How We Teach Poetry

by Macklin Smith John Whittier-Teresa Yolpe Prints

Introduction to Poetry—Macklin Smith

We are strong in poetry. Many of us do our primary research in poetry, poetic, or a particular group of poets, and no less than a dozen faculty members have published books of poems. We bring poetry to local and international literary audiences and to many campus settings, from Computer Center workshops to Cancer Center vigils. We staff interdisciplinary poetry courses with the School of Music and the College of Engineering. Within our Department, we nurture a talented cohort of emerging poets in our MFA Program, and we attract promising undergraduate poets into our Honors Subconcentration in Creative Writing.

The English Department offers many literary programs and creative writing courses that focus on poetry, and as a matter of preference as well as necessity we include poems in the syllabuses of many of our offerings. Unless we are teaching The Modern Novel, say, or Samuel Beckett’s Plays and Fictions, how can we teach poetry? Indeed one of our concentration prerequisites is Introduction to Poetry, and we use this course not only to expose all of our students to some examples of poetic sounds and rhythms, but also to teach the integrative, differs radically from our primary textual analysis, but also to teach the range of English diction and syntax, the affects (sound patterns, stress rhythms), and its emotional impact.

When I teach Introduction to Poetry, then, I try to encourage students to be sensitive to the range of English diction and syntax, the possibilities of figurative meaning, and the ways in which the line-structures can enhance these meanings. I ask students also to learn to hear and feel the emotional effects of poetic sounds and rhythms. My premise, throughout, is that it is fun to figure out how poetry works its magic on us. Here are a few examples of the kinds of things I imagine that our students can learn to appreciate:

1. In Shakespeare’s Richard III, the title character’s opening soliloquy reveals that his evil plots are motivated by resentment—resentment at being unsuited for amorous play. Richard here speaks disdainfully of King Edward IV, whose throne he plans to occupy:

   Capipeキャン in a lady’s chamber
   To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.

   Richard III

   2. As we may—and do—respond to poems. The sonnet can be traced to Renaissance Italian traditions. It has been, until recently, an almost exclusively male genre. It can be seen to have served various social functions in Elizabethan England, particularly the social function of appreciating: it is a vehicle for talking about love and making love. Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Wordsworth, Hopkins, Cummings, and Millay (among others) not only composed memorable sonnets, but each poet contributed some formal innovation and some shift in attention to the genre, so that we can speak of a “sonnet tradition.” And beyond—or within—these matters of history, class, gender, authorship, and literary traditions, questions of form persist. Why do sonnets rhyme as they do? Why do sonnets have fourteen lines? Why are sonnets typically used for lyric rather than narrative expression? The sonnet exemplifies some of the critical possibilities before us. Many other possibilities emerge from free verse, song, hip hop, and other forms. There’s a lot of poetry in the world, and each of us teaches it with our own special interests in mind, be these cultural, historical, formal, or aesthetic.

   Although we all agree on the importance of exposing undergraduates to poetry early in their literary studies, our practice, section to section, in the Introduction to Poetry prerequisite varies widely. Some of us use mostly modern and contemporary poems for reading and discussion; others attempt a broader historical coverage. Some of us teach sonnets as a poetic for critical analysis; others regard it as a needless chore whose main effect is to interfere with the appreciation of rhythm. In our individual sections, we may give more or less weight to literary history, to formal analysis, to cultural or historical contexts, or to questions of emotional and aesthetic response.

   I teach poetry as a whole-brain experience, and I organize this syllabus to treat the various mental activities that poems engage. It seems to me that even though our responses to poems are strongly conditioned by cultural forces, their poems nevertheless make their impact on us through their simultaneously unfolding meanings and affects. When I teach poetry I try to probe the meaning-structures of pOEIY (words, syntax, lines, figures, voice), its affects (sound patterns, stress rhythms), and its emotional and its logical structures (or poetic forms). All the while I try to remind students that this method, being analytic rather than integrative, differs radically from our primary experience of poetry. To break down a great poem like Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73 is not to experience its power in its beauty, its truth, yet paradoxically, to analyze the integrative complexity of such a poem is to appreciate its impact.

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Chair's Column

It is my distinct pleasure to write this, my first newsletter to our alumni/ae and friends. In July of 2003 I returned from a year's sabbatical and leave to assume the chairship of the English Department. I came to the position at an auspicious moment, though one also marked by difficult budgetary constraints. The Department has benefited immensely over the last half decade from the creative and committed leadership of Linc Faller and Patyi Young. They left behind a legacy of intellectual excitement, collegial governance, and a solid draft of our long-range planning document mapping out our goals, challenges, and priorities for the next decade.

Last Fall, the Graduate Program admitted 28 students (18 MAAs and 10 PhDs) from an applicant pool of 900. I had a chance to meet with them during their first days on campus—all of them anxious about classes and living arrangements and schedules but eager to take on the new challenges of graduate study. At the Department's faculty reception on September 17th, 19 new faculty—Professors William Ingram, Lyall Powers, Jay Robinson and Russell Fraser—joined our constituents in this impressive new faculty: Jennifer Wenzel (postcolonial African and Indian literatures and cultures), Laura Kassich (poetry and action), Gregg Cran (19th century American literature), Khaled Mattawa (poetry), Sunil Agnani (Modern and contemporary literatures), and Barbara Hodgeton (early modern English). And throughout the year we have reached in excess of 12,500 students, approximately 800 of whom are majors, and 300 of whom graduated with degrees in English in April.

Much of our energy during the Fall term went to the completion of our Long-Range Plan. The completion of our long-range plan brought to fruition of our long-range plan. The completion of our long-range plan brought to fruition of the Department's Long-Range Plan. The completion of our long-range plan brought to fruition of the Department's Long-Range Plan. The completion of our long-range plan brought to fruition of our many programs, our students, and our faculty. Support for fellowships for our MAA students is a high priority in fundraising; as is support for a strategic fund that will allow us to attract and retain stellar scholar-teachers. We are also seeking support for the Prison Creative Arts Project, the Bear River Writers' Program, the New England Literature Program—three programs within the Department that continue our history of community involvement and alternative education opportunities.

The focus of this year's newsletter is the teaching of poetry in the early 21st century. Macklin Smith, our dedicated newsletter editor, asked faculty to tell you about their classroom approaches to poetic texts and to issues of aesthetics and culture. We hope this issue of our newsletter gives you an opportunity to remember back to your engagement with poetry in your undergraduate and/or graduate courses here at Michigan and to learn about contemporary approaches in today's classrooms.

In the next several months, the Department will be preparing plans for the University's current development campaign, officially launched this May. We are hoping to raise $10,000,000.00 in support of our many programs, our students, and our faculty. Support for fellowships for our MAA students is a high priority in fundraising; as is support for a strategic fund that will allow us to attract and retain stellar scholar-teachers. We are also seeking support for the Prison Creative Arts Project, the Bear River Writers' Program, the New England Literature Program—three programs within the Department that continue our history of community involvement and alternative education opportunities.

Throughout the year our faculty continued to excel in their achievements, a few of which I catalog for you. Two of our junior faculty, Eileen Pollack and Anne Curzan, earned tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. Peter Ho Davies has won a Guggenheim Fellowship for next year. Anita Norich won a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania Center for Advanced Judaic Studies for next year. Linda Gregerson's collection of poems, Negative Capability, was selected this year's winner of the University of Michigan Press Book Award. For her book, The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England, Val Taub has received the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women's award for the best book published in 2002-2003. Poet Lorin Goodison was selected this year to receive a Henry Russell Award for 2004. This award, recognizing both exceptional scholarship and conspicuous ability as a teacher, is one of the highest honors the University bestows upon members of the faculty. John Rubadeau earned the title of Senior Lecturer effective September 1, 2004. The Senior Lectureship is a five-year appointment that comes with a stipend and a one-time salary increase. And President Mary Sue Coleman directed a year-end funding commitment of $53,000 from the DaimlerChrysler Corporation to the English Department in support of the MAA program.

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It has been another productive year of writing for our faculty. Recent publications include: Richard W. Bailey, Rogue Scholar: The Sinister Life & Celebrated Death of Edward R. Ruoff (4); Enid Bratcher, The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography (3); J. Edward Chamberlin, If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground (8); Anne Curzan, Gender Shifts in the History of English (1); Anne Curzan and Kimberly Emmons (co-editors), Studies in the History of the English Language: Unfolding Conversations (10); Nicholas Delbanco, The Secret Tom: Writing Fiction by Invitation (3); Simon Gikandi (editor), Encyclopedia of African Literature (12); Simon Gikandi (editor), Death and the King's Horseman (13); Arlene R. Keizer, Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery (9); Khalid Mattawa, Zodiac of Echoes (14); Kahled Mattawa (translator), Miracle Maker: The Selected Poems of Fadhl Al-Azzawi (13); Thylas Moss, Frenzy 675 (CD) (16); Lyall Powers, Alien Heart: The Life and Work of Margaret Laurence (2); Michael Schoeffel, et al. (editors), Imagining Death in Spencer and Milton (4); Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (11); Donka Minkova and Therese Tinkle (co-editors), Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H.A. Kelly (7).

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My tongue
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Fire runs under my skin
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I freeze
with a sweat that seizes me
all trembling.
No longer can I see (you).
White with fear, I am, truly
mortal to myself (I seem to be:)
(a little less than dying).
Still, all that is heavy must be endured,
Even by a woman lacking.
Reflecting on her translation, Erin realized she took "unintentional liberties with line breaks and rhythm" because she was thinking "only of the breath of the poem." She needed more breathing room in English: "I wanted to give the poem space, to allow Sappho time for her extreme reactions." To come closer to Sappho, Erin created greater distance from Greek.

Reading these versions might lead us to wonder, what about the original text? What was Sappho really saying? This is one of the central questions raised by my course on "Sappho and the Lyric Tradition." The poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that Sappho has become a translation without an original. Can we even imagine Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho?

While the reversal of original and translated text may seem counterintuitive at first, it prompts the class to think about questions of authorship, authority, and authenticity. Throughout the course, I use poetry written in the name of Sappho to complicate our understanding of not only Greek, but also the complexities of translation.

Jennifer Wenzel joined us as an Assistant Professor of Global Anglophone literatures in Fall 2003, after teaching at Stonehill College in Massachusetts and at the University of Montana. In her first two years at Michigan, Wenzel will be teaching courses on fiction from West Africa and from South Asia, and on cultural/political representation and indigenous peoples during and after the era of European imperialism. A cluster of concerns that inform her current research projects, including an articulation of how she terms "anti-imperialist nostalgia" points to and beyond the limits of contemporary postcolonial theory. Her book project, "Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Millenarian Movements," examines how these spectacularly "failed" nineteenth century movements—and the prophetic visions that inspire them—survive into the postcolonial era as repositories of images available for recuperation by a range of nationalist projects, whether hegemonic, oppositional, or otherwise.

Wenzel writes:
Part of what I enjoy about joining the department, which I have found to be supportive in the best ways—joining intellectual lives of interpersonal warmth. Having so many smart, dynamic junior faculty colleagues has been wonderful, and the formal and informal ways in which we share experiences have helped me to avoid re-inventing any number of wheels. My research projects have benefited from them and from conversations with senior colleagues in a wide range of fields, who have gone out of their way to welcome me and to share their savvy and passion about the institution and the profession. I'm also excited to be making connections with important interdisciplinary conversations here inside the department, in African and South Asian studies.

Khaled Mattawa comes to Michigan from the University of Texas, where he was an Assistant Professor of English. He was born in Benghazi, Libya, in 1979 he immigrated to the United States. He lived in the South for many years, finishing high school in Louisiana and completing bachelor's degrees in political science and economics at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Mattawa earned an MA in English and an MFA in creative writing from Indiana University. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts translation fellowship, and the Alfred Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University, and two Pushcart Prizes. His poems have appeared in Poetry, The Kenyon Review, Ploughshares, Exquisite Corpse, Antioch Review, and the Best American Poetry. Mattawa is also the translator of four volumes of Arabic poetry.

Mattawa writes:
"I am delighted to join one of the most prestigious English departments in the country, and one of the premier creative writing programs. My colleagues have shown great enthusiasm and hospitality upon my arrival, and I have made wonderful new friends among them. The department's overall ambitious spirit is coupled with an encouraging and inspiring atmosphere. Ann Arbor is compact and full of cultural riches. I have had a wonderful semester, and look forward to many more.

Gregg Crane comes to Michigan as an Associate Professor after stints at the University of Washington and Miami University of Ohio. With a Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, and a J.D. From Hastings School of Law, Gregg is not only an expert in early nineteenth-century American literature but also in the burgeoning field of law-and-literature studies. His book, Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2002), focuses on the way law thinking in the making of nineteenth century literature, law, and culture. He is currently working on a new project on the idea of flux in American literature, focusing on pragmatist arguments for notions of value that encompass, rather than deny, the possibilities of change. Crane writes:
I love the relative diversity and resultant level of engagement of my students here. My lecture class of 70 is more talkative than my seminars at my previous institution. Attending several scholarly presentations this term, I have been repeatedly struck by the richness and vitality of this Department and University. And I am thrilled at the prospect of entering into conversation with (and learning from) colleagues in English and other fields, such as CAAS, law history, and philosophy. The intellectual opportunities and resources of this place strike me as inescusuable.

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Crane writes:
For when I look on you
(just a little)
speaking is possible
no more.
My tongue
breaks
into silence.
Fire runs under my skin
I burn
(with thunder in my ears).
I freeze
with a sweat that seizes me
all trembling.
No longer can I see (you).
White with fear, I am, truly
mortal to myself (I seem to be:)
(a little less than dying).
Still, all that is heavy must be endured,
Even by a woman lacking.
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cal co-optation went unfelt beneath the of power for the use of corporations, was ment relied on literary reference in order The corporation behind this advertise be like ‘1984.’” Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984 won’t scene fades, printed words come on our Olympic hammer. She seems overshad color in this limitless mass-produced gray of “pure ideology.” As the head speaks, a ebrate the “Information Purification” that computer screen, addressing another dog seated below him. “On the Internet,” the higher dog says, “nobody knows you’re nobody knows you’re a dog.” While it is clear that word process- ing and email rely on letters and should be the domain of English departments, it is also clear that the copy-and-paste conve- nience of the Web makes misrepresenta- tion—including plagiarism—seductively easy. As Sir Walter Scott observed, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, / When first we practice to deceive.” It is no wonder that English departments, valorizing lan- guage and the voices of authors, came to the potentially deceptive web much later than did physics departments. But the real question is, especially now that the than did physics departments. But the real question is, especially now that the useful a computer?), have been around for quite a while. In World War II, the modern electronic computer was developed for military use and by the 1950s we were all being admonished by our Industrial Establishment creditors not to “penel fold, spindle, or mutilate” the punch-card bills we received each month. The machine was programming us in its image, a scary thought recalling Nineteen Eighty-Four. Then, on the real January 22, 1984, during Super Bowl XVIII, the most famous single advertisement of all time was broadcast. Rank after rank of indistin- guishable gray workers shuffle in unison into a vast auditorium and sit slack-jawed before a huge gray screen filled with a talking head admonishing them to cele- brate the “Information Purification” that will homogenize everyone in the service of “pure ideology.” As the head speaks, a vibrant woman athlete, the only spot of color in the mass-produced gray- ness, changes through the ranks toward the front of the auditorium brandishing an Olympic hammer. She seems overshadowed by the obvious project head as she spins, strains, and hurls the hammer at the screen. It arcs and smashes, splintering the image and silencing its voice. As the scene fades, printed words come on a screen and an announcer speaks to us: “On January 24, Apple Computers will introduce the Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984 won’t be like 1984.” The corporation behind this advertise ment relied on literary reference in order to assert in palpable terms that the dom- inance of a translation frame the reservation of power for the use of corporations, was about to end. The irony of this rhetori- cal co-optation went unfelt beneath the thral of visible iconoclast. The age of the individual would dawn, putting tools in the hands of all; hammers that could smash, build or figure in Olympic (video) games. And English departments changed a little. Most began, rather slowly for the first few years, to use word processors.

And email, too, after a while. In 1992, Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web as an aid to physicists around the world, a communication pro- tocol that allowed hyperlinked access to resources anywhere on the Internet. In 1993, Marc Andreessen wrote Mosaic, the first graphical user interface for accessing the multi-media content of the Web. This was the precursor of the modern web browsers we all use all the time, and this, as they say, changed everything. The computer stopped being just a hammer; it became our all-purpose toolkit for the world of information. And it happened barely a decade ago.

The impact of the Web on the world was immediate. Already on July 5, 1993, cartoonist Peter Steiner, in The New Yorker, showed a dog seated on a chair in front of a computer screen, addressing another dog seated below him. “On the Internet,” the higher dog says, “nobody knows you’re a dog.” While it is clear that word process- ing and email rely on letters and should be the domain of English departments, it is also clear that the copy-and-paste conve- nience of the Web makes misrepresenta- tion—including plagiarism—seductively easy. As Sir Walter Scott observed, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, / When first we practice to deceive.” It is no wonder that English departments, valorizing lan- guage and the voices of authors, came to the potentially deceptive web much later than did physics departments. But the real question is, especially now that the useful
one in my forty-student assembly of advanced English majors had ever read or been taught T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, my choice (at least to me) was clear. Using a fine new edition of the poem that I collected, I read from the books Eliot summoned to his side as he wrote this most important and difficult poem of the “high modernist” period, we ventured together into Eliot’s text.

Yet, even with teachers’ astute notes, the essays and reviews, and my own lectures helped to elucidate the poem, but what struck all of us most powerfully—them for the first time, me all over again—was how dazzlingly and unresolvably complex this work is, how its broken form and ambiguous images force us to offer a reading and then, often, to maintain also its opposite. The 434 lines of The Waste Land are filled with and surrounded by spaces that are both legible and resistive interpretative bridges. We worked together at a level of detail that, I think, surprised many in the class, to understand not only what each line meant, but how Eliot’s thought and feeling moved from one line to the next. It became increasingly clear, as meanings exfoliated and the transitive possibilities of every section continued to unfold, that we were caught in a text “taping the atmosphere of unknown terror and mystery in which our life is passed,” as Eliot puts it in an essay published in 1922, the year of the poem’s publication.

Our conversations about this poem moved always along lines laid down by fundamental questions: who, what, why, how? They did not, for the most part, trail off quite as inconclusively and desperately as Eliot’s queries in this stanza, and yet their answers remained open-ended, as does this stanza, with its last word, “Unreal.” The poem describes the once-magnificent cities, now that they have fallen, and expresses too the fact that destruction, if carried out on a sufficiently monstrous scale, becomes scarcely comprehensible.

I plan to continue teaching The Waste Land in my modern novels class, not only because of its centrality to the period and to the century, but because its lessons in reading and in insisting on attention guiding men and women toward a hopeful future, makes their vision of people and a world deeply unsettled by questions of things coming to pieces—a disintegration that occurs before our eyes, on this page, in Eliot’s stanza as well as in the world that provokes his poem.

Our conversations about this poem moved always along lines laid down by fundamental questions: who, what, why, how? They did not, for the most part, trail off quite as inconclusively and desperately as Eliot’s queries in this stanza, and yet their answers remained open-ended, as does this stanza, with its last word, “Unreal.” The poem describes the once-magnificent cities, now that they have fallen, and expresses too the fact that destruction, if carried out on a sufficiently monstrous scale, becomes scarcely comprehensible.

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These three questions are unpunctuated, as though the horror and surreal specificity of details that follow “what,” “who,” “what” overwhelm the initial impulse to discover the substance and the identity of the forces leashing society apart. The questions themselves give way to the most basic of linguistic forms: a list. The stanza degenerates, under the pressure of its subject, into proper nouns that are then wiped with the final, solitary adjective: “Unreal.” That these nouns once denoted the glorious sites of civilization, positioned like a bright constellation guiding men and women toward a hopeful future, makes their haphazard assembly as mere names, trailing off at this stanza’s end, an expressive emblem of all that has been lost in the violent beginning of the twentieth century. “Falling towers,” isolated in its own line, set in falling rhythm—treading on its insistence on the pattern of iamb/s/1 most common in English), captures in its brevity and its awful, general applicability to any place, any time, the horror of things coming to pieces—a disintegration that occurs before our eyes, on this page, in Eliot’s stanza as well as in the world that provokes his poem.

One of the courses I teach on poetry (Introduction to Poetry, Victorian Poetry and Prose, Nineteenth-century Poets, Contemporary Women Poets and Feminist Critics, Lyric Theory) my favorite has been “Sappho and the Lyric Tradition.” We begin by reading various English translations of Sappho, the Greek archaic poet whose songs survive only in fragments, and then we study a long history of poets who have imitated the Sapphic fragments in their own poetry.

Early in the semester, I ask my students to translate one of Sappho’s most famous poems, known as “Fragment 1.” I don’t expect them to know ancient Greek for this exercise. I hand out a “crib”—a list of words and phrases in the target language that is publicly available scholarship. The Web has made peer editing, collaborative writing, and every other aspect of communal creation and refinement of writing visible and convenient.

The collaboration potentiated by the Web is hardly limited to prose. U-M Professor David Porter’s students in eighteen centu-

The Waste Land

Published in 1922, the year of the poem’s publication, T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is a complex and challenging work that delves into the themes of modernity, disillusionment, and the disintegration of society. The poem’s open-ended nature and mystery, as well as its rich symbolism and ALL RIGHTS RESERVED 2014-2015

[Image 9x748 to 60x819]

[Image 9x9 to 1251x54]
In the final chapter of this book, we explore the concept of poetry and its importance in modern society. Poetry, as a form of expression, has been used throughout history to convey emotions, ideas, and social commentary. In this chapter, we will examine the various forms of poetry, including sonnets, free verse, and rhyming poetry, and discuss their unique characteristics.

We will also examine the role of poetry in contemporary society, including its use in political protest, social commentary, and cultural expression. We will explore the ways in which poetry can be used to challenge societal norms and to promote social change, as well as to express personal emotions and experiences.

In addition, we will discuss the role of poetry in education, including its use as a tool for teaching language and creativity. We will examine the techniques used by poets to create meaning and emotion in their work, and we will consider the ways in which poetry can be used to foster critical thinking and analytical skills.

Finally, we will explore the role of poetry in contemporary culture, including its use in film, music, and other forms of media. We will examine the ways in which poetry can be used to create a sense of community and to bring people together, and we will consider the ways in which poetry can be used to express individuality and creativity.

Overall, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of poetry in modern society, and to encourage readers to explore and appreciate this important art form for themselves.
What interpretations might work for this? What is going on with this smeared syntax? turn are modified by a prepositional phrase

Obviously the rushing, comma-less syntax a long series of ultra-long free verse lines.

2) In Allen Ginsburg’ s Howl mocked. weak, frivolous, a thing to be scorned and attitude: love-making is unmanly, delicate, play and rhythm to express his character’ s stand that Shakespeare has used sound time on “lute” provides a wonderfully derisive cli (nimbl

ey anecdotes and eyeball kicks and whispering facts and memories and

I often use non-literary poetry, such as

anecdotes be screamed? Can memories

or in succession? Does yacketayackking

That carries you off,

Your person fair, and feel a certain zest....

By all the needs and notions of my kind,

These are the sorts of things we notice and

and syntactic patterns and figures of

language that has been carefully chosen on the previous rhyme (and actually form

wonderfully absurd rhyme-chain. “Cough” the pun on “cough,” “coffin,” and, by implica

The fun doesn’t stop there. We also have the pun on “tough,” “tough,” and, by implica-

MILBAY gaveld the male-soonnet tradition a

And approach greater accuracy of both representing and understanding this manner, students of this poetics find equivalent infinities that

does rupture, into what does it break? What then become equivalences equivalence? At which scales does equivalence break down, and, if it

Metaphor as equation invites questions: Does metaphor hold true in both

The nets of various polyhedra can be useful in mapping

Poetics of Flux,” demonstrating in changing name alone how poems

I offer an understanding of poetry as failed effort to capture this, poetry an attempt to come to awareness of the world that time no longer exists by the time a poem is experienced through writing or reading in my courses. That failure is, for me, a recent moment of inspired desperation, “Fork Poetics.”

Patterns of existence appear to countless uncorrelated locations and existences, some of which may be identified through dynamic systems models, yet the particular journey which a particular journey is experienced, Ideas of connection are made

FORK POETICS IN 500 WORDS

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How we Teach Poetry

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

one in my forty-student assembly of advanced English majors had ever read or been taught T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, my choice (at least to me) was clear. Using a fine new edition of the poem that was in my library, I found the book Eliot summoned to his side as he wrote this most important and difficult poem of the “high modernist” period; we ventured together into Eliot's text.

There are no text gestures. Quoting a short passage from the fifth section with questions raised by the arrangement of words on the page, text, and never to allow a sense of mastery to replace entirely that space, its rhythms and rhymes beginning and then stopping or cause the text progresses elliptically, its lines surrounded by white space, its emotions moved from one line to the other, its fragments caught in a text “taping the atmosphere of unknown terror and its awful, general applicability to any place, any time, the horror of the twentieth century. “Falling towers,” isolated in its own line, set in falling rhythm trochees (landing on the stress or accent pattern of iamb 1 / x) most common in English), captures its brevity and its awful, general applicability to any place, any time, the horror of the twentieth century. The questions them-

These three questions are unpunctuated, as though the horror and surreal specificity of details that follow “What,” “Who,” “What” overwhelm the initial impulse to discover the substance and the identity of the forces tearing society apart. The questions them-

The Waste Land is, how its broken form and ambiguous images force us to of all over again—was how dazzlingly and unresolvably complex this text. Yes, the textual apparatus, and the notes, and the essays and line-by-line in class, I send the students home to ponder the

My choice (at least to me) was clear. Using a fine new edition of the poem that was in my library, I found the book Eliot summoned to his side as he wrote this most important and difficult poem of the “high modernist” period; we ventured together into Eliot's text.

What is that sound high in the air?...
Individual would dawn, putting tools in the
of power for the use of corporations, was
management of the mainframe, the reservation
relied on literary reference in order
be like ‘1984.’"

On
she spins, strains, and hurls the hammer at
Olympic hammer. She seems overshad
the front of the auditorium brandishing an
ness, charges through the ranks toward
Talking head admonishing them to cel
before a huge gray screen filled with a

1984, during Super Bowl XVIII, the most
famous single advertisement of all time
was broadcast. Rank after rank of indistin-
guishable gray workers shuffle in unison
into a vast auditorium and sit slack-jawed
before a huge gray screen filled with a
talking head admonishing them to cel-
brate the “Information Purification” that
will homogenize everyone in the service
of “pure ideology.” As the head speaks,
a vibrant woman athlete, the only spot
of color in this mass-produced gray-
ness, charges through the ranks toward
the front of the auditorium brandishing
an Olympic hammer. She seems overshadowed
by the obvious project ahead as she
spins, strains, and hurls the hammer at
the screen. It arcs and splashes, splitting
the image and silencing its voice. As
the scene fades, printed words come on the
screen and an announcer speaks to us: “On
January 24, Apple will introduce a New
Version of the Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984
won’t be like 1984.”

The corporation behind this advertise-
ment relied on literary reference in order
to assert in palatable terms that the domi-
nance of translation foams the reservation
of power for the use of corporations, was
about to end. The irony of this rhetorical
collaboration went unfelt beneath the thrill
of visible iconoclasms. The age of the
individual would dawn, putting tools in the
hands of all, hammers that could smash,
bond or figure in Olympic (video) games.
And English departments changed a little.
Most began, rather slowly for the first few
years, to use word processors.
And email, too, after a while.
In 1992, Tim Berners-Lee invented the
World Wide Web as an aid to research
around the world, a communication pro-
tocol that allowed hyperlinked access
to resources anywhere on the Internet.
In 1993, Marc Andreessen wrote Mosaic,
the first graphical user interface for accessing
the multi-media content of the Web.
This was the precursor of the modern
web browsers we all use all the time,
and, as they say, changed everything.
The computer stopped being just a hammer;
it became our all-purpose toolkit for
the world of information. And it happened
barely a decade ago.

The impact of the Web on the world was
immediate. Already on July 5, 1993, car-
toontist Peter Steiner, in The New Yorker,
showed a dog seated on a chair in front
of a computer screen, addressing another
dog seated below him. “On the Internet,”
the higher dog says, “nobody knows you’re a
dog.” While it is clear that word process-
ing and email rely on letters and should be
the domain of English departments, it is
also clear that the copy-and-paste conve-

tion of the Web makes misrepresenta-
tion—including plagiarism—seductively
easy. As Sir Walter Scott observed, “Oh,
a tangle web we weave…” When first
we practice to deceive.” It is no wonder
that English departments, valorizing lan-

guage and the voices of authors, came to
the potentially destructive Web much later
than did physics departments. But the real
question is, especially now that the
Web is pervasive, what sort of Web shall
we weave?

U-M Professor John Whitter-Ferguson
offers this justifiably enthusiastic catalog
of strands:

I find it difficult to imagine how I’d teach
without computers and, particularly,
without the Internet. [Introducing] linking my stu-
dents up with a world of … resources that are already out there in the virtual
library that I am always connected to.
I use—and I believe a number of my stu-
dents use—digital research tools on a
daily basis: the Oxford English Dic-
tionary, encyclopedias, bibliical resources,
concordances, hypernet suites, MobySoft, abe books (for rare and out of
print books). I certainly could not teach
writing or conduct class business one
tenth as efficiently without email, which
I use for my classes on a daily basis
as well. I have students sending me
paragraphs, paper ideas, outlines, draft
materials, questions about particular
writing issues, and I cannot imagine a
more focused and productive way to
supplement conversations in my office.
In many ways, I find that when stu-
dents have to write rather than speak
their ideas, the work we do around
our written exchanges is actually more
productive than conversations. With
my graduate students, not all of whom
are even working on campus, I have
been having dissertation chapters in
attachment form … and I respond to them
electronically as well. Again, the
detail and the simplicity of this process
are worth a great deal to me and to my
students. …[E]ven with something as
taken-for-granted as email is these days,
structure of the Greek text: each stanza is composed of three long
lines and a short line at the end, thus retaining some of the rhyth-
mic effects of the poem in Greek. But sometimes his seemingly
literal translation flares out into something surprisingly figurative
(as in “bladed envy,” punning on green grass). Nevertheless, as
Stokes wrote about trying to find Sappho “through the layered
cartography of translation,” he tried to stay close to the phrasing
of the original text. He retained the beginning of the fifth stanza
to show how the translator may lose his way: after this fragmentary
line the poem fades into silence, because the rest of the Greek text
is missing.

By contrast, Kate Epstein decided to omit this final line. She put
a period after death and ended the poem dramatically:
Opposite you a man might sit
feeling himself to be a god,
lean close to your sweet speak-

ing, hear
your alluring laugh, while—
the
heart shudders in my breast, when
I look at you a moment, speak-
ing is impossible.

Silence breaks
my tongue
threads of fire
run in my flesh

my eyes can
not see, my ears ring
and roar.

Cold sweat seizes
me, trembling
covers me, crimson
with fear
I seem close
to death.

Kate’s version made the poem look increasingly fragmented after
the second stanza. In the third stanza, when “silence breaks / to
your immediate fire runs me fleshily through,” when I even glimpse you speak-
ing, hear,
and the seduction of laughing which
always terrifies the heart in my breast,
for when I look at you a moment, speak-
ing not any more is possible.

my tongue has only this silence, subtle
impression is impossible.

When I look at you a moment, speak-
ing, hear,
and the seduction of laughing which
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When I look at you a moment, speak-
ing, hear,
Parentheses were also used by Erin Galligan as a structuring device of the line for these needs to be fulfilled. The suffix of ‘rest-’ could be explained. “So I listed the things the speaker lacks, leaving the rest to imagination. She got rid of possessive pronouns in stanza three (‘to give is less’ and ‘less’ and ‘less’) and by repeating the suffix ‘less’ and ‘less’ and ‘less’ she reinterpreted the poem as a meditation on loss. “I took possession of the poem to create a sense of distance as well as the complex passions they can discover in, and for, poetry.

Reflecting on her translation, Erin realized she took “unintentional liberties with line breaks and rhythm” because she was thinking “only of the breath of the poem.” She needed more breathing room in English “I wanted to give the poem space, to allow Sappho time for her extreme reactions.” To come closer to Sappho, Erin created greater distance from Greek.

Reading these versions might lead us to wonder, what about the original text? What was Sappho really saying? This is one of the central questions raised by my course on “Sappho and the Lyric Tradition.” The poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that central questions raised by my course on “Sappho and the Lyric Tradition.” The poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that the poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that the poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that the poems of Sappho are so fragmentary, it seems that Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of Sappho’s poetry is a site of reading and writing that requires both translation and interpretation. Erin’s translation of Fragment 31 before translation, or is it possible that translation comes before the original to create the very idea of
It is my distinct pleasure to write this, my first newsletter to our alumni/ae and friends. In July of 2003 I returned from a year’s sabbatical and leave to assume the chairmanship of the English Department. I came to the position on an auspicious moment, though one also marked by difficult budgetary constraints. The Department has benefited immensely over the last half decade from the creative and committed leadership of Lin Faller and Paty Yager. They left behind a legacy of intellectual excitement, collegial governance, and a solid draft of our long-range planning document mapping out our goals, challenges, and priorities for the next decade.

Last fall, the Graduate Program admitted 28 students (18 MAIs and 10 PhDs) from an applicant pool of 900. I had a chance to meet with them during their first days on campus—all of them anxious about classes and living arrangements and schedules but eager to take on the new challenges of graduate school. At the Department’s faculty reception on September 19th, our impressive new faculty: Jennifer Wenzel (postcolonial African and Indian literatures and cultures), Laura Kaschilke (poetry and fiction), Gregg Cran (19th century American literature), Khaleed Mattawa (poetry), Sunil Agrawal (Anarchist Studies), and Barbara Hodgon (early modern and Shakespearean literature). Throughout the year our faculty continued to excel in their achievements, a few of which I catalog for you. Two of our junior faculty, Seline Pollack and Anne Czuraj earned tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. Peter Ho Davies has won a Guggenheim Fellowship for next year. Anita Norich has won a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Advanced Judaic Studies for next year. Linda Gengerson’s collection of poems, Negative Capability, was selected this year’s winner of the University of Michigan Press Book Award. For her book, The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England, Val Truby has received the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women’s award for the best book published in 2002-2003. Poet Lorna Goodison was recently selected to receive a Hennessey Award for 2004. This award recognizing both exceptional scholarship and conspicuous ability as a teacher, is one of the highest honors the University bestows upon members of the faculty. John Rubadeau earned the title of Senior Lecturer effective September 1, 2004. The Senior Lecturership is a five-year appointment that comes with a stipend and a one-time salary increase. And President Mary Sue Coleman directed a year-end funding commitment of $33,000 from the DaimlerChrysler Corp Foundation to support the English Department in support of the MFA program.

In the next several months, the Department will be preparing plans for the University’s current development campaign, officially launched this May. We are hoping to raise $50,000,000, in part of our many programs, our students, and our faculty. Support for fellowships for our MFA students is a high priority in fundraising, as is support for a strategic fund that will allow us to attract and retain stellar scholars-teachers. We are also seeking support for the Prison Creative Arts Project, the Bear River Writers’ Program, the New England Literature Program—three programs within the department that continue our history of community involvement and alternative education opportunities.

The focus of this year’s newsletter is the teaching of poetry in the early 21st century. Macklin Smith, our dedicated newsletter editor, asked faculty to tell you about their classroom approaches to poetic texts and to issues of aesthetics and culture. We hope this issue of our newsletter gives you an opportunity to remember back to your engagement with poetry in your undergraduate and/or graduate courses here at Michigan and to learn about contemporary approaches in today’s classrooms.

I cannot end without saying how much we depend upon the support of our alumni/ae and friends in initiating, implementing, and maintaining our many endeavors and programs. We are poised for another great year, despite the ever-grim budget news and the ever-increasing numbers. In this time of budget pressure, we remain committed to retaining our nationally and internationally recognized faculty and recruiting the most outstanding scholars to join our ranks. We also remain committed to serving our undergraduates, majors and non-majors alike, and to attracting exceptionally talented graduate students. To meet the challenges and achieve our goals, we will need your considerable help. Your gifts, large and small, will help us to sustain this Department’s and this University’s reputation for excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service to the larger community.

It has been another productive year of writing for our faculty. Recent publications include: Richard W. Bailey, Rogue Scholar: The Sinister Life & Celebrated Death of Edward R. Rulloff (6); Erich Brater, The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography (3); J. Edward Chamberlin, If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground (8); Anne Czuraj, Gender Shifts in the History of English (11); Anne Czuraj and Kimberly Emmens (co-editors), Studies in the History of the English Language & Unfolding Conversations (10); Nicholas DeBacian, The Secretion Form: Writing Fiction by Imiation (3); Simon Gikandi (editor), Encyclopedia of African Literature (12); Simon Gikandi (editor), Death and the Kings) Horseman (13); Arlene R. Keizer, Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery (9); Khaled Mattawa, Zodiac of Echoes (14); Mikhail Magid, Taking. Magic Maker: The Selected Poems of Fadhil Al-Azzawi (13); Thylas Moss, Frenzy 675 (CD) (16); Lyall Powers, Alien Heart: The Life and Work of Margaret Laurence (2); Michael Schoenfeldt, et al. (editors), Imagining Death: Spernon and Milton (4); Seline Pollack and Julia Watson, Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives (11); Donka Minkova and Therese Tinkle (co-editors), Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H.A. Kelly (5).

We invite you to visit our website to get re-acquainted with our faculty and programs. http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/ENGLISH

We are always thankful for the generosity of our alumni/ae and friends, and for their gifts large and small.

The University of Michigan has just announced its new campaign, “The Michigan Difference.” The Department of English Language and Literature has set the following fundraising goals for this campaign: a robust strategic fund; graduate fellowships; endowed program support, and endowed professorships. With your help, we hope to raise $13 million by the end of the campaign in December 2008.

If you would like to help shape the Department’s future, please consider:

Supporting our Strategic Fund. Our strategic fund enables the Chair to attract and retain faculty and to respond to scholarly, curricular, and program opportunities as they arise. Every gift, regardless of amount, makes a difference.

Supporting graduate fellowships. Fellowship monies enable us to attract the very best graduate students to our MFA, Language, Literature, and English and Women’s Studies graduate programs.

Supporting specific programs. We hope to ensure the long-term futures of our established and innovative programs, including the Bear River Writer’s Conference, the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP), the New England Literature Program (NELP), the Hopwood Program, and the Visiting Writers Program.

Supporting faculty. Endowed professorships help us attract the most promising junior faculty and internationally recognized senior faculty to our department.

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

Professor Notes

Program Notes

The LS&A Development team is always ready to talk with potential donors about various ways of making a lasting difference at the University of Michigan, including a bequest commitment or a gift annuity or charitable remainder trust (both of which generate income in one’s lifetime). If you would like additional information about who we are and what we do, or if you would like to explore the numerous ways you might make a gift to the Department of English Language and Literature, please contact Deb Kocessy (734) 998-7324 or dkocessy@umich.edu.

We are inviting you to visit our website to get re-acquainted with our faculty and programs.

http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/ENGLISH

We are always thankful for the generosity of our alumni/ae and friends, and for their gifts large and small.
We are strong in poetry. Many of us do our primary research in poetry, poetic, or a particular group of poets, and no less than a dozen faculty members have published books of poems. We bring poetry to local and international literary audiences and to many campus settings, from Computer Center workshops to Cancer Center vigils. We staff interdisciplinary poetry courses with the School of Music and the College of Engineering. Within our Department, we nurture a talented cohort of emerging poets in our MFA Program, and we attract promising students from many different cultural, historical, and personal backgrounds. Our students publish poems in many national literary journals, and we sponsor an annual campus poetry contest.

Our research in poetry is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or Vietnam-era veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, admissions. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination and affirmative action, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin or ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, admissions, and all other university programs.

The English Department offers many literary courses, but poetry is a favorite of many of our students. Although we all agree on the importance of exposing undergraduates to poetry early in their literary study, our practice, section by section, varies widely. Some of us use mostly modern and contemporary poems for reading and discussion; others attempt to expose all of our students to some exempla from the past, and many include both modern and traditional poetry. Occasionally, we use poems in combination with works on other literary traditions. We are strong in poetry. Many of us do our primary research in poetry, poetics, and literature and creative writing courses that focus on it. It is a central part of our English programs. The English Department offers many literary courses, but poetry is a favorite of many of our students. Although we all agree on the importance of exposing undergraduates to poetry early in their literary study, our practice, section by section, varies widely. Some of us use mostly modern and contemporary poetry for reading and discussion; others attempt to expose all of our students to some exempla from the past, and many include both modern and traditional poetry. Occasionally, we use poems in combination with works on other literary traditions. We are strong in poetry. Many of us do our primary research in poetry, poetics, and literature and creative writing courses that focus on it. It is a central part of our English programs.