WRITING EDUCATION

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Special Issue on Poetry, Memory and Performance: edited by Julie Blake, Paul Munden & Tim Shortis; with contributions from Amina Alyal, Jane Bluett, Josephine Brady, Jonathan Davidson, Mike Dixon, Maura Dooley, Robert Hull, Glyn Maxwell, Andrew Motion, Mario Petrucci, Antonia Pont, Alison Powell, Debbie Pullinger, Ed Reiss, Catherine Robson, Peter Sansom, Kaiti Soultana, Jean Sprackland, Morag Styles, David Whitley, Patrick Wildgust

plus: NAWE Conference; CPD update; HE & partner news; reviews

@NaweWriters

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FOREWORD

Everyone with a general interest in poetry, and all those with a particular interest in Poetry by Heart, will have their own story to tell about how and why they came to value hearing it spoken ALOUD. My own begins in a school classroom forty-five years ago, when I was baffled by a silent page of "The Waste Land", but felt the hairs on the back of by neck standing up when my wonderful English teacher played us a record of Eliot reading his poem. What, I wondered in my fifteen-year-old way, did it mean to feel moved by Eliot's voice, if I still struggled to understand its silent print equivalent? Could it be that sound itself had a kind of sense?

In due course my answers to this question led to the creation with Richard Carrington of the Poetry Archive (poetryarchive.org) where people can hear poets reading their own work, and enjoy playing with the various bells and whistles that also appear on the site. We launched the Archive almost ten years ago, and re-launched it as a downloads store (and much else besides) two months ago; our visitor numbers (over 200,00 a month, listening to something like a million and a half pages of poetry a month) suggests that a lot of people share our view that "the ear is the best reader".

The success of Poetry by Heart proves this as well. Julie Blake (the Education Director of the Archive) and I set this up a mere two years ago, in association with her organization The Full English, and the take-up in the secondary schools for which it's intended has already been remarkable. In the various explorations, readings, heats and progressions associated with Poetry by Heart, the value of hearing things said aloud is tremendously reinforced by the value of committing them to memory. A generation ago, this might have seemed a pretty dusty idea, tainted by the experience of boring rote-learning. But the zeitgeist has changed – and/or been persuaded to change – and heart-learning is being taken-up and affirmed as never before in my lifetime.

To memorize a poem is to make it a part of ourselves; to feel it grow and change as we grow and change; to understanding it on our pulses; to feel read by it, even as we read it through in our minds. In their various ways, the essays in this issue of *Writing in Education* are all seized with the same ideas. At once scholarly and enthusiastic, they celebrate a significant moment in the teaching of English. A moment which offers infinite new pleasures to teachers, students, and writers involved in education, and which re-focuses the attention of everyone on what it is that makes poetry a necessary part of our lives. As necessary as breathing.

Sir Andrew Motion

Poetry by Heart is launching its third competition, to find the 2015 national champion, on Saturday 28 June 2014. Registrations will open then – for schools/colleges wanting to join the fun and for everyone who would like to subscribe to the Poetry by Heart e-newsletter and blog about poetry education – via the website: www.poetrybyheart.org.uk.

Poetry by Heart is an educational initiative of the Poetry Archive, developed in association with The Full English (thefullenglish.org.uk). NAWE is pleased to support this initiative.

NAWE NEWS

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Following Andrew Motions's foreword, and ahead of the introduction from my co-editors, Julie Blake and Tim Shortis, we're including here the usual mix of NAWE news. By coincidence (or maybe not), a number of the items relate, in a broad sense, to our focus on poetry, memory and performance. It's an interesting snapshot of the vibrant literary landscape we inhabit.

Thanks to Julie and Tim, this edition is being launched at the NATE (National Association for the Teaching of English) Conference in Bristol, 27-29 June, where Poetry by Heart is launching its next annual search for a national champion. This careful co-ordination has enabled us to produce this issue of *Writing in Education* in greater numbers and distribute it to teachers – both at the NATE conference and to schools signing up for the next round of the Poetry by Heart competition.

As ever, we feature columns from our international colleagues, and we have now established a regular slot for the Canadian Creative Writers and Writing Programs (CCWWP), whose conference I attended last month, speaking as part of the "Global Context" panel with colleagues from the US and Australia. Jen Webb and Paul Hetherington were representing AAWP and are based at the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra, home of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI). It was when I was browing the IPSI website that I noticed a contribution to a recent symposium – on "developing intelligence through learning by heart". I was pleased to invite the contributor, Antonia Pont, to write a piece for this magazine. Antonia's work expands the reference of our theme – at the same time making clear why learning by heart is so fundamental to education in general. The whole sequence of this particular negotiation underlines how useful it is to maintain conversation across borders.

At the NATE Conference I shall be joining Nicole King of the Higher Education Academy, together with John Hodgson and Ann Harris, in talking about "transition". This is clearly a hot topic, with the introduction of a Creative Writing A Level – welcome as it is – causing undergraduate programmes some inevitable restructuring. The success of the A Level, with its emphasis on wide reading, may also be posing something of a challenge to English Literature qualifications, especially as they face imposed revision. It's a time of transition for all involved.

In terms of transition from university to the world of work, I find HE staff are exceptionally mindful of students' needs (without turning a university education into a workforce pipeline and thereby stripping it of its prime, exploratory purpose). We do of course still hear of some students with the most unrealistic expectations – or is that just healthy ambition? There'll be a big debate about all this – and more – at the NAWE conference.

Like NATE, we are holding our own conference in Bristol this year (see p.4), so we hope that many local teachers attending NATE will wish to take advantage of our event too.

To support teachers and students of the new Creative Writing A Level, NAWE is planning a published resource with chapters relating to various aspects of the course. Anyone wishing to contribute to this important new resource is invited to submit a proposal for a specific chapter no later than 31 July 2014. A proposal should consist of a 500 word synopsis and make reference to the specific course content as provided in the AQA documentation on their website: www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/a-level/creative-writing-2750. If you wish to discuss your proposal, please contact me: paul@nawe.co.uk.

The NAWE Conference 2014 will feature a 90 minute session focused on the A Level, run by Sarah Oliver, Jane Bluett and Karen Buckley.

NATE and NAWE have liaised for many years, and our own management committee includes two NATE stalwarts, Liz Cashdan and Jane Bluett. The useful overlap between the two organizations has never been more apparent, but we have not truly joined forces as much as we probably should. It is no doubt time to put that right.

NAWE has always welcomed teachers as members, indeed a dialogue between writers and teachers was a fundamental part of our original manifesto, and since this issue is reaching more teachers than usual, we are taking the opportunity to introduce a specific Teacher Membership rate, with benefits tailored accordingly. Full details are available on the NAWE website.

We are, interestingly, following in NATE's footsteps by adding a peer-reviewed research journal to our output. Our new publication, *Writing in Practice* (see p.8), will complement *Writing in Education*, focusing in particular on critical discussion of creative processes.

And so back to our main theme. I have written several columns about Poetry by Heart over the past twelve months, and yet I keep wanting to say more. In finding the hooks – intellectual and sensual – that help a poem take hold in your memory, you uncover the means by which a poet has made a poem memorable. You therefore take important steps on the way both to a critical understanding of poetry – and to writing it. If that's not central to what NAWE is all about, then I don't know what is. This time, however, you don't have to take my word alone, but can delve into the extraordinary array of eloquent testimonies from some of our leading poets and scholars.

Paul Munden

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

"Imagination is limiting," said the historian from the London Institute of Education's Holocaust Centre in answer to my suggestions for possible student responses. He was showing a group of us (teachers, Holocaust Trust directors, writers) photos taken at Auschwitz by an SS guard, probably a member of a photography unit, and found accidentally some years later in what looks like a personal photograph album. This particular photo showed people getting off the train and queuing up for selection. You could discern a woman just arrived talking to a man already in striped clothing. I suggested this would be a good opportunity to engage students in trying to imagine what they might have said to each other and that was when the historian said you had to stick to the facts. This seems odd because the very activity of interpreting a photograph has to rely as much on conjecture as on any underlying facts.

We argued. I don't think I convinced this particular researcher but several other participants were obviously not on his side, thank goodness. How else would we have any historical fiction, or even historical biography; how else can we get students to empathize with victims of past and present atrocities, or to understand the motives of past and present perpetrators. I would recommend novelists like Amos Oz and David Grossman in Israel, Raymond Williams in the UK, and Jonathan Smith's recent article in the *New Statesman* "Where History Stops, Fiction Starts" (23-29 May 2014).

It was purely co-incidence that the conference on Holocaust Education where this exchange/difference of opinion occurred came for me just a few days after I had returned from Portugal on a Jewish historical tour and where fact and fiction had been highlighted in a talk by the American novelist, Richard Zimler, about his book *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon.* The novel is told in the first person by a young Jew who is a secret kabbalist and illustrator of Hebrew Manuscripts. His story is based on the events of 1506 when Franciscan monks drummed up a riot which resulted in the burning or killing of probably 2000 Jews and which left the Inquisition the possibility of persecuting and killing any remaining "New Christians" as the forced Jewish converts were called in Portugal.

I can't say Zimler's novel was the best I have read this year, and if you are wanting some background to Portuguese history while you sip your port on the banks of the Douro, I'd recommend instead *Perreira Maintains* by the Italian Antonio Tabucchi, set in 1930s fascist Portugal, which, incidentally, Zimler castigated for being historically inaccurate. And it does have an intriguing narrative trick. All of which goes to show that as writers and teachers of writing we need to take care with our historical research but we can't renounce it altogether.

And this brings me to the question of whether NAWE can play a wider part in helping historical and social organizations with an educational remit to take on board the importance of the imagination in getting young people to engage with difficult historical and contemporary events. One of the people I talked to at the Holocaust Conference was an education officer from the Ann Frank Foundation who said firmly that what they were best at was the facts: they didn't want to go into areas like creative writing. As Jonathan Smith wrote in the above-mentioned article: "Sticking to the facts does not take you to the truth beyond events." That truth is what creative writers produce.

Liz Cashdan
Chair, NAWE Management Committee

NAWE CONFERENCE 2014

14-16 November
Bristol Mercure Holland House Hotel and Spa, Redcliff Hill, Bristol, BS1 6SQ

We are delighted to confirm all details for the NAWE Conference 2014, the essential UK event for writers and colleagues developing creative writing in all contexts.

The conference has been scheduled to feature over 100 contributors, in five parallel strands. There will also be several plenaries in which to debate the big issues of the moment. The full programme is now available on the NAWE website.

For details of exhibiting and sponsorship opportunities, please contact Sarah Byrne: sarah@mosaicevents.co.uk

Booking

Booking can be made for the full conference – with or without accommodation – or for individual days. For those wishing to be on site for the full event, an excellent rate has been secured with the hotel when using the NAWE online booking system.

Booking and payment deadline: **10 October**

Please see the NAWE website for booking details, directions and further updates.

www.nawe.co.uk

NAWE gratefully acknowledges the support of Bath Spa University as Conference Sponsor.

Conference Venue

The venue, which is under half a mile from Bristol Temple Meads railway station, has very comfortable accommodation, free parking and wi-fi, and a large, indoor heated pool.

Conference Guests

We are delighted to announce our evening readers, Roger McGough and Deborah Moggach.

photo credit: Peter Everard Smith

Roger McGough, "a trickster you can trust", is one of Britain's best-loved poets. He was awarded his OBE for services to poetry in 1997 and more recently a CBE. He was also honoured with the Freedom of the City of Liverpool. His autobiography *Said and Done* (Century) explores overnight fame with Lily the Pink, The Scaffold and *Yellow Submarine,* which he helped write for the Beatles. He is presenter of the BBC's *Poetry Please*.

Friday 14 November, 8pm

Deborah Moggach has written seventeen novels including *The Ex-Wives, Tulip Fever, These Foolish Things* and *Heartbreak Hotel*. She has adapted many of them as TV dramas and written several film scripts, including the BAFTA-nominated screenplay for *Pride and Prejudice*. *These Foolish Things* was made into the film, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. *Tulip Fever* is also about to be filmed. Deborah has also written two collections of short stories and a stage play. In 2005 she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree by her Alma Mater, the University of Bristol. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, a former Chair of the Society of Authors, and is on the executive committee of PEN.

Saturday 15 November, 8pm

NAWE CPD PROGRAMME

NAWE's CPD programme for 2014 is well underway. Highlights so far have included a day on Working as a Writer in the Community, held in the West Midlands, and another successful NAWE and Lapidus retreat at Ty Newydd in Wales. Our relationship with the centre is developing and we hope to work in partnership with them again this autumn, offering a poetry and education weekend, 21–23 November, just after the NAWE conference. Aneirin Karadog and Martin Daws will be leading the course, sharing what they learnt whilst out in New York, and there will be special rates for NAWE members, with single room places at £250 and shared room at £200. Please contact me for details via email: a.caldwell@nawe.co.uk

The poetry theme has been dominant this year in our CPD programme, including an event for writers interested in Poetry by Heart. Sixteen of us met in London on 28 May to begin a dialogue on how contemporary poets could support the project in schools, working alongside pupils and teachers. This exploratory workshop reflected the productive partnership between NAWE and Poetry by Heart, as further evidenced by this wonderful issue of *Writing in Education*. The first part of the day was led by poet Peter Sansom, who offers here (in the following column) his thoughts on poetry readings, an example of how Poetry by Heart is giving rise to all sorts of thoughtfulness about poetry in general.

Our summer CPD programme features our highly successful Coaching Skills for Writers course, which is oversubscribed for the third time. This accredited programme will take place in York during June and July.

Later this year, and next, NAWE intends to prioritize resources for teachers, with publications, web resources and further CPD events for those involved in poetry education and in the Creative Writing A Level. This promises to be an exciting chapter in our history.

Anne Caldwell, NAWE Programme Manager

Poetry Reading Reading

My contention is that poetry readings would be transformed if some of the poems were read twice. I don't think I'm alone, and hope that some of us will start if not campaigning then at least quietly suggesting something of the sort at events. Because I think that if you've only heard a poem once you usually haven't really heard it at all – and it is actually quite dull not really hearing poems. Whereas the second time there is generally a real thrill of recognition and engagement. Or so it seems on the occasions when I pluck up courage to ask the poet for that one again.

First time through we're listening for the meaning, aren't we, or reassuring ourselves we've not missed the "prose" of the poem. It's on second hearing that we really engage fully, relaxed, wholly alert.

Of course we all know poems which communicate in one reading – Poetry by Heart gives plenty of examples – though much of the immediacy is down to the delivery, and a second reading might be even stronger. And then there are performance poems which, like jokes or matches or some songs, are not meant to work a second time. We know, too, that there are poems in this world which we're sorry to have heard even once. Twice would be torture. So it's a high risk procedure, I understand that; but currently most readings are at best ok, aren't they, with the interval the best bit – though again there are exceptions, those mesmerizing readings by poets genuinely on song.

It seems strange having to ask for this, when we routinely read poems twice on the page. Maybe it's because readings are an entertainment, and are usually somewhere between stand-up and a concert. And this is maybe because a poem itself is somewhere between a joke and a song. Or between story and music. In any event, it's interesting to think that most songs – like most music – need repeated listenings to be appreciated. Whereas, though we don't want to hear a joke twice, it stays funny for us telling it again to whoever has just wandered into range.

If you have any thoughts on this, it would be very good to hear from you, especially if you know of any research that has presumably already been done in the general area of poetry and its audience.

Peter Sansom
office@poetrybusiness.co.uk

MAX REINHARDT LITERACY AWARDS

The Max Reinhardt Literacy Awards (MRLA) is a new initiative that will run as a pilot in 2014-15, supported by NAWE and engage (representing gallery, art and education professionals in the UK). Three awards will be made to museums or galleries in England to support schools to work with creative writers. The pilot programme will be reviewed before the programme runs in future years.

The programme will aim to:

• Support museums and galleries to use their collections, displays and buildings to support creative writing and literacy work with schools;

• Share practice from the MRLA with the cultural and education sectors in order to encourage the greater use of museum and galleries by schools to support creative writing and literacy work.

Venues will be invited to apply for the awards in July/August, and NAWE will then assist them in selecting writers with whom they will work.

An Induction event, for all involved, will take place at the Photographer's Gallery in London early in November. This will assist the venue/writer partnerships in planning the work that will be undertaken during January-March 2015 (approximately 5 paid days, tbc). A sharing of experience gained by all involved will be scheduled for April 2015. Each partnership will produce resources to be published online, and disseminated at a subsequent event.

For NAWE, this project builds very positively on the work explored in our Writing on Location project of 2010–11. It also marks an exciting new collaboration with engage, as a direct consequence of our joint involvement in ArtWorks, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Special Initiative developing practice in participatory settings.

The project is being funded by the Max Reinhardt Charitable Trust, which also funds the Alexandra Reinhardt Memorial Award (ARMA), an annual residency, managed by engage, which enables an artist to work with children and young people and create a commission for the public realm.

http://www.alexandrareinhardt.net/max-reinhardt-charitable-trust/
http://www.engage.org

WRITERS IN SCHOOLS

The Writers in Schools and Communities Project Managers' Network met in Brighton in April. Areas of discussion included working with Bridge Organizations and a perennial favourite, how to manage DBS checks (formerly CRB checks). We also discussed working with Teaching Schools and heard about New Writing South's recently launched Young Writers' Manifesto and Arvon Foundation's residential courses for teachers. The next meeting will be in Birmingham, hosted by Writing West Midlands, on Thursday 10 July 2014, from 2pm to 4pm (meeting for lunch at 1pm) with guest speakers to include Julie Blake of Poetry by Heart, who will be talking about their regional work.

YOUNG WRITERS' HUB

A Novella Idea

The deadline for the inaugural Manchester Metropolitan University Novella Award 2014 has just closed. The Award is a major step towards recognizing and raising the profile of the form. A strange hybrid between short story and novel. It is the platypus of the literary world. Not quite one thing, or another.

Yet its canon contains some of the the greatest works in Literature, big or small. *The Old Man and the Sea, Animal Farm, A Clockwork Orange, Seize the Day, Fahrenheit 451, To the Lighthouse, Le Stranger, War of the Worlds,* and *Metamorphosis* are giants of any genre. Still, we know what a novella is, but there is no absolute agreement on a definition. It is typically asserted that a novella is between 7,500 and 40,000 words, a one act structure with few or no subplots. There is a unity of time and place. Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day* for example, takes place over three days and is divided into three acts. Voltaire's *Candide* is commonly referred to as a novella because of its size. It looks like a novella, but for me, is clearly a *novelette*. The novelette is a micro-novel. It has the same structural components of a novel (multiple chapters, time periods, characters) but is scaled-down down to around 10-20,000 words. The true novella should more or less be able to be read in a single sitting and combines the aesthetic unity of a short story with the character development and pathos of a novel.

Yet many novellas are routinely called novels. Many publishers and the media will still term a novella as a "short novel" or even "novel". Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, a study of a super-rich asset manager as he rides around New York on a single day, is little over 40,000 words and – to use that most bovine of phrases – "brought to market" as a novel. Literary awards may be one reason for identity theft. In recent years, a few dubiously slimline "novels" have entered and been shortlisted for the Booker. Colm Tobin's "short novel", *A Testament of Mary,* is a mere 112 pages of large font. Similarly small are Mohsim Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist,* Alison Moore's *The Lighthouse* and Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach,* to name but a few. For some, the novella is little more than a *short* novel. But is that right?

After the commercial boom of the 70s and 80s, the novella and shorter prose forms fell from the mainstream publishing radar. It was harder to sell novellas than novels. They were deemed unappealing to readers, lightweight and uneconomical. The rise of ebooks and the likes of *Kindle Singles* have provided a new platform for the novella. Their size isn't obvious with the immateriality of digital reading and their brevity is conducive to one-click buys, serial publication and risk-taking. This allows for a more integrated, multi-platform method of audience development. In terms of audience, having a few novellas out isn't a bad thing. The unit price is likely to be more affordable and it enables the author to experiment, to try out new ideas in a way they can't when they're sweating through the marathon of producing a 80-100,000 word novel. And with short-run printing an option, there is also a spate of attractive, hardback editions of novellas, often in series, that are attractive to book collectors and general readers alike. You don't have to invest five years of your life into writing a novella. Like good prose, the novella is light and swift.

In the introduction to *Jekyll and Hyde,* Robert Louis Stephenson writes, "The novella is one of the richest and most rewarding of literary forms... it allows for more extended development of theme and character than does the short story, without the elaborate structural demands of the full-length book. Thus it provides an intense, detailed exploration of its subject, providing to some degree both the concentrated focus of the short story and the broad scope of the novel." The lingering intensity of literature, a medley of theatre style structure, short story brevity and the wisdom of the novel. For me, it is the best form in Literature.

As with the music video and the two-hour feature film, the shift from analogue to digital is breaking up the Gutenberg consensus on form. These forms are still prominent but they are no longer as central as they once were. The novelistic HBO-style long television series is Prince of all forms and the small screen – not the big screen – is now the King of popular. Without the necessity of writing 300+ pages to make the best return on print runs, the very form of prose fiction is liberated. On the other hand, the march to a new medium is itself a form and may threaten the sanctity of what was known as prose. In a similar spirit, Will Self recently proclaimed the death of the novel as a cultural force. What of the novella?

With the first round of changes in the 20th century, the novel retreated into itself, becoming linguistically hermeneutic and a baroque self-parody. The rise of ebooks – a new platform in which to consume Literature – threatens to redefine Literature itself, whether it's through gamification, livelinks and extension to other media, the fact that your data can be harvested while reading, or just the departure from paper itself. If the television series and subscription viewing are better suited to novelistic enterprises than the novel is, then the novella is the perfect concentration of what might be termed *literary*. It does what Literature does best, in one elegant form. It doesn't need embellishments, bells or whistles.

A world with more novellas and fewer novels would be a better place. Imagine all those first-time novelists, struggling to make their first marathon run, when they may be better suited and less exhausted by a stronger showing in a 10k. Or not having to read the bulked-out meanderings of so many mass-market novels that are simply trying to make a market-defined page count. Novelists learn language first, structure second. That lesson is nowhere more pertinent than in the writing of novellas. There is simply no room for slack, for scaffolding, for dull-headed prose or abstruse meanderings.

Later in life, presumably with less time on his hands, Saul Bellow said he had come to believe with Chekhov that he could not read a novel without wishing it were shorter. So do I. More novellas, please.

Wes Brown is co-ordinator of the NAWE Young Writer's Hub.

HIGHER EDUCATION NEWS

In my last column I was pleased to report that there was widespread support in the Review of English Benchmark panel meeting for the development of a separate QAA benchmark for Creative Writing. I'm now delighted to say that in April, QAA confirmed that our proposal for a subject benchmark statement in Creative Writing has been approved and NAWE will have a key role in developing the new statement.

The Quality Code steering group has recommended that the project should begin in September, when they will have a consultation draft prepared for English.

We are very proud of the work the outgoing HE committee did in preparing our own subject benchmark and making this new development a reality, with particular thanks to Steve May.

In another move which firmly establishes our sisterly status alongside English, we have been invited to participate in the development of the first joint conference of the English Association with University English (formerly CCUE). Our invitation to take part in the very early discussions and planning for the conference feels like confirmation of wider recognition of Creative Writing as a separate subject discipline, but still very much aligned with our colleagues in English.

We hope that a further confirmation of Creative Writing as a fully fledged subject discipline in the UK will be the launch of our peer-reviewed journal, *Writing in Practice*, which will give a new REFable outlet for creative writing research. The call for submissions has gone out and articles are beginning to trickle in as I write this at the end of May. The deadline for submissions is the 10th July, and then the hard work begins. The first issue editors have been confirmed as Celia Brayfield, Derek Neale and Harry Whitehead, with me as Principal Editor. We have had a good response from people offering their services as Peer Reviewers, though more would still be welcome. We look forward to reading really high quality articles, which will firmly establish the journal when its first issue is published in February 2015.

If the record number of contributors who have been accepted for the conference in Bristol in November is anything to go by, our editors and peer reviewers could be in for a busy summer!

Dr Maggie Butt
Chair of NAWE HE Committee

HE NEWS: EUROPE

European Association of Creative Writing Programmes

The next symposium of the EACWP is taking place in Paris, 11-14 June. Helena Blakemore has been invited to make a presentation of NAWE's activities, with a view to developing links between the two organizations, and she looks forward to reporting back.

The aim of the EACWP is to "promote networking along with the organization of international events, projects and activities by fostering the exchange of students, teachers and scholars and the dissemination of information, ideas and knowledge in the field of Creative Writing, especially, but not exclusively, in Europe."

http://www.eacwp.org

HE NEWS: CANADA

CCWWP conference explores global perspective

No matter where a Creative Writing program is located, educators are challenged by recent changes in the publishing world. That was one of the conclusions shared in a plenary session of the 2014 CCWWP conference held in mid-May at the University of British Columbia.

Among the 259 registrants at "Canada's Writing Conference" were representatives from three different countries where the teaching of Creative Writing is a growing concern: representing the Association for Australasian Writing Programs were Past Presidents Paul Hetherington and Jen Webb, both based in Canberra, Australia; representing the UK's NAWE was Paul Munden, and speaking for AWP was Robin Reagler from Houston, Texas.

The panelists were not strangers, however. Several CCWWP members had already attended the AWP conference, an extravaganza of 10,000 delegates, and

CCWWP Conference Chair Andrew Gray had also attended the NAWE conference in York in 2013. Still, having a plenary session to discuss the ways education needs to change to reflect current students' challenges was fruitful.

Each of the panelists described the current state of the writing arts and the concerns of their organizations during the plenary. We learned of the academic focus of writing education in Australia, and the large number (25) of PhD programs in Creative Writing in the country. Paul Munden (NAWE) described the recent launch of the A Level in Creative Writing, which enables secondary school students to study creative writing as a discipline separate from English. And Robin Reagler (AWP) discussed the continued growth of writing programs, and some of the issues caused by the economic downturn in the US as well as the rapidly changing publishing marketplace.

Common to all countries, Creative Writing continues to be a bright light in the arts and humanities, attracting students in greater numbers and, in many areas, supplanting English Literature studies. CCWWP is the "new kid" on the block compared to the decades-old programs from the UK, Australia and the United States, and members of the board were excited to learn from their colleagues. Several plan to attend the next AAWP conference in New Zealand in November 2014 and hold a panel on Creative Writing pedagogy in Canada.

Lynne Van Luven and Andrew Gray

HE NEWS: AUSTRALIA

The AAWP is continuing with our scholarly projects in 2014.

In 2013, the Australian government funded a research project into creativity. This involves a case study of poetry, designed to investigate whether there are elements consistently present in the contexts and practices of established poets. The project is led by AAWP past chair Professor Jen Webb in collaboration with *TEXT* editor Professor Kevin Brophy, writing academic Associate Professor Paul Magee, and international expert on practice-led research, University of Hertfordshire's Professor Michael Biggs.

Now in its second year, the project has gathered about 40 interviews with poets from across the world; including UK-based poets Monza Alvi, Andrew Motion, Don Paterson and Kathleen Jamie. In addition, the AAWP has supported the team through promoting the project, and providing space at the annual conference to run workshops on thinking, making and knowing in, and through, poetry.

The AAWP has embarked on a campaign to promote the organization and its aims to writers at several key festivals this year.

Our sponsorship of the Emerging Writers' Festival www.emergingwritersfestival.org.au/ held from 27 May to 6 June in Melbourne is an Industry Partnership to present their popular Writers Night School series. This series provides workshops on travel writing, poetry, commercial fiction, non-fiction and facilitating writing events to a festival audience where 60% of attendees are past or present writing program students.

Two of the editors of a significant Special Issue of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* will be joined by a contributor to the issue to present a panel at the Gold Coast Writers' Festival (www.goldcoastwritersfestival.com.au), 13-15 June, 2014. Dr Moya Costello, Associate Professor Anna Gibbs and Virginia Barrett will discuss the creation and impact of *Mud map: Australian women's experimental writing*, a landmark anthology available at: www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue17/content.htm

The AAWP is also a Cultural Partner of the popular Byron Bay Writers' Festival (www.byronbaywritersfestival.com.au), 1-3 August 2014. Members of the Executive Committee of Management will participate in a panel on the Academy and the Book as part of this partnership.

The AAWP Executive will also attend the Byron Bay Writers' Festival, having just finished their mid-year meeting which is held this year at Southern Cross University in Lismore, New South Wales. The agenda for the meeting includes discussion about professional development training for post-graduate Writing students, future sponsorship opportunities and the upcoming AAWP Annual Conference in Wellington, New Zealand from 30 November to 2 December 2014. The Call for Papers for the conference can be found at www.aawp.org.au/annual_conference.

Dr Lynda Hawryluk
Chair, Australasian Association of Writing Programs

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Once, when I was in Denver for a writing conference, I met a friend for a drink, a friend who worked at a Department of Defense outpost in Colorado. I'd forgotten what a striking figure Stuart was – six feet five inches with broad shoulders, lean and muscled. He wore an expensive suit with a crisp white shirt the likes of which one never saw on a university campus, and he resembled the comic book hero, Thor, except that his hair was short-cropped like a Secret Service Agent's instead of long and perpetually blowing like there was a fan hidden someplace.

As the two of us worked our way through the hotel bar, Stuart parting the crowd in front of me, one of my gay friends grabbed my arm. "Jesus," the friend shout-whispered in my ear. "Where did *he* come from?"

Right. Exactly.

Stuart and I got settled at a table and ordered our drinks from the waitress, struggling to be heard over the throngs discussing their books and their agents and their angst. He surveyed the scene, the purple velvet décor and the fancy pod-like booths, where groups huddled. Maybe he was surprised by the scale of the event, to find himself under the same roof with so many wordsmiths. It was a strange thing, even for the people in attendance, who spent so much time alone at computers.

"Writers…." he said and then stopped himself, making eye contact like he wanted to apologize for a thought he hadn't spoken.

"What?" I said. "Writers what?"

"Well," he said, and he studied the ceiling for a second before the desire to speak seemed to renew itself. He leaned forward on his elbows. He cupped hand to his mouth. "Well, they're not the best looking bunch – are they?"

While Stuart was certainly a noteworthy specimen in this room, it hadn't occurred to me that the inverse could also be true. Writers seemed more image-conscious now than they'd ever been, presumably because of the need to promote themselves on social media and blogs. I knew more than a few, male and female, who were using prescription strength Retin-A skin cream to fight back crow's feet that hadn't even been noticeable in the first place. On their tiny writer incomes, they purchased designer eyeglass frames and messenger bags and scarves.

Was Stuart right? I studied the conference-goers, trying to imagine I'd never been to one of these things before. Compared to the population at large, maybe there were still, on balance, more long scraggly ponytails, ill-advised Indiana Jones hats, threadbare Hawaiian shirts, bum bags, and unkempt beards. There was certainly a lot of bad posture. "Now that you mention it," I told him. "The gym is empty every morning. I thought maybe people were just partying too much."

He shook his head. "That would never happen at one of our conferences," he said. "No matter how much tequila."

In a way, Stuart might as well have been from Thor's realm of Asgard. In the defense industry, it presumably mattered if a person were fit, if one had a strong handshake, unwavering eye contact, and the ability to put others at ease or maybe to scare the crap out of them, depending on the circumstance. In short, presentation was important. Beyond important.

But writers, historically, have been under no such pressure. They're people who spend hours alone, who need to be able to shut out everything and everyone so that they can live in the worlds inside their heads. It's perhaps why they want to work at universities – traditional safe havens for smart, eccentric people who may leave home in socks that don't match.

At their best, writers can create text that gives readers poignant, thrilling, sexy, devastating experiences that might in some small and permanent way transform those readers' internal landscapes. But at a book signing or a reading, fans might encounter a George RR Martin type of figure – someone in an ill-fitting leather waistcoat, a Greek fisherman hat, and a beard that threatens to devour his whole face. It's an interesting disconnect, one that has not, of course, slowed *Game of Thrones*. And I love that.

Writers have been one of the few groups about which people have abided by the axiom, *Don't judge a book by its cover*. It's amazing because we judge everything by the cover – especially books. The fruit industry artificially colors our berries to accommodate our visual palettes. "Attractive" people, researchers say, get hired

for jobs at higher rates and thus make more money over their lifetimes. Maybe they then spend it on full-priced furniture – after all, nobody wants a scratched-up armoire, even if perfectly functional. But with writers it has always been different. Everyone can quote "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways." No one cares, though, even in an age when they can google his image, that Robert Browning has a wild comb-over and a Colonel Sanders vibe that could evoke the smell of chicken. Or at least, I hope not.

It's the unusual person who has the introspection and imagination and love of solitude and discipline to be a good writer. It's rare for that same person also to have the charisma and theatricality and social skills and sock-awareness to be a good public ambassador of his or her work. Readings seem like an especially ill-suited forum for writers.

Even for a professional actor, a reading from a novel or collection of poems would be hard to deliver. The words aren't designed for performance. They're designed for private delivery in people's heads. So it was always a bonus, of sorts, if a writer one admired turned out to be an entertainer. Sherman Alexie comes to mind. So does Kurt Vonnegut. Everyone can probably name a few.

Mainly, though, writers are introverts. And so it's incredible, isn't it, that they get up there at those podiums, and they do it? Sure, sometimes they mumble and sometimes they fall into a flat monotone. But they do it. And every now and then, their voices soar through a room or a bookstore, and the words refresh the audience like the oxygen it needs to stay alive – because the words are ultimately what it's about. The words reveal that person's beauty and also our own. Can I plant my feet and hold my breath and wish for writers not to become too slick and glamorous?

Maybe all those hats and beards and bags and those shirts with camouflaging foliage give writers the buffers they need to leave their writing rooms. Maybe what I should have pointed out to Stuart is that Thor is the exception amongst super heroes. He doesn't wear a disguise. But most of them do. Consider Clark Kent, Diana Prince, Peter Parker. Their glasses and hats and overcoats allow them to walk among us, to hide the electric white within, the light that might blind us if we saw it too clearly.

Kathy Flann
Assistant Professor, English (Creative Writing)
Goucher College, Baltimore

LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER

Created by Neil Bartlett and Kate Pullinger and commissioned by 14-18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER is a new kind of war memorial, one made only of words. It has been produced in association with Free Word, in conjunction with the BBC.

The inspiration for the project is the Charles Jagger war memorial on Platform One of Paddington Station (pictured above), which features a statue of an ordinary soldier in battle dress, reading a letter.

Neil Bartlett and Kate Pullinger comment:

"For us, the creators of the project, it is important to move away from the usual imagery associated with war and commemoration. We'd like instead to hear what people think – what they really think – and for them to write to the unknown soldier a letter. If they were able to speak to him now, with all that has been learned since 1914, and with all their own experience to hand, what would they say?

"This is everyone's chance to be part of a new national conversation about remembering the war, and to have their voice heard. Their letter will be published online alongside those of our commissioned letter writers, and the entire collection will be added to the British Library web archive at the end of the project."

Fifty writers from England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland have already pledged to write letters to the soldier. These fifty include writers as distinguished and different as Alan Hollinghurst, A L Kennedy, Andrew Motion, Caryl Churchill, Daljit Nagra, David Almond,

Deborah Levy, Esther Freud, Glenn Patterson, Kamila Shamsie, Liz Lochhead, Malorie Blackman, Owen Sheers, Sebastian Faulks and Stephen Fry.

From 21 May until 4 August, everyone can contribute their letter to the website 1418NOW.org.uk/letter either online or by sending it to LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER, PO Box 73102, London EC1P 1TY.

Young people are encouraged to take part and offer their own voice to this memorial. Teachers can download easily adaptable lesson plans for schools, relevant to English, History, Citizenship, Creative Writing and Drama curriculum areas.

These resources will support a meaningful and thought-provoking lesson that encourages students to think about WW1 and the centenary commemorations, and contribute their own short piece of creative writing to this nationwide project.

The memorial will begin to take shape online from Saturday 28 June. Letters will be published as they arrive, and throughout the 37 days leading up to the declaration of war on 4 August. They will be searchable by theme, keyword and geographical origin.

LETTER TO AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER will create a snapshot of how twenty-first century Britain views the First World War, one hundred years on. At the end of the project the entire collection will be archived online at The British Library and kept in perpetuity for generations to come.

About the Artists:

Neil Bartlett is a novelist and theatre director. Kate Pullinger is a novelist and Professor of Creative Writing and Digital Media at Bath Spa University.

Contact: Anna Vinegrad annavinegrad@gmail.com
0207 609 8905 / 0781 3808 487 Twitter @letter1418

We print here two of the letters received, the first by Caryl Churchill, the second by Anna Mitchell, aged 13.

Dear Jack

I know we're not on speaking terms but I've been thinking what if you die.

I've been finding it hard to forgive you and it's worse because I'm the only one who thinks you've done anything wrong. Your family and mine certainly don't.

It was hard to bear the white feathers and specially getting one from Ellen. Don't flap your hand at me, I know you like her. (So do I of course, but you're the hero now.) You'll still say it wasnt the feathers, you just saw the light.

Maybe you're right. Maybe it is sometimes not wrong to kill people. Maybe this war is a glorious exception and

No, I cant think that or only for a short time about four o'clock in the morning. I hope in a way you're still as determined as the day you got on the train and don't have doubts at night to suffer as well as all the other things there. When it's over we can argue about it in the pub.

I keep wanting to say how could you? how could you leave me? and trying to stop myself.

I want you to regret it bitterly. I'm sorry.

Will I send this? It helps writing it anyway. If I go to prison they might not let me write to you so I will send it. I expect your mother will send socks and chocolate (Ellen too?) So just this from your friend still

Edward

Dear Ferno,

I write to you with hope. Hope you're still alive. With each passing day my yearning for you grows, the longing that you will come home and hug me once again. In my hands I hold the handkerchief you sent me, a faint sweet smell of you still lingering on the cloth. An image of your body rises from the handkerchief, I see you standing, tall, strong, my brother. That's who you are, not an unknown soldier, but my loving brother, taken from my side.

Yesterday an English ship was torpedoed here! The British men then tore down the street crying out "eggs" in a most unruly manner. Mother invited them in for dinner, I think she hopes that, if in the same position, someone would do the same for you. Though with their arrival brings hope. Yayate can't stop staring at one of the many soldiers, she plays with her hair and laughs at whatever he says. She asked if he liked artichoke and he re- plied "yes good music". We laughed for hours and father was reduced to tears of joy. Do you laugh even when you're facing death itself. In his letter I wish to give you hope, to will you home from wherever this evil war will lead you to. Come home.

From Yvonne

NEW GENERATION POETS

The search is on for the next generation of poets. Next Generation Poets 2014 will be an ambitious promotion following on from two earlier lists, which launched the careers of many of today's leading British and Irish poets. New Generation Poets in 1994 is widely regarded as establishing a movement, with an immensely strong group of poets who have gone on to dominate the mainstream literature scene during the last twenty years, including Carol Ann Duffy, Simon Armitage, John Burnside, Ian Duhig, Don Paterson, Kathleen Jamie and fourteen others.

Next Generation Poets in 2004 promoted and helped bring to prominence the next group of rising poets, with many who are highly visible today, such as Paul Farley, Gwyneth Lewis, Robin Robertson, Alice Oswald, Jacob Polley, Maurice Riordan and fourteen other poets.

The Poetry Book Society, backed by funding from ACE GftA and the TS Eliot Estate, will seek to find the 20 most exciting new poets who have published their first collection in the decade between 1 May 2004 and 30 June 2014, with no age restriction. The call for submissions went out on 12 May and the judging panel will comprise Ian McMillan (Chair), Caroline Bird, Robert Crawford, Paul Farley and Clare Pollard.

The PBS will announce the list of 20 Next Generation Poets 2014 on 9 September with a major PR campaign, a reading group scheme and a dedicated website with a video gallery of the poets. Audiences across the country will get the chance to hear the poets read at 23 events in festivals, libraries, venues and bookshops, running through to March 2015. We'll finish up the promotion with a big celebration at a major London venue at which all the poets will be invited to read.

http://www.poetrybooks.co.uk/projects/51/

HIPPOCRATES INITIATIVE

5th International Symposium on Poetry and Medicine 10 May 2014, Royal College of Surgeons, London

Report by Joan Michelson

This conference drew together fifty medical health professionals, doctors, students, academics and poets for a day comprised of short papers, poetry readings, question and answer sessions and the award ceremony for the 2014 Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine.

In his opening paper, Professor Michael Hulse distinguished "medical poetry" from the poems about associated subjects: loss, death, and bereavement. He suggested three categories: the first written from the point of view of the patient; the second, by those close to the patient; the third by professionals treating the medical condition and others responding to it. Characteristics, particularly of the first group, include a heightened focus on the self, as found in Romantic poetry.

Poems read in the morning session furthered our understanding of the subject. Each of the poets has written poems around a medical condition. The first poet to read, Clare Best, has a familial history of breast cancer. Genetically high-risk, in her forties she chose to have preventative bilateral mastectomy and, boldly, claiming her flat scarred body, without reconstruction. Breaking the silence around cancer in which she grew up, Best has written a thirty-one poem cycle, "Self-Portrait without Breasts", (*Excisions*, Waterloo Press, 2011). The sequence illustrates Hulse's first category, writing from the point of view of the patient. On a celebratory note, one poem announces, "I am streamlined in air and water."

Rebecca Goss's book-length poem, *Her Birth* (Carcanet 2013), illustrates category two. Sixteen hours after giving birth, Rebecca and her husband were invited into the "Bad News Room". They were told that baby Ella had a rare and incurable heart condition. For the sixteen months that Ella lived, Goss carried her against her shoulder close to her heart. Despite the birth of a healthy second daughter and the passage of years, Goss still feels the physical absence of Ella. She writes in a poem, in which the title begins the first line: "I SWEAT WHEN I//Hoover. Mash potatoes. Fuck./ You sweat sitting up. [...]// A breastfeed left us slippery, hot/ your heart working harder// than mine.
(See http://shadowtrain.com/id315.html)

The third reader, Lesley Saunders, a poet whose writing inhabits the "haunted" world of science and technology, is, category three, a responsive outsider. Her poem "Peccant Attoms" (*Cloud Camera*, Two Rivers Press, 2012) draws on the novelist Fanny Burney's account of her right breast mastectomy. The operation was performed in 1812, half a century before general anaesthesia was available. Incorporating lines from the patient's letter to her elder sister, the poet writes,"*his forefinger first described a straight line from top to bottom // of the breath, secondly a Cross & thirdly a Circle./*
There remains only the syntax of clean bandages//
and, as muscle goes under the knife, silent dictation."

Throughout the day, short papers were offered on a variety of themes: Poetry and Illness as “narratives of a last resort”; Surgical metaphor in the poetry of Sylvia Plath; Anorexia in recent poetry from Ireland; Traces of TB in the poetry of Norman Nicholson (the “whispering” poet); Acts of naming disabilities in contemporary poetry; The wounded healer; Forgetfulness and ageing; and Wordpharmacy, about a conceptual artwork linking language and medicine. In the late afternoon, Philip Gross, winner of the TS Eliot Prize and National Poetry Competition, gave a reading of poems about his father’s aphasia.

The culmination was the presentation of prizes in the Hippocrates competition. Over one thousand poems were submitted from thirty-one countries for the three categories: NHS, Open, and Young Poets. The first prize in the NHS category was for “Out of Hospital Arrest” by Dr Ellen Storm about witnessing and dealing with a death on a train. First prize in the Open, “The Return”, by Jane Draycott, invites us to walk into an abandoned sanatorium where the furniture waits for the return of patients. The Young Poets first prize poem, “I Will Not Cut For Stone”, is by Conor McKee, in his first year at Cambridge. The title suggests gravestone incisions, while the poem thinks around surgical procedures and the body’s aura: “I couldn’t [...]/ understand why only one part was the patient./ Worst of all would be the heart/ stripped of its mysteries”.

To mark its 5th year, the Hippocrates Initiative is launching a new venture for schools in partnership with the Healthy Heart Charity, the Cardiovascular Research Trust. Poets Wendy French and Rebecca Goss will be editing a book of poems on the heart written by children for children of all ages.

Entries are welcome from anywhere in the world from schools or individually from children and young people.

Wendy writes: “The aim is to bring to children, from an early age, awareness of the importance of keeping the heart healthy through diet and exercise. The idea for this came from a pilot poetry project in schools in and around London. Please do get your pupils writing! Our experience of this type of project in schools has shown that it can be very exciting both for pupils and teachers."

http://hippocrates-poetry.org/healthy-heart-poetry/online-entry-for-healthy.html

LAPIDUS

Poetry has always been close to the heart of Lapidus members. Lapidus works with writing of all kinds. We have an elastic definition of the literary arts; it includes traditional written forms – poetry, fiction, memoir and creative non-fiction, oral forms such as performance poetry, story-telling and song writing – and also forms of writing that overlap with other art forms, such as drama, film, soundscapes, collage and even opera.

But time and again, in therapeutic writing workshops, in one-to-one psychotherapy, or in work in hospitals and care homes, it’s poetry that is the art form of choice.

So what is it about poetry that is so powerful when it comes to promoting health and wellbeing? The word ‘poem’ is from the Greek for “a thing made” – and specifically here, made of words. What makes this “thing” different from other kinds of things made of words?

A poem can act as a container. Typically, it’s concise and the ideas and images it contains are structured either by a formal metrical or rhyme scheme, or lineation, with words set out either conventionally or not on the page. The look of a poem and how it relates to the white space around it conveys meaning in advance of its content.

Articulating complex and potentially overwhelming emotions in a poem can be a way of getting them under control. The American poet, Edna St Vincent Millay wrote a famous sonnet in praise of sonnets which opens: “I will put Chaos into fourteen lines/And keep him there.”

Reading such poems at times of heightened emotion can also provide solace, a sense that someone else has been there too. Reading and sharing poems in a group often elicit a collective “ah” of recognition. One of the tasks of the poet is to “tell it like it is”. There’s a paradox that when we are sad, we are most comforted by sad poems – or sad music – because they can validate our experience.

Another characteristic of poems, compared to other art forms, is their potential to be richly ambiguous. Poems demand active reading and all of us bring personal associations to a poem. Typically, in a therapeutic writing group, the same poem can elicit widely varying responses. Working with these is at the heart of therapeutic writing.

Poems can often arrive fully formed at times of

heightened emotion or perception – this form is complementary to the “splurge” that might find its way into a diary of journal. Every practitioner is different but in my own sessions we often start with “free writing” with its boundary-less quality, and later move to more structured writing exercises, which often yield poems.

There’s a lot more to be said about poems and especially the connection with the heart, but back to Lapidus!

We are delighted that we have appointed a new membership secretary and website manager, Mel Parks. She will be at the heart of our administrative activities and can be contacted on info@lapidus.org.uk and the website is already reflecting her creative input.

We are also delighted to announce that the next Lapidus Day and AGM will take place on Saturday 1 November 2014, in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University at their campus in historic Llandaff, a couple of miles from Cardiff city centre. Further details and booking will be available soon.

Like all Lapidus gatherings, it promises to be full of heart and not a little poetic.

The Lapidus Board: Christine Hollywood, Jill Teague & Victoria Field

MEMBERS’ NEWS

Briony Goffin had the privilege of giving a talk at TEDxCardiff in March on the subject of Writing as Tribute and an edited version is now available at: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsRNoUx8w3rO8QJhMRPI5YLNzb2vWlCep. The talk would be of interest to those who have personal or professional interest in writing/creativity/dementia/loss/ memory/ love across generations.

John Lindley has a new poetry collection brought out to mark the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas. *Dylan Thomas: Embers & Sparks* is published by Riverdane at £3.50. Contact: j.lindley1@sky.com

Janet Olearski’s short story, “The Older Short-Haired Female”, appeared in the April 2014 issue of *Bare Fiction Magazine* (www.barefictionmagazine.co.uk). Janet, who is based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, was also one of the six authors short-listed for this year’s Telegraph/Harvill Secker Crime Writing Prize.

Sarah Salway’s new book, *Digging Up Paradise*, combines original photographs, creative writing, poems and historical details to feature twenty-six gardens across the Kent. It costs £12 and is available from the publisher’s website, www.culturedllama.co.uk, as well as on-line booksellers. ISBN: 978-0-9926485-6-5.

Curtis Tappenden reports that *Leave No Trace*, an anthology of writing by students from the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) has been accepted into the main collection of the National Poetry Library at London's Royal Festival Hall. Curtis organized the workshops in which students were encouraged to engage in narrative responses to artworks in Tate Modern, the hustle and bustle of visitors, and reflections of self and key questions which motivate and drive personal vision.

“I knew it was a mistake...”

We should like to alert readers to the experience of one NAWE member who had dealings with Chapter One Promotions, a company claiming to provide “opportunities for aspiring and established writers”. Offering prizes in its inaugural 1st Paragraph Competition, the company proceeded to list winners on its website but then rewarded them with meaningless contracts relating to inclusion in an anthology that never materialized. Needless to say, the company website no longer exists. Somewhat incredibly, the headline here above was how the competition was advertised.

NEW MEMBERS, SUMMER 2014

Institutional Members:
Emma Scattergood, Bournemouth University
The Library, University of East Anglia

Professional Members:
John Osborne, North Lincolnshire
Aviva Dautch, London
Patsy Isles, London
Jennifer Laurie, Glasgow
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Joe Kriss, South Yorkshire
Susannah White, Gloucestershire
Kristin Durinick, Surrey
Alice Thorp, Hertfordshire
Sally Gander, Somerset
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Gill Blanchard, Norfolk

Spencer Jordan, Cardiff
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Jennifer Hart, Hampshire
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Niel Bushnell, Cleveland
Morven Crumlish, Edinburgh
Katherine Armstrong, Cheshire
Mab Jones, Cardiff
Bob Beagrie, Middlesbrough
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Allen Stroud, Bedfordshire
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Alyson Hallett, Cornwall
Georgina Kirk, Lancashire
Rebecca Loncraine, Powys
Cathy Wood, London
Anna Morvern, Co. Down

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Deborah Llewelyn, Swansea
Joe Kipling, West Yorkshire
Natalia Spencer, Bristol
Joanna Pike, Wiltshire
Kathryn Barton, Hampshire
Priscilla Morris, Norfolk
Elizabeth Phippard, Wiltshire
Jessica Bellman, London
Ruth Goldsmith, London
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Writing in Education

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Bryan Podmore
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Submissions

Please send articles by email to the editors editorial@nawe.co.uk and as hard copy to the NAWE PO Box as below. All articles will be considered by the editorial board who will also take independent advice. Reviews, as commissioned, should be sent by email to the Reviews Editor reviews@nawe.co.uk. Full submission details are published on the NAWE website.

Please note that the individual contributions to this journal do not necessarily represent the views of NAWE or even the majority of its members. We welcome responses to any of the articles and reviews including those which would seem to offer contentious opinions.

Advertising

Quarter page: 3.5" (w) x 4.5" (h) £55

Half page: 3.5" (w) x 9" (h) or 7.25" (w) x 4.5" (h) £100

Whole page: 7.25" (w) x 9" (h) £150

Qualifying members receive a 10% discount.

Copy/artwork to be sent to the NAWE office by:

Spring Issue: 1 February
Summer Issue: 1 May
Autumn Issue: 1 October

Leaflets and/or similar material may also be included in the magazine mailing (x 1500) £100 for a single A4 sheet, otherwise by negotiation.

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Editorial

Julie Blake, Tim Shortis

Poetry by Heart is a national poetry recitation competition for 14-18 year olds in England. Contestants compete in school-based competitions, county rounds, regional heats and a national final. The competition was launched in December 2012, funded by the Department for Education, and is now starting its third search, to find the 2015 national champion. The competition offers the challenge of serious fun to its many competitors from the thousand or more schools that have registered so far.

Poetry by Heart seeks to open up the ways in which people can enjoy and engage with poetry. It is an educational initiative of the Poetry Archive, the premier online collection of recordings of poets reading their own work, developed in association with the research-informed curriculum workshop, The Full English. The design and implementation reflect its development in close consultation with poets and writers, and with teachers, pupils, students and researchers. The website timeline of over 200 poems spanning a thousand years, one poem for each poet selected, with accompanying portraits, biographies, notes, recordings and links to the online Oxford English Dictionary, offers a way into reading and listening to poetry which has proved to be of value and interest to a web public not defined by nation, age or participant status.

Poetry by Heart has been funded for its first three years but whether it will come to have a life beyond this will depend on the discourses and practices it attracts as more people seek to engage with choosing, memorizing and reciting poems. We understood this at the start and worked with NAWE in devising and developing the first programme of professional development for teachers in 2013. This collaboration has now widened to include sessions for writers in education who wish to explore poetry, memorization and recitation, in a context where this has been made obligatory in primary school programmes of study. Without a lively professional debate, poetry memorization will be no more than a prescription of the curriculum, surviving only as it is enriched by extrinsic rewards or enforced by coercion. There would be little purpose in a special edition of this journal focusing on such a predicament.

As Catherine Robson has shown in her historical study of the practice, the memorization and recitation of poetry came to be of overwhelming importance in the teaching of what we would now call literacy. In the 19th century, it was a matter of national policy, curriculum obligation, testing and coercion, often by methods that would be deemed unacceptable today. The memorization and recitation of poetry have since become rare in England, though it is preserved in other cultural contexts and countries, such as through the national Eisteddfod in Wales and every Burns night in Scotland (and wherever Scots gather).

We are delighted to collaborate with NAWE to stimulate this timely and important professional debate. This special edition of *Writing in Education* has set out to gather together in one place a diverse range of ideas, views, experiences and perspectives on poetry memorization and recitation associated with the Poetry by Heart competition and beyond it. We wanted the edition to reflect the emergent nature of this knowledge. We wanted approaches to be eclectic and lively and to serve to open out the topic not narrow it into any particular groove. We have too much to learn from each other to reach any conclusions at this stage about how this discourse and its practices might best develop next.

What we do know is that Poetry by Heart has provided a focus for thinking about the place of poetry memorization and recitation in our lives. It's not just an English thing: you will find news here of established competitions in the USA, Canada and Ireland. We know there is an annual competition in Jamaica and there are new pilot competitions developing in France and South Africa too. We dream of a poetry learning Commonwealth or Olympic games!

We know that poets value it as an act of building up a treasure-house of poems. Hughes and Heaney spoke substantially about its value, and Poetry by Heart has had very positive endorsements from poets as diverse as Alice Oswald, Simon Armitage, Lemn Sissay, Francesca Beard, Patience Agbabi and Daljit Nagra; our MCs have been Owen Sheers, Jacob Sam-La Rose and Roger McGough. In this special edition Andrew Motion and Jean Sprackland, our judging panel chairs, and Glyn Maxwell, one of our judges, write about their connections with it. So too do poets Robert Hull and Maura Dooley, whose poem "Explaining Magnetism" was recited by our 2014 national champion, Matilda Neill.

We know that students and teachers enjoy it. Kaiti Soultana, 2013 national champion, describes her experience, drawing in the voices of other student participants. Kaiti's teacher, Jane Bluett, describes how taking part in the competition has refreshed some of her practices.

We know that researchers working in poetry education are fascinated by it. We are delighted to have developed a close collaboration with Homerton College, Cambridge, and the Faculty of Education, three of whose members write here. Morag Styles, Professor of Children's Poetry shares her experience of having been involved in the judging for two years. David Whitley and Debbie Pullinger's Poetry and Memory project is investigating experiences of poetry learning, and examining the relationships between memorization, recitation and understanding. They write here on how we might discover sense through sound, and on some of the forgotten traditions of recitation.

Teachers in all sectors are starting to explore how poetry recitation and performance might help learning of different kinds. Here you will find reports on projects devised to test these ideas, from Amina Alyal at Leeds Trinity University and Josie Brady at Birmingham City University, while Gary Snapper shows what poetry enjoyment of this kind is up against in the A Level English Literature curriculum. Mike Dixon explores the decisions entailed in writing the biographies and commentaries that accompany the poems on the Poetry by Heart website, and what we hoped they might do for learning, while Antonia Pont reflects on kinds of deep learning and intelligence that learning poetry by heart might foster.

Poetry educators in a variety of other contexts are experimenting with memorization and recitation. Mario Petrucci gives us twelve approaches he has tried and tested in workshops. Alison Powell recovers ancient memorization traditions and tries them out on Year Seven pupils. Patrick Wildgust, Jonathan Davidson and Ed Reiss share their creative experiments too, working with poems by William Wordsworth, Peter Didsbury, Percy Shelley and with the anonymous grave marker for Laurence Sterne.

It is a rich and stimulating mixture of articles. We hope you will find much food for thought, debate and practice.

Julie Blake *is the Education Director of the Poetry Archive and co-founder of Poetry by Heart. With Tim Shortis, she is also Director of The Full English thefullenglish.org.uk, a research informed curriculum workshop.*

Tim Shortis *is a lead member of the senior project development team of Poetry by Heart, with a particular focus on partnerships and professional dialogue. He is also a Director of The Full English.*

"The poems we learn when we're young stay with us for the rest of our lives. They become embedded in our thinking, and when we bring them to mind, or to our lips, they remind us who we are as people, and the things we believe in. They become personal and invaluable, and what's more they are free gifts – there for the taking. We call it learning by heart, and I think such learning can only make our hearts bigger and stronger." – *Simon Armitage*

Poetry by Heart 2013-14

Reflections and Perspectives

The first winners

Giving poetry a voice has always been important to me. Since I was a child I read out loud, and I was read to by my mother. There is so much more that you can gain from hearing the words glide from the mouth of another into your own ears, and there's even more to gain from vocalizing it yourself, let alone learning it. It's as if the words live within you, and they have built the foundations of their houses to stick around for a while. Sometimes they poke their heads round the doors and you are reminded of a line or a phrase from the words you had once remembered. No doubt they will keep doing so for the rest of your life.

The moment I was first introduced to Poetry by Heart was by no means glamorous. A generic and relatively plain email sent round to the students at Bilborough College found its way into my inbox. The specifics of its contents escape me, but there was something that drew me in. I hadn't heard of anything quite like it, certainly not in England.

I clicked on the link in the email that sent me to the Poetry by Heart website. I was instantly in love. I was engulfed by what seemed to be an endless supply of really good poetry; poetry I had never seen before, never knew existed, and it was all there at a click of the button and a slide of the mouse. I had found, from studying a compact version of A Level English Literature since that September, that the syllabus was somewhat restricted. We were only studying a select few of the works of two poets, and that never seemed enough for me. I wondered, while I was scrolling through this online treasure chest, why can't we study some of this?

The first poem I came across was "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight". I had thought by starting my journey at the bottom of the pile, where the timeline began, I would work my way through and find the one that suited me best. I didn't have to search long. Sir Gawain stared back at me, mighty and strong, as if to say "bring it on". I looked at the words on the page and, frankly, they didn't look like words at all. That excited me. The idea that I could find the magic in the alien words and bring them to life again made me start straight away. Men haven't always been writing. There was a time when poetry was an oratorical form, from the times before Homer and beyond. I felt as though there is no other way than to give this poem a voice, and it didn't seem as though it had been given much of a chance before.

I chose my second poem, Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish", just as simply, but because it was so beautiful to say. The words were so perfectly selected that they made a fish sound like a sovereign.

I spoke to Logan Jones, the 2014 3rd place national finalist, about his experience of choosing which poems to recite. He told me that "finding a poet that you connect with is the most important thing when it comes to reciting their work". I find it interesting that some people place a lot of emphasis on the poet as well as the poem. I found it really interesting that the Poetry by Heart team chose to team up with The National Portrait Gallery and link a picture of the poet with the poem. It seemed as though we were able to interactively shake

the hand of the writer, and it seemed, to me at least, as though a certain bond was created between poet and reciter.

And so I began. I learnt “Sir Gawain” first, because I thought it would be the one that was the most challenging. Line by line, I explored the sounds and took to bringing them with me wherever I went. Walking down the street every morning to the bus to college, I said the lines out loud, matching the rhythm of my footsteps. From the few guidelines I found on the internet, I managed to patch out a pronunciation that worked for me and which sounded authentic. Every day when I came home from lessons, I challenged myself to remember the lines I had learnt that morning. Day by day the number of lines grew until I had ten of them stacked up.

I went to show Jane, who was the teacher organizing the contest. She seemed to like it. It spurred me on to learn more, and that night I had another five under my belt. Within two weeks I had the poem in my fist and I knew it by heart. I had about ten days to learn ‘The Fish’ in time for my college contest, and honestly that was the scariest part of it. I remember thinking I couldn’t pull it off with the few days I had left.

When the afternoon came, the small classroom grew into a meeting point, where two of my friends I had invited sat alongside teachers and the handful of other competitors. We were lucky enough to have a poet come to judge and observe. It was the most nervous I had been throughout the entire competition. I hadn’t shown many people my recitation just yet, and I was sceptical about what they would think of it. I remember having to hold my hands in front of me to stop them from shaking.

Having spoken to some other contestants, I found the reasons each of them joined the competition varied vastly. I find it amazing that one competition can bring together people with so many different experiences with poetry and with school, and unite them. I spoke to Brandon Ra Pestano, a 2013 national finalist, and he said this:

“What appealed most to me about the competition was the chance to prove people wrong. I decided that this was a chance to showcase to not only my teachers but also my peers that just because I didn’t necessarily fit in with what they deemed as the correct attitude of an intellectual student, linking my ability to comply in the school system to my ability to excel was a big mistake. And in that moment, the fire was lit.”

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The jump from classroom to theatre stage wasn’t so much a frightening one, just one that allowed the realization of “this is real” to sink in. The county competition I took part in took place in quite a large theatre, one that I had performed in before on a number of occasions, so I was somewhat at home with it. I found the best part of it to be listening to the others recite their poems. We were able to watch from the seats in the audience, and there is an overwhelming sense of quiet when someone is about to recite that is intoxicating.

The time leading up to the finals weekend was generally quite exciting. I went down to London with Jane. Meeting all the other contestants from different parts of the country was easy, just because everyone seemed to have the same passion for the same thing – words. There was a sense of comradeship that I hadn’t experienced elsewhere. The buzz was electric, and I have still kept friends with some of them from the competition. The 2014 Champion, Matilda Neill told me of a similar experience she had this year. She said that “the thing I most enjoyed about it was being amongst others who really appreciated poetry the way that I do.” From being there at this year’s finals weekend, it certainly felt as though the vibe had been amplified. It seemed as though contestants’ excitement for poetry grew as the weekend went on.

Logan told me that “I was expecting the worst, but this soon changed when I’d made myself at home in my room, and started (slowly) to get to know some of the other finalists. By the end of the weekend, I didn’t want to leave and I felt lost for a good few days afterwards.” It seems as though one of the core aims for the weekend was far from the completion of a competition, but to knit a network of people who share a passion for one thing.

And of course, to have fun!

Nothing was ever set in stone. We arrived not knowing what was going to happen over the upcoming days, which I think contributed to being so overwhelmed with what we got given. I didn't expect a trip on the London Eye or a tour around the British Library, let alone the prizes we got at the end of Saturday's final. It was such a treat to be able to watch others compete in their own regional finals.

Despite the friendly atmosphere, there was still a rife sense of competition. Everyone wanted everyone else to do well, but for themselves to do better. The standard was exceptionally high. It seemed as though being around other competitors intensified my relationship with my poem, and I took on more responsibility to project it outward. I felt as though I owed it to the poem to do it justice, and to prove I was the best person for the job. The competitiveness was also felt by Brandon: "I felt like I was in the film *Enter the Dragon*, the other contestants my opponents in this journey of knockout stages and head to head duels."

The evolution of the poems I recited interested me. Brandon told me that "I found that the poems began to grow visually. I began to picture the lines of the poems as film scenes in my head, with me the reader as the protagonist." I had noticed that over the course of the time I spent with my poems, reciting them down the street, in my head when I was making myself dinner, in between lessons at school, the meanings of them began to change. I began to understand them better, and in turn, the way I recited them evolved. The rhythm of each poem found in itself a strong undercurrent and drew me along from start to finish. I started to become more confident in playing around with them and trying new techniques out.

Matilda told me that "It is very true about taking the poems into your heart". It seems almost universal that the journey a poem takes through you is a positive one, despite the various different paths it can take within each individual person.

What I have gained from the competition is definitely rare. It opened up an avenue to poetry in a new way. Recitation isn't old fashioned. There are voices in these poems that need to be heard, and we should use our voices to host them. I have been lucky enough to have since worked with the team behind the competition. I have travelled the country to universities to show future teachers on PGCE and TeachFirst courses that recitation in the classroom and beyond is vital. I have taken recitation to new levels, reciting for BBC Radio 4, The Birmingham Literature Festival, and am currently in rehearsals for an upcoming gig to perform my own spoken word poems.

I can imagine this last year of mine to be experienced in a similarly great way for Matilda. Winning the competition brings great things. Since then she tells me that she has been on BBC Radio Newcastle, in a couple of local newspapers, and will be on BBC4's *Poetry Please* with a recording of her recitation of "The Way through the Woods". "It's really opened up my network of contacts and I am very excited about all the things that may happen next year. One of the best outcomes was a personal postcard and book sent in the post to me from Maura Dooley who wrote 'Explaining Magnetism', it was such a lovely letter and I was incredibly touched".

Poetry recitation is timeless. There is an audience out there ready and waiting to be overcome by words. I am sure I am speaking for all who have been a part of the competition when I say what a truly incredible journey it has taken me on, and I will be an advocate for it for ever more.

Kaiti Soultana *is currently reaching the end of her gap year and will be starting a combined English degree in the Autumn. She is a resident actor at the Television Workshop, a member of National Youth Theatre and the poetry collective, The Mouthy Poets. Kaiti was the Poetry by Heart inaugural National Champion in 2013, and an ambassador for 2014.*

A teacher's perspective

At the time of writing, I am busy taking A Level Literature students through the final stages of their course in preparation for the exam. The exam our students take is "closed book" and this exercises them greatly. Having asked three classes this week what they would like to focus on, the unanimous response has been, "Quotes!" They are genuinely afraid of being unable to remember bits of their set texts. They see quotations as something separate to the texts themselves, they demand lists of them. They have not, in spite of my cajoling, taken their texts to heart.

I am not of course suggesting that my students should

be able to recite *Wuthering Heights*. What I am suggesting is that, if you know a text, interact with it with an open ear and actively read it enough times, it sticks. It strikes me more than ever this year, that if the skills espoused by the Poetry by Heart competition were transferred effectively to the Literature classroom, student engagement with all texts, not just poetry, would be greatly improved. It is, as ever, not what we read but the way we read that is important. Ironically, my A Level Creative Writing students have no such qualms about quotation and can happily cite the ideas of writers. I suspect this is because they engage with language through their ears.

Bilborough College, Nottingham, has now taken part in both Poetry by Heart competitions. We are a sixth form college of 1850 students. Participation in competitions is widespread but takes place within specific curriculum areas. Given time constraints and the sheer number of students, we depend on individual student interest for participation. It is very difficult to convince teachers to give over curriculum time to things that are not deemed "relevant". In this context, I email the entire student body about the competition and invite them to a meeting. In both years we have had about half a dozen respondents. The advantage of the small uptake is that they're very keen and committed. They happily turn up to practice sessions and become very supportive of one another. They have great fun with the anthology and choose their own poems.

Our college competitions have been delightful. Something about the idea of reciting a poem from memory sparks an interest in all sorts of unlikely places. English colleagues are keen to judge and really seem to enjoy the official nature of the task. Support staff, Physics teachers and tutors attend, often citing their own experience of learning poems as the reason. Mostly, however, it is the sheer joy of listening to a young person reciting beautiful and powerful words "by heart"; poetry as incantation, poetry as living language and what a treat for the ears. We have also had great support from Nottingham poet, Rosie Garner, who judges and awards prizes.

One of the best aspects of Poetry by Heart is that it takes teachers into account. I was thrilled to attend a free workshop with poetry hero, Peter Samson. This clearly demonstrates the commitment of Poetry by Heart not simply to the competition but to the skills it involves. Imagine an English classroom where the teacher recited the poems to be studied, by heart, rather than simply reading them. The more teachers that are involved in this sort of training, the better. A competition that genuinely values teacher input is on to a winner.

Having mentioned the word, I had better mention the student. The reason I am writing this article is because Bilborough student, Kaiti Soultana, won the first competition in 2013. She not only won, but she did it in such a way that, as she says "introduced (her) to a whole new literary world and community." Kaiti came to me one lunchtime and asked if she could enter the competition. I asked her if she had a poem in mind and she said that she was going to recite an extract from "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", in the original. This obviously wasn't a young woman who was scared of learning a few quotes.

Kaiti had very little help with this project. She popped in occasionally to show me how she was getting on. She was getting on very well. One of her A Level teachers, Kevin Rogers, who was teaching Chaucer, gave her some advice on pronunciation but most of the research she did herself. She had no coaching and I had no input into her choice of poems, apart from obvious admiration. She is quite an extraordinary young woman. This was further revealed at the final of the competition where I watched on nervously as Kaiti took it all in her stride. I would like to add that, even though great attention has been paid to the Gawain recitation, Kaiti's rendition of Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish" just gets better and better. I use "gets" advisedly. Kaiti has practically been "on tour" since winning the competition. It has been an incredible experience for her. Bilborough College are justly proud.

Back at Bilborough, Kaiti's success has had a noticeable impact. Although great numbers didn't flock to take part in this year's competition, those that did were wholly aware of Kaiti's achievement. They were thrilled when she came in to meet them on the day of the college event. There has also been a marked increase in students taking part in other competitions. Bilborough student, Ruth Rimmer, won this year's Forward Young Judges, and two of our other students have just been awarded prizes in the National Young Flash Fiction competition. Kaiti's experience in Poetry by Heart has shown students that participation can have more benefits than simply taking part. It has also shown them that people from Nottingham win competitions too.

As a teacher, what the competition has given me, is the opportunity not only to indulge my own enthusiasm for learning poetry by heart, but to meet people like Kaiti. Two students who entered the competition this year belong to Deborah Stevenson's collective, Mouthy Poets. Since the competition, I have been lucky enough to see

them perform their own poetry on stage at the Nottingham Playhouse. “Say Sum Thin” is a truly inspirational event. I am a poet and a poetry enthusiast. Poetry by Heart has given me the opportunity to seek out like minded students at college and uncover the talent that exists. Poetry lives in a world far larger than the English Literature classroom. It’s happening everywhere.

It is also worth mentioning that most of the students at Bilborough who have taken part in Poetry by Heart also write poetry. Engagement with poetry should involve multiple approaches. Reading, writing, listening and reciting all have their part to play if our students are really to embrace the form. There have always been competitions for the writing of poetry. Now, I am glad to see there are also competitions for young people to write about poetry. I am sure Poetry by Heart has been instrumental in the current proliferation of opportunities for students.

Personally, I applaud the competition. It is very democratic, well run and provides much for teachers as well as students. There is plenty here of value to the classroom. I have exploited the wonderful timeline in Literature, Language, IB and Creative Writing lessons. Students really enjoy exploring it and the links to the Poetry Archive. Bilborough College will certainly be competing in future.

When I last spoke to Kaiti, she said, “It’s probably been the best thing that has happened to me”. Any teacher will tell you that to have a student say that about something you’ve helped with is a privilege. Going with Kaiti to the London final and watching her win is probably one of the most exciting things that has happened to me as a teacher.

I love learning poetry by heart and, in a way, it should be something that we just “do”. You don’t have to go much further than Gillian Clarke’s “Miracle on St David’s Day” to understand the power of remembered verse. I would like to see far more interaction with Literature “by heart” in the classroom. Learning with our ears, our eyes and our hearts is the way to embed a love of the written word. Poetry by Heart is a real celebration of this and long may it continue. Now to see if I can get those Literature students to remember a little bit more than “I am Heathcliff.”

Jane Bluett *lectures in English and Creative Writing at Bilborough College, Nottingham. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from Nottingham Trent University. She is Principal Examiner for the AQA examination in A2 Creative Writing.*

One thrilled poet

One of the things I took for granted as a child but grew up to see as unusual was the fact that my hometown of Bristol held an annual Eisteddfod. Bristol was, afterall, only a stone’s throw from the Land of My Fathers, brought nearer even in the time I lived there, by the addition of a bridge. Borrowing a cup of the rich cultural traditions of neighbouring Wales seemed fair enough. So it was that generations of children in the West Country entered competitions in the performance of music, speech and drama held annually at the imposing Victoria Rooms or the landmark Wills Tower of Bristol University. Every year, my two brothers and I learnt the poem set for our age group, practised and practised, screwed up our courage and entered the classes. At five years old I fell flat on my face going up to the platform (Eleanor Farjeon), at ten years old I won the Bronze Medal (Robert Louis Stevenson) but was chastised for my “breathy quality”. Meanwhile my brother’s sulky French Exchange went back to France with one perfect piece of English. He had sat through an afternoon in which thirty local schoolchildren recited one after another and he returned to Bordeaux quite certain that “Death Shall Have No Dominion”.

To encourage my brother’s understanding of this slightly strange choice for the Eisteddfod’s fourteen-year-olds’ class, my mother bought the Caedmon recording of Dylan Thomas reading four of his poems. The sound of his plumrumbling cadences filled the house for weeks. Aged eight, I poured over the black and white photograph of him, fag in mouth, pen in hand, serious: so that was what a real poet looked like.

Thinking about the Eisteddfod now, I see that it was an odd experience. The poems chosen were a mixed bunch and the matter of standing up in front of all those people was, frankly, terrifying. However, my parents encouraged us because they loved poetry and because we were shy. They thought it would be *good for us.* It looks as though they were right. Years later, all three of their children love poetry, read widely, are published poets and, though still shy in smaller company, each of us can speak up when required (though you’ll have to forgive my “breathy quality”).

I never thought I would find myself agreeing with Michael Gove about much but when the Government gave some funding to the Poetry Archive’s Poetry by Heart competition he remarked: “To know a poem by

heart is to own a great work of art forever." Well, I think he is right. It is perhaps the only great work which we can inhabit fully, freely and forever – which we can take into our hearts.

In the last years of my mother's life, as so much was taken from her by dementia, she was left with a few poems (Wordsworth and Yeats) and a snatch of Shakespeare. On our slow walks, at the edge of the nearby Common, the smallest stir of breeze through the leaves would often bring one of those poems to mind again and her whole face would light up as she remembered it and spoke it aloud.

I have often felt unfashionable saying that I thought it was a good thing to have some poems by heart. It was not a popular point of view. For too many people forced learning at school and the humiliating memory of countless faltering recitations had left too many scars. Times have changed. The growth of spoken word poetry and open mic has taken away some of the stuffiness and fear. Poetry by Heart with its eclectic anthology of world famous classics from across the canon, together with more recent surprising choices by younger, living poets has shaken things up nicely. The *by heart* is not *by rote* but *by choice*.

When I heard that Matilda Neill from Whitley Bay had won this year's competition with two poems, one of which was mine, I was completely thrilled. The idea that something I had written might be carried around in someone else's head, dare I say it, someone else's heart? What more could any writer hope for, ever?

***Maura Dooley**'s most recent collection of poetry is* Life Under Water*. Anthologies of verse and essays she has edited include* The Honey Gatherers: Love Poems *and* How Novelists Work*. She has twice been short-listed for the TS Eliot Award. She teaches at Goldsmiths College, University of London and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.*

One of the judges

It was a both an honour and a delight to be a judge of the Poetry by Heart competition. I do love its "county-based" approach – the consciousness of county only really survives in local elections and cricket, but it's an ancient English source of power with which we're slowly losing contact – rather like the gift of memorizing poems.

Somewhere between late infancy, when lullabies, nursery rhymes and nonsense poems first imprint themselves on our souls, and our teenage years, when to learn *anything* by rote feels too cramping and conforming, we turn our backs on a treasure. To know great poems by heart – and by "great" I mean only those that have survived the years – is to breathe in an element *stronger than time itself.* Your very cells are being girded and brightened by the sound of the English language at its most indefatigable.

It may feel old-fashioned to talk about "immortal" verse – so let's change it to "songs with superpowers", and who wouldn't want *those* in the bloodstream? It's not about remembering poems because they celebrate our culture – the best poems remind us that our culture is, was, will be, nothing but a little local growth. Nor is it about remembering poems because they are old. We should remember them because they never age, and our mortal species, always on the look-out for an elixir that can fight off Time, should seek no further than to open our hearts and train our minds to this inexplicable magic.

***Glyn Maxwell** is a poet, playwright, novelist and librettist. He received the Somerset Maugham Award for his 1992 collection of poetry,* Out of the Rain*, and subsequent collections have been shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award, the TS Eliot Prize and the Forward Poetry Prizes.*

A retiring professor

Now that I am close to retirement I can look back on a long career, a large part of which I have spent on poetry with or for young people in some shape or form – in academic and school settings, at conferences, festivals and libraries, in the UK and overseas, as teacher, anthologist, literary historian, judge. You name it, I've done it, except that is, anything to do with learning poetry by heart. Having now had the privilege of listening to the finalists for Poetry by Heart for two years running, and organizing two conferences to support teachers working with young people learning poetry by heart, a few thoughts come to mind.

First of all, it *has* to be a good thing for children to learn poetry *by heart.* The heart bit is essential as learning

poetry by rote might put off more children than got turned on after realizing what a fantastic resource it is to be able to recite poems in your head and hold them in your heart. In my own far off schooldays, we were, of course, forced to learn poetry. I can still remember Miss Gallagher reciting "Quinquireme of Nineveh …." in her rather high poetry voice and relishing the images conjured up and the gorgeous sound of the words. I never objected to learning poems and found it came naturally then, but it's no good those of us with a strong feeling for poetry proselytizing its merits as we can't even begin to imagine the misery it provokes in others. Encourage not force.

Working on the Poetry by Heart conferences, I set myself a very easy challenge – to learn a three-verse poem by Robert Burns which I loved and was already familiar with, 24 lines in all. Dead easy? No, it wasn't. Admittedly I've reached an age when the memory is not functioning as efficiently as it used to but I really can't blame old age. I am used to being intellectually active but I found it quite hard to engage with an activity which was internal, made me slow down, required me to be very quiet and at which I was not terribly good. I needed patience and persistence and I had to slow down and be methodical; none of these qualities I have in abundance. Reader, I finally mastered the poem and I take great delight in iterating it to myself when upon my couch I lie in pensive mood. How did I do it? I used some of the tricks of the trade – printing the poem, cutting out each line, covering it over till I finally got it, plus masses of repetition, checking, correcting, starting again from the beginning… I also focused on key words that I found hard to remember, and worked on linking rhythm with content. Reciting aloud on my own was useful as it showed up insecure sections.

By the end of the process I was in awe of what actors have to do on a daily basis and most certainly what the young people achieved in Poetry by Heart. As a prompter for the finals this year, I only had to help with the odd nudge a couple of times. Each finalist had learned three, sometimes difficult, often lengthy poems, which in every case they performed with verve. The most brilliant won the prizes. I was aware that behind most of those contributors were their teachers offering support, inspiration, encouragement and practical aid. What came across was the sheer pleasure the young people took in the poetry itself, their skill at learning it and how they valued the opportunity to perform it to a supportive and enthusiastic audience. It was a competition where everyone was a winner and the taking part was far more important than being the person judged to be best. Those young people were justly proud of their achievements and they had every right to be. I would love to know more about the journeys they had travelled to get to the point of accomplishment that I witnessed.

Poetry by Heart has shown that young people are willing to work very hard to become word perfect with often difficult material in terms of language, theme and metre. They were willing to take trouble with the poetry of the past as well as present, and spend time and attention communicating what the poems had to say and polishing their performances to a very high standard. This meant, of course, plenty of hanging out with poems to make their choices, followed by deep concentration on, and engagement with, the selected texts – mostly a quiet, inward, private activity to start with as they worked towards ownership of the poems. The final phase would be much more social, with the outcome a large public event.

What then have I learned from those young people performing poetry with such flair in the National Portrait Library these last two years that might be of benefit to teachers? It mostly confirmed the beliefs about poetry I've held all my life. Put the pleasure back into poetry lessons. Never reduce a poem to its parts and drive young people away by analysing it to death or as Billy Collins put it in his "Introduction to Poetry", "tie the poem to a chair with rope/And torture a confession out of it." Don't take a narrow or elitist view of poetry – humour, song lyrics are great places to begin. Be a poetry enthusiast yourself. Believe in poetry to do its good work on readers and listeners in ways that cannot be measured, which means giving it time, status and attention in the classroom. Draw on the wisdom of poets like Auden who remind us that the best poetry is just "memorable speech" or Heaney who talked about summoning up of the energies of words and letting down a shaft into real life. Remember that poetry should always have an oral (and aural) component and offer every opportunity for performance. Poetry by Heart has shown how well young people rise to that challenge; after all, as Frost put it, poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom.

Morag Styles *is Professor of Children's Poetry at Homerton College Cambridge. She is currently leading a Caribbean Poetry Project in collaboration with the University of the West Indies.*

From around the globe

Ireland, United States, Canada...

Poetry Aloud (Ireland)

Poetry Aloud has come of age. It celebrated its twenty-first birthday in 2013. Knowing a poem in one's head and in one's heart is an age-old practice and the space and the silence that surround the speaking of a poem have always been special. People have been reciting poems for centuries and poetry has played a part in every culture in the world. In 1993 Poetry Aloud was founded in Wesley College, Dublin. It wasn't a new idea but it was a worthwhile one and, though it began with a small group of pupils speaking poetry and celebrating that art form, last year it attracted over one thousand six hundred participants.

What began in one school grew and spread and it became an all-Ireland event in 2006 when Poetry Ireland and the National Library of Ireland extended the Poetry Aloud format to every school on the island of Ireland. The poems spoken from the outset included a wide range and included poems by Stevie Smith, William Blake, Miroslav Holub, John Keats, Fleur Adcock, Louise Glück, Shakespeare, Sharon Olds, Carol Ann Duffy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Elizabeth Bishop, AE Housman, Seamus Heaney, Noel Duffy, Wendy Cope, Philip Larkin, Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin, Andrew Motion, Eavan Boland, Robert Hayden ... Pupils, in the three categories, were invited to speak a compulsory poem, a poem from a prescribed list and a poem of their own choosing.

Then in 2008 when Seamus Heaney, recipient of the David Cohen Award, was invited to name a literary institution or event deserving of the Clarissa Luard Award, he nominated Poetry Aloud, adding that "I truly believe it deserves all the support it can get, first because it promotes literature, and, in particular, poetry, widely, intimately and to inestimable effect" and "fundamentally I choose it because it brings poetry into the memory and affections of the young in a way that will make it a lifelong possession and value".

Poetry Aloud gains more and more momentum. Winners have appeared on radio and television and, in a special tribute to Seamus Heaney in the National Concert Hall on 23 April 2014, fifteen-year-old Niall Ó hAnnagáin, overall winner of Poetry Aloud 2013 joined a host of posts and musicians including Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Paul Simon, Liam O'Flynn, Michael Longley and Colette Bryce. The youngest person on stage spoke "Mid-Term Break" to great acclaim and reminded everyone there that poetry matters, that young people and poetry connect and poetry is wonderful when spoken aloud.

http://www.nli.ie/en/udlist/programme-and-events-education-post-primary.aspx

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Poetry Out Loud (USA)

From a competitive field of 365,000 students nationwide, Anita Norman, a student at Arlington High School in Arlington, Tennessee, won the title of 2014 Poetry Out Loud National Champion at the National Finals held in Washington DC on 30 April 2014. The event took place in the Lisner Auditorium at the George Washington University. Norman was among nine finalists and 53 state champions from across the country who participated in the ninth national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Norman's final recitation Wednesday evening was "Let the Light Enter," a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Norman also recited Stanley Kunitz's "The Layers" and Robert E. Hayden's "Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday" at the Wednesday evening finals. When asked about which poem a person should recite, Norman said, "The poem should make a statement and be a piece of who you are."

The second-place winner was Lake Wilburn of

Columbus, Ohio. Natasha Simone Vargas of Lawrenceville, New Jersey, received the third-place prize.

On April 29, 53 high school students—Poetry Out Loud champions from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands—recited poetry in three semifinal rounds based on geographic region. Nine students advanced to compete in the National Finals the next day. Judges evaluated student performances on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students performed poems from the Poetry Out Loud print and online anthologies. The event was the culmination of a pyramid-structure competition that began last September in more than 2,300 high schools across the country.

Poetry Out Loud encourages the study of great poetry by offering educational materials and a dynamic recitation competition to high school students across the country. It gives students an opportunity to master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its ninth year of national competition, Poetry Out Loud has inspired millions of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry.

Created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation (poetryfoundation.org), Poetry Out Loud is administered in partnership with the State Arts Agencies of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.

http://www.poetryoutloud.org

Poetry in Voice/Les voix de la poésie Canada)

Poetry in Voice/Les voix de la poésie is proud to announce the winners of its fourth annual poetry recitation competition, held at Vancouver's Fei and Milton Wong Experimental Theatre.

Roan Shankaruk from Vancouver, BC, won the first prize for the best combined score of three recitations in English. Ian Hogeboom-Burr from Toronto, ON, won the second prize and Leo Chang from Vancouver, BC, won the third prize.

Mattis Savard-Verhoeven from Montreal, QC, won the first prize for the best combined score of three recitations in French. Ophélie Proulx-Giraldeau from Montreal, QC, won the second prize and Nicolas Desnoyers from St-Hyacinthe, QC, won the third prize.

Kelsi James from Vancouver, BC, won the first prize for the best combined score of one poem in English and one poem in French. Marianne Verville from Montreal, QC, won the second prize and Andrea Rodriguez-Marin from Toronto, ON, won the third prize.

During the two-day National Finals, students were treated to a guided tour of the Vancouver Art Gallery followed by a visual arts workshop and a writing workshop run by poet and Creative Director Damian Rogers.

Many of Vancouver's best poets and artists were present at the Fei and Milton Wong Experimental Theatre and the reception at the World Arts Centre, including George Bowering, Elizabeth Bachinsky, and Vancouver poet laureate Evelyn Lau.

"Students participating at the Canadian finals held in Vancouver were excellent. The judges and the audience were inspired by their performances, which speaks to the importance of poetry and the place it should occupy in our cultural lives," said Scott Griffin, founder of Poetry in Voice and The Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry.

Over 370 schools signed up for Poetry in Voice this year and the National Finals included 39 finalists from secondary schools and Collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs) from across Canada. This year, an estimated 30,000 students were challenged to memorize and recite poems in English or French from a set anthology of classic and contemporary poems. All of the finalists had already won their classroom, school, and regional contests. Each year, Poetry in Voice awards more than $75,000 in travel for finalists, cash prizes, and library resources.

Poetry in Voice aims to promote poetry in the classroom and the community. It is a national recitation competition, reaching across Canada, for secondary school and Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP) students. It serves to engage students in an appreciation of the beauty of language through poetry, while at the same time instilling a sense of confidence through the art of public speaking.

http://www.poetryinvoice.com/

"Those Winter Sundays"

Jean Sprackland

"Sundays too my father got up early / and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold ..."

I have known "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden since I first encountered it in my twenties. It was in an anthology – I would love to be able to recall which – and I was struck by it, struck to my heart. As an English student I saw certain things in the poem: the sonnet form, the internal rhyme, the alliteration. I could see it was very beautifully written. But its impact on me seemed out of all proportion with these technical observations. The poor old dad, I thought. And a memory flashed over me of my own father sitting on a stool in the kitchen, with the family's shoes lined up on a sheet of newspaper waiting to be polished. He had an old apron he would wear for this task, and two brushes, which he had labelled with a permanent marker: On and Off. There was a velvet pad for buffing up the leather at the end. The smell of cherry blossom shoe-polish was vividly present as I recalled this.

My own experience, my own childhood memory, slid into place, overlapping the experience in the poem, like a filter which saturated the poem with colour. Or was it the poem saturating the memory? It's impossible to say. Anyway, the poem entered my memory. I won't claim I learned it, because that sounds too deliberate an effort – I simply found I knew it. It's only a short poem, and the technical features I noticed at the start – the rhyme, the alliteration – made it easy. They are mnemonic. And as Don Paterson says, a poem is "a little machine for remembering itself". Like many people, I had learnt poems very easily as a child, through a process of absorption, and "Those Winter Sundays" joined the list and has been there ever since.

When we memorize a poem, it's available to us in a special way. It's part of us, and we can hear it, examine it, *have* it whenever we like. That's reason enough for doing it. Michael Schmidt has likened the experience to building a library of tunes to carry around on an iPod, portable and available to be enjoyed again and again, whenever the mood takes you. And of course once you have the poem in your memory you can recite it, whether on a stage in front of an audience or in bed with a lover or whispered to yourself as you walk to work. There is something essential about speaking poems. They have a life in the mouth and on the ear. The special thing about the Poetry Archive is that it offers that uniquely illuminating experience of hearing the poem in the poet's own voice, whether it's Browning in 1886 or a 25-year-old poet recorded last month. But once a poem is published, anyone can read it in their own voice – it takes on a separate life out there in the world.

For some people, poetry recitation is a reminder of something dull and dusty, something they were made to do in an uninspiring way, the whole class learning by rote and then parroting back, the teacher beating time on the edge of the desk with a ruler, the poem horribly dismembered into meaningless chunks to be swallowed and regurgitated. That is one way of doing it, but it's not what this project is about. If this was compulsory, part of the curriculum, assessed, accredited, then we'd be in trouble. But it's about choice, diversity, ownership. It's about tapping into the natural enthusiasm of young people and inviting them to take part in this enriching experience, if it appeals to them. In its own quiet way, this is a subversive project, for at least these following three reasons.

It assumes no limits whatsoever to the kind of poem a young person might want to encounter, which is in itself radical, because it subverts all the assumptions which are made about The Youth and What They Like. Having been so closely involved in drawing up the anthology for the competition, I was delighted to see that students had chosen widely and wildly from what was on offer.

It puts a very high value on the sound world of the poem, which begins to redress the balance after a long period in which the page has been very dominant. It's often said that as young people have become more visually literate their listening skills have declined, but I don't think the basic human principle has changed, that in David Rothenburg's words "we love to inhabit the pure realms of sound". Inevitably, over time, this will in turn affect the student's own writing. All those details of voice, texture, tone, phrasing, syntax – having been internalized – are available within for the next time the student writes a poem. Or reads another one.

It demonstrates the power of slow reading, by which I mean two things: taking time to read for deep understanding and subtle shades of meaning; and reading over time, returning again and again and letting the poem develop gradually like a photograph in a darkroom. We live in a world of information overload, where skim-reading and speed are important skills, but we don't want to lose sight of the different rewards that come from going slow. It could be the poetic equivalent of the Slow Food Movement, with its emphasis on real cooking and eating for pleasure.

In the classroom, reintroducing the joys of memorizing and reciting poetry offers a counterbalance to some of the more mechanistic teaching approaches we've all seen over the past twenty years or so: the feature-spotting and the decoding which can reduce a poem to a set of components like nuts and bolts and bits of piping. Poems can present a particular kind of challenge: they can be difficult to understand, they can seem to be hiding something, they can appear to be something like cryptic crosswords which have to be solved, or locks which have to be picked with specialist tools to reveal the "message" concealed inside. Every poetry reader has to cope with incomplete understanding, because good poems are always, in some way, a bit mysterious. But this can be an uncomfortable position for a less confident teacher to be in. Rather than accepting that mystery and uncertainty is integral, and that a poem can be enjoyed without being nailed down to a set of definitive meanings, students are usually quickly engaged in a poem-related activity, and some of the poetry activities I've seen in schools have been really good and have illuminated the poem in interesting ways. But often the poem is used like a door – we don't linger there too long – have a quick look but it's principally a way in to something else: a social issue, a political question, a consideration of something beyond the poem. All of which has its own value, of course. But at some point over the past ten years or so it began to dawn on me that there was too much striving going on – that it might be better if teachers were encouraged to do less. The simple processes of choosing a poem, committing it to memory and speaking it aloud is an another approach which requires no special poetry spanners and wrenches, but stays faithful and true to the essentials. I think it offers the potential for a lifelong love of poetry, by encouraging young people to take poems into themselves – to start building their own personal library of poems which no one can take away from them and which can be browsed and tapped into anytime, anywhere, for the rest of their lives.

[let] the poem develop gradually like a photograph in a darkroom. We live in a world of information overload, where skim-reading and speed are important skills, but we don't want to lose sight of the different rewards that come from going slow.

But that's only half the story. A poem carried in the mind, which (unless you're a believer in Descartes's "ghost in the machine") is the same as being carried in the body, changes with us as we change, body and mind. Poetry is slow-burn stuff, and the poem that lives inside us as we change and grow and go through life experiences is not only a touchstone, a still point, a reminder of timelessness and continuity (though it can be these things) but also a living thing which flexes and shifts and grows with us. It's a significant feature of the poem, of any good poem, that it rewards reading again and again, that each time we return to it, though the words on the page are static and unchanging, the impact it has on us as readers is different. We understand it differently, more deeply perhaps, we hear subtleties in it which we passed over on first reading.

I don't think this should surprise us. Music has the same quality, and after all poetry is a kind of music. One of the curious things I've noticed about my own appreciation of favourite pieces of music is that I actually seem to hear it differently as I get older. The difference seems to be that whereas when I was younger I perceived music primarily in its horizontal plane, in middle age I'm much more aware of it in the vertical. I mean that what used to matter most to me – what my ears were "tuned in to" in my youth – was melody, and that now I'm much more captivated by what's happening underneath the melody – by the harmonic

texture. Why this should be I'm not sure, but it is a noticeable phenomenon. My appreciation of a poem, I think, changes like this too.

A few years ago, having known "Those Winter Sundays" for a very long time, having recited it scores of times to many classes of students, something strange started happening. I started finding it difficult to get to the end of the poem without weeping. To begin with, it happened when I reached the penultimate line, where the measured lyricism, already freighted with feeling, gives way at last, and the narrative voice of the poem turns on itself, and Hayden ups the rhetorical ante with that devastating repetition: "What did I know, what did I know…". My voice would splinter and break like the cold in the poem. My struggle to control and contain this, to remain professional in front of a class, had the effect of bringing the moment of crisis earlier; the constriction in my throat would start as I embarked on the final stanza and could see the moment coming.

There's nothing wrong with weeping as a response to a poem – if it can't "break the frozen sea within", as Kafka put it, then what is a poem for? It's interesting, though, that this response came only later in my life, when I had myself become a parent. One of the life-changing things about parenthood is that it dramatically re-focuses the view of one's own childhood and relationship with parents. The conflicts, the failures of communication, the kindnesses and sacrifices made. Some very obvious piece of understanding had slotted into place at last: that my parents had felt for me the same overwhelming feelings I felt for my own children, and I had failed to appreciate them properly at the time because children don't. It's not until I myself had performed some of "love's austere and lonely offices" that I knew what they were.

I think I would not have had this experience if I had not learnt the poem all those years ago. It's lovely to revisit favourite poems by reading them in books, but the memorized poem sneaks in at the edge of consciousness much more frequently, at all sorts of odd moments. And by learning it in the first place, I had in some sense made it mine. Robert Hayden was in my head, and now he was speaking not just about his own childhood and his relationship with his particular father but about the very nature of childhood and parenthood and ageing and time, the imperfect ways in which we know each other, and the bittersweet mix of gratitude and sorrow and regret which can come when we look back, the irretrievability of the past, and the beauty of the simple, practical task performed again and again, by one person for another, out of love.

"Those Winter Sundays" is available online at: http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/those-winter-sundays

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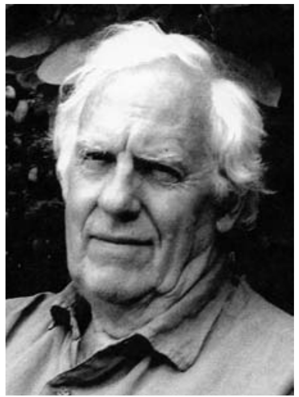
Heart and Rote

Shakespeare on the Mississippi

Robert Hull



"Ope not thy ponderous and marble jaws/ But to a nunnery go !" is the delightful injunction to Ophelia that ends "Hamlet's soliloquy", as performed on the raft by the Duke of Bilgewater for his companion rapscallion "the king", alias ex-Louis 16, who is learning it for a performance to the locals that evening. Huck Finn, looking on, also "learned it, easy enough, while he was learning it to the king."

Bilgewater, walking up and down, has managed to "piece it out from memory", to "call it back from recollection's vaults" so as to teach the king. His "Hamlet's soliloquy" is a hilarious mish-mash of out-of-sequence lines from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, recalled exactly as individual lines and phrases but disconnected and wonderfully re-assembled to make sublime nonsense.

Has the remembering been done by heart or by rote? The duke has many whole lines intact: "Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst". But like Eric Morecambe playing all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order, he doesn't put lines in sequence and so doesn't make sense. His next line skips to Hamlet: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,/ The oppressor's wrong…", and he gets two and a half more lines right before arriving, gratifyingly, at "the quietus which his pangs might take".

If the duke gets whole lines and phrases right, from his past schooling perhaps, lines important enough to be exactly remembered and readily summoned "from recollection's vaults", one could say that he has learned some Shakespeare "by heart". He might have done so formally, with intent; or lines overheard a few times may have just "stuck", wind-blown seeds finding a niche to flower in. The king, though, who is drilled by Bilgewater to take on the whole meaningless "speech", is learning "by rote", simply going over and over the nonsense Bilgewater intones. Huck too, evidently, is doing the same.

But why have lines from Shakespeare lodged in Bilgewater's memory? Perhaps because of their intrinsic musicality, as in the persuasive ease of: "With this regard their currents turn awry/ And lose the name of action." Bilgewater recalls the whole 5-stress line – and a half-line of 3 more stresses. In fact, it's also the music of the lines that conduces to mistakes in sequence and sense: 'To be or not to be: that is the bare bodkin/ That makes calamity of so long life". Mark Twain's varying prose manners in Huckleberry Finn, most arrestingly Huck's own voice, are a marvel. It's not surprising that a character whose role in the story is to seduce riverine dwellers with language is imagined as being himself lured into mouthing mellifluous nonsense by fragmentary but pressing memories of Shakespeare's blank verse.

But what might this have to say about children and learning poetry by heart? Two things perhaps. One, musical lines readily "stick". And two, there is a crucial difference between learning a poem or lines by somehow coming into easy, unforced possession of them as verbal music, formally learned or picked up casually, and having them stapled or rammed into the memory "by rote", by the kind of drilling repetition that Bilgewater submitted the king to. The fact that both methods result in the memory's possessing poetry can induce us to forget the total difference, pedagogically, in the processes by means of which lines are installed there.

But what kind of significance does this difference have, if both methods leave a corpus of verse in the memory, which the adult can pleasurably "call back from recollection's vaults"? If Patrick Leigh-Fermor took great pleasure in recalling long passages of Latin and much other verse, does it matter that he might have learnt some of it under duress, copying lines out as punishments? Or to speak more hypothetically, if prisoners who learned all Shakespeare's sonnets, say, could count that achievement towards a favourable hearing in a parole appeal, would that discount the learning in some way? Does it really matter whether a poem is learnt by rote or by heart, so long as it's learnt?

For children it clearly does, since schooling is about how they get to a place, and how they spend the time doing so, not just about ultimate destinations. It's preferable that they don't get bored out of their minds learning all of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin", simply in order to have it available for recall as adults. And it's not just ethically desirable that they don't learn under duress, it's pedagogically saner, since genuine learning by heart, the taking of pleasure in language's musicality, leaves them favourably disposed towards doing more of the same.

Should children learn poetry by heart? And if so, what poetry?

The question "Should children learn poems by heart?" is less interesting and less useful than it looks, because by the time the teacher meets them the question has been answered by the fact of their already knowing things by heart: some rhymes, some tunes, some songs, some parodies, some hymns or carols possibly. And that learning "by heart" has meant little more than the social practice, or fun, of picking up what has been audible round them. Clearly, it has had nothing to do with rote learning. They learn poems by heart, then, because it's their human right and skill readily to take on board the tunes and songs and rhymes and jingles and parodies of childhood. And then in school they can go beyond that, and keep learning poems and songs – by heart, not by rote.

Once the normality of learning by heart outside school is acknowledged, the interesting and difficult questions for a teacher become: *what* shall they learn by heart in school; and *how* shall they do it?

To take the first question first, I'd suggest that musicality is the key to deciding what poems children might learn by heart. Musicality might mean the blank verse line at some point, but for junior school children I'd argue that it mainly means stanzaic organization or some other regular deployment of lines, such as couplets, and regular rhyming lines. The implication of that is that the rhythms of free verse (and prose) may be too demanding to be readily learnt. I like Michael Rosen's children's free verse anecdotes, but I don't think I'd ask children to learn them by heart, nor those poems of DH Lawrence or Carl Sandburg that, despite their non-potential for learning by heart, I'd nonetheless want to read with any junior school class. I'd make an exception only of very short poems, like Sandburg's "Splinter".

Some Robert Frost poems, on the other hand, I would certainly wish children to learn by heart: that is, once we'd read them over, perhaps a couple of times, and I'd sensed in their pleasure an opportunity to stay with the poems longer, or come back to them. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is one I recall 11-year-olds learning in a matter of minutes, subsequent to a couple of readings.

That famous poem is hauntingly musical, magically learnable. So are – to offer at random a few of my own favourites:

e e cummings, "Maggie and Millie and Molly and May"
Kipling, "The Way through the Woods"
Hardy, "Weathers"
Elizabeth Coatsworth, "On a Night of Snow"
Laura A Richards, "Antonio"
Rachel Field, "Something Told the Wild Geese"
David McCord, "Cocoon"
Charles Causley, "Charity Chadder"
Vachel Lindsay, "The flower-fed buffaloes of the spring"
John Mole, "Sing a Song of Christmas"
Christopher Reid, "A Doll, an Orange, and a Handkerchief"
Emily Dickinson, "I'm Nobody"

And there are many more.

What these poems and "learnable" others have in common is, technically, the rhyming couplet or stanza, and mainly regular length of line, whether it's two stresses, three, four or five. What they otherwise have in common is relative shortness (all but two are 14 lines or fewer), modernity (all but "Antonio" and "I'm Nobody" written in the last 100 years or so), and of course, real power over the imagination.

I'd also want to find some suitable poems by children, and some poems in languages other than English, like this Mexican song, "Mariposa", recorded by children on a brilliant Putamaro world music CD:

Vengan a cantar la morenada
Que empieza a sonar
Como el vuelo de una mariposa
Vamos todos a bailar
Con los manos
Con los piedos
La morenada

Come and sing the morenada
That begins to play
Like the flight of a butterfly
We will all dance
With our hands
With our feet
The morenada

It's crucial, in fact, that some poems that children learn should be lyrics, words set to music. I'd see the poem/lyric set to music (as with performances of old ballads) almost as the bedrock of their pleasure in learning by heart. And it would be wise for teachers also to keep in touch with the way youngsters go on to pick up pop lyrics.

How are children to be encouraged to learn by heart? What is the teacher's role?

The learning of poetry by heart should be an integral part of the teaching of poetry, not a practice that stands apart in some way from those routines. To attempt resuscitation of a cliché, perhaps it's a kind of icing and cake relation. The routine teaching of the poem is the cake, the learning by heart the icing. And, in the right circles, icing doesn't get scraped off and knocked back separately.

The words "competition" and "recitation" – frequently used in these contexts – have connotations which pull us away from the routine classroom, and the routines of the clasroom, and therefore from children's habitual experience of the poem. They are words that work towards prising up separate activities that threaten to place the "real" learning by heart outside the classroom, in competitive performance. That isn't, I'd suggest, what "learning by heart" needs primarily to connote.

For one thing, a few "winners" can create a lot of losers; what one wants is that everyone is equally involved in performance – as they are, for example in choric or shared reading aloud in the classroom, or when everyone reads a different poem aloud, which can be a nice, controlled, anarchic sort of fun, as well as a useful way of getting round shyness.

In the same way that not all cakes imply icing, not all poetry teaching needs a topping of learning by heart. A poem that a class likes the sound of, that becomes familiar to it with a couple of readings, is a poem of the sort that potentially might be learnt by heart. It's the teacher's delicate skill to be alert to the propitious occasion. And this of course depends on his or her own knowledge of the kind of poetry children will enjoy and pick up easily. The teacher's key strategy, in fact, is to get to know a lot of poems. Who knows, maybe even a lot more poems.

***Robert Hull**'s sixth collection of poems,* Pavarotti of the Sidings*, was published by Beafred in 2012, and his third for children,* High Tide*, by Salt in 2010. He has written extensively for children, and published three books for teachers, the most recent from David Fulton,* Poetry, from Reading to Writing, A Classroom Guide for Ages 7-11. *He was a classroom teacher for 30 years, and worked as a writer in schools from the early 90s. He was recently shortlisted for the main prize at the 2014 Strokestown Poetry Festival.*

Reading Aloud and Performing

Impact on the motivation, confidence and understanding of English and Creative Writing students

Amina Alyal

A paper on the outcomes of a Teaching Fellowship held at Leeds Trinity University 2012-2013 by Amina Alyal and Richard Storer

Introduction

So many students resist reading aloud, some perhaps having had chef Marco Pierre White's crushing experience in school, where it "broke [his] confidence down" (Benedict, 2001). Given the choice, many would rather not read aloud at all. Allowing for the fact that some students, like Marco Pierre White, find it difficult because of dyslexia, there still seem to be further obstacles to reading aloud, including self-consciousness in speaking in front of a group and hesitancy due to lack of practice. Students who spoke of such feelings were amongst those who took part in the pedagogical study, and the same students found the exercises increased relaxation and confidence, even going so far as to read their work aloud at the public open mic events.

But it is not just this personal benefit that makes research into reading aloud and performing so important in the university study of English. English is not a specifically vocational subject, and offers so wide a range of professional skills that often the subject can be dismissed as being purely "academic" and not related to employability at all. To bring out in clear terms the actual professional skills that the subject develops is hence a pressing need, and performance of texts is just one of the areas where professionalism can be tested, since there are several identifiable skills to be gained by it. Encouraging students to practise it despite the unwillingness of some can yield surprisingly rich results. Performing texts, our study found, relates directly to understanding, and this in turn leads to other results, such as increased analytical powers, greater attention to detail, increased confidence, and increased range of verbal expression.

Poetry, as Josephine Hart maintains, is best understood if heard or read aloud, because the complex additional qualities of sound and voice add to understanding of the text. There are lots of studies on school reading aloud, less on undergraduate level, which suggests that reading aloud at university is a new field. But some useful elements can be drawn from school studies, for application to a university context. Dreher (2003) for example carries out reading in class times, and recognizes that individuals thrive on different ways of reading; he outlines three methods of reading he allows students to choose from – a group where they are read aloud to, a group where students share reading aloud and a group of silent individual reading (p.51). He finds that students' confidence and sense of success increases with such an exercise and sees this as a stage in working towards encouraging students to read on their own (p.51). Student essay grades improved (p.53). What this study highlights is the dearth of community reading – and perhaps the recognition that a return to ante-technological (not anti-!) activities will train and enhance the cognitive abilities of students.

With undergraduate pedagogical study of reading aloud, findings such as those of Hoger (2013), Griffin (1992), and Walker-Dalhouse et al (2012) suggest that reading and reading aloud are alike often alien concepts to students, and look at the benefits of various forms of reading aloud and performance. Of tangential interest to our purposes is Griffin (1992), who finds that reading aloud in a TESOL context leads to "… expansion of oral

vocabulary, developing awareness of the sounds of the language, facilitation of chunking of words in meaningful groups, and development of self-confidence" and helps instructors in "diagnosing knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and knowledge of syntactic structure, determining learners' overall comprehension, and understanding students' processing of written information" (p.785). Griffin reports students' own sense of increased confidence and satisfaction (p.786). Although this is about learning English as a foreign language, some of the conclusions resonate with the context of English-speaking students too, whose understanding and command of "oral vocabulary, … the sounds of the language … and … syntactic structure" equally need developing during the course of an undergraduate degree. Often, it seems, reading itself, including reading aloud, is not a habitual activity even amongst students of English.

Walker-Dalhouse et al (2012), in their study of the reading habits of pre-service teachers, present research that shows many student teachers do not enjoy or engage in habitual reading; and they suggest that "teacher preparation programs can better prepare them to be reading models for their future students", asking further "What impact will a Reading-Aloud university-sponsored program with pre-primary, primary and elementary students have on the perceptions of preservice teachers about their oral reading skills?" (pp.33-34). They find that "Enthusiastic readers were significantly different from unenthusiastic readers in the use of oral expression and maintaining children's interest in reading" (p.36). This demonstrates through research what many of us might have previously suspected: that reading aloud not only increases engagement with the topic but also develops professional skills, in this case teaching skills. This is of central relevance to a subject like English, which is one that gives graduates general professional skills, unlike more vocational subjects, and which at the same time is notoriously hard to relate to professionalism and employability.

A key study in terms of employability is Beth Hoger's (Hoger 2013), in which she presents the findings of a study into poetry recitation for business students. "Poetry recitation enables that separation with an almost complete focus on presenters' delivery skills. After concerted attention to delivery, students may then have a base of abilities and confidence on which to build original presentations." (p.292). She lists "Delivery skills":

Use of the voice: clarity, volume, pitch, enunciation, pacing, timbre, variation, emphasis, articulation, energy
Use of the body: stance, gestures, tension/relaxation, eye contact, posture, confidence, movement
Conveyance of the message: clear and appropriate interpretation, emphasis, pacing, audience attention, pronunciation, enjambments, engagement

These skills, like those associated with acting, can bring essential vitality to presentations that are too often seen as nothing more than moribund chunks of information to be dropped into the lap of sleepy audiences. (p.292)

Hoger concludes that "(a) memory demands risk taking and thorough preparation, (b) the selection process asks students to make good choices based on who they are, (c) teamwork and partnering are inescapable, and (d) to develop confidence, one must encounter anxiety" and further that "learning to trust a prepared memory develops an additional tool for business situations and bolsters confidence for impromptu speech in ways that reading PowerPoint slides cannot" (p.295, p.297). She finds that such presentations provide valuable data for writing references: "When calls come for recommendations, particularly for students in sales, their poetry recitations sometimes open the door to discussing risk taking, self-confidence, individuality, leadership, teamwork, and diligence. Recruiters have been more than receptive to these supplemental discussions because they are vivid, indelible, and extend beyond the predictable list of traits for success in business" (p.298). She concludes that "Poetry recitation transcends the predictability of standard business presentations and enriches presenters' skills, classroom community and creativity, with additional explorations of self-knowledge and memory, all essential qualities to carry into a workplace" (p.298). Hoger's study goes to the heart of the matter in terms of outlining the professional benefits of the study of English, which are innate in the discipline but which need to be stated explicitly and tested in practical contexts.

The project

Our Teaching Fellowship, therefore, examined questions of pressing significance in the developing study of English in higher education. Richard Storer and I pursued complementary areas of study: his focus was on reading poetry aloud and its pedagogical benefits, and mine was on students performing their own work, assessing the impact of this activity on confidence and articulacy as graduate qualities.

The project was carried out over one academic year, building on previous pedagogical experiments.

Students were drawn from the undergraduate programmes of English Single Honours, and English and Writing. Students volunteered to take part, in a couple of cases insisting on coming along after having heard about it from other people – this did mean that the sample cohort was a lot more predisposed to be positive than a whole class might have been; on the other hand, there was clearly an appetite for this kind of activity, and a sense of value and gain. There were around 60 altogether who took part in different activities, with a central group of about 8. The study was something students did not have any preconceptions about, indicating the lack of prior knowledge with which students approach such activities, for example from school.

We set out to ask the following questions:

1) What effect does reading aloud have on students' understanding of poetry?

2) How effectively does reading aloud increase student engagement with texts?

3) What effect does performing their own work have on students' confidence?

4) What employability skills are enhanced by reading aloud and performing texts?

Methodology

Key events were marked with activities involving reading poetry aloud, e.g. Induction Week, National Poetry Day, and the annual Literature Festival held at Leeds Trinity. Members of the College, staff and students, were invited to record snippets of poetry reading. Workshops were offered.

A weekly open mic practice session, Writing Aloud, was held throughout the autumn term, for students to practise reading their own poetry and prose compositions, with use of a recording mic and an amplifying mic.

A public open mic event was set up as a venue for students to take their experiences further.

Students were invited to carry out their placement with the department and took part in workshops on Writing Aloud and Reading Aloud, and in discussion which was also produced as podcasts.

Experts were invited for master-classes, including a performance poet and a voice coach.

These activities took place in Creative Writing classes, in extra-curricular events, at lunchtimes, and also as part of students' work experience. Some of the students undertook work placements with the department, in which, taking a holistic approach, we harnessed different elements of their degree. For the Reading Aloud part of the project, predominantly with Richard Storer, students read work out, discussed it and read it again. This stimulated analysis, and was recorded as a series of podcasts. Students also took part in collective reading with me, based on the principals of the madrigal. The act of selecting words for repetition or choric reading meant that the poem had to be analysed and observed closely. For the "performing" element, lunchtime practice sessions were set up, where students read out their own poems, which were recorded, played back, and subjected to group analysis. The emphasis in these sessions, nicknamed Writing Aloud, was on performance rather than meaning, although of course the two overlapped. Once the recording had been heard and discussed, the student read the poem again, and this recording too was listened to for comment. Students scrutinized and discussed voice control, such as pace, range and pauses; engagement with audience, such as use of eye contact and gesture; and the psychology of performance, including how to dispel "fight or flight" feelings towards a potential audience.

These relatively informal workshop sessions were augmented by expert masterclasses. A performance poet gave a performance of his own poems, and coached students on performance. A professional voice coach raised awareness of voice work in performance. Both classes gave the students insights into practical applications of what they do in class: the poet gave them a glimpse of how for him performance directly earns him a living, while the voice coach opened up understanding of how the body produces sound and the impact of how voices are used on audience – which has many general professional applications.

Having spent a few months engaged in these activities, students were ready to engage in actual public output. The annual Literature Festival at Leeds Trinity in March is a public event, and in 2013 a group of students gave a performance of their work, based on the weekly sessions. Students also attended a local open mic session, Night Vision, in December 2012. The first Leeds Trinity Open Mic (now Wordspace) was set up in a public venue to provide students with a safe yet public venue, with a professional poet as guest speaker. Students took up these opportunities enthusiastically,

even though they might have begun the project with misgivings about doing this, or without even having considered performing in public as an option. They were thus able to attain a landmark achievement as the conclusion to their experience on the project, and one which effectively measured the development in skills and enterprise that the project had nurtured.

When asked for feedback, student responses identify, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, professional skills such as teamwork; development of trust with peers through exposing original creative work; willingness to use the voice expressively; greater readiness to engage with the audience using eye contact and other body language; willingness to speak in front of others; increased level of comfort with exposure to scrutiny; enhanced ability give feedback to others, and to receive such feedback; attentiveness to detail; ability to retain focus on laborious and unrewarding work that leads to benefits not at first obvious; increased output as a result of team focus on a project.

The enthusiasm with which students came to approach the sessions was clear, with an appreciation of each other's writing, as is evident in this comment on a group effort:

And then he read out a piece of prose which was a script about a man who had just died and was seemingly on the brink of the afterlife, and was speaking to an angel. The way in which it was written and read was excellent, creating the ability to differentiate between the two characters involved. We then decided to record it, with me assuming the role of the angel, and [WA001] providing sound effects in the background.

I particularly enjoyed this session because the way in which we recorded (WA002's) piece of prose together was a fun kind of teamwork and I thought we all pulled it off very well. In addition to this, I learnt that my poems are better read when I add a certain expression to my voice, as I find that it emphasizes the message my poem is carrying more. (WA003)

Teamwork was linked to increased confidence and creativity for one student, who felt initially that she was "extremely nervous – less about reading out in front of others, but more about the piece I had written – I feel we are very critical of our own work, and therefore wonder how critical of it others will be" but by the end of the session she felt "It has made me feel the need to do more creative writing, and it has also given me a slight confidence boost. I think another couple of sessions may influence my creativity even more – (the afternoon I got home, I was able to write five poems in quick succession)" (WA004). "Group discussion and critique," said another,

is in my opinion, always relevant. The words and form of a poem will inevitably have an effect on your performance of it and so hearing others' opinions is useful. As I mentioned earlier, it gives you the motivation to improve yourself. The fact that everybody had prepared something and was willing to perform did make me feel a part of the community of writers. (WA005)

Furthermore, working with others improved the students' knowledge-base, as it was not just a question of exposing their own work to scrutiny but of applying that scrutiny to others: "I had the opportunity to watch somebody else do the recording of their work beforehand, this enabled me to learn from the mistakes that the previous person had made and make sure that I don't make the same mistakes" (WA001) and "I enjoyed hearing the other's read out their work and the discussions that took place afterwards, and enjoyed hearing the recordings back. I feel the session was extremely inspiring." (WA004)

Listening back, analysing and re-recording performance was seen as difficult for various reasons: it "did become tiresome" for one student (WA002). For another, because "Like a lot of others, I strongly dislike hearing my own voice … I felt awkward and embarrassed … This was the part of the session I disliked the most" (WA002). However, both of these students and others crucially recognized the benefits of this tedious and painful process, which they could see in the form of recordings (before and after). They thus reflected on the value of carrying out hard work of which the benefits are not at first obvious, but which become clear with perseverance:

This analytic tool ironed out mistakes and helped re-evaluate work more thoroughly with suggestions from everyone. In addition, the listening back to the recordings was extremely beneficial, because it made you listen to your work both objectively and subjectively; therefore, guiding you to become the best judge of your own work as well as others'. (WA002)

Another student wrote:

I then recorded it, but we felt it best afterwards that I change my tone of voice – the poem is written from the point of view of a man obsessed with a girl who is already in a relationship – and is severely mentally ill, though he is not aware of it. I re-recorded the piece in a deadpan tone, an emotionless tone which we felt worked better, and we listened back to it, which is the one major struggle I had in the session. (WA004)

Others concurred in this observation of improvement on

the second attempt at performance, after reading and analysis: "As it is directed at an individual in writing, I was asked to re-read it whilst making eye contact with the others, and I feel that this worked effectively as it gave the poem the personal vibe that I was looking for" (WA003) and "The main way in which the performance poetry changed what I usually do with my poetry, is that I concentrated a lot more on the flow and the structure of the poem than I usually do. I did this in a conscious effort to make the poem more accessible and easy to listen to for the audience when it is being performed" (WA001). Equally, the use of the recording flash mic was seen to be beneficial:

I felt that listening to my own work helped me quite a lot, as it gave me a good indication of what worked and what didn't, or maybe making me realize that something that I thought might sound good, in fact didn't and worked a lot better when written slightly differently. By listening back to it, it enabled me to make minor changes to my work in terms of choice of words and also slightly change the way in which I performed it. (WA001)

For me, the most effective part of the whole experience was developing the ability to speak confidently and expressively, as well as using the flash mic, as that has allowed me to hear my voice and what improvements could be made to my delivery when I am next involved in public speaking. (WA003)

Students could, therefore, appreciate the ways in which their performance and techniques improved, their creativity rose, their positive response to teamwork increased, and they found they lost some of their nervousness in performing something they had written to others. This last element particularly was noted, as the element of confidence-building was seen as valuable and was demonstrably effective in enhanced performance. This enhancement of confidence enabled them to continue to write fresh material and to give and take feedback. The fact that this was as much a psychological effect as concrete improvement of the work (maybe more so) was also recognized:

I felt that doing it in front of peers was very confidence building, however I don't know if the confidence was falsely justified, as you can never be sure if people you know can be fully critical of the parts of your work that they don't like, I can't help but feel that it would help a lot more if you were critiqued by people who you didn't already know. (WA001)

This comment indicates a desire and a readiness for a more rigorous, more objective critique, and it can come as no surprise that these students ended the year with public performances of their work.

Students had many suggestions about the future development of teaching provision, in terms of developing an understanding of one's own performance style, and in creating a relaxing environment in which to experiment:

The session helped me understand quite a bit about my own style. I learned that naturally I speak at a fast pace and this was evident in the delivery of my poetry; I need to be conscious of this and slow down. Learning things like this made me realize how worthwhile sessions like that are, as they can be vital to a performance's progression. I think playing about with style would be fun, as well as adding some drama into our performances. [WA001's] dabble with rap was not only hilarious; it actually helped me think outside the box. I think we should do something slightly ridiculous every session to loosen us up and get our ideas flowing. (WA005)

Another noted the specifically creative outcomes of these sessions, of benefit particularly to Creative Writing students:

I think sessions such as these would be fantastic in a learning environment … For example, an entire lecture could be based around students' performances. We could create a page on Moodle in which performances recorded during a lecture could be uploaded and then discussed by other students. It might encourage a sense of community. (WA005)

Others felt that it would be useful to have whole Creative Writing sessions devoted to the students reading their work aloud, because the practice for each individual would increase performing skills, and because hearing others' work would broaden understanding (WA001); that open mic nights were a useful addition to Creative Writing provision because it was socially cohesive as well as improving writing skills (WA003); that it would build confidence (WA004).

In conclusion, this was a project that underlined the importance of performance both for subject-specific pedagogy and for professional development. The challenges now are various. One is to be able to incorporate elements of the methodology employed here in the classroom without requiring additional staffing resources or additional time (recording and re-recording is time-consuming), or losing other valuable practices (a whole lecture of reading aloud, for example, would mean cutting out other activities such as introductions, theory, writing exercises). Then there is also the undeniable fact that many students do not enjoy reading aloud or performing, and do not necessarily see the benefits of going through the experience in the interests of future gain (the benefits would have to be outlined

very clearly in modular material and reinforced verbally and through pedagogic mechanisms such as recordings, or measuring acts at the start and end of the semester, e.g. performing at open mic).

All these points considered, however, there are a number of ways in which the project impacted positively on the experience of those students, and is going on to benefit others taking English or English and Writing at the University:

• A successful Leeds Trinity Open Mic has been established, at which students from the Fellowship scheme form the core of a very well attended and flourishing event. This is held in a public venue, where students have mixed with members of the public, including experienced and published writers and publishers, and university staff, and have encouraged each other to perform, often surprising themselves with their confidence and willingness to perform. Guest speakers are invited, setting the tone and giving the event status. The aim of the event is to give students a professional experience equally useful to those who become professional writers and those who go into other careers.

• The master-classes were well received. With the voice coach, students learned to be aware of the part played by facial movement, chest muscles, abdomen, throat and lungs, when enunciating clearly, projecting effectively, and using a range of vocal tone. With the performance poet, students were galvanized by the vividness and energy of the performance. Feedback from students indicated that the class was inspiring, both in terms of a future in poetry as a career and in terms of the possibilities of performance.

• Student motivation is improved in their own writing, so that the act of reading, performing and discussing their own work meant they wrote more in their own time. As a result of discussion students thought more about editing and rewriting their own work.

• Students noticed details in poetry as a result of hearing poetry read out loud, and the act of reading and presenting on a poem for a recording session meant that students had researched and absorbed their research more dynamically than with the somewhat inert “student presentation” that is viewed with dread or lack of enthusiasm; podcasts were created with flair.

• Students became more collegiate, as a result of activities seen as occupying the borderlands between study and recreation.

• The voice coach is returning this year for a session on the MA module, Writing as a Profession.

• Performance elements in graduate and undergraduate modules will be introduced over time – for example making more direct connections between performing poetry and gaining employment skills, a la Beth Hoger (2013).

• Books and articles on performance and reading aloud will be introduced into undergraduate and graduate reading lists.

Notes

Individual students have been given codes to avoid giving their names: WA (Writing Aloud) followed by a number. Material is quoted from their feedback, written up and uploaded on Moodle, at various points in the process.

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Other materials

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Student feedback and reports.

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"Each man kills the thing he loves"

Rescuing poetry from set text and exam culture

Gary Snapper

As I write, I have on my desk a pile of essays about the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Ted Hughes' *Selected Poems of Sylvia Plath*, and Simon Armitage's *Selected Poems of Ted Hughes* are the set texts for one unit of the A Level English Literature course I am teaching. My twenty A Level students and I have studied the *whole* of the Plath selection and a *part* of the Hughes selection. That's something in the region of 45 poems of Plath and 15 poems of Hughes. Plath is the "core" text, and Hughes is the "partner" text, studied with the intention of "illuminating" their readings of Plath. This rather complicated arrangement is a result of government prescriptions about the number of set texts, with the requirement that some of them may be studied as "wider reading" but that nevertheless students need to write about all of them as part of their final assessment (Ofqual 2011).

The students have to know those 60 poems pretty well because the exam is very demanding. We haven't "done" all 45 poems of Plath at the same level of detail: there just hasn't been time. The exam board makes it clear that students have to *know* all 45 and be prepared to write about them in the exam, but that it isn't necessary for the teacher to *teach* all 45. There's a crucial point in there about the need for students to be independent learners – but, on the other hand, Plath's poems are *difficult*, the students are only 17 years old, and their university places could depend on their being able to write with considerable depth and complexity about any one of these 60 difficult poems.

Teaching these set poems has taken a long time. I allowed 30 out of 36 hour-long lessons for teaching the set poems and preparing for the exam, but I was also determined to set aside some time to explore poetry *beyond* the set texts *before we began* the set texts. You'd think that this would be standard practice, but unfortunately it's not.

I wanted to attempt to undo some of the damage that might have been done to these students' positive feelings about poetry during the manic scramble to learn vast numbers of set poems for their GCSE exams. At the beginning of the course, many of them complained about the experience of studying poetry at GCSE, in which they simply had to "cram" information about a large number of oddly randomly selected poems and regurgitate it under pressure in highly formulaic ways in stupidly short periods of time, being sure to "hit" a number of "assessment objectives" as they write.

So, I tried to find time to do several things. First, I opened up the subject of poetry and poetry education for discussion, letting them talk (perhaps for the first time in a formal setting) about what they actually *feel and think* about poetry and about their experiences of reading and studying it.

Then, I got them to think about what poetry actually *is;* why it has been (and still is) an important part of culture; why it is, in many important senses, so much less popular than other forms of literature in the present; and why even literature students (even at university level) and English teachers are often less enthusiastic about poetry than other forms. We also talked, of course, about why some people *are* enthusiastic about poetry, and reflected on the crossover between "poetry", "rap", "slam" and "pop lyrics", amongst other things.

Next, we explored the relationships between poetry, visual art and music by discussing some paintings by 20th century painters such as Dali, Kandinsky, Pollock and Mondrian, and thinking about the ways in which poetry, art and music might be similar or different. Along the way, we thought about what we mean by "responding" to and "interpreting" poetry, we discussed the concepts of "meaning" and "aesthetic pleasure", we talked about the idea of "modernism", and we considered the importance of sound and hearing in poetry.

Finally, before starting on the set texts themselves, we looked at the history of poetry – its origins in oral culture and music, the role of verse as the dominant mode of telling stories until the arrival of the novel in the 18th century – and we explored the three main elements of poetic form (rhyme, metre and stanza), using close study of some carefully chosen poems to try to get into the creative imagination of the poet and understand the ways poets use and abuse poetic traditions and conventions (and their reasons for doing it.) And crucially we did all this work *away from the pressure of learning set texts for exams*.

None of this is explicitly part of the A Level curriculum; there is no formal tradition of (and in any case very limited time for) teaching this kind of material about how poetry actually *works* or why it *matters*. Instead, they plough straight into exhaustive and exclusive study of their set texts, and are expected magically to have acquired a sensitive understanding of literary "techniques" and how they have an "effect" before they begin.

We're now at the end of the unit, and I am training my students to write the examination answers they are required to write so that they can be tested on what they have learnt.

They have the grand total of 75 minutes in which to show off what they have gleaned from these hours of complex study and subtle discussion, by churning out (no other word is suitable) an essay on four of the poems they have studied. They have to be prepared to answer on a huge range of topics: how Plath and Hughes write about death, or families, or nature, or water, or suffering, or time – and many more; or how they use imagery or sound or form or tone to convey meaning.

Having thought through the issues and the possible poems they might write about from the 60 they've studied, they then have to form an argument in response to that question in which they explain the kinds of approaches to the topic which are typical of the work of the two poets. They have to write in detail about two poems by Plath, showing detailed understanding of the way she uses elements of language, form and structure "to shape meaning", and of the way understanding meaning might involve considering alternative readings of the poems. They also have to write in less detail about two Hughes poems, exploring how these poems "illuminate" their understandings of Plath's work. They have to write clearly and accurately, using an effective essay structure with well-formed introduction and conclusion, quoting judiciously from the poems. All this in one hour and a quarter.

Understandably, the students find this frustrating. Even the quickest and most concise of them finds it a challenge to finish the essay in that time, let alone craft it in any truly satisfactory or meaningful way. All the subtlety and complexity they have been mulling over for weeks has to be reduced to a formula, and a quick-fire routine must be performed so that they can "hit" all the objectives in the time available. Even giving them two hours instead of one and a quarter would give them more of a reasonable chance of feeling some satisfaction in what they are doing, but, again, government regulations specify the maximum lengths that exams can last, and so no more time is allowed.

How can this be a sensible approach to beginning to instil in our students a committed understanding of and feeling for poetry – which so many of our students know so little about, have so little experience of, and feel so uncomfortable with?

Apart from the narrowness of this approach to the *range of texts* that students encounter, what about the kind of *learning about literature* that goes on in classrooms and is enshrined in syllabuses and examinations? Again, we are stuck with a heritage approach rooted in the 1930s and earlier, in which the text has become classroom-bound, largely detached from any of the ways in which it might be experienced, re-created or contested in "the real world", or within broader understandings of and debates about the categories of "literature", "language" and "culture".

There have been a number of advances in this respect in recent years – a move away from Leavisite models of textual analysis to modes which are more sensitive to ideas about the role of context and interpretation in reading. But the major insights into literature – its multimodality and performativity, its contested values and definition, and so on – which have been generated since the 1960s have still, in the main, to filter through to

the advanced literature curriculum. For poetry, this means that the potentially hugely motivating and revelatory resources, perspectives and strategies that might be offered by the worlds of performance, creative writing, media and publishing remain largely unexplored.

Beyond this, however, what about the world of *other* modes of learning and assessment that might in the end help to free up and broaden the literature curriculum? This is particularly an issue for poetry. It is not as if we don't *know* how alien poetry is to so many of our students, how de-motivating many students find traditional modes of poetry learning and assessment, and how much they have the potential to "put them off" poetry (see, for instance, Andrews 1991). If we want our students to become committed and creative participants and messengers in culture and society, can we not envisage different ways of teaching and learning, and of assessing their knowledge and abilities, in poetry?

We could start with creative writing and performance. Both these modes imply different ways of *learning* about poetry as well as different ways of *assessing* that learning – ways which might help us and them to access vital aspects of knowledge about poetry (such as the role of sound, the creativity of the poet, and so on) which the traditional methods can't access so directly. Even if we don't see these modes as methods of *assessment*, we need to begin to see them as *necessary conditions* for dynamic *learning* about literature to take place, not just as optional extras. Creative writing and performance have the potential not only to make our students more motivated about and committed to poetry, and better writers and performers, but also, in the end, more *knowledgeable about and sensitive to* poetry, and thus better writers of critical *essays* too (see, for instance, Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, 2008).

Poetry by Heart is one of a number of voices attempting to signal that there might be other, and perhaps better, ways of making poetry a significant part of people's lives and education – by placing writing and performance at the heart of poetry in education, and by attempting to model new ways of dealing with poetry in the curriculum. There are plenty of other voices too, some of them focusing on writing and performance (see, for instance Dymoke, 2003), others on offering critiques (like this article) of the way poetry is being held back by outmoded and bureaucratic approaches to curriculum and assessment (see, for instance, Dymoke 2013).

Now take a step even further back and imagine a literature curriculum which takes as its starting point the ways we can connect the new and the old, and the classic and the popular, in literature; the multimodality of literary texts and language; the connections between literary and other kinds of texts; the ways in which ideas about literature are negotiated; the ways in which texts live and are created in the real world through education, publishing, journalism, the media, performance, creative writing; and so on.

It's a world away from what we have now.

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The Lost Jewel in the Crown

Poetry memorization and recitation in the primary classroom

Josephine Brady

In his introduction to *The Faber Popular Reciter* (1978), Kingsley Amis wrote:

When I was schoolboy before the Second World War, the majority of the poems in this book were too well known to be worth reprinting. If they were not in one anthology they were in a couple of others; they were learned by heart and recited in class, or performed as turns at grown-up gatherings… Most of that, together with much else, has gone.

Fast-forward nearly forty years and poetry memorization/recital is poised to take on new life in our primary classrooms. From September 2014, a national curriculum is to be introduced that will require pupils to learn and recite rhymes and poems by heart from the first year of school. Arising in a climate of phonics and oracy, the idea is to encourage even the youngest of children to delight in words and be moved and inspired by language. Yet, these early encounters with poetry will be mediated by teachers; teachers whose personal attitudes and experiences of poetry reading and teaching could make or break the poetry agenda.

As a teacher educator, my own view is that bringing poetry memorization and recitation out of the past and into the formation of the future is one of Michael Gove's more attractive ideas. However, I know from talking to friends and colleagues that some teachers are approaching this particular curriculum change with a feeling of dread.

"Do you think it's important to learn poetry by heart?" I asked an unsuspecting group of PGCE Primary trainee teachers on a wintry Friday morning. Their responses varied, with some interesting positive comments:

Yes – encourages an appreciation of the beauty of poetry. In schools, it builds self-confidence and has cross-curriculum uses.

Yes, I think so. By doing so, the poem becomes part of you and stays with you over time.

Yes, it's the memorization of wisdom. One is never alone when one can recall a tradition.

But such comments were like plump raisins buried in a yeasty dough of scepticism:

I think that if the message of a poem is delivered and received, then surely that is more important than remembering words that mean nothing?

No, as it does not increase your understanding or enjoyment of the poem. These two things are more important than being able to recite it.

No, I think is it only necessary to know a poem by heart if you have a passion for poetry.

I don't think that knowing a poem by heart means that you understand the poem anymore than someone who doesn't.

I think that it's more important to be able to read a poem, deconstruct it and analyse it for meaning, and engage with your own feelings about the poem. When we read prose, we don't memorise it, do we?

No, I just don't see how learning poems by heart helps anyone learn anything about poetry.

There are few surprises here, of course, as one of the morose truths of the last twenty years is that

generations of students were weaned on an educational diet of practical criticism and P.E.E. (Point, Evidence, Explanation) exercises. But now that an opportunity for change has arrived, the key question is how do we encourage individuals to put down the baton of deconstruction and feast on a banquet of poetry alive and aloud?

The "Poetry Voiced" Project

I am a firm believer that one of the best ways to learn about something new is to listen to those who have traversed a similar path before you. Towards this end, I got in touch with our local literature development agency, Writing West Midlands, who helped to broker a relationship between myself and the national organization, Poetry by Heart. At this point, the Poetry by Heart team was planning the second year of their pioneering competition designed to encourage pupils at secondary school to learn and recite poems from memory. As part of their school programme, they had offered a series of regional CPD (continued professional development) days for teachers. I was interested to hear more about these events as well as their views on the forthcoming changes to the primary curriculum. My aim was to inspire current trainee teachers to embrace the Poetry by Heart agenda, and value its distinctiveness from present poetry pedagogy.

I wanted the project to be innovative and a genuine collaborative effort. For these reasons, the "Poetry Voiced" Project was purposefully designed as a nested action research study. This meant that, as a tutor-researcher, I would engage in a university-based study focused on my trainee teachers' development and, on another level, the thirty PGCE trainees, who had chosen English as their Primary Focus area, and would engage in their own action research studies in school, focused on their classroom-based practice. The multiple action research projects would then, in the final stages, be woven together to form a larger action research study. As the trainees are currently on their final teaching experience carrying out their projects, this article reports on the university-based element exploring in some detail the workshop sessions and the trainee teachers' shifting ideas about poetry memorization and recitation.

Poetry and Memorization with Mario Petrucci

Many creative endeavours start with a collective activity: the first read-through of a play or a friendly football game, the purpose being to unite everyone to a common goal. The "Poetry Voiced" project began with a workshop day with acclaimed poet Mario Petrucci.

The workshop was divided into five thematic sessions:

1) Memory vs Page: the pros and cons of memorization
2) Memorization: techniques and issues
3) The Poems: Introduction and selection
4) ShadoWork' Voice exercises
5) Participant Reading: from page and from memory

The day was all about "taking the plunge" into poetry and becoming familiar with the process of poetry memorization and recitation on a practical level. Session five, in particular, drew the students out of their comfort zones and led to a candid and open group discussion about the potential value of "poetry by heart" for adults and young people. Afterwards, the students had some time to reflect upon their experiences before completing an evaluation. The students' verbal and written feedback was overwhelmingly positive, as the snapshot of responses presented here indicates:

I felt it was really beneficial and my own confidence grew throughout the day.

It made me realize that poetry is really for reading out loud; it only truly comes alive away from the page. It exposed me to poets I had not heard of or considered reading before that I am now eager to find out more about.

I do feel experiencing reading, memorizing and reciting poetry ourselves was an invaluable insight that was needed to be able to teach it. We can now fully appreciate how daunting it can be!

Very positive it made me realize the power of memorization. It also made me realize that I enjoy performing poetry and feel comfortable performing poems to others and I think this will transfer to the class.

However, what next? How do I, as their regular tutor, build on the success of this initial workshop yet push them forward in their understanding of their role as teachers of poetry? Fortunately, the direction also came from the evaluations as they were eager to find out more about classroom application: which poems to use, how to introduce them and possible approaches to take with young children in order to bring poetry to life in the classroom. In short, they had encountered poetry as living words and they were keen, but unsure of how, to engage their pupils in a similar way.

Re-imagining poetry pedagogy in the primary classroom

The purpose of the second workshop day was to help

students develop a greater awareness and understanding of poetry as spoken word on a practical and theoretical level. In advance of the day, several poems were recited and audio-recorded in two distinct ways. The first essentially described a recitation process that lacked any real awareness or insight – the mere recall of words in the correct order. In contrast, the second referred to a personal connection borne of an awareness that "poetry" is not contained in the printed words on the page but rather in one's relationship with the text.

The recordings were shared with the students and they were encouraged to explore and discuss the differences between the two versions. The core objective was to demonstrate how the voice can be used to bring a poem to life through voice modulation and through subjective interpretation. Indeed, to summarize, the main outcomes of the second day were:

1) An increase in confidence in their personal interpretations – based on the recognition that there is no right or wrong way.

2) The permission, as it were, to move beyond the straitjacket of academic analysis to engage intuitively with the poem and perhaps the life of the poem and its wider historical context.

3) An increasing affection/love for spoken poetry within the group which, in many, was infectious.

Feedback from the evaluations was again very positive and there was a genuine sense of a progression and a radical shift in perspectives:

It was a very focused and useful follow-up to Mario's day. Many of my questions relating to how the project is to be carried out were answered and the theory was enlightening. It was also useful to receive clear guidance on where material can be found to use in the classroom.

Listening to different recitations of poetry made me realize just how important the voice is – the pace, pauses and pitch.

It made me consider different ways that I would teach the memorization of poetry in the classroom. For example, the idea of the children creating portfolios of different poems appealed to me.

Spoken poetry and popular culture

In the sessions that followed, we explored how different poems lent themselves to different key stages and we explored, for example, how verses of poetry could be inserted in adventure stories. These adventure stories could provide, for younger children in particular, the impetus for memorization and the opportunity for teachers to investigate the children's perspectives:

Charlie the dog has been locked in the tower. Jake and Emily have to get Charlie out of the tower. In order to free Charlie and release him from the tower, they must recite the magic four lines to the owl. They have to learn the lines off by heart. This means they cannot take any books or paper with them.

The magic four lines are:

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep.

(the last verse of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost)

- Do you think they can do it? Is it going to be hard or easy? Why?
- How long do you think it will take them to learn it?
- Could you learn it?
- How long do you think it would take you to learn it?

Shall we have a go…?

We debated the use of humorous poems as a catalyst rather than a stopping point, considering at length other possibly more fruitful avenues. (We also started a buying frenzy on "The Works" website as one student noticed that a hardback version of "Where My Wellies Take Me", a part-memoir, part-poetry anthology by Michael and Clare Morpurgo for children aged seven years plus was retailing at the bargain price of £2.99!) We spent substantial time exploring the roots of poetry in popular culture, tracing poetic devices embedded in CBBC and Disney programmes and considering the presence of poetry in well-known television programmes, films and adverts. The recent Winter Olympics and iPad Air commercials in the UK, for example, suggest that spoken poetry is in the zeitgeist.

Skype calls and the Poetry by Heart semi-finals

As a group, we engaged in skype conversations with

Tim Shortis, from Poetry by Heart, and Megan Turner, a final year undergraduate trainee teacher from Belfast who had just finished her dissertation on poetry and memory in education. We discussed overlaps with secondary practice and shared classroom ideas and experiences, with Megan outlining the discoveries and successes of running her own miniature Poetry by Heart competition with her youth club group.

The culmination of the university-based element was marked by our attendance at the semi-finals of this year's Poetry by Heart competition which left a lasting impression on us all:

The event gave me lots to think about in terms of how to encourage learning poetry by heart when I return to my Year 4 class after Easter. The day was especially useful in demonstrating how the act of reciting poems could be organized into a competitive format. I think this will be helpful in motivating the Year 4 children to want to learn and perfect their skills. My current school was very interested in my experiences on Friday and has prompted teacher discussions on how reciting poetry can be incorporated into literacy learning and the different ways this could be approached depending upon the age of the children.

The power and passion you could feel from every reader was breath-taking. I can honestly say the reading of Chaucer's 'Prologue to the Wife of Bath' will stay with me. Plus I now have a favourite new poem 'Wedding' by Alice Oswald, the reading just brought to life its essence. From the day, I can only hope that Poetry by Heart grows and expands.

I thoroughly enjoyed being an audience member of the Poetry by Heart semi-finals. It was fantastic to see young adults performing their poetry readings to such a high standard. I admired all of them, and each in turn had me captured into the world of the poem.

Aside from the talent shown by the contestants on the day, it was a valuable opportunity to see our research project in action; if I wasn't convinced about memorizing poetry before, I can certainly see the benefits now. The project and the event has also given me inspiration to explore new poems that I had not heard before. Thank you for organizing this day, and for choosing this project. Primary Focus has been my favourite part of the PGCE course led at university.

Closing thoughts

As the first part of the study draws to a close and my students seek to ignite a love of poetry aloud in the pupils they are currently teaching, I turn to reflect on the words of Pullinger (2012):

In the UK, we now have an education system that offers neither an inscribed curricular place nor a hospitable space for poetry learning. (383)

From September 2014, at primary level, this position will be spectacularly tipped on its head. Learning poetry by heart will have "an inscribed curriculum place" but whether or not it is "a hospitable space for poetry learning" is essentially up to us. We have a chance to take on the role of forest guides – creating the path as we walk and leading smaller foots along the way. Thus, I want to end this article with a plea that all practitioners working in the field of primary education consider what might be gained by embracing this curriculum change and breaking out of the confines of more structured poetry pedagogies. However, I will leave the final word of encouragement to Kate, one of my PGCE primary students:

Thank you for arranging the [Poetry by Heart semi-finals] day, it was a truly inspiring experience and one I'm very glad I attended. I felt it gave me a real insight into what can be achieved through a curriculum that promotes poetry recitation. Cannot help thinking if this is the result of encouraging poetry recitation for a short period in secondary school, what could be achieved from starting at primary level!

Acknowledgements

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Memorizing Poems

Twelve Portraits of a Process

Mario Petrucci

This article explores the issues that arose in my CPD workshop at the National Portrait Gallery (London), designed for teachers from schools taking part in the Poetry by Heart competition. It ran twice (March and November, 2013) with a follow-up day at Birmingham City University for trainee teachers, which took place in early 2014.

1. Process over Product

Being asked to lead a day on memorization at the National Portrait Gallery brought an initial burst of *"yes!"* that emanated from a love of such things, followed quite rapidly by an equally instinctual *"no"* which my mind paraphrased as "Oh god – how will I do this?" I'm sure my initial yo-yo reaction is also felt by some of the children who agree to memorize poems!

One of my chief instincts as an educator, accrued as a youthful physics teacher, is to always try to put myself in the recipient's shoes – maybe even their socks. It doesn't take much empathy, though, to see that there may be as many anxieties and obstacles in performing a memorized poem as there are rewards. I therefore decided to open up the CPD day to the more tender aspects of personal process rather than focus on the transfer of memorization skills. Those skills would have a part to play, yes; but if we are to lug our marionette bodies onto a stage to recite a poem, it'll be the more self-aware Self that tends to breathe universal life into the performance and prevent our particular strings being pulled by the ego.

I've begun to realize that "Process over Product" might apply to all teaching, whether one is involved in performance training, book-reading, or creative writing. My ideal, increasingly, is to run fully enriching writing workshops where nothing *necessarily* gets written, or memorable and energizing days on memorization at the end of which nothing is *necessarily* committed to memory. Of course, the poems *do* get written, or memorized; but that's not the point. One trusts, instead, that if the process is right, the right "products" will come. It's life-changing to finally free one's creativity of preset habits of thought (including, I have to add, the sense that embracing process is no more than the means to get what one already wanted).

2. The Journal

When memorizing poetry, please keep a journal of your insights and experiences as you go – *in medias res.* Not just your ideas, but your feelings too, not least those things you don't fully understand or immediately grasp. I suspect that many of you won't bother in the first place; or else you'll start the journal then decide it's too much to keep it up. Resist those tendencies. The journal contributes to reorienting and focusing your inner gaze: it's probably the single most productive thing you can do in making a firm commitment to process.

3. Create an initial sense of ease...

I won't repeat here any of the ice-breaking jokes or anecdotes I use to introduce a teaching day, but it's crucial to acknowledge that some means must be adopted to initially relax, expand and sharpen the attention (for participant *and* tutor alike) away from that anxious kind of inwardness that's unproductive and, usually, self-fulfilling. A good warm-up exercise is to try to write down a few lines of poetry (at random, as it were) from memory, paying full attention to the *process* and not the result: one is observing, calmly, what's happening internally, rather than scouring oneself in an attempt at perfect recall. I might also stress, early on, that one needs, in any group or individual memorization process, to lift oneself out of passivity. Even if we're "only" listening or reading, we need to be active in it, ever moving towards questions like "What does this reveal to me?" and "Am I missing something here?"

4. Memory and Memorization

"A memory is what is left behind when something happens and does not completely unhappen."
– Edward de Bono

What motivates your wish to memorize a particular poem? Is memorization a priority for you? Do you really have the time? Look deeper than the usual reasons. Where do you go to find poems? What kind(s) of poem would you choose, and why, if there were no curriculum, no poetry establishment? What sways you most when digging out poems for your own enjoyment: your own instinct and reading, or the guidance of organizations and critics? What qualities do you value in poetry (music, meaning, message...)? Do you need to pin down what a poem "means", or why it draws you? Do you respond to the blank steppes of a page of poetry as much as its parallel tracks of words? Do you read a poem with your head, heart, gut or loins? What are the relative (dis)benefits, (dis)advantages, risks and (missed) opportunities involved in reading a poem aloud: (a) from memory; (b) straight from the page?

For me, saying from the page and speaking from memory are equally appropriate and both intimately context-dependent. It might be that reading something aloud to your class – with just a couple of lines memorized so that you can make eye contact – is all you need. Mark Twain: "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." Whether I choose to memorize in whole or in part, or not at all, I try to be truthful to myself. Of course, we can always challenge ourselves to go beyond our usual borders; so, by all means, decide to memorize a poem, but only if you really want to and if it feels right as a natural extension, in performance, of yourself. Don't press to impress, or become unnatural in your teaching or reading style; and please don't memorize because you feel you somehow ought to.

5. History

I mean *personal* history. Bring to mind previous experiences of having to memorize a text, in whatever context: exams, a classroom recitation, a school assembly, the first poem you were set to memorize as a child... Or, later in life: a university presentation; a set piece you'd prepared for interview; a wedding or funeral speech. How did it feel (before, during, after)? What were your initial concerns? What worked? What were the social as well as personal rewards? What physical senses and personal tricks, if any, did you use in support? How did you feel if/when you got it "wrong"? *How* did it go awry (going completely blank, "rewriting" lines or rearranging their order, substituting a word similar in sound or sense, etc.)? Did the "sticking points" follow any pattern? And so on. Don't just bring these memories to mind: relive the experience as though it were happening right now. What do you learn from all this? What might you glean by sharing these experiences with others?

6. Context

How important is context to the recall of content? What types of context might be relevant in memorization? There is, for instance, the occasion (the situation or event) for which the memorization is taking place. Then there's the rest of the poem (if you're doing an excerpt); there's the historical context of the piece, too, how typical it was for its time; the facts in or about the poem; the details of how the poem came to be written; and much more (unless you follow New Criticism). In short, there's your research! Part of this research will involve the author's biography – but what about your *own* biography? Why would that impinge? Is your performance conditioned by your reasons for rating or choosing this poem over all those other ones? Isn't it part of the process of understanding how you render the poem on air – of how you thus "interpret" the piece – to be as fully aware as possible of who *you* are? Or is performance something, paradoxically, one can hide behind? Taking this even further, if reading a poem out loud is about involvement rather than passivity, surely your relationship with your own creativity is implicated? What, then, is the current state of your creativity?

7. Techniques

Before you memorize a poem, by whatever means: prepare. The SURF mnemonic (Figure 1) may be helpful here ("SURF" because reciting a poem from memory can be a little like riding the poem's wave, relaxing our natural urge to cling onto something – namely, the text). Begin by developing a strong personal **U**nderstanding of the piece (i.e. emotional as well as cerebral) and a **F**amiliarity with the larger story of the poem that you yourself construct for it, partly through research. Develop a personal dialogue with the text *that isn't passive*. It's far easier to memorize a poem after you've internalized it as something you feel and know, because the process will have already begun, creating a variety of hooks for you to hang the words upon. At some point, begin to also make yourself aware of the various **S**onic patterns in the text (rhyme, alliteration, rhythm, etc.): these constitute the text's "sonic scaffolding".

As for the **R**epetition/**R**ehearsal part of the mnemonic, helpful resources are everywhere to be found, in self-help books and online. I have a particular (and very simple) methodology that works for most people, at least as a starting point, as illustrated in the second part of Figure 1. There are variations on how this kind of approach works (i.e. hiding the text under a card), but the one I prefer is to cover the entire poem with the card and try to say the first line out loud. Then uncover the first line to see if you got it right. Repeat, until you can say the first line correctly. Then cover the whole poem again and try to get the first *two* lines, in the same way. When you can say those two lines correctly without seeing them, cover everything up and try to get the first *three* lines. And so on. If, while doing this, a particular line doesn't come to you correctly, refresh your memory then cover the *whole* poem up and try again.

There will probably be "snag-points" in a text that keep stalling you: certain places where you seem to continually hesitate or halt, particularly when you're caught up in the intensity of a live performance. There

S	U	R	F
"SONIC PATTERNS"	UNDERSTANDING	REPETITION & REHEARSAL	FAMILIARITY
Rhyme Rhythm Line breaks...	Personal ideas Emotive response Internalization...	(see below)	Background Context Knowing the text...

CARD-COVERING

ONE LINE AT A TIME ...

TRY TO RECALL EACH LINE *BEFORE* YOU EXPOSE IT!

... *or* some variation on this ... whatever works for *you*.

... start at top ... start at top *each time* ...

EXPOSE LINE 1 EXPOSE LINE 2 etc...

© Mario Petrucci 2013

Figure 1. Techniques for Memorization: SURF

are many ways to deal with these. Two good approaches are: (i) try to work out what kind of things tend to snag you, and why (the mere insight seems to help); (ii) associate the text of each snag-point with a strongly relevant visual image, or joke, or even something quite outrageous. In (ii), the unforgettable item links you, meaningfully, to the snagging text: recall the (easy) link and the (difficult) snag will often unravel.

8. Lateral and Collateral Activity

Sometimes it's good to return to a text having done something else, or to come to it via an unexpected route. At the National Portrait Gallery, I asked participants to: (a) compose something short, but memorable, in front of a portrait of their choice; (b) present (or "give") the text being memorized to the face in the portrait. There was agreement, afterwards, that these creative forms of engagement had not only served to deepen the memorization process, but had also been incredibly valuable in their own right. One participant intoned *The Kraken* to the youthful Tennyson "... as the barriers of time, place, image and death seemed to melt away – a virtually spiritual experience". (Learning Lessons, vol. 3/ issue 10, January 2014, website of King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford, www.kegs.org.uk)

9. Preparing the Body/Breath; Holding the Thought

Figure 2 is a sample of some of the exercises and ideas I developed for ShadoWork, a project I co-founded in the nineties for collaborative performance and training. The content here is mostly self-explanatory, but "Holding the Thought" bears further elucidation. In this activity, a partner stops you (they mustn't be shy in this!) when, in some way, you lose intimate contact with a text you're reading to them out loud. By all means interpret the concept and exercise in your own way; but remember that it has to do with a sense, in the *listener*, that the reader knows, unhesitatingly, exactly where they are and where they're going, that they're utterly inside the text and what it means, rather than feeling their way through it or handing it over in a detached way, as a series of phrases. Indeed, a great recitation comes across as a kind of hologram, where the whole is somehow fully present in every passing part.

10. The Performance: You

At the National Portrait Gallery, participants first read an *unmemorized* poem segment, aloud, from the page; they then performed another segment from memory. Afterwards, we talked...

What worked? Even a faltering performance can profoundly move its audience; a vulnerable or nervous persona on stage, if centred on the text, can still be compelling. Never forget that the audience is willing you on, wanting you to succeed, not hoping that you'll fail. Moreover, what about when it does come together and you feel that you gave a rendition that honoured the author but also left room for you, where (paradoxically, for all your presence) the audience stopped noticing you at all and were swept along to cohabit the text with you? That elation we feel when, through us, a poem lives again – that humbling thrill of a stilled, pheromonal audience – does takes some beating, doesn't it? All this is relevant, too, to those who sometimes read their *own* poems aloud, because one needs to honour that author as well: the author you were when you wrote and edited your poem.

Now for some tough questions. Are you harbouring in you just a tiny splinter of *Dead Poets Society*? Do you use your natural voice (a heightened form of how you usually speak) or something far less "you", a more pressing or precious "performance voice"? Do you inhabit the text, or are you acting? Does your voice arise in a body of stillness and alert readiness, or do you sway, rock yourself, pace or shuffle, become unsure what to do with hands? It's astonishing how wayward the body can become in front of an audience, without the mind having the faintest idea what's happening (I used to throttle myself, symbolically, with my "sinister" hand). The more adept and powerful you become in public performance, the more noticeable are the various tics that arise from an un-centred body or lack of self-esteem. These distractions are mostly unconscious attempts to reassure ourselves, or to send out a subliminal message that we shouldn't really be there. I recall Seamus Heaney failing to make, I think, a single unintentional or unnecessary movement throughout an entire reading.

Sorry, there's more. Do you read too fast? Are there sufficient lacunae – is there enough "air" – in your rendition to allow micro-thought and micro-response to happen in the listener, or do you hurry everything along? In schools, some girls (it seems) could read at half the speed and still be way too fast! How do you manage, if you happen to have a very soft voice? Where do you look when speaking (is your gaze seeking the poem in the upper middle distance)? Whom do you address? When you're reciting, where "is" the poem, do you feel, in the room? Do you begin with an apology (actual or implied)? Do you begin too soon, *as* you arrive? Do you look down and rush off the stage the instant the poem ends? That's probably already enough to contemplate,

but three further points can't be evaded...

Firstly, what do you do if you trip up, or lose your way altogether? Well, certainly don't slump or jump out of the poem. Try to remain calm and still. Breathe. Tenseness can de-oxygenate the brain, and adrenalin destroys the relaxation in which memory best operates. Meanwhile, don't allow your mistake to generate a situation that's all about "you": keep the attention, even when things are going astray, *on the text*. It's quite possible to get things wrong in a serene, good-humoured way. Don't keep saying "sorry" if you've lost the poem: it's probably best to just end it there, say "thank you" and walk calmly off. Secondly – and this relates to the preceding point – why is it so common for people to have a poem absolutely nailed, until they stand before an audience? What they could recite with ease last night in their room, or ten minutes ago backstage, suddenly has huge holes in it. Obviously, the two contexts (that is, the two "occasions") are thoroughly different. Part of the answer is to have a preparatory routine in which you relax, avoid coffee and alcohol, hydrate yourself (not *too* much!), loosen up, and rectify any shallow breathing. Another part of the answer is simply to get more used to reading on a stage. So, take every opportunity to get up there; but never get so used to it that you don't have *some* nerves. A bit of fizz in the blood is essential. Finally, my third (and most important) point: are you, in any way, enjoying yourself?

11. The Performance: the Others

Do you watch and listen, actively, as well as recite actively? What can you learn from the other performers? Do a few come across as amateur actors and others as "themselves"? If they read the same poem as you, how is it read differently? Do you notice what others do that enlivens the text (vocal range, shifts of pace, etc.) or distracts you from the text? Is the performance a vehicle for the performer? Are they exploiting the text, or serving it? Are the physical gestures absolutely necessary? How important is the face and its expressions? Does the performance seem to want to elicit from you a desired response; or does it simply and effectively present the text, for you (as listener) to inhabit in your own way?

12. Reflection

In memorizing a poem, have you come to know yourself a little better? What's different, for you, in reading from a script and reading from memory? Which do you prefer? Why? Does reading well from the page take just as much investment? To what extent do you wish to communicate the author's (real or imagined) intentions above your own? Was your process concerned with precision, humanity, or both? What was the role of silence in your rendition? (Indeed, what's the point of anyone writing a poem if not to modify silence? I sometimes wonder whether the momentary stillness that follows a poem *is* the poem.)

And did you, after all, keep that journal?

"Holding the Thought"

There's no "right way" to memorize a poem. However, to embrace the world of that poem, to return it to the culture with interest, publicly, in auditorium or classroom, does require one indispensable quality: courage. Yes, one does well to seek guidance to support and inform one's individual responsiveness, passion and self-directed movement towards the text; but, ultimately, there can only be (as TS Eliot might have demanded of poetry's readers as much as its writers) an authentic and courageous "continual surrender" to the text. No passive slaughtering of self, though, but an active commitment to explore those infinite expanses of communion between a living reader and the living/dead author. With that in mind, I might well challenge my own metaphor in the title of this piece: perhaps the memorization of poetry isn't a painting of portraits, or even of self-portraits, but a living landscape populated with many figures apart from ourselves. I love reading from the page and rarely memorize poems entire; but I still retain an inexplicable desire to walk into that landscape, in steps of breath, with all the sonic, somatic, psychological and spiritual self. And I'll often look up from my script during a reading, realizing happily that the next few lines – even though I haven't yet said them – are already flying off with me, like a child's kite, away from the page.

SHADOWORK: SOME VOICE EXERCISES

CENTRE YOURSELF

a. **Stillness.** Close eyes. Breathe naturally. Relax thoughts. Clear head.

b. **Breath.** Easy. Slow. Full. Free. Rhythmic: in through nose, out through mouth. In your head, count to 4 breathing in through nose, hold for 2, out for 4 through mouth, hold for 2, REPEAT. Breathe deep into belly. Keep going for a few minutes.

c. **POSTURE:** ***"a state of readiness"….***

Feet – parallel, beneath hips. Weight slightly forward on the big toe.
Knees – not locked. Bend & bounce on them slightly. Unclamp **thighs**.
Hips – not thrust out or sideways. Draw big circles with your pelvis, then spiral gradually down.
Stomach – don't pull it in!
Spine – straight. *"When your spine goes, you age"*.
Chest – don't collapse it. Avoid hunching.
Neck & shoulders (a key area) – shake them out, and flop.
Head – neither pushed forward nor pulled back. Not 'tucked in' or tilted.
Jaw – unclench, lift chin slightly. Clench and unclench.
Face. Do **tongue** gymnastics!

d. **Place your palm where you think your voice comes from. Now say "Ahhhh"**, expelling breath slowly with the mouth open. Rediscover the source of that sound with your hand. Is it lower than you thought? How low down *might* it be?

e. **Be aware of tensions, lack of posture** = Restricted delivery. How you stand, move, breathe – all are important to emotion & connection to audience.

BREATH & POSTURE

1/ Breathe in, but then begin to speak before you are ready. Feel the tightness.

2/ Breathe in, hold back and then speak (too late). Note how abdomen is clenched & the chest too high. (Common fault.)

3/ Breathe out fully. When the breath is *completely* expended, try to read a line out loud. Remember this horrible feeling! When you feel that way reciting, BREATHE!

4/ Speak "oh" from deep stomach. Clench shoulders and repeat. Note the thinness of the sound moving up the tensioned body. Unclench and repeat "oh". Is that better?

HOLDING THE THOUGHT

Do you read each line of a poem as though it were a disembodied phrase? Rather: is the start still there in the middle, is the end somehow inevitable? Do the words and thoughts flow, link up, move fluently? Rather: is the start still there in the middle, is the end somehow inevitable? Do the words and thoughts flow, link up, move fluently?

In pairs, read your text **aloud** to your partner. They stop you whenever they feel you've "lost" the text in some way. Every time that happens, you go back and read again from the start. If you're having trouble "Holding the Thought", try to:

* Speak text in a **monotone.** Then with an **exaggerated range**, swinging the tone wildly. Then just speak the text, again, from a new-found centredness.

* Speak selected lines with **different emotions**. Languor, anger, boredom, anxiety…

* **Mouth the text** with no sound.

* Read out **one another's texts**: note the qualities and emphasis of the *other* voice.

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Figure 2. ShadoWork: some voice exercises

Mario Petrucci *works as an educator and creative writing tutor for all ages, and as a radio/tv broadcaster. He lectures at the Imperial War Museum and is much in demand as a visiting writer specializing in war poetry and the curriculum. He was recipient of the 2002 Arvon/ Daily Telegraph International Poetry Prize and has been RLF Fellow at Oxford Brookes, Westminster and Brunel Universities.*

The Old Man in the Attic

Using the Method of Loci for Poetry Memorization

Alison Powell

In a corner of my parents' attic is a box that contains a blue hardback folder filled with certificates of achievement from my school days. Sitting on top of the box is a wizened old man with his well-worn backpack and walking stick. He holds a yellowed map in his gnarled fingers and is clearly a traveller from an antique land. Both the box and the man have sat in that space with the glimmering dust motes and irritating fibre glass insulation for more than 20 years.

Don't be alarmed, the well-being of the old man in the attic is actually quite intact. In fact he has barely changed a jot in all this time. This is because, unlike the folder of certificates, which I could retrieve and present to you fairly easily, the old man only exists in my internal landscape. He is part of an imagined version of my parents' attic I have created and one that is intrinsically linked to the certificates folder. This particular travelling man is an image from a Memory Palace that I created when I was 16 years old in my endeavours at winning at least two of the awards in the box he sits on.

I consider myself fortunate to have attended a school in South Wales where the annual Eisteddfod was anticipated with the sort of enthusiasm other schools reserve for sports day. An Eisteddfod is a traditional Welsh celebration of culture and the arts with a competitive edge. My school ran a successful and active house-system to which the Eisteddfod competitions added valuable points. The event culminated in a day when the whole school assembled to witness the performance categories of the competition in drama, speaking and poetry recitation, all typically accompanied by vociferous support.

My small contribution to accumulating house-points was to take on the poetry recital competition. The first time I entered, the prescribed poem was Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky". Initially my attempts at committing poetry to memory involved arduous hours of writing and re-writing lines, then repeating them in my mind, or under my breath and nagging family members to "test me" when I thought I had the completed the task. This approach did work, but involved a lot of effort, a number of strange looks from people as I mumbled poetry on the bus and an increasingly strained relationship with my family who, quite frankly, didn't want to hear "Jabberwocky" again.

Thankfully I later stumbled on the works of Tony Buzan in my local library. Through his books, *Use Your Head* and *Use Your Memory,* I discovered that the memory was something I could actually train and improve and, even better, that there were specific techniques developed over centuries that I could employ to make poetry remembering not only much easier, but also fun.

One of the techniques I learned, and the reason for the installation of the wizened old bloke on the top floor of my parents' house, was the Memory Palace, also known as the Memory Temple, or Method of Loci system. Fans of the recent BBC adaptation of the Sherlock Holmes stories featuring Benedict Cumberbatch might recognize the Memory Palace concept. In practice this involves selecting a building (or imagined version of a building) as a framework for setting up memory triggers. In the process of memorization, images are placed or attached to rooms in the building, following a set pathway. In order to recall the images, an imagined walk through the building should be all that is required. It's a memory technique that was considered an art by the Romans and Greeks, but like many ancient practices, has fallen out of

fashion.

Before we began outsourcing our memories to the written word, mobile phones, SatNav or Aunty Google, memory was, in many ways, king. In Cicero's *de Oratore* he credits Simonides of Ceos with inventing the system of mnemonics or memorization techniques. Simonides' theory was that the best aids to memory are clear order and images and the Method of Loci utilizes both of these.

In order to use this method for memorizing a poem, it is useful to pick out a series of key images that will then be attached to the imagined architectural structure you intend to use. In the Latin work *Rhetorica ad Herennium* we are instructed to choose images that are "strong and sharp and suitable for awakening recollection". Images that are unusual are more likely to stick with us, as are images that create a visceral response – repulsion, disgust, or laugh-out-loud hilarity.

If you haven't already worked it out, the old man in my parents' attic enables me to recall the first line of "Ozymandias": *I met a traveller from an antique land.* I imagine the man sitting there on the box, wearing a beige cloak and hat. I create a feeling of compassion, as if he is someone I want to speak to and spend time with. He reminds me somewhat of my grandfather. I imagine his clothes so vividly that I can feel the rough hessian of his robes. According to Buzan this is the Von Rorstoff effect in action: "The brain will remember something better if it stands out from the context, particularly a big, loud, multisensory image."

In terms of creating order, the Memory Palace should be treated like a guided tour. You need to be able to move between each room in a set and easily followed path. This works best if it is a logical route that you could physically emulate should you wish. Going from the attic to the kitchen on the ground floor wouldn't work at all for my "Ozymandias" palace. It makes more sense to imagine stepping down the ladder from the hatch that leads out of the attic and to park the next key image here.

The Roman rhetorician Quintilian recommends in his *Institutio Oratoria* that an ideal Memory Palace is a "spacious house, divided into a number of rooms". Personally I like using buildings I have either lived or worked in and know well. It has to be a place I can imagine walking around easily.

The next line of "Ozymandias" is: *Who said 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone'*. So I imagine the old man speaking this line and as he does I mentally move towards the ladder at the hatch and there I visualize a set of "vast and trunkless legs". The top half of the body is in the attic. The legs are cold and crumbly pale stone and I have to squeeze past them to get down the ladder.

The room below, my childhood bedroom, is suddenly filled with sand and the air is dry and hot. I imagine a heat haze over the sand and see the legs from the ladder sinking into the surface. This is my trigger for the next line: *Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand.* The next two lines link visually: *Half sunk, a shattered visage lies whose frown/ And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command*. Here I imagine a huge stone mask half buried in the sand of my old room. I watch the face frown and feel a repulsion and fear. I notice the lip, and to remind myself that the adjective is "wrinkled" I imagine trying to remove the creases with a heavy iron.

In the Memory Palace the surreal and silly are completely acceptable and actively encouraged. Although ironing the lip of the sculpture is an image that might seem disconnected with the meaning and context of the poem, it is an effective aide memoire that works because of the fact it is unusual and illogical.

Of course, memory is subjective, so whilst I could go on and describe the entire Memory Palace that I built for my Eisteddfod recitation of "Ozymandias", the exact same system is unlikely to work for other people without some personal adaptation. We all make different associations and connections, and will all have different environments available to use as our Memory Palaces.

The key to making this method work is to practise. Repetition of the poem is still required to make a Memory Palace that will last more than twenty years, but unlike the learning by rote approach, the order and images combine with the lines of the poem to create a lasting memory. I suggest that you imagine walking through the Palace during each recitation, adding to the images and keeping them alive. We wouldn't expect to remember a 15 mile route through a new city after walking it once, and it's the same with a new Memory Palace. The more we invoke the sequence of images, the easier it is to recall them. Repeating the lines of the poem and seeing the lines imprinted in the appropriate rooms of a palace can also be helpful. For example, when I imagine the man in the attic I also see the first line of the poem appear in a spider's web above his head.

In recalling a poem the Method of Loci establishes a framework that also encompasses an individual's

understanding of a poem. In recital we can walk the pathway of loci to trigger not only a memory of the lines but also a memory of feelings that we might have attributed to or interpreted from them. In recitation this can allow a speaker to bring an emotional truth to the words they speak aloud.

During my teaching career I have usually introduced students to the Memory Palace as a fun way to approach revision. More recently I have used it to help young people learn poems for recital, modelling my own examples. A year 7 group that I worked with were particularly delighted with the technique and went on to learn a range of surprisingly complex poems using it. Students report that they find the Method of Loci technique not only to be useful, but enjoyable.

I attribute this enjoyment to the process required by the Memory Palace. It is itself an act of creativity – albeit one that is internal. It is a process of engagement with a poem that takes time, practice and care. If a particular line is causing problems for recall, it's often because the image used is not strong enough. Occasionally a student will report, usually after a short-lived first attempt, that the technique doesn't work for them. I encourage them to give it a little more time. After all we wouldn't expect to master tennis with one go at hitting a ball.

I also suggest that it is a process that works well alongside other mnemonic systems for poetry. Buzan tells us that the more pathways we link to recall, the more chance we have at successfully retaining and retrieving information as and when we require it. For example, an understanding of rhyme, metre, or alliteration can also help secure a poem in the memory. Combining these imaginatively into the Memory Palace is one way to learn a poem by heart and see it stand the test of time.

The Eisteddfod awards for my recital of "Ozymandias" all those years ago may well have rotted by now. I don't know. I haven't physically been into that corner of my parents' attic for a long time. What I do know though is that during the more than twenty years that have passed since I first imagined him there, I have visited that antique traveller time and again. And each time I see him and walk the pathway of my Memory Palace I recall the lines of the poem with ease. Where the paper certificates may have deteriorated, my memory, appreciation and understanding of the poem have steadily increased.

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Alison Powell *is an educational writer and consultant. Her recent work with Poetry by Heart includes facilitating CPD workshops for beginning teachers on poetry memorization, and preparing website content to support teachers and students. She taught English and Drama at secondary level for many years and has a Diploma in Creative Writing from the University of Bristol.*

Almost by Accident

The Case of Hezekiah and the Messengers

Patrick Wildgust

Image © Martin Rowson

Last year, Paul Munden and I delivered one of the Teacher Days associated with the Poetry by Heart initiative, using Shandy Hall – the former home of Laurence Sterne – as our venue.

Sterne was born in 1713, making last year the 300th anniversary of his birth and a cause for celebration, marked by various projects including "Voice from the Pulpit".

Sterne's sermons, delivered in the churches of Sutton-on-the-Forest, Stillington, Coxwold, York Minster and in London and Paris are fascinating insights into the language delivered from the 3-decker pulpit to the congregations in their box-pews. A voice from the 18th century pulpit is particularly fascinating when we know that the published sermons were not carefully edited – they were rushed into print to take advantage of the success of *Tristram Shandy*. However, when first offered on sale in London the sermons were attributed to "Mr Yorick", the fictional parson in *Tristram Shandy*.

Sterne had a reputation for improvising; *ex tempore* – without preparation or forethought. Making it up as he went along is perhaps a little too loose a way to describe his approach, but he knew it was necessary to interpret the biblical text to suit his audience; to speak with a voice that would engage the attention of his congregation.

So where does learning by heart enter the picture? This free-wheeling, certainly dramatic (possibly charismatic) preacher might seem to represent the complete opposite of the deliverer of a text committed to memory and reproduced after lengthy rehearsal. The connection comes from a decision that was made at the start of the "Voice from the Pulpit' project. One of Sterne's sermons, possibly the last he ever gave, was to be the focal point of our tercentenary celebrations – *The Case of Hezekiah and the Messengers* would be the sermon around which we would base our celebrations. It would be delivered in York Minster – but with a difference. The text would be assigned not to the responsibility of one voice but to an actor, 4 choirs, a tenor, square piano, viola da gamba and a string quartet. The text of the sermon would be reiterated and amplified by 40 children from four local schools who would lighten, darken and add emphasis to the meaning of the text. And all to a commissioned score by composer David Owen Norris.

Right from the start it was decided that the sections the choir would be responsible for would be learned by heart. This would ensure the delivery of the eighteenth century text would be confident, informed and clear.

Consider this passage :

If a sound head, warm heart, and breast humane,
Unsullyd worth, and soul without a stain;
If mental pow'rs could ever justly claim
The well won tribute of immortal fame,
STERNE was THE MAN, who with gigantic stride
Mow'd down luxuriant follies far and wide.
Yet what, though keenest knowledge of mankind
Unseal'd to him the springs that move the mind;
What did it boot him? Ridicul'd, abus'd,
By fools insulted, and by prudes accus'd.
In his, mild reader, view thy future fate,
Like him, despise, what twere a sin to hate.

The text is from Sterne's grave-marker and served as a finale to the piece. The text of this finale (and all other sections of the sermon proper) was introduced line-by-

line in conjunction with the music. As each tune was learned the words were imprinted along with it. The words were written out on a flip-chart and each line was discussed and explained by question and answer. The rhythm of the text was brought to the children's attention. Choirmaster (Jonathan Brigg) encouraged clarity of pronunciation, the right places to breathe and the proper technique for ensuring each voice would make its contribution to the whole.

The children were taken to St Michael's church in Coxwold where the memorial is mounted on the wall in the porch. They were not informed that one of the texts they had been learning to sing was sharing the space with them – until one spotted a line that was obviously familiar. Spontaneously and excitedly they broke into song. These were *their* words; they knew them by heart. Each line was again examined, orally interpreted (e.g. the C18 long "s" making the reading of the word "soul" as "foul" on the original) and once again reinforcing the meaning and ensuring it was understood.

Sterne's grave-marker has been used as a curiosity (an educational curiosity) ever since I arrived at Shandy Hall. It is a wonderful example of how churches contain much that is of value to the teacher. The design of a stone; the precision (and mistakes) of the stone-carver; the material used and the effect of the weather on that material; the verse-form used and the social history contained within the words of remembrance can all be found in the churchyard of your local church. St Michael's, Coxwold is richly endowed with texts of great variety and interest. The decision to include the text of the grave-marker into the libretto of the performance was sound. The fact that David Owen Norris had found the words particularly inspiring and had, as a result, set them beautifully to a tune that the children loved to sing was more than could have been

wished.

I had learned the words on Sterne's stone almost by accident. I used it as an experiment with a small group of teachers from local schools (on the Poetry by Heart day mentioned earlier) to see if learning by heart, even superficially, could be achieved by understanding the text rather than simply learning it by rote.

We went to the church porch and inspected the stone and read the text aloud – a line at a time. We understood the meaning thoroughly. The teachers remarked on the use of language and how cleverly the poem of remembrance had been composed. We read that it had been erected by "two brother masons" – despite the fact that Sterne had no connection with the world of the compass and square. We returned to Shandy Hall and I gave each teacher a copy of the text they had been reading with such concentrated interest only a few minutes before, however on every other line a word had been replaced with asterisks. An asterisk for each letter, so that a line might read :

*Unsullyd ***** and soul without a stain.*

I asked them to cast their minds back to the church porch and try to envision the words on the stone and tell me the words that were missing. If I remember correctly only one of eight asterisked words was remembered by the group – a result that I found quite startling.

My own method of learning this particular text was partly to imagine it in my mind's eye – laid out on the stone like type upon the page. The first line was anatomically connected and could be brought to mind by placing a hand on head, followed by heart and breast; the second by imagining a television comedian who used to open his programme by being discovered half hidden behind the corner of a plate-glass shop window and then, by raising his visible leg and arm, he appeared like a starfish, defying gravity by the illusion as his legs left the ground. His name was Harry Worth and his shoes were clean – "unsullyd worth". This might seem a crazy way of remembering a text but it suited me and it acts as a memory aid that has not failed me yet. If the words of Ted Hughes in the introduction to *By Heart* are considered :

One of the brain's spontaneous techniques for fixing anything in the conscious memory, in other words for making it easy to recall is to connect it with a visual image. And the more absurd, exaggerated, grotesque that image is the more unforgettable is the thing to which we connect it.

But why the need to learn something that can be read? Is it because it gives the speaker an added authority – the ability to memorize equals power? Or is it simply that the words are given a new life when committed to memory and recited? We wanted our ten- and eleven-year-old choristers to become authorities (*we know the words, we know them by heart* they could say); we wanted them to become powerful ambassadors for an English text that was nearly 300 years old and one that their parents would struggle to understand. Each one would have inside a grain of confidence, the necessary courage and power to sing in the Quire of York Minster in front of their teachers and their parents and brothers and sisters and give the words of the sermon and Sterne's epitaph a meaning for today.

Reference

Hughes, T. (ed.) (1997) *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember*. London: Faber and Faber.

For further information about *Voice from the Pulpit* see: www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk/exhibition.php?id=137

For further information regarding churches and their value as educational resources see: www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk/wp/reading-the-past/

For those interested in moths (and why not?) see: www.shandyhallmoths.blogspot.com

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Learning Lines

Jonathan Davidson

It's early morning and I'm running along a Suffolk lane. I've climbed above the low lying mist and the air is cold and clear. My right ankle is hurting; a nagging ache that makes me think I'm getting old. And my left shoulder has a pain that won't go away. But worse, I'm failing to learn by heart Peter Didsbury's poem, "Cider Story": despite having it on a sweaty piece of paper in my left hand, despite stopping every fifty metres to declaim a line to the empty fields, despite all this stopping and reading and declaiming, I'm days away from knowing it.

We'd been set the task two days ago and we've got a day to go: eight of us on a residential course (the Aldeburgh Jerwood Poetry Seminar 2009, to be precise) – a lot of writing, a lot of reading, and a single poem to learn. I have this idea that the rhythm of running (or, hey, walking) will help with the learning. Don't we walk in iambs? I am learning it, slowly, but more importantly as I'm learning it by heart, as the poem is being released in ever more accurate sections through my voice, so I am beginning to understand how it works and what it is about. That's strange. I thought I knew it. I'd read it a dozen or so times, more probably. I loved the sound of it, the phrase-making, the allusions, the incongruous contemporary references and a certain pattern. Yet, as I stumble through the first stanza, it is becoming clear that I hardly knew this poem at all.

It begins, I think, with the lines:

A daughter now for her blinded sire in England
Pronounces the Greek and Hebrew which she cannot understand,
Or carries him cider, along the whitewashed hall.

Can I get this into my head and onto my tongue? The syntax of the first line is curious but gives us the partial rhyme on "England" and "understand". Then, there is the first reference (second if we count the title) to cider. She carries it to him; that's important (see later) and the hall is "whitewashed" (remember the colour) and she goes "along" the hall not down or up because the "al" and the "all" speak to each other. It is starting to knit together, the strings are tightening, the first stanza is becoming inevitable.

And now to the second:

I hear her candid voice approaching, skirts on flagstones,
And it strikes me, that at twenty shillings a litre,
Cider is still, just about, affordable.

So now it is in the first person. That's a change I knew but have only now properly registered. And "flagstones" is important as we'll see later. The second line is ludicrously contemporary ("twenty shillings"? That's a quid. That's what we pay for cider now, surely?) and that makes it easier to remember, clear and simple, as is the last line.

After two days I have the first two stanzas almost perfect. No, I've not been running for two days, we just started to think about it then. Keep up. I need to remember the change into first person. I need to remember how the word cider is important, how "Greek and Hebrew" is right and clearly "Hebrew and Greek" isn't because it puts the brakes on in a line that needs to move quickly. And the "or"; the "or" is important (see later, again).

The third stanza is tricky:

It is middle morning, one of those apple forenoons
Which make the fairest lineaments of England. I decide so
In my darkness, then return to my rigid, black questions:

The "middle morning" is beautifully archaic, that helps. It is "which make" not "that make" and "those" not

"the" "apple forenoons". Key words in this poem are short: "or", "those", "my". What are the "finest lineaments of England"? I don't know that I know, just like I don't know what "apple forenoons" are, but the word "apple" links to cider and it threads through the poem. "I decide so" has that declamatory feel to it, just what we need for Milton. It is John Milton, isn't it? I decide so. I know enough or I think I do. And the "darkness" echoes the "blinded sire", and then the "black questions". Things are linked again, but it's a stanza that defeats me for hours. I forget the word "fairest" and try to use "finest" instead. I forget to get the word order right: I say "black, rigid" instead of "rigid, black". Come on, Peter Didsbury, help me here.

And then the questions:

What kind of chair is this? Who released it from the native oak
With my person attached

I pause. Did I tell you I am typing this poem from memory, even now, even one week after having learned it? That was a tough line and a half. Milton wants to know the "kind of chair". Why? How lovely the notion of it being "released" from the tree with the man already attached. And I've forgotten the rest. Damn. Wait. I've got it:

and set it down upon limestone.
The rhetorical pavement echoes the courteous step

That was close. I almost lost it there. That was a hell of a difficult stanza to learn. But limestone is like flagstones. Remember that, Jonathan. And "rhetorical pavement" is bizarre so that should lodge, and "the courteous step" brings me back to the woman, but the sentence takes me onto the next stanza, it links it and carries me over to it, so:

Of my cool but resented dryad, who carries me cider,
Whose voice I detect in the apple-green light by the wall

The repetition of cider catches me out, and I need to remember it is "who" then "whose", a sort of step change but subtle and apples are back, this time green (so we've had white, black and green) and the "detect" and "light" click together. And then the final two lines:

''Tis good for thee,' she comes trilling in consolation.
'And drink it up, now, that it shall take thy mind off thy dole.'

The end, at last. "Trilling" I didn't expect but "consolation" feels like it comes from "courteous" (and links to "comes trilling"). That final line, with its many short words, is not easy to learn. The only help is that "thy" comes from "thee" and is repeated twice and "dole" is nicely final and clicks with "wall" two lines before. That I have just noticed, after a week: the half-rhyme of "dole" and "wall". So, the poem is learned.

It look longer than the four days allotted, but it came easier over the weekend and by the Monday I thought I had it for ever. If I am honest – and I am – I have just been over my text and found a few small errors, so I haven't yet got it perfectly. The going running in the mornings helped: perhaps the rhythm of movement, perhaps the quiet. Being able to speak out aloud was a privilege; harder to do on the early train to work. Being told to learn the poem helped too – wanting to learn it to prove I could, to show off, to flex the muscles of my memory and make them hurt.

And the point is? Actually, it was fun: to say the lines again and again, to gradually have the hooks reveal themselves, the subtle connections, the half-rhymes, the assonance, consonance, the reverse of syntax, the colours and images, the complex Latinate words, the short, sharp Anglo-Saxon words, the cider going back to apples, the stone and the wood. "Cider Story" is now a poem I feel very close to. The poem has become mine. I no longer just like the way it sounds and the story it might tell and the complicated moment in the history of Milton it might be illustrating, I like the fact that I can speak it; I know it and I can release it, like Milton, from the "native oak".

***Jonathan Davidson**'s most recent poetry collection is* Early Train *(Smith/Doorstop 2011). His* Selected Poems *are due from Smith/Doorstop in Autumn 2014. He is producer of four touring poetry-theatre performances using poems from Bloodaxe Books' anthologies, most recently Being Human (Co-Production with The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry and Bloodaxe Books). A new performance, The Hundred Years War - is in production and will tour from November 2014. www.livepoetry.org. He works for the literature development agency Writing West Midlands.*

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Jonathan Davidson

ON LEARNING A POEM BY PETER DIDSBURY

I am learning a poem by Peter Didsbury,
speaking it to the apple-crisp morning while walking
the knife-narrow lane.

I'm using the 'image' method, linking each line
to an image or two, to anchor the words
in the stream of my mind.

Things are not going well; the poem, 'Cider Story',
is not cushion-stuffed with images and lots
of the language is opaque

and will not be still but keeps drifting off towards
the shallows of my consciousness
where the ducks are feeding.

There are no ducks in 'Cider Story', although two
have just cut the sky with their urgent flight.
And now a single hare sits up
in a field and looks at me in much the same way
I imagine Peter Didsbury would, although
neither of them are in the poem.

And then a deer springs rhythmically across my path
into a thicket: his publishers, surely,
astonished at my nerve,

doubtless. And here comes a low loader lorry loaded
with oblong portable public conveniences
bowling along the lane

heedless of my health and welfare, unaware
that I am trying to learn a poem by heart.
Then the black dog appears.

Then the white cat. Then the sound of the curlew
and then the curlew itself and by the time I enter
the neighbourhood watch area

I've barely half a stanza learned and images enough
to cobble courtyards with should I be of a mind
to do so, which I am.

Peter Didsbury

CIDER STORY

A daughter now for her blinded sire in England
Pronounces the Greek and Hebrew which she cannot understand,
Or carries him cider, along the whitewashed hall.

I hear her candid voice approaching, skirts on flagstones,
And it strikes me that, at twenty shillings a litre,
Cider is still, just about, affordable.

It is middle morning, one of those apple forenoons
Which make the fairest lineaments of England. I decide so
In my darkness, then return to my rigid black questions:

What kind of chair is this? Who released it from the native oak
With my person attached and set it down upon limestone?
The rhetorical pavement echoes the courteous step

Of my cool but resented dryad, who carries me cider,
Whose voice I detect in the apple-green light by the wall:
''Tis good for thee,' she comes trilling in consolation.
'And drink it up, now, that it shall take thy mind off thy dole.'

"Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart"

On learning "Tintern Abbey"

Ed Reiss

The point of a poem is the poem itself, not the paraphrase or critique. And learning a good poem by heart establishes a right relation with it. It requires meeting the poem on its own terms; giving it due attention; seeing it as a whole; and appreciating it in detail. It's a way of honouring the poem and bringing it alive, as reading aloud is.

It's also, apparently, a way to bring someone out of a coma. Just recite to them a poem which they know by heart and presto! something far inside them stirs and wakens. This is the health-and-safety rationale for memorizing a bit of verse.

Whilst some poems, such as limericks, slip smoothly into the mind, "Tintern Abbey", for me at least, is not among them. Except, that is, for one passage, the bit about "the still sad music of humanity", a fourteen-line snippet (lines 88 to 102), often anthologized, which is the shortened form in which I first came across the poem. I loved the flow of this, especially the "sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused"; and these lines settled effortlessly into my memory.

But the rest of it seemed unpalatable and indigestible. Why so? Perhaps I didn't really want to learn the poem, to mix my mind with thoughts Wordsworth variously describes as "half-extinguished" (l.58), "pleasing" (63), "elevated" (95), "purest" (109), "lofty" (128) and "healing" (144). Perhaps part of me objects to his patronizing attitude to his sister, or resists something towards the end of the poem that is pompous, smug, turgid or morbid. Perhaps there are two voices — and I really don't want the "half-witted sheep"[1] bleating in my long-term memory. Or perhaps, more fancifully, Wordsworth has encoded into the lines a virus which subliminally instructs the memory to delete as it goes along. If so, suspicion might fall on particular words, such as "lose" (13) and "loss" (87); the repetition of "unremembered" (31 and 34) and "forget" (149 and 155); that "unintelligible" (scrambling line 40); the "decay" of line 113; and all those negative constructions: thirteen "nors", five "nots", six "nos", a "neither", a "never", three "-less" suffixes and eight "un-" prefixes.

According to Wordsworth, he composed the poem all in his mind, after re-visiting the Wye — and "not any part of it was written down till I reached Bristol". How then to follow his example? The Wordsworthian way would be to set off on foot, reciting aloud, to the robust iambic beat of strolling-through-the-countryside pentameter, incorporating the words through the steady rhythm and flow of walking.

Another way, recommended by Ted Hughes, involves visualization. He shows, as example, how to translate Hopkins' "Inversnaid" into "a mental film of unforgettable images".[2] (Julia Sutherland observes that "this way of learning lines might not be too dissimilar to the poet's way of writing them".[3]) Hughes' "arbitrary cartoon accompaniment" may seem preposterous, but he goes on to stress the role of musical memory. "What is essential then, in memorizing verse, is to keep the audial faculty wide open, and not so much look at the words as listen for them — listening as widely, deeply and keenly as possible, testing every whisper in the echo-chamber of your whole body…"[4] I like this — and the easy-does-it approach in which you begin by just engaging with the poem, listening to it, reading and enjoying it, then looking for patterns until eventually… you find it lodged in your memory like the lyrics of a favourite song or hymn you never consciously bothered to learn.

The first step then is to make a dozen photocopies of the poem and keep one to hand, for stray, free moments. The next is to go through the poem underlining (in colour) significant sound patterns. In this case I began with the long "O" (behold, repose, etc); the long "I" ("eye"); and variations of the letters "ear" (years, hear, here, weariness, weary, corporeal, here, years, dare, dreads, learned, hearing, earth, ear, heart, etc.).

At the same time, try to get a sense of the poem as a whole. Clearly this one divides into five parts. (That opening word, "Five", repeated twice in the first sentence, is a clue.) How do these five "verse paragraphs" develop and differ? The poem would, for example, be quite different if it ended with the fourth part, on "soul of all my moral being". Who, whom or what is Wordsworth addressing? What is he actually saying? What is the tone and mood? When is it written in the indicative (saying what is the case) and when is it more a (volitive or optative) subjunctive, expressing wish or desire, as in "this prayer I make" (121) or "these my exhortations" (146)? And how does each section pitch between faith and anxiety, doubt and belief?

The point is to be thinking about the poem and marking its patterns. The search for these patterns is of course part of exploring the meaning; and the potential patterns are countless. Beginning to suspect that the poem is darker than I had supposed, I marked out words with mainly negative connotations (lose, vagrant, absence, weariness, burthen, weary, vain, etc). At another stage, I was more interested in identifying allusions, the "many recognitions dim and faint" of Shakespeare and Milton, the Psalms and Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer. Later, I wanted to observe how each word is deployed through the poem. Some thread the whole, while others are limited to particular parts. In the fourth paragraph, for example, the words "half", "faint", "like", "he" and "still" are all repeated, but they never occur in any other part of the poem. By tracking words, when they are introduced and when repeated, you can watch the poem creating its own vocabulary-world. The final sentence has 36 words, of which 35 have already been used in the poem. Only one (the last one) is new; and that can set off a new search for words which chime with the odd one out.

As you are engaging with the poem, it enters your memory, openly or by stealth. You could be marking internal rhyme or half-rhyme; or studying pronouns. You could be analyzing how the verbs manipulate tense and time; or how often Wordsworth uses monosyllables to end his lines. (Seven lines are made entirely of monosyllables.) You could be spotting the anacoluthon; or dowsing for the feeling beneath the words. It doesn't much matter if the search is arbitrary, esoteric or far-fetched, as long as the mind is engaged and intrigued. You could be hunting the letter *z* (dizzy and zeal), the letter *q* (quiet and tranquil), or combinations of "dw..", an unusual combination in English. Or you could be scrutinizing individual words, such as that "intercourse" (131), whose first recording in a sexual sense is given by the OED (online) as, strangely, 1798.

Meantime it's also useful to read around the poem and the circumstances of its composition. There is, for instance, a claim that it's haunted "like a passion" by Annette Vallon — the French mother of Wordsworth's child, from whom he had been separated these "many years of absence" by war with France. The word "Vallon" means, in French, a dale or small valley — and what else is Wordsworth describing? "Tintern Abbey" becomes an allegory or displacement for feelings about Annette Vallon.

Such background knowledge can lead the search for patterns into Kaballistic, "da Vinci Code" territory. For instance, with some lines (arguably, significant ones) you can indeed transpose the letters to find the name "Annette Vallon". Try it with these:

Lines composed a few miles above Tintern
As have no slight or trivial influence (32)
And their glad animal movements all gone by (74)
An appetite, a feeling and a love (80).

Don't take this too far: that way madness lies. But you can switch around the letters in

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood (15-16)

to make the name "Dorothy Wordsworth". And whilst the mind is entertained in this innocent pursuit, it will also be inwardly digesting the poetry.

Meanwhile I also discussed the poem with friends; read bits of it aloud; and listened to it on tape (as read by Ted Hughes). When I first got the tape, years ago, I would sometimes fast-forward through "Tintern Abbey", but now I would be more likely to linger over the washing-up, and rewind, to hear again those cadences and rhythms.

My feelings about the poem have changed — in the direction of deeper admiration. When Wordsworth mentions "the blue sky" (99), I once thought that a feeble adjective, which would be culled at any self-respecting

workshop. But perhaps he gets away with it, in context, or in the service of sublime simplicity, as Larkin does when he writes of "the deep blue air that shows/ Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless." A mini-crisis, grappling with the final section, when I began to think that I disliked Wordsworth, as a man and as Dorothy's brother, is resolved. And I have noticed silly details I never saw before: like the play in the first three lines on "summers… winters…springs"; and that nod to Barack Obama in line 65: "And so I dare to hope".

I've found that without trying to force anything into my head by rote, I have effectively memorized the poem, merely by dwelling on it with relish. Perhaps I have made a bit of a meal of it. If it stays put, "passing even into my purer mind", I will come to know it in the deeper sense *by heart*, such that you could use it to rouse me from a coma. Meantime, it is memorized. Test me, if you wish.

Postscript

Five years have passed since Peter Sansom asked me to learn "Tintern Abbey" and write about learning it. Occasionally I murmur the poem in hours of weariness or after the fretful stir of a day's work. From time to time I have also refreshed my memory of "Tintern Abbey" in ways similar to those described above.

Notice how Wordsworth brings his scene vividly before us by use of demonstrative adjectives: eight uses of "these" and "this" in the first verse paragraph alone. In "Tintern Abbey" as a whole, I count at least thirty demonstrative adjectives and two demonstrative pronouns. On this subject of showing or deixis, Wordsworth also specifies location by three uses of the word "here" and one "hither".

In order to re-engage with the poem, I have re-read it, highlighting at various times the language of the sublime, musical vocabulary and religious lexis. I have tried interpreting it in the manner of a militant Freudian, identifying symptoms of the poet's feelings for, or repression of feelings about, Annette Vallon. I have underlined repeated words (such as "love", "joy", "green", "all") and wider clusters such as images of food, or money, or light and dark.

More particularly I became interested in how much Wordsworth took or learned from Coleridge. Compare "Tintern Abbey" with "Frost at Midnight", composed some five months earlier, in February 1798. Both contrast a present state with the past, then address a loved one and confer a blessing. Wordsworth's "Therefore let the moon/ Shine on thee in thy solitary walk" echoes his friend's "Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee". A similarity in shape and movement is reinforced by striking lexical overlaps. From the first paragraph of "Frost at Midnight" (twenty five lines) "Tintern Abbey" borrows such words as "solitude", "disturbs", "hill", "wood", "life", "fire", "still", "motion", "dim", "form", "thought", "living", "frame", "behold", "deep" and "faith". Coleridge's "transfuses" is, arguably, picked up in Wordsworth's "interfused". Likewise, many of the words in "Kubla Khan", composed in May 1798, also appear in "Tintern Abbey". I shall not labour the point with examples. But by picking them out the brain is led to engage with both poems and if the mind is receptive, both may lodge readily and freely in the memory.

One of my English teachers (Mr Geoffrey Withrington) told us that it helps to know plenty of poetry by heart in case you are in a war and have to do long nights of sentry duty. He may also have said that it is useful if you are captured and imprisoned. I think I also understood that metaphorically. Certainly, to know "Tintern Abbey" by heart is to have a closer relationship to it. And learning any great poem by heart is a good way to respect it.

Notes

1. Stephen, J. K. 'A Sonnet'. In Jerrold, W. and Leonard, R. M. (eds) (1913) A Century of Parody and Imitation. London: Humphrey Milford.

2. Hughes, T. (ed.) (1997) *By Heart: 101 Poems to Remember*. London: Faber and Faber. (p.xiii)

3. *Ibid*. (back cover)

4. *Ibid.* (p.xv)

***Ed Reiss**'s pamphlet* Now Then *won the Poetry Business Competition in 2006 judged by Simon Armitage, and his first full collection,* Your Sort, *was shortlisted for the Aldeburgh Prize. Ed lives in Bradford, where he teaches at the University.*

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LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY, ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR. JULY 13, 1798

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view 10
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves 13
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines 15
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods, 20
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too 30
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps, 31
As have no slight or trivial influence 32
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts 34
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world, 40
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft— 50
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought, 58
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity, 60
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts 63
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope, 65
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man 70
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements all gone by) 74
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love, 80
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, not any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe, 87
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes 90
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime 95
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man: 99

A motion and a spirit, that impels 100
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, 109
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul 110
Of all my moral being.

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay: 113
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once, 120
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make, 121
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues, 128
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all 130
The dreary intercourse of daily life, 131
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms, 140
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts 144
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance— 146
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget 149
That on the banks of this delightful stream 150
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget 155
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake! 159

William Wordsworth

Poetry Recitation

Traditions, terms and conditions

Debbie Pullinger

As an audience member at the 2014 Poetry by Heart competition finals, I was handed a card on which I was invited to write a short description of what we had seen and heard at the event. Though probably designed to elicit soundbites that might be useful in future publicity material, the request raised some profound questions. What, indeed, was going on in that auditorium? What were the participants actually doing? And was it some kind of nostalgic revival, or an inevitable swing of the pendulum, or a genuine attempt to reinstate a productive practice?

Poetry *recital* (a term I provisionally adopt for the moment) is certainly enjoying some renewed interest, if not, as yet, an actual revival. But if we are to re-engage with this practice, then it seems to me that some thinking is required in order relocate it in twenty-first century culture and understandings. One symptom of the current dislocation is a quandary over language. The competition compère, poet Jacob Sam La Rose, generally referred to the competitors as "readers", which didn't seem quite right since no one was reading from a book, and occasionally as "poets", a slip he later acknowledged but which nevertheless indicates his dilemma: we do not currently have a lexicon for what we are doing. There are, I think, several reasons for this.

First, although the competition stands in a long line of recital *tradition*, we have largely forgotten its history – or, rather, we have remembered only the reasons why it was recently abandoned. Second, having rejected *terms* such as "elocution" and "verse-speaking", mainly because of their association with those reasons, we have been left in something of a linguistic vacuum. Third, at the heart of the matter is an uncertainty (indicated by that slip of the tongue) about the *conditions* of poetry recital – in particular, the question of who speaks, and how?

Traditions

Poetry recitation can be traced back to the classical times, but also has an established place in the history of the British Isles that stretches back to the oral traditions of the Anglo-Saxons. It was only in the nineteenth century, however, that it became accessible outside the upper echelons of society. At a time when social reform and the consequential growth of the middle classes resulted in a growing number of people with both time for leisure pursuits and the desire for self-improvement, what became known as the Penny Readings movement, under the auspices of the Public Reading Association, offered performances at which any member of the public could volunteer to give a *reading* in poetry or prose to an audience who were admitted for the price of one penny. The movement had "two goals, which were sometimes in contradiction: the training of readers in the arts of *elocution* and *recitation* and the providing of entertainment for audiences" (Sivier, 1983b, p.223). The evenings were highly organized, with lists of prospective readers and their texts being published in advance, so that audiences could then vote to determine the final programme. Publications to assist aspiring readers with training in elocution and public speaking proliferated,[1] but despite the progressive plan of study issued by the association to all applicants, dealing with those who failed to take the advice was inevitably a problem:

What can be done with the incapables who offer themselves so liberally as readers? It is awkward to say "you cannot read"; it is ruinous to the Society to suffer them to read, for they will

inevitably scare away the company. (Cox, 1881, p.226)

What indeed? Managers of the events were instructed to advise such a reader that

he would not dream of attempting to sing in public before he had learned to sing, so neither, without serious and laborious study of it, should he venture upon Reading, which is an Art requiring education equally with the Art of Singing.
(Cox, 1881, p.336)

Having served their purpose, and having also become the object of ridiculing caricature, Penny Readings had died out by the time of the First World War.

The next surge in popularity resulted from the separate efforts of a handful of enthusiasts, notably the poet John Masefield, and speech teachers Marjorie Gullan and Elsie Fogerty.[2] The activity this time, in what has been referred to as a "golden age of poetry speaking" (Sivier, 1983a) was centred on the phenomenon of the poetry festival, beginning with the Oxford Festival in 1923.[3] The movement's three principles were that: poetry is for the ear; the poem and its meaning not the poet or the method is paramount; poetry is for sharing and enjoyment (Sivier, 1983a). In line with this, the methods advocated by the teachers of *verse-speaking* or (as Masefield preferred, *poetry-speaking*) were aimed at bringing out the meaning of the text, so that the emphasis was not so much on serving the interests of reader (as previously) as on those of the poetry itself. For the teachers, this represented "the possibility of a fresh and more effective practice of the art of speaking and reading aloud", whilst the poets "saw an opportunity to have their poetry read and shared in a manner commensurate with its significance and meaning" (Sivier, 1983a, p.283).

Initially, competitors were mostly speech and drama students, but soon all the places were taken by speech teachers and actors. As standards became increasingly and uniformly high, the final years of the Oxford Festival saw the competitive element disappear completely; instead, Masefield commissioned, from three of the poet-judges, new work to suit and be performed by their favourite verse-speakers. Thus public poetry reading moved away from the more democratic culture of the Penny Readings and became increasingly professionalized – which could be seen in some ways as a return to the situation in the Middle Ages, where oral performance of jests, poems, tales and so on was the province of the professional minstrel – or before that, of the Anglo-Saxon scop. But although these festivals certainly increased the involvement of the poet in matters of performance, it was not really until the next poetry revival that the poets themselves got back on stage.

In 1965, a poetryfest in the Albert Hall attracted an audience of 6,000 to hear poetry – read not by professional actors or trained verse-speakers, but by poets. In the years that followed, the National Poetry Society sponsored a programme of poet *performances* and readings, and again poetry festivals proliferated nationwide, but this time with contemporary poets reading their own poems.

This is not to say that the matter of authority in poetry reading had been settled. Asked about the attitude of poets towards trained readers, Brian Mitchell, General Secretary of the National Poetry Society said, "all those associated with the Poetry Society do consider there is an art to reading poetry, but that does not preclude a great deal of debate taking place as to whether poets or trained readers are best in terms of reading contemporary poetry" (Johnson, 1983, p.310). Entering into that debate, Betty Mulcahy (a leading light and campaigner in the verse-speaking world)[4] questioned whether the poem in the poet's voice may risk losing something: "has he the capacity for being true to his innermost being when he … vocalizes his experience … Or, through sheer familiarity with his own material, the poet may even underplay his own poem" (Mulcahy, 1969, p.22). There was, moreover, a tension between the National Poetry Society's sponsorship of both poet readings and tours of schools, and its school examination system, which examined an average of ten thousand students a year (Johnson, 1983): the poet readings became the respected model of performance and yet their interpretations were not necessarily always in line with the stated aims and practice of verse-speaking education. Since that time, however, whilst verse-speaking has all but vanished from education, poet readings have, with some fluctuation, continued to grow in popularity, and the tension could now be seen to reside in the differences between readings by actors and by poets

This is a necessarily highly condensed account of the history of poetry performance in England, but it nevertheless highlights some important points: the way in which the focus in performance has shifted – from reader, to audience, to text, to poet; the continual and varying interaction between performers and poets; and the consistent attention to education and methodology, with poetry in the past being seen as something of a training ground,[5] even though there was also always an equal and continuous call for the poetry itself to be the focus.

Terms

What this potted history also demonstrates is that the terms used in poetry performance (as italicized above) have come and gone. Potentially, any might still be used for the act of speaking a poem aloud to an audience, but of course none means exactly what it meant in its historical context, and many have acquired an unwelcome set of connotations.

With its overtones of received pronunciation, *elocution* is probably not a term we're likely to consider reclaiming – though interestingly, as one of the five elements of the classical study of rhetoric, it originally referred to what we would now think of as "composition": the process of finding appropriate words and creating patterns of sound and sense. (Similarly, *rhetoric*, though now used in a wide range of senses, from "verbal ingenuity" through "delivering a speech" to "spurious persuasion", was previously a term for the study and practice of verse and prose (Joseph, 1983, p.460). *Reading* is perhaps a more neutral option, and seems fitting if taken in the sense of "interpretation" but is problematic in that it also does duty as a sort of antonym for recitation, referring to situations where the text is read from the page and, it may be implied, not internalized in the same way. *Recitation*, then, might be preferable, except that it seems to have acquired a faint sense of parroting, as in the phrase "mindless recitation".[6] *Verse-speaking* and *poetry-speaking* manage to avoid both those sets of problems, yet have a somewhat pedestrian feel; they also fail to provide the all-important noun for practitioners. (Welcoming a speaker onto the stage prepares the way for a lecture rather than a poem.) Finally, the all-purpose term *performance* (or *poetry performance),* meanwhile, which carries a complex and multiplying set of connotations, certainly invokes a sense of audience as well as hinting at the unique nature of any act of recitation – so in many respects seems well-suited to the job. If it has a shortcoming, though, it is perhaps that it is less specific and does not distinguish a piece of poetry from a piece of drama.

Which is all to say that in reclaiming the practice of poetry recitation, we find ourselves struggling with words whose original contextual meanings we have forgotten, and with experience that we do not know how to describe. As in the very act of poetry writing, we find ourselves at the edges of language. Perhaps we need to reclaim one of these terms; perhaps there are yet others that we have lost (the art of memory had a whole lexicon, much of which is now obsolete); perhaps we need something new. As this brief consideration of language indicates, to think about these matters is to touch on philosophies of the relation of mind and body, on theories of art (which have become so much more problematic in the postmodern context), on theories of communication, and, most fundamentally on the question of what poetry actually is.

Conditions

Poetry is fundamentally a phonic art form, its medium being the sounds produced by the human voice. But to whom are we listening when a poem is spoken aloud? And in what way should it be spoken?

Who speaks?

It seems agreed throughout the history of recitation that poetry differs from drama, where an actor seeks to take on the voice of a character.[7] As early as 1604, Thomas Wright distinguished between the dramatic speaker who would "act faindly" to perform a fiction, behaving as an imaginary character, and the rhetorical speaker who would "act really" and not as an imaginary character (Wright, 1971, p.179). But even if the speaker is not attempting to assume a role, that still leaves the question of whom we think we hear. The poet? The poet's poetic persona, or some other fictive character? The reciter or reader? Clearly this will depend in part on whom we regard as the speaker or the personality in a poem. And here we can see a very real split between the principles and purposes of performance and criticism. Within literary criticism, assumptions about the generally autobiographical nature of lyric poetry were replaced in the twentieth century by those of New Criticism, in which the text is treated as an autonomous entity, severed from any of its contexts, including the writer. A development of that view is the idea, now espoused by many critics, that the speaker of a poem is neither an implied narrator, nor a dramatic persona, but that the poem contains a representation of movements within the poet's consciousness, and may best be described as an event in language.[8] Within the realm of performance, on the other hand, the figure of the poet still loomed large. Speech teacher Fogerty, for example, believed that a requisite for verse-speaking was that "the power to sink one's own personality completely and to interpret the mood of the poet" (Rose Bruford in Sivier, 1983a, p.295); later still, the National Poetry Society examination's top award[9] was based on assessment criteria which stated that the candidate should demonstrate "a sensitivity to and awareness of the poet's intention, and to convey the individual voice of each chosen poet" (Johnson, 1983, p.312). Indeed, the advocates of poetry recitation and its highly developed methodologies maintained that these yielded an

understanding of a poem just as valid and valuable as that obtained by close reading.

There is, however, within the performance domain, one approach that appears to provide a degree of synthesis. The American speech teacher and scholar, Don Geiger, offers a highly developed theory of oral interpretation which suggests, inter alia, that a poem should be treated as the presentation of the author's views on real and important subject matters, and as an invitation for the real-life reader to live through an experience which, though imaginative, is analogous to dramatic experiences in his own life. A reading or recitation is therefore not an attempt by the speaker to imagine or portray herself *as* the poet speaker; rather, she imagines herself in the speaker's situation, and "lives through the represented experience" (Geiger, 1963, p.55). This theorization brings Geiger to the point where he can observe that oral interpretation is "an unformulable amalgum of acting, public speaking, critical reaction and public sharing" (Geiger, 1963, p.86)[10]. As well as clarifying the relationships amongst reader, poem and poet, this view of the poem might also help us to address the question about what happens when the poem is spoken by the poet. With the poem as a represented situation, the poet is now also outside that situation, and becomes again the co-creator of the work in the performance – which will then depend on the particular poet's skills of vocalization, in the same way that a musical performance depends on the skill of the instrumentalist in interpreting the score.

How should we speak?

Having resolved that a poem is not essentially a *dramatic* representation, this still leaves us with the question of to what extent performance should stress the poem's metre and to what extent the cadences of natural speech. This is a question that those involved with the writing and reading of poetry have long been exercised, and views have been various and often conflicting.

The Penny Reading publications urged that poetry must be, on the one hand, "neither sung or chanted" but, on the other, "not made into prose". The emphasis was also on "natural speaking" – though this "naturalness" was something that was, paradoxically, cultivated through strenuous study and practice. This may be because what was termed "natural speaking" was actually a style that moved more towards the dramatic end of the continuum. Certainly, in the same publication we find the somewhat surprising exhortation: "Do not fear to overact; there is little chance of this becoming a fault in the reading of poetry" (Cox, 1881, pp.142–143). We know, moreover, that the verse-speaking movement that followed was in part a reaction to the growing trend for verse speakers to ignore the principles of rhythm in poetry.

The speech teachers did seek to steer a course between natural or even dramatized renditions on the one hand and chanting on the other; they sought to bring out the poem's meaning, yet did so using methods that also inculcated a strong sense of poetic metre. These methods differentiated between "mechanical beat" and "subtle rhythm", and recognized the varying and relative strengths of stressed syllables, determined by a combination of sound, position in the phrase relative to other syllables – all the while being mindful of the sound of the whole phrase (Gullan, 1926). They recognized, too, that rhythm in poetry is not separate from meaning, but helps to construct it, and that "to understand and present this variety in unity is the essence of artistry" (Gullan, 1926).

Both Gullan and Fogerty also believed that no method was universally valid, so that each form of poetry required its own kind of oral interpretation. Both outlined the broad requirements of lyric, narrative and ballad forms in this respect, but again emphasizing the subtle choices to be made, even within the constraints of the form. To hear and then to render some of these nuanced interpretations was a great skill; thus to be trained in verse-speaking was to develop both an experiential understanding of poems, and facility with the voice. Fogerty, especially, stressed the musical aspects of poetry (whilst being very clear about the differences between the two), and the verse-speaking methods in general can be characterized as addressing both the technical aspects of poetry, and the training of the voice (and body) as an instrument, in the same rigorous way that a singer needs to train the singing voice.

A little later, one can detect another slight shift in emphasis, in teaching that aimed to draw out latent aptitudes within the performer – or as the professional poetry speaker and trainer Jill Balcon put it, there are "certain absolute principles that cannot be taught beyond absolute technique" so that "phrasing, lyric impulse, submission of SELF, these have to be drawn out of someone in whom they do exist … " (in Johnson, 1983, p.309). This seems to represent a further move towards recognizing the partner relationship between poet and speaker, and in some ways can be seen as a return to classical notions of Cicero's characterization of the ideal orator as "the good man speaking well".

Look backwards and forwards

In this brief discussion, I have sought to further the debate rather than supply answers. And, as I have tried to indicate, this debate would benefit from being located historically, rooted in phenomenological enquiry, and immersed in practice of all kinds – writing, reading and performing. Within that debate, I suggest that we need to acknowledge and think about the way in which a poem is distributed amongst poet, reader and audience, for a performed poem is an event in which all these parties participate. Thence, we may be able to develop a language that reflects these understandings.

Such a debate has the potential to provide a basis for developing both the practice of performance and the practice of criticism, and perhaps to work towards some synthesis of the theories of both. My own view is that we need to give serious reconsideration to Geiger's conclusion, that "oral interpretation is one of the most effective methods for studying literature" (Gudas, 1983, p.609) – and there may be something to be gained from a re-examination of some of the recitation methodologies of the past.[11] But whatever approaches we adopt need to be fitting for contemporary texts and contexts, in which categories are so often purposely blurred, as well as a plurality of cultural sensibilities (which could, of course, mean challenge as much as congruency). And yet, poetry has always picked at the boundaries between poet and performer, between reading and interpretation, between fiction and reality, actor and speaker … that is its fascination. Similarly, the current cultural climate perhaps means that it is harder to have confidence about any "method" that might be advocated, and certainly it seems likely that a twenty-first century training in poetry speaking would offer a range of possible approaches rather than prescription.

Notes

1. Among these, Edward Cox's influential book, *The Art of Reading, Writing and Speaking,* was an important source for the Penny Reading Association's own publications (Sivier, 1983b).

2. In the current climate in which attitudes to the quality of speech are more relaxed, it may be hard to recall or imagine that "speech training" was very much a going and serious concern within education.

3. Other festivals included The Poets Festival, The London Speech Festival – plus organizations – The Poetry Society, The Speech Fellowship.

4. Mulcahy established a National Speak-a-Poem competition in 1984.

5. The idea that a poem is, as the poet Don Paterson (2007) suggests, a form of text in which all the features of language are made manifest in a concentrated form would seem to support the idea that poetry-speaking lends itself to speech training.

6. Of course this does raise the question of whether we are referring to poems read from the page or recited from memory – and whether there needs to be any distinction in terminology. Interestingly, histories of poetry performance tend to ignore the matter; Penny Readings, for example appear to have included both, but no real distinction is made. And although the question of how memorizing a poem affects our relationship with it is a very interesting one, I think it can be reasonably set aside for purpose of this discussion.

7. One could argue that this is the case in a dramatic monologue, as for example in the Browning poem. But even there, it can also be argued that this is still a poem in which the words are still subject to all the formal structures of poetry, that the poet is using this device to express something that he could not otherwise convey using a voice closer to "real life" or his own. And so it asks to be read with that sense of doubleness.

8. See, for example, Reeves (1965), Culler (2005), Attridge (2004).

9. The Adult Gold Medal.

10. This idea resonates with Christopher Collins's argument that in writing a poem, a poet effectively splits himself to become both the speaker and the listener (or the addresser and the addressee). The reader, on the other side of the page, as it were, is invited into an act of poetic play or performance as they respond to the text and use their own voice to effectively impersonate the speaker. By taking the part of both speaker and listener, a reader thus assumes a "multi-voiced central consciousness" and thereby a centrality within their perceived world – a "degree-zero here-and newness" (Collins, 1991). So, in other words, when we read a poem, the voice within the poem and the voice from within ourselves blend to become that which we speak.

11. After beginning to map out recitation practices of the past, I thought it would be interesting to do some first-hand research on current practice, and simultaneously improve my own recitation skills, so searched for a course or workshop. Interestingly, although there are

plenty of courses of all shapes and sizes on which I could learn to act, there doesn't appear to be anything for poetry recitation. The lack of contemporary resources stands in stark contrast to the situation in the early and middle part of the last century, and as an interesting indication of its current status.

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Discovering Sense through Sound

David Whitley

In the preceding article, Debbie Pullinger has argued that we have lost touch with the rich history of debates taking place within the traditions of recitation and poetry performance. She suggests that both our conceptual vocabulary and understanding of what we are doing when we recite poems are in need of re-examination in the context of contemporary culture. In what follows, I will explore some of the points of contention which that article identifies through an investigation of two poetic examples. I hope to develop a fuller understanding of the issues at stake in the process, as well as raising awareness of some of the core principles of *poetry performance* (itself a loaded term). I will do this through a close comparison of what might be involved in reciting two poems, whose form looks very similar, but whose spoken utterance will, of necessity, evolve very differently. The poems were written within 20 years of each other in the mid-nineteenth century and both were in the 2014 Poetry by Heart anthology. The first is a sonnet by John Clare:

I found a ball of grass among the hay
And progged it as I passed and went away;
And when I looked I fancied something stirred,
And turned again and hoped to catch the bird-
When out an old mouse bolted in the wheats
With all her young ones hanging at her teats:
She looked so odd and so grotesque to me,
I ran and wondered what the thing could be,
And pushed the knapweed bunches where I stood;
Then the mouse hurried from the craking brood.
The young ones squeaked, and as I went away
She found her nest again among the hay.
The water o'er the pebbles scarce could run
And broad old cesspools glittered in the sun.

The first thing one notices about this poem is that it appears to narrate a small incident – the speaker's encounter with a mouse disturbed while feeding its offspring – unembellished by any obviously poetic language. This narration feels unforced and natural, focusing on the detail of what happens in front of the speaker's eyes, rather than probing his inner thoughts or reactions. The drama of the poem appears primarily external and small-scale, conveyed through what the speaker notices in his environment. If you speak the lines out loud, what comes across is an everyday, apparently artless, voice relating events – then this happened, then that, then this. And yet what is also conveyed is a highly focused kind of attention and indeed responsiveness to the miniature drama being enacted on the farmland in front of us.

Characterizing the poem in this way places emphasis on the speaker's role as narrator of a small dramatic incident. But if, as the previous paper has argued, the history of recitation theory suggests that the speaker of a poem should be conceived as "neither an implied narrator nor a dramatic persona" but as "a representation of movements within the poet's consciousness", how do we then read this apparent act of narration? What are we to make of this notion in the context of a poem that would seem to embody both roles so centrally? And how might this affect performance of the poem?

Perhaps the first thing to note here is how tightly the poem on the page is organized - seven couplets, nearly all end-stopped, with full masculine rhymes. The first four lines, in particular, are extremely regular in their iambic beat, with a weak/strong stress on alternate syllables throughout. So one thing a performer of the poem might well ponder, as they begin trying out ways of reading it out loud, is how to make a seemingly down to earth, conversational style of narration work within a poetic form that appears so rigidly regular. This would seem to lend credence to the idea that the performer of the poem should not think of themselves – in an

ordinary sense – as simply narrator of its action. The utterance must be accommodated – perhaps unselfconsciously – to highly ordered pattern of sounds. In practice, though, the apparent rigidity of the form is likely to prove less of an issue than anticipated. This is partly because the extreme regularity of the pentameter lines is loosened somewhat after the first two couplets. But more importantly, the pace at which the small events unfold tends to pull the reader along, and the rapt attention to detail makes the formal pattern less obvious when spoken. Seamus Heaney has described this quality as the poem's "notational speed", suggesting that "the 'ands' and 'whens' and self-contained couplets and endstopped movement of the lines do not irk as they might…They are eager to grab a part of the action" (Heaney, 2002, p.278). And yet the action itself also has a curious quality to it, which begins to emerge especially strongly when the lines are spoken out loud.

The challenge facing a performer of the poem, then, is how best to convey the speaker's intense interest in the detail of the scene taking place before his eyes – the external drama, if you like – whilst allowing the subtler inner transformations of consciousness enough reflective space to emerge fully.

It is tempting to define this quality as a kind of drama that unfolds in the speaker's consciousness of the mouse, and a performer might well be tempted to use physical gesture, as well as voice, in conveying this quality. Indeed, a number of participants in the Poetry by Heart competition took advantage of precisely this possibility by "acting" elements of their chosen poems on stage. Given the longstanding tradition of using dramatic techniques to engage students with poetry in the classroom, it is perhaps unsurprising that this potentiality is now being used for recitation to such a significant extent. However, the perspective of earlier debates suggests that we might examine the effect of this performance strategy carefully. At first sight Clare's poem seems to lend itself to enhancement through physical performance accompanying voiced narration, since what is registered is the speaker's gestural movement in "progging" the ball of grass, passing on, turning back, pushing the knapweed aside, and so on. But as you read out loud and try to decide where to lay particular stress to bring out emotional force and significance, what becomes increasingly apparent is that it is an inner drama of consciousness that is really animating the poem, not the outer drama of action. For instance, to bring out the speaker's initial surprise when he first realizes the mouse is not the bird he expected, one might inflect the words "bird" and "mouse" accordingly. But the speaker's initial mild surprise then distils into a more profound, uncomfortable feeling when the bolting mouse is glimpsed with all its babies hanging at its teats. Remembering that mice are born hairless and with their eyes tight shut might help to explain the perception of the old mother as so oddly "grotesque". But the movement in consciousness is so profound that, by line 8, she has become a "thing", whose identity the speaker is no longer clear about. Something has happened inside the speaker's consciousness to render that most familiar of small creatures for the countryman – the mouse that Burns claimed as his "earthborn companion" – in a state of compelling otherness. The mode in which we perceive being in the world around us has now been subtly destabilized, so that the most ordinary things are seen in a strange light. The way is prepared, once the mouse has resettled in its nest, for this keynote of estranged engagement to be transposed onto the environment at large, in the poem's enigmatic closing image of cesspools, imbued with glittering beauty by the sunlight. The challenge facing a performer of the poem, then, is how best to convey the speaker's intense interest in the detail of the scene taking place before his eyes – the external drama, if you like – whilst allowing the subtler inner transformations of consciousness enough reflective space to emerge fully. A shift in consciousness is also required, perhaps, on the part of the performer – away from a dramatic reading of the poem that could easily jeopardize this other dimension, and towards a mode of performance that re-creates this reflective space.

In considering Clare's poem in the context of performance, I have focused primarily on the relationship between drama and inner consciousness, exploring the functions of form and rhythm in relation to this in a rather generalized way. Turning now to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnet XXIV from the Portuguese", I would like to examine how rhythmic and formal qualities interact with meaning in a more detailed way. Browning's poem looks superficially similar to Clare's, since it is also a sonnet with a regular rhyme scheme, but it raises a very different set of issues for the performer. Here, there is no single "event" that is either narrated or dramatized. The opportunities for a dramatic rendering of the poem in a conventional sense are thus more limited than with Clare's sonnet. But the

issues of how the poem's metre and rhythm interacts with its sense, and the degree to which the cadences of ordinary speech might effectively be used are both potentially crucial to performance:

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

If we speak the lines of the Browning poem, even before we feel confident that we've fully grasped their meaning, we are likely to notice something distinctive. Put simply, the lines tend to be much more broken up. Many of them move rather haltingly, with sub-clauses, qualifications, antitheses that require the reader to mark mid-line transitions prominently, if the verse is to make proper sense. This is quite different from the Clare sonnet, where each line is more or less a self-contained unit that could be articulated through the measure of a single breath, and where links between the units of sense tend to be in the form of conjunctions – joining words – rather than prepositions that angle parenthetical phrases or clauses in different directions. What are we to make of this feature?

We need now to weave this initial perception of distinctive movement into the sense of the poem. Browning's poem is not particularly easy and it will take most readers a number of careful close readings before they feel they understand all of its twists and turns. But the emotional ground on which the poem is built – the tender unity of the lovers representing a kind of safe haven that is set off against the pain inflicted by the larger world they inhabit – is clear enough from the start. How do the poem's rhythms intersect with this inner drama, then? The mid-line pauses, which mark shifts in the articulation of a central tension between the sharp pain of the hard world outside and the comforting security of love, may provide a way into understanding. The poem begins as a kind of prayer, asking for the cutting edge of the world to be neutralized by the beneficent power of love. The mid-line breaks mark transitions that enact that process, first by transforming the cutting potential of the world into a safe metaphor (the folding knife), then by elaborating on the qualities of love ("now soft and warm") that would enfold the clasped knife and stave off its threat. Performing the poem, then, we might discover the potential for a discriminating response to the different functions of these breaks: bringing out the pauses that mark the transforming of the world's sharp force with clarity; perhaps marking more lightly those that dwell on the soothing qualities of love, to register greater harmony. One might also note that the underlying metre emerges after an initial, jarring deviation: two feet that begin on stressed beats ("**Let** the **world**'s **sharp**ness …"). The speaker's prayer is registering the painful force that the world outside exerts on them. The end of this opening sentence ("**Aft**er the **click** of the **shutt**ing") also begins on a stressed beat and deviates from the iambic pattern of most other lines – but the pressure on the rhythm has now been subtly relaxed. The line is less compressed than the opening phrase and is modulated with many more unstressed syllables, so that it has an altogether lighter, though still perhaps insidiously threatening, feel about it. This is a good example of a line in which the transformation, which is experienced through the rhythm, as much as sense, may be brought out through performance. This specific example demonstrates aptly a more general point: the "event" that a performance of the poem attempts to realize is not a dramatic incident re-enacted. Rather it is a conjunction of thought and feeling, articulated through distinctive sound patterns and rhythms, whose adoption helps to create the "degree zero here-and-nowness", which, for Christopher Collins, describes how a sensitive reader may enter imaginatively into the situation of a poem's speaker, without trying to dramatically embody them.

The second part of the poem – the sestet – is markedly more difficult to comprehend than the first and few listeners who hear the poem for the first time without having previously dwelt with it on the page are likely to grasp its meaning fully. The audience needs as much help as possible, therefore, in order both to apprehend the underlying emotions and to experience the poem's intricacies without bafflement. The sestet also develops the poem's preoccupations on a more abstracted, spiritual plane than in the octave, and this shift in focus is registered through a change in the central symbols. In the octave the symbols expressing the poem's contrasting emotions of vulnerability and deep security were the lovers' hands, with the world conceived as a stabbing knife that could be closed shut. In the sestet the central symbol becomes the lily, growing out of reach of humankind's destructive forces on a hillside. The hill brings the emblematic lilies closer to God, and the poem

ends with the resolute assertion – or sententia – that it is only God who can affect the flower/lovers' spiritual destiny (make them "rich" or "poor"), not the apparently remorseless pain inflicted by other humans (the "worldlings" of the first part of the poem). The primary sense of these lines is rendered considerably more difficult by the deliberately convoluted syntax, which only really straightens itself out in the much clearer assertive phrasing of the last two lines. In the long sentence running from line 9 to 13, the reader must remain exceptionally alert to realize how the subject of the sentence shifts from the "lilies" to "their roots" (which act to "reassure" the lilies' "blossoms"), before moving back to the blossoms, whose elevation on the hillside makes them particularly "accessible" to the "dews" that fall from heaven.

Using phrasing and pauses to make sense of complex syntactical relationships is a potentially important strategy here, where the syntax is so highly wrought, even pushing at the "edges of language". One might suggest that this strategy cuts across the claims of metre and form in the poem, using rhythms closer to ordinary speech to make the sense clearer. But in fact the poem seems to sanction this through its extensive use of enjambment. In the sestet, particularly, the ends of lines are less marked because the interconnection of rhyme words is weakened. The rhymes alternate now, in the Petrarchan manner, rather than having the strong proximity of the couplets that are embedded in the middle of the two preceding quatrains. Moreover, the rhymes themselves are much more varied and likely to register only very subtly on the ear. "Reassure/fewer/poor" are half rhymes at best, while the full, single syllable resonance of "still" and "hill" is placed five lines apart, and few readers will hear the mediating "accessible" as anything but the slightest of correspondences. As the formal structure foregrounds itself less strongly, the reader is encouraged to find the sense through phrasing that asserts a counter-movement. One would hesitate to affiliate this too closely with "ordinary speech" (the diction is too elevated, including highly literary rhetorical devices, such as "not fewer", meaning "more"). But it moves closer towards the way we might use speech in a formal context.

Debbie Pullinger's article suggests that the repertoire of strategies we can bring to recitation may need to be adapted carefully to suit different kinds of poem. What this article shows is that even poems nominally in the same form may make very different demands on the performer. What has also been forcefully brought home to me, though, as I have prepared this article, is that one's sense of a poem is markedly different if you engage through trying different approaches to reading it aloud. The results of analysis in this mode may not look completely different from that of a close reading on the page, with subvocalization of the words. But, in fact, commitment to a fully realized sound texture for the poem puts one in touch with a wholly altered discovery process. Performing poems generates a distinctive awareness of the intersections of form, sense and feeling that is unattainable in any other way. The art of reading a poem out loud – particularly memorized and in a shared context – is perhaps the best possible testing ground for such insights to be developed.

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Starting a Conversation

Writing commentaries on poems for Poetry by Heart

Mike Dixon

There is a wonderful moment in Malcolm Bradbury's satirical campus novel, *The History Man,* when Howard Kirk the radical Sociology lecturer is interrogating Annie Callendar, one of his new colleagues in the English Department. He is desperate to know exactly what "method" she employs in writing about literature. He has often "…wondered what you people do over there in English."[1] Annie Callendar is of course aware that Kirk wants her to pledge her allegiance to a particular school of literary theory. Using language with which the history man will feel comfortable she seems to be about to offer Kirk a satisfactory account of her approach: "Do you mean am I a structuralist or a Leavisite or a psycho-linguistician or a formalist or a Christian existentialist or a phenomenologist?" However, she perplexes Kirk by rejecting all of these views of the world and its literature in favour of, "I read books and talk to people about them."[2]

The debate between Annie Callendar and Howard Kirk popped into my mind when I was asked to write the majority of the commentaries and short biographies of poets for the Poetry by Heart online anthology of 200 poems. It felt like an enormous privilege to be able to spend time with poems from 1375 to the present covering every major movement in the history of English Literature. I was encountering some old favourites and poems that live unarguably within the canon but I was also engaging with poems I had never read before. The selection made by poets Andrew Motion and Jean Sprackland, together with Julie Blake, co-founder of Poetry by Heart, is respectful of the literary canon but eclectic and stimulating. The timeline presents for example Samuel Johnson's well known, elegant and moving tribute to an old friend in "On the Death of Robert Levett" from 1782 and then immediately follows it with the unfairly neglected Charlotte Smith's arresting sonnet published in 1783, "On Being Cautioned against Walking on a Headland". As I read and re-read poems from the collection the sense of excitement prompted by the task that lay ahead began to be replaced by an awareness of the size of the challenge and the responsibility to offer comments on the poems to readers that would help illuminate and inform their individual responses without dictating an official, approved interpretation.

With *The History Man* exchange playing in my head I wondered if the Annie Callender approach, albeit mischievously and disingenuously expressed in the novel could be viable? Could I really simply read these poems and talk about them? Would literary theory inevitably inform what I would write? And if literary theory is a helpful lens through which we can see texts more clearly, which lens should be placed over the poems?

I read English at Cambridge in the late seventies a few years after the period depicted in Bradbury's ruthless but very funny satire. It was a curious time for undergraduates in the English faculty. The influence of the final generation of Leavisites was still clear and yet at the same time a young English lecturer called Colin MacCabe, influenced by Lacan, Barthes and Derrida, was introducing students to the idea of transformational grammar, the history of linguistic thought and modern logic. The great Middle English scholar JAW Bennett was still lecturing on Chaucer whilst his younger colleague Tony Spearing was drawing large numbers to his dynamic explorations of the work of the Gawain Poet. Muriel Bradbrook had graduated from Cambridge forty years earlier but her high pitched, idiosyncratic

tones could still be heard in the lecture halls communicating her infectious love of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. Distinguished critics like Christopher Ricks and Frank Kermode were there of course whilst a young Heather Glenn (now a professor at Murray Edwards College in Cambridge) was giving lucid, illuminating and for me still vividly memorable lectures on Blake. But the early skirmishes in the "Theory Wars" were starting to intensify and it was just a couple of years later when MacCabe was denied promotion by what he regarded as a "…philosophically ignorant and ideologically vacant"[3] element within the faculty. Kermode who had supported MacCabe resigned his Professorship and MacCabe moved on to other universities, professorships and film production. As the row became public and was presented as a battle between the ancient and the modern, the word "structuralism" was found perhaps for the only time before or since on the front page of many newspapers.

The theory wars were not confined to the offices, seminar rooms and lecture halls of university English departments. I can remember, not armed conflict, but certainly lively debates in the sixth form college where I taught in the eighties about the place of theory in our A level teaching. Discussions became particularly animated one Christmas when an exceptionally talented former student who had left in the summer returned to the college for an awards evening after a term studying English at her 1960s founded university. Chatting with members of the English department over a vol-au-vent and warm orange juice we asked her how she was enjoying her degree. Her response shocked some and delighted others when she said, "I'm quite enjoying the course but I'm looking forward to reading some complete books. We're doing literary theory for the first term so we don't start reading complete texts until next term." The next day the English team was divided between those who rejoiced in the fact that she was at a modern, progressive university and not spending her first term at a university like Cambridge plodding pedantically through pages and pages of "Piers Plowman"; and those who simply despaired.

It was in the context of this deeply ambivalent attitude towards literary theory that I sat down to complete the commentaries on the poems, working to tight deadlines and with a word limit of around 200 words for each poem. For a while I played with a sturdy box of different, colourful lenses that could be conveniently placed over the poems. Paul Muldoon's multi-layered, chilling "Meeting the British" obviously demanded a post-colonial interpretation whilst gender studies could help inform Edwin Morgan's touching, passionate "Strawberries" and Vicki Feaver's riveting "Judith". And as for the new historicists' lens, well, that could provide lots of fun with Thomas Wyatt's "They flee from me that sometime did me seek" and Ralegh's "Walsingham". Then again, perhaps a powerful and very large lens marked "New Criticism" could be placed in front of all the poems in the anthology. And then I stopped, gathered up all the lenses, placed them securely back in their box and returned to the purpose of the commentaries and their audience.

In creating the commentaries, the last thing we wanted to do was to offer them to readers with an unwritten but nonetheless very clear preface which said, "This is what you should think about the poem". We anticipated a core audience made up of many students in schools and colleges, their teachers and perhaps some general readers interested in poetry who may have stumbled upon the website. We wanted the commentaries to anticipate questions readers might have about poems and we wanted to ask a few of our own to stimulate further thought. For example with Chidiock Tichborne's deeply moving "Elegy" from 1586 it seemed to make sense to give some brief details about when Tichborne wrote the poem, his age and his involvement in the Babington conspiracy to assassinate Queen Elizabeth. Those details provide a secure spot from which the reader can look more closely at tone and style and their own response to the controlled emotion in the poem. The commentary goes on to ask questions about the impact of the use of monosyllables and the extent to which Tichborne is referencing his Catholicism in the poem. Similarly, in Robert Southey's "After Blenheim", the commentary provides some brief historical background about the 1704 battle but encourages the reader to consider the views of war expressed in the poem.

We wanted the commentaries to be self-effacing but not tentative; confident but not dogmatic. We wanted to prompt and suggest; to explain historical and social context where appropriate but to avoid it where it seemed not to help a reader's appreciation of a poem. For example in John Donne's "The Good Morrow" it would have been tempting to discuss what was happening in the world of the Metaphysicals but it felt more meaningful in a short commentary to ask readers to consider what this magnificent poem is saying about sensuality and spirituality within love.

If we wanted to avoid saying, "this is what you should think about a poem" we also did not want to be suggesting that "a poem can mean anything you want it to mean". Instead we wanted to draw attention to the

craft of writing, to the shapes and sounds of language and most certainly we wanted to encourage enjoyment in wrestling with ambiguity. To return to *The History Man* for a moment, there is another passage in the novel where Howard Kirk is convinced that he has correctly quoted and understood the meaning of a line in a William Blake poem ("Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires")[4] when talking earlier with Annie Callendar. He rings her up to boast about the accuracy of his memory of Blake, only for his sparring partner in the English Department to explain that Howard has misinterpreted the line by missing the implicit meaning. The disgruntled history man complains that in Sociology they are "…concerned with exposing the true reality not with compounding ambiguity." Annie Callendar responds laconically saying "I've always found reality a matter of great debate" and that "It must be nice to think there is a true reality."[5] The Poetry by Heart commentaries are designed to encourage awareness of ambiguity and to foster debate about the realities individuals may find in their responses to poems in the anthology. In dealing with these 200 poems we set out to be respectful but not reverential; to initiate conversation and dialogue about poems. To put it simply we were aiming to allow a reader to respond to a poem without getting in the way.

Controversy surrounding literary theory has waned of course in the last twenty years and it has rightly become accepted as an important part of any significant study of literature; a valuable tool or set of tools employed in the act of interpreting meaning. But if a latter day Howard Kirk (heaven forbid) quizzes me on my method in producing the Poetry by Heart commentaries, I will say in tribute to clever, conflicted Annie Callendar, "I like to read poems and start a conversation about them."

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2 Ibid.
3 MacCabe, C. (2011) "A Tale of Two Theories". *New Statesman* 26 September.
4 Bradbury, M. (1990) *The History Man.* London: Vintage. (p.143: Blake reference – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* 1790, from *Proverbs of Hell)*
5 Ibid.

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Developing Intelligence through Learning by Heart

Antonia Pont

To risk a broad statement about education, one could say that education is one means whereby we might develop intelligence. A further unpacking of this statement could be that education may involve and include technologies, methods, practices and contexts in which a person might develop intelligence. We could further extend this line of musing by elaborating: education, as such, might also lead to developing an understanding of intelligence *per se*, or rather of *intelligences*, and also then that: education might also involve developing a meta-understanding of its own mechanisms, thereby unleashing a loop that ramifies its initial impulse and direction.

It is commonly conceded that good learners are those who think about learning as such, and not just about the content of what is learned. It then matters less "what" they learn, so much as that they continually refine the "how" of learning, and can adapt it swiftly to various kinds of content and contexts. In this article I want to argue that learning-by-heart constitutes a generalizable practice of learning, where its contents as well as its practice strengthen certain aptitudes or kinds of intelligence. By turning to a very old paradigm of the "human", I want to situate learning-by-heart at a particular register of learning. This framing will be deployed as a lens to help to argue a case for learning-by-heart as relevant to contemporary education.

The paradigm is one found in the "Taittiriya Upanishad" (in Radhakrishnan 1994), whereby the human being is seen to be constituted by a number of layers or *koshas* (literally: sheaths). These, also referred to as "subtle bodies" (Saraswati 2002: 6) are instructive insofar as they allow us to countenance the idea that there are various registers in a human being, each with its own kind of intelligence. Consequently, these different aspects might require diverse and specialized approaches in order to develop their potentials. My aim is not so much to substantiate whether the *koshas* of the *Upanishads* (as one lens among others) are in themselves defensible physiologically, psychologically etc., but rather to propose that by viewing learning as something that needs to unfold at various levels, and therefore via different approaches, we might better be able to think how to learn more productively and effectively.

The notion that we have various intelligences is already at play in contemporary contexts. The now-common notion of "EQ" that is thrown into quite everyday workplace or social conversation – the intelligence quotient, or more simply "emotional intelligence" – points arguably towards a shared curiosity for thinking intelligence as multiple. Many teachers and learners may also sense that systems of learning have fallen, or do often fall, short, in their over-emphasizing of one layer's development to the neglect or at the exclusion of others. I turn now to the schema of the *koshas*, or Upanishadic sheaths of the human, mentioned above, that will serve as the frame for my argument about learning-by-heart.

Outlined in the two thousand and five hundred year-old *Upanishads*, the *koshas* are as follows:

1. The Annamaya Kosha
2. The Pranamaya Kosha
3. The Manomaya Kosha
4. The Vijnanamaya Kosha
5. The Anandamaya Kosha.

My argument is that our thinking about "education" could be enhanced using this (or a comparable paradigm), since to acknowledge that there are modes of intelligence, represented by each "level", allows a strategic interaction with the qualities and functions of each layer. Even more interesting is when such an approach takes into account the *relation* between each of these layers, which in the yogic texts are seen as being

"embedded" in one another and as operating in mutually reinforcing ways (the analogy of a Babushka doll is often used).

The first is the Annamaya Kosha that, according to the *Taittiriya*, pertains to food (Radhakrishnan: 543). It concerns that in us which needs food and also our being food for other food-needing entities. The *annamaya*, in other words, might relate to everything that concerns our *physical* or "meaty" bodies. (The rude shock in Australia, when humans are eaten – very rarely – by sharks, points to a reluctance on our parts to admit that our needing food also implies our *being* food.) Were we to speculate, we could say that the intelligence of this sheath might benefit from the development of understandings of, and experience with, diet and food preparation, physical alignment (of our tasty bones!), digestion principles, other movement practices, sleep patterns, and so on. The list would be long, and the methods for developing this intelligence many. Physical Education in schools by its very title indicates at least its intention to address this aspect. The asana (posture) practice in the Raja yoga tradition, along with the shatkarmas of Hatha practice (cleansing techniques) and so on, most obviously contributes to "educating" this layer.

The next layer is the Pranamaya Kosha – or the energetic (or even "electrical") layer (see Radhakrishnan: 544). "Prana" is also the name of a phase of the breath, and often translates simply as "life force" (compare *qi* and *ki*, in Chinese and Japanese traditional medicine, respectively). I'd like to propose generally that it might be a layer very much influenced by rhythms and frequencies. In yoga, there is a very specific set of technologies that pertains to this kosha, collectively called "pranayama" (restraint of the *prana*), and which work with breath and with manipulation of the rhythms of breath, even stopping it altogether for varying lengths of time. I don't want to muse too elaborately on what educational equivalent we might know in a "western" paradigm. It may be that western thought has a lacuna around this layer, often collapsing it in the directions either of the "physical" or "mental". It may, however, have its own set of logics operating in between, and developments in so-called "mental health" (perhaps misnamed) may gain increasing ground concerning this aspect of being human, which is quite tangible, if not yet so easily and objectively measured. In yoga, pranayama is often practised in parallel with meditation, since it effects a quietness, arguably through a reduction in "noise" or "static", that is to say, of the electrical "busy-ness" of the system as a whole. In the absence of a nuanced vocabulary for this layer, new-comers to yoga often describe the effects as "the mind going quiet". Our quotidian expressions of feeling "nervy" or "strung out" might describe what happens following a lack of formation of, and therefore intelligence in, this sheath.

But what of the potential role of learning-by-heart? What I've been attempting until now is a cursory, but hopefully instructive, mapping of the layers of this paradigm with which I'm playing in order to see how it might help us to think of education as development of intelligence, or of intelligence*s*.

It is with the next two layers that what I would call a "technology of learning-by-heart" enters the equation.

The third kosha is called the Manomaya (Radhakrishnan: 544) and is sometimes linked to perceptual capacity – the fact of our being "conscious", of sights, smells, sensations. It is also the aspect of "mind" before it becomes understanding, corresponding to a certain level of mental processing that is simpler than insight and more complex discernments. I often like to think of *manomaya* as involving thoughts of the "black and white" or "on-off switch" kind, discriminations required for safely navigating the physical world as an entity: "yes" go here, "no" avoid that, "yes" I'm hungry, "no" I need to sleep. It's perhaps the layer where we keep bus timetables, to-do lists, the fact that we should do our laundry soon, and so on. It pertains to coping in the world as it is, but does not extend to re-thinking this world, analysing or deconstructing its mechanisms. It also isn't an intimate knowledge of world. It is, to put it another way, knowledge of things "from the outside". *Manomaya* might be like knowing about "love" before you've ever fallen. The "idea" of a storm at sea as opposed to enduring its thrashing. Understandably then, this layer also precludes innovative thinking. It is hard to innovate in relation to something about which one has only textbook knowledge. It is a crucial layer, however, and when untrained and overloaded (this is my experience), quite maddening and *impoverishing*.

Now, I'm proposing this framework as a kind of poetic lens. I mentioned earlier that what's interesting about the *koshas* is that they can also be thought of as interrelated and intra-dependent. That is to say, that intelligence in one sheath may affect the way intelligence or potential is expressed in the other sheaths, especially in the sheath directly "above". In some applied physical sciences, such as chiropractic, there is a notion – after Gonstead – called the Theory of Foundations. It would approach the body a little like a building, noting that problems higher up often reflect

weakness at the foundation.[1] I extend this to imply that if there is a problem (pain, restricted movement etc.) at a certain site that one should look at least to the level(s) below. Or, in the face of weakness or dysfunction, one might check if the source is not in the layer *which supports* that layer. Physically this can be as simple as saying: there are pains around the shoulders, why not check that the muscle that tethers and moves the scapulae – serratus anterior – has not grown weak and tight through daily strain or neglect? Or that problems in the knees can stem from misalignment of or restriction in the foot. If we extrapolate this mechanism to the *koshas*, as I am suggesting, we can think about the next sheath and its relation to *manomaya*, which we've just discussed.

The fourth sheath is called the Vijnanamaya Kosha. It is sometimes translated as "understanding". Radhakrishnan writes:

Manas *is the faculty of perception. At the stage of* manas *we accept authority that is external; at the stage of* vijnana *internal growth is affected. The Vedas are our guide at the former level; at the intellectual we must develop faith, order, truthfulness and union with the Supreme. At the level of intellectuality of* vijnana, *we ask for proofs.* (1994: 545)

Radhakrishnan links *manas* to perception, as mentioned above. But he goes further, saying that this level involves a relationship to authority and our acceptance of it. Authority here, it seems, might also be rendered by "tradition", since he immediately mentions *The Vedas*, the earlier texts that effectively set out protocols for sacrifice and some other Brahmanic "technologies" (namely, spells). Authority, here, could be read as how things have been done up until this point – as *law*. *Manas*, I would contend, might also give us to think, in more contemporary terms, something like our relation to Lacan's symbolic order (see Evans: 201-203), our capacity to operate within structures and economies that pre-exist our arrival on the scene and with which we must come to terms in order to function. So what kind of education befits the intelligence that pertains to this level? My hunch is that it is a formation that involves the learning of certain approbated and derived content. To live in the world there are certain things that it just helps to *know about*. Don't walk down dark alleys alone near where people consume a lot of alcohol, for example. That is a rule, and is mostly useful! Don't jump out of fourth floor windows, and so on. We *know about* these things, without testing them for ourselves. As if in summary, Radhakrishnan writes, at *Vijnanamayakosha*, the level of intimate understanding, "we ask for proofs" (1994: 545). Sen Gupta, adding to this, explains, "the mind apparatus disappears and only the object that is focused upon is seen – and the seeing of that is total'.[2] She also emphasizes that the "proof" of which Radhakrishnan writes is the proof of direct perception.

To learn poetry by heart speaks to both of these layers, as framed by these two commentators. *Manomaya* involves a learning of content, a becoming-familiar with something established and finite (the poem itself), upon which one *doesn't* improvise. It isn't an experiment, at this level. It is a training, a formation. One comes to learn aspects of the so-called "canon", and accurately. My argument, however, is that there is another hidden layer (maybe even two) that has been forgotten in our move away from learning-by-heart. After the training, quite strenuous and difficult, involved in setting a poem to memory, there is the experience of being able to know that poem "from the inside". Once learnt, the poem can be directly experienced, in a way that is more intimate than reading it off the page. The encounter can productively *repeat* (as ear-worms often do), allowing a far more complex "knowing" to emerge. This can only happen over time, and I would venture, only in a meandering, haphazard way: when the poem, for example, accosts one "from the inside" while doing the dishes, driving a freeway or making love. Interestingly, one can see that in order to move into an "intimate knowing" or "direct perception", one has to move through the stage of becoming-fluent-in-content of *manas* (whether that's the law, rules, customs, tradition, conventions etc.). Borrowing from my take on the Theory of Foundations, it would be worth, then, strengthening the intelligence of *manas*, because it can facilitate and support the broader "vistas" of *vijnana*.

When we become overloaded with informational detritus, our brains seem to "work" less well, or we start to perceive them to be persecuting us with their "chatter". It is not uncommon to hear the quip, "Oh, I just think too much…" or worse, the often-gendered sleight "*You* think too much!" I would like to propose that the problem is not with the quantity of thinking, but rather with its lack of structuring or of formation. If the brain can be likened to a fidgety child, it *likes* to have something to work on. The compulsion with which smart device owners have taken to the "labour" of consulting and using their iPhones and Androids might suggest that the brain seeks to be occupied until it is sufficiently trained to sustain moments of resting.

In other words, there is value in the experience *per se* of the practice of learning-by-heart. The exertion of memorizing involves a certain kind of discipline strong enough to curtail and funnel certain momentums of

manas. Although the term "discipline" can provoke sinister frissons, we also know that the "self" is formed through its various disciplines. Another way to say this is that there is a *pleasure* involved in the cultivation of structure, despite the latter's demanding of effort and tenacity. In this way, learning-by-heart deserves to be considered a "difficult pleasure". I would like to suggest that memorizing, and then knowing-from-inside, bring to the layers of *manas* and *vijnana* a kind of tone (yes, as in "muscle"!).

To engage in memorizing (as attempt) and reciting (as memorizing) texts is strangely satisfying. I cannot offer a reference here, except to say, *Try it*. The next time you're feeling miserable, scattered, frustrated and irritable, try spending half an hour learning a poem – one that you like and admire – and check the difference between the "before" and "after". The effort-of-trying is, of itself, transformative. The brain function steadies, the sense of "lack", or of our dissatisfied grappling-after-something-to-allay-a-something, may be interrupted. I'd even go so far as to say a weird and unaccountable sense of …. *happiness* might eventuate. But let's not get carried away.

As argued above, capacities at any register may require a supporting sheath that is integrated and therefore not begging for our attention. The analogy is the physical sheath, which as we all know, complains most loudly and is at its most demanding, when we fail to attend to it. If you don't attend to eating in a way that suits your constitution, you'll get digestive issues, and your guts will never let you hear the end of it. Not attending to a layer does not make it "disappear" or fade, but rather leads to it returning – like the repressed – and taking up all of one's awareness. "To live in sickness" as Settembrini remarks in *Der Zauberberg* of Thomas Mann, "is to live *only* as body" (Mann: 144, slightly paraphrased in translation, my emphasis). To extend this in the direction of my contention, to ignore the specific formation required by *manas* is to live only as *manas* and never to access the more subtle function of direct "understanding" or *vijnana*, or of *ananda*'s creative playfulness, but we'll come to that in a moment.

In other words, if we work in education, or wish simply to educate ourselves and develop multi-levelled intelligence, then we *need* (I don't use this word lightly) practices that form and are appropriate to each layer. As I have endeavoured to demonstrated above, we may gain something from finding a schema (whether with the help of neuroscience, psychology or any other theory on what constitutes the "human") and then to seek ways of educating each aspect. Perhaps the crusty school-masters of old – as perverse as they may have been or seemed – had inherited a tradition that wasn't entirely useless. To learn (as act/ivity) a poem, and then have that poem (as content) as an inner resource – to consider, despise, consult, adore or dismiss – is a two-fold advantage. The learning itself steadies aspects of our "system", while *to have done it* also affirms a capacity that would otherwise remain latent until exercised. When people argue that we have no need to memorize anything in an age of web searches, they miss the purpose of what the learning-as-activity itself served. If oral traditions did function as ways to preserve texts, their incidental effect was also a formation of the subject, with all the benefits, opportunities, distortions and dangers that any formation entails.

Before finally concluding, I'd like to offer what can only be a speculation. If as well as needing to be functional in a world of laws and traditions, to have a "brain" that does not persecute us with unruliness (*manas*), and to be capable of incidents of direct perception – a "swift" and wise knowing of our world (*vijnana*) – we might also want to engage creatively with that world and re-envision its limits. I would like to ask whether it might perhaps be the sheath of the *anandamayakosha*, which might gesture poetically towards that rare capacity in the human. If the *vijnanamayakosha* operates to bring us into more direct contact with experience and the world, one could argue that it would support the next sheath, that of *ananda* – which commonly translates as the bliss layer. I like to think of it as where we are clear enough in our relation to the world to play – and play *seriously*. If joy is what becomes possible at this level, then it may be here – with the functionality of *manas* and the wise seeing-from-inside of *vijnana* – that we could begin to improvise in ways that would be responsible and informed, hence my terming it *serious*. Neither earnest, nor cynical, flippant nor arrogant, at this register, innovation of the most astonishing kind might emerge. As one practice among many adequate ones, learning-by-heart then might contribute to building a scaffolding in the human that gives true creativity a fighting chance. We know that improvisation without discipline and insight usually leads to charlatanism or mere irrelevant productions. For those who would work at innovating within language, what better formation than firstly to relate to language rigorously from outside – as artefact – and then intimately, from the inside – as lived and *live* experience – in order then to approach the edge where truly fresh "thought" (if we'd still even call it that) might be possible.

Learning poetry by heart, then, arguably assists us not only to think better, but to understand what constitutes the various guises in which "thinking" occurs. The next

time you hear the sentence, “you think too much”, try to drown out the monotonous drone of this imprecise platitude with a few lines from Eliot, or Baudelaire, or Plath, or Neruda, or Tsvetaeva, or Amichai, or Harwood, or Bukowski, or Levertov, or Lear…. one that you can conveniently call to mind. I suspect that afterwards you might also find yourself composing your own poem, or happening upon a conceptual strategy that hadn’t previously come to light, or solving a bind in a stalled project. But don’t just take my word for it. As the *vijnanamayakosha* insists, we need to find our own proofs, and then following *ananda*, let that delight us.

Notes

1. My thanks go to chiropractor, Amanda Singer, for conversations and correspondence about this idea.

2. Sen Gupta, O 2014, *personal correspondence*, 21 May.

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Why Memorize a Poem?

Some Reflections in the Dark

Catherine Robson

There's a power cut. You have a supply of batteries and candles, but you're not sure you want to spend the whole evening pointing a torch at a book or reading by the light of a solitary flame. What might you do instead?

How about spending the next hour or so with a single poem? Somewhere on your shelves there's probably an anthology or two, or a slim volume of verse; maybe you have mobile-phone reception so you could take a moment to pull some poetry off the web. The work doesn't need to be very long, but choose something that's complete in itself, not an extract. Find a poem that the poet fashioned to be its own world, and then start to make it part of yours.

Because you are not only going to read this poem — you are going to repeat it out loud, line by line, until you have it by heart. After a while you'll turn off the torch or blow out the candle and say it all the way through once, twice, three more times. And then you'll stop and think. This is where it starts to get interesting. And then you'll recite it again.

Perhaps you went for a sonnet. There's something very satisfying about those little rooms built of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, whether they are constructed in the Petrarchan pattern (an octave and a sestet) or the Shakespearean shape (three quatrains and a final, clinching, couplet). Or perhaps you were pulled into the orbit of an apparently simple little poem with short lines, a driving rhythm, and a steady sequence of strong and definite rhymes.

Perhaps you chose some verses by William Blake or Emily Dickinson. You noted how the regularity of the poem's form and the simplicity of its words made memorizing it a relatively quick and easy process, but at the same time, you were proud and pleased of your achievement, and so you said it over for fun some four or five times. And then you stopped and thought. Only then did you realize what had happened. You were riding in a chariot of fire. You were carrying a loaded gun. The next time you said the lines, they exploded in your head. Neither you, nor the poem, would ever be quite the same again.

Or maybe I have been wrong to think that on this dark evening you decided to find a poem that was new to you. Perhaps this was an hour in which you broke the silence in your room by giving voice to lines you learned long ago, lines you were once required to learn at school or at university, or which you decided to memorize one day because you were in love, or in pain, or simply caught up by a skein of language that demanded you make it your own.

What happened when you recited that long-held poem tonight? Did it bring back memories of the time when you first committed it to heart, or other occasions on which you said it out loud for others, or silently just to yourself? Did your tongue falter in the places that always used to catch you out, or had new chasms opened up in your memory of its landscape? Or were you gratified to discover that word followed word and line followed line without obvious effort, that the whole poem seemed to have been resting quietly inside you all these years, just waiting for the moment when you would call its measured tones back into being?

Did you find yourself thinking about it differently this time around? Were you drawn to stretches in its fabric that you once ignored or never really understood? Did these shifts of emphasis make it pivot around another

point than it did before? Which had changed: the poem or you? Or both?

For the most part, speakers of English no longer live in societies which make the memorization of poetry a standard element of their education systems. Yet we have a hazy sense that things were otherwise in the past. Both the British and the Americans are pretty sure, for instance, that it used to be the case that all children regularly stood up in class and recited a piece. Some of us even recall proofs of this fact — occasions when older relatives summoned up evidence of that lost world by polishing off a dusty gem and bringing lines from Gray's "Elegy" or a piece by Longfellow back into the light.

When everything else has been taken from you, a memorized poem still remains. It is there to remind you of who you once were, who you are now, and who you might be. It is there to remind you that there is a world beyond the self, a world in which someone once joined word and word and word to make something that had never existed before, a world in which the possibility for change, for seeing differently, is always there.

In contrast, our personal experiences of reciting poems from memory are likely to be much more random and idiosyncratic – outcomes, as noted, of individual whims or those of an inspiring or exacting teacher. (Professors of medieval literature in the United States have been especially assiduous in this respect. Many of those who were undergraduate English majors in the past half century still have some portion of the first twenty lines of Chaucer's "General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* rattling about their heads. "Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote …")

Every so often, there is a new burst of enthusiasm for a more general restoration of the practice – galvanized in the US, for instance, by former poet laureate Robert Pinsky's "Favorite Poem Project" in the late 1990s, or, as abundantly illustrated in these pages, by the vibrant Poetry by Heart competition established in 2012 as an educational initiative of the Poetry Archive, developed in association with The Full English. And as numerous contributors point out, Michael Gove is famously a fan: "Reciting" became a specified activity in the "Speaking and Listening" and the "Reading" directives for English in Key Stage 1 in 2011 and 2013 respectively. But for all this, a large-scale return to the recitation cultures of the past seems highly unlikely.

Numerous and at times complex factors supported the rise of the memorized poem in British and American public education systems in the nineteenth century. But the single most significant reason for its huge success is easily stated. In these straitened learning environments, rote memorization constituted the dominant method for teaching all subjects, including reading, and poetic material worked especially well in such a form of instruction.

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, attacks on the mindlessness of this teaching mode grew in volume, but by this point rote-learning's most prestigious variant, verse memorization, had lodged itself firmly within the DNA of elementary education. The force of tradition played the major part in keeping it there, but supporters of the exercise were also adept at finding a wide range of justifications for the memorized poem's central place in the curriculum.

Over time, however, three key areas of thought developed such profound differences, both from each other and from their nineteenth-century counterparts, that they no longer shared enough common ground to support the continued presence of recitation in schools. Understandings of the role of juvenile education underwent significant modulation. Beliefs about the needs and abilities of the individual child changed beyond recognition. And perceptions of the function of poetry, and its relationship to society, were utterly transformed. For all these reasons, a phenomenon which for many years had formed a regular feature of mass experience was demoted to the status of an optional pursuit.

It may be tempting to lament the passing of an era when one and all were seemingly united by a joint stock of poetic knowledge stored up inside their heads, but it's important to register that the once-mandatory exercise was not equally beloved. For some, standing tongue-tied in front of mocking classmates and a threatening teacher when the words wouldn't come was a hated and humiliating ordeal. For others – perhaps for the majority – it was just something to get through, a practice which meant little at the time, and still less later on.

But there's a world of difference between being forced to memorize a poem and choosing to do it off one's own bat. The pleasures of this exercise are many: it can be amusing or moving; challenging and satisfying; simple or profound. And sometimes it provides much more than pleasure.

[A memorized poem] is there to remind you that you are not alone. When you recite a poem, you are in conversation with another.

Clint Eastwood's 2009 film *Invictus* dwells upon the strength that Nelson Mandela drew from his memory of W. E. Henley's poem during twenty-seven years of captivity as a political prisoner. One of the most devastating chapters in *If This Is A Man*, Primo Levi's account of his experiences in Auschwitz, records the moment when the author recites the Ulysses canto from *The Inferno* to a fellow inmate and understands for the first time the terrifying implications of Dante's words. There are memoirs aplenty about the degradations of life in the Soviet Gulags in which survivors give thanks for the saving grace of Pushkin's poetry committed to heart in happier days.

When everything else has been taken from you, a memorized poem still remains. It is there to remind you of who you once were, who you are now, and who you might be. It is there to remind you that there is a world beyond the self, a world in which someone once joined word and word and word to make something that had never existed before, a world in which the possibility for change, for seeing differently, is always there. It is there to remind you that you are not alone. When you recite a poem, you are in conversation with another.

You don't need to be in desperate circumstances to appreciate the power of the memorized poem. You don't even need a power cut. Go on, try it. Consider beginning with a poem written in the first person – perhaps Hardy's "I look into my glass," Dickinson's "I dwell in possibility," or those famous 16 lines by Henley. And then ask yourself this. Where does the "I" of the poem end, and your "I" begin?

Catherine Robson *specializes in nineteenth-century British cultural and literary studies, and is the author of* Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman *(Princeton UP, 2001) and* Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem *(Princeton UP, forthcoming). Her work has appeared in a range of scholarly journals, including* PMLA, Victorian Literature and Culture, Dickens Studies Annual *and* Journal of Victorian Culture*; in 2003 she joined the* Norton Anthology of English Literature *as co-editor of* The Victorian Age. *She is an associate professor in the English Department at New York University, and currently, with James Eli Adams, associate director of the Dickens Project in Santa Cruz.*

A review of Heart Beats *was published in* Writing in Education No. 60.

REVIEWS

Criticism & Creativity

Karen Stevens (ed), *Writing a First Novel: Reflections on the Journey*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. ISBN 978-0230290822, £15.99, paperback.

"Please do not think I am damning the 'how to' book," says Karen Stevens in her introduction. It's a statement that can only be followed by "however…"; and this excellent collection of essays duly dismisses the idea that fiction can be machine-tooled. For Stevens, writing a novel is about "unpredictability"; it is "arduous, uncertain and chaotic"; full of "surprise and disorientation". Thus, in the first essay of the book, Hanif Kureishi would rather discuss what it feels like to be a writer than lay out the nuts and bolts of the craft. His description of writing *The Buddha of Suburbia* is all emotion and exploration. The closest he comes to solid advice is to say that working every morning "gives the day a necessary weight".

Writing a First Novel is like a particularly good symposium, with Kureishi's piece as the big name keynote speech. Everyone will be there for this one, though it is one of the few essays in the book previously published elsewhere; and everyone will reconvene at the end for another properly famous writer: Lionel Shriver, who finishes things off, as she is wont to, in a flurry of bitter fun. Between these celebrity bookends, we have seventeen reflections on aspects of the tyro novelist's journey, as seen by an impressive range of writers and industry pros. Readers can dip in as they see fit, guided by helpful categories that (theoretically) reflect the first novel's progress from idea to bookshelf. Or more properly, the first Literary Novel's progress, since that is overwhelmingly what this book is about.

Part 1 is devoted to "Inspiration" and the novel; Part 2 is about Research; Part 3 concerns itself with Voice; Part 4 offers ideas about Form and part 5 looks at The Business of Publishing. There is advice here, of course, for what writer is able to refrain from advising others? But it's mostly anecdotal stuff, and it tends to confirm that what William Goldman says about Hollywood is also true about writing and publishing novels—nobody knows anything. Over and over we find writers saying, this was *my* experience, this was what *I* did: take from it what you will.

Towards the end of the collection, Helen Garnons-Williams, an acquiring editor for ten years, writes that there "may not be any hard and fast rules to becoming a successful novelist (or indeed a successful publisher) but perhaps this simply means that you have to make up your own." Not such original advice; but in the context of everything that has come before, it acquires the weight of truth.

The difference between this book and a "how to", like Robert McKee's *Story*, is one of reliability versus validity. Mckee's principles are reliable—you can see them applied in thousands of successful narratives. The accounts Karen Stevens has drawn together here are not reliable, but they are valid. Each may not be widely or specifically applicable, but each will reward your attention, and if you are a first-time novelist, you will hit upon moment after moment that chimes profoundly with your own experience.

David Wharton

Celia Brayfield and Duncan Sprott, *Writing Historical Fiction – A Writers' & Artists' Companion*. (Series Eds: Carole Angier and Sally Cline) London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. ISBN 978-1-7809-3785-4, paperback.

As a teenager one of my prized possessions was a second-hand *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, which was two years old when I bought it in 1977. I used it to guide me in my mission to have my brilliant poetry and even greater prose discovered before my eighteenth birthday. It did not work as well as I thought it should have done – and for that the teenaged me magnanimously took some of the blame. I also used it as a touchstone for dreaming as a kid. Since then the *Writers' & Artists'* brand has had a special place for me. With that in mind, it is easy to see how Celia Brayfield and Duncan Sprott's *Writing Historical Fiction – A Writers' & Artists' Companion* caught my eye.

Madeleine moment aside, I found myself reviewing this book the way I feel it should best be used – by dipping in and out of it. I am presently completing a large nonfiction work, which although obviously not historical fiction, does share relevant aspects and methodologies addressed by Brayfield and Sprott's fine book, which is in three parts. Given my dipping in and out method, it is Part 3 that I will detail first. In Part 3 – "Write On" – there follows an impeccable guide covering research and planning in clear and accessible detail which would prove a boon whether you are an established author, a potential doctoral candidate or even a bewildered teenager dying to write. In this section both online and offline research sources are covered, from search engines to listings of local, national

and international websites for museums, galleries, libraries and archives, as well as register offices across the UK and Northern Ireland. There are also tips on research, planning and getting published – and more importantly how to approach publishers and agents. I was also pleased to note a fine guide to writing courses with the excellent codicil from Sprott that warns:

Nobody can teach you to write. Period. A writing course won't teach you how to write either. But it can act as a facilitator; it can show you how to make the going easier. (p.256)

Apart from the use of a pet hate Americanism, "Period" – to distract a pedant such as I – Brayfield and Sprott's book proves an excellent facilitator. It cannot teach you to write or get published but it does provide an excellent handbook and it makes the going easier. I class it with the same attributes as *The Arvon Book of Life Writing*, (Angier and Cline, 2010) has had for me as a welcome addition to my bookshelf these past three years.

To mention, briefly, the other two parts; the first reflects on the genre and provides a short history of historical fiction; the second is a series of contributions from great exponents of the art – including Hilary Mantel, Philippa Gregory, Charles Palliser, Alan Massie (Scotland's hardest working and most prolific journalist and writer, whose copy I often sub-edited in a previous life!), alongside contributions from Alison Weir, Rose Tremain and more.

In conclusion, I must point out that if the teenaged version of me were writing this review he would feel compelled to point out the revelation on page 264 that the first recorded instance of the F-word was in 1278.

This is a first-rate companion to the aspiring writer of historical fiction.

Brian Lavery

Robert Graham, Heather Leach and Helen Newall (eds), *The Road to Somewhere: A Creative Writing Companion*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. ISBN 9781137263568, £17.99, paperback.

Taking the idea of writing as a journey as its starting point, this delightfully useful book offers guidance on the craft of writing. It is designed to be a companion to writers on their journey and provides advice for creative writing students and anyone taking their first steps as a writer. Written by a team of writers and tutors with experience of teaching in higher education, this is an honest and accurate account of the writing life and includes creative practical exercises. There is an emphasis on developing your writing craft and the approach is both comprehensive and encouraging.

This updated and expanded new edition of *The Road to Somewhere* is divided into four sections; "Getting Going", "The Road", "Going Where?" and "Help". "Getting Going" is full of inspiration and advice from practicing writers. In her contributed chapter, "Becoming a Writer", Heather Leach explores what it means to become a writer by drawing on her own person experiences. She generously offers her advice, from which all aspiring writers would benefit. In his chapter, "Journals and Notebooks", Nicholas Graham inspires us to choose the perfect notebook and start writing. In "The Necessity of Mess", John Singleton champions the importance of chaos. He believes in letting your imagination find its own path as you gather ideas and explore the muddle of story. In "A Writer's Territory", Julie Armstrong addresses the important issue of where to write and the need to develop a writing habit.

In "The Road" section of the book, writers offer more detailed advice to help you find your way. The basics are covered in a straightforward and inspiring style. It is as though a team of creative writing tutors is cheering you on your way. Robert Graham tackles characterization and enthusiastically explains how to create and develop characters. John Singleton gives his expertise on dialogue and guidance on how to master it. Helen Newall explores the importance of place in writing. There are chapters devoted to forms of writing such as memoir, flash fiction and poetry, including a chapter by Heather Leach about poetry for people who don't like poetry. This updated version of the book also includes a chapter on digital writing, which provides a timely overview of recent developments in literature as well as links to places where you can find out more.

The section "Going Where?" challenges you to stop and reflect on where you are going. As in all the chapters, there is a strong sense that writers are sharing their experiences to help make your path smoother. In their chapter, Robert Leach and Robert Graham offer advice on getting your writing out into the world. John Singleton gives valuable information on publishing your writing. There are also fascinating interviews with writers about how they find writing-related commissioned work.

All writers, however experienced, sometimes get stuck

and the "Help" section of the book provides guidance across tricky patches. The tone of this section is patient and reassuring as basics such as paragraphing and punctuation are covered. It contains an "agony aunt" section where examples of problems faced by writers are directly answered. There is something that every writer can relate to, from struggling to get started to the nervous feeling when you finish a writing project.

The Road to Somewhere is the kind of book you can read in one sitting or dip into when you need a little encouragement. It would be a useful addition to the bookshelf of any new writer looking for guidance on their writing journey.

Amy Spencer

Vanessa Gebbie (ed), *Short Circuit: A Guide to the Art of the Short Story (2nd ed).* Norfolk: Salt, 2013. ISBN 978-1-907773-44-0. Paperback. £16.99.

Short Circuit was originally published in 2009, and was well received by many reviewers, including this rather wonderful journal you're now reading. I can see why this book was so warmly reviewed: this book is not really a textbook, how-to guide or a critical commentary on the short story, but rather a mixture of advice, reading, musings, tips and exercises on the genre. I read, write and research short stories, and I feel that these chapters illuminate each of these practices, and I enjoyed dipping in and out of it.

The original text is still the same as the first edition, which contains the original key and well-received chapters by Alison McLeod, Tania Hershman, Paul Magrs and David Gaffney, as well as an insightful forward from the editor, Vanessa Gebbie. But there are now eight new chapters, including segments by writers Stuart Evers, Tom Vowler, writers and lecturers Patricia McNair and Nicholas Royle and writer and publisher Scott Pack. Each of these chapters offers us something new about the short story and its current state: in a question-and-answer type chapter, Stuart Evers urges us to "trust the story", for "the very best stories appear effortless". In another similar "Q and A" chapter, Scott Pack says that what draws him to a short story is "a great first line". He also goes on to chide us with the (sadly, probably truthful) reminder that "writers rarely edit their work enough". This is a point from which many of us could learn, I think. I enjoyed the honesty of these chapters.

The best advice here sticks to an understanding of the short story proposed by Sean O'Faolain, many years ago, of the "punch and poetry of the short story", but it also contemporizes this, for, as Adam Marek states, "I think people who enjoy short stories have a special gland, one that responds to the unexpected with little bursts of pleasure chemicals". I loved these calls to the short story. This book makes me want to write. And it also makes me want to read – and both of these, of course, are crucial practices for good writing. Joyfully, each contributor has suggested a handful of short stories for you to read, and well as taking an idea from their chapter for you to try.

Just as in the previous edition, this is a book about the craft of writing a short story – and it is also about the writers' personal experiences of it. This is what sets this book apart from other writers' guides to the short story, for at times the advice is arcane, strange or even contradictory. But that doesn't matter, here, for this book is a network of thoughts, choices and reflections on the genre by writers who write them. This book is useful in several contexts: for students and for teaching, for research, and for writing exercises or ideas to try yourself.

Holly Howitt-Dring

Helle Abelvik-Lawson, Anthony Hett, Laila Sumpton (eds), *In Protest: 150 Poems for Human Rights*. London: Human Rights Consortium School of Advanced Study, 2013. ISBN 978-0-9575210-3-2, paperback.

"Because your back is turned/ your face will never be remembered,/ woman with your wrists tied up...// Because your face is shown/ you will forever be remembered,/ officer who reaches up,/ adjusts the noose so that the drop will take her weight..."
(from "Civilian Executions, Minsk 1941" by Eamonn Lynskey)

This poetry anthology offers ways to turn this soon-to-be-hanged woman in Minsk around to face the camera. Most of the poems conjure names, places, the "bristling grass" and "toothsucking sand" of dislocation, slavery, exile and war. In this way experiences of oppression, injustice and cruelty are given veracity, a viscera and a kind of power beyond statistics and buried news reports. Many poems express situations that some people will find difficult to contemplate, but they do so with considerable power, resonating long after the last line.

The poetry "makes sense of it" as Ruth Padel says in her

foreword. And as Sigrid Rausing eloquently suggests in the afterword, "the ability to feel empathy with strangers, human solidarity, is a state of grace. And reading takes us to that state." That said, there are a number of poems, perhaps ten percent of the 150 poems included, which rely on slightly over-wrought emotion to convey a message, often at the expense of technique or craft. Perhaps all anthologies are subject to at least minor unevenness but I couldn't help wondering if 120 or 130 poems might create more balance, with some of the weaker ones not quite making the cut.

The anthology is a collaborative project created by the Human Rights Consortium at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, and the Keats House Poets. As the editors rightly point out, "poetry and human rights are related; empathy and solidarity, unsurprisingly, are essential in human rights work."

What's interesting is how the subject of human rights has been interpreted and positioned via thirteen thematic sections. I imagine some readers might question some of the thirteen themes (how different is "Expression" from "Protest"?) and I wondered how to reconcile a chapter labelled "History", such a broad theme, with the more specific ones such as "Workers". Nevertheless, the editors have clearly considered the dimension of what is meant by a "protest poem"; how it acts as a site of resistance and brings together what may awkwardly be called the personal and the political.

On the whole, the strongest poems, perhaps obviously, are those born of witness – there is a power in experience given voice that is not quite so evident in poems which point to atrocity from afar; Yewa Holiday's memory as an image, "the soldiers squatted like flies in their quarters" has a specific menace whereas "a/ place disfigured/ by our colonial knife" (in David Costello's "Lord's Resistance Army") leads us to reflect more broadly on culpability. It may be worth noting that the criteria for inclusion did not include personal experience and it would be quite a different collection if the poems came out of enduring the experiences of which others write from a position of observation and detachment, however concerned. The inclusion of several poems by established poets such as Carol Anne Duffy, Douglas Dunn, Ruth Borthwick, Maggie Butt and Moniza Alvi does add a gravitas to an interesting if a little uneven collection which none-the-less feels necessary and insistent. As Wislawa Szymborska wrote: "We are children of the epoch./The epoch is political." (http://www.mission.net/poland/warsaw/literature/poems/epoch.htm)

Andrea Holland

Fiction

Martin Goodman, *Ectopia*. London: Barbican Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-9563364-5-3, £12.99, paperback.

Set in a near-future London, *Ectopia* paints a brutally unpleasant picture of what might come next. Bender is a teenager with a twin sister, Karen, who has a unique claim to fame: she is the last female born on Earth. Global society fatuously clings to normality. Bender's hideous father still trades online in wood futures, though there will be no future. Bender is a member of an officially sanctioned "teensquad" that tours the streets killing "dreks", keeping fit with long-distance running, and celebrating their testosterone through group masturbation (often to images of Bender's twin sister). Dad, Bender's teensquad members, his brother Paul—everyone voyeuristically leers at Karen's feminine curves. Survivalist Dad has constructed an improbable set of defences around their house to protect Karen's chastity. He patrols like some psychotic version of the father from Theroux's *The Mosquito Coast*—except his binoculars are more often trained in through his daughter's bedroom window. Indeed, Bender's family is about as gruesomely fucked up as any I've come across in fiction. I will spare the spoilers, but when the state attaches something to Bender's stomach lining to grow, the stage is set for a very weird final act indeed.

Ectopia is determinedly nasty, populated by unlikable characters and, at times, makes for a bilious read. Graphic descriptions of incest and parental abuse are the least of it (and there is a line I never thought I'd write!). If all this puts you off, then it probably should. However, if it sparks your interest, read on.

Barbican Press's original remit was the publishing of novels written as PhDs, novels about which mainstream publishing might be wary. It was an important decision (and the reason for reviewing it here). *Ectopia* was author and Barbican Press founder Martin Goodman's PhD submission to Lancaster University in 2007. He knows a thing or two about the subject as Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Hull. So: vanity publishing? This reviewer does not think so. *Ectopia* represents a studied attack on the mainstream in its pushing of boundaries, and experimentation with form, genre and style. All the very things with which a good Creative Writing PhD should surely be concerned (discuss…). The tension that arises between *publish-ability* and innovation will be familiar to anyone who has supervised a Creative Writing PhD. Still, as a slice of malicious futurism, *Ectopia* works on the whole very well indeed, and it would be unfair to think of it as

"only" a PhD novel. Think a cyber-punky *Clockwork Orange* meets *The Butcher's Boy* in *Eraserhead*'s basement, written by some tripped-out Carlos Castenada apostle (the hallucination scenes bear the hallmark of significant authorial "experience"– to use the word as Jimi Hendrix might). It all makes for a clot-filled Bloody Mary of a novel, driven by excellent, controlled prose. Goodman has written seven books – including three novels, and an award-winning biography of Haldane – and he rarely puts a technical foot wrong. Written in the first person through a number of mostly teenage characters (though predominantly Bender's), the language is plausible, curt, nasty and impressively unrelenting. *Ectopia* is often a brilliant and visceral exercise in originality.

To pick nits, this reviewer found the novel's future-scape somewhat partially drawn. This is an interesting technical issue, as much as a criticism. Writing a first person account by a semi-psychotic teenager like Bender does not allow for longwinded descriptive sections. Indeed, when Bender meets the fat controller Doc Drake, the older man's descriptions feel a tad labored at times, after Bender's economy of line. A thinly-drawn world, then, reflects the POV decision made. As such, it must be lived with. Perhaps the subject came up during the Viva Voce?

What makes *Ectopia* a good example of a PhD novel, then, is that it takes no prisoners. It revels in pushing the envelope. Dad's rants are reminiscent of Bret Easton Ellis tapping the most virulent part of his gendered psyche to write *American Psycho*. The protagonists are as antagonistic as the antagonists. Bender is thoroughly awful, if a believable product of his background. The yukkiness of the family's mucoid birthing-detail dialogue never lets off. This can feel implausible occasionally, until one remembers the central premise of no more females being born, and the inevitable obsession with parturition that would develop. The novel makes no effort to explain itself in the first fifty pages; it takes that long to establish the beginnings of a plot. I feel certain this is no error. Goodman is more interested in painting character and emotional environment than pandering to "readers' expectations" (dread phrase). This would be many editor's first problem, I suspect. What makes this a very good book indeed is its conviction to its own style, voice and direction.

Harry Whitehead

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I was grateful to read a review of my novel *The Deconstruction of Professor Thrub* in Issue 62 of *Writing in Education* (p.86), and I thank the reviewer, Holly Howitt-Dring, for engaging with the book. I would never challenge criticisms of my work's structure, style, or concept, but given my long-involvement with feminist politics, I was disappointed that my book was read as a sexist text. As a NAWE member, I hope you'll forgive me seeking to clarify my intentions.

1. A book is not sexist because it contains sexist characters. We have to consider to what extent the author endorses those characters' views and intends for readers to identify with them. In *The Deconstruction of Professor Thrub*, the eponymous professor is a comic caricature of a disgraced, ageing chauvinist, and the narrator's lust for his love interest is doomed, pathetic, and ridiculous: for instance, when they're first alone together he defecates himself and throws his soiled pyjama bottoms from his bathroom window. Further, the narrator's crush, Lempi, spends the last quarter of the book deconstructing herself as sexual object while foregrounding the consequences of hegemonic ideals of female desirability.

2. Regarding whether the narrator's historical fiction is sexist, we need to consider whether it's told from a biased perspective. For example, if a book is in part about sexual relations, are those relations invariably described from a male perspective with female characters presented as the objects of a male gaze? In *Thrub*, only once is sex described from a male character's perspective, and then the character is a youth who, during the Ukrainian Civil War, tries and fails to lose his virginity with a prostitute. All other sexual experiences – including those of Elsie, Yulia, and Magdalena – are described from a female perspective.

3. To the charge that "women do not fare well", women did not fare well in mid-20th-century Europe, and it would not be a feminist writing that sought to deny the exploitation and sexual violence that women faced in the past and continue to face today. For instance, it would be wrong for a social history of the Ukrainian Civil War to neglect the prevalence of prostitution and rape.

4. To the charge that "Elsie can't resist her lover, Ramón," why should she resist her lover? Surely post-sexual revolution we can accept that women are not asexual and have as much right as men do to enjoy having sex with their partners.

5. To the charge that “Elsie is a sexual plaything to others throughout her story,” besides Ramón the only other character with whom she has described sexual contact is her predatory boss, Menzies Flynn. It is accurate to describe her as Flynn’s sexual plaything, but as this traumatic incident is told from Elsie’s perspective, a better way to put it might be that she is a survivor of a sexual assault.

6. Finally, I agree that women in the book usually have “submissive” roles during sex. The politics of desire are complex and beyond the scope of this response, but we should remember that all the sex described in the book occurred almost a century ago. Rightly or wrongly, it seemed plausible to me that the sex lives of these historical characters would in some ways reflect the prevailing patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality. This is not meant to imply that there weren’t also alternatives: for instance, while in Barcelona in the 1930s, Elsie encounters women active in *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women), the revolutionary anarcha-feminist organization whose members rejected church and state, mocked the idea of marriage, and in some cases pursued same-sex and polygamous relationships. But it was not my intention to write about these revolutionary heroes, and to readers who wish to learn more about their inspiring social revolution, I heartily recommend Martha Acklesberg’s *Free Women of Spain.*

I had hoped to write a feminist book, and I apologize if I have failed.

D.D. Johnston

About the reviewers

Andrea Holland teaches Creative Writing at UEA.

Holly Howitt-Dring is Course Leader for the MA Creative Writing at the University of Portsmouth.

Brian Lavery is completing a PhD at Hull University, where he has also taught creative non-fiction.

Amy Spencer works with hard-to-reach groups. She is the author of *The Crafter Culture Handbook*.

David Wharton is Course Director for the Certificate in Creative Writing at the University of Leicester's Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Harry Whitehead is Senior Tutor for Creative Writing at the University of Leicester.

“One of the best ‘How to’ books on writing I’ve come across.”
AMANDA ADDISON, AUTHOR OF *LAURA’S HANDMADE LIFE* AND CREATIVE WRITING TUTOR AT CITY COLLEGE NORWICH

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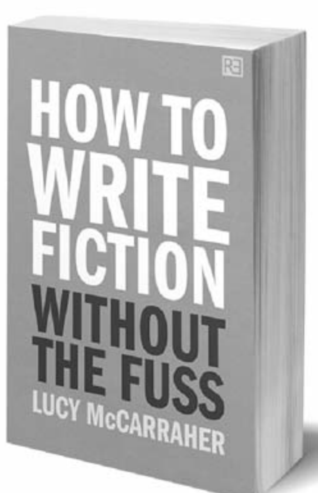

“Not only do I appreciate the book as a novelist, but am also inclined to steal her ideas wholesale as a Creative Writing teacher!”
SARAH BOWER, AUTHOR OF *THE NEEDLE IN THE BLOOD* AND THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER, *SINS OF THE HOUSE OF BORGIA*

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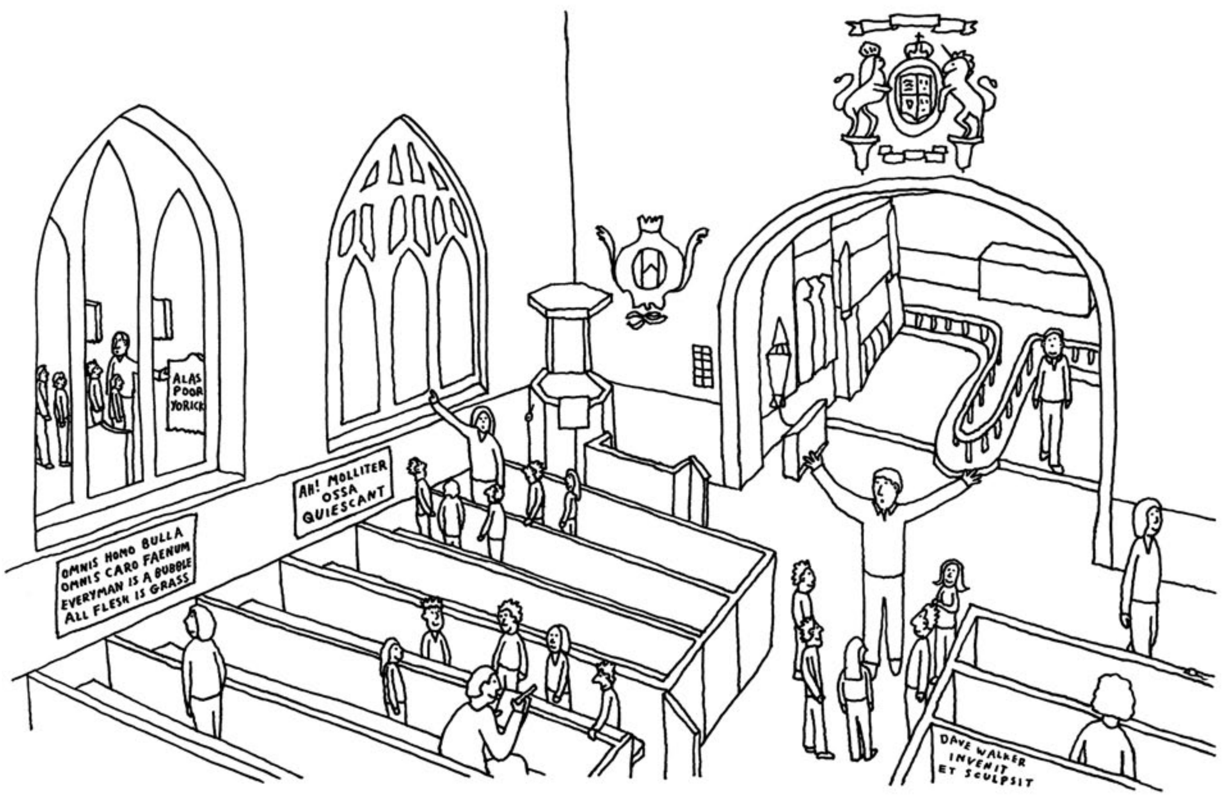


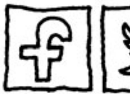
Reading the Past, Writing the Future is an educational project, devised by The Laurence Sterne Trust, which aims to encourage schools to visit their local church in order to stimulate and inspire creativity.

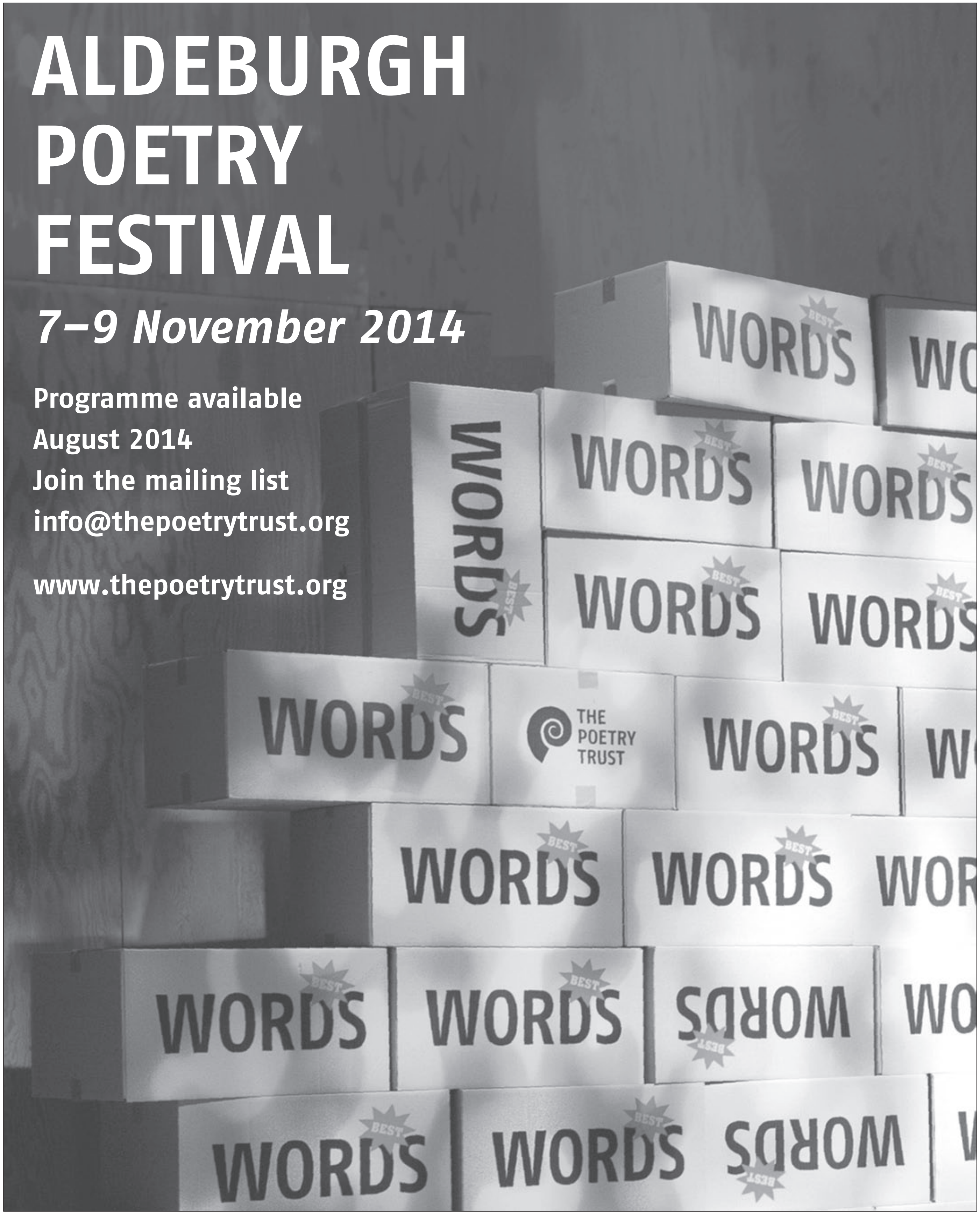
The **Reading the Past website** is an online resource for teachers. Video introductions from a range of experts - an historian, a creative writer and a variety of master craftworkers - show how a church can be 'read' in a variety of different ways.

The website also contains examples of imaginative work by children who have already been inspired by a visit to their local church with a creative writer.

www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk/reading-the-past/

The Laurence Sterne Trust (Registered Charity No. 529593)
Shandy Hall, Coxwold, York, YO61 4AD
01347 868465 / info@laurencesternetrust.org.uk





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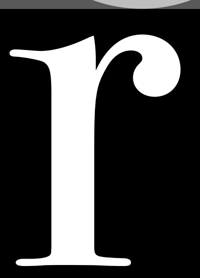

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Thursday 2 October 2014

This year's theme is '**Remember**'

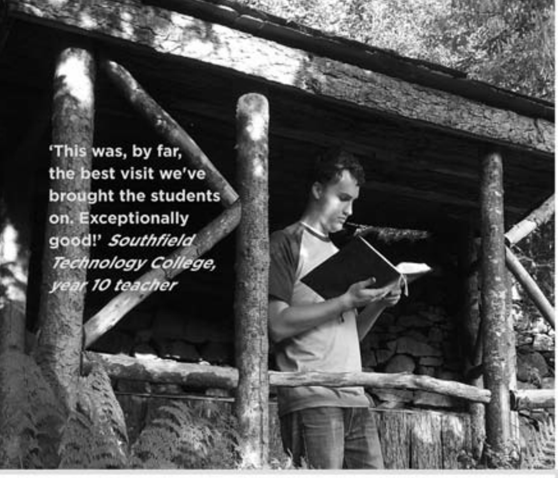
Share a poem you know by heart on Twitter **#nationalpoetryday**

To join in the biggest poetry celebration of the year, sign up at:

nationalpoetryday.co.uk

Dove Cottage and the Wordsworth Museum

The Wordsworth Trust at Dove Cottage is an inspiring and unique place for pupils - and teachers - of all ages. Whether you want to improve your pupils' creative writing skills, learn more about poetry or explore the beautiful landscape of the Lake District, a visit to Dove Cottage is always rewarding and worthwhile.



Romantic Poetry: where better to learn about the lives and works of the Romantic poets than in Grasmere 'with paradise before me', the place that inspired Wordsworth's greatest works? With over 90% of Wordsworth's manuscripts in our adjoining museum and research centre, your students can see first-hand the process of poetic composition, surrounded by first editions of Keats, the Shelleys, Byron and more, as they take part in one of our award-winning workshops.

Real Live Writers and Poetry Readings: we know that poetry comes alive when it is read aloud, so why not book your pupils in for an unforgettable poetry reading with some of the nation's best-loved poets? Simon Armitage, Jean Sprackland, Kit Wright and Andrew Forster are all giving special schools readings here in Grasmere this year: have a look on our website for detail and to book your place! Throughout the year we also offer Real Live Writers workshops led by published poets, ideal for those studying the new Creative Writing A-level.

Please contact **education@wordsworth.org.uk** or **015394 35544** for more details.

www.wordsworth.org.uk

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NAWE is a member of the Council for Subject Associations. www.subjectassociation.org.uk

Membership

As the Subject Association for Creative Writing, NAWE aims to represent and support writers and all those involved in the development of creative writing both in formal education and community contexts. Our membership includes not only writers but also teachers, arts advisers, students, literature workers and librarians.

Membership benefits (according to category) include:

- 3 free issues per year of *Writing in Education*
- reduced rate booking for our conferences and other professional development opportunities
- advice and assistance in setting up projects
- representation through NAWE at national events
- free publicity on the NAWE website
- access to the extensive NAWE Archive online
- weekly e-bulletin with jobs and opportunities

For Professional Members, NAWE processes Enhanced Disclosure applications to the DBS and can assist in dealing with any other government clearance schemes. The Professional Membership rate also includes free public liability insurance cover to members who work as professional writers in any public or educational arena, and printed copies of the NAWE magazine.

Institutional membership entitles your university, college, arts organization or other institution to nominate up to ten individuals to receive membership benefits.

For full details of subscription rates, including e-membership that simply offers our weekly e-bulletin, please refer to the NAWE website.

To join NAWE, please apply online or contact the Administration Manager, Clare Mallorie, at the address below.

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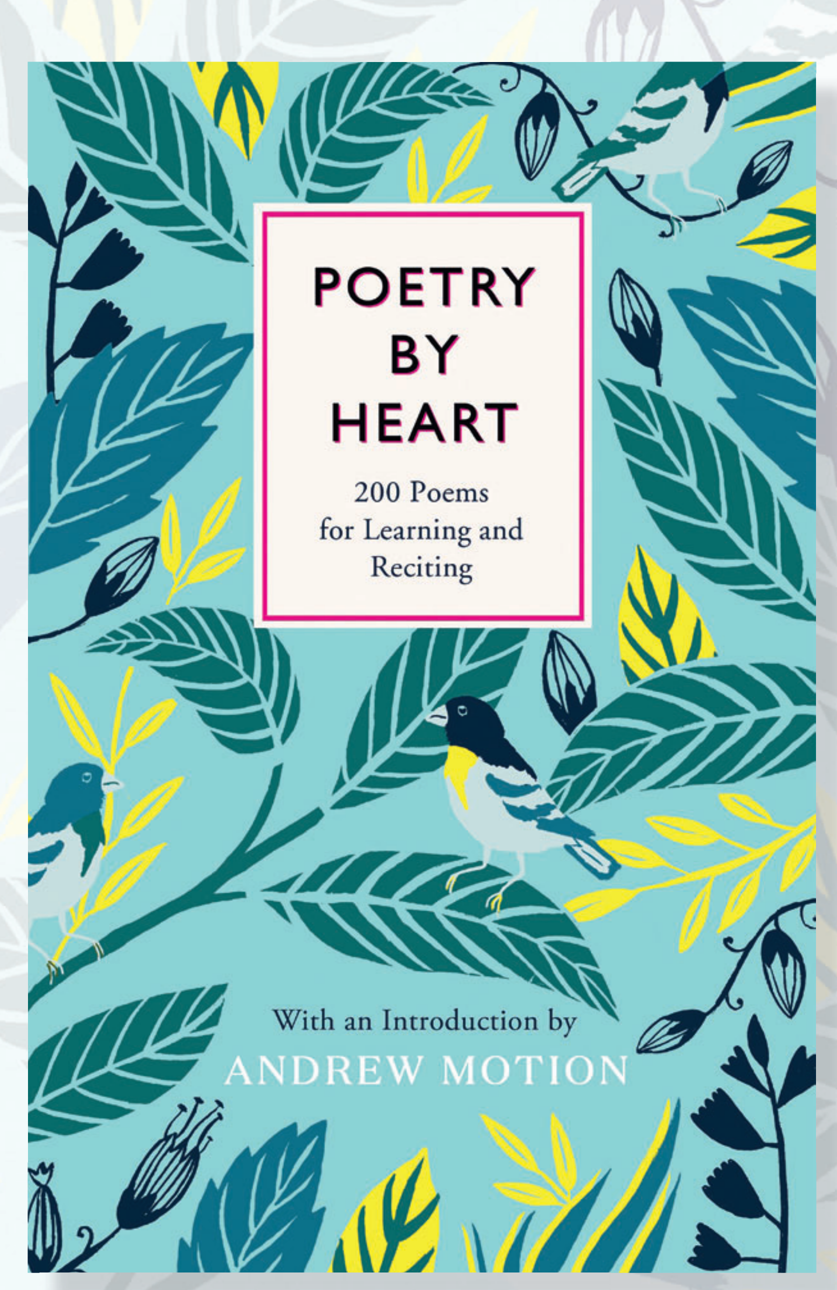
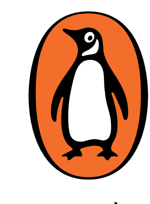


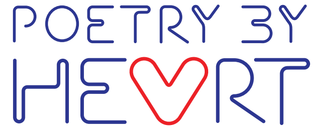
Poetry by Heart

The timeline anthology, featured on the Poetry by Heart website, is published in book form by Penguin on National Poetry Day, 2nd October 2014.

Edited by Julie Blake, Mike Dixon, Andrew Motion and Jean Sprackland, this hardback features QR code web links to recordings of the poems.



www.penguin.co.uk



www.poetrybyheart.org.uk