rhetorical questions actually gives a specific answer to one of the two doubts raised in the why-question. Can you match the answers with the doubts?

(from *A Birth in Seeing*, pp. 121-22)

"It can stand alone, just like the last one." Helen is referring to the biographical backdrop, what we may or may not know about the life circumstances behind the work itself. Here, the reader can appreciate the poet's existential fear without having to know that he is an ordained minister. The poet's angst has been recollected and recreated in a way that anyone can feel. Or, judging from the discussion, everyone has indeed felt: a fear that chills us to the very bone of our being, down to the basic tenets of what we believe.

The discussion is an interesting one I'd like to join, but once again, I'm entangled in the thicket of ungrammaticality. My sticking point is the word "from," sandwiched between the two last questions in the poem: "Are we not fleshed ...?" and "Is not our God ...?" My first suspicion was that I was dealing with more telegrammatic quirkiness along the lines of "the space of what's answering itself from." But: "We are *from* the stuff that makes life *from*"? No, here something must be supplied. The reader will try to match up that second "from" with some object. Life from what? I also quickly discarded the possibility that "from" was no more than a loose memory remnant, junk interference patterned on: "We are such stuff that dreams are made *on*."[1] One thing I cannot do with this modern poet who weighs every word is put such an infraction down to whimsy or cute mental remixing. Unlike some moderns, David does not equate originality with obscurity.

Two other explanations remain. Either this is a broken-off thought (what we call "aposiopesis," or interruption) to be punctuated by a dash, or a very strange sort of substitution (called "metallage"[2]) by which the object of *from*, instead of a noun, is a whole idea that the poet did not manage to pack into a single noun. Metallage is actually rather common in the idiom of the commonplace when the speaker, often a teenager, is caught speechless: "So here I am listening to <u>wow</u> and, like, really getting this sense of <u>just off the charts</u>." But in the hands of a poet, what this fill-in-the-blank device can do is unveil a white screen upon which a whole slide show can be projected. Slide one might look like this:

We are from the stuff that makes life from <u>is</u>.

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1 *The Tempest*, Act IV, scene 1. Even the strictest grammarian will forgive Shakespeare for final prepositions.

2 A Greek word meaning "alteration" or "mutation." Pronounced meh-TAH-la-gee.

Which we might read as:
"We are from the stuff that makes life from what is = something."

In the first slide, what we have done is fill in the blank with the first word from the next sentence, perhaps taking David's fascinating 3-word line "life from Is" to mean "life comes from the infinite Is," the ultimate life source. But since this is a poem about doubt, we might just as well read it as "life comes from something that already is," such as a chemical soup.

We have already started running the first sentence about the stuff of life over into the next one, another rhetorical question: "Is not our God creating the realms of will to overcome?" So, what if we complete the first sentence with the opening *two* words of the next? Slide two.

We are from the stuff that makes life from is not.
Which we might read as:
"We are from the stuff that makes life from what isn't = nothing."

Slide two perpetuates the doubtful state. Either life has been fashioned *ex nihilo*, from nothing in some sort of miracle, or it has just crawled forth from random nothingness. The tension between "is" and "is not" provides a perfect fulcrum for a poem about doubt, balancing "to be" with "not to be." It gives rise to a perfectly binary mindset, a sort of doublethink which allows us to live as if "is" and "is-not" were somehow mutually compatible.

Before they gradually merge, the two sentences collide at various points, creating a myriad of plurisigns, like sparks flying off a grinding wheel. In succession, each one flashes through the mind as we try to pin down the border between the thoughts. What if we draw the line after the first *four* words: "*Is* not our God"? Doesn't God exist? This one, slide three, plunges us deeper into doubt: Either our lives are made from hope for a life with God or they are made from utter godlessness.

The second question, "Is not our God ...?" is not a real question at all, but a rhetorical affirmation of the enduring power of creation. God is both creating to overcome and giving us the will to overcome. What finally happens is that this entire second question becomes subsumed under *from*. Thus, both rhetorical questions—in fact, all three questions that make up the poem—are quietly resolved into peace of mind: We are created in an act of divine will from the very stuff that gives us

the will to overcome our fears. In other words, God gave us a portion of his creative good will to use for the good, to be creative with ourselves. Well, we might ask, if that is the answer, why then this gnawing fear?

As I ponder this message from the slide show, I realize that the group has also arrived at the same point: the response to gnawing fear. The word they have been tossing around is "antidote," a medical term suggested by "stuff." Helen has been saying that the antidote to fear is love, while Rudiger insists that it is faith.

It is Rudiger who has the floor: "Before you decide what the antidote is, you have to diagnose the nature of the poison." Helen signals agreement with a drawn-out "jaaaa," as if their disputation was in German. "The poison is fear, something that has put the poet into a mood of autumnal despair. He sees nothing but the lifeless limbs of dead trees and heaven seems beyond his grasp. The fear is described as 'gnawing,' something that eats at you and plagues you like doubt. Doubt eats away at the edifice of your faith, until it crumbles." Rudiger seems to be constructing a chemical equation: Fear equals despair, despair equals doubt, and doubt equals disbelief. If disbelief is cured by belief, doubt and fear will be dispelled.

Helen counters: "You are right: The fear is 'gnawing,' a word that signifies destruction. But what is being destroyed? Is it our intellectual belief system? No, gnawing is painful. Like a disease, fear attacks us physically and emotionally. This destruction by fear is being counteracted by God, who is creating a realm where fear is overcome. Fear, an emotion, can only be overcome by a more powerful emotion, love."

A fog horn from behind me blasts: "Perfect love casts out fear."

Jennifer ignores Dudley's outburst: "In fact, I notice that 'gnawing' and 'creating' are set off against each other, one in the second line of the second stanza, the other in the second line of the second stanza from the end. They are the two opposing forces in the poem."

Tony wonders if these forces have agents: "I would just say that since God is the force of creating, whoever might be gnawing at us is very likely one of those hellish tormenters from a Bosch canvas."

Carol sees another link: "As gnawing is a continuous disintegration, creating is an ongoing process, too. It's also in the present tense. The power of creation is not confined to the remote past. God did not create, then wander off to let things take their course."

"He is creating the realms of will." Rebecca reads from the last

stanza. "Is that like a kingdom? But why is it plural?"

"Everyone possesses a will," her neighbor Helen replies. "And, yes, a realm is a place that is ruled. Our wills should be ruled by love. Everyone needs to create a stronghold of love to withstand fear. Love is the spiritual antidote to fear."

It's time for me to get into the act: "I think there's a simple linguistic explanation why 'realms' is plural: It is parallel with the word 'heavens.' One effect of fear is that it lets the stars blot out the heavens. The vacuum between them seems to fill the whole universe, making any idea we may have had of a heavenly realm seem beyond our grasp." These are the fearsome "empty spaces" that Robert Frost contemplated:

> They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
> Between stars—on stars where no human race is.[1]

"The cosmos as explained by astronomers leaves no room for God," Chang declares. "Science's verdict on the whole proceeding is a fearful condemnation of faith."

"Condemnation? Maybe that's the idea behind 'solemned stars.'" Jennifer is leaning back in her chair pointing at the ceiling with her pen. "They are sitting up there in the sky, cloaked in their black robes of night, passing judgment on our vain deliberations."

Silvia asks about "solemned." All afternoon, she has been stumbling over David's use of the participle. Whitman talks about "solemn stars," which would be accepted poetic diction, but, as we know, David likes to stay away from the gaudiness of descriptive adjectives.

Jennifer has a helpful answer: "'Solemned' is an example of the pathetic fallacy at work. When we hear the judgment of the stars, we imagine that they are sitting up on the bench with solemn demeanors and cold, severe stares. Actually, we are the ones who have been intimidated by the court. We have been silenced and solemned by their stern sentence. But we transfer our own solemnity to the stars. This is called a 'transferred epithet.'"

Helen sees further validation for her theory of love conquering fear: "'Intimidated' is a good word for this. Made fearful. What David is doing is characterizing the fear beyond 'gnawing.' The fear not only gnaws away at us, it makes us feel like condemned prisoners. Banished from God's nearness: 'solemned / stars to dis / tance the hea / vens

1 From his poem "Desert Places." For the New Englander Frost, the blank nothingness of a snow-covered field is just as awesome as the vast darkness of a night sky.

from our / grasp.' The abrupt breaks between those lines magnify the distance."

Helen is right. Actually, there are two present participles modifying fear. Fear is:

(a) Exposing the nakedness of our earthly ambitions,
(b) Leaving the stars to make heaven seem beyond our reach.

Jennifer sees this: "The autumn trope also helps put a face on fear. It exposes us, leaves us naked and defenseless, as fall bares the trees."

"It also exposes our night sky," adds Tony. "Our canopy of leaves leaves, leaving just the stars overhead to leave us wondering."

The first rhetorical question, "Are we not fleshed ...?" answers (a) above. Whereas fear strips us, we are clothed in ("fleshed in") living spirit. Likewise, the second rhetorical question, "Is not our God ...?" answers (b). God is helping us break out of our limitations, reach our goals, and combat fear.

Michael, who has seen fear close-up, gives us his take: "I think what we're learning is that a certain kind of fear is debilitating. Not the adrenaline fear that freezes us in our tracks. It's all about the fear that gnaws away like cancer and makes us give up on life. It takes away our plans and our hopes. It even takes away our voice of protest. We are sent silently to our cells to rot."

As if on cue, the sound of a heavy door squeaking open. Now it stands ajar, but no one is entering. Instead, Jennifer, who is seated in front of the exit, does a short pantomime with the unseen presence. The exaggerated tapping at her watch is a clear signal to our speaker that his allotted time has expired. "The next group is waiting," she announces.

David checks his timepiece and flips through his photocopied sheets. "Oh, yes, we have overdrawn. Well, we didn't even make it to the last page, but never mind. Your contributions have been well worth the time, even the overtime. Thank you very much for all your comments. I apologize for not being a better timekeeper. We can pick up at this point next month."

"But we won't be here next month," Wendy wails.

Jennifer's friend Laura walks in with Corrine, followed by Leroy. Outside, people are milling around. A handful gather in the doorway, lending new meaning to "library noise threshold."

"Our flight from Orlando departs in a fortnight," Tony shouts. "And

we'd really fancy spending a few days at the Magic Kingdom beforehand. Couldn't we work in an extra session next week? Please?"

David and Rosemarie do a quick face-scan check that is only possible after decades of close coordination. For us other couples, as well as for Chang and Dudley, arranging an appointment is a matter of some consultation. Before any of us can commit to next week, Jennifer's friend, who is obviously Corrine's guest author for the Creative Writing group, decides to officiate: "I'd like to invite anyone who has time to stay for the next hour. We will be looking at the personal memoir as way of collecting and passing on local knowledge and life experience. I can see that all of you have some very interesting stories to tell." She begins unpacking her bag on the table behind David's lectern. Out come dozens of shrink-wrapped copies of *My Plane of Reflection* by Laura Kendall, "How a Maverick Aviatrix Played with the Big Boys in the Florida Keys." Would-be memorialists are now streaming into the room. A few, drawn by the cover shot of Laura in her safari jacket and little else, show interest in thumbing the book for tantalizing details, but these are safely locked away behind tamper-proof plastic. Others pick up our hastily abandoned photocopies and examine them curiously. Mainstream prose culture meets a marginalized culture of poetry, struggling to hang on in the blog age. "What's this?" someone asks, not even trying to read it.

Leroy has OK'd room availability for next Wednesday afternoon's slot. While David tries to confirm the time for our extraordinary meeting as he takes leave from our members, Corrine is welcoming the aspiring autobiographers and introducing them to Laura. This creates a hello-goodbye dialogue full of wrenching splices.

Tony is thanking David with a line from Hopkins reminiscent of Florida: "The thunder-purple seabeach pluméd purple-of-thunder ..." To show his appreciation, David tries to repeat it, but this takes longer than expected, causing the exit traffic to back up.

Everyone at the front of the room is caught in the floodlight of the data projector. The first transparency from Laura's presentation proclaims a three-step method of "getting started." First, if you want to put your life story on paper, you should ask "Who am I?" and try to answer in one sentence. Question two is: "Where were your crossroads?" i.e. the decisions which have made you who you are. Laura recommends Ranke: Find at least one "intensity moment" from each decade of your life and then "tell how it went down." Finally, you

should ask yourself: "How have these moments changed the course of your life and impacted those around you?" All in all, she has not strayed far from Horace or Sidney in her emphasis on chronicling the essence of what we all experience. Her list, though, stops short of the critical Wordsworthian-Jaffinesque third point: How is that experience transcribed into language?

Out in the late afternoon heat, the library's flag still shows a steady on-shore breeze as we split into pairs on the front steps. Silvia and Jennifer are exchanging phone numbers. Carol and Helen are heading up to the pier. Michael and Rebecca are grooming the dog. Rudiger and I are unlocking our bikes, when Chang walks by. Dudley, he informs us, has opted to stay for Creative Writing. Would we like to join him at Lin's Garden for tea? We would, but it will have to wait, as the tide is coming in, making it harder to cycle on the beach as we move nearer to sundown. We suggest that while he's at Lin's, he reserve the back room to round out our group's special session in one week.

Riding south, Rudiger and I have to push it fairly hard on the narrowing strip of packed sand. When we get to the first of the towering condos that alert passing boaters and pelicans to the nearby south channel, we stop for a swig from our water bottles. The high-rises are also a sign for us cyclists to turn in toward home. High on the Sunset, a mammoth dangling "S," a local landmark and an unintended tribute to E. E. Cummings, is lit up with reflected rosy-tinged rays. I ask my neighbor what he thought of his first modern poetry reading.

"It's a different way of thinking, not easy for the scientific mind. But it's a healthy exercise. Reason will help us decide which solution is the best, but imagination will help us figure out which solutions are even possible." He pauses to survey the spectacular cathedral sky resplendent in the rose window of the gathering sunset. "But you never said what *you* think."

"About what?"

"In that last debate I was having with Helen, what do you think is the antidote to fear?"

"You know, Rudiger: It's like reason and imagination. We think of them as contraries, but, as you say, they are companions. Same goes for faith and fear, I think."

A little conversation seems to be brewing in the afterglow of poetry. Dismounting, we cross the dunes and trudge through deeper sand to one of the tiki bars for early sundowners.

Later I come home to find Carol already cushioned by the window, where fish are plopping, predators prowling, and night creatures looming. She has picked up my volume of Stevens' *Collected Poems* and is trying to "solve" one of them, as she solves crosswords or whodunits. She tells me about her sunset on the pier with Helen, and the pelican they spotted on a pole. "You realize, of course, that today we all just assumed it was a pelican. The text just says 'bird.'"

"Was that an assumption—an inference of intellect—or something that we just saw?"

"You mean he said bird and we saw pelican?"

"That's how our own experienced world participates in the poem. As listeners who are drawn into a piece of music, we readers step onto the stage the poet has created. The scene is bare, just a sketchy *sfumato*. Our imagination fills in the details, just as you invented a crocodile to go with of the pair of eyes in the poem about nocturnal animals. The poet suggests an indistinct nightscape and we supply the whole swamp behind our house."

"Setting a stage is the very way Wallace Stevens describes it." She refers to the metapoem she's been reading, "Of Modern Poetry." "The poet is depicted as both a metaphysician and a musician, possessing a unique combination of gifts, conceptual and musical intelligence, the cerebral and the sensual. The poem is of the mind, but it is an act of the mind, acted out in music on the stage."

The poet leading a double life, miraculously bipolar: "Il Penseroso" and "L'Allegro," Milton's companion pieces, depict a recluse thinker and a convivial reveler.

"The poet is on the stage 'in the dark, twanging an instrument.'"

A thinker with fingers, who frets upon the stage. She reads on:

> ... twanging a wiry string that gives
> Sounds passing through sudden rightness, wholly
> Containing the mind ...

Strangely anticipating string theory, this metaphor seems to contain Carol's answer, the solution to Stevens' mystery of modern poetry: the metaphysical mind voiced in physical vibrations, "abstraction blooded, as a man by thought," the unseen world of ideas bodied forth and blooded into living sensations and sensualities that invite us readers to hear, feel and see its sudden rightness, even to become part of it.

III. Story & Symbol

One week later, it's not exactly what the mainlanders would call a "beach day." Although the fog has burned off, there's still a gauzy smear across Sanibel, melding it into sea and sky. Gusty billows of gray threaten bucketfuls of more cooling rain, giving us a very small window for an early afternoon dash up to the library along the white-snailed foam.

Three of us are slogging single file through the sand, while Helen is sloshing along in the water, shoes in hand. Carol is leading the pack, occasionally stopping for shells. Helen's husband George, still patched into his conference call, is pulling up the rear.

When his call came a half hour ago, we were sitting on the lanai drinking Greek coffee and taking in the oddly deserted beach. Helen had just cleared away the pan of her magnificent moussaka, a treat she saves for guests only, as George is allergic to eggplant. This intolerance is the only un-Greek cell in his body. "Excuse me, please. They just need to fly something by me. It won't take more than four minutes to shoot it down." With a smile and a wink, he gestured for us to help ourselves to some baklava.

While Carol carved a sliver, I reached for one of the two ponderous tomes George had brought from his library after lunch. Both run about 300 pages of poetry. The first was the *Iliad* by Homer, the oldest poem in the Western canon; the other was *Dream Flow*, a recent collection by David Jaffin. The books, far from serving as subtle prompts to segue into today's poetry agenda, were evidently props for another one of our host's mini-homilies on modern civilization: "Witness what has happened to poetry in the last 3000 years. On the one hand, we have a gripping story with a plot and a cast of heroic characters we can all identify and sympathize with. A mythic saga that strikes a chord deep within all of humanity, not just Greeks. A story with a clear beginning, a middle, and an end ..."

"A middle, a beginning, and an end," I corrected. Unlike classical tragedies, epics like the *Iliad* usually start *in medias res* and then go back and pick up the beginning.

"OK, a middle, a beginning, and an end. But a structure everyone

can follow. It is a tale told by a 'rhapsodist,' a minstrel or bard for whom storytelling is an art. It keeps the audience spellbound for hour upon hour as it is recited around the fire. 'Rhapsody' comes from *raptō*, to weave. The ode is masterfully stitched together into a large, lavish tapestry held together by a taut thread of continuity. One episode builds upon another and the various conflicts all move to some kind of resolution. The rhapsodist is a song weaver who integrates a plethora of details into a wondrous panorama." George was clearly becoming enraptured by his own inner rhapsodist.

As he picked up David's book in his other hand, it was easy to intimate the thrust of the coming argument. "And what do we have today? A thousand details, but no panorama. The heroes are gone; the story is gone; gone is any kind of conflict and resolution. The hero's ancestral home on Ithaca is occupied by strangers. Penelope has unraveled her tightly woven tapestry into a thousand shreds." He started leafing through David's delicate poem-pieces. "A thousand moments, but no chronology. Where does it begin or end? No one knows. What's it about? A patchwork of a thousand different topics, but no unifying thread."

"Life?" I suggested.

"Yes, it's about life, but what about life? You know what Homer thought about life, what worldview Achilles entertained, and exactly what kind of honor code spurred kings Priam and Agamemnon to action. But here we are never quite sure what David thinks about this painting, or that sunset, or about some bird that meanders by. And as for any grand vision, a unified field theory, we have to piece it together one conjecture at a time. But how do all the pieces fit into life if life has no storyline? How can you assemble a puzzle whose pieces form no picture?" At this point his cell jingled, matters of great pitch and moment summoning his attention. "We know what Homer's culture meant, because Homer told us. Who today can tell us what our own culture means?" Putting down the books, George shrugged his shoulders and lifted his eyebrows in that great Greek gesture of patient acceptance.

Was modern poetry really only a pale ghost of past splendors? Deprived of character and action, could it still hold our attention? Was it up to the task of chronicling our culture "as it really was"? Nibbling from Carol's baklava, I opened David's book. A personal dedication to George on the title page caught my eye. "From a lowly makar to a top

maker and shaker. May my muse inspire all your makings." Playing on our Scots word for poet, "makar," David is extending Ben Jonson's[1] view that poetry is "the craft of making" to every deed that is done with craft or art.

Then I flipped to this:

A kaleidoscope

can turn
the meanings

of its world
around until

you're touch
ing into the

timeless
ness of where

space continue
s to sound

out signals
of its las

ting fragmen
tary design

s.

(from *Dream Flow*, p. 169)

metapoetry
poetry about poetry

Alexander Pope: "An Essay on Criticism"
Archibald MacLeish: "Ars Poetica"
Marianne Moore: "Poetry"
Carl Sandburg: "Ten Definitions of Poetry"
Wallace Stevens: "Of Modern Poetry"
are some well-known examples of metapoems.

True to his own tenet that "poetry is the subject of the poem," Wallace Stevens made poetic art one of his major themes. In "The Idea of Order at Key West," Stevens describes a woman singing on the beach as "the single artificer of the world," and the "maker of the song." Both titles, artificer and maker, could be literal translations of the Greek word "poet." Through the creative power of her song, the night and the sea seem ordered and comprehensible. It is the poet with her "keener sounds" who succeeds in conferring meaning on the mindless "grinding water and the gasping wind."

"Kaleidoscope" is one of those big, fat Greek compounds that breaks down into three words: It's a device for *scop*ing out *kala eidē*, beautiful forms. These forms are produced by rotating bits of tinted glass in a tube and reflecting them in mirrors. The kaleidoscopic view of life is essentially fragmentary; nevertheless, random patterns emerge, or "designs" that were not really designed. The glittering prismatic bands we

1 Ben Jonson, a contemporary of George Herbert, was a lyricist in the Horatian style.

marvel at are just reflections, brief flashes of recognition, glimpses of Stevens' "idea of order." When all is said and done, we are just looking at a jumble of tiny glass splinters. Whereas an epic poet, a rhapsodist, will take the thousand details of life and place them all into a cohesive mosaic, the lyricist will hold up one detail and then another, until we finally see a colorful rainbow of pieces, one that dissolves and reconfigures into something completely new as soon as we turn the page or turn the dial on the kaleidoscope.

In contrast, the epic holoscope pulls the whole world together and resizes it to something we can visualize. Since the whole epic contest between Priam and Agamemnon was a microcosm of the passionate forces in the ancient world, Homer's lens could easily back away and wide-angle this struggle, or move in close on grieving Achilles covering himself with ash. The narrative thus switches effortlessly between the public and the private, the Greeks and the Trojans, the people and the gods, and, in doing so, connects all the pieces. This unity of storyline, George's "thread," makes it easy to film the *Iliad* or to rewrite it as a novel, something that no one can ever do with a collection of lyrics like *Dream Flow*.

So why do we need lyric? This poem tells us. Lyric is not one of those gimmicky kaleidoscopes that bedazzles us with mirrors and bursts of iridescence, but it can be likened to one because the lyricist's kaleidoscope unveils the "beautiful forms" of a higher plane of being. Plato taught that for every visible object, there is a transcendent reference or ideal pattern in the immaterial world. He called these "forms" *eidē*, the central element in the word kal-*eido*-scope.[1] Plato's forms represented the perfect state that every object strives for; thus, the forms are "beautiful" in the sense of embodying fullness and faultlessness. In his poem, David refers to the beautiful forms as "meanings." With his magic kaleidoscope, the lyric poet will take us behind the visible exteriors of things and show us the true forms of what they really mean.

Like many of David's lyrics, this one imitates its own subject. On the one hand, it is shaped like a long tube full of shiny, brittle, broken words; on the other, it is built as an optical disc, a round viewfinder guiding the eye deep into meanings. Its outer rim is formed by the

1 *Eidos* is closely related to the concept of "idea," since both words derive from the verb *horaō*, to see. Plato used both eidos and idea to describe these perfect forms. The world of ideas is thus also the world of the ideal.

bridging title and the final dangling *-s*. At the center of this kaleidoscopic sight (the fourth of seven couplets) are the crosshairs of time and space, the "timeless / ness of where." But unlike a telescope or periscope, the poet's kaleidoscope gives an audiotactile, as opposed to a visual, image of the target. The stanzas flanking the center show that we *touch* into spacetime (couplet 3) from which signals are *sounded* (couplet 5) back. We touch in; space sounds out. Moving another ripple out from the chiastic center, we have the full roundedness of the kaleidoscope's world and its "meanings" (first couplet) balanced with "fragmentary designs" (last couplet). These designs are word-thoughts, the lyric *logoi*,[2] cast in fractured lines, or "out-lines," of verse.

It is in the tension between designs and meanings we can pinpoint David's answer to George's problem with the fragmentation of modern life. While the thought-designs of twenty-first-century poetry are indeed a bewildering, loose assortment of colorful scraps or glass shards, as atomistic and chaotic as twenty-first-century life itself, its underlying meanings, those "beautiful forms," are still whole. Their very roundness symbolizes the perfection and completeness George is so nostalgic for. Having captured the forms in their wholeness, the poet-metaphysician switches hats and mounts the stage. Now the poet-musician twangs his lyre to create "sounds passing through sudden rightness," songs instantly recognized as true copies of what is true. In whirling rhythms, the poet entrances his audience, conjuring epiphanies of a timeless reality, the world that the forms inhabit. Ultimately, we readers can reach right into this dimension beyond time and effect a "poetic crossing,"[3] the penetration of another mode of existence.

Such crossings were repeatedly made by the heroes of epic: Aeneas or Dante passing into the underworld, Odysseus and his men entering Circe's ban, the Christ retiring to the desert in *Paradise Regained.* To set up such excursions into the beyond, epic poets often frame at least part of their story as a journey. The journey itself is a device, an extended metaphor for a person's life.[4] It's an example of what is called

2 Remember that *logoi* are both words and thoughts. See page 28.

3 A term used by critics such as Harold Bloom in his book on Wallace Stevens and the poet Edward Hirsch in *How to Read a Poem* (Harcourt, 1999).

4 In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell has identified the journey-quest as a recurrent mythic motif in literature. This theme abounds not only in epic, but in other genres with a clear storyline, as well as visual media such as film and painting. The hero's journey can be traced through novels from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Tolkien's *Hobbit* and Frazier's *Cold Mountain.*

an "archetype," or universal symbol. An archetype is a concrete image or theme that a whole culture, not just the initiated, can understand as pointing to an abstract concept. The sun is another common example. Around the globe, the sun is seen as a life-giver and nourisher, one whom the Greeks even deified as Apollo. A rising sun is an archetype of promise or renewal; a setting sun signifies death.[1] By weaving hero journeys and other archetypes into their poems, rhapsodists were able to open their own doors for us to cross through, other exits from What Happened Once into What Always Is.

But story and symbol were not the only doors for poetic crossings in epic. The truth is, every good epic contains frequent flashes of lyric.[2] More than a master of plot, character, and staging, the great epic storyteller was also expected to be a sensitive songster. This meant stepping out of his holistic frame of reference and grand-symphonic style to break into brief kaleidoscopic interludes on a simple lyre.[3] In these lyric passages, quiet moments of repose in the heat of the action, the heroes, along with the readers, can pause and reflect on what is happening or take time out to enjoy a fleeting moment of beauty, a glimpse of the beautiful forms. Who can forget Aeneas' meeting with his father in the Elysian Fields, or Eve's love lyric from Book IV of *Paradise Lost*? The epic view of life is so broad and sweeping that it encompasses the lyric mode as well.

Neither does the lyric mode totally exclude the epic. In fact, a lyricist like David, in the sheer breadth of his vision and the scale of his poetic output, assumes the epic function of cataloguer. His kaleidoscopic view may well be fragmented, but it does unite the whole of experience by faithfully listing, recording, and reporting "the feel of how it really was" to live in these disjointed times.

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1 In his ground-breaking *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung theorized that primal phenomena like the sun's journey are internalized by our minds and made into myths. "It is not enough for the primitive to see the sun rise and set; this external observation must at the same time be a psychic happening." (Translated by R. F. C. Hull in vol. 9 of the *Collected Works*.)

2 Poe even suspected that the *Iliad* was originally "intended as a series of lyrics." (See "The Poetic Principle.")

3 As the name tells us, lyric poems were originally sung and accompanied by the lyre, a Greek harp.

5 Framed in a Story

George bestrides the library like a composite of heroes from a thousand books. His life is in fact a palimpsest of myths: a Trojan enthralled by the beautiful Helen, an Ithacan wandering from Alexandria and Beirut to Paris and Louisville, or the great Athenian crowned king on the acropolis (George was once awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Athens). One can also see a little of Saint George in him, slaying the dragons of commerce, his fierce and unrelenting market competitors.

Such myths were not merely entertaining stories, but psychological case studies that informed the ancient understanding of life. The Greeks had essentially two ways of explaining and confronting forces that could impact them, *logos* and *mythos*. To discern threats and devise blueprints for action, they could either map out chains of cause and effect, or they could try to sequence steps within a known story framework, the matrix of myth. Often, they did both at once. Like Wallace Stevens' fertile symbiosis between reality and imagination, this binocular mode of seeing, the purely logical and the mythological, allowed them to operate on a pragmatic, rational level while actualizing values, beliefs, and attitudes from deep within their psyche. When adversity struck, they could call upon *logos* for strategies to confront or escape the crisis, and *mythos* for help in learning to accept or overcome the fear, pain, or grief in its wake. The journey-quests of Odysseus to his home, or Theseus to his father,[4] or Jason to Colchis[5] might remind them that life was full of pitfalls, but that courage, patience, and perseverance would enable them to prevail.

The myths have lost ground, lost much of their potency, but have persisted. As defining narratives for who we are and why we matter, they still hold sway over much of today's world. In her poem "The Chorus," Rachel Hadas[6] portrays the modern Greeks sitting in cafes around the square, observing the goings-on of their village, matching them up with the myths engraved in their memories, and continuously

4 On his way to Athens, Theseus cleared the highway of bandits. For this heroic deed he was crowned king.

5 Told in the epic *Argonautica* by the third-century poet Apollonius of Rhodes.

6 A contemporary American poet who has lived in Greece and translated the works of Greek and French poets.

superimposing the psychic patterns of the past on the present day:

> These watchers locate in their repertory
> mythic fragments of some kindred story
> and draw them dripping out of memory's well.

Modern people who no longer dwell in villages, while enlightened by the *logos* of science, are still moved by *mythos* of imagination that connects us to the mysteries of the cosmos. Poetic thinking in symbols, archetypes, and myths helps us maintain those connections, without which we would find ourselves plunged into the kind of emptiness that Eliot describes in "The Hollow Men" or the kind of neuroses that psychologists like C. G. Jung or Viktor Frankl trace back to a current-day disconnect from our own place and purpose in life. By reading poetry and thinking poetically, we activate the foundation metaphors that link us to our world. We begin to see ourselves as part of a larger story, which unlocks our creativity. We keep our consciousness in touch with its deepest subconscious roots (the upper and lower brain halves) and maintain the vital equilibrium between logic and intuition, thought and feeling (right and left brain halves). We ultimately rediscover the power of parallax: *logos* and *mythos* together, probing and piercing dimensions that only the whole mind, firing in unison, can fathom.

Having done a quick headcount, David is his usual chipper self, perhaps even a little extra-pleased that none of his sheep, except Laura, have fallen by the wayside. As today's extraordinary poetry circle was unadvertised, no newcomers have to be greeted and seated. Instead, David is circulating among his charges, passing out personally addressed poems.

"You know, choosing a poem is a great way to reach out to someone. It's like a valentine, a heart-to-heart message without all the girlfriend-boyfriend overtones." Since David neither emails nor texts, paper is still the sole bearer of his heartfelt tidings. I am honored with a card in original hand, a piece from last week's output on his mission to carve out "a new grammar of thought." Tony reads aloud from David's short homage to Gerard Manley Hopkins. But not all of the poetic valentines are from his own pen. Carol gets an elegy by Rilke;[1]

1 Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), an Austrian lyric poet.

for Rebecca, he has picked out Elisabeth Barrett Browning's[2] tribute to her dog Flush. In return, David receives a sand dollar from Carol and a paw print from Rebecca's Chihuahua.

Rosemarie is merrily supplying back-up photocopies from last week for those that have misplaced them or left them at home. "Yes, a well-chosen poem is something between a greeting card and a gift. It's a thoughtful way of saying a person means something to you."

"Don't I mean anything to you, David?" It's George, whom we are pleased to see today take his rightful place among the regulars. But did David remember this somewhat unreliable regular with a personalized line or two?

"Oh, did I forget you, George? Sorry." He blindly deals him the last greeting card from the deck, the only one left over.

George looks at the poem and the name on the back. He reads:

Finding oneself
Finding one

self is
often being

found out. (from *A Birth in Seeing*, p. 53)

epigram
a short, pithy lyric bearing a sharp, witty point or caustic message, often aimed at a person. The genre, as George would remind us, goes back to Classical times, where epigrams first appeared as votive inscriptions and then developed as a literary form.

"What's that supposed to mean? And who is Laura?"

"Laura was Petrarch's[3] inspiration," replies Rosemarie quickly.

anaphora
repetition of the same word or phrase to open successive units of thought

Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world,
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance,
  always substance and increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction,
  always a breed of life. (from "Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman)

2 Elisabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61), a British poet famous for her love sonnets to her poet husband Robert.

3 Francesco Petrarca (1304-74), an Italian poet famous for his love sonnets to Laura.

I may not have
known those

seas as he did
or the islands

that kept calling
for his

long-desired
home.

I may not have
been so en-

ticed as he was
by the glance of

women's eyes that
took him for

their own. But in
these tropical

nights and the
winds that keep

caressing me to
stay I could for

get, Lord, to what
You have called

me, far away
from a final ease

that should be
mine, yet.

parallelism
is generated when a series of phrases, clauses, or sentences are built on similar patterns. Parallel structuring not only creates an eloquent effect via rhythm, but also builds an emphatic argument. For this reason, parallelism is not only used by poets, but also lawyers, politicians, and all manner of rhetorically skilled salespeople.

I may not have known ...
as he did ... islands that ...

I may not have been ...
as he was ... eyes that ...

anaphoric parallelism
linking parallel structures tighter by opening them with identical wording (anaphora)

Love - thou art high -
I cannot climb thee -
But, ...

Love - thou art deep -
I cannot cross thee -
But, ... (Emily Dickinson, *Fr* 452)

(from *That Sense for Meaning*, p. 60)

As David reads "Ulysses"[1] a second time, I am rubbing my eyes in disbelief. Are these tiny spots on the photocopies actual periods? Is this poem composed of complete, punctuated sentences? Do I see a comma in the last line? And is that a genuine hyphen joining "en" and "ticed"? Is some fantastical punctuation pictogram smiling out at me?

David has also sensed something strange going on. Helen is now up on the front row, not trying too hard to suppress a laugh. "OK, my dear, what's behind that big grin on your face?"

"First, just tell me if you're being serious here. If you are, I'll drop it."

"Why wouldn't I be serious?"

"Comparing yourself to Ulysses isn't exactly serious. Painting yourself as another Hemingway sailing the seas and fighting foreign wars isn't an especially serious claim. Making yourself out to be a ladies' man isn't exactly serious." Now George is grinning, too. Dudley and Chang are chuckling over some kind of joke behind me, while Wendy has launched into a limerick about a lady from (the Isle of) Man. Helen has a point: Parading epic heroes onto a stage can be tricky business unless you want to dwarf their modern counterparts in ironic contrast, reducing them to anti-heroes like Bloom, Prufrock, or Sweeney.[2] It's an open invitation to ridicule.

"Where have I cast myself as a ladies' man?" asks David indignantly. "Ulysses himself wasn't even a ladies' man, though no one told the ladies."

Wendy reads the Ulysses comparison with two particular stresses: "I *may* not have been *so* enticed as he was ... but I *could* have been *almost* so enticed."

"I wouldn't read it as a pure modal," my inner grammarian says, "but as a flag of concession anticipating the 'but.' It *may* be true that I wasn't as enticed as he was, *but* I do admit something else." It all depends on which words you wish to stress.

"And what about these tropical nights?" asks Carol. "Are you sure it's only the winds caressing you? In any case the imagery is quite sensuous."

"That's exactly what imagery should be," Jennifer protests. "A picture that appeals to our senses."

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1 Ulysses is the Latin name for the Greek hero Odysseus.

2 Leopold Bloom is the protagonist of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Prufrock and Sweeney are modern figures in the poems of T. S. Eliot that some critics have seen as mock heroes.

"David is comparing himself to Ulysses all right." Rudiger has drawn circles and arrows over the entire length of the poem, making it look like a scrimmage diagram for a wildcat play. "But the point of similarity is not their mutual love of the ladies."

"You mean, they're both islanders?" Silvia ventures.

"Yes, but their island life is different. Ulysses hears the seas and islands calling him home. David feels the nights and wind caressing him to stay." Rudiger has obviously done his homework. The well-creased photocopies are laid out like battlefield maps on his lap. "Calling is set off against caressing. Both are used with 'keep.' The islands keep calling and the winds keep caressing."

"When you 'caress to stay,' touching becomes a way of telling," Helen observes.

"And being embraced becomes being caught in her clutches," adds Tony. "As with Circe, the witch."

"I was thinking more of the Sirens," Helen replies. "Their call was a song to stay, not just for a year as with Circe, but forever."

"Very dangerous ladies," says George with a wagging finger pointing at himself.

Silvia gives Rudiger's riddle another try: "Is that what you mean? Both the poet and Ulysses are far from home?"

"That's part of it. But were they homesick? That's the crucial point of comparison, I think. They both made themselves comfortable on a tropical island and forgot that duty was calling."

Checking the poem's text, I note with irritation that a hyphen in the key word "for / get" is the only punctuation mark in the whole poem David forgot. Is that some sort of intentional provocation, a nose-thumbing at the whole profession of language teachers? Or is he leaving a lingering gap, a momentary lapse, to show what it is like to for …

… get?

"I see what you're saying about getting too comfortable," Rebecca muses, "but that doesn't mean they've forgotten their duties. The poet only says 'I could forget.' And Ulysses constantly hears the islands calling. His home is 'long-desired.' So he hasn't forgotten, either."

Tony agrees: "Yes, both of them probably suffer from a mild case of guilty conscience, like Wendy and me indulging in an extended holiday at the seaside. The poem is sort of a reminder that this isn't real life, that it's time to wake up from the dream."

"Life is real! Life is earnest!"[1] What I've never figured out about Longfellow's passionate appeal to rouse ourselves from the hammock and get back to work is how we can leave "footprints on the sands of time" if we don't take long walks on the beach?

"I think you may be projecting your own guilty conscience on the poem," Rudiger shoots back. "But it's not a matter of deadlines and to-do lists. It's about a higher calling. Ulysses and the poet have been called, but they're not going anywhere. Look at the third stanza from the top: 'calling,' referring to Ulysses. And the third from the bottom: 'called,' referring to David. The calling is echoed, but neither of them obeys it."

Rudiger has found a good example of polyptoton, a repetition which mutates the form of the verb, as in David's poem on Ranke: "It is not our / task to *know* / If *knowing* means ..." Here the polyptoton is symmetrical, giving it a framing function which backs Rudiger's theory that the poem is "about a higher calling."

"So it's a calling they forget or conveniently overhear?" Tony rejoins.

"They both forget." It's Chang, speaking in his firm tone of incontrovertible fact. "This poem is set up like a program comparing two values, A and B. It's a straightforward item-by-item, side-by-side analysis. Comparative criteria in the vertical; A and B in the horizontal." Chang draws a chart in the air with his hands, then starts filling in the fields. "The criteria for comparing A and B are either levellers, which you would denote with an equals sign, or distinctors which you would mark as 'more than' or 'less than.' We start out with two statements that distinguish A as not behaving as B. 'I may not have done so-and-so as he did.' Whenever you do a comparative analysis, it is essential to make clear which two values are being compared. In this case, they are 'I' and 'he.' Rule number two is: If you are running through a whole set of criteria, you don't want to waste space naming the referent in each iteration. A double reference is sufficient to establish the contrast pair. That's what our poet has done here with 'as he did' and 'as he was.' In both cases the 'I' is less than the 'he,' less informed about the islands, less enticed by the women. Now, when the poet gets to the third criterion, the statement form is altered. As signalled by the 'but,' we're no longer dealing with a distinctor format. This final statement is an equalizer: Both parties are equally guilty of forgetting. Again, when

1 From "A Psalm of Life," by the popular New England poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 - 1882).

you say 'I forgot,' is it necessary to reiterate 'as he did'? Definitely not. That would be pure redundancy, and one thing we've learned from these discussions is that if it's redundant, inflated, or overstated—if there's one superfluous word—it's not poetry. And it's not sound logic, either. Sound thinking is always expressed in the simplest terms."

As we all wonder if what Chang has just said meets his own standards of sound logic, George asks David why, in his quest to streamline and reduce to the simplest terms, he doesn't make use of mathematical symbols. "For example, instead of repeating 'this is like that' or 'this is a metaphor for that,' you could use the different signs for similarity, equality, approximate equality, and full congruence. We have a whole range of symbols for each degree of resemblance. Just a few squiggles and your poem is slimmer, trimmer."

"Mathematical symbols? Are you kidding?" Chang is not going to let David answer. "A poet wouldn't know what to make of them. They are synthetic markings that neither originated in the real world, nor mirror it in any way. They are the artificial Esperanto of machines and programmers like me. Why should one wavy line stand for 'similar to'? Compare that dead symbol to the true-to-life Chinese pictogram for 'alike.' If you see two near-identical boxes, with the four lines of the left-hand box ever so slightly extended, you don't need a dictionary to tell you that the one on the left resembles the one on the right. You don't have to stop and wonder what some funny ripple sign means. Such symbols are all arbitrary. You don't even need to bring the English word 'similar' into the equation. Alphabetical words just complicate a simple idea. The pictogram is instantaneously transparent; it's an icon anyone can recognize, like an image in a poem. When you look at the Chinese word 'ripple,' what you see is a boat and water. Boat-water, a kenning for ripple. Every word a metaphor."[1]

Ever so delicately, Jennifer tries to steer us back on topic: "Speaking of word-pictures, you obviously love the sound of 'ease.' You used it last week in the cloud poem. Here, you're talking about your final rest after a life of hard work. Do you picture yourself as an angel one day, reclining on a cloud? Is that the picture behind 'ease'?"

"No, harp-plucking angels sitting around on clouds is a caricature. With 'ease,' I was trying to find a word that would suggest perfect spiritual calm and permanent freedom from conflict. Not the uneasy

1 These ideas are expounded in "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," an essay by Ernest Fenollosa, edited by Ezra Pound.

truce of someone stealing a brief respite or time-out. I could have used 'rest,' the biblical term, but it sounds trivial, like a rest stop or an afternoon nap. Or I could have used 'peace,' an overused word that has a sharp edge to it. A 'piece' is something you cut, like a slice. You can feel that stinging sharpness in the women's piercing glance. But, you're right, 'ease' has a final 'z' sound that is soothing. It eases you like the buzz of bees or maybe a soft breeze."

Rudiger has a more scientific explanation: "I take 'ease' as a counterpoint to 'seas.' Notice that they stand at balanced poles like 'calling' and 'called.' In stanza two from the top, Ulysses is being called back to the seas. Two stanzas up from the bottom, the poet is promised final ease. In the Revelation, the sea is a symbol of sorrow and separation. Many beach lovers are sad to read that in heaven 'there will be no sea.' But the sea's only a symbol, a symbol for a troubled condition that is the very opposite of ease."

"The counterpoint is created by the rhyme," continues Jennifer. "Now that I tune in on it, I hear a lot of rhymes. 'Stay' and 'far away.' 'Forget' and the last word, 'yet.' Don't forget what is yet to come."

"The one that strikes me is the near-rhyme that ends the first two sentences." Rudiger is glued to his annotated photocopy. "On the one hand you've got a call back to 'his home.' But the women are taking him for 'their own.' Each call is a claim of ownership. David's call reminds him that, as a minister, a servant, he belongs to his Lord. Only after death can he take possession of the promised ease 'that should be / mine, yet.'"

The last two poems on the second page are shorties, tucked down into the bottom corner, almost as autobiographical afterthoughts. To introduce them, David has asked Carol to do her "rap sheet routine," one of our rituals that spares him the embarrassment of taking tours through his own trophy gallery.

"As we have seen, the many children of his brain may present impenetrable mysteries, but the poet is himself a study in contradictions. A mystery man, if you will. A one-lady ladies' man. An American European. A Neo-Bavarian Old Floridian. A high-stepping man of the world walking shoeless on a beach. A historian perfectly at home in the mazes of the millennia who can't find his way home from the air-

port. A vagabond searching for the ease of home even in his own easy chair. Ulysses and King David without the royal trappings. (Any royal treatment goes directly to his wife.) The scion of successful lawyers who turned to art and theology. A scholar who teaches the New Testament straight from the Old. A better friend to man who's befriended man's best friend, who cherishes the comfort of creatures more than creature comforts. An unhedonistic Hadynist, but an irreverent reverend. A New York Jew who married a German sixteen years after Auschwitz. A man who has undergone both bar mitzvah and baptism, and still stands by both. A man in that no-man's land between a German wife and a Jewish mother, and is still standing. A maxed-out minimalist. A wordthrift and a filljoy. A cutting-edge classicist. An old-school upstart. A repentant Lutheran unrepentantly Lutheran. Someone who can retell age-old truth in new-age idiom. Who tells all the truth but tells it slant.[1] A man with two sisters and no brothers, but two sons and no daughters. A man with advanced degrees from two continents, who has written more than 100 books in two languages, but hasn't got a clue about commas. A comically clueless, tragically shoeless, indelicate teller of indelible truths."

Self Portrait

I wrote:

Jewish minister

Modernist poet with conservative values

Biblical humorist

they never wrote back.

(from *Through Lost Silences*, p. 116)

tone
the poet's attitude toward the subject and/or the readers

Tone may be playful, matter-of-fact, formal, satiric, intimate, etc.

Here the tone is light, as we can readily picture the poet reading his "Self Portrait" with a smile on his face. This gives the serious CV format of the words themselves a tongue-in-cheek undertone.

"That's exactly how it should be done." Dudley is amazed that this short poem incorporates most of the pointers he picked up last week from Laura's seminar on memoir-writing. "Laura says the key to any

1 Carol is quoting the first line of Emily Dickinson's metapoem *Fr* 1263.

great story is opening with a bang and closing with a bang. The lead-in and wind-up should somehow tie together, like it does here. 'I wrote, but they never wrote back.' That's the way Laura does it in her autobiography. The trick, she says, is finding that surprise twist at the end, which for her was easy, because her life has taken such dramatic turns. But the first step in telling your own story is telling who you are. That's why Laura recommends finding three short labels—she calls them 'unique classifiers'—that force your readers to invent a new category just for you. Otherwise, they just slot you into existing mental molds; they've got you pigeonholed before you even begin."

One cannot help but notice what a change a week has wrought in Dudley. Beard and mane have succumbed to a neat trim. The harsh rasp has come out of his voice, as in someone who has just recovered from a bad cold. His descriptions come across as brisk and spirited, but mellifluously intoned, like a veteran sportscaster. Gone is his all-purpose beach-and-dock outfit; in its place, Bermuda shorts with a belt and a new boutique T-shirt sporting a stunning print: A pair of outstretched hands releases a white bird into the infinite blue. Dudley's liberation from his past? If he has landed the lead in his own life story, he has to look the part.

"Well, these three classifiers are certainly unique," Helen remarks. "It's not every day you run across a Jewish minister, much less one who writes modern poetry. But one who looks to modernism as a showcase for ethics or to the Bible as a sourcebook for humor is rare indeed."

"No wonder they never wrote back," Tony concludes. "David failed to fit into their requirement profile. We might find it useful to bear in mind that unique classifiers might impress audiences, but not employers."

George, whose businesses thrive on innovation, has always been fascinated by flashes of creativity. "How on earth did you get the idea," he asks, "to make a poem out of a curriculum vitae?"

"I'm not sure this really is a poem." Silvia preempts George's question by undermining its basic premise. "There's no music. There's no metaphor. There's nothing that elevates it out of the ordinary."

"It's what some call a prose poem." Jennifer rushes to David's rescue. "A prose text lineated or laid out as a poem, a very widespread technique."

"So it's prose."

"I would call it a poem written in near-prose."

"Near-prose is still far from poetry." Silvia isn't budging. At her comment, a distinct "amen" is heard from the podium. The poet is siding with Silvia?

Rosemarie jumps in: "Wordsworth says the language of every good poem is grounded in good prose. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, he made a conscious effort to adopt the speech of real people. We shouldn't think that prose and poetry exclude each other; they are more like ends of a continuum. While poets constantly imitate the natural patterns of living language, good prose writers also use antithesis and parallelism to create poetic rhythms. Good prose writers also employ colorful images and figurative language, but that doesn't make them poets."

"What makes them poets?" Silvia wants to know. "Can I just take my grocery list and send it in to a poetry magazine?"

Chang accepts the challenge: "I write computer programs. They consist of highly structured language serving a very specific purpose, tightly ordered communication aimed at a practical function, very similar to your grocery list. Both my programs and your lists are essentially utilitarian. They are not intended to express visions or impart insights. Our kind of compositions, mine and yours, describe how to do something useful, not what something is like or what it might mean. Now imagine I take your grocery list and overlay it with a metaphor. What once was a few items of food is now a survey of America's regions. Milk from New England, bread from the western prairies, beef from the plains, ham from the Shenandoah, vegetables from California, fruit from Florida. I've transformed a prosaic scrap of paper into a paean to our national bounty. And look: Your factual list is now no more than a backdrop for my fanciful portrayal. It's no longer a set of useful instructions, but a profession of patriotism. In the final analysis, the words themselves don't matter, but what we do with the words. David's actual resume might be prose, but his vivid self-portrait overlaid on the resume is a poem."

"A prose poem." Silvia is letting this idea sink in.

"With poetic balancing," Jennifer says. "The first stanza balances the last, as Dudley pointed out. And each of the stanzas in between, these unique classifiers, are balanced opposites. A minister, but Jewish. A modernist, but conservative. A biblical scholar, but a humorist. And as Rosemarie said, this kind of antithesis sets a back-and-forth rhythm in motion, one we pick up and process with our own rhythmical sense."

"As music," Silvia finally admits.

"Which would be another distinctor for poetry," Chang continues. "The more you are intent on expressing the quality of experience as opposed to describing how to accomplish a task, the more the sounds of the words come into play, the more the music emerges. It's just the opposite with task-centered, content-driven communication. We programmers tend to strip musical elements away because they distract from the message. Our problem, though, is that the words themselves are filled with music. That's why wherever possible, we try to get away from words altogether. That's why I break my software code down into numerical terms and ideograms, operands and logarithms. If you ordered your groceries online, you would have to click on an order number. Words are semantic minefields. You never know how someone is going to take them. They look innocent enough, but inexplicably blow right up in your face. You enter a breakfast cereal on your grocery list, and bang, your husband brings home pet food. Numbers, on the other hand, are reliably clear-cut and therefore, like symbols, part of the purist vocabulary of scientific prose. As such, they are anathema to poets, precisely because, in the narrowness of their denotation, they leave no leeway for connotation or interpretation. Poets need words, pictograms, and the multi-channeled music that emanates from inexact human language."

Poemed
Don't

look for
a poem

unless it'
s look

ing right

in you.

verbing
using a noun as a verb, e.g. making "a poem" into "to poem"

Verbing is a kind of functional shifting (anthimeria), changing a word's part of speech. In English, most concrete nouns can be easily verbed, e.g. "to body." Verbing is more difficult, however, with abstract nouns, especially abstracts already formed from a verb, like "embodiment."

(from *Through Lost Silences*, p. 36)

Rebecca is explaining why she doesn't get this one. "If you haven't even opened the book to pick out a poem, how can it already be look-

ing at you?"

"Looking *in* you," Michael amends.

"Looking in me. How can something like a poem be looking right *in* me before I've even started looking *for* it? Before I've started looking, I haven't read it. But it's already got a reading on me?"

"That's not quite right." Again, Rudiger is armed with his notes. "It's not a matter of until, but unless. You are thinking, 'I can't encounter this poem until I look for it and find it.' But that's not what it says. The key word is *unless*, which stipulates a condition. The poem has to get a fix on you, look straight into your soul. Otherwise, you can't expect to access the poetry of the poem. You can read it, but you won't encounter it. Again, it's a chiastic arrangement with the unless condition in the center. Five words precede 'unless'; five words follow it. An understood 'you' is the subject, which matches the last line 'in you.' You – not look for – poem – unless – poem – look in – you."

"How can a poem look into my soul?" Rebecca inquires, with a pleading look toward the podium.

The poet gears up to answer, but over on the far end of the room, George and Tony are already talking over each other. Gracious as ever, David motions "you first."

Dudley, sitting back in the opposite corner, has missed this prompt, and takes the floor himself: "It's like the moment you meet your soulmate, a moment of recognition. Laura says that everyone's life is looking for a self-image, which she calls a 'brand.' Each of our lives has a need to fit into a picture, to be branded, to take on a face that can attract attention and be recognized by others as 'me.' By the same token, others have a need to form a clear image of who we are, so that all the facts about us, all the really important information, can be associated with that picture. Laura says that it's much easier to store information around an image than inside a text. It's all about visualization. A face, for example, can often tell more than a book. Not only that, the face can be read instantly, while a book can take days to pore over. Without our brand, those around us have no place to file all the facts they should remember about us."

"Sounds like a grand marketing ploy," says George. "How to sell yourself to the world."

"Actually, it's just good communication," Dudley retorts. "We all need a metaphor we can model our lives on. For Laura, it's a flight jacket, such a simple statement of her profession, her passion, and her

constant readiness to take off on new adventures. It's also a repository of remembrance. Each jacket pocket holds a souvenir; each patch tells a story. Anyway, when she asked us to name such an icon for our own life narratives, I found it really hard. I mean, my life so far hasn't exactly been drawn along a solid line that points in any single direction. And then, over the weekend, I was glancing through these photocopies and what did I run across? A poem—more like a poetic image really—that was looking right into my soul. I mean, it was as if the poem knew me better than I know myself. And what it was telling me ... about myself ... was so shockingly true, that I knew I had to pursue it."

"To go look for it?" I suggest.

"Yeah, to go for it. To be honest, David's ditties have always been kind of interesting to fool around with, you know, like a lot of women you meet? But this one just walked up to me and called me by name, like a long-sought soulmate. It had me nailed with my own self-portrait. And I suddenly had the feeling, this one is too important. It's a chance I can't mess up."

"The feeling you describe," George begins, "has been well-known to the Greeks for thousands of years. However, it's not limited to life-defining images, but encompasses all life-changing impacts. In fact, our great literary theorist Longinos ..."

"Longinus." Helen reminds him that English speakers prefer the Latin form of his name.

"Longinos or Longinus wrote a treatise, 'On Loftiness,' in which ..."

"On the Sublime," Helen corrects.

"Titled 'On the Sublime Loftiness' in which he describes the state of ecstasy when confronted with a poet's genius. 'Ecstasy,' a Greek word, means more than of being out of one's mind with amazement or with bliss or on drugs. You are ecstatic when you are beside yourself, literally having an out-of-body experience. You have left your body behind and now are somewhere else. This is the hallmark of great poetry. For the Greeks, a great poem will pull us out from behind our peephole and transport us to the pinnacle of awareness, to an elevation from which the full extent of everything is revealed. When we begin to see the world ecstatically, we realize that poetry is looking deep into our very souls. Only then can we begin to appreciate what true poetry is."

"Yes," says Helen. "That's when the poem is looking right in us, staring at us with such power that we are changed forever. Longinus says

the key to sublimity is intensity. Only poetry, the most intense form of language, can electrify. It's not the persuasion of speeches or the pleasure of songs, but the intense power of poems that can charge us so full of cosmic energy that we are renewed, made anew. This is the sense of the title, 'Poemed.' It sounds a bit odd in English, but it's a good Greek participle, *poiēmenos*, 'made.' If a poet, *poiētēs*, is a maker who makes a poem, what is it that the poem makes? The reader is the person poemed, the one remade by the poem's creative power."

"In a way, being transported is a process of being unmade and remade," Jennifer says. "At the end of a journey, what you get is a new person. If the goal of poetry is to move us, great poetry will really move us, all the way to a place outside ourselves. Ecstasy, then—what Emily Dickinson called 'transport'—is more like teleportation; it's being taken apart and reassembled like those teleporters do in science fiction movies. If the poem is looking right in us, we are teleported: dissolved into nothing, then completely refashioned to see the world in a new way."

"We mustn't go looking for a real poem," Rudiger rephrases, "unless we've been 'sublimed.' Unless we've been poemed ourselves."

"Of course, a poet is a *faber*, a maker." Pregnant pause. David, in search of just the right metaphor for poet, is wavering between father and facilitator. "But the maker and the thing made are not strictly analogous to potter and pottery. Michelangelo used to say that he was not forming a statue from stone, but was releasing the form of the statue from the stone, as if the statue's form was imprisoned in the medium and struggling to break free. I would put it in slightly different terms: The poems are already there; they come to me. I prepare them for release; I let them go."

"So we could also read the 'you' in 'Poemed' as the poet?" I ask. "The poet never goes out to look for a poem? The poem has to be on his doorstep looking right in his house."

"That's right. The poem is peering right into my soul, and I say, 'Come on in.' Far be it from me to take issue with the Greek language, which is very clear on matters of agency, but let me be equally clear about the creative process. First comes the poem, then the poet, and then the poemed. If the poet 'makes' something, he makes the poem feel at home, then he turns around and makes the poem ready to go out in public. The poet gets the poem prepped to get people poemed."

Tony has been waiting his turn: "Ladies and gentlemen, that's as

clear a statement as you will ever hear from a poet. We finally know who is who and who does what. Poet preps poem; poem poems people. We take note, however, that here in the poem itself, he's been up to his old trick of switching the addresses on his pronouns, as he did with that nocturne last week. The 'you' in 'Poemed' could be either the poet or the poemed, but there's a third way to read it, one which makes most sense to me, a Hopkins. It's the poet speaking to his subject. For example, he sees a gorgeous sunset over the Gulf, one which would ideally suit his present poetic mood. Of course, whenever poet meets sunset, there's always a good chance that they'll, you know, hook up. But our poet says to the sunset, 'You're likely thinking you're attractive enough to be cast in the last scene of a romantic western, and maybe you are, but don't get your hopes up for a guest appearance in my latest book of Florida memories. That's not the way it's done here on the beach. If you want to be poemed, you'll just have to see if the poem comes along and looks right in you. I'm just his agent, the poet.'"

"A very different kind of agency than what we get in Greek grammar." Helen is decoding another one of Tony's puns: A grammatical agent is a real doer, not just a deal broker.

"This was the way Hopkins approached poetic subjects. And he was interested in all the sort of things David writes about: waves, birds, sunsets, shipwrecks. What he was really focused on, though, was the inner-connectedness of nature, the natural principles describing how waves break on shore or how birds alight on trees. He called these unalterable patterns the 'inscapes' of things. If a sunset, even one that bowled him over with her beauty, failed to reveal the inscape behind all sunsets, he wouldn't hesitate to tell her flatly: 'Don't you go looking for a poem. The poem, the inscape of words, has to discover you.'"

David reflects for a moment. "I said the poem comes first. But you're right, even before the poem are the inscapes, akin perhaps to what Plato called the 'forms.' The true source of originality, the original forms exist in the timelessness out of which poems are sounded. Poems are travelers from that first-formed space, ambassadors and guides who can show us the points of crossing. Where we can get ecstasized, so to speak. Which reminds me, before we move on, Dudley was talking about a poem he'd read, one that had, uh, ..."

"... poemed me? Yes. It's actually the first one on our last sheet, number 18."

6 *Fired by Imagination*

Both rhapsodists and lyricists add layers of meaning and metaphor to their stories and images via symbols. Some of these symbols will be familiar archetypes that every reader can immediately connect with; others may be more subtle, and only accessible to certain groups of readers with shared experiences. Still others may fly so far below the radar that they are picked up only by the overly sensitized reader, ghost sightings which in fact were perhaps completely unintended by the author.

So how can we recognize what is a symbol and what is not? The New England poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson[1] maintained that everything has the potential to symbolize, since all of "nature is a symbol, in the whole and in every part."[2] Nature itself is a symbol of spirit.

> Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch. A lamb is innocence; a snake is subtle spite; flowers express to us the delicate affections. Light and darkness are our familiar expression for knowledge and ignorance; and heat for love. Visible distance behind and before us, is respectively our image of memory and hope. Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour, and is not reminded of the flux of all things? Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence. Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life, wherein, as in a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine. This universal soul, he calls Reason.[3]

Looking at the world this way, we might try to allegorize every detail around us as replete with some hidden significance. Like the visionary poet William Blake,[4] we may begin to "see angels in things." This can lead us into treacherous territory when interpreting a poem,

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-83) was one of the most influential figures in the Transcendentalist movement.
2 From his essay "The Poet."
3 From the "Language" chapter in *Nature*.
4 William Blake (1757 – 1827), English poet and painter.

because, as Chang has pointed out, only mathematical symbols are truly "reliable" as to their correspondences. Emerson's contemporary Herman Melville demonstrated the slipperiness of symbols with his great white whale *Moby Dick*. For many people today, the whale is an environmental emblem, a reminder of our duty to protect unique species. In the book of Jonah, it is a symbol of deep spiritual crisis. For the Inuit and other peoples living close to nature, the whale is a symbol of creation, or of the majesty, vitality, and energy of the natural order. So how, we ask, can Captain Ahab imagine that it is a symbol of destruction and evil?

> All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him.

We note that Melville (in the persona of Ahab) and Emerson, though wide apart in their respective religions, personal lifestyles, and poetic sensibilities, both shared this notion of nature as a "pasteboard mask." It is the poet's job to "strike though the mask" and show us the poetic crossings, to "liberate" us, as Emerson says, from our literal-mindedness, or from what our class philosopher George has termed the "peephole perspective." The question is: What will lie on the other side? Will it be pure reason, as Emerson believed, or Ahab's madness?

Cool waters
flowing

my hands the
way of the

bird's expan
ding needs

for flight.

(from *Thought Colors*, p. 259)

metonymy
a metaphor in which one thing stands in for a broader concept which it suggests or symbolizes

When Churchill said he had "nothing to offer but blood, [...] tears, and sweat," he was referring to sacrifice, sorrow, and hard labor. Likewise, in this poem, the word "hands" may, by metonymic extension, refer to human resourcefulness or strength.

Dudley is giving us his elucidation of this poem which just a few days ago grabbed him out of his comfortable life as a beach bum and gazed right into his soul. "Back when I was jobbing down in Tap Lamu, that would be toward the end of my first drop-out phase in Thailand, there was this seaplane operator who used to take me out to the Similans where I'd do some repairs and hang out for a couple of days. A few times, he'd let me take the controls. Since then, I've always dreamt of getting my license for those fabulous machines which can take us all the places our feet can't—whether it be air or water—with the speed and grace of pelicans. Haven't you ever wanted to be a pelican, just for a soaring moment, or maybe for that splash-down second, when you scoop up fresh fish, then sweep back up? That was one of the reasons I came to Florida. No, not for fish. It's the easiest place to get a pilot's license."

"So you are reading this as a seaplane flight?" Jennifer asks.

"Not only. The full sense comes when you read it on two levels. On level one, the cool waters are being sprayed back by the cockpit window as you gather speed; then, your hands pull back on the yoke and suddenly you're airborne, where the blue of the water and the blue of the sky are gently whitened by the wings of the bird."

"The bird spreads his wings, expanding the airflow surface as his need for uplift expands." Chang is closely following his friend's line-by-line account of lift-off.

"Yes, that matches the parallelism of 'my hands' and 'bird's needs,'" Rudiger confirms. "The pilot's hands react to the changing needs of the plane for speed or stability."

"Not only the pilot's hands," says Dudley, standing to let everyone see his new T-shirt. "The mechanic's hands are the ones that actually release the bird in the air. It is the mechanic that makes it all happen. 'My hands: the way.' That's my life brand. Level two lets everyone know: no pre-flight, hey, no flight. Then, once the bird is safely aloft, the mechanic washes away the dirt and grease from those hands and heads home."

"Cool waters, clean hands. Tell them about the expansion," Chang prods.

"I suppose I can, since it's already been in the paper." He takes his seat again, folds his hands on his paunch, and tips his chair back like a rocker. "Laura is opening a new service center up on Captiva, including a seaplane dock. It would support all her Everglades and Ten

Thousand Islands traffic, as well as everything around here. As she said in her press release, it meets the region's 'expanding needs for flight.' Of course, she will be needing help on this project."

"Of course, she'll find him!" Chang repeats by way of blessing. They do a congratulatory hand-slap in mid-air and for a brief instant, Dudley comes perilously close to flying backwards off balance.

"Level two strikes me as more true to the text than level one," Helen deliberates, "since the hands actually feel the water. But since I doubt a mechanic washes his hands in cool water, even level two becomes more a spin-off, an ancillary association, an undermeaning."

"More in my head than in the poem? I'm seeing things again?" Dudley is back on *terra firma*.

David intervenes: "You may well be seeing things from *my* head that were subliminal when I wrote them. The thrill of flying is universal."

"Even before airplanes," Carol adds, "the dream of levitation was present in all cultures. Eichendorff,[1] for example, dreamt of soaring across the cool seas."

Ich wünscht, ich wär ein Vögelein	I wish I were a tiny bird
Und zöge über das Meer	Who'd glide above the main

"Those of us, though, who've never flown a seaplane," says Rebecca, "may have trouble visualizing your scenario."

"What if the 'cool water' is just a mirage?" The question is from Michael, who's sitting next to the hand-slappers. "You guys know that old cowboy song? The miners have gotten lost in the desert and everybody has died of thirst except old Dan, who thinks he sees an oasis up ahead. He puts his hands out in front of him to keep the location in his sights as well as to keep his balance. He's fading fast, but he feels he's almost there. He's made it—but no, his hands aren't reaching forward at all. He's lying on his back. His hands are stretched in the air, where a buzzard is about to descend. From the ground, the bird's wings look like they're expanding. Within seconds, they fill his field of vision and out go the lights."

"That's horrible!" screeches Rebecca. Michael takes her hand, but clearly does not share her revulsion. If you work in the prison system, as he does, the dark side of your imagination will assert itself now and then. And if you're in the poetry business, you'll get your share of

1 Joseph von Eichendorff (1788 - 1857), a German Romantic lyricist.

buzzards,[1] ravens, and carrion crows along with the pelicans, herons, and egrets.

Tony wants to take a different tack: "All this is fine and good, but in trying to find the right locus here, let's not overlook the fact that the first word '*fl*owing' consonates with the last word '*fl*ight.' Both words describe fluid motion with identical sounds. What that's telling me is the link-up is a simple simile. The water flowing is *like* a bird flying. Instead of straining to fit flowing water and flying bird into the same action series, we put ourselves in the physical space of the water and the mental space of the bird. Here I am in the cool Gulf water paddling along with a breast stroke. Lo and behold, as my hands sweep forward and down in a wide arc, I realize that with my paddling I have slipped into an inscape of propulsion, the flapping 'way' of the bird's wings in flight."

"You're swimming through the air," Wendy says.

"Or flying through water."

"That reading makes sense," Jennifer opines, "but even if you see flying only as a metaphor for flowing, you still have room in the poem for an actual swimmer and an actual flier. Maybe the swimmer is doing a back stroke. Looking up, she sees a pelican and feels a kinship with her fellow creatures capable of flight. In her mind, she enacts a swim-flight."

This comment excites Silvia: "Yes, but when you enact, enact it with your body and not just with your mind. Acting something out kinetically promotes understanding." She stands up and faces the group. "This is an exercise I do with my patients in rheumatic therapy."

Silvia kneels down, as if on a riverbank, and scoops up imaginary water in her cupped hands. Then, still on her knees, she slowly straightens her back and lifts her hands. As they pass her lips, the cup they form morphs into bird wings. Joined along the little fingers, her hands begin to wing their way heavenward in a flapping rhythm powered by the slapping together of her forearms. "This is not easy to do if you're at all stiff."

Rosemarie asks Silvia to repeat the exercise to the words of the

1 Buzzards are part of the landscape in Wallace Stevens' "O, Florida, Venereal Soil," as well as in his Florida nocturne, "Two Figures in Dense Violet Night."

> Say, puerile, that the buzzards crouch on the ridge-pole
> And sleep with one eye watching the stars fall
> Below Key West.

poem. As Rosemarie reads, Silvia moves as if following a script. Each scene in the mini-drama seems to match a stanza in the poem. Bending down and cupping the flowing waters, lifting the cup ("my hands the way"), sprouting wings for the "bird's expanding needs," and raising her hands over her head for the final "flight."

"Sometimes my good classes can even stand back up without having to push with their arms." Silvia is back on her feet. "I usually do it to music, and the first part, the scooping action, isn't dipping into water but extracting a bird from a cage. But in the future, with your permission, I think I'll do it this way, to the poem's accompaniment."

"By all means." David holds Silvia's chair as she sits back down.

Silvia's enactment has stirred something in Rudiger: "What I think we've witnessed is a dramatization of life's beginning and end. That's perhaps why it has affected us so deeply. The river bearing the water of life is a myth that goes back all the way to the Garden of Eden, but it's also found in the Revelation. All the ancient peoples, Mesopotamians, Hebrews, and Egyptians, observed how water flows through the desert and brings life wherever it goes. Therefore, water is the symbol of life: Originally life comes from water and chemically life is water. Baptism, our spiritual initiation, takes place along the flowing waters. At the end of life we surrender our soul; we give up the ghost. One of the earliest symbols of the spirit is a bird. Throughout Western art, the Spirit of God is represented as a dove. It is the eternal part of us that can fly away from a sinking vessel, like the bird that Noah set free from the ark. When we feel that bird's expanding need for flight, we know our time has come."

So what are the cool waters in the poem? A launching pad for seaplanes, a desert mirage, a swim with a beach bird, a drink from a mountain stream, or the living waters of spirit? Later, on the beach, I ask David which interpretation he would deem correct.

"Ah, the grammarian wants a plumb line to ascertain correctness. A poem, though, is like a prism through which you can view the same object in different guises, different coats of light. All of these imaginative vistas reflect the inherent order of the poem. As long as the reader views the object through the prism, without projecting something extraneous into it, I doubt that even a poet can delimit what is correct."

A Form of Presence

Light'

s a form
of presence

Performing
these trees

into a spo
ken awareness

of being
formed from

leafed-in'
s awaiting.

synchysis
an interlocking pattern of organization

If we diagram chiasmus as ABCCBA, synchysis is ABABAB.

In "A Form of Presence," we have two groups of three words, both taken from the title. The first triad is built via polyptoton around "form": form → performing → formed. The second triad develops out of "presence" in a chain of assonant rhyme: pres*ence* → aware*ness*. *Awa*reness → *awai*ting. In the first two couplets, "form" and "presence" alternate twice. In the two central couplets, "performing" alternates with "awareness." In the last two couplets, "formed" and "awaiting" complete this synchytic two-step.

(from *A Voiced Awakening*, pp. 177-8)

"This poem makes me dizzy." Carol is holding her head steady with both hands.

"You mean, like a boat rocking?" Silvia asks. "I feel that, too. See-sawing up and down."

"Perform*ing* and be*ing* formed," I read. "Form of presence and awareness of formed."

"Yes, but worse than seasickness. As a child, I used to get migraines whenever I'd sit in the car and watch the trees speed by. The light blinking on and off on a thousand reflector leaves would set it off every time."

"A lot of it makes me blink," Jennifer says. "It's full of funny reversals that make you wonder if it would make more sense backwards. Does light perform trees or do trees perform in the light? Are trees 'being formed from leafed-in's awaiting' or awaiting being formed from leaves?"

"Definitely the former," declares Tony. "'Leafed-in' is a marvelous phrase for the inscape of leaves. The leafed-in is waiting its time to take the form of what it is intended to be. The trees are proudly aware that their splendid panoply of leaves was originally formed from the leafed-in, the pattern of all leaves."

George spots another reversal: "Light is a form of presence. Without

light, objects can't present themselves. So it's a form of material presence. At the same time, light is a form of divine presence. It's the only phenomenon in our physical world that transcends physics, making it a universal symbol of the metaphysical. But while light is a form of presence, light is also the presence of form. Without light, which is formless, forms can't emerge from darkness. Light reveals forms, makes them present."

George's comments bring to mind Milton's hymn to light at the opening of Book III in *Paradise Lost*. Trapped in a dungeon of darkness, the blind poet prays for second sight:

> So much the rather thou Celestial Light
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I might see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.

"What makes me dizzy," Helen reflects, "is all the starting and stopping. The poem opens in static equilibrium: Light *is* a form of presence or the presence of form. But then the light performs—more like transforms—leaves *into* a new state. A dynamic transformation. That state is awareness: static again. An awareness of being formed—transformed again—into what? Into awaiting; back to static."

"So the light forms the leaves, but also transforms them?" I try to summarize.

"And *per*forms them as well," Wendy adds. "Like stage lighting. By shining on the leaves, the light makes them aware. It illuminates them."

"Illumination is enlightenment," Dudley reminds us.

"But awareness is also realization," a Southeast English accent pipes from back across the room. "The leaves become realized, achieve their reality, through the light. This, of course, sheds a new light on the matter, the matter being the leaves." Tony breaks into a high-beam smile.

"The whole poem is about this relationship between light and leaves." Rudiger consults his notes. "Note the balance between the word 'light' in the second line from the top and 'leaf' in the second line from the bottom. These two l-words sound the theme. The light is a form of presence for the leaves. The light forms the leaves. It performs them and transforms them."

"It performs them into a spoken awareness," Rebecca reads. "They speak? How do they speak awareness?"

"Trees rustle," Jennifer replies. "They rustle in the breeze."

"You can hear that very sound in the central line." Rudiger has done his usual thorough job of analyzing. "Count ten words from the front and ten words from the back. That puts you at the heart of the poem: '*th*e tre*es*,' l*eave*s rustling in the br*eeze*. That's how trees speak."

"Also in the sibilants: '*s*poken awarene*ss*,'" notes Jennifer.

"But that's the sound of the wind," Rebecca objects.

"The wind itself is silent," George retorts. "You only hear it when it causes objects it's brushing against to vibrate. It's as soundless as light itself, and equally formless."

"Which puts it in the same sacred category as light," I say. "In the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek, the word for 'wind' is the same as the one for 'spirit.' That mysterious force which can't be seen, heard, or touched, but which can be seen and heard touching, becomes our most persistent symbol of spirit. That, together with their performing light, gives trees a very spiritual mode of discourse."

Carol nods: "We should be attentive to their spoken awareness. Even if it makes us dizzy."

God-seeker

However

much we've
reclaimed

this land to
our own use

And tilled
out the soil

of our finer
feelings

There would
always be a

On the surface, the poem "God-seeker" seems tightly ordered by its antithetical structure:

> However much we (might) claim X,
> we (would) still face a counterclaim Y.

Nevertheless, the poem employs a number of devices that create undercurrents of discontinuity:

anacoluthon
changing the grammar in midstream. The two halves of the sentence structure do not match grammatically. If the dispute with darkness is real, "however much we've reclaimed" should be followed by: "there will always be a counterclaim (or threat of counterclaim)." If the claims are only hypothetical, "there would always be a counterclaim" should be premised on: "however much we might reclaim (or might have reclaimed)." The poet thus starts with a prediction based on fact and switches to a hypothesis.

dark ness
that would

spread its
claims again on

us Far out
beyond the ti

dal urgings
of this sea

to that last
starried hope

of being more
than what we

are or could
possibly

mean.

tmesis
dividing a word in two. The key word "darkness" has been split in half, which in itself is not unusual considering the poet's habit of spilling letters onto the next line. Only, here both word halves remain on the same line!

amplification
tacking on an explanation. Since this dark adversary can "spread its claim," the extent of this claim needs to be demarcated: "Far out beyond ... to that last ..." This pins a long "tail" (6 stanzas) on the core sentence.

sentence fragments
dressing up phrases and other constituents as sentences. This is what will really drive teachers of Freshman Composition crazy. Ostensibly, the poem consists of four "sentences." In reality, the whole poem expresses only one complete thought.

(from *Through Lost Silences*, p. 86)

Rudiger has a question: "Did I understand correctly from Carol's bio a moment ago that you come from a family of lawyers?"

"Yes, I grew up under the general expectation that I would carry on my father's law office. But that's something I've left to my son."

"I might have guessed as much from the focal imagery of claims and counterclaims in this poem."

"Or from the fact that the poem starts with 'however' and slowly builds its argument," Helen reasons.

"If it's a courtroom setting," I continue, "you need two parties in contention. I notice the poem is sprinkled through with 'us'-references: 'we,' 'our,' 'us,' and 'we' again. Since assigning an identity to personal pronouns, as we know, is not always obvious, the question is: Who are *we*, and who are *they*?"

"The *they* is easier than the *we*," Carol says. "It's the 'dark ness / that would / spread its / claims again on / us.' It's an *it* that has already started spreading: dark - ness."

"A dispute with darkness." George wonders: "What kind of courtroom is that?"

Tony has an idea: "The dispute is about land. Maybe it's the Land Registry."

"Tony might be on the right track." Rosemarie has some inside information: "The title of the poem is borrowed from one of Sinclair Lewis's [1] last novels which deals with a very idealistic missionary to the Sioux Indians on the Minnesota frontier in the mid-nineteenth century. It was a time when, piece by piece, the land of the indigenous people was being claimed by the white settlers."

"So the missionary was a God-seeker?" asks Jennifer.

"An honest man seeking to do the right thing. But, when confronted with the whole process of 'civilizing' the Indians, a man who honestly questioned if he was doing more harm than good. If the religion he taught them made up for the evil of tearing apart their culture and taking over their land."

"In other words, another God-seeking skeptic." Is Jennifer referring to "Gnawing Fear"?

Wendy tries to get it all straight: "And now a lawyer's son who became a missionary in Europe has written a legalistic poem about a missionary in the American West?"

"The conflict, though, seems to go beyond the historical context of North American settlement," Rudiger notes. "While our party wants land, their party, or the party of 'it,' is threatening to extend their claim to the sea and the stars."

"So the conflict is cosmic in scope," George concludes. "It's darkness against light, evil against good, or ignorance against knowledge."

"Or all three, and more," says Helen. "I agree with Rudiger that it's not just between some European settlers and American Indians. Whatever it's about, the conflict has been raging back and forth for some time, maybe for all time. The second stanza says we have *re*-claimed the land, claimed it again. But so has the darkness. It's 'a darkness that would spread its claims *again*.' Maybe the Minnesota frontier is the current battleground, but it's just the latest battle in an ongoing struggle."

"Maybe I'm seeing things again," Dudley admits, "but I just can't get bird images out of my head. The darkness is 'spreading' its claim

1 Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951), a satiric novelist, was the first American to win the Nobel prize for literature.

on us. That could easily be Michael's buzzard spreading its wings like a shroud over our eyes. Or maybe it's a giant blackbird, flying far out over the sea and blacking out the stars, erasing all our hope."

David, I notice, has been verbing again: Out of the hope we place in the steadfastness of stars, he's made "starried hope."

"I don't know, Dud." Chang calls his best bud "Dud"? "Lots of dark things can spread. Disease, unemployment, civil unrest."

"That doesn't mean they can't be symbolized by a bird image—right, David?" Dudley looks to David for confirmation but denies him the chance to respond. "Just look at the contrasting eco-spaces of the claimants. Our party, the 'we,' only claims the land, the domain of humans. On the other hand, the darkness spreads its claim out over the sea into the sky, both spaces where unfeathered bipeds are not particularly at home."

Silvia is confused: "So the conflict is mankind against nature?"

Rudiger helps: "Could be. We claim the land. But look what the other side claims: us."

"Man tries to separate himself from nature by claiming the land," George theorizes, "But nature wants to get him back under her total control."

Carol has uncovered a poetic clue: "As in the other two poems on this page, I think David is linking key concepts through consonance. In the first one, remember, it was 'flowing' and 'flight.' Then it was 'light' and 'leaf.' And here we have 'tilled' and 'tidal.' The tilled land against the 'tidal urgings' of the sea."

Jennifer sees it, too: "Yes, the tilled 'soil of our finer feelings' against our elemental 'tidal urgings.' Our super-egos resisting our ids' base instincts."

"You mean it's a conflict within ourselves?" Now it's Rebecca who's confused.

"A conflict within mirrored by externalized behaviors. We cultivate the soil and imagine that we ourselves are cultivated. We develop finer feelings and give them expression in our learning and our laws."

"And in our literature," I add.

"Yes," Jennifer continues. "Poetry is one of the fruits of the earth we till. We started with dirt and have now brought forth the riches of refined thoughts and feelings. But all the while, our own dark urges are encroaching upon our tidy fields and farms, spreading destruction."

"Our inner conflict is mirrored by nature?" Rebecca asks.

"The external mirroring I mean isn't just the pathetic fallacy, nature feeling what we feel. It's nature that we've manipulated turning on us and biting back, like a mistreated animal."

Michael, who has been listening carefully, now advances an idea of his own: "If it was the Florida frontier we were talking about here instead of the Wild West, I might think that the word 'reclaimed' was telling us something. We have reclaimed land from the great Sea of Grass with disastrous results. Now the tides are taking their toll." Michael, I see, has learned how to listen not only for what the words are saying, but what they might be suggesting.

"Well, let's relay that question to David." But Helen reformulates: "When you title the poem 'God-seeker,' is that like one of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues? Along with the title, have you borrowed the character and given this frontier missionary the speaking role? Or is it just you, the Floridian poet, speaking in allusion to the Sinclair Lewis historical novel?"

"If the conflict is within ourselves, as Jennifer believes, that's a moot question. A missionary will always face discouragement. Our higher motives will never stop battling our lower drives. We will always be skeptical as to if what we are doing has any lasting value. The same is true if the conflict is truly cosmic, as George has indicated. Whether we're standing at the Mississippi a hundred and fifty years ago or in the Everglades today, we cannot escape the fact that all our mighty efforts to subjugate 'this land to / our own use' will ultimately have to face the even stronger forces of the untamable sea: atrophy and decay, chaos and meaninglessness. This will bring us face-to-face with the pressing question of our own role in the universe: 'what we / are or could / possibly / mean.'"

"Just a follow-up on that." George sees an opening to return to the problem that has been nagging at him all day. "Do you ever bring real characters into your poems? We know you allude to Ulysses, but does Ulysses ever take center stage? Is your poetry a place where we can ever meet our own kind, as in the great epics?" He might well have continued his chain question a little longer, but headquarters suddenly issues another urgent call. Cell in hand, he bolts for the door in an unceremonious exit, as if the Greeks had been routed from the plains of Troy. High time, we decide spontaneously, for all of us to take a break.

IV. Persona & Idea

As George has lamented, the modern lyric has largely abandoned the sweeping linearity of epic and drama. This not only removes the overarching plotline (the classical "unity of action") with its single focus on a protagonist like Odysseus or its dual focus on protagonists vs. antagonists engaged in a vast conflict like the Trojan War,[1] but also leaves these heroes and the big ideas they represent stranded on the sidelines. The heroes now join a whole cast of characters, including ordinary background figures and walk-ons, who take turns stepping forward into the limelight for their brief moment of fame. In lieu of the central point or philosophical construct behind the story, the kaleidoscopic narrator's multiple focus pans out to a tumbling, turbulent farrago of thoughts and themes, which are inventoried and given concentrated treatment, one at a time. We have left Renaissance Italy with its neatly framed subjects behind and have crossed the Alps into the chaotic world of Bosch and Brueghel.

What Prof. Harvey[2] called "perspectives of range," with which the reader, by connecting the author's strategically placed dots, is able to track how characters and ideas are developed piecemeal throughout a work of fiction, have been replaced by "perspectives of depth," in which one character or idea is brightly illuminated from one point of view at one point in time, like an X-ray. Instead of collecting information and gradually assembling a composite picture of the whole, the reader is challenged to extrapolate the whole from an intensely seen part. This transfers a great deal of the imaginative work involved in making poetry from the poet to the poemed. Sometimes, the work load is so demanding that many readers long to sit back for a while and simply be consumers of a conventional story told in a novel or film.

Seen from the perspective of depth, the usual profiling of biographical facts takes a back seat to capturing a single "defining moment"

1 Rick Altman's *Theory of Narrative* posits single-, dual-, and multiple-focus modes of organizing textual material (Columbia, 2008). In the visual arts, he cites the sixteenth-century Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel as an example of decentralized narrative style with multiple characters.

2 W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1965), p. 55.

that will characterize and summarize a whole life. This kind of poetic summary statement is not the unique property of lyricists. Besides inventing some of the most complex characters we know, Shakespeare the dramatist was a master of packing a full character portrait into a thumbnail sketch of just a few lines:

> Nothing in his life
> Became him like the leaving it; he died
> As one that had been studied in his death
> To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
> As 'twere a careless trifle. (*Macbeth*, Act 1)

Lacking the perspective of range to do a full character study over five acts, the lyric poet is forced to assume such a perspective of depth. Here is Emily Dickinson with a similar epitaph:

> He fought like those Who've nought to lose —
> Bestowed himself to Balls
> As One who for a further life
> Had not a further Use — (*Fr* 480)

Bravery in the face of death is a typical defining moment, a moment's choice that culminates a lifetime of conduct and character. With the tightest economy, the perspective of depth uncovers what we commonly call character traits. While Homer takes the long view, the perspective of range, to demonstrate that Achilles is wrathful and Odysseus is cunning, the two lyrical miniatures above can make us believe that the Scottish nobleman and the American foot soldier described were brave. By becoming believable, these characters achieve a "roundness" that we recognize as life-like. Thus, to answer George's question, round characters, the kind of people we know, can indeed be encountered in modern lyric. Prof. Harvey explains that while we do not see the full circumference of their roundness, but only a small cutout of the curve, its arc is so pronounced that the rest of the circle can, with a little effort on our part, be filled in by imagination.

Applying Stevens' analogy of the actor from "Of Modern Poetry," the emptier the stage, or the darker the theater, or the less information provided by the poet, the more our imaginations have to supply. The less the poet has to deal with the external trappings of someone's daily business, the more he can shine his light on his subject's inner life. Our poet believes that this flash of inner revelation will tell us what is

more significant about a particular life, as well as about living in general than the bare "facts of the case." When these details are stripped away from the defining moment and we find we have not been initiated into the backstory behind that critical decision or decisive showdown, what we are left with is a feel for the subject, a feel that is more than a momentary mood, or snapshot of an emotional state, but close-up contact with character.

The More becomes
The facts

don't finalize
us as if

Life were
written for a

piece of paper
Born, done and

finished Then
with a stoned

on inscript
for lasting mea

ning It's that
sense for

some thing
more not even

equalized with
words The fee

ling out to be
ing as a

Child stretches
his arms her

legs That coming
in to without

really knowing
why The touch

of love that real
izes some thing

more of us
than we knew

more could be
The quiet of

simply lis

tening, seeing
to being These

are the real
facts to

life

the more
becomes.

(from *Into the Timeless Deep*,
pp. 109-110)

The poet starts by contrasting life facts (gathered through the perspective of range) with a life feeling (experienced through the perspective of depth). This is the primary contrast on which the poem is built. The facts preserved on paper record our ephemeral deeds and transactions; those chiseled in stone attempt to express *lasting* meaning, but, as the verb pair "finalize" and "finish" suggest, only manage to utter the *last* word. Neither of them are the real life facts, as we are told in the conclusion: The real life fact is a life feeling, a poetic sensitivity to life, a "sense for something more." This feeling is defined in four dimensions:

(a) a feeling out (a stretching)
(b) a coming in
(c) the touch of love
(d) the quiet

These dimensions of feeling also function as coordinates for being. With four compass points, we can pinpoint our location in life much more accurately than with the quasi-real "facts."

(a) feeling out → to *be*ing
(b) coming in → to *be*ing (unstated but understood)
(c) touch of love → realizes something more of us
than we knew more could *be*
(d) quiet → of listening and seeing to *be*ing

The "sense for something more" is thus our true existential awareness. But it is also awareness of something more. That "some thing" (tmesis) which is beyond the power of words to convey is the potential for a fulfilled life. The deeper-level contrast drawn by the poet is therefore between being and becoming. These are the two key words in the poem. The word with the highest frequency, "more," points both ways: The "*sense* for something more" is being; "*realizing* something more" is becoming.

"Realizing" is another leitmotif. We come into being "without *really* knowing why," but our life feeling or poetic sense will provide the *real* facts about life, the ones worth knowing, those that will help us *realize* why.[1] As with our poem on Ranke, the claim put forth here is that poetry will give us the feel of what *really* was. What makes this feeling more real than facts? The feeling, this "sense for something more," is validated by the real fact of something more: Something more is realized, made real, by love.

1 The mutation of *really* → *realize* → *real* is another example of polyptoton.

The facts themselves are finite; they finalize. They tell us what we have done, what has been finished. On the other hand, our inborn "sense for something more" leads us to a quality of "more" we never even knew existed. The new "more" thus belongs to a new quality of existing, a More with a capital M. When we exist in a state of More, we are on our way to becoming: The More becomes. We are like a Child (also capitalized) growing toward the Most we can become.

While facts final*ize*, a touch can real*ize*. Here the poet is reinforcing his primary contrast though the repetition of word endings, a device called homoeoteleuton in classical rhetoric. All facts put down in words cannot equal*ize* the More. The More is more than all the facts because the facts finish: They run out of paper or stone and stop, but still they cannot "finalize us."

What the life facts attempted to do on paper and stone is accomplished by the life feeling for being and becoming. *Being* fully aware in a sense of More, we record the deeds and transactions of life that really matter: a feeling out, a coming in, the touch of love, and the quiet that gives us this awareness. Then, we achieve "lasting meaning," not just a stone monument, when we realize our *becoming*.

We are almost at a point where we can understand the title of the poem. First, however, we have to acknowledge that "the More becomes" is a conflation of at least five different sentences.

(a) [The more life is lived in a sense of becoming,] the more [it] becomes [real].
(b) [The more we are quiet and listen,] the more becomes [clear to us, realized].
(c) [When we reach a state of "Something More,"] the More becomes.
(d) [It is my prayer that your love] becomes more and more. (Philippians 1:9)
(e) [Love will help us realize something more of ourselves than we ever knew] more [could] become.

All these ideas have been distilled down to a three-word essence: "The More becomes." While the title is tightly compressed, the poem itself stretches out like the infant in its central image[2] by tacking idea onto idea into one long, winding accordion sentence. In the final stanza, the accordion is compressed again by the repetition of the title.

2 Rudiger would point out here that the stretching image is placed in the central stanza (11 out of 21).

7 Portrayed in Faces

Back in my seat, I am clawing the chair, trying to keep my tenuous hold on the horizon. My sense of grammatical order has already deserted me; now, I can feel my semantic orientation slowly unhinging. The room is rocking as reference points I thought were solidly tied-down snap loose from their moorings. I realize I am unrealizing.

Unrealizing

and uneasy
as the shift

ing sense of
waves un

certained
upon a chang

ing timeless
sea He clung

fast and tight
to the mast's

flags Flying
higher than

he could poss
ibly grasp.

(from *These Time-Shifting Thoughts*, p. 39)

"shifting sense"
exploiting the different senses of words (polysemy) to create multiple dimensions of meaning (fields of association)

Here, "the shifting sense of waves" is not only our sense of unsteadiness out on the ocean, but the oscillating sense of words that leaves us semantically disoriented and "uncertained" inside our own heads. The word "sense" itself is multisensed (polysemous): It can refer to both the sensory and the semantic. The poetic use of such words can trigger parallel fields of association in which language is processed in different ways at once.

In the last selection, love "realizes": It both makes something new real and brings us to a new realization. Here, does the first word "unrealizing" refer to the character's inability to accomplish his life goals or to his unwitting plight? Likewise, does the final word "grasp" refer to physical or mental action? In what sense exactly is he "flying high"?

David reads the first half of the poem in an unsteady rhythm, letting the last words in each stanza trail off drunkenly into space before plunking onto the next line. Then, starting with "sea He clung," he moves into an almost military march, enunciating each monosyllable until the long pause after "mast's" and the abrupt halt at "flags." The coda ascends rapidly in tone, leaving the last "grasp" more like a last gasp, hanging on for dear life.

On the second run-through, appropriately timed reactions from the group confirm that most of us are getting the humor.

"Is this Ulysses again?" Helen wants to know.

"Ulysses?" queries George. "He had himself tied to the mast."

"I know—to resist the Sirens' call. But if you only look at the third stanza from the bottom, it could be a line from the *Odyssey*: 'fast and tight / to the mast's …'"

"If you're on a rough sea, the mast is the safest, most stable part of the ship." Any sea legs Chang may have are the kind you get climbing the ladder to the aft swimming platform of a 42-ft. motor yacht. "It's the best place to be if you're getting woozy."

Dudley calls his bluff: "How do you know? Far as I can remember, you're strictly a fair-weather captain. The whooziest conditions you've ever seen are when you stir your drink."

"Then why is this nautical treatise all about me? Don't you see my name in the seventh line? And, if you tune in to the half rhymes at the end of the stanzas, you'll see that I'm Ulysses: Chang clung to the mast's grasp."

"The whole second half of the poem is full of those whiny vowels," Jennifer says. "Fast – mast – flag – grasp. Maybe it's Ulysses wailing a mournful answer to the Sirens."

"I remember the punchy anaphora from the Ulysses poem." Helen is talking about similar initial sounds or phrases piled up for emphasis: "I may not have … I may not have." "Here we start with a whole string of un-prefixes."

"And an '*u*po*n*' to round it off," notes Carol.

"'Unrealizing and uneasy' are a pair of wobbly words." Rudiger has highlighted them on his photocopy. "They come from the sea. Look how they match up with the other pair, 'fast and tight,' words that come from the mast. The sea is the motif of the top half: wild and wobbly. The mast towers over the bottom half: fast and tight."

"The two halves meet in the juxtaposed 'sea He,'" Tony points out.

"Right. Caught between wobbliness and steadiness, he makes his choice: 'sea He clung.'"

"But notice," I interject, leaning over Rudiger's sheet like a man about to go overboard, "that the first pair of un-words, 'unrealizing and uneasy,' still apply to him. Although they appear up here at the top, they are actually adjectives which modify the 'he' down in the middle. He is as 'unrealizing and uneasy' as the waves."

"There's another wobbly un-word in the mix: 'uncertained,'" Wendy adds. "But is that even a word?" David has just been caught verbing again.

"Shifting and Chang-ing are wobbly, too." Dudley pronounces "changing" by verbing his friend's name.

"But 'timeless'?" Rebecca is stuck. "How does 'timeless' fit into that series? The sea is unrealizing and uneasy, uncertained, shifting and changing. But 'timeless' sounds permanent."

George has a theory: "This sailor is being tossed on a sea of timelessness. The only thing permanent is change. *Panta rei.*[1] The permanence of the sea is perceived to be in flux with its wave-sprayed surface. But does our sailor embrace the deep-lying permanence all around him? No, he hugs the mast, which seems to offer momentary stability. But he is the victim of another illusion, because the mast is on the boat and the boat is on a wave."

Dudley has a golden musical flashback to his drop-out days: "Yeah, it's sort of like in that old Flatlanders tune: 'Babe, you're just a wave, you're not the water.' The wave is the change that unsettles everything around it, but the water is unchanging. That's the way a boat deceives you. It's called a watercraft, but it depends on the wave, not the water. It makes you think you have solid ground beneath your feet, but it can be mashed to pulp by the crack of a wave. So our sailor is grasping for the only thing solid he can find, a frail boat which is riding the eternally shifting, massively crushing waves. Double deception."

"It's more like a triple whammy," Jennifer says. "The sailor isn't grasping the mast at all, but the mast's flags. Now he's also dependent on the vagaries of wind. Bouncing on the waves, flapping in the breeze, and trusting in a very transitory nutshell."

"Or yogurt cup," Dudley proposes. "Modern boats are built more like plastic yogurt cups. Not quite as timeless as the sea, but definitely more resistant to biodegradation."

"Who is this sailor we're talking about?" Silvia asks. "Who is stupid enough to clutch the flag on rough seas?"

"A patriot?" suggests Wendy.

"A patriot is a flag-waver, not a flag-clutcher," Tony objects. "A flag-clutcher tries to attach himself to something larger than he is, because he himself feels insignificant and insecure."

---

1 George is quoting Heraclitus: "All things flow." This was one of the Pythagorean ideas that inspired Ovid: "*cuncta fluunt.*"

"Unrealizing and uneasy," Wendy reads.

I'd like to explain that up here in my unrealizing state, I'm not wrapping myself in national colors. These in fact are international code flags, a whole dictionary of unwavering definitions in plainly-stated sentences. Any reader tossed on the uncertained sea of polysemy trying to recover some clarity will seek the sanctuary of the signal halyard, this semantic center of gravity, the steady antipode to shifting sense. Lifted on these wing-like pennants to a commanding vantage, I can see above the fog and fly higher than I could possibly ever grasp.

"He's uneasy and insecure, clutching at ready-made, pre-packaged mission statements," Chang avers decidedly, "because he is completely at sea. A seaman with no inkling of seamanship. Let's not overlook the obvious here: Anyone knows you maneuver a sailboat with the sails. But he's not a pilot. He's a manager who can't maneuver, only manipulate. In the corporate world, he goes by a number of titles: 'Project Portfolio Coordinator,' 'Administrative Director,' 'Head of Compliance,' all of which sound important enough for him to position himself at the top of the mast, as a super-superior supervisor. So he's right up at the top where the flag is flying, which makes him a high-flyer himself; such a high-flyer, in fact, that he latches on to everything in the company which is colorful, ceremonial, and steeped in sufficient pomp and circumstance. So completely does he identify with top-heavy protocols and power plays, top-down policies and procedures, he thinks he can steer the ship by the flag. But he's flying higher than he can grasp. He's flailing, because up at the top of the mast, as every seafarer knows, the swell and sway of the sea is magnified. If we are rocking down on the deck near the pivot point, he's rocking and rolling so violently up there in the tackle that he won't be able to grasp much longer. Oops, did he get blown away? Well, that low-down, toplofty lightweight clung on—past tense—as long as he could. The sad part is people like him are expendable and completely interchangeable, even if they do get a little clingy." Chang brushes an imaginary fuzzball from his shirt.

"Sounds like you know the guy," George speculates.

"Every programmer who has ever worked in a corporation knows him. The trick is to be tricky: as tricky as Ulysses once he drafts you on his crew."

So much
He talked

so much a
bout himself

that at the
end there

was much
more talk

than self a
bout him.

(from *Dream Flow*, p. 100)

antimetabole
In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one of the hallmarks of fine poetry was considered to be "wit." In his essay "Of Poetry" from 1692, Sir William Temple, thinking no doubt of Horace, stated that poetry should produce both "profit and pleasure," profit from wisdom and pleasure from wit. The wit involved in the epigram on the left depends on a rhetorical device known as antimetabole, discussed in detail below. With its balanced elegance, the reversal of element pairs from one clause to another produces a ready-made witticism that usually wows an audience, regardless of whether the occasion is poetic or political.

"I think I've run across this person before, too," Chang comments.

"Who hasn't?" asks Silvia. "As a matter of fact, he sounds a lot like my ex-husband. He thought he was the center of the universe and that everything revolved around Mr. Star of the Galaxy."

"So was there more self or talk about him?" inquires Rebecca.

"I think he blew so much hot air that his ego inflated, like a balloon."

"Just because he's egocentric," Helen says, "it doesn't mean there's anything at the center. A center is just a dimensionless point, a hollow core."

"More like a black hole, sucking everything down. Mr. Dark Star."

Tony sees a metaphor: "A black hole was once a bright star. Maybe the poem is about someone whose star has gone out."

"There seems to be a good supply of these has-beens in Florida," remarks Wendy the tourist. "They retire from their real lives and sit around the golf club glorying in the good old days."

"There's a sweet one we always see perched on his bench at sundown." Rebecca's speech, I notice, is now laced with metaphor: a pensioner perched like a pre-established pelican.

"At least they have a past they can glory in." It's Michael, who knows a lot of quick burn-outs facing prolonged cool-downs. "We also get a lot of young people in Florida whose blaze of glory was short-lived. Now there's nothing left but big talk. Short on living, big on talk."

Now Rosemarie speaks up: "That's precisely the point. It's when talking about oneself takes the place of self-development. This can

happen to people anywhere, not just in prison. It's a kind of self-limiting narcissism. We get so concerned about ourselves that we don't expose ourselves to life. Living is risky; doing nothing is safe. But once something has happened, the self can actually be strengthened by talk. Talking problems through, for example in therapy, can reinforce our self-identities."

Tony the talker agrees: "No, there's nothing wrong with self-reflective talk. It's part of living an examined life. It's putting that dialogue in the center of your life that's harmful. We need something in the center of our lives besides ourselves."

"The center of the poem is interesting." Rudiger has been counting words again. "It's the three words 'at the end.' See them there in the very middle of the middle verse? Nine words in front, nine words after. The center is 'at the end.' So the question is: At the end of what?"

Rebecca: "At the end of his life?"

Helen: "At the end of the evening."

"At the end of the one-sided conversation." Carol combines both views: "Which, since it doesn't stop at the end of the evening, but goes on till the end of his life, is essentially endless."

"Also endless in the sense of running in loops." Silvia is recalling the recurrent self-referentiality of her ex-husband's monologues. "It would always be repeating itself, like those advertisements on TV."

"A little like this poem?" Carol asks. "The last two stanzas repeat the same words of the first two."

"Except 'more,'" Rudiger notes. "'Was,' 'more,' 'than' are new words. The loops expand slightly with each retelling."

"And the words are jumbled," Silvia continues. "As if saying something different, but really saying the same thing."

"They're really not jumbled," Carol protests. "They're just inverted. 'So much' in the second stanza becomes 'much more' in the second one from the bottom. 'Talk-ed,' verb plus past marker, becomes 'was talk.' 'Talk so much' becomes 'much more talk.'"

"Everything backwards."

"Including the sense." Rudiger has learned the hard way that in English the subject comes first. When he first came to this country, he used to entertain everyone with Germanisms like "The car washes Maria." Maria, his wife, got him out of that habit in a hurry. "You talking a lot about yourself is not the same as a lot of talk about you."

I take a moment to introduce antimetabole, a rhetorical flourish used

to finish off a sentence with a twist by transposing two previous elements. This is an old rhetorical tactic that never fails to seduce listeners into believing that anything so clever must also be true:

Don't look for a poem of the heart, but the heart of a poem.
The poems put action into words; the poemed then put the words into action.

"See how it works? But watch: Here our poet is pulling a serial switcheroo. Not only does he reverse 'talk much' with 'much talk,' he goes from 'about himself' to 'self about him.' A double switch for double effect."

It doesn't take long for our group to find other examples. Dudley comes up with a bold, original reformulation of his life brand: "My hands know the way of the birds; my hands show the birds the way."

Tony the pun-lover sees antimetabole as an opportunity for sense-shifting wisecracking: "Never get fighting mad unless you're mad about fighting."

Wendy has a sequel to her Lady of Man limerick:

There once was a man-eating lady
Who lived on the fair isle of Haiti.
She said, "Come to my cove,
If you live for love."
"But I love to live, darling," said he.

Michael and Rebecca get the hang of it, too. Michael delights his spouse with: "Don't wait a lifetime for your woman, wait on your woman for a lifetime." Rebecca responds with the old standby: "You can take the boy out of the country, but not the country out of the boy."

Helen quotes an antimetabolic axiom: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country,"[1] which Rudiger recognizes as chiastic: ABC (country – do – you), CBA (you – do – country). This was the structure of "Poemed": "Don't you look for a poem unless the poem looks right in you."

Mightily poemed, too, is Chang: "Don't look to stop a high-flying underachiever unless one stoops to look right into your cubicle."

1 from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address

Helen's Greek tells her that *chi*asmus slots words into an X-shaped[2] pattern and that *anti*metabole involves switching around a pair, AB → BA. Seeing that both devices work inside four corners, she asks about the difference.

I explain: "Antimetabole is a virtuoso juggling of words from one clause to the next. But it is only one variety of chiastic patterning. As Rudiger has pointed out, chiasmus can go beyond pairs. It can range from simple AB-BA[3] to triplets (ABC-CBA), all the way to longer ascending-descending chains (e.g. ABCD-DCBA), as we saw in our nocturne. Remember, the nocturne had a center, the echo. This is the point where the arms of the X cross, another particular feature of chiasmus. It can go ABC-D-CBA. A third distinction is that chiasms don't depend on strict repetition of words. For example, in the last poem we had:

the shift / ing sense of / waves un / certained
A B B A

"In the middle, we have two nouns linked by final consonance: sense and waves. These are flanked by two participles, each modifying the inside noun. This is a chiastic structure of similar elements. Antimetabole would apply the same ABBA formula to repeated elements:

The strong sensation (A) of waves (B) overwhelmed me in strong waves (B) of sensation (A).

When the wave stung my eyes, I couldn't help (A) crying (B), but soon I was crying (B) for help (A).

"As with 'Poemed' and the Kennedy quote, the antimetabolic pair (A & B) can also be part of a larger chiastic ordering (ABC-CBA):

The shifting sense of waves made me long (A) for (B) shore (C), but sure (C) not for (B) long (A).

"As long as we are looking at word patterns, let's not forget synchysis, which we noticed earlier in 'A Form of Presence.' Synchysis is an interlocking structure, an alternation of elements. David also used this scheme with his verb forms in the last poem where present participles

2 chiasmus = in the form of a chi (X), crisscrossed
3 The pop group Abba was named for their boy-girl-girl-boy line-up.

alternate throughout with past forms:

Unrealizing [title] /
and uneasy / as the shift / ing sense of / waves un / certained /
upon a chang / ing timeless / sea He clung / fast and tight /
to the mast's / flags Flying / higher than / he could poss / ibly grasp.

"Synchysis (ABAB) and chiasmus (ABBA) are the two most basic ways for poets to group their words and structure larger units. In free verse, they provide internal balance and order in the absence of external forms like sonnet or ode."

Sitting out
Joe

was busy sit
ting out his

life Slouch
ed over time-

receding
thoughts Sun

drenched in the
Floridian

waves of time-
tending year

s.

oxymoron
a figure of speech in which something is given two apparently contradictory attributes, like "unspoken voices" in the nocturne "But barely heard." One can appear busy, but not when one is slouched on a bench. "Busy sitting" is an oxymoron.

Romeo, alluding to the Roman poet Catullus' ode "odi et amo" (I love and hate), puts together a whole string of oxymora to describe his conflicting feelings:

> O loving hate [...]
> O heavy lightness, serious vanity [...]
> Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,
> Still-waking sleep ... (*Romeo & Juliet*, Act 1)

(from *Dream Flow*, p. 252)

David's voice hums along like a vacuum cleaner sucking up the bits and pieces of words littering the left margin and streaming them into speech. Hearing his steady hum while watching the words scattered down the page can bring on sudden gestalt shifts with unsettling cognitive dissonance. Here, for instance, his voice phrases the epigram in three distinct spurts, coming to complete stops before "Slouch" and

"Sun." By underscoring the caesuras, the vocal reading shows that both participial phrases beginning with "slouched" and "sun-drenched" belong to Joe. This clashes with the visual reading, where the two-word lines seem to pair the same participles with "life" and "thoughts." The eye passes on the muddled message that not only is Joe's life slouched and his thoughts sun-drenched, but that this "life slouch" whiles away his time in a strange land where worn and weary ideas are hung out to dry/die and then washed away by the waves/years.

"Would Joe be that older fellow who frequents the Lazy Flamingo?" inquires Dudley.

"I suspect Joe hangs out at the Swashed Wassailor." Michael knows the spot. "They have a deck out over the back bay where you can get drenched with sun or anything else you want to get drenched in." Now Michael is sense shifting, another sign of his ongoing poetic refinement.

Out of the blue, George asks: "Would you call yourself a satirist?"

"You don't have to be a satirist to depict the contradictions of modern life that scream 'farce.' The satirical point of view is born of realism, seeing things as they are. That's the poet's task: to faithfully record, conveying a feel of how things really are."

"But it also assumes a certain way things *should* be," Helen remarks. "It's a way of slipping in a commentary on the whole scene. You leave your reporter's role and become a commentator."

"Of course I'm commenting, but I'm not slipping in any commentary surreptitiously. I have my attitude to what I'm describing and you hear it. Sometimes you hear it loud, sometimes more softly. But there's no back door to language that allows me to sneak in opinions and implant them in the text *sub rosa*. My subtext is an open book."

"I think what Helen means," George says in his seasoned voice of reasonableness, "is that these three portraits we have seen are all a little unflattering. You have chosen to show these gentlemen in an unfavorable light."

"When you bring something to light," says Rudiger, taking up David's defense, "the light reveals it. In the full light of day, everyone sees the blatant inconsistencies in these characters. In rough seas, the flag won't keep you from blowing away. If you talk too much about yourself, your word count will soon outstrip the things that really count. And you can sit a lot of things out—a dance, a game, even a battle—but not life."

Silvia leans over to ask Rudiger about the title "Sitting out." I always enjoy listening to foreigners explaining the intricacies of English to each other, and now Rudiger is differentiating "sitting outside" and "sitting out." "When you sit something out, you opt out, you decline to take part and watch from the sidelines."

Meanwhile, Jennifer has made the point that although "sitting out life" has an abstract sense, the poet's eye has actually portrayed Joe in a sitting position. "Most people sit something out passively, but Joe is *busy* sitting out."

"He occupies a seat, but not to the degree that sitting occupies him." Tony is really getting the knack of antimetabole.

Michael seems to be well acquainted with the Joes of the beach: "His car is stashed in unmetered parking and he's settled in for the long haul. A daytime drinker with a long, lonesome stretch to closing time. No eye contact with the waitress is like a sign around his neck: 'leave me alone.'"

Jennifer gets the picture: "We can envision him comfortably ensconced in his chair outside on the sundeck, slightly slouched over a drink."

"A glass of bittersweet memories." According to Michael, the metaphor of "liquid memories" is a recurrent motif in the honky-tonk repertoire. "Lefty Frizzell sings about this guy sitting alone with his whiskey. When a beautiful lady asks if she can join him, he points to his glass and replies: 'Sorry, honey. This is just between an old memory and me.'"

"That's sad!" exclaims Rebecca, always a soft target for tearjerkers.

"What's sad," Jennifer goes on, "is that the alcohol distorts time. He's staring into a glass of 'time-receding thoughts.' On the one hand, the time from the present back to his memory is foreshortened by thought and he's immersed in the past: time receding in thought. On the other hand, we have the thought of time receding: The time left in his future is running down, making the past more urgent and insistent. It demands to be replayed again and again."

"Like an old favorite on the jukebox." Now Michael displays a *tour de force* of time tropes, yet another sign of his maturing poetic sensibilities:[1] "Time receding is time 'winding down.' It's what the five-o'clock crowd says they're doing: just winding down after a hard

1 Or is his head just full of Clint Black's Texas barroom ballads, like "Killing Time" and "Winding Down"?

day. But that's just an excuse. Really, they're just killing time, which is passive suicide: sitting out life. Time is winding down, not them. Winding down like a watch you can't wind up again."

Carol is already looking at the next compound with "time": "I'm wondering if this might be the sense of 'time-tending years.' Time is ticking, t-t-t-ending toward the end. Time is ending. 'Time' in the sense of the final time called by the referee at the end of the match."

"That would make 'time-receding' and 'time-tending' almost synonymous," I observe.

"From the tender years of youth to time-tending years of old age?" Wendy likes the symmetry of Carol's reading.

But Silvia hears the Spanish *tender* behind "tending," the original Latin sense of "stretching": "I think 'time-tending' and 'time-receding' are opposites. Time is like water washing ashore, fanning out into rivulets over the beach, then receding. Just like the waves, our years spread time out into a few lunar cycles which, one by one, dissolve into the past."

As a cinema buff, Helen sees "tending" in yet another light: "This poem portrait brings us face-to-face with Joe. The first part is like an establishing shot in film: 'Joe was busy sitting out his life.' Then the camera moves in and we see the outline of his body at a table, a wide view. That's the middle section: 'Slouched over time-receding thoughts.' Still moving closer, the camera now frames a headshot. His face is 'sun-drenched in the Floridian waves of time-tending years.' Exposure to the sun has accentuated his deep wrinkles, the 'waves of years' like the rings of trees. This is the way time tends his looks, and it's not the way a movie star tends hers."

"I think you are all being much too harsh on Joe." Rebecca has balanced her photocopies on the wiggling bulge in her jacket. "You accuse him of being a failure, of forgoing life, of drinking himself silly. I don't see him that way at all." She smiles defiantly, baring teeth. This softie for sad songs is clearly made of sterner stuff when it comes to serious matters like poems. Here she is, after only one week, ready to take on the regulars. But first she turns to Michael, as if he were a witness to be cross-examined. "You know that bench we pass when we take our walks on the beach? Every evening there's a retired senior sitting there waiting for the big show at sundown."

"The greatest show on earth," says Michael, borrowing a line from the Ringlings of Sarasota.

"And what does he think about when the sun goes down? Slouched there on his bench?"

"Slouched as the sun is slouching in the sky." Rudiger has taken the two Joe epithets, "slouched" and "sun-drenched," and combined them into "sun-slouched."

Rebecca answers her own question: "About days gone by, those time-receding thoughts. I like Helen's idea of the movie. But we're not watching it; he is. He's 'sitting out' there on the beach watching his life spool by. He's not letting life pass by, he's reliving it. He's not at a table, but on a bench. And his liquid memories are not in a glass; they're out on the beach. The waves are the years rolling by. It's all right here in the poem. Joe is 'sun-drenched in the Floridian waves of time-tending years.' How can he be drenched in the sun and the waves at the same time?"

This time Michael gets the jump on her: "He's going for a swim?"

"No, because his face is bathed in the sun's dying rays as he sits on his bench watching the waves." Rebecca, now fired up, pulls another poem sheet out of her pile. Making her first case before the poetry panel, she is proving beyond a doubt that she too has been poemed. "Our very first selection, number one on our photocopies, was also about a wave." She reads from "White-snailed": "the / smoothed wa / ter's even / ed flow of / times reced / ing." The wave, it seems, is David's favorite symbol for time. Both recede like fading memories, time-receding thoughts. Walking watchless on the beach every evening, the poet steps in time to the wave-clock, running backwards into the past.

Rebecca wraps up: "After a wave recedes, what happens? It is replenished. Fortunately, there's a never-ending supply of waves, just as there's an infinity of time. The years tend to the business of resupplying time, just as the sea restocks each successive wave."

"The time-tending years." Michael is beginning to see it his wife's way, but is somehow unable to dispel the Swashed Wassailor milieu from his mind. "They're standing at the ready like an endless column of bartenders, pouring out fresh portions of age."

"Apportioning our lives," Rudiger reflects.

"Then down the gullet go the drams of our days," Jennifer poeticizes, "burning like receding memories."

"Yes," affirms Silvia, another new member vindicated by group consensus. "You can almost hear the waves going out and coming in: time-receding thoughts, time-tending years."

8 Patterned in Thoughts

The dramatist, rhapsodist, and the balladeer all have a wide stage on which to present ideas. They can bring on different characters to articulate varying points of view and then let these philosophical conflicts play out in a story. They can give a nuanced account of how conceptual systems might be built up and acted out over time, then either validated or modified in practice. Without the luxury of this perspective of range, a lyricist wishing to give the reader something to ponder would do well to follow the Horatian model of tightly packed phrasing in clear frameworks of thought. By keeping the lines uncluttered, stripped down to the essence, the poet can open up a perspective of depth that will "touch into timelessness," exposing the kaleidic outlines and patterns that make up the world of ideas.

The Horatian ode is an ideal vehicle for a contemplative style, one that stimulates thinking by patterning thoughts in abbreviated language. To achieve this succinctness of expression/compression, as we have seen, a poet will employ three vital strategies:

1. paring

The primary strategy requires pruning away the foliage, paring everything down to the "slenderness of branched designs." The paring principle is implemented in two ways.

(a) On the level of words, there should be no excess load. As we have read, this can lead to a poem sinking under its own verbal weight. Horace uses a similar metaphor in his "Ars Poetica": Every superfluous word will spill over, finding no room in minds already brimming with ideas. (How much more valid is this today in the information age?)

(b) The basic sentence pattern should be established early and bared to the bone. This is the virtue Horace calls *ordo*, an orderly, transparent arrangement that facilitates understanding. Further condensing is achieved through ellipsis and other paring techniques like using participles instead of main verbs.

2. sharing

The paring strategy leads to a sharing of responsibility. The poem is a reader-centered adventure of the imagination. However, it is no

armchair adventure, where we sit back and watch the poet do all the work. Poemed and poet are an active partnership. Reader participation is invited by:

(a) leaving information gaps and fields of association to fill in,
(b) posing conundrums and questions.

3. comparing

Since a poem is a speaking picture, language need not bear the message alone. When there are simply "no words for it," the picture can take over. The reader is invited to:

(a) emotionally connect with an image which will evoke a missing piece of the message,
(b) intellectually connect with a metaphor, the direct comparison of the missing piece with something familiar.

In each of the three reflective poems below, David will illustrate his message with an "as" clause combining image and metaphor. This is the pattern we already know from "Out-lining":

Not a word / too many / As a tree / stripped / leaflessly / out-lining.

By placing via metaphor a worded message side-by-side with an image, the poet is able to put across his teaching point with maximum effectiveness and economy.

When
do thought

s merge in
to dream

and dream in
to those

first claim
s of death

as clouds
coalescing

continuants
consonants that can be produced in a sustained breath, like a hiss or hush with sibilants, or a hum, drone, or moan with nasals

liquids
continuant consonants that produce a rippling effect like *l* and *r*

If we imagine rolling clouds as making a sound, liquids would be particularly descriptive: "c*l*ouds coa*l*escing th*r*ough thei*r* t*r*ansient ..."

through
their tran

sient one
ness. (from "Poems from Crete '08" in *Time Shadows*, p. 41)

paring: The sentence pattern is a simple two-part interrogative. When does A merge with B and B with C?
sharing: Starting with the opening word, the title, the reader is drawn in to the question posed: When?
comparing: Thoughts merge into dreams as clouds coalesce.

"Back to clouds again," Wendy sighs. "Can we conclude you spend much of your time lying on the beach staring into space?"

"Yeah, that ease of space where the clouds softer felt." Tony is quoting from "Cushioned."

"David spends most of his time running around giving lectures," Carol reminds us.

"And instead of watching the clouds and imagining giraffes and funny faces floating by, he's mired in morbid thoughts of how it will all end." George is masking his grimness with his I'm-not-being-completely-serious grin.

"In a way, he's like that surrealist painter, Magritte." Helen is talking about the Belgian artist René Magritte, who was fascinated not only by clouds, but by the semantics of perception. "He looked in the clouds and saw torsos, tubas, and chairs."

"You would also expect a poet to see such shapes," Jennifer says. "But David is just painting blobs. Clouds coalescing."

"Do clouds coalesce?" asks Silvia.

"Of course. They gang, they throng, they glitter in marches." Tony, now reciting Hopkins, leaves Silvia baffled.

"Oh, yes." Dudley reads cloud formation for signs of weather change. "When they're driven by air currents. As here they must be because they're 'transient' and not stationary."

"Ah, the wind." Rudiger ruminates. "That archetype of universal spirit."

Which prompts my question: "So, is that part of the metaphor, I wonder, that thoughts and dreams are also spirit-driven?"

"Maybe," Jennifer answers. "Clouds coalesce as thoughts merge into dreams. In both cases, something has to cause the motion."

Chang spots a fallacy in the comparison: "The clouds are in motion when they coalesce, but they remain clouds. Thoughts merge into something else: dreams. They change their state."

"Clouds also change their state when they coalesce," Dudley argues. "When a cumulus[1] cloud starts to get bigger, it becomes a rainmaker, a nimbus."

But Chang is adamant: "Look at the last stanza. Clouds coalesce, but even when they're wandering around the sky on individual courses, they're all connected in their oneness."

"Thoughts are also interconnected," Rosemarie points out. "By the neural network in our brains. No thought exists in isolation. Dreams, too, are products of the mind. They can drift through our consciousness like clouds, then dissipate. At different levels, consciousness takes the form of both thoughts and dreams. So there's a mental oneness, too."

David prefers the poetic version: "The images of thought and the imaginings of dreams originate in one and the same imagination, the essential oneness of self."

"I understand why you would compare dreams to clouds," Jennifer reasons. "They are both these fuzzy, indistinct smoke puffs, hard to get a handle on. But why would thoughts belong to the same category? Animals can dream, but human thought is on a higher plane altogether, I would think."

"Thought is more than just our faculty of reason," replies the poet. "Even the vaguest of our conceptualizations have somehow been thought. They might not be expressible in words; they might even be trembling on the border of what we can barely imagine. For the most part, they are intimations of meaning that perhaps we haven't thought about before at all."

"So your poems aren't meant to be rational. Is that what you're saying?"

"No, they are meant to be imaginative, but in no way irrational. They are in absolute accordance with reason, and will often follow strict lines of ratiocination, but without turning into philosophical treatises. Philosophy seeks to harness reason in order to transport us to truth. Poetry strives for the same goal via imagination. However, as Wallace Stevens has said,[2] poetry must satisfy both reason and the imagination.

1 *Cumulus* is Latin for "a heap." When cumuli heap up, they cumulate or coalesce.
2 In his essay "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet."

That's why, in the final analysis, poetry is superior to philosophy."[3]

"But is it superior to grammar?" I wonder. The grammar that keeps it rolling along those lines of reasoning and not spinning its wheels in a ditch?

"Science has the same limitation as philosophy," declares Rudiger. "It cuts itself off from the oneness of consciousness and pursues truth exclusively by measuring observable phenomena."

"From which humanity has profited greatly over the centuries," Chang reminds us.

"I would agree that it limits itself to the observable." Dudley contributes without any of the stentorian bluster from his former life. "But not that it cuts itself off from the wholeness of the mind. Especially in the East, under the influence of Taoism, science and the humanities have worked in closer harmony. And right here, on the page in front of us, we have a poet asking a scientific question."

"When?" Helen is reading from her sheet. "When do we switch gears from thoughts to dreams? Where is the boundary, the hypnagogic gate?" That was Keats' question: "Do I wake or sleep?"

"And when is the moment we switch off the engine?" George adds.

"These are questions that neuroscience is probing into," Rosemarie says, "but they are also questions with a deep moral dimension. When is someone guilty of a crime if there is no *mens rea*, only a dream state induced for example by drugs? When do we pull the plug on a coma patient?"

Helen is still focused on the text: "These may be scientific and moral questions that have to do with how the brain works, but David is framing them from the vantage of a brain user and asking how we actually experience these crossovers."

"He's also using the language of poetry to pose the questions." Carol, too, is bent over the page. "It's not an exact transition point he's asking about, but a merging process, or as he calls it here, 'smerging.' We can hear what he's talking about when he does his own smerge, sliding from the when-question in the top half to the as-illustration below. The question is dominated by d-consonance. There's a d-word in every stanza: do, dream, dream, death. A kind of drumbeat. But there is a second important motif, the *m* of drea*m*s *m*erging. With the lips pressed together, *m* is a perfect description of two things merging."

3 This was also Sidney's opinion. See page 58.

"Mmm-mmm!" quips Rebecca, throwing a kiss to Michael.

"Then, the illustration, starting with 'as,' is characterized by gliding and rolling consonants: sibilants, cl-clusters,[1] n-nasals, and r-liquids. We have '*cl*ou*d*s co*a*le*sc*i*n*g th*r*ough thei*r* t*r*a*n*si*e*n*t* o*n*e*n*ess.' There is another grouping of these sounds in the top half, as a sort of overture to what is coming: 'tho*s*e fi*r*st *cl*aim*s*.' Notice that all of the cloud continuants are previewed here in the overture except ...?" Carol is used to talking to students and checking if they are listening.

"There's no 'n.'" Jennifer is listening.

"Right. Instead, we get another nasal, the bilabial *m* in 'clai*m*.' Why?"

"Because the *m* is the marker for merging." Silvia is also paying attention. Though new to poetry, she fully understands the symphonic poem and the suggestive power of musical themes.

"Correct. Thoughts *m*erge to drea*m* and drea*m* ... David plants the merging motif in the overture, which winds up his question and eases into his illustration."

"In other words," says Tony, "he's answering his own question."

"By showing us gradual mergers on the phonetic level." Wendy finishes his sentence.

"Not only on the phonetic level," says Jennifer. "The drumbeat, as Carol calls it, in the top half consists of thumping monosyllables. Then, the clouds are described as 'coalescing' and 'transient,' trisyllabics. But transient in their 'one-ness.' So, there's also a merger in the measure of the words themselves."

Now it's my turn: "Another way the merging is expressed is by anadiplosis, a kind of repetition.[2] We go from thinking ('thoughts') to dying ('claims of death') through a dream phase. That last word in stanza two, dream, doubles back on us in stanza three, producing a chiasm which slows down the sequence:

thoughts → dream → dream → claims of death (canceling the thoughts)

"This is the same structure as in Hamlet's soliloquy where he meditates on the 'sleep of death':

1 Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker has identified more than two dozen verbs with *cl-* that designate merging of some type, including "clamp," "clasp," "cleave," "cling," "clump," "cluster" (*The Stuff of Thought*, Viking, 2007, p. 301). Thus, dreams merging and clouds coalescing produce the same phonesthetic effect of aggregation.

2 See the box on page 59.

to die → to sleep → to sleep → perchance to dream (Ay, there's the rub!)

Hamlet deals with the mental states in reverse order: First, he considers the dreams of death; only later does he worry about the 'pale cast of thought.'"

Tony tries to summarize: "So the poet's own answer to the question 'when' is 'gradually,' after a drawn-out, doubled-up dream phase?"

"Fade in, fade out," says Dudley. "I always thought it would be fade in, cut out."

"It might well be a very abrupt cutaway for you," Chang counters, "should you pilot one too many of those iffy seaplanes."

Helen's cinematographic vision prefers crisp cuts to blurry fades: "Again, it all comes back to how we experience these transitions. Magritte was trying to show us that the borders between reality and the dream world are precariously thin. You might go back and forth without even noticing them. Do any of you remember his picture of the 'Human Condition'? In front of an open window, the artist's easel has been set up. On it, there's a painting of the very scene we see beyond the window. But the painting is so exactly aligned with the outside landscape that the borders between the two are almost imperceptible. So, you think, the painter did a good job of getting his proportions right. But then you look again. Even the edges of the clouds are perfectly matched up. How is that possible? Unless the painting was completed within scarcely a second, less than a second ago, the real clouds would have moved on. They are supposed to be wispy transients in what otherwise seems to be a world of permanent solidity. But what if the dream clouds on the canvas and the thought clouds in the sky are seamlessly coalesced in their oneness, as Magritte has shown? Are you then thinking dreams or dreaming thoughts? Maybe your mind's musings have already smerged?"

We turn to the last selection on our photocopies, number 25. As the poet reads "No words for it," it becomes clear why this one was saved until the end. First, as a fitting way to wind up a concert, a musician will often do a tribute to the music. Here, the music is language and the notes are words. So, while the topic is on target, and while the

poem's brevity and simple structure lure us in quickly, we soon run up against its complexity of ideas, a final hurdle set up as a test of our analytical acumen just before the finish line. Its elusive message stubbornly refuses to come forth from the cloudy, transient phrases and resists coalescing into coherence. Will our class be able to put the pieces into a pattern of sense? Like a prophet, David delivers the text as if its words form a unique set and belong in exactly this combination.

"No words for it"

If there

are "no word
s for it"

may be archa
ically self-

resounding
as those bare-

blank wind
s shoreless

ly confin
ing.

(from *Time Shadows*, p. 15)

The central interpretive problem in this poem could be called "the case of the missing tenor." This has nothing to do with a kidnapped opera singer, but refers to the two parts of a metaphor:

tenor
the "proper term" of the metaphor, who or what is being compared (Shall I compare thee ...)

vehicle
what the tenor is being compared to (... to a summer's day?), the "metaphorical term"

The vehicle is announced by "as": "those bare-blank winds." So what is it that is being compared to these winds? Join the hunt!

paring: The sentence pattern is a logical if-then proposition: If A (condition), then B (conclusion). By ellipsis, the subject of the second clause (then) is missing. What may be archaically self-resounding?

sharing: Starting with the opening word, "if," the reader tries to fit the ideas into the condition-conclusion pattern.

comparing: The words (or non-words) may resound like the winds.

Dudley is stroking his beard. "This one is like that shipwreck poem[1] that got Laura so befuddled. She was sure someone had shortchanged her on a few words. And now I'm getting that same sinking feeling."

"It's all here," I declare flatly. "All the clues we need. The game David is always asking us to play is called 'find the right match-ups.' In your

1 "Words too heavy," see chapter 2, page 47.

poem, Dudley, do the 'hands' go with cool waters or with the bird's way? Are your hands being washed or being used to prepare a flight? In the poem about the bench-sitter, does 'slouched' go with Joe, the sun, or life? Who or what is doing the slouching?"

"Maybe all of the above." Carol is right. Sometimes the fields of association attract each other, pull together, then begin to overlap. Hands form cups that become wings. The sun is taking a last bow for its day and Joe for his life.

Dudley clutches his photocopies as if to wring an answer out of them: "The 'if there' has to match up somehow with the 'as those.' Having no words can be confining, but how can you confine without boundaries? Shorelessly?"

Silvia is shaking her head: "Something may be archaically self-resounding. But what? And what does that even mean?" I am always amazed by the power of grammar to organize meaning. Silvia has no idea what this sentence means—and I'm not sure I do, either—but she knows for sure the subject slot is vacant in the second clause of this proposition and something has to plug into it.

While Rosemarie helps Silvia with the pronunciation of "archaic," Jennifer consults with Rebecca about the possible meaning of "self-resounding": "It could mean speaking to itself or maybe sounding over and over again, like a recording or a transcript of Silvia's husband."

Our Greek and British contingents, meanwhile, are silently self-resounding the poem. "No words for it" has left them speechless. The three gentlemen behind me are quiet, too. Rudiger seems to be counting words or syllables.

Dudley takes a stab: "One match-up I see is between 'self-resounding' and 'confining.' Talking to oneself is a restrictive or confining act, an inability or refusal to communicate. That part of the poem's metaphor clicks. But if it's the winds that are confining, what is it that is resounding?" So Dudley has hit upon the same problem as Silvia by a different route. He has noticed a mismatch between the elements in the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor:

[blank]	archaically	self-resounding
= those bare-blank winds	shorelessly	confining

"There may be a number of suspects for the missing subject," I say, hoping to prime the group for some detective work. "So the game is afoot. This time we play match-up in a variation called 'fill in the

blank.' We can all hear the gaping blank after the second stanza. Blank (whatever it is) 'may be archaically self-resounding,' whatever that means. Now, a noun or pronoun has to go in that blank and it's most likely one that is nearby. Anyone find a match?"[1]

"You mean 'it'?" Helen is incredulous. "We have already used 'it' in the protasis. 'If there are no words for *it* ...'" Helen has used the Greek term for the condition, the clause that begins with "if." Grammatically, she is correct: A word can only play one role in the sentence at any one time, but is that a rule in this game?

"That's another game the poet plays." Silvia is learning that every time the rulebook is shortened, her playing field expands: "It's one he's borrowed from musical scores, the reprise. It's the go-back-and-repeat-the-last-measure game. *Da capo*, please. Saves valuable paper."

"And makes the whole thing tighter," Jennifer notes.

"What is 'it,' anyway?" Rebecca is asking a good question. "No words for what?"

"Ah, those tricky pronouns again," Tony answers. "That's yet another favorite game: Guess the referent of the pronoun."

"Let's leave that question for now. I mean, let's leave it for later." Helen is tangling herself up. "For now we can imagine David writing a poem and looking for a word, *le mot juste*. But he can't find a word for it, whatever it is that he wants to say. And suddenly he begins to wonder: 'Does a word for it even exist? Is it recognized at all by any lexicon in any language?' And that was the starting point for this poem."

"You mean, he wrote this poem instead of the one he intended to write," Jennifer deduces, "because he couldn't find a word for it. And now that poem that he didn't write is stranded out there on the sea of unborn poems hopelessly resounding itself in eternal misery."

"Let's not confuse our suspects," I caution. "If 'it' is the subject and Helen's scenario is right, what is resounding archaically is not a lost poem or a forgotten word, but an unknown concept. 'It' is what the words *would* stand for, what the poet *would* want to say but can't because there are no words for it. Your scenario, though, Jennifer, requires a different subject for 'may.' In your reading, we have to fill in the blank with a reprise of the whole title line: 'no words for it.' Your

1 A similar substitution game ("metallage") was played in the slide-show side-show we had in chapter 4 with "Gnawing Fear." In that poem, we attempted to complete one sentence with any word or phrase from the following sentence, not just a noun or pronoun. "The stuff that makes life from _____?"

unborn poem damned to wander the seven seas like a ghost ship is called 'No Words for It.'"

Now Carol, who can multi-task with sudokus and crosswords while solving a murder case on TV, gets the hang of the substitution game. "So Helen reads the poem like this:

> If there are no words for it, it (the unknown concept) may be archaically resounding.

"And Jennifer reads it like this:

> If there are no words for it, 'No Words for It' (a poem) may be archaically resounding.

"So, what if I read it like this?

> If there are no words for it, those words may be archaically resounding.

"I think it's the words that are lost, not the concept behind them or the poem they could have been written into."

"How can 'those words' be resounding when there *are* no words for it?" Chang, as he has to be in his work, is adept at dodging the snapping jaws of logical traps.

Carol sees the problem: "OK, they aren't words that any language knows what to do with. Let's just say they are orphans, forlorn castoffs, lonely non-words."

Tony rephrases for Carol: "So you want to fill in this bare-blank blank with 'no words':

> If there are no words for it, no words (the non-words) may be archaically resounding.

I like that interpretation because 'archaic' is a common description for words that have passed out of use."

"Like in old poems?" asks Rebecca.

"Yes, all pommed out, fully decrepotated," Tony jests, sense shifting. "They've cashed in their proverbial fries. I might say 'chips,' but the word is over-worn."[2]

"You might say they've bitten the dust," Wendy translates.

"Yes, discarded, so to speak, on the dustheap of history. At last,

2 Tony is doing a Monty Python imitation of the clown's wordplay in *Twelfth Night*, Act III.

Shakespeare can be thoroughly sanitized and bowdlerized. No more saucy minions and dull hinds."

"There must have been a time, however, when these words were appreciated." George is clearly warming up for another of his sermonettes on civilization's demise. "A golden age when people watched Aeschylus and Sophocles instead of rock videos and reality shows. An era of poet-priests whose magic made words come alive. That was a time when wisdom reigned, because the ancient words would speak to the people and reveal their ageless truths."

"An Age of Revelation?" Rudiger suggests.

"Yes, but then came the Revolution, the modern revolt against poetry. Poetry, the Hollywood producers said, belongs on the scrapheap of history. So the words took refuge in the confines of a remote, inaccessible island, inaccessible because it has no shores. That's where the archaic words resound unto themselves, since no one's there to hear them."

"They self-resound like the winds, 'those bare-blank winds shorelessly confining,'" I read.

Carol now fills in the blank with George's interpretation:

> If there are no more words for it, those archaic, banished words may still be resounding.

"Right, George?"

"Right, just as the winds that blow in the desert, or in the middle of the ocean, confined to self-resounding emptiness, banished from human shores and forgotten."

Inspired, Carol bursts into her beloved Thomas Wolfe: "Remembering speechlessly, we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven ... O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again!"

"Maybe the poet can help us recover it, whatever 'it' is." Helen is going back to her version of the gap-filling exercise. "Now that there are no more words for it."

"That's my calling," says David. "I'm trying to express what hasn't been expressed before. Maybe because there are no words for it, in which case it is my calling to find words, or to discover word combinations that will define it, or at least de-confine it, release it from its confinement. I can do that by releasing the reader's mind from the confines of sloppy, shopworn, self-resounding language."

"You are training us to think." Rudiger remarks.

"By giving you the language to think in."

"Hold on a minute." Carol has picked up a hint of yet another way to fill in the blank. "David, did I just hear you use 'self-resounding' to refer to the tired, trite language in use today?"

"Yes, we speak of words being 'in circulation,' like coins. Round and round they go, in an endless competition for currency, recirculating the same hackneyed phrases, clogging the mainstream with the detritus of triteness. Every time they complete a circuit, another layer of meaning wears off and the churning becomes more sluggish. Soon, they only refer to each other, not to anything outside their stagnant word pool. They become self-resounding and archaic. Time to coin new words, or, as Pound[1] says, 'new-mint the language.'"

"But that's not the way we construed 'resounding.' We thought you were talking about a lost, forgotten, archaic language."

"It can certainly be construed that way as well. I agree with George that ancient Greek was the language that established poetry in the West, like Chinese in the East. But I liked all your creative construals. You all saw the key point through different kaleidoscopic lenses. You all recognized that the words we use today are simply not adequate. That's the reason for that big blank, a screaming silence, wailing like bare-blank wind. No words exist for what we are desperate to say. And every time you, the readers, try to fill in that blank, you realize how difficult it is to write a poem when there are no words for it."

"Ah, so 'it' is the poem." Helen finally gets an answer to her question. "The poem is the unknown idea the poet is trying to make known."

"To prep for public consumption," Tony adds. "In words his consumers can process."

Carol completes her list of versions: "That gives us still another way to fill in the blank:"

> If there are no words for the poem, that may be because <u>all the words</u> are archaically resounding and no longer capable of doing their job.

"Such a lot of suspects for one missing subject," Silvia exclaims.

"And they're all guilty," says Michael.

1 In his article "The Wisdom of Poetry" (1912).

David is about to make a little speech to congratulate us on our investigative skills and send us on our poetic way, but we are having none of it. "Encore, encore," Helen pleads.

Tony asks if David would mind picking out a few selections that might be suitable for oral recitation: "As an encore, could you relieve the eye strain of tracing sense along these typed-out snail tracks by sounding the strains of something more rousing to our ears, preferably along the lines of Hopkinsian performance poetry?" This proposal meets with noises of general approval from the group.

When our poet checks his watch, Chang reassures him: "Don't worry; I've reserved the back room at Lin's in case they run us out of here as they did last week."

While David and Carol are dispatched to the Poetry section upstairs to pick out some encore numbers, Jennifer volunteers to read a poem.

"One of your own?" Rosemarie inquires.

"It is now. David gave it to me as a present earlier. It's very similar in structure to the last couple we've read. Content-wise, it reminds me a lot of 'Why then this gnawing fear,' that thought poem we did last week. I liked it a lot, and I suppose that's why he gave me this one."

No distances left
If

there're
no distances

left Where are
the silences

within As a
night discover

ing through
stars those vast

open spaces
of untold dark

ness.

(from *These Time-Shifting Thoughts*, p. 192)

protasis
the "if" clause of a conditional sentence

apodosis
the "then" clause that tells what will or would happen under the condition of the protasis

protasis: If there are "no words for it," ...
apodosis: ... those words may be archaically resounding.

protasis: If knowing means more than the feel of what has really been, ...
apodosis: ... it's not our task to know.

paring: The sentence pattern is again built upon an if-then proposition: If A (protasis) → then B (apodosis). However, the apodosis ("the silences within will also vanish") is left unstated and reframed as a question. Thus, the pattern combines the structure of the previous two poems: if-then + question.

sharing: Starting with the opening word, "if," the reader tries to fit the ideas into the condition-conclusion pattern. Then, before the conclusion is even stated, the question demands an answer from the reader, who is given help with the *as*-illustration.

comparing: We may encounter and enter meaningful silences within ourselves as a night discovers its own expanses of unspeakable darkness.

Between her first and second readings, in what is like a condensed version of the poem, Jennifer recapitulates the poem's six nouns: "Distances, silences, night—stars, spaces, darkness. It sounds like a silent midnight procession, doesn't it?" She points out that all of them end in *-s*, except "night." In her second reading, the endings of the words "distances," "silences," and "spaces" are slightly extended.

"I like the way this poem evokes mystery by describing outer space in terms of silence and darkness, while asking how these very same conditions may be found in our own inner space. The nouns line up in different formations. In the middle, there are two monosyllabics: 'night stars.' The other four terms seem to be balanced in a double metaphor, a quartet. Distances hollow out silences as vast spaces draw in darkness."

Rudiger breaks down for us how this quartet is ordered: "Conceptually, it's synchystic, ABAB, with distances and spaces forming the A-pair, silences and darkness the B. Phonetically, it's chiastic: *d*istances and *d*arkness on the ends, *s*paces and *s*ilences in the middle."

Rosemarie turns around to Jennifer and borrows the poem card. She indicates she wants to make photocopies.

Jennifer continues: "What we have are diminishing distances, closing in and slowly suppressing our inner silences. This contrasts with the endless spaces of night opening up vast tracts of darkness."

George can relate: "On a starry night, especially in remote areas like the Greek Islands, we can also discover those spaces, a vastness that dwarfs us and engulfs us with awe."

Chang, too, has been touched by the stars: "I remember having that

very sensation the first time we did a night crossing to Fort Jefferson on the boat. As soon as we got fifty miles offshore, the coastal lights went out and the stars started blazing in full glory, millions of them, lighting up the deep distances of space. The depth of space amplifies the sense of your own insignificance and the silence of wonder within."

"So we are the ones who really discover the depth of space." Rebecca spots the pathetic fallacy: "The night, you would think, lives with those vast distances forever."

"And because she lives forever," Silvia adds, "she would just take infinity for granted."

"There's a metaphor in the metaphor," Helen explains. "A personification of night. The mental resizing of your universe and the sudden shock of realizing you're something less than an ant or a microbe is such an amazing discovery that it's as if the whole night has been struck speechless, swallowed up in untold darkness."

Rebecca sighs. "We need to spend more time outside looking up at the stars, putting ourselves in the right perspective." The grand view from Blake's grain of sand,[1] *sub specie aeternitatis*.

"Instead," says Tony, "we let this perspective become narrowed and distorted. Street lamps, neon signs, computer screens, and prime-time telly distract from star gazing. Worse, they make it seem trivial, a non-activity."

"It's like the electricity going off after a tropical storm, leaving deafening silence, the modern horror of dead air time." Rebecca is very familiar with such enforced silences before everyone revs up their generators.

"Soon there are no distances left." Jennifer reminds us of the poem's title.

"Silences and distances are the same," Dudley divines. "Our silent meditations fill the universe. The mind is everything and everywhere, as Buddha said, but without silence, there's no space for thought. Thought-space, the space within that we thinking beings inhabit, is silence." His last word, "silence," comes out with a finality as if delivered by the expiring Hamlet.

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1 His "Auguries of Innocence" begins:

> To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour.

"Are those the shrinking distances?" I want to know. "Do the exigencies of daily business impinge on our inner life of contemplation, slowly shutting down all the silences we need to go about our core business of thinking?"

Helen spins out my question: "Or maybe, as Tony suggested, the crowded density of urbanized society is paradoxically what cuts us off? Our uprooting from the wide open country or from the Greek Islands?"

Michael heard the poem differently: "When you deprive people of space, you isolate them. Solitary confinement isn't just in prisons. When people lead isolated lives, silence spreads like ever-darkening shadows in them and around them. That dark silence is the real prison."

"Actually, it's something related to all these ideas." As usual, Chang speaks with calm certitude. "It's communication. Telephone, SMS, Internet, email, TV, all cutting away the physical distances between us and conspiring to fill any minute of silence we might have had to reflect on the stars. The stars are central to the poem because they are the catalysts of discovery. Jennifer has given us the logical framework: We have lost distances and silences as the night has found its spaces and darkness. Darkness is the quality that most defines the soul of night. But, ironically, the true dimensions of night's darkness are only made visible by the stars, by points of light. Night discovers itself 'through stars.' The metaphor tells us that we are like the night making an awesome discovery. The quality that most defines our souls is silence. Silence is both the starting point and the goal of meditation. Ironically, though, it is our capacity for speech that lends contours to silence. Speech is like starlight, making the silences audible, giving them discernible shape and depth. It's like that poem we talked about last week. The pauses between words, the silent spaces, are measured out by the words. Unfortunately, artificial speech, what our poet would call 'self-resounding words,' drowns out the silences, as artificial light whites out the night's natural darkness. In both cases, you have to put distance between yourself and the artificial in order to rediscover the authentic."

Helen parses: "So you are taking the quartet's double metaphor comparing inner distances and silences to outer spaces and darkness and extending it to speech and stars? Did I get that right?"

"Correct. That is the function of a metaphor. To give you multiple

points of comparison, thereby helping you understand a complex situation. That's why it's not only a poetic ornament, but a practical tool for thinking. That's why we all realize beach-going is not just fun, but is actually conducive to solution-finding. What a grand drawing board we have out there to sketch our little problems. OK, we ask ourselves: 'Nature faces a similar need; how does she cope?' Look at the shorebirds. How do they cooperate, socialize, organize their community? Look up at the stars. How are the spaces they inhabit like the ocean of time flowing by us? How do they communicate with each other? By blinking and twinkling? Light on—light off? If night's darkness is like our silences, then starlight must correspond to our speech."

Jennifer, who "owns" the poem, only semi-approves: "Speech is not even mentioned in the poem. But just below the surface, it is omnipresent. In my reading I tried to bring out the *sez* ending on the key words 'distan-ces,' 'silen-ces,' 'spa-ces,' as if all of these words are saying something. Distance says, space says. Even the silence speaks. The last word in the series and the last word in the poem—'darkness'—breaks this pattern. Instead, the darkness is 'untold,' unspoken and unspeaking."

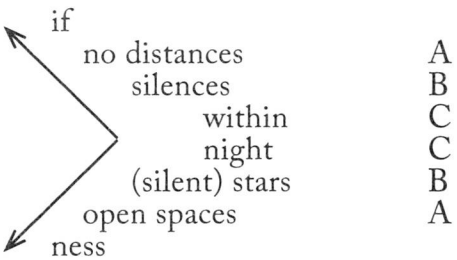
Helen half-agrees: "I think 'speech' is too vague a term for what Chang means. Speech could include both authentic sense and artificial nonsense, those windy, self-resounding words. If we can just stretch the metaphor one more notch, we could say that stars, the origin of natural light, are to the night what *logoi* are to silence. *Logoi* are word-thoughts, thoughts clad in words and words crafted by thoughts. They are where natural speech originates."

"Aren't we already stretching the metaphor too thin?" I ask. Rosemarie has returned, having saved a whole dollar by making only one photocopy on an overhead transparency. Although she and David are both completely computer illiterate, she is well-versed in the antiquated OHP technology she still uses at her husband's art lectures. Deftly, she cranks up the projector and the poem appears on the wall. We all take a minute to take in the design of fragile lines. It soon becomes clear to me that we have indeed gone too far by making darkness directly analogous to silence, a mistake which Chang magnified by negating both sides of the equation (non-darkness or starlight = non-silence or speech) and Helen blew further out of proportion by particularizing light and speech (stars = words).

"Running blind," I say, "has put our imaginations into overdrive.

Sometimes I think it's good to just sit back and listen to poems without hard copies for rhythmical appreciation, but seeing the layout and lineation really supports the structural analysis. Here, the poet is again ordering his ideas chiastically, with 'if' and 'ness' forming the head and tail. The second stanza goes with the penultimate: 'no distances' and 'open spaces.' These spatial terms are matched by their *sez* terminations and underscored by the wide *o* assonance in *no* and *open*. Then come the silences in the third and third-from-last stanzas. The hushing sibilants in *silences* are repeated in '*stars* tho*se* va*st*.' That means we should take the stars as silent rather than bright. The whole poem turns on the middle stanza, whose lines begin with 'within' and 'night.' 'Within' is the domain of the metaphor's tenor, so it points up to the first half of the poem. 'Night' is the setting of the vehicle, so it points down."

Taking the flip-chart marker, I draw arrows on the overhead transparency to show the chiasm:



"So 'darkness' doesn't match up with 'silences,' but with 'spaces'?" Dudley asks.

Since I am standing with a marker in hand, I feel like the teacher: "Darkness describes the spaces, but really matches up with 'night.' 'Night' and 'darkness' open and close the bottom half of the poem, the sentence unit starting with 'as.'"

"So you would take 'darkness' out of the quartet?" Jennifer inquires.

"There are really only two points of comparison: the distances and the silences. While we have lost the distances that open up silences within, the night has discovered its dark spaces and silences of the stars."

"Spaces are silences. That's what I was saying," Dudley reminds us. "You don't have space to put anything without emptiness first. Even non-dimensional thoughts require silent spaces. The coordinates of space are stretches of silence. And the stars are those points of silence

that define dimensions of thought."

Chang defends his thesis: "I see the stars as being more than silent witnesses. They are the active agents that lead the night to the discovery."

"Isn't it rather as if we, like the night, make the discovery *through* the stars?" George has locked his fingers deliberatively. "You're right, Chang. The stars are central to the poem, but not so much because they disclose with their light, as because they form the central image that enables us to discover. The stars form the image we latch onto emotionally: a starlit night, as on your cruise to Fort Jefferson. It's the stars that fill us with this amazement and fear. Amazement at the abstraction of infinity demonstrated before our eyes in such irrefutable concreteness; fear at the inevitable corollary of that proof, our own very finite existence. This fearful wonder bleeds over into our intellectual perception of the distances and silences within ourselves. In other words, the feeling aroused in the second half of the poem informs our understanding of the first half. The metaphor is more than a cipher to unlock the logic of the poem; it is a means of helping us focus both logic and emotion on what the poem is saying. The chiasm links stars to silence since silence is our human response to the stars. It is the way we respond to our own mortality and to the natural order that has ordained it. It is the only way finite beings can respond to the infinite with respect and reverence. And when there are no distances left, our inner peace and quietude can always be rediscovered through the stars. More than their light, their infiniteness can illuminate the silences within."

Chang is gearing up for a rejoinder but at that instant, Carol and David enter the room, each with a couple of David's books. The poet sees me standing by his lectern holding the teacher's scepter, a flip-chart pen. Taking a seat with Carol, he demonstratively leans back in his chair. "Ah, all my life I've been waiting for this moment," he says. "A grammarian to help me find my own idea of order."

V. Song & Sound

Reading the last poem, "No distances left," without the benefit of a printout was a revealing exercise. On the one hand, the ideas were so densely packed (in fewer than two dozen words) and so replete with mystifying sensations from the imagery, that we were somewhat slow in seeing the superstructure and mining the full meaning beneath. On the other hand, Jennifer's careful delivery and her "midnight procession" of nouns brought out a subconscious apprehension of what was behind the poem, something which, Eliot says, often precedes intellectual comprehension.[1] But something else, equally important, came out of the reading, something I have also noticed with David's ritual of reading the poem through twice: Much of the sense comes out of the sound, and the sound really only comes out when it is repeated. Perhaps the *da capo* (repeat) notation that Silvia inserted into "No words for it" should be put at the end of every Horatian ode, or, even at the risk of felling more trees, every ode could be printed twice, as a refrain of itself. Like a fine painting or play, a poem worth reading is also worth a second or third look, allowing us to penetrate its subtleties and allowing it to plant itself in our memories.

Modern poetry has often been criticized because, even though its phrasings and ideas may be memorable, the verses themselves defy memorization. Somehow, they tend not to stay long with the reader. Evading spontaneous recall, they are seldom quoted without reference to the text. Although various kinds of repetition abound in free verse, it is most abundant on the level of individual sounds or words.[2] Seldom are whole phrases repeated as in the Pindaric outpourings of Walt Whitman; a Horatian like David simply lacks the luxury of space for repetitive refrains and choruses.

So, the next time I happen to be out marveling at the night sky, what

1 In his 1929 essay on Dante: "Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."

2 In David's work, we have seen consonance and assonance bringing individual sounds, and homoeoteleuton bringing suffixes to our attention. When words have been repeated, it is through anaphora and anadiplosis, parallelism and polyptoton. (See glossary.)

free verse will be available to my memory to help me articulate what I feel or even discover "through / stars those vast / open spaces" in myself? Will it be one of David's poems or perhaps the one by Whitman where he is "On the Beach at Night Alone"? Probably the latter, because of Whitman's frequent built-in reprises, enabling me to remember the "vast similitude" spanning everything. "A vast similitude interlocks all," he states, and then proceeds to enumerate all spheres ..., all distances ..., all souls ..., all processes ..., all nations ..., all identities ..., all lives and deaths ... Cataloguing these items, the anaphora generates a sprawling rhythm with recurrent metrical schemata into which whole word sequences can be strung together for easy storage in our brains. Whenever we can catch the musical sense embedded in the line, helping us anticipate what comes next, we say the verses are "catchy," easy to remember.[1]

Most songs that we would describe as catchy employ the same kind of irregular meters as those in free verse, like this five-star oldie with the anaphoric "don'ts":

Don't let the stars get in your eyes,
Don't let the moon break your heart.
Love blooms at night,
In daylight it dies,
Don't let the stars get in your eyes,
Don't keep your heart from me,
For some day I'll return,
And you know you're the only one I'll ever love![2]

Of course, "catchy" being a term primarily used to describe tunes rather than texts, it's the melody that makes this song catchy. If it were a lyric poem instead of a song lyric, its forced measures and sophomoric sentiments would put it in the category of "doggerel," inferior verse. On the other hand, taking away the quirky irregularity of the lines would deprive it of the very catchiness that made it a pop song in the first place. Replacing its hip Latin beat with classical English iambic pentameter (five feet of one unstressed plus one stressed syllable) would mean it would never sell a million records, but would limp along unnoticed and unsung, de-dum, de-dum, de-dum, de-dum, de-dum:

1 "Music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory." – Shelley
2 By the country singer Winston Moore, better known as "Slim Willet."

You mustn't let the stars get in your eyes,
Or give the moon a chance to break your heart.
Remember that the night awakens love,
While daylight lays it gently back to rest.

Striving for utmost musicality, Gerard Manley Hopkins was a poet who experimented extensively with rhythm. Like Whitman and the free verse movement, he realized that hypnotically repetitive rhythms could pull the poem out of the song mode, away from the vibrant cadences of performance poetry, into something more sober and stiff. But unlike the free-verse artists, he chose to write in his own variable rhythms which could be adapted as needed to the clash and dash of dramatic recitations. Thus, in typical poet fashion, if he had to stick to rules, they would be of his own making. The result was something that the world had not heard since the days of Old English meters: unfamiliar and original, yet strangely catchy at the same time. There can be little doubt that, alone on the beach at night, our friend Tony would be able to recite:

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
("The Starlight Night")

Each of these end-stopped lines puts an unconventional twist on conventional meter. The first line has the ten requisite syllables of pentameter, but some of the feet are syncopated (with inverse stress) and the middle iamb is double-stressed ("look, look," a spondee). The second line ends in two elisions, contracting "sitting in" > sittin' and "the air" > th'air. The third line has five stresses, but one extra unstressed syllable (in "citadels"). If we elide "the elves" > th'elves, the fourth line has ten syllables, but seven sense-stresses.

The rapturous tone, the rhyme, and the unrestrained alliteration add to the oratorical, choral feel of the lines. It is no wonder that many of Hopkins' poems have been put to music. If what we've seen is true, that odd, variable, and free-style rhythms take us closer to the catchy, singable song than the strictly metrical poetry of ages past, why, then, haven't we seen more songwriters raiding the oeuvre of modern poets

for potential hits? My theory is: They aren't tuned in and they aren't listening, just as we, the readers, often fail to listen.

Many readers confuse non-metricality with lack of rhythm. Free verse, by definition, is non-metrical; it cannot be scanned into metrical feet. But every utterance in the English language has, in the distribution of its weak and strong accents (its pattern of intonation), a distinct rhythm. Even if I take the most banal colloquialism, like "Don't blame it on me," there's a distinctive "dum-dum-dee-dee-dum" sequence that a gifted songwriter could easily turn into a catchy song. The same goes for "Ain't that a shame," or "I'm ready." In fact, the New Orleans rock 'n' roll composer Fats Domino, starting with the simple notes suggested by such formulaic commonplaces, has turned each of these titles, and many more, into chart-toppers.

Now, what would happen if a songwriter used the same method, but started with something less prosaic? Would it be possible to take a song-like Jaffin poem and make a real song out of it? To answer this question, I have chosen a poem which buries its metaphor in a literary allusion, a nod to Walt Whitman's collection, *Leaves of Grass*. The leaves, naturally, are pages of poetry, or by metonymy, the poems themselves. When they reach their maturity, these poetic creations detach themselves and take flight to far-flung realms where anonymous readers will take delight in their richly felt colors. In this moment of parting, the poet is left with a wistful, autumnal feeling of release, of having been loosened from a significant bond. The poems no longer belong to him, but to the unseen recipients, the poemed, who now hold those precious leaves in their hands.

Loosened

As these

leaves loosened
their last-

felt colors
to far-

flung realms

for flight.

(from *A Birth in Seeing*, p.109)

synesthesia
reacting to a stimulus in one sensory domain (e.g. taste) with a sensation from another (e.g. touch)

Colors are usually registered through the eyes as bright or muted. The poet, however, senses them as "last-felt," a tactile or perhaps emotional sensation.

Now try this: Starting with "as," repeat the poem aloud five or six times. The first time or two might not be easy because of the thick Hopkins-style alliteration. If you are a native speaker of English, you will instinctively identify the stresses: leaves, loos-, last-felt col-, far-flung realms, flight. Nine out of sixteen syllables are stressed.

The next step is to peel away the metrical pattern from the poem, like a leaf from a tree. Try replacing the words of the poem with a nonsense syllable like "da," while maintaining the stress pattern of the underlying text. You will then hear the sound skeleton:

da-da-DA-DA-da-da
DA-DA-DA-da-da
DA-DA-DA-da-DA

There are now two possibilities. If you are a hundred years old, you will probably have realized that the song we are trying to write was already a hit, back in the '20s of the last century, and that, in contrast to the text's September melancholy, it had more of a springtime bounce:

When the RED ROB-in goes
BOB-BOB-BOB-bin'— goes
BOB-BOB-BOB'n' a-LONG ...[1]

Should by any chance your age be under one hundred, you can forge ahead with devising a catchy new tune for a new century, entitled "Loosened." A big assignment—true—but look at what you have already accomplished. Almost as a by-product of your intense listening and repeating, you will be pleased to discover that you have actually memorized a free-verse poem.

1 Lyrics by Harry MacGregor Woods. Thanks to my brother, the musician Truxton Fulton, for helping me identify this old Al Jolson tune.

9 Sung in Meters

A slightly diminished poetry circle has regathered in Lin's back room, snugly seated by a rain-washed window overlooking the end of a canal and the RV park where Dudley hangs his hat. Dudley, though, will join us later, after his Creative Writing class. George has also stayed behind at the library to check his emails, a job he'd wanted to do at home, before the cloudburst convinced him otherwise. We are all drinking hot tea and slowly drying out from our wet walk over in threes under a total of four umbrellas. Michael cradled the dog. David made a solo run for it after making sure the two collections of precious poem leaves he'd checked out were safely tucked under his raincoat.

Carol has the other two books and is huddled with David and Rosemarie at the adjacent table to select Tony's encore numbers. In the meanwhile, Chang has volunteered to read the poem David gave him earlier as a poemgram, his personalized poetic salutation. As we have no copies, the rest of us are just gazing out the window, watching the rain stand still and think ponderous thoughts:

Heavy
The rain

s standing
still Heavy

with the
thoughts of

those dark
branch-ben

ding bird
s.

(*Sunstreams*, p. 183)

quantity
the time needed to pronounce a syllable

Songs and poems differ not only with respect to tune but to timing. In music, the meter is measured in a "time," a beat which is coordinated by the composer with the natural stresses of the lyrics. Writing lyrics without music, poets measure their meters in stresses. Some stress patterns, though, also affect timing, like the pace-slowing spondee ("Look, look") we saw in Hopkins' "Starlight Night." Long stresses slow down the line by making the syllables quantitatively heavy, as here in the last two stanzas where such stresses are bunched to produce the picture of a bending branch.

But Chang reads it this way, as a haiku:

The rains standing still
Heavy with the thoughts of those
Dark branch-bending birds.

Chang starts by explaining why David was correct in assuming that this poem had an Asian feel and begins a rather long statement drawing various connections between Chinese verse, calligraphy, and Zen Buddhism. This soon breaks down into a dialogue with Rudiger, who has taken several trips to China. At this point, several other conversations branch off.

One thread was in answer to Rebecca's question: "Does 'standing still' refer to rain in a puddle, since rain coming down is obviously moving?" Wendy and Tony think that "heavy" must describe rain coming down. They then consider various English idioms that show the solidity of a downpour and decide that "curtain of rain" goes best with "heavy."

Jennifer explains to Silvia the multiple referents of the title. The rain is heavy in its intensity and in its thought. The observer's mind is heavy as it ponders the drab scene. The reader is weighed down under the inscrutable shadows of blackbirds. The birds are heavy on the branches. The words are heavy on the line. The rhythm is heavy with its strong stresses.

Helen and I get into a friendly debate over whether "Heavy" is a tribute to Imagism. "If you want to find out what one of David's poems is about, find the image," Helen says. "That is always the emotional and intellectual heart of the poem, the real subject, as it was for *Les Imagistes*. That's why they always insisted on eliminating every single word that obscured it or that distracted from it. David has the same obsession with streamlining everything for utter simplicity." She quotes Pound's impressionistic couplet written "In a Station of the Metro":

The apparition of faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

"This poem started out with thirty lines, but in the process of revision was whittled down to two."

"But, Helen, that's because Pound wanted to give room to the reader's imagination to fill in the points of color, the bright face-petals on the dingy metro platform. David leaves the stage dark: a rainy day with sombre blackbirds on the wet, black bough. Instead of evoking colors, David invites the reader to fill in the thoughts. He overlays his image of the sagging branch in the heavy rain with the metaphor

of weighty questions. The Imagists never allowed heavy thoughts to intrude on the perfect moment they were painting."

"They can't intrude because the image itself is the thought. The image is idea. The *idea*, from *horaō*,[1] is something seen in Greek, something that sets off emotional and mental associations of its own. It is what the poet wants us to think. Thought isn't merely a string of abstract textual symbols; cognition is predominately visual. That's why even in English you say 'I see' when you finally understand something."

"But that's not what post-Imagists have in mind when they hear 'idea.' David, following the tradition of Wallace Stevens, is looking for 'ideas of order,' philosophical insights from the images into the ordering principles of reality. This poem reminds me more of the closing stanza of Stevens' 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird':

> It was evening all afternoon.
> It was snowing
> And it was going to snow.
> The blackbird sat
> In the cedar-limbs.[2]

The blackbird in the tree is a part of the way a dark snowy afternoon is ordered. It's not just an omen or some concomitant phenomenon, or anything incidental. It's almost causal, just as if the river is moving, the blackbird must be flying. There is an 'indecipherable cause' lurking behind every movement of the bird. The poet's task is to sound it out."

The group from the small table has joined us at the window. David overhears me quoting Stevens and glosses my comment on the poet's task: "Sounding out causalities or seeing into correspondences is what imbues the world with meaning. For an image to acquire meaning, it has to be framed in the 'lucid, inescapable rhythms' of language. Only poetic language can make an image into a symbol and explain how a blackbird in the snow or Sylvia Plath's[3] 'Rook in Rainy Weather' is a part of what we know to be meaningful. Looking at the bird, the brain will label it and check off its attributes in dry denotations. But the mind is also possessed of complex, connotative language that can talk to the imagination and emotions, engage our instinctive grasp of symbols, so that we feel and understand the portent or purport behind

1 See the footnote on *eidos* and *idea* in the opening section to part III, page 96.
2 See the comments on Stevens' poem in the opening section to part II, page 61.
3 Sylvia Plath (1932-63), American poet. A tortured artist, she committed suicide.

that bird's being there. What I'm saying is that poetic language is capable of taking raw sensory data and ordering it into sense, of organizing random neural signals into significance. When spoken, the result is a poem: sounds that ring true as they 'pass through sudden rightness.'"

David, Rosemarie, and Carol have each picked out a couple of poems to read aloud, with Carol going first. "This one reminded me of a dance out on the water." She reads it twice, and then, at our urging, a third time:

Foam of Waves

The foam of
waves is

like the form
of snow

when it ceases
to hold

quite so fast
to appearances

This melting of
time unto

the telling of
the sea

up (and then)
under and

as far as the
birds might

have it.

(from *That Sense for Meaning*, p. 10)

measures
metrical units, sometimes called "feet"

Metrical poetry (not David's) is measured in metrical stresses per line. A line of iambic pentameter, for example will have five regular measures or metrical feet. An iamb consists of one unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. This is the most common meter in English poetry because natural English sentences slip easily into the pattern of alternating stresses. One could take, for instance, the first two stanzas of "Foam of Waves" and make a line of iambic pentameter:

The foám of wáves is líke the fórm of snów.

Although free-verse poets like David do not observe metrical stress, they do try to bring out the natural lexical and phrasal stresses for certain effects. A sudden abundance of heavy stresses, as we have seen, slows down the pace, as here when the melting snow "ceases / to hold / quite so fast" to its wave-like form. We can almost hear "the melting of time" in the timing. Or, when a wave is described as dancing "up (and then) / under and as far as the birds," we detect a lighter, tripping rhythm arising from the abundance of unstressed syllables:
´ x x ´ x x x ´ x x ´

"As far as the birds might have what?" Silvia asks.

"It might be the form of the breaking sea wave," Jennifer replies. "Or the melting snow wave. The birds themselves might be imitating in air the same wave-like plunge."

Carol agrees. "The 'have' in the last line picks up the 'hold' in the third stanza, where the snow wave is slowly letting go of its shape. What we see as a wave, its crest, is just a momentary holding onto form before it dissolves into foam."

Wendy sees ideas of order in nature: "With their wings dipping and whirling, the birds take part in the inscape of breaking waves."

"It's nature's dance on the sea mirroring the spiraling of the birds in the air," Tony speculates. "Both of them mirrored by the slow motion of snow on land. Sea, air, and land all moving in the same cycle."

Carol describes the dance she hears: "The tempo is set by the 'telling of the sea.' Each breaker melting away follows an unseen conductor's baton rising, falling, and rising again in perfect time. Rising how far? 'As far as the birds might have it.' That's as if to say the birds, darting above the water, are leading while the waves fall submissively in step."

I wonder about the other half of the metaphor. If the foam is pirouetting with pelicans, is the melting snow doing a danse macabre with the blackbirds? I also wonder about subtle sense shifting with "as far as." Is our poet describing the dwindling distance between the dance partners, or implying that the birds might not be closely adhering to the prescribed dance moves (the waves reach up only inasmuch as the birds follow the wave form)?

The comments on dancing have reminded Helen of her poetic valentine from David which refutes her criticism of "Pre-established Presence," the poem about the pelican sitting sphinx-like on the pole. Looking at her poem card, she says: "David has presented me with a dynamic portrait of a pelican gyrating with the wind, each one's wings wrapped around the other like a pair of dancers. Now I see David also has pelicans dancing with waves. In both poems, the poet has used line length and rhythm to render the spectacular motion of these birds in flight. I will never accuse him again of trying to stuff them like a taxidermist for some museum."

"Particularly the rhythm gets it across," says Silvia. "I hear a light fluttering motion all through the poem, but it's only at the end I find that I've been dancing with the birds in complete defiance of gravity."

Tony has been taking notes. "Actually, we have a number of rhythmic

dance partners for the foam:

the foam of the waves	melting of time	the waves up and under
the form of the snow	telling of the sea	and as far as the birds

These antitheses, like musical restatement of a theme, create the rhythm of the poem. One sees that the foam does a whirl with the snow, the birds, and with time itself."

Chang is taken by the idea of a universal wave form permeating the observable world: "It's scientific fact that all waves, regardless of their medium, behave in accordance with certain laws. All waves transfer energy through space and time in predictable phases. Sound waves strike our eardrums with bursts of kinetic energy from periodic variation in air pressure. Light waves with their impulses of electromagnetic energy inform our eyes of the periodic variation in the peaks of the sea's surface. Our bodies, the earth, indeed all material things, emit energy in radiation whose wavelengths can be exactly quantified. That is, it is possible for us to know every object by its distinctive wave. Looking beyond our world, we can see in the swirling galaxies the tracks of primordial gravitational waves generated by fluctuations in Einstein's space-time curvature. The whole universe, the harmonized wholeness of time and space, seems to have been set into wave motion and is now spinning and ringing with vibrations from cosmic energy or *qi* that we cannot see or hear, but, with the wholeness of our being, can attune ourselves to, seeing as we are the most sentient and intelligent parts of the whole."

Rudiger wants to add something, but Carol seizes a chance to redirect the topic back to the text: "I think this is expressed very well as 'the melting of time unto the telling of the sea.' Time and space fusing as one wave."

"Once again, we have the wave symbolizing time," Rebecca notes. "In the poem about 'Joe,' time was spreading out like a wave on the beach. Earlier, in our very first poem, time was receding like a wave from the beach. Now time is melting away like a wave out on the ocean."

From her beachfront aerie seven floors above sea level, Jennifer has developed a similar understanding of wave motion: "When you spend much time looking out at the water, time and water tend to merge. Both seem to stretch in both directions forever, up and down the beach, future and past. Both seem to measure themselves out in regu-

lar beats, the strokes of waves or clocks. Both seem to organize themselves into 24-hour cycles, day and night, sunrise, sunset. I can look out the window anytime during the day and tell the time just by the tone texture of the water."

Michael says that there are some prisoners who can do the same by looking at their private slice of sky. He then reads the short poem David gave him.

Windows
imprison

ed in their
in-defining

sameness
for view.

(from *Sunstreams*, p. 113)

paradox
a close cousin of oxymoron, a statement that, on the surface at least, appears absurd. For example, why do windows, which were made to help us see *out* and beyond, keep our field of vision *en*closed? Starting with the title "W*in*dows," how many times can you find the word "in" hiding in this poem about outlooks?

Helen wonders if this is not a commentary on Magritte's "Human Condition," the human mind imprisoned in a skull like Plato's cave. But George finds the poem rather epitomizes his earlier remarks on the "peephole perspective" of the unpoemed, those sad souls condemned to a life without the sublime view from the mountaintops.

Rosemarie is next:

Even if

he could
fathom the

depths of
where these

seas have
relinquish

distinctio
a clarification or working definition inserted immediately after a term to specify a special sense of that term which furthers the main argument

A distinctio is typically introduced with the words: "... and by 'x' I mean ...," or, when x is a symbol or an abbreviation, "... where x stands for ..."

ed their
hold on light

into that
all permea

ting silence
If he could

meet him
self on his

own terms
Standing for

where stan
ding has come

to mean
Still, even

in that be
ing of be

ing the
wherefore

and why of
would be as

elusive
as the in

tangi
bilities

through

shadow.

For poets concerned with renewing the language, the poem itself can be seen as a kind of distinctio. David pursues the permanent goal of producing what he calls "poems of definition" in which experience is freshly recreated by words used in fresh collocations. Thus, one can read the poem "Even if" as an attempt to define the experience of inner silence or stillness.

While it is in the nature of a distinctio to be distinct, this one is "as elusive as the intangibilities through shadow." Defining the term "standing," for instance, would be pertinent if the poet had just used the simple verb *stand*. But the phrasal verb *stand for* can itself be used to define a term. Thus, the first problem we face here is determining what term(s) the distinctio delineates.

This elusiveness also puts in doubt where exactly the distinctio begins and ends. It may begin after the words "his own terms," which are then to be defined. But "standing for" could also modify "he." In reference to a person, to "stand for" something means either to support it or to tolerate it, two potentially contradictory ideas, as seen in the question, "If you say you stand for the rights of workers, how can you possibly stand for this infringement of their rights?" And where does the distinctio end, before "still" or after it? Or after "even in that being of being"?

It all depends on how we take *still*: as an adjective (= "quiet") or as a conjunction (= "yet"), or both. If *still* is an adjective, we know what "standing has come to mean." If it is a conjunction, balancing the title "Even if" with "still, even," the distinctio may be cut short before it has defined much of anything, but the rhythms created by the "even if he" and "if he could" are extended to a climactic "even in that being of being." Perhaps, as we've seen in other poems, the best answer is "both." *Still* cuts both ways: The poet is both talking about stillness and building rhythmic tension through a tightening string of three *even if*s.

(from *Through Lost Silences*, pp. 9-10)

Rosemarie, who, like Helen, used to teach French Literature, takes a unique pedagogical approach to a challenging text for a group without printed copies: She encourages our active listening. Each of her three readings is prefaced by a one-minute briefing on one particular feature of the poem.

"I chose this poem because I think rhythms come out better in longer works that have room to develop clear currents of phrasing. The first time you hear this, just try to let those currents wash over you without trying to focus on how the words all fit together. Like Jennifer, I would like to give you four key concepts to listen for: light, silence, still, shadow. You may notice that these words are laid out in chiastic order; light and shadow at the ends, silence and still in the center. What these terms all have in common is that they are sources for meaning. You can use them as conceptual base camps for exploring the poem. You will see that understanding gradually emanates from the light, the silence, the stillness, and the shadow."

In reading the poem the first time, Rosemarie puts each of these terms in an acoustic spotlight by pausing less than half a heartbeat before and after the word.

Tony likes the flow of the poem: "The rhythms balance these four terms, linking them in a matrix of equilibrium. Light leads into silence. Silence is standing still. Stillness is as elusive as shadow."

Before her second reading, Rosemarie asks us to follow the logical structure of the two if-conditions with their apodosis: "The rhythms of free verse are the natural rhythms of the argument. Here, as in 'No words for it' and 'No distances left,' we have an if-then format." Next, still laying groundwork for the second reading, she isolates both if-clauses and the conclusion from the distinctio:

protases (ifs)
Even if / he could / fathom the / depths of / where these / seas have / relinquish / ed their / hold on / light / into that / all permea / ting silence

If he could / meet him / self on his / own terms

apodosis (then)
the / wherefore / and why of / would be as / elusive / as the in / tangi / bilities / through / shadow.

Listening to this pared-down rhetorical outline brings to mind Sa-

tan's first halting speech in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. Clearly, the natural rhythms of piled-on *if*s are not limited to poems in free verse.

Silvia asks if she could put another of her repeat notations after "would be." This solves the problem of an "of" with nothing to attach itself to: "The wherefore and why of 'would be' would be elusive."

Rosemarie agrees that such a repeat is legitimate for a musical piece and now reads the poem all the way through a second time, with a clear through-line in the strings of *if*s, full-rounded *w* in the alliterative "wherefore and why of would," and Silvia's metallage.

David, himself without a copy to refer to, is enjoying the experience of being a listener. "I feel that I'm hearing my own work for the first time."

"Give your work a chance to work. The third time is always magic." In her warm-up for the final reading, Rosemarie now extracts the distinctio:

> Standing for / where stan / ding has come / to mean / Still, even / in that be / ing of be / ing

"We see that this middle section has its own rhythmic pattern: 'standing for standing' on one side, 'being of being' on the other."

Her third reading is aimed at connecting the four base camps. Rosemarie lifts off slowly from "Even if," then cascades rapidly to a descent, fathoming the depths down to "light." Then a short hop from "light" to "silence," followed by a hushed sprint through the middle section to a pause at the comma after "still." The last leg is like a winding obstacle course, full of disputational dodges, first through the wherefores and whys, then through the tangle of "elusive intangibilities," before coming to rest at "shadow."

Chang asks to examine the text. It takes him less than thirty seconds to come up with a reading of his own. The sense pause that Rosemarie put after "still" now comes before it, giving "still" the force of "nevertheless." This dramatically shortens the distinctio:

> Standing for / where stan / ding has come / to mean (= where it has taken on meaning)

At the same time, it draws the bow of conditions even tighter by adding a third protasis:

Even if / he could / fathom the / depths ...
If he could / meet him / self on his / own terms
Even [if he could stand] / in that be / ing of be / ing

Silvia hears this tightening rhythm as a series of waves: "Rosemarie asked us to listen to the word torrents washing over us. This time, they sounded like fanciful surmises and suppositions hitting the beach, one after the other. Then, as they came up against hard reality and broke apart, they slowly dissolved into the sand, leaving nothing but shadowy trails."

David, reassuming the chair, thanks Chang and the ladies for their readings. "Lest anyone think I disagree with Rosemarie on matters as important as poetry, let me just say that although I have selected a short poem for the very reason she chose a long one, this one has a very circular rhythm, almost like a round. In fact, it keeps on going round day and night, giving it in total almost epic proportions, but only as long as the power is on, thus making it potentially a *very* short poem here in Florida." He then shows us what he means by reading the poem three times in a row without a break, as if it could be endlessly reprised:

The fan
circling

its own sound
less wind-

creating con
tinuous

ly shadow
ing reflect

ions.

(from *Time Shadows*, p. 262)

metrical silence
a pause, like that in music, created when an unaccented syllable needed to complete the foot is omitted

Can you discern the regular meter in the spinning fan? Can you detect the metrical silence that Tony compares to a squeak?

"It's like a dog chasing its tail," Rebecca comments.

"Or a ceiling fan racing its own reflection on the floor," Jennifer propounds.

"A fugue." Silvia supplies the right musical term.

"But I think it's got a squeak," Tony complains.

"So has my bedroom fan. Drives me to distraction," Silvia says with all the sympathy due a fellow fan victim.

"Try counting squeaks," Wendy suggests. "Hey, you're not going to play those spoons, are you?"

Tony is collecting teaspoons. "Why not? I got rhythm." Now he lays three of them handles-up in a row on the table, with a tablespoon between the middle one and the one on his far right. "Just imagine these are the four cardinal directions of the fan blades, but also four beats as the blades turn around. Now could I trouble the poet to read the first four syllables again? The first four syllables only, please."

David reads: "The fan / circling ..."

As Tony repeats each syllable, he touches the bowl of each spoon, starting with the one on his left (our right). When he gets to the tablespoon, the third syllable, his finger strikes the bowl off-center, causing the handle to thump.

"Is that the squeak?" asks Silvia.

"The stressed syllable in 'circling'? No, that's just the rush of air from each rotation."

Tony asks for the next four syllables. Repeating the poem from the top, he fingers the row of spoons twice.

the fan CIRC-ling
its own SOUND-less

And when David gives him "wind-creating," he recites with three thick thumps:

the fan CIRC-ling
its own SOUND-less
wind cre-AT-ing

But the next four syllables, "con-TIN-u-ous," are out of sync. "There's the squeak," says Tony. To align "continuously" with the metrical pattern, he gives the "-ing" in "creating" an extra beat, a squeaky-sounding slide drawn out even longer by the rhyme with the stressed TIN. The squeak, as it turns out, occurs right at the halfway point of

the poem. By the end, with the help of his spoons to keep rhythm, Tony can recite the whole poem from memory:

the fan CIR-cling
its own SOUND-less
wind cre-AT-ing
(-ing) con-TIN-u-
ous-ly SHAD-ow-
ing re-FLEC-tions

As he starts a second run-through, some of us join in what then turns into a kind of bizarre chant that prompts Steven to stick his head through the door to see what these delirious tea-drinking poetry fanatics are up to in his back room on an "evening all afternoon." Those who are not chanting are laughing hysterically at the foot-tapping spoon slapping, which with every metrical foot flips the tablespoon farther and farther across the table.

I turn to Steven, who is stoically surveying the commotion like a foreigner in the stands who hasn't been told how the sport is played. "Isn't it beautiful?" I ask him. "Poetry, as you see, is nothing less than the rhythmical creation of beauty."[1]

He nods blankly and starts clearing away our cups.

The rain has stopped and Rudiger is getting antsy. Long ago, when he first moved to the beach with Maria, he made a vow to himself, and the beach, and Maria, that he would never let the sun set on a single precious beach day without being there to say thank you and bid farewell. Calling for Steven, Rudiger graciously pays our bill and takes his leave. "Meet you all on the pier after sundown," he calls. "Or under the pier if it's raining."

Realizing they are down to their last Gulf sundown, Tony and Wendy rush out to join him. With the prime instigators of our encore session gone, Carol suggests: "Maybe we could save the last round of readings for the pier?"

1 Poe's definition in "The Poetic Principle."

10 Sculpted in Music

As the half-dozen of us taking the beach route to the pier stop for the greatest show on the planet, the coalescences of clouds are thronging for their grand ceremonial gilding. Gleaming in matching gold, a broad-brushed "S" has been painted across the Gulf, a lone leftover dangling from the final line of the day. Standing transfixed at nature's signs of timelessness and magnificence, we wonder what that "S" might stand for. To make sense of the signs, though, we realize we would not only have to remember Wolfe's lost language, but read it backwards, working our way from the last letter back to "in the beginning." Thinking perhaps that *Through Lost Silences*, the book she is holding, might preserve some of that language, Rosemarie goes looking for a poem, when suddenly one is looking right in her.

However much an afternoon of poetry may have opened our visual sensibilities to these splendors of sea and sky, our ears have also been sharpened to the sounds of wind and wave. Nature's sound and fury, signifying what? From the sea, a hollow blast of air, the empty bluster of a mindless low-pressure system. From the white-snailed foam, an unintelligible chant drones on tirelessly, like a litany that could go on forever.

> There will never be an end
> To this droning of the surf. (Wallace Stevens, "Fabliau of Florida")

If we listen hard, as to an opera in a foreign language, can we pick out any meaningful syllables? Straining our imaginations to the limit, we might think we can distantly discern some "dimly-starred" inkling of what it is all about.

> If it was only the dark voice of the sea
> That rose, or even colored many waves;
> If it was only the outer voice of sky
> And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
> However clear, it would have been deep air,
> The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
> Repeated in summer without end
> And sound alone. But it was more than that ...
>
> ("The Idea of Order at Key West"[2])

2 Steven's "Idea of Order" was discussed as an example of a metapoem in the introduction to part III, page 95.

It is more than that because those dark, deep, heaving sounds have been made comprehensible by the song; they have been put into words for us. When he defined the poetry of words as "the rhythmical creation of beauty," Poe was talking about the "supernal beauty" created by the "union of poetry with music." When words and notes unite perfectly, these refrains of the sea will be rendered in comprehensible messages, as will the waltzes of the royal palms behind us. Beyond the beach, the poet will record the chiming of city bells and the dirges of cedars, their bare, ruined choirs breath-touched by winter winds. All pieces of a design that will begin to fall into place once they are translated into song and "uttered word by word," as Stevens describes it.

Message
These

waves urge
their mea

ning in
sounds in

cessant
ly told.

(from *A Birth in Seeing*, p. 28)

evocative etymon (→ footnote 3, page 191)
A poet mindful of a word's associations will play on its ancestral definitions (etymology). The Latin verb *urgeo*, for example, meant not only "to urge" someone verbally but also "to push" something physically. Ovid, in book XV of *Metamorphoses*, tells how each wave presses ("urget") the one before it ashore, "just as time moves on and follows itself [...], so each moment is renewed." This "wave of time" simile was also seen in our poems "White-snailed" and "Sitting out."

Now, our group on the beach only needs a "maker of the song" to find the right words for this incessantly told message of the waves.

Five of us form a circle. Jennifer has waded in up to her ankles, while Silvia and Carol are barely getting their feet wet. On my right, like Wallace Stevens standing watch at Key West beside his friend Ramon, the hatless poet with raincoat flattering in the breeze, his book *Time Shadows* clutched in hand, appears rapt by the singing from "beyond the genius of the sea." It's his muse Rosemarie in our midst with the special refrain that has found her for sunset.

We are not alone. Spotting our group, a few beachgoers slow down and start to collect curiously around us. With what looks like a high priestess reading ceremoniously from an open book, we are probably

being taken for one of the frequent beach weddings, but where is the young couple? Maybe it's just some old married folks renewing their vows. Or the mystical marriage of the sea, with the ring soon to be cast in the water? Little do they know, it is a secret poetry sect flourishing right under their noses.

Ever the teacher, Rosemarie again asks us to listen actively. "Here are the four concepts you should listen for this time: calm, quiet, voice, stillness."

In Refrain
The

calm of
when these

waves express
them selves

at the quiet
of sunset'

s final voice
A stillness

in refrain.

unstressed rhyme
minor accent rhyme, the rhyming of unstressed syllables

Normal rhyming syllables are stressed, making the rhyme clearly audible. An unstressed end-rhyme, like here with "quiet" and "sunset," creates a more subtle effect in keeping with the theme of stillness. The same muted effect comes out in the refrain of final sibilants: these, express, selves, voice, stillness.

(from *Through Lost Silences*, p. 12)

Of course, we do not hear the tmesis splitting the "wa*ves*" into choruses of "them - sel*ves*," but even in a single reading we can recognize that these sunset wa*ves* whisper in a low *voic*e as they roll ashore with hushed repetitiveness, "a stillness in refrain," rather than brash crescendo. Silvia feels the music: "The waves, one after the other, are soothing, like a rosary being repeated." She feels as if she's entered a chapel, but not even the boldest Baroque of the Counter-Reformation would dare to paint a ceiling as lavish as this sunset.

It is a beauteous evening calm and free
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea ...
(Wordsworth, Sonnet)

"It's as if sea and shore are in some sort of equilibrium," Jennifer says. "Sunset has brought on a balanced stillness of earth and water, body and soul."

Carol looks down at the surf: "Making the wave motion a slow heartbeat, the refrain of life resting at the end of the day."

This is the first time I have witnessed a poet being poemed. Maybe it was attributable to the glory of the sunset or the serenity of his wife's reading, but you know sublimity has struck when the mouth opens and verses come to light like unearthed treasure:

> It may be that in all her phrases stirred
> The grinding water and the gasping wind;
> But it was she and not the sea we heard.
> ("The Idea of Order at Key West")

"She and not the sea": that is, the singer's ordered measures and meters, not the babblings of nature. The human mind can process songs as products of human language, which in turn reflects the ordering of mind. The grinding and gasping of water and wind, however, do nothing but endlessly rejuggle ungrammatical randomness.

Continuing down to the pier, I fall in with David. With his cape-like raincoat, wind-tousled hair, and slight limp, he cuts a Byronic figure. "You know, there's something in that poem by Stevens," he says, "I was trying to get at with 'Poemed.' At Key West, the poet and his friend Ramon stop to listen to a lady singing on the beach. In that instant, the singer, not the poet, becomes the maker, the 'single artificer of the world,' since it's the act of singing that imposes order on the night. A singer is poemed with a poet's song. A poet is poemed, too, but, while not everyone can be a poet, anyone can be poemed who encounters a poem that reads the reader in the same way the poet writes the poem—with immediate and thoroughgoing recognition. Like love at first sight or a blinding light on the road to Damascus, the impact of that encounter is transformative. A poemed person is renewed according to the forms and ideas of poetic language, remade to make the world anew with the ordering force of that language and to sing even the seemingly demented words of the sea into that language. Remember, at the end of 'Order at Key West,' the two listeners that have been poemed by the song undergo a magical paradigm shift. They see that the anchor lights of the moored fishing boats are really stars mapping out well-ordered constellations over the waters. The whole dark night appears suddenly subdued by the mind's understanding and subordi-

nated to the poem's patterning. The listeners have been poemed with the maker's gift of seeing, ordering, and recomposing the world. They have been blessed with the creativity of the poem."

"Yes," I answer, "that is certainly part of being poemed. But when the poem looks right in me and through me in perfect recognition, I expect a few sparks to fly: those blinding Damascus-road lights along with flames and fireworks. And as you well know, the ordering function of the poetic vision is not simply a matter of taking the logic of language and using it as a grid through which to see reality. The blessing of creativity is a 'blessed *rage* for order,' a passion to come to grips with Chaos and Old Night. To draw Stevens' demarcations[1] of mind in well-defined measures, but measures *con fuoco e furore*, with emotion and ecstasy. A poemed singer sings with heart."

"This is what comes across in the music of the poem, Warren. One side of the poem is the logic of language; the other side is the emotion of music. The demarcations of mind expressed in 'keener sounds.'"

"Logic and music, logos and mythos. Two channels for two cerebral hemispheres."

"Appealing to the whole mind, while reaching it via two very different channels. The video channel transmitting word-pictures and word-thoughts, universal designs visualized and verbalized for the reader. These are imprinted on the mind, where they become copies of the original designs. On the audio channel is music, those 'sounds wholly containing the mind,' rhythms and phrasings that ring so right that they infect the listener: We say that a melody is infectious, but so is enthusiasm. It's that passionate part of poetry that infects us and *affects* us right in the affective part of our being, our emotions, until we become carriers of the infection."

"If it's so infectious, then why is poetry dying?"

"It's not. It's just moving to different centers of diffusion. Academic

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1 The last stanza of Steven's "The Idea of Order at Key West" reads:

> Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
> The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
> Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
> And of ourselves and of our origins,
> In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

"Ghostly" demarcations are probably the ordered ideations of the "ghost in the machine," the human mind. As a grammarian, I would tend to call them simply "principles of syntax."

curricula have crowded it out, making room for pseudosciences that repackage common sense and trivial technologies that will be outdated before they are learned. In place of schools, poetry circles and Internet coffeehouses are sprouting up. Where there were once crooners, now there are singer-songwriters to satisfy the public's thirst for lyric. When they get enough of folkies and rappers, sooner or later they will come back to us."

I see it a little differently: "If as you say it's the audio channel that's infectious—infectious with passion as well as catchy numbers—then Tony is right about the need to free poetry from the page. It has to move all right, but not to a new marketing mix, rather from print to performance, from reading to listening."

"George is right, too. Somehow, we have to get back to the bardic."

Bit by bit, we have rounded up most of our group: Michael and Rebecca have dropped the dog off at home. Chang has picked up Dudley from his class. The British tourists and Rudiger have witnessed the sunset, complete with sailboats and dolphins, from the end of the pier. Helen has called to say George needs another quarter of an hour with his correspondence. We tell her we will be waiting outside in the café next to the pier, where we all crowd around a long table overlooking the beach.

Fortunately, the wind has died down and the sun's warmth has not yet released its embrace. The sky is still aglow, transfiguring the beach and the Gulf with its luminous otherworldliness. Even our faces, as we stare out at the time-receding waves, are lit up like the clouds. For a moment, we are all caught in a still refrain of incessantly told memories, like Rebecca's perennial bench-sitter or pelicans on poles.

Now, at the far end of the table, Silvia is reading the short ekphrastic poem[1] David has given her, a pastiche of impressions on listening to a Segovia CD. She believes the poem will fit in well with the music she uses in therapy. At our end, Chang, borrowing one of Carol's books, fills Dudley in on our two new poems with bird images. By the time Tony has passed around his camera with the sunset snaps, everyone's drink is getting low. The twilight shadows are retreating into darkness as a quarter hour has turned into a half. David decides to proceed:

1 ekphrastic poem = a poem about a work of art

Breath-touch

Emptied

sounds the
winds cool

ed down to
their trans

piring breath-
touch.

half rhyme
final consonance, i.e. when two words end in the same consonant(s) but do not share a vowel. Example: sounds/winds.

Half rhyme is a kind of "off-rhyme" or "slant rhyme," a similarity of sounds between words (breath/touch) without the brassy chiming of true rhyme. No wonder, then, that it was especially preferred by Emily Dickinson in her delicate, subtle lyrics.

(from *Time Shadows*, p. 142)

Jennifer likes the musical feel of the title "breath-touch," which she calls "a kenning like a kiss."[2] But she fails to understand what "transpiring" might have to do with it. Language purists like me pretend to be aghast whenever events are described as "transpiring," a perversion introduced by pretentious journalists only a couple of centuries ago. I would be deeply disappointed if a poet misused the word in this way, but as a veteran Latin teacher, I see the etymological sense David is asking us to excavate and activate: The verb *spiro* means both to breathe and to blow, just as *spiritus* originally meant breath or wind. By extension, the breath of life is spirit, the common meaning of *spiritus* in Medieval Latin. Like many poets,[3] David is playing on original word origins to give a metaphorical dimension to his image. The wind is spirit, moving invisibly through (trans-spiring) the cool evening. Like spirit, the wind touches everything with its breath, in-spiring the whole world with life. As George said earlier, the wind is silent, but whatever it breath-touches gives off "emptied sounds," water rippling and leaves swishing like animals hungry to be fed and filled. The spirit-wind is thus the life-giver, answering the needs of every living thing by filling and fulfilling.

2 Wallace Stevens personifies the August night-wind in the third panel of his triptych "Headache": "Its breath touches me."

3 In his poem "Design," Robert Frost uses the word "appall" in its literal Latinate sense of "to whiten." Jay Parini, in *Why Poetry Matters* (Yale Univ. Press, 2008), cites this as an example of "drawing words back into alignment with their original pictorial, concrete, and metaphorical associations." Silvia, we recall, extracted the image of "stretching" from the etymology of our English word "tending" (cf. "Sitting out"). The undisputed master of this "evocative etymon" technique was John Milton, who used the word "transpire" to describe how excess nourishment simply "breathes through" the bodies of angels who try to overeat (*PL* V, 436-9), much like bullets or other foreign objects easily exhaled through the skin of the robots in the *Terminator* movies.

I am about to explain all this when Rudiger beats me to the punch with a very different take: "Transpiration is one of the key processes in biochemistry. Plants circulate water by absorbing it from the soil and transpiring it into the air. As it evaporates from the surface of their leaves, more water is extracted from their root system, carrying vital minerals for biosynthesis. Without water, nothing lives. That's why, as I said earlier in connection with Dudley's poem, water is a symbol for life."

It is also a very ancient symbol of spirit.[1] Intrigued, I ask: "Does the wind have any role in transpiration?"

"Indeed it does. The wind provides the dry air which promotes transpiration. Humid air increases the concentration of water particles outside the leaf, making it harder to transpire. Blowing over the leaves, the wind lowers that moisture level outside, so the plant can vaporize what's inside and suck more through the straw of its stem. It's is like giving the plant a drink of water."

The breath-touch. "So, looking at the whole water cycle, the cycle of life on earth, would you say that evaporation is a critical interface with the force of wind, the point where water is breath-touched?"

"I would indeed," Rudiger affirms, but is unable to go on. Some of our group are getting impatient with his science lesson and others are plain getting hungry. Besides, Helen has just made her appearance at our table.

But she makes no move to sit down. "Sorry I'm late. George and I were coming through Times Square when we ran into our friend Kostas, the owner of that taverna on the corner. If you're all in the mood for a bite to eat, he can accommodate our whole party in his upstairs dining room." Turning to Carol and me, she adds: "And if you've already had a Greek meal today, I'm sure he can catch you a grouper."

Somehow, all the men ended up seated at one end of the table. Here, the two businessmen George and Chang, having wound up their discussion of "No Distances Left," have moved on to Dudley's new position in Laura's seaplane venture. George is wary: "You'd better take an extra parachute along in case your partner bails out first."

1 In the opening verses of the Hebrew Bible, God's spirit or wind (*ruach*) is moving over the waters. See also John 7:38-39.

Chang agrees: "And no banker in a Superman suit will bail you out, either."

Dudley takes a sober view: "It's strictly business. We'll have a contract, drawn up in the blandest prose. There's another side to my relationship with Laura that's pure poetry. But relax; I do know the difference between poetry and prose. That's one of the big bonuses of taking two classes simultaneously, Poetry Reading and Prose Composition. All the same, George, it would be great if you could take a look at this partnership contract I'm supposed to sign. I'm not too savvy when it comes to the nuances of legal lingo."

"Be glad to. Just zip it over and I'll give it a perusal."

Chang asks him how his writing is coming along. "Today we learned how to document what is going on in our lives. This is the journalistic part of writing a memoir, collecting the incidents you need later for the plot line." He inquires if David has written his memoirs yet.

"I've done a couple of autobiographical sketches in German, but that genre is something quite different from the memoir." Picking up Dudley's blank look, he continues: "It's much like the difference between history and story. An autobiography is a historical documentary covering your life so far, whereas a memoir is one of life's lessons learned, an exemplary story told from your own point of view. When people ask me why I don't write memoirs, I show them my books of poetry. I don't need to write a lot of long chatty letters or keep a diary, either, since everything I'm concerned with, everything I'm learning from life about life, is right here." He taps the cover of *Time Shadows*.

George raises his fork like an antenna for receiving poetic pronouncements: "So if a memoir is a story from your life and that book is a memoir, where is the story in your book?"

"You read the whole book and didn't get the story? And now you want your money back, is that it? Sorry, but I didn't say the book was a memoir. It's a journal, a potpourri of memorabilia, like Dudley is putting together now. It's the raw material for a story, or for a whole shelf of stories, like a scrapbook of news clippings. Shadows of the time we live in."

"A scrapbook? Aristotle said that whatever the work of art is about has to be set forth organically, like a living thing, and complete unto itself, that is with unity of action that can sweep forward unencumbered by bits and pieces that don't belong."

"Yes, and that's an excellent definition of a story, such as your trage-

dians and epic bards would tell. But I will leave modern storytelling to novelists, filmmakers, and memoir writers like Dudley. My field as a lyric poet is not the story, but history. Each poem is a unique moment, a crystallized instant of historical time through which something timeless is revealed. Instead of connecting points on a timeline, I take you deep inside one moment until it collapses into eternity."[1]

"But certainly even history has some sort of coherence: dominant leaders, sequences of events, trends of the times."

"All I can say, George, is that since Classical times, history has moved on. The Parthenon frieze, panel by panel, tells one kind of history; *Guernica*, in one long torturous mural, tells another. Each age has to be documented in the spirit of the times. You Greeks took plenty of time for the poet. You gave him your undivided attention, even elevated him to prophet-priest. In return, he held a mirror to the ancient world and faithfully portrayed its people: honor-bound, spear-toting warriors, pre-scientific philosophers in pursuit of the good and the beautiful, citizens of far-strewn city-states, each with its own pantheon of whimsical gods. My audience, wired into a secularized, globalized corporate culture driven by gratification and greed, has no time for me and little respect. In return, I shall do my best to tell them who they are and what it really feels like to live in their time."

Chang has been listening intently, but he's just taken a bite of fruit salad. Dudley goes first: "So, with this book of yours, you've essentially done what I'm doing now, pulling together a lot of experiences that can in a later stage be worked into a story. In its present form, it's little more than an unedited diary. Somebody still has to come along, find an idea for the memoir, link up what's relevant to that theme, filter out what's not. Who's going to do that if not you?"

"The reader. There are hundreds of themes a reader could trace through my poems. Some of them will hit home, some of them will attract only passing interest. It's like reading a newspaper, or sorting through your post, or homing in on the messages that concern you amongst all the messages out there vying for your attention. It's a selection process that is part of living in the information age. And there are gaps, parts of the memoir that the reader has to supply. No one

1 "A poem is the very image of life expressed in eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature ..." – Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*

gets spoon fed."

Now Chang comes in: "You say you are a kind of historian, but that would require a certain amount of objective distance to what is being told. What you are giving us is a very up-close, personal account of what you yourself have experienced. And when you express it, you are also expressing yourself, are you not?"

"When I started writing poetry as a teenager, that admittedly was one of my aims. But a mature poet is not in the business of flogging his own feelings. In fact, I try to isolate myself from what I have experienced as I seek the universal. Even if what I am unveiling is a feeling, I don't want your tears or moans of sympathy. I'm not trying to impress the girls any more with my sensitivity. What I am trying to show is how that feeling might be a gateway we can open and enter, a passage to deeper understanding. In fact, I would say that true poetry is a selfless act of stepping back and letting the poem have its say. Letting the poem take the poemed reader out of my unique personal moment into an act of the mind which will speak to our shared experience as human beings."

"It sounds more like metahistory," Chang concludes. "Writing history not as we happened to watch it play out in one chance unfolding of events, but the essence of being a part of the human drama regardless of your profession, culture, or worldview." He picks up David's book and leafs through a few pages. "Momentary shadows projected on history's wall from a flame burning beyond time." Forgetting the conversation, he becomes engrossed in the poems.

"Oh, George, before I forget, could I get your email address?"

"Sure thing, Dudley."George reaches in his pocket for one of his cards, but finds only a used poemgram to jot down his address. "Just send the contract to my beach office."

Dudley examines the card, addressed "to Laura." "Oh, I didn't know you knew Laura ... or that you were writing her poetic valentines."

George, who always has an answer to everything, finds that even his resourceful Odyssean alter ego offers him no other option but, for the second time today, sheepishly to wag an accusing finger at himself. Another femme fatale—a siren, a Circe, or even perhaps a dark lady of the sonnets—has him in thrall. The myths have taught him not to fight the fates, and Helen not to protest too much.

"Or that you write ancient epigrams on prehistoric typewriters. But I'd be happy to deliver it for you."

Standing and clearing his throat, George is once again this evening's congenial host, a role he has never really abdicated since lunchtime. All the dinner recommendations from Kostas passed through George, while all our orders went the same route in reverse. This is partly, of course, the Greek's high calling to hospitality, but also just the naturally generous way George deals with everyone around him. "My very esteemed patrons of poetry, if I could ask you to put your discussions on hold long enough to give these two ladies your attention for the last two short lyrics of the day." Carol thanks him as she stands and opens her book.

The stroke of time'
s out

sending birds
ringing

through the
pulsed

silver-shine
of those

bells in ac
claiming.

(from *Thought Colors*, p.186)

euphony
the shaping and texturing of sounds to produce pleasing effects

In "The Bells," Poe demonstrates the "gush of euphony" produced by different city bells:

Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

Carol reads it twice, but Tony insists on two more repeats. "Finally, a poem for a Hopkins." By now, we know the kinds of things that get a Hopkins excited. For one, we have all heard the two-stroke pulse of the bell clapper:

stroke time	birds ring	silver-shine
out send	through pulsed	those bells

The sound effects have also made their mark: the alliteration and the off-rhyme, the ringing in acclaiming, the jingling and tinkling.

But, maybe because he is a German speaker,[1] Rudiger was the one

1 In German, the prepositions in phrasal verbs like "send out" behave like prefixes that sometimes detach themselves. So the infinitive form, what you would look up in the dictionary, would be "out-send." This is the form that David, at least in the back of his mind, might be trying to render in English with "out / sending birds /ringing."

who caught the anastrophe. This is the inversion of natural word order we first saw in "Cushioned" last week, where "the clouds softer felt." He knew "out sending" sounded very un-English, but soon realized that David wanted to couple the "out" with both "sending" and "ringing" without having to spell out "sending out" and "ringing out." This would have blunted the tintinnabulating euphony in the second stanza: "*send*ing birds r*ing*ing."

David makes a show of presenting Tony a signed copy of the poem on a Times Square Taverna napkin. This is accepted to a round of applause. Reciprocating, Tony inscribes another serviette with the line that Hopkins might have been written on a Florida beach, had he ever come here: "The thunder-purple seabeach pluméd purple-of-thunder ..." He signs with a simple "Hopkins," as if he were the poet. Wendy adds her name, along with their Hertfordshire address. This time, the applause carries over into a warm burst of recognition for David's effort as a poet and for sharing his poetic visions with us in these monthly sessions on the beach.

Rosemarie gives her usual pre-game warm-up: "Please listen for the following word pairs: First, 'naked' and 'skeleton.' Notice how *n* and *k* characterize both words. Of course, a skeleton is about as naked as a body can be. Then, 'branched' and 'danced.' Besides rhyming, these words depict pairings. Got it? OK, the final pair is 'urged' and 'death.' These are both monosyllables with a hard d-sound and the soft continuants, voiced *g* and unvoiced *th*. They combine in the concept 'death urge,' and, in the other direction, a jury can urge death. Now, these are the three pairs who will be dancing through the poem, but it's a dance where they change partners. Listen to see how they match up in the poem."

Naked branched
skele-

tal urge
d danced in

death.

masculine rhyme
rhymes in stressed final syllables

In traditional metrical works, poets create masculine rhyme by ending lines with words like "branched" and "danced."

(from *Through Lost Silences*, p. 62)

After reading David's version three times, Rosemarie asks the group to help reassemble her original couples. What comes out is our own group poem:

Naked skeleton
In branched dance
Urged death.

Then come her pay-off questions. Why did David's version sound like a real dance? How could we describe the dance?

Silvia describes a dance she does in her therapy class. "There are no steps. The legs are together, rooted into the floor like a tree trunk. You extend your arms like branches swaying in the wind, then you bend from your hips as your arms wave back and forth. Some of the older members of my class claim they can hear their bones creaking."

Helen imagines the sound of a dead branch creaking until it almost cracks. "First, there is a straining, culminating in a dull thud. The straining in the wind is heard in the *n*s, '*n*aked bra*n*ched ... da*n*ced.' Then comes the lifeless d-sound that dominates the dance, the staccato of thumping a tambourine without any bells." The visual layout supports her idea: The final *-d* in "urged" drops to the next line, creating a bizarre stutter, "d danced in / death." It's as if the tambourine-thumpers have formed a diabolical circle around "skeletal urge," the only two dancers left without *d*s.

Rudiger thinks that what Helen hears are only "emptied sounds," the kind we heard in "Breath-touch." These are like bones banging when a voodoo shaman has strung them together as a wind chime. The real musical accompaniment is being provided by a whistling wind somewhere off stage.

Michael recounts a recent boat trip up to Cabbage Key. "There was a north wind, making the Intercoastal pretty rough. The dead trees from the last hurricane were reeling back and forth, waving to us almost, but not in a gesture of welcome. It was something foreboding."

This reminds me of Wallace Stevens' "Farewell to Florida." "The poet is on the deck of a ship headed back north from that Island of Bones, Key West. He remembers the oppressive heat of the 'sepulchral South,' with its 'trees like bones' and bleached-out 'ashen ground.' The whole landscape is like a tomb, covered with silent sand, dead leaves, rust and bone. The only music to be heard on the beach swells up from the reefs, where the seaweed is swirling on the bottom while up top the

waves drone their endless refrain. But the refrain is just a grim announcement that 'the snake has shed its skin' again. The death watch of the beach goes on."

"Trees like bones," Jennifer repeats. "Naked branched, skeletal urged."

The time to bid farewell to Florida is coming for Tony and Wendy. "We leave tomorrow morning for Orlando." Michael advises them on the route to take, avoiding the interstates by cutting up through the horse ranches and orange groves of the inland counties.

Times Square is emptying, closing down for a few hours of predawn repose until the rumble starts all over again. Rebecca suggests the four of them have one for the road and climb up the bridge for a midnight goodbye to the island. Michael knows a quiet place off the beaten track, just under the bridge on the deep-water harbor sheltered by the island: the Swashed Wassailor. "Maybe David's friend Joe will still be there."

Wendy is surprised that there are still a few local watering holes they haven't hit yet. "We'll have to come back and do the full pub crawl next year. Maybe Joe can give us the tour if he's not too busy sitting out his life."

"I think Gerard Manley would have called him Jack," Tony theorizes. Hemingway certainly knew him as Sloppy Joe.

"I think you'll meet more authentic Floridians at the library," cracks Chang, shaking Tony's hand. Though genuine Florida natives are still missing in our group, we from five continents all call the Sunshine State home. One by one, we Floridians take leave of our guests from England. Though the fraternity of poetry-readers extends its arms around the globe, our circle here on the beach will forever miss the Hopkins couple.

Ten hugs later, Wendy turns away from our group to survey the pier, the beach, and the night sky. There, the silver fringe of clouds looks like heaven's answer to the shimmering ringlets of white-snailed surf. "What a beautiful night!" she exclaims.

"'Beautiful night' is a cliché." David has raised his arms to embrace the whole scene. "How would you describe the beauty of the night?" The question he asks himself nightly, now ricocheted to Wendy like a

parting shot.

Like all the new members we have taken under our wing, Wendy is now powerfully poemed. To prove her mettle, she reaches into her jacket pocket. Has she penned a limerick nocturne? "Instead of more teary good-byes, let me just say thank you to all for making this extraordinary poetry day possible. And in the spirit of the day, and the magic of Florida nights, here is the souvenir poem David gave me earlier." She reads from her card:

Star-down
winds palm-

sensing grow
th of these

immensing
night-vis

ions.

feminine rhyme
rhyming in words of more than one syllable, where the last syllable is unstressed

Example: sensing/immensing

(from *Time Shadows*, p. 269)

"I promise to commit it to memory so words won't fail me the next time I'm standing on a lonely beach and the starry night lays bare my vast silences within."

Glossary

aesthetic distance – the level of the author's or the reader's emotional involvement in an art work. (See "Raphael," page 79.)

affective fallacy – the assumption that a work of art must be first-rate if one likes it or, inversely, must be worthless if one finds it insufferable. (Not to be confused with the "pathetic fallacy.")

alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds, such as in tongue twisters. (See "Pre-established Presence," page 63.)

amplification – lengthening a sentence by adding on an explanation. (See "God-seeker," page 124.)

anacoluthon – beginning a sentence with one grammatical structure while finishing with another. (See "God-seeker," page 124.)

anadiplosis – a "doubling back" effect in which the last word from one line or stanza is repeated at the beginning of the next. (See "Not Ranke," page 59.)

anastrophe – poetic inversion, a reversal of the normal order of words. (See "Cushioned," page 30, and "The stroke of time," page 196.)

anaphora – the repetition of the same word or phrase to open successive units of thought. (See "Ulysses," page 102, and "Unrealizing," page 134.)

antimetabole – the repetition of a word pair in successive clauses whereby, in the second clause, the order is transposed. "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." (See "So much," page 138.)

antithesis – a structure in which two contrasting ideas are set in relief: on the one hand *this*, on the other hand *that*. In poetry, antithesis of parallel elements creates a balanced rhythm. It is a popular device in the classical Horatian style. Simple example: "Common, but never

commonplace." (See "Self Portrait," page 108, and "Foam of Waves," page 175.)

apodosis – the "then" clause that tells what will or would happen under the "if" condition of the protasis. (See "No distances left," page 160.)

aposiopesis – a broken-off thought or unfinished sentence. (See page 85.)

archetype – a universal symbol, like wind for spirit. (See "Kaleidoscope," page 97.)

assonance – the repetition of vowel sounds. (See "Pre-established Presence," page 63.)

assonant rhyme – a near rhyme achieved primarily by similar vowel sounds. (See "Pre-established Presence," page 64.)

ballad – a spirited song or poem traditionally sung by a bard as a showcase for a story.

bowdlerism – the condensing, sanitizing, or expurgating of an original work to make it more palatable for modern readers. The practice is named after a certain Thomas Bowdler, who edited Shakespeare. (See "No words for it" in chapter 8, where Tony condemns bowdlerizing old-fashioned vocabulary.)

caesura – a pause occurring within the line signaling completion of a thought. (See "True-telling stones," page 43.)

chiaroscuro – a term borrowed from painting for the contrast of light and dark elements. (See "But barely heard," page 71.)

chiasm(us) – an inverted order of sentence elements. (See "Outlining," page 52, "But barely heard," page 71, "So Much," page 138, "No distances left," page 160.)

concrete poetry – poems whose lines form shapes or patterns. (See "Icicled fear," page 21.)

connotations – ideas, images, or feelings associated with a word, but not part of the word's literal denotation. (See "Self Portrait," page 111.)

consonance – the repetition of consonant sounds. (See "Pre-established Presence," page 63.)

clause – a sentence element containing its own subject and predicate. In a conditional (if-then) sentence, for example, there are two clauses: the "if" (protasis) and the "then" (apodosis). "If you work hard, then you will be successful." (See "No distances left," page 160.)

continuant – a consonant that can be produced in a sustained breath, like a hiss or hush with sibilants, or a hum, drone, or moan with nasals. (See "When," page 148.)

couplet – two lines of verse forming a unit. Most of David's stanzas are presented as couplets. In traditional verse, couplets rhyme. (See "heroic couplet.")

deictic – a word whose meaning is completed by what it points or refers to, such as the demonstrative pronoun "that" or the personal pronoun "us." (See the footnote on "Raphael," page 83.)

diction – the poet's choice of words. (See "True-telling stones," page 46.)

distinctio – a clarification or working definition inserted immediately after a term to specify a special sense of that term. (See "Even if," page 178.)

dramatic monologue – A poem spoken as a soliloquy by one character. (See "God-seeker," last page in Part III.)

ekphrastic poem – a poem about a work of art. (See page 190.)

elision – contracting an unstressed with a stressed syllable or merging two vowels into one. Elision is why most people pronounce "comfortable" as three syllables. (See Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

ellipsis – omission of words. (See "Words too heavy," page 47.)

end-stopped line – a line of poetry which contains a complete thought, and thus ends with a punctuation mark. (See "A poem," page 38, and Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

enjambment – breaking a sentence or clause off at the end of a line, so that the thought is incomplete and runs over to the following line. (See "A poem," page 38.)

envoi – in a ballad or sestina, a short final stanza used to draw together sounds and ideas from the previous stanzas. (See "Pre-established Presence," page 64.)

epic poem – a long narrative in verse, usually about the exploits of a national hero like Ulysses or Aeneas. (See George's comments on the *Iliad*, page 93.)

epigram – a short, pithy lyric bearing a sharp, witty point or caustic message, often aimed at a person. (See "Finding oneself," page 101, and "So much," page 138.)

euphony – the shaping and texturing of sounds to produce pleasing effects. (See "The stroke of time," page 196.)

evocative etymon – the technique of using the literal or etymological sense of a word to add coloring to its connotations. (See "Message," page 186.)

feminine rhyme – rhyming in words of more than one syllable, where the last syllable is unstressed, e.g. "chiming" and "rhyming." (See "Star-down," page 200.)

foot – a unit of meter, sometimes called a "measure." (See "Foam of Waves," page 175, and Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

free verse – poetry without regular meter. (See "White-snailed," page 14.)

haiku – a Japanese verse of 17 syllables. (See "White-snailed," page 14, and "Heavy," page 172.)

half rhyme – final consonance, i.e. when two words end in the same consonant(s) but do not share a vowel. (See "Breath-touch," page 191.)

heroic couplet – two lines of iambic pentameter, usually end-stopped, that form a witty sentence. (See Pope's heroic couplet from his *Essay on Criticism* on page 52.)

homoeoteleuton – repetition of suffixes to create contrastive or emphatic links: "I've had enough of their dupery, their trickery, and their treachery." (See "The More becomes," page 133.)

iamb – a metrical foot of two syllables, the first unaccented, the second accented. The rhythm of poems written in such alternating beats is called "iambic." (See "Foam of Waves," page 175, and Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

iambic pentameter – poetry written in five iambs per line. This is the most common metrical pattern in English poetry. (See "Foam of Waves," page 175, and Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

kenning – a poetic compound formed by connecting two nouns, like "meal-drift" to mean "cloud" or "breath-touch" for "wind." (See "Icicled fear," page 21.)

leitmotif – a musical phrase or poetic sound cluster which is identified with a person or an idea.

limerick – a light-hearted, five-line rhyme popularized by Edward Lear (1812-88) and practiced by Wendy Hopkins. (See page 140.)

liquid – a continuant consonant like *l* and *r* that produces a rippling effect. (See "When," page 148.)

lyric – a short, song-like poem, originally recited to the accompaniment of a lyre. (See "Kaleidoscope," page 98.)

masculine rhyme – true rhyming of lines in their stressed final syllable, as heard in "chime" and "rhyme." (See "Naked branched," page 197.)

measure – a unit of meter, sometimes called a "foot." (See "Foam of Waves," page 175, and Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

metallage – substituting an element within a sentence with a word or phrase from elsewhere. I'm tired of your negative attitude. → I'm tired of your constant "I can't!" (See "Why then this gnawing fear," page 85.)

metaphor – a figure of speech which describes something (the tenor) by comparing it to something else (the vehicle). (See "White-snailed," page 15, and "No words for it," page 154.)

metapoetry – poetry about poetry. (See "Kaleidoscope," page 95.)

meter – the ordering of words into a pattern of regular beats such as iambs. In contrast to "free verse," metrical poetry has a regular meter or beat. (See Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

metonymy – a metaphor in which one thing stands in for a broader concept which it suggests or symbolizes. When I ask you for "a hand," I probably mean either applause or help. (See "Cool waters," page 117.)

metrical silence – a pause, like that in music, created when an unaccented syllable needed to complete the foot is omitted. (See "The fan," page 182.)

mock epic – the satiric dressing of modern characters in heroic garb. (See "Ulysses," page 103.)

le mot juste – "just the right word," the Realists' emphasis on word choice. (See "True-telling stones," page 46.)

nocturne – a dreamy mood poem set in the reveries of night. (See "But barely heard," page 71, and "For our son Raphael," page 79.)

ode – a highly formalized lyric poem in the style of Horace or Pindar. The English Romantic period produced Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (page 71), Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality."

off-rhyme – "slant rhyme," a similarity of sounds between words without the brassy chiming of true rhyme. Half rhyme is kind of off-rhyme. (See "Breath-touch," page 191.)

onomatopoeia – the use of words that sound like what they mean, such as comic-book noises ("wham" & "whoosh") or the "buzz" & "hum" of insects. (See "Night animals," page 67.)

oxymoron – a figure of speech in which something is given two apparently contradictory attributes. (See "Sitting out," page 142.)

paradox – a statement that, on the surface at least, appears absurd. (See "Windows," page 178.)

parallelism – similar wording or structuring in successive sentence units. (See "Ulysses," page 102.)

participle – a form of the verb which can act like an adjective. The present participle of "rise" is *rising*. The past participle is *risen*. (See "Predator," page 15.)

pathetic fallacy – the assumption that nature has feelings in tune with our moods. (See "Raphael," page 79.)

personification – a kind of metaphor in which an animal or something inanimate is compared to a human. (See "Predator," page 21, and "No distances left," page 162.)

poetic crossing – the penetration of another mode of existence through the poetic experience. (See "Kaleidoscope," page 97.)

pictogram words – words that look like what they mean, for example the interjection "O," a pictogram of a rounded mouth exclaiming "O." (See "Night animals," page 67.)

polyptoton – the repetition of the same word in different grammatical forms. (See "Not Ranke," page 59.)

polysemy – ambiguities or plurisigns resulting from the "shifting sense" of words. (See "Unrealizing," page 134.)

protasis – the clause that states an " if" condition. (See "No words for it," page 156, and "No distances left," page 160.)

quantity – the length of time a vowel is "held" like a note of music. (See "Heavy," page 172.)

ratiocination – reasoning with oneself in questions and answers. (See "Why then this gnawing fear," page 84.)

refrain – a word or phrase repeated at the end of each stanza. (See "A Pause," page 34, and "Refrain," page 187.)

repetition – one of the main devices used by poets to create rhythm and establish continuity. Two types of word repetition are polyptoton and anadiplosis. (See "Not Ranke," page 59.)

rhapsodist – an epic bard like Homer. (See the discussion leading up to "Kaleidoscope.")

rhetorical question – a question which does not expect an answer, as it has been posed only for effect. (See "Why then this gnawing fear," page 84.)

rondo (rondeau) – in music, a composition which repeats the main theme. (See "True-telling stones," page 43, and "The fan," page 182.)

sibilant – an s-sound. (See "White-snailed," page 12.)

simile – a direct comparison drawn by "like" or "as." (See "White-snailed," page 15.)

sonnet – a traditional lyric poem consisting of fourteen lines. (See "Refrain," page 187.)

spondee – a metrical foot consisting of two accented syllables, like "look, look." (See Hopkins' "The Starlight Night" in the introduction to Part V.)

stanza – a grouping of lines. A unit of two lines is called a couplet.

style – the "feel" of words. Two easily identifiable styles are the "Horatian," named for the Latin poet Horace, and the "Pindaric," named for the Greek poet Pindar. A Horatian style is tight, restrained, and reflective; Pindaric writing is expansive, effusive, and bursting with emotion. (See "Fragile line," page 27, and "True-telling stones," page 43.)

synchysis – an interlocking pattern of organization, ABABAB. (See "A Form of Presence," page 122.)

synesthesia – a crossover from one sensory domain (e.g. taste) into another (e.g. touch). (See "Loosened," page 170.)

tenor – the "proper term" of the metaphor, who or what is being compared: "Shall I compare thee ...?" (See "No words for it," page 154.)

tmesis – writing one word as two. (See "God-seeker," page 125.)

tone – the poet's attitude toward the subject and/or the readers. (See "Self Portrait," page 108.)

transferred epithet – modifying one noun with an adjective that technically belongs to another. (See "Why then this gnawing fear?" page 88.)

unstressed rhyme – the rhyming of unstressed syllables as in "quiet" and "sunset." (See "Refrain," page 187.)

vehicle – the "metaphorical term," i.e. what the tenor of a metaphor is being compared to: "My love is like a red, red rose." (See "No words for it," page 154.)

verbing – using a noun as a verb, e.g. making "a poem" into "to poem." (See "Poemed," page 111.)

Index of Poems

Note to Teachers

The analysis tools, examples, and terminology covered in this book may be suitable as resources for your poetry circle or literature class. The pedagogical materials listed below are available for download from:

www.poemed.org

Please follow links to "Teachers' Shelf."

- "Poemed" course description
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Emptied Spaces, Abelard-Schuman, London 1972
In the Glass of Water, Abelard-Schuman, London 1975
As One, The Elizabeth Press, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1975
The Half of a Circle, The Elizabeth Press, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1977
Space of, The Elizabeth Press, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1978
Preceptions, The Elizabeth Press, New Rochelle, N.Y., 1979
For the Finger's Want of Sound, Shearsman, Plymouth, England, 1982
The Density of Color, Shearsman, Plymouth, England, 1982
Selected Poems (English and Hebrew), Massada Publishers, Givgtyim, Israel, 1982
The Telling of Time, Shearsman, Kentisbeare, England, and Johannis, Lahr, Germany, 2000
That Sense for Meaning, Shearsman, Kentisbeare, England, and Johannis, Lahr, Germany, 2001
Into the Timeless Deep, Shearsman, Kentisbeare, England, and Johannis, Lahr, Germany, 2002
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As with Michael Heller's memoirs and essays, *Two Novellas: Marble Snows & The Study* continues his project of poetry by other means. These works, written some twenty years apart and drawing on such diverse influences as Akutagawa's short fictions, Joyce's *Portrait* and Valery's *Monsieur Teste*, embody Heller's exploration of language's dramatic relationship to character, fate and incident. Using radically different narrative techniques, the two novellas are united by a persistent vision, both anguished and comic, of a consciousness ransomed to words and yet, in mysterious ways, seemingly redeemed by them.

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Delta Blues by Skip Fox **978-0-9811704-2-8**

Delta Blues is the fourth in a series of texts tentatively titled *Dream of a Book*. It was preceded by *What Of* (Potes & Poets), *At That* (Ahadada Books) and *For To* (BlazeVox). Reprising his role as entomologist, Skip Fox presents passages sprawling and pinned in a shadow box of observations and odd lots. Patrick James Dunagan writes that Fox "holds forth in the tradition of Stein and Williams with fluid experimental passages that hang on the page in a successful bopping between prose and poetry ... alongside the pleasure and beauty to be found is also the grotesque and absurd."

Songs and Stories of the Kojiki by Yoko Danno **978-0-9781414-7-9**

The *Kojiki* is arguably the earliest and most important collection of stories concerning the founding of Japan and the beginnings of Japanese culture. Dating from the sixth century, the *Kojiki* introduces us to a delightful host of gods and goddesses, heros and heroines, warriors and soothsayers, beautiful princesses and hideous demons. Yoko Danno's graceful retelling of the *Kojiki* in modern English brings this ancient classic to life for a new generation of readers. Illustrations, notes and bibliography are included to enhance the reader's enjoyment.

Nota Bene Eiswein by Eileen Tabios **978-0-9808873-9-6**

In this book, Tabios applies the methodology of making 'eiswein,' a German sweet wine, for extracting poems from her readings of Christian Hawkey's poetry collection *The Book of Funnels* and Sarah Bird's novel T*he Flamenco Academy*. *Nota Bene Eiswein* extends Tabios' body of work that is unique for melding ekphrasis with transcolonialism. Just as she is inspired by other art forms for creating poetry, her poems have been translated into other art media—Paintings, Video, Drawings, Visual Poetry, Mixed Media Collages, Kali Martial Arts, Modern Dance and Sculpture—in addition to languages such as Spanish, Italian, Tagalog, Japanese, and Portuguese.

Even the Dog Won't Touch Me. by Tom Bradley **978-0-9811704-1-1**

A seven-foot-tall member of the Greatest Generation gets to stay home from World War II and fornicate with his friends' wives ... sexually ambiguous creatures lay a six-figure book advance on a harelip ... an obese janitor in a Mormon prayer hall wedges himself behind the organ pipes, dies, and "fills the joint with green corpse steam ..." Meanwhile, in China, a Palestinian medical student gets chained to a conveyor belt in a Manchurian abortion mill ... a former Red Guard returns from rustication only to find his comrades running a bourgeois beauty salon called SYJVESTER STAJJONE'S ... an American "foreign expert" hijacks a beggar's wheelchair and steals a baby ..."

Term as in Aftermath by Alan Halsey **978-0-9808873-5-8**

Term as in Aftermath is Alan Halsey's first full-length collection since his retrospectives *Marginalien* (Five Seasons 2005) and *Not Everything Remotely* (Salt 2006). Here is the complete 'Looking-glass for Logoclasts' alongside the first viewing of his 'Unkempt Archives' and in the title sequence re-readings of texts from the schoolbooks of the ancient Egyptians via Seneca and Stein to *The Tennis Court Oath* and the codenames of recent military operations, together with translations of newly discovered fragments of Mercurialis and further studies of the lizopard.

Prolog Pages by Donald Wellman **978-0-9808873-8-9**

Prolog Pages are various in the complexities of their bundled themes: travel, observations from everyday life, allusions to the accomplishments of poets and artists. Wellman sometimes calls to the figures who populate his poems, expressing sympathy with the emotions that he detects in their person or their work. Unexpected bursts of conversation catch his ears. His material is the rough stuff of notebooks and journals, here from travels in Mexico and Spain (although New York City, Chicago and Angola appear as reference points too). Collages of fragmentary observation ruled by temporal juxtaposition and expediency become disciplined exercises in pared down constructions.

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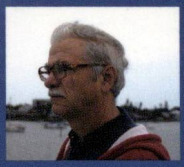
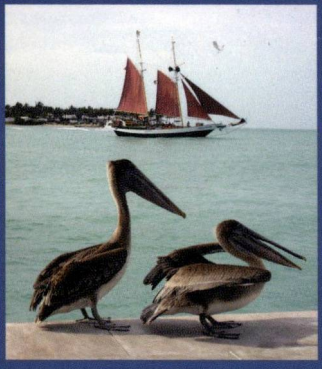
Warren Fulton, Jr., author of several language textbooks, designs and teaches Business Communication seminars for Austrian banks, government agencies, and NGOs. He and his wife Carol divide their time between Vienna and Fort Myers Beach, Florida.



One day at the beach, David, a modern poet who gives readings, innocently walks in front of a firing squad:

Silvia is a musician who expects to hear melody.
Rudiger is a scientist who wants to understand why.
Laura is an adventurer listening for a personal story.
Warren is a grammarian insistent on linguistic purity.
Carol is a German teacher with a passion for puzzles.
Dudley is a mechanic in search of transcendent truth.
Chang, a programmer, sees poems as logical processes.
Jennifer writes poems in private for emotional release.
Tony recites poems in public to revel in the rhythms.
Wendy thinks the highest form of poetry is the limerick.
George thinks a poem is action, plus heroes and big ideas.
For Helen, poems are what the French symbolists wrote.
Michael's favorite poem is "Face on the Barroom Floor."
Rebecca likes animals and thinks poems might be fun too.



Poetry is not something for dead poet societies in crumbling colleges; it is alive and well in places you might never expect, like a tourist town in Florida, or wherever people meet to share visions of truth and beauty. And poetry did not die out with the Romantics' effete tributes to their mistresses' eyebrows; it's alive and kicking with hot topics seen from modern perspectives, expressed and enjoyed by independent-minded people around the globe. All you need to enter the conversation is to get yourself **POEMED!**

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