

Poetry for University Class

in Room 205

Every Tuesday I go to my once-a-week session of Poetry for myself with myself alone all wrapped-up tightly within myself head down and mind down on myself for not writing enough in the past week and all full of expectation as I pass The Coffee Machine and The cigarettes, cigarettes, Cigarette Machine and my favorite: The Zagnut Candy Machine (God, to be lost in a forest of zagnut trees!) head still down lost in solitary introversion as I pass Rm. 205 and from the slightly-ajar door come insane cries of Organization!—of Management!—and of orderly technical techniques and I see 4 rows x 8 of narrow tie-checked people including a female Navy Commander getting their gears oiled on the theory of how they are going to manage the world.

Modern Techniques of Management—That's what's in room 205.

Will they be able to manage me and that non-group of unmanageable misfits in Room 205—

Will they be able to manage Lew who in his gaunt body's presence stands between our oblivion and our madness who affirms Love as a sword against dollars and hate—

Will they be able to manage Sam who has walked the stations of the Cross with his heart in the footsteps of Christ—

Mad Sam directing a non-dance dance troupe in mythological dances with, count them, eight beautiful girls—

Will they be able to manage poor, tortured, Tony who in ten years from the day he turns twenty-six vowed to be a great Poet—

Will they be able to manage the young lunatic minister from God's Universal Church in Modesto?

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*Exercise for W.B. Yeats* (whom I don't understand)

Surely the urge that propels me is the same:

To know and to be understood;

That's quite simple and reasonable and good.

Not so much concerned from where I came—

And, not so much concerned with where I'm going.

Knowing, knowing, knowing. That's what I crave.

In other words, am I innocent or guilty;

Am I Freeman or Slave. And

If Freeman and Innocent,

When I'm put into mothballs, a rusted-out hull;

Will I say I found Life flat and dull?

How sad it would be to look back and say:

"After much searching and reading and desiring to live

I have taken and taken and taken and

I have never learned how to give."

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Since I started thinking
 my head has never let me down;
One thought always leads to
 another—
I don't care if I never burn-
 out.

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*One Sentence Exercise*

This morning began a milestone-in-reverse sort of day—  
    with the sun really shining and the birds really singing  
I stepped ahead into my childhood  
    into innocents and gladness and  
    except for those things that I've done—  
I'm not guilty.

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Words really don't do justice to this new prophylactic.
When using a prophylactic do you really want Justice?

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The sole Ambassador from Peru  
(or was it Bolivia?)  
    in his black hat  
    which reminded me of Abraham Lincoln  
was today unable to walk between the raindrops.

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Sometimes I have to close my eyes to see more clearly.
What do you see?
Oh, not much—just pink and orange light
 and eyelashes from the inside out—
 just ordinary stuff like that.
Oh, but the silence is wonderful.

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Its dark now and its raining.  
City lights, car lights, **Stop** and **Go** lights—  
    green and red and yellow and white  
    lines and reflections  
No, don't reflect now—hurry step on the gas  
    must get to my quiet idea room and finally face  
    that 8 x 12 of white blankness.  
At last, its come to this—  
    blank mind facing blank paper  
    with pen in hand and daring to take the plunge  
    to write nothing.

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I don't like people who mumble.
I don't like people who think out-loud
 and
I don't like oil-scented hippies
 and
When I meet a mumbling thinking-out-loud-oil-scented hippie
I go right out of my mind.

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Someone to whom I'm very close  
    close in the sense of geography  
asked me to write her a poem.  
Actually I don't mean to be cynical  
    regarding that comment two thoughts ago—  
It's just that it's difficult to make up one's mind  
    to stay glued to one thought and one feeling.  
Not that I'm identifying with great Renaissance Artists  
    who were commissioned to limit their greatness—yet—  
However, I imagine my process is similar  
    the renaissance in this case is written in small letters and  
small thoughts out of sleep come out slowly as white daisies in spring.

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Well, back to the poem.
It's a question of need, of belonging, of giving, of taking,
 in short, it's a question of loving.
Is it cruel to think of her as a comfortable background?
 Or is it really like that—
When I think of her the most, common things seen profound, for example—
 I'd be like a fish out, of water, unable to function and
not understanding that in a matter of seconds I would be dead.

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I think that today I've discovered why  
I function best in a box.  
My mind imagines old Sisyphus and his Rock—  
condemned to his task of constantly pushing  
except in that moment of respite when the Rock rolls back  
down—Yes, that's it: But wait—  
Where did I read that? Now would be the time  
to insert the appropriate quote  
to give this writing that air of importance—

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Never mind, I understand it in relation to
my box.
When there are no interruptions—then,
energy rising out of one's gut makes the mind imagine
the Rock-Box breaking and
all things are possible
'till the next interruption.

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Her legs were so very long  
that one could imagine just about anything.  
I imagined those legs wrapped around this thin body  
8 x like the figure 8 not two circles vertically touching but  
down and around and up and around and so on 'till 8 x 8 and on and on  
Time forgotten—Eternity at last in this spasm of joy.  
Then I see a not yet dead fish thrashing and  
flapping its limp wet flippers against the wooden dock—  
Flapping and gasping—gasping and reluctantly dying.  
Not understanding, I turn away and feel the cool wet west wind and  
know its time to go.

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It's raining—
Let's flip on the radio—
What we need is a little background music for the foreground.
Ah, that's better—
Hey, what's that?
It's Haifitz again, still cranking-away on that fantastic violin.
What's the number of that concerto?
I never could catch those details.

It's too bad though, 'cause it would really be something to be able to drop those numbered concertos at those cocktail parties where everyone is always dropping things that are supposed to show how smart they are.

Slide-squeak-up-the-scale-hold it-crank-squeak down
falls the rain filling the space between Haifitz and his frantic stroking.

Taken altogether it's a grand moment. Wait—

What's this? an interruption.

Jesus: **A Net Alert!**

Damn, what an awful sound. Only dogs should be able to hear it.

What's happened somewhere—is **The Government** going to tell us that finally those damned Russian rockets are on their way?—or perhaps—the East Coast into the Atlantic and great cities never visited are no more.

Or again, maybe they've found a cure for cancer—

Wouldn't it be fantastic if they've finally crushed that damn crab?

Ah, thirty seconds have passed—

Here it comes—**The Big News:** ...

Damn, it was only a test.

A test of what?

Of **The System** of course, stupid.

Up the scale—down the scale—lovely, lovely.

Yes Haifitz is still in his box, cranking-away and
the rain is still falling etc....

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### *Flood Tide*

God's whole-blue Pacific

condensed into a swell-wave wall of clear energy

Rushes to squeeze through the throat of

our not so Golden Gate.

The Tide Book says:

maximum flood 12:30 -4.2 knots.

All optimistically figured by computer for months in advance

so that once-a-week sailors and everyday sailors can frolic and

Live.

O, immeasurable mass of protein plankton

for how many Perch, Gulls, Pelicans and Bass

For how many little not-so-white birds

oil-soaked and dying somewhere past the Antioch Bridge

Will you be The Last Supper.

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Exercise for William Carlos Williams.

I see and I talk to at least 200 people every day
lonely.
I'm married, with two children, and have an excellent credit rating
lonely.
I have taken all that The American way of Life has to give
lonely.
I have done all that Tradition requires, like combing my hair and wearing a tie
lonely.
In short, I'm the epitome of Success. You name it and I represent it.
Why then, am I alone?
By myself
alone
with myself
alone in solitary confinement.
Eating, Loving, Working.
Alone.
To this Riddle I don't know the answer—but
I'm damned certain of one thing:
When I'm old and sucking on my false teeth I'm going to die
all alone.

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Dogs and cats to be fed—  
not to mention wife and children  
though not necessarily in that order.  
Lawns must be mowed.  
Cars must keep running to get to the job  
that keeps the dogs and the cats fed etc....  
It's not a question of being interrupted—  
it's more like a trampoline existence  
with dogs and cats and again to mention the wife and  
the children bouncing and jumping up and down  
up and down on this taut gut strung -out from here to everywhere.  
It may not be living but  
that's life.

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Poetry for University Class

What can I help you with?

It's poor Grammar.

You must never end a sentence with a preposition —

Or, was it a proposition?

Well, never mind—back to the original question.

What? I can't really help you—That isn't what I meant.

It's just a figure of speech—just one of those expressions
with which to fill-in the silence.

Just help yourself.

Thank you.