

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

Edmond, Oklahoma

Dr. Joe Jackson College of Graduate Studies

**POETRY OF LITERARY STUDIES**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

By

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Edmond, Oklahoma

2017

Poetry of Literary Studies

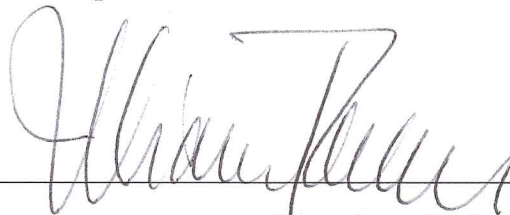
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APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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## **Abstract**

Section 1. Poems inspired by classes attended.

Dante.

Age of Chaucer.

Nineteenth Century.

Eighteenth Century.

African-American Women Writers.

Twentieth Century.

Ethnic Literature.

Section II. Personal Poems.

See separate index.

In this section of my thesis, I have selected certain sections of *The Inferno*, which impressed. My aim has been to shorten and clarify the sections without changing the tenor of each tale. I have tried to use much of the text of the English translation. Mostly I wanted to impart the terror I experienced as I read Dante's *Inferno*.

The Malebranch of my poem *The Fifth Bolgia*, are as frightening today as is any modern horror literature. My first reading left me breathless and exhausted as Virgil and the Pilgrim barely make it to the next bolgia before the malebranch descend.

Canto III deals with Limbo. My poem again tries to use many of the original words and lines of Dante, while at the same time, abbreviating the original for a modern reader. A common modern concept of Limbo is that of a place in which one waits for approval before finally ascending to heaven. This is incorrect. Those in Limbo are there forever and seem to unfairly contain the souls of babies unbaptized, as well as all souls who never knew Christianity. Those in Limbo whirl in rain, wind, and cold for eternity.

My third poem, *Metamorphosis* inspired by the *Inferno*, deals with the Cantos that seem to deal with the worst of all punishments... the loss of identity and of individual sinners, as they merge with other deceased persons and with reptiles. In so doing, they lose their unique soul. Again, I have abbreviated the text while retaining the language, the style and many of the words of these Cantos.

### **Canto III of Dante: Limbo**

At the Vestibule of Hell,  
Virgil took the arm of Pilgrim,  
Who read the words above the gate.

Abandon every hope, all you who enter.  
“The words are cruel,” I spoke. Virgil  
Answered, hand on mine, and smiling,

“Leave distrust behind and cowardice  
Die upon this spot.” Reassured, I  
Descended with my guide through Hell.

The whirling storms of Limbo met us  
In an air of endless black, as cries of anguish  
With cadences of anger, met our ears.

The wretched souls who had lived with  
Neither blame nor praise, unknown to God,  
Forever unreceived by Heaven.

“The wretches have no hope of dying  
And they envy every other fate,” whirling naked  
In the cold rain of eternity.

Reaching the sorrowful shore of Acheron,  
Reluctantly rowed by angry Charon  
With coal-burning eyes, we went further into Hell.

## The Fifth Bolgia

In the bubbling, boiling pitch the barrators submerge.

Strange darkness o'er the Malebolge, lamentations all in vain,

A cry "Watch out. Stick him once again." The Malebranche patrol

Flew and skimmed the rocks; black devils, jabbed cruelly.

A sinner moved as bubbles from the pitch betrayed: caught

By ankle tendons, "Here's one, I'll go back for more."

Virgil and the Pilgrim watched as skin was peeled and tendons cut

As Malacoda directed, while cooks like scullery boys

Tamped down with pitchforks sinners floating to the top.

The Malebranche had seen us. Like dogs they sprang upon us.

"Stick 'em good," directed at us, and, "In the rump," but Virgil stood

His ground. "Heaven will let us pass," and Malebranche fell back.

Scarmiglione turned screaming, "You cannot travel straight, the sixth

Arch is broken." Sensing false directions and limited permission, we

Proceeded in haste and apprehension. Farts ringing in our ears.

I recognized some sinners, squatting terrified on the edge of boiling pitch

Ready to submerge at sight of patrolling Barbariccia.

Yet two devils plucked one like an otter from the steaming pitch.

"Hey," one devil called, "Dig your claws down deep into his back.

Peel the skin off him." A fiendish chorus egged on Rubicante

As the sinner wretch was tortured and tormented by his adversaries.

In single file we hurried forth without escort or impediment.

Virgil lead and I behind. Minor fryers on a journey.

Yet I thought of the fiends, like dogs on a hare.

Skin tightening, I searched for Malebranche above rocks, behind our steps,

"Oh master, I am afraid if we don't hide, they're on our tail."

Then I saw them, wings wide open, bearing down.

Virgil saw, held me to his breast, and ran up the rubble of the broken arch.



Slipping, climbing, he held me as he descended to the next bolgia.

Over the edge, then down the rough and stony bank.

Hardly touching rock bottom, they were on us. Above us, ten of them.

Yet safe, as Providence limited them to cleaning the fifth ditch,

And tears of anger and frustration left them powerless to follow.

## **Metomophosis**

Aver Cangiata Faccia: (has changed it's face).

Cantos XXCIV-XXV. Dante.

Dante tells of perhaps the greatest horror of all for the souls described in these cantos as they are fused with other sinners and with grotesque animals. In so fusing, there is no longer a sense of self, nor of individual soul.

In the newborn year the sun renews it rays,  
In Aquarius, nights last as long as days.  
“Stand up,” the master says. “Arise from weariness.”

We saw a naked sinner run by our bank in darkness.  
A snake shot out and bit his neck  
As he flared and crumbled to a heap of ash.

The ashes came together in another form.  
Struggling to arise, the confused shade  
Moaning, and in anguish, he stared about.

Then a serpent with six feet, shot up and hooked  
Another wretch. Biting his face, coiling around,  
Its tail between the sinners legs. No ivy tighter.

The two began melting like hot wax. Fusing  
Head to head, chest to chest, colors mixing.  
Merging into blurred strips of flesh. We watched.

Finally a lizard formed and darted forth. Also arose  
A human form, all former likeness blotted out.  
Neither creature seemed aware of new deformity

The lizard chased from hedge to hedge two remaining sinners,  
Biting at their guts while a serpent also sank its teeth  
And both shades metamorphosed before our gaze.

These spectacles confused our eyes  
And stunned the mind as these wretched  
Shades changed to other souls

**Section Two: The Age of Geoffrey Chaucer**  
Translated by Burton Raffel.

In this section, I chose to concentrate on *The Shipman's Tale*, and also, *The Merchant's Tale*.

In both instances, I have tried to reduce the length of the original story while retaining the context, meter, and rhyme of each tale. In many instances I have used the same original words, phrases, and even lines (italics) where applicable.

I found poetic summary of the original, an extremely useful means of understanding and appreciating Chaucer. Both tales are long. Both are perceptive, human and funny, and poetic summary seems an appropriate manner in which to admire Chaucer.

January and May

From "The Merchant's Tale," Geoffrey Chaucer (Translated by Burton Raffel).

My poem attempts to clarify and crystalize Chaucer's prolix. When possible, I have attempted to use original words, phrases and lines. Those words or lines have been used in sequence. The story told by Chaucer, is reproduced in its entirety yet abbreviated from the original.

## January and May

In Lombardy lived January, *a worthy knight* who  
*For sixty years, a wifeless man was he.*  
In dotage he felt an urge, *an appetite, a terrible rush*  
Praying to God he would marry soon.  
*“To take a wife, is... a glorious thing,*  
*Even more when the man is old and hoary.*  
From clerics and brothers, he received advice,  
But chose a maiden, *there in that town,*  
*Whose beauty gave her great renown.*  
*Although she rated low on the social ladder,*  
*Her youth and beauty satisfied him better.*  
Brother Justinus *hated this raging folly* and  
*Plunged right in with sharp-edged words,*  
*“Don’t worry yourself about your state of bliss,*  
*For she may be, in truth, your purgatory.”*  
Good Justin and his brothers took their leave.  
The marriage arranged as fast as January was able.  
*The priest chanted his prayers as custom expects,*  
*The sign of the cross, God bless them,*  
*The knot tied securely, with holiness.*  
As the wedding continued, carried away, not  
Looking merely, but ravished in a kind of trance  
January felt his heart beat with *intense enchantment.*  
*How ferociously he meant to hold her, tighter*  
*Than Paris held Helen; to attack his fragile,*  
Tender creature. He wished, *“God give me the*  
*Strength... to deal with rising ardor.”* Yet  
Wishing guests *already gone,* servant Damyan  
Carved; everyone danced and ate their fill.  
*The sun had performed its daily arc,*  
*Night’s dark mantle barbarous, replacing day.*  
Old January, finally braying, *“For the love of God,*  
*It’s time for everyone to show their regard*  
*By leaving.”* The bride brought in, *as if dead,*  
*A nuptial from a priest, as January embraced*  
*May, his paradise, his longed-for woman...*  
*Hard bristles on his face... like dogfish scales.*  
*He labored until he saw the sun.* Morning  
Saw how he *bounced like a colt, flirted and winked,*  
*As full of words as a magpie on a branch...*  
*Slack old skin around his neck shaking.*  
O Damyan, alas, was held in Venus’ fire  
With desire for his master’s wife, Lady May.  
Feigning illness, Damyan exchanged a letter

With May visiting with her ladies and January's permission.  
 Finally, a tryst arranged and signaled after January,  
 Eyesight failing, requested both he and his lady share  
 A morning of naked sport and *pleasure* in a walled garden.  
 Hastily, Lady May wrote Damyan of time and place.  
*The noble knight, our January, though old and poorly sighted*  
*Carried a tiny silver key to the secret garden.*  
*Copied in warm wax by Lady May and delivered*  
*With love's quick prying hands to Damyan.*  
*Before a week was over, in the warmth of June,*  
*May had her husband breathing hard, at the thought*  
*Of what they could do in the garden, just them alone.*  
 So early one morning, January asked his wife: "Come,  
*Rise up, my wife, my love, my fair white spouse...*  
*Come let us play, relishing our sport."* Reminding May,  
 "Although I am old, and can no longer see,  
*Stay true to me."* May listened, then quietly,  
*Gave Damyan a simple signal, so he*  
*Should enter the garden before them, and hurriedly.*  
 Fresh May spoke in pleasant words, she objected not  
 As bonded to her husband, *my lord so dear.*  
 Seeing Damyan beneath a bush, *she coughed*  
*And with her fingers signed to him that he*  
*Should quickly climb up in the nearest tree*  
*Hung heavy with fruit, and up at once he went.*  
*Truly understanding all she meant.*

*There in the garden,*  
*On the farther side, Pluto, the king of fairies*  
*And famous queen, Proserpina could not*  
*Deny the scene of a noble, good and honorable*  
*Knight, a cuckold by his servant soon to be.*  
*"We will give him back his own eyes' sight...*  
*As his wife is doing him injury,"* Phoebus said.  
 Proserpine, in May's defense, replied quickly,  
 "I'll give her more than a satisfactory answer."  
 She'll "have the courage to stand and make up facts  
*Of words. A man may say what his eyes can see'*  
*But women will always face it vigorously."*

May then declared, "to keep from swoon  
*I must have one of the pears hung on this tree."*  
 The noble knight did not object she stand on his back  
 But sightless, did not see her go up the tree,  
*And quickly, then, this eager Damyan*  
*Pulled up her gown, and thrust right in.*  
*Pluto, seeing this wretched, wrongful sight,*  
*Immediately gave January his eyes.* The sight of

*Damyan playing with her private parts, caused a roar.  
“Out! Help! Alas! Harrow!” he began to cry,  
“Oh bold and cruel lady, what are you doing?”  
May answered, this was a cure to heal his eyes.  
“May God be thanked! My eyes see true,”  
Said the knight, “but I saw what he did to you.”  
May answered, he was mistaken; that one so recently  
Blind, with sight repaired, must adjust his eyes  
And wait a day or two for perfect sight.  
January considered. O how delighted was he!  
Still holding tight, he led her home.*

From "The Shipman's Tale," by Geoffrey Chaucer.

(Translated by Burton Raffel).

My poem summarizes Chaucer's tale of the same name. Original words, phrases and lines have been used. The humor of Chaucer and his use of explicit sexuality is typical of many of his tales. Human infidelity plays a central part, and the duplicity of religious characters is also integral to the Canterbury Tales. This entire story of Chaucer, is reproduced but abbreviated from the original. Line-length and meter are both modeled upon Raffel's translation. Many words, phrases and lines are used intact. The story is true to the much longer tale of Chaucer, and has the same satisfying ending.



## Shipman's Tale.

A wealthy merchant lived in Saint-Denise  
He had a wife known for her beauty.  
They loved to make *merry with feasts and dances*  
In their house *visited by many and all,*  
*One of whom was a monk, handsome and bold,*  
*A youngish monk, with a very handsome face.*  
Don Juan flattered the merchant,  
Tipped the servants, gave gifts and soon became  
A welcome guest at the home of his wealthy 'cousin'.  
Rising early one frequent visit, he greeted the merchant's  
Wife who, *aware and pleased to see Don Juan,*  
Spoke of problems in her marriage, and how  
*"Sometimes I think of running away from France."*  
The monk was silent, then affirmed, *"I'll not betray a*  
*Single thing you've said."* Thereupon they kissed  
*And spoke to each other exactly as they wished.*  
The lady requested of the monk, one hundred francs  
For clothes in which to dress, appropriate to  
Her husband's honor upon his return from Bruges.  
*"As well be dead. O Dear John, I cry:*  
*Lend me these hundred francs! By God on high."*  
Don Juan, *the courteous knight* affirmed the loan  
*And saying this, he caught her by the flanks.*  
*And hugged her hard, and kissed her many times.*

That evening the merchant said to his wife,  
*"Tomorrow, I leave for Bruges at dawn...  
When I return is something I cannot say."*  
He added, *"So you, dear wife, will now assume I pray  
The duty of keeping this house in proper order."*  
After dinner John took his host aside,  
*"Cousin, at the monastery, one of my tasks  
Involves the purchase of livestock and I will need  
An unexpected one hundred francs. I'd like to borrow  
That sum from you... but keep it secret if you don't mind.  
My dear cousin... your profits should grow by dozens of dozens."*  
The merchant was gracious and gave at once.  
They drank together and strolled the grounds until  
The good *Don Juan rode off to his holy home.*  
*Next day at dawn the merchant headed for Bruges.*  
*Soon Don Juan was off to Saint-Denise*  
*His head and also his beard freshly shaven.*  
*He and the merchant's wife arranged their business*  
*And for the one hundred francs... her in his arms,*

*In her bed—and they did it, all right,  
 The honest monk and the merchant's wife.  
 At dawn Don Juan went riding on his way  
 Bidding servants, "Farewell, have a good day."  
 None with suspicion or inkling about Don Juan.  
 The merchant, hustling and bustling, business done,  
 Turned his horse around and rode back home.  
 He greeted his wife and told her of business,  
 And for good cheer he'd visited cousin Don Juan  
 To see for himself the monk's own home.  
 The monk gave, "thanks heartily by God and Faith,"  
 Explaining he'd already returned the same gold coins  
 To the wife of the merchant at his very own home.  
 The merchant came home, his wife at the door,  
 Waiting as always, to welcome him back...  
 He embraced her, kissing her face,  
 And they went at it... both long and hard.  
 Voluptuously, she worked it with him because  
 He explained he knew 'cousin' John had left gold with  
 Her, and he felt himself distinctly unthanked.  
 His wife was neither troubled nor afraid,  
 And boldly answered, as ever ready at once,  
 May bad fortune fall on his evil snout.  
 I understood without a doubt, what he gave  
 Was acknowledging the debt he owed to you."  
 "I spent every cent on beautiful dresses,  
 And put the money to work in your honor,  
 So, laugh and play? My body is ready to serve  
 And the only place I will pay is in bed... My dear  
 Husband, torn toward me, not away... right here.  
 The merchant knew there was nothing to do,  
 And scolding her would be stupid too.  
 "Now wife," he said, "Of course I forgive you.  
 I pray in the future you may not spend so freely."  
 Don Juan the 'cousin' nevermore seen at the home  
 Of merchant and wife, of whom each has forgiven  
 The other, of misunderstood events. The Merchant  
 Knew there was nothing to do and wife was happy  
 For things already done, -and this tale is done.*

### **Section Three: Nineteenth Century**

In this section of my thesis, I have chosen to attribute my first nineteenth century poem to Augustine St Clare of Harriet Beecher Stowe's, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Through the mouth of St Clare, much of the contemporaneous nihilism of the era comes through to us today as we read his thoughts and dialogue. Although St. Clare is a "good" slave-owner, we see his passive acceptance of slavery in general. We also see the ineffectuality of northern do-gooders like Ophelia. As readers we see the cruelty of slavery.

I have chosen the chapter, "The Symphony," from *Moby Dick*, by Herman Melville, in my poem of the same name. I enjoyed this reflective chapter because it seems to demonstrate a rare and brief humanity in Ahab. He seems to express some regret for his life. The book is long and detailed. The tumultuous climax is about to begin and this chapter is thoughtful and gives the reader insight into the characters of not only Ahab, but of Starbuck as well.

Finally, I have appropriated "Goblin Market," by Christina Rossetti, as inspiration for "Patient Waiting Room." This is my modern fantasy based upon the sometimes negative aspects of a physician's waiting room of fifty years.

St. Clare

This poem is in tribute to Harriet Beecher Stowe's, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and a reflection of my thoughts on frequent business trips to New Orleans, Louisiana, particularly as the small plane alights at Lake Front airport. Where possible, I have chosen to Stowe's descriptions and also dialogue attributed to St Clare, or to sister Ophelia. I suspect my New Orleans' visits will always have me dwelling upon the ugly history of slavery, as well as thinking about the characters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

## St. Clare

When the Pilatus begins descending  
Into Lake Front, I see Pontchartrain  
Alongside and my thoughts go  
To *St. Clare*. An *East Indian cottage*  
*Of verandahs and bamboo, fragrant*  
*With plants and sea-breezes, the summer*  
Villa of Beecher Stowe's, *St. Clare*.  
Nestled on these shores where *Little Eva*,  
*Uncle Tom*, the *St. Clare's*, and *Ophelia*  
Lived with their slaves in summer.

I disembark and gaze at Pontchartrain  
Assuming the mythical villa stood  
On the north shore. I strain, but cannot see.  
To the west I share Eva and Tom's vision:  
*A sea of glass, mingled with fire, as sunset*  
Begins, and recall Eva, pointing heavenward  
As she tells Tom, "*I'm going there before long.*"  
Yet Miss Ophelia's stomach *was fairly turned*  
When Eva *shook hands and kissed slaves*.  
The cool northerner saw her own prejudice.  
"*I want to be kind to all,*" said Ophelia  
"*But as to hugging and kissing...*" "*Niggers,*"  
Said St. Clare, "*that you're not up to, -hey?*"  
Gently then, "*You loathe them as you*  
*Would a snake or toad, yet you are indignant*  
*Of their wrongs. You would not have them*  
*Abused; but you don't want anything to do*  
*With them yourself.*" Thoughtfully, Ophelia  
Agreed, "*There may be some truth in this.*"

Luggage in the rental car, thoughts of *St. Clare*  
Continue on the drive to New Orleans. A city  
Where slavery, human auctions, and cruelty flourished  
Two hundred years ago. The nihilism of Augustine  
St. Clare rings, "*What is to be done with a human*  
*Governed only by the lash?- that fails... a common state*  
*Of things down here.*" Also, "*One man can do nothing*  
*Against the whole action of a community.*" Outside,  
Black Americans drive to work, and walk to school.

All at once I see a divided race; A land of the free  
And a home of the brave in which the sentiments  
Of *Ophelia*, and the passivity of *St. Clare* remain

Little changed from that time of *Uncle Tom*.  
In disproportion, black males fill our prisons.  
Single women care for impoverished children.  
I recall *St Clare*, “*Tom... I don’t disbelieve...*  
*I think there is a reason to believe,*  
*and still I don’t. It’s a troublesome bad habit I’ve got.*”

## The Symphony

This poem was written to celebrate the quiet power and sensitivity of Herman Melville's "The Symphony," Chapter 132, *Moby Dick*, using Melville's words. My poem responds to the text of this Melville chapter while at the same time condensing and clarifying my interpretation. I believe this is one of the only instances in the novel in which Ahab gives open expression to his thoughts and his regrets. Starbuck's pleas for Ahab to abandon his mad quest for the white whale is heard, but denied. Starbuck through concern for his captain, and through dialogue, reveals his own caring character... and his distress by rejection at the chapter's end.

## Chapter 132. The Symphony

*A clear steel-blue day... firmaments of air and sea  
Hardly separable in that all-pervading azure,  
The pensive air... pure and soft with a woman's look.  
The sun seemed to give this gentle air  
To a bold and rolling sea... as a bride to a groom.  
The equator, where the bride gives bosom away.*

*Yet, tied up and twisted; gnarled and knotted with  
Wrinkles; haggardly firm and unyielding, eyes  
Glowing like coals... glowing in the ashes of ruin  
Untottering Ahab, stood forth in the clearness  
Of the morn, his splintered brow heavenward.  
How oblivious were we of Ahab's close-coiled woe.*

*Starbuck saw the old man... how he heavily  
Leaned over the side... and seemed to hear his  
Own true heart... the measureless sobbing  
That stole from the center of the serenity around.  
"A mild, mild wind... a mild looking sky, said Ahab,  
Forty, forty years..." sailing "on a pitiless sea."*

*Forty years whaling; storms, privation and peril, forsaken  
The peaceful land to make war on the horrors of the deep.  
"Away from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty...  
Leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow,.. the madness,  
The frenzy, the boiling blood, a thousand lowerings...  
To furiously, foamingly chase... more a demon than a man."*

*"Fool, fool, old fool, has old Ahab been. How the richer  
Or better is Ahab now? Locks so grey did never grow  
But from some ashes. Starbuck, I feel deadly faint,  
Bowed and humped... crack my heart, stave my brain.  
Mockery, bitter mockery. Stand close to me...  
Starbuck let me look into a human eye."*

*"Oh, my Captain! my Captain! Noble soul, grand  
Old heart... why chase that hated fish!... away,  
Let us fly these deadly waters. Let me alter the course.  
Wife, and child, too are Starbucks. Let us away. We head for Nantucket.  
I think sir they have some such mild blue days,  
Even as this, in Nantucket."*

*But Ahab's glance was averted,  
Like a blighted fruit tree, he shook,*



*Casting his last cindered apple to the soil.  
Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I God... that lifts this arm?  
Blanched to a corpse's hue with despair,  
Starbuck crossed the deck and stole away.*

## Patient Waiting Room

.... Inspired by "Goblin Market," by Christina Rossetti,  
and adapted to the occasional waiting room of a physician of fifty years.

From the waiting room, he heard their cry  
"Come treat our illnesses, heal our complaints."  
In the room were little men, some bold, some shy.  
Women also; *one a cat's face, whiskered tail,*  
*Two tramped at a rat's pace, one crawled like a snail*  
*Cooing... together like the voice of doves*  
*In pleasant weather, kind, full of loves.*  
Then three obese, made calls like geese.  
Suddenly in unison, came their call  
"Come heed. We demand you heal us all."  
Then *in tones as sweet as honey,*  
*Whiskered-tail* explained no money,  
*Cat-face purred,*  
*Rat-face spoke a word,*  
*Even snail-pace was heard.*  
A parrot voice, which sounded jolly  
Called loudly, "Treat us, heal us, Pretty Polly."  
Methodically, he sighed, then treated all.  
Symptoms weighed, both real and tall.  
"Heal us all, *we have no coin,*  
And if you take, *it were to purloin.*"  
They sucked his *knowledge juice,*  
*How could it cloy with length of use?*  
*They suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more*  
*They suck'd until their lips were sore.*  
No kind words from their mouths did pour.  
"Treat us all, treat our complaints, do it right,  
Or we will see our lawyer tonight."  
Night came on. They sauntered out  
With gobbling words and scowls and pouts.  
None listened to his learned advice.  
Few gave thanks, and none were nice.  
He heard the tramp of little men go down the lane,  
Wives in arm, "Heal us now, we were in pain.  
We'll bring plums and gifts tomorrow  
For we will have more complaints and sorrow."  
Moon and stars gazed after them.  
*Wind sang to them a lullaby.*  
*Lumbering owls forbore to fly.*  
*Cheek to cheek and breast to breast,*

Birds and patients, *locked together in their nests.*  
To eat, to fornicate, to breed  
And live without regard to heed.

## Section Four: The Eighteenth Century

Class studies of the eighteenth century, “The Age of Johnson,” revealed the importance of trade and the rise of commerce in Europe. I was interested in the rise of slavery and Simon Gikandi’s, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste*, and also influenced by Lisa Lowe’s, *Intimacies of Four Continents*. The paradoxical rise of slavery at the time of The Enlightenment is discussed by Gikandi. Europeans justified slavery partly on the reasoning black humans were scientifically inferior, less-than-human and un-Enlightened, making it more palatable for philosophers to justify commodity assignation of Africans and the developing slave trade.

It is impossible to be interested in slavery while at the same time not becoming fascinated with the rise of the British Navy of the same era. In the late sixteenth century, the British quadrupled their national budget for the navy and continued to do so. Taxes were democratically increased on poor and wealthy alike. In so doing, the British Navy rose to become a world power. Slavery was never obvious in Britain, yet transport of negro slaves to the West Indies and to eastern colonies of America, was an enormous profit center for Britain.

While the abhorrence of slavery drew early abolitionists and eventually ended, the stories of slave transport, colonization, plantation life, piracy and of the British Navy, took on lives of their own. Such stories abound in eighteenth century studies. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, and *The Slave Trade*, by Hugh Thomas, explore these topics. My poems were inspired by these authors.

## Slavery and Racism

When the rise of commerce and Enlightenment  
Saw the expanse of trade and Colonialism,  
European countries assumed power and entitlement.  
Labor needs addressed with slavery by Imperialism.  
Black bodies hunted, transporting, African defoliation.  
Packed and shipped as cargo to the Caribbean  
For labor, profit, pain and soul-less exploitation.  
Europeans in their righteousness had not foreseen  
The baseness of their actions, handling cargoes of humanity.  
Philosophy was not extended to a defined subhuman race  
Because of skin pigmentation. Yet this profanity  
Centuries prolonged, continues to embrace.  
Old latent judgments based upon appearance and culture  
Tainting aspirations of freedom, equality and our future.

## **Slavery and the English**

Inspired by Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Duke University Press, 2015... with a nod also to, *The Slave Trade*, by Hugh Thomas. Both manuscripts provide a wealth of detail on the development of slavery and upon the lucrative national and international financing of the slave trade. My brief poem tries to include of these factors. I also wanted to include English philosopher, John Locke's justification of slavery through his *Two Treatises of Government*.

## Slavery and the English

Words of John Locke allowing rights to property,  
Possession of lands, entitled by labor, overcame  
Native people's claims of ownership of land  
On which they'd hunted, gathered and roamed free.  
Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, written as an  
Englishman, justified and paved the way for exploitation  
Of the New America and of the Caribbean.  
Lands not possessed by *any Christian prince of people*,  
Merely *Indians, natives, infidels and savages*,  
Were *antithetical to human civility*. Settlers also claimed  
The right to punish native rebellion on claimed land.

Papers of the Royal African Company,  
An English business partnership and venture,  
Advertised supplies of *considerable Numbers*,  
*Negroes at very moderate rates*, boasting this *cheap*  
*Price responsible for Improvement and Growth of*  
*Plantations, the Exportation of British Manufacturers,*  
*And Importation of Sugar, Tobacco, Bullion*, justifying  
Slavery... *choosing Negroes as they do horses in a*  
*Market*, the traveler Richard Ligon wrote.

Simon Gikandi understood the distance of slave societies  
From Europe, kept the horror out of view of England.  
Yet, abolitionists Wilberforce and Clarkson stressed the  
Immorality. In the English House of Commons, 1792  
William Pitt, the Younger spoke for those who knew,  
“*No nation in Europe... has ... plunged as deeply*  
*Into this guilt as Great Britain.*”

## **The British Navy and Slavery**

Attributed to a documented story by Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade*. Library of Congress. 1997. P 721.

Thomas gives a detailed and referenced account of this factual incident. In this instance, Captain Hamilton of the British Navy, displays remarkable bravery in tracking and capturing not one, but three slave ships. My poem was inspired by Thomas' account. We are not told the fate of the slaves. Thomas relates many such incidents... with variable outcomes for crew and slaves.



## The British Navy

Havana, 1852, the Spanish *Venus* slipped quietly away,  
Confident, a night's head start, reported fastest slaver of the time.  
Captain Baillie Hamilton of the *Vestal*, had watched his prey.  
Nearby U.S. sailors cheered the British Navy in it's prime.

The twenty-six gun frigate sailed off in disciplined pursuit,  
Twenty hours sailing gave sight of *Venus*' pure white sails,  
Its colors, contours, and its broad-sailed canvas suit.  
But a hurricane scattered all ships through Caribbean trails.

Searching Bahama channels two days later, Hamilton spied a port  
Sheltering anchored *Venus* with two other slaver ships  
From the easing storm. A deep draft and dangerous shoals  
Forbad the *Vestal* entry into port, but the British unrelenting

Fired a long range shot and scored a hit as *Venus* hove to ahead.  
A boat crew from the *Vestal* rowed to *Venus*, then boarded  
Captain Hamilton, a revolver to the Spanish Captain's head.  
All three ships surrendered and followed Hamilton to Cuba as ordered.

## Section Five: African American Women Writers

In this class, I became more acquainted with the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks whose verses I'd enjoyed in other classes of general poetry. "*We Real Cool*," by Gwendolyn Brooks seems at first a short, simple poem. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have attributed my own poem, "*Finger Raised*," to the poem by Brooks. I also added to that poem, discussing the poetic terms and tricks which Brooks used in her short poem.

Brooks poem, "*A Boy Died in My Alley*," is also credited for my own, "*The Boy Who Withered*." Like Brooks, I feel I share some blame for the troubled schoolmate of my youth who though fictional, was with other "different" playmates, perhaps afflicted by domestic discord or mental illness.

My poem "Eyes Watching God," attributes Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for inspiration. I have attempted to crystalize and summarize Hurston's book while using specific language used so well by Hurston. Similarly, my poem, *The Bluest Eye*, attempts a brief precis of Morrison's book of the same name. Again, I have used poetic form, and when possible, language used by Morrison.

## **Finger Raised**

A tribute to *We Real Cool*, by Gwendolyn Brooks...

With a closer examination of poetic terms and devices.

High in the air,  
Finger raised.  
We number one.

Enough school,  
Education aborted.  
We number one.

Football Saturdays,  
Work on weekdays.  
We number one.

U.S.A.'s the greatest,  
Freest, toughest.  
We number one.

Perhaps we're racist,  
Intolerant and sexist,  
But we're number one.

I am always impressed by the apparent simplicity of *We Real Cool*, by Gwendolyn Brooks. I am reminded always, just how much a student poet can learn from this ten-line poem.

Alliteration; repetition of initial consonants.

Consonance; recurrence of similar sounds, repetition of final consonants,

e.g. “real,” and “cool.”

Assonance; repetition of vowel sounds.

Slant rhyme; any kind of sound similarity.

Repetitious rhyme.

Epistrophe; repetition of one or more words at the end of a phrase, clause or verse. In this poem of Brooks, “we,” repeated at the end of successive clauses.

## **The Boy who Withered (two versions)**

A tribute to *A Boy Died in My Alley*, by Gwendolyn Brooks.

### Version I

Withdrawn and shy,  
I saw the boy and knew his face.  
In school, we teased him mercilessly.

In class, in silent pain he struggled,  
Recess was worse, with us he dealt.  
One day, he'd gone,  
We hardly knew and little cared.

Now I know my heart was closed.  
We school-children killed this boy.

We suffocated with rude attention,  
He had sought to avoid.  
We used mockery and ridicule.  
We school-children killed this boy.

### Version II

Withdrawn and shy,  
I saw the boy and knew his face.  
In school, we teased him mercilessly.

In class, in silent pain he struggled,  
Recess was worse, with us he dealt.

Now I know my heart was closed.

We school-children killed this boy.

My poem is inspired by *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston.

I have attempted a poem-summary of Hurston's book. This is an emotional summary from memories and high-lights of the text which left impressions on my thoughts. When possible, I attempted to make use of descriptive words and phrases from the text. My summary is brief, but for me, incorporates the salient and thrilling events of Hurston's manuscript.

## Eyes Watching God

Janie kissed Johnny Taylor over the gatepost,  
As Janie and the pear tree blossomed.  
The *thousand sister-calyxes arched to meet in love embrace*  
While the *blossom and frothing of delight*  
Was seen by Nanny from the window.

Nanny saw womanhood was upon Janie  
Ole *skullhead* Logan Killicks seemed the answer.  
The vision of Killicks desecrated Janie's peartree  
A tear swelled in each eye as Nanny slapped twice.  
The *black man must pick up the white man's load*  
Nanny explains, the black man hands it to his womenfolks.

Janie hates *de way* Killicks' *head is so long one way*  
*So flat on the sides and dat pone uh fat back on his neck.*  
*Citified* Joe Starks runs off with Janie to Eatonville.  
Mayor Joe builds a town and general store  
Bombastic Joe's ascendance checked by illness, Janie declines for  
Lack of respect. But Tea Cake comes to fill her heart.

Joe's funeral was the county's finest *in Negro eyes*.  
With subtlety and charm, Tea Cake advances gently.  
Hezekiah warns she *oughtn't 'low dat Tea Cake*  
*Tuh be walkin' to de house wid yuh*. Phoebe warns  
*Be keerfuln 'bout dis sellin' out and goin' wid strange men*.

Twelve years her junior, Tea Cake proves loyal.  
Janie looking at Tea Cake in sleep, feels *a self-crushing*  
*Love*. Together they negotiate *the muds*, a Seminole-  
Predicted hurricane, a flood, and even Nunkie!  
Their eyes were watching God.

Janie, rescued in the flood by Tea Cake, sees  
*Him-with-the-square-toes* take her dog-bitten  
Husband as she shoots her soulmate in self-defense.  
Back in Eatonville, Phoebe listens to her friend  
She *growed ten feet higher from jus' listenin'*. Meanwhile  
The *great fish-net of the world* draped the shoulders of Janie.  
Tea Cake's *song of the sigh* flew out of the window  
*And lit in the top of the pine trees*.

## **Blue Eyes**

.... From *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison.

This poem is inspired by Morrison's book. As a summary, it is far from complete but it contains my post-reading impressions of this dark and violent tale.



## Bluest Eye

We sisters did our best when Pecola came to stay,  
A girl who had no place to shelter, *put outdoors*.  
As coloreds, *we moved on the hem of life* anyway  
We two sisters put her in our bed, the middle,  
Until the Breedlove's took her back.

That family *wore their ugliness*, an early Master said.  
*Small eyes set closely under narrow foreheads,*  
*Crooked noses, insolent nostrils, ears turned forward.*  
Looking at themselves, they agreed. Even shapely lips  
Called attention to each ugly face.

Mother shocked when starving Pecola drank our milk.  
I hated white blue-eyed dolls and scratched out eyes.  
Shirley Temple images of white girls, we dismembered.  
Then came the blood of Pecola's first *ministratin'*,  
Followed soon by mother's amused explanation.

That night, we three girls in a bed, discussed how  
Pecola could have a baby. Somebody, before  
Leaving, would need to love Pecola first.  
*How do you do that? I mean how do you*  
*Make somebody love you?* Pecola asked.

Ugliness and poverty confirmed daily by  
Teachers, friends and playmates, Pecola prayed  
For pretty eyes, pretty blue eyes, big blue eyes  
Morning-glory-blue-eyes, Alice-and-Jerry  
Blue-storybook eyes. She prayed nightly without fail.

In her ugly world, as Pecola slipped away,  
Her drunken father Cholly, paid animal attention.  
Painfully thrusting, the object of his lust,  
Pecola added pregnancy, then stillbirth  
Into a descendance, and life of mental illness.

Cholly was *dangerously free. Free to feel fear...*  
*Guilt, shame, love, grief, pity... be tender or violent.*  
*Could go to jail and not feel imprisoned... had already*  
*Killed three white men, had been a gandy dancer,*  
*Free to enact his fantasies, even with Pecola.*

The pretty blue eyes, the big blue eyes  
Morning-glory-blue-eyes, Alice-and-Jerry

Story-book blue eyes, never came. Prayers  
Alone did not seem to assist Pecola's  
Request for blue... the bluest eyes.

## **Section Six: Twentieth Century**

In this section, I have chosen two short fiction stories by Ernest Hemingway, *Indian Camp*, and, *The End of Something* to turn into poetry. Using poetic form, I have summarized and shortened both stories while at the same time retaining the emphasis of Hemingway's story in both cases. Hemingway was known for his constant re-editing and revision of his manuscripts. I enjoyed shortening, re-editing and using poetry to condense these two well-known stories.

I have chosen my poem, *The Voice of Hardy*, to add to my section of Twentieth Century poets. Thomas Hardy was of course, one of the best and most prolific prose writers of the nineteenth century. He abruptly changed to poetry and became equally famous a poet. This poem written in tribute, allowed me to list his accomplished writings which have strongly influenced my own career.

Finally, this section of my thesis contains a brief salute to Siegfried Sassoon, as well as to Robert Graves, poets of the first World War. I have been interested in, and influenced by war poetry during my literary studies.

## Nick and the Doctor

This poem is a tribute to *Indian Camp*, a work of short fiction by Ernest Hemingway.

Before daylight, two Indians rowed  
Nick and his father to the camp.  
We are going to assist a woman having  
A baby, Nick's father said as he explained.  
Cold and dark, Nick heard the oar-locks  
Of the boat ahead with Uncle George.

Barking dogs signaled arrival at the logging  
Camp of shanties. An old woman with a lamp  
Stood in a doorway where they entered.  
Screaming from two days of labor greeted.  
Nick's father discussed breech delivery, no  
Anesthesia, and possible caesarian section.

They held down the woman as they worked.  
Uncle George was bitten as she screamed.  
Nick didn't want to watch. Hearing was enough  
A pen-knife, boiling water, more screams,  
Surgery was over, baby slapped, and the  
Exhausted mother lay back and fell asleep.

Father boasted of his obstetric expertise.  
Nick didn't want to survey the incision,  
Eyes averted as the afterbirth discarded.  
Father in his pride, pulled back the husband's  
Head to see if he was pleased. Boasting ceased.  
They saw his throat was cut from ear-to-ear, head  
Resting on his arm and body facing wall.

## **An Ending Sonnet**

This poem is inspired by, *The End of Something*, a short story of Ernest Hemingway. This short fiction by Hemingway appears very simple. Short, declarative sentences are typical. Brief conversation cries out for more dialogue but Hemingway has revised and abbreviated, leaving only a skeleton of a love story ending in a painful breakup. It forces one to think of conversation not written.

## An Ending Sonnet

The life of lumbering town, Hortens Bay had ended  
Saws, equipment, workers gone, buildings effete.  
Nick and Marjorie fished, rowed, and wended  
To the bank, set rods and disembarked to rest and eat.  
On a blanket, together they sat. "*Not hungry*," Nick shouted.  
"*What's the matter?*" she asked. Without touching, watching above,  
Moon rise, as she'd predicted. "*You know everything*," he pouted,  
"*It isn't fun any more.*" Marjorie questioned, "*Fun isn't love?*"  
She sat close but with her back to him a while longer.  
"*I'm going to take the boat*," Marjorie called, "*you walk round the point.*"  
"*All right*," answered Nick from the blanket, his voice stronger.  
Facing away, eyes closed, he heard her rowing with oars anoint.  
*The End of Something*, begins with a town  
Yet ends in a love story with emotions wound down.

## **The Voice of Hardy**

Attributed very loosely to, *The Voice*, a poem by Thomas Hardy. I drew satisfaction from using one of Hardy's own poems in order to write a poem about him. I have been influenced throughout my reading and writing by Thomas Hardy. I compared many contrasting film adaptations of several versions of Hardy's novels for a term paper on Film as Literature. Hardy has been seen by some critics as the greatest author of the nineteenth century, and the greatest poet of the twentieth.

## The Voice of Hardy

Hardy, how you call to me, how you call to me.  
Your poetry is not, as was your prose.  
When you changed one, that was all to me  
But at first, I was puzzled, caught by surprise.

Yes, it is you that I hear. Let me view you again,  
Writing from Wessex in verse,—a refrain.  
Will you wait for me? I need to adjust  
*Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure,*

*Return of the Native, The Trumpet-Major,*  
And, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, call to me still.  
While *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, echoes of you.  
*A Changed Man, The Distracted Preacher*, and

*The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*, call with the  
*Woodlanders*, from *Under the Greenwood Tree*,  
While *Two on a Tower*, and *The Hand of*  
*Ethelberta*, cry out with your voice.

Can it be you I hear in your verse?  
Or the breeze in its listlessness, travelling  
Across the wet mead to me as I muse,  
Or just leaves around me, randomly falling.



***The Brass***

A Tribute to Siegfried Sassoon, *The General*, 1917.

This poem is an updated version of Sassoon's poem which harshly criticizes the incompetence of Army leadership of World War I, but could be applied to battlefield decisions of other wars.

*The Brass*

“Good-morning; How are you?” the officer said  
As they met him last week on the way to the line.  
Now the soldiers he greeted are mostly all dead,  
And you’re cursing the brass as incompetent swine.  
“A friendly old guy,” grunted Harry to Jack  
As they wearily trudged with rifle and pack.

\*\*\*\*\*

And he took care of them both with his plan of attack.

## **Done with War?**

This poem is an update of Robert Graves, “Two Fusiliers,” written in 1917.

Graves was one of the best-known, and most quoted of World War I poets. My poem does not analyze or discuss his poem. I have simply built on the first line of his poem.

## **Done with War?**

And have we done with War at last?  
Well, we were lucky. It touched us not  
Upon the shores we live and love  
Yet cost the lives of those we sent.  
Perhaps our oaths and promises,  
And prayers to God were not forgot.  
Our land seems blessed if we are not.  
Yet we know that others pray  
And reside in lands once without fray.  
They too had families, lives and oaths  
And prayed like us, but now they're dead.  
Robert Graves asked if War was gone, but  
It goes on and on, for reasons contrived,  
Trite, obscure, petty, and ill-advised.  
War hasn't gone. A human blight,  
It lives and moves within us.  
Can we save our lives and lands?  
War hasn't gone, just resting and not here  
At this time...

## Section Seven: Ethnic Literature

It is hard to do justice to a subject which encompasses a broad and ever-changing category. Studying ethnic literature brings the reader away from classical English and American pool of studies. Ethnic literature includes the poetry and prose of all the other racial and ethnic groups living among us. African-American, Spanish, and Native American cultures have added to our national literature, and other cultures, Viet-Nam, India and others continue to contribute as the background of America changes.

I have placed my poem, Mexican Ghazal, in this section. As I watch the Mexican immigrants struggle to achieve, to establish and to survive, I admire their tenacity and do not doubt their eventual success in their new homeland.

My poem, *Homophobia*, together with, *Persona Poem*, *Jericho Brown*, are both inspired by our class studies of Brown's poems. I was struck by his poetry and realized this sensitive and incisive poetry would not have come to my attention were it not for classes on Ethnic Literature.

Finally, my poem, *Medical Exam*, puts in verse my own feelings of ignorance when, as a physician, I examine someone from another culture.

## **Ghazal The Mexican**

Illegal I am, illegal I stay. Lawn mowers roaring.  
Rules changing, money scarce, leaf-blowers  
Whining on.

Family growing, wife legal, children USA-born,  
At first light of dawn arrive truck, mowers, blowers  
Whining on.

Any exchange with authority risks deportation  
So, with other immigrants I mow and use blowers,  
Whining on.

Years pass on by. As vulnerable now as when first I  
Arrived; but construction persists, mowers still roar  
And politicians whine on.

**Persona Poem, based on Jericho Brown (loosely).**

I'm no fatalist, no determinist, only an agnostic  
Who sees achievement as a long solo journey,  
A lawn and or a garden planned with patience and foresight.  
It begins as a child with parental advice, and teachers  
Who influence by behavior and attitude. Affected by adversity,  
And fortune, both bad and good. Goals remembered.  
Obstacles averted, blind alleys explored  
Back-steps retraced, but goals kept in view  
However difficult distant horizons appeared.

Life is long, but if not, we don't know it.  
Asthma and illness, poliomyelitis encountered  
Unplanned on the journey, provided  
A role-model doctor respected by parents, a  
Goal or a talisman to a child of inchoate dreams.  
Dimly aware of the education needed,  
He worked on his grades, setting college  
Then Medicine, research and academics,  
Consecutive steps in a pathway of years  
As friends, family and time, moved alongside.

One day, he paused and noted the date. Fifty years  
In his practice surprised, even more interesting now  
Than when he began. Children all grown with  
Families their own. Houses they'd lived in. Countries  
Inhabited... relatives scattered through four continents.  
A long race was ending, but aware, and grateful  
His career was not merely long, but fulfilling as well.  
Graceful retirement next on that list, had begun  
Years before as a solitary child in a small, obscure school.

## **Learning the Facts of Life**

As children, we grow and learn.  
How do we know hate and prejudice?

When did I learn of homophobia?  
It was years after I knew of racism

But before any knowledge of sexism,  
Yet after xenophobia came to my attention.

Then I heard of gay-bashing but did not  
Believe. Two old men dragged from a jeep

By their genitalia, simply for cohabiting.  
What point to hurt or injure

Anyone based on sexual preference?  
Yet stories of humiliation along with

Mutilation and castration are true.  
So, before denouncing fellow man,

I sought to ask associates,  
To learn their inner view.

I quickly found such views widespread.  
Asking, brought suspicion on one's head.

Fear of foreigners was easily understood.  
Differing cultures, language and dress,

Was this why my father harshly  
Wished them gone... to overseas return?

Yet in a year or two they were the same  
And blended, and befriended us in turn.

Parents did not clarify sexism.  
Men were simply superior.

Women doctors, politicians,  
Authors, artists, merely aberrations.

Parental racism was more subtle,  
And impolite to discuss at table.



Just don't come home with persons black,  
Or brown, or yellow for that matter.

But in a family that never spoke of sex,  
It took years to learn of homosexuality.

Discovering some had a different preference  
Only served to confuse reactions further.

We don't beat, castrate or kill blue-eyed  
Humans, nor those left-handed.

In a world of inequality and uncertainty,  
Of many religions preaching love,

What drives such hostility and anger  
Over same-sex coupling?

## **The Medical Exam**

Pockmarked from acne,  
Muscular arms turned leather by sun,  
He spoke few words of English,  
And gruffly at best.

Smiling shyly yet broadly,  
Teeth brown or absent,  
Tapping his chest, 'I Chicano,'  
His English exhausted.

Yet, bonded strangely  
To this tanned man of smiles.  
Interpreters helped  
But it wasn't the same.

I'd have to make do.  
Shamed by my language impediment  
It was I who felt ignorant  
As I began his exam.

## Section Eight: Personal Poems

### Tolerance

Of all emotions, Love is valued most.  
Kindness and Generosity rank highly,  
But Tolerance is overlooked  
And doesn't get the press it should.

If Tolerance was abundant  
We could welcome differences.  
There would be no racism, sexism,  
Even xenophobia, no more preferences.

White and black especially, but people  
Of all color would Tolerate each other.  
Religions would self-examine  
Carefully, to amalgamate their creeds.

Political discussions, no longer adversarial.  
Wise in charge, leaders and the rest,  
Tolerant, and willing to assist,  
Would aim to work in harmony for best.

The elderly would be housed and  
Cared for by relatives their own,  
Views respected, generations spanned,  
Seeds of further Tolerance shown.

Moral views of alcohol or addiction  
Would be seen simply for their worth,  
Unhelpful views of sickness and affliction,  
Prone to anyone, regardless of our birth.

The list of qualities requires a shove.  
Let's change Tolerance from a lukewarm emotion  
To equate with Kindness, Generosity and Love  
To vie for equal virtue, a model for aspiration.

## **Depression.**

For CF

Depression is a wondrous thing.  
It enters from within or out  
And flips from limb to limb  
Then settles in the amygdala,  
From whence it reappears again.  
It dwells quite close to self-despair.  
Anguish lives next door. Melancholy,  
Sadness, and The Blues reside nearby.  
Around the limbic system, floating  
Back and forth and roundabout  
Until its gone, or seems that way.  
All at once, the hippocampus surges,  
Back again the mood returns.  
Depression seeps back in, and purges.

## O, Spacious Skies

Every town whether big or small,  
Should covet a Wal-Mart in colors white  
And accents blue; Also, Walgreens or a CVS  
On researched corners, or prominent site. A  
Taco Bell, and McDonald's, vie for excess  
With Pizza Hut, Wendy's and Nail Salons.  
When the town grows more, we can duplicate  
Commercial space, adding eateries which come  
And go by season or success, even failure.  
Larger buildings grow with time. Civic  
Structures house Police and Fire, and civic  
Halls, utilities, and schools are built and grow  
Into edifices larger, taller and more imposing.  
The town changes to a city as taller buildings  
Replace those earlier dwellings, out of date.

O, to return in fifty years when populations  
Double, when towns are cities, and cities merge and  
Overlap; when residential still exists but corners  
Serve to satisfy immediate transactions, with vast tracts  
Of glitter and commerce changing always,  
Demanding attention. Our spacious skies will be less sweeping  
When we gaze heavenward between man's structures,  
And at night, the electronic dazzle becomes our stars,  
As by default, we accept our collective destiny.

## United States of Light

The romance of Ellis Island was not our path,  
Nor squeezed amongst the huddled masses,  
Or even yearning to be free, but just a little  
Family on a work visa, a residency to begin.  
Sailing ships of centuries gone by, replaced by  
Massive airplanes, strange airports, customs,  
Immigration, documents, and the confusing  
Game of time-zones, took all the confidence  
Mustered by the immigrants. Each decision  
New and threatening, they made the taxi-drive  
To a pre-arranged hotel, they stopped for breath,  
Attend children, check belongings, and rested  
From thirty hours of planes and airports.  
Exhaustion reigned.

They fell asleep. Three a.m.,  
They all awoke, circadian rhythms pounding  
To New Zealand time. Outside, night, Miami, Florida,  
Too dark to see; car headlights on a freeway close,  
Flashing billboards, frequent sirens, and oppressive  
Heat if a window opened. Morning came,  
Contacts affirmed; Between rest and simple food,  
They ventured timidly to view America.  
The predominant impression was the light!  
Avulsed from late New Zealand winter overnight,  
The summer glare of Miami, painfully caught  
Their eyes as they scuttled back and forth  
Between hotel room and outdoors. Like roaches  
Suddenly exposed, it was several days until  
Their eyes were comfortable at last.  
Years later, laughing, they remembered  
How the overwhelming light became their  
First impression.

## **Ghazal for a Leader**

What happens when a leader will not learn?  
Name-only advisors, performing sycophants.  
He cannot learn.

Advisors are not always friends and give  
Best counsel unpaid, and are of reprisal unafraid.  
He cannot learn.

Summarily fired, and abruptly dismissed  
For opinions honest but contrary to his own,  
He cannot learn.

Whirling storms of dissonance and disarray  
While the hapless Public look on in dismay  
He will not learn.

## Point of View, A Sonnet

The Point of View is where I come at you to write  
Your story, or pen a poem. My teachers say my view  
Is distant, implying cold. Yet I know with all my might,  
Emotion churns within this soul as in others, and in you.  
Age does not dampen enthusiasm, simply tempers gut reaction.  
Three score years and ten, alive, a world of beauty, laced  
With ugliness and random violence, with sorrow and jubilation,  
I envy those who feign surprise when daily faced  
With consequence of natural, or human happening. Stories,  
Poetry, and wonder yet exist, nay thrive, within the confusion  
Of our lives. Like the stars from which we're made, our glories  
Are as numerous, as rewarding... and provide profusion.  
Although my point of view appears aloof, perhaps distracted,  
This life observer remains enthusiastic... and still attracted.



## The Nineteenth Hole

A tribute to *My Papa's Waltz*, by Theodore Roethke.

Golf on Saturdays was my father's choice.  
With mother and sister, a young boy I spent  
My time in quiet reflection mother gave voice  
To her week while visiting her parent.

Later, father came in the car. Golf he extolled,  
His afternoon game, as we hugged and greeted,  
I caught the whiff of beer... the 19<sup>th</sup> hole.  
Nervously, assuming my rear position seated

I seemed to notice, while mother smiled  
And greeted, she did not embrace.  
Slowly I began to discern mutual guile  
Permitting teetotalism to her semblance.

Years pass by. Mother and sister still visit.  
I miss the rough hug, his rare smell of beer.  
Father is gone, and golf of no interest.  
This grown man remains abstinent through fear!

## **We Get More...**

Every day we get more electric,  
More hectic, more frenetic.  
Every day we get less satisfied,  
Less pacified, less organized.  
Every day we get more hollow,  
More shallow, more fallow.  
Every day we are less sublime,  
Less serene, less on time.  
What is the standard we're up against?  
Self-driven aspirations without relent.

## Literature Class

Who of us did not dream in class,  
As we caught the thread of another's thought  
Written long ago in lines that pass  
Before our eyes? Having fought  
Our torpor, now alert, a dead  
Voice calls across the years.  
Jolted from inertia, how did that writer  
Know what I have often thought?  
We never met and he is dust,  
As one day I too will be?

## Old Photographs

...thoughts on disturbing reflections when viewing old photographs.

A doctor in a busy practice, my children  
Passed right by. Deciding names, then infants  
Crawling, tottering, walking, talking,  
Reading, then first day of school.  
    Photographs of all,  
        ... and the phone rang.

Teacher meetings, sports events, pediatric visits  
Illness days, school plays, happy days.  
Repeat this over for each child.  
Add family vacations, gentle discipline.  
    Photographs, some more,  
        ... and the phone rang.

High School reached for some, while younger  
Children just begun. College finally, as  
Their ages trickled upward. Learning, striving.  
No sprint each child. A marathon for parents.  
    Photographs of all,  
        ... and the phone rang.

Graduations, caps and gowns, repeated for  
Each child. The pace seemed faster  
Spare rooms at home. Children missing, gone  
To marriages. Wife aware, but I am lost.  
    Photographs of everything,  
        ... and the phone still rings.

My God, there are grandchildren, while I've adult  
Children I don't know, who sit and prattle  
About their children's schools and skills.  
My wife is happy. I forgot their names, I'm lost.  
    Photographs of anything and all,  
        ... and the phone rings.

Retired at last, restless and impatient,  
What did it mean? I rarely ponder photographs.  
My children and I lived lives in parallel  
Touching occasionally... the best we could.  
    The photographs are gone.  
        ... the phone is disconnected.

## **“Michael W.” The Oklahoman Heavy-Equipment Operator**

I met a man from Frogville, on the Texas line, . . .  
Heavy Equipment Operator, self-referred and single.  
Skinny, shy, soft-spoken, overalls and boots with clay  
For he'd just left his worksite, earlier that day.  
Beneath his arm, held tight, his little dog.  
Three fingers on his left hand, two fingers on the right,  
I shook his thin right hand and searched for further  
Defects automatically. Most teeth were missing,  
Yet, smiling nonetheless. What brought this man to me?  
What were his complaints? “Weakness and fatigue,”  
Our interchange began, but highlights of his story  
Were a twenty-year, three pack-a-day history  
Of smoking, garnished with three six-packs of beer  
Every day since high school. Divorced and childless,  
(Why divorced? “Well look at me,” his answer). Hinting  
Quietly he missed his wife, yet understood her  
Long forbearance, and finally, abandonment.  
A little dog his only friend. The doe-eyed  
Creature held with the two-fingered arm.  
Cardiomyopathy from alcohol, and chronic lung  
Disease from smoking, rendered diagnoses easy.  
I gave the practiced talk of abstinence, given frequently  
To others, expecting limited success. We agreed  
On visiting and re-evaluation in a month.  
A few weeks passed and I was surprised.  
He'd not touched a drop in thirty days, but  
Cigarettes still craved. ‘Though he cut back,  
He'd not quit. Three months more, then twelve,

And his heart improved at every visit.  
I knew by his compliance, he was now a friend  
Confirmed by snapshots of his dog I had to view.

Then an absence of ten months, a fall from grace.  
Alcohol renewed, but still he came  
And deserved at least some praise for  
His contrite attendance and confession.  
Years gone by, he attends sporadically  
Three packs a day of cigarettes, three  
Six-packs of alcohol, a failing heart,  
A little dog, his sole companion.  
It puzzled why he still attends.  
I liked him and encouraged always,  
He seemed to need to hear once more,  
The simple request to “just refrain.”

Once again, he tried, then again...  
Finally, his visits ceased unnoticed.  
Then one day from Frogville came a call,  
A co-worker gave a terse report...  
The dog had died, our patient gone.

## Sleep.

A fantasy.

As I prepare to lie on my side,  
I welcome all random thought.  
I expect a few position changes  
As I enter a zone of comfort.  
Adjusting covers to prevent  
Cool air sliding down my back,  
Unfiltered events enter my resting  
Conscious state, slowly at first  
    Then steadily faster, becoming random.  
    A snatch of a song heard that day,  
        Something my wife said, the shape  
    Of a face partially seen on the train.  
Playfully, I hold on to fragments  
Which shimmer like silvery fish  
Through the ephemeral mist  
Of a mind preparing, uncoupling,  
Disorganizing, for sleep.

## The Would-be Boxer

A tale that is true!

In Medical School, when I was young, I tried boxing for recreation.

Months of weights, acquiring jargon, learning straight lefts, and education about hooks and uppercuts and body shots, soon lent strength and confidence,... followed by a sense of invincibility.

Next was shadow boxing, make believe, then pairing-up by size, and all too quickly, friendly sparring. Barely middleweight, my smiles faded when an ugly heavyweight stood up. Known to me only by his academics jaded, demeanor coarse, and language foul. He knew I studied in medical school. Weeks earlier I recall, he asked if delivering a blow to his girlfriend's abdomen might successfully abort their unwelcome fetus. I warned against. This was the man, a student still, uncouth, unpolished.

Yet he seemed to like me as a match...and grinned, gleefully.

The three-minute contest was immediate. A plea of cowardice, illness or insanity unacceptable, the only course expedient was to proceed, smilingly, using muffled profanity. Mouth-guards in place, but without the luxury of headgear I prayed, adopting pugilistic pose.

First contest, a thirsty crowd one could predict.  
So, on they came, the curious, the malevolent, to see  
What bloody damage my bigger partner might inflict.  
A bell sounded as we circled most professionally.  
He closed as we scuffled with harmless blows,  
Probing, cautious, weaving and moving as were taught.

Closer, smelling his breath and sweat. Confident, he released a flurry of blows to my left. All missed as I defensively threw out my bent left arm, three times, striking accurately and with heft to his mid-face, mouth and chin. His mouth flew open. He dropped his guard. I was too shocked and slow to take advantage. Our trainer allowed a pause for my surprised opponent to recover.

Only then, did I read anger mixed with humiliation  
In his eyes, and wondered how much longer was the bout.  
Three minutes seemed forever, but with trepidation  
And good fortune I survived 'though several clouts  
Pierced my unskilled defenses as I quickly realized  
I was not born a successful pugilist to be.



“I boxed in college,” I occasionally boast. My soft  
physician hands and obvious lack of traumatic encephalopathy deny long-term  
involvement in the Noble Art.

...Yet, I am glad I tried boxing  
So long ago, but happier still I had  
the youthful sense to seek fitness  
Thereafter, in a gym.

## **Distress, Divorce, and Oscar Wilde**

This poem is assigned to my section of personal poems but might equally have been allocated to my nineteenth century inspirations. I have long admired the intelligence and courage of Oscar Wilde. It was one of his inversions and witticisms that a good divorce was made in heaven. I have based my verse on Wilde's, *In the Forest*, and in so doing, approached a very different subject. I have changed Wilde's use of *copses* for *corpses* and deliberately used his word *faun* in place of *fawn*. I like to think Wilde would have approved.

## **Distress, Divorce, and Oscar Wilde**

He heard the lawyers laughing as they combed  
Through the finances of their marriage of years.  
Pleasing to attorneys, to handle divorce between  
Wealthy clients, to bill by the hour, by the minute,  
For research, for phone calls, for records and papers.  
Roughly to trample on a lifetime of planning,  
And to skip through the corpses singing.  
Grown are the children, fauns have flashed on  
While the old couple sue, and harbor their wrongs.  
Voices and shadows still dance along.  
Ivory limbs and brown eyes are gone.  
The lawyers are winning, corpses are singing  
And I know not which I should follow,  
Shadow or song.