

SITTING ALONE, LISTENING

by

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Approved by:


Major Professor

To my mother and father,
and my wife, Ruth.

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I.

how gorgeous the world is
outside the door

D.H. Lawrence

Scenes From an Afternoon

In an upstairs room, a cat leaps
onto a table and sprawls in light
that streams from a single dormer.

A map, adding another window,
colors the air like stained glass.
Stretching, the cat rises, falls

back into sleep as a woman enters
the room. Color pulls her across
like a dry meadow drawing children.

By the window, she looks onto trees,
follows birds that soar from limbs
while their cries fall like drizzle.

Two Views of Farmland

A man comes to walk about his yard.
He takes the path that light throws
from the door. He reaches the gate
and crosses into fields, where he sees

his house signaling to a train,
as though a buoy marks the channel
through land for hoppers and boxcars
clattering over rails with his harvest.

A woman, inside, running her bath,
stands naked and opens a window
as engines rumble through fields,
as a horn splits air like thunder.

She looks out onto a beach to hear
sound swell in fog, waits until
it moves over water to fill a harbor,
to draw boats through fog to moorings.

An Evening Among Poets

the Closerie de Lilas where poets
had met since the days of Baudelaire

George Wickes

From the cafe terrace,
stars are eclipsed by the awning
and the light that drenches our table.
At an open shutter, a flautist casts
music that mingles with the poems
we send into the evening. In his pages,

Josef leaps a frame, and as an artist
who translates for an eye and its cones,
he enters a room where a man takes
a woman's hand as they exchange phrases.
He erects his easel in the doorway
and brushes their upright forms onto canvas.

He sees in her mirrored reflection
the woman who carried his child as she fell
into death. Through her skin that night,
he felt a kick against his hand as though
his child savored a dark world, undisturbed
by sound that water robed for its passage.

(stanza break)

As he now alters the woman's contour,
he places her hand on her belly and deftly
centers her gaze on the stirring movement
in her body. Shifting to the windowsill,

he paints in the oranges he had squeezed
at breakfast and rounds their forms
like the unflickering candle that he gives
to the chandelier swaying in the draft.
Slipping from a room and figures clothed
in patches of color, Josef ends his poem.

As though by a window, for days he will
brighten canvas. Cries from the street
bring us now to limbs of a cypress tree,
where a woman signs our look to the sky
and the meteors that melt from view
like the stars we lose from the terrace.

At a Kansas Farmhouse

The gravel road before their house
has for days clouded no one with dust.
At the door, he watches her pull shut

the orchard gate and come with fruit
that color her arms. Leaving the path,
she stops under branches, where she drapes

her clothes that swell like sails on a dhow.
Beneath cloth ballooned by the wind,
she bites from a peach, offers it to him

who crosses the yard with shades at dusk.
Laughing, she lets him catch the juice
that slides from her breasts. Soon she

leans back for him to press her figure
onto grass. Hours later, clouds cannon
the valley and draw her from the bed.

She sees a burst of shot that blanches
the yard framed and glassed by a window.
Light that again floods the yard blots

(stanza break)

her cry. But as if he breathes words
at her ear, she hears him, turns to look
into the room where she lies beside him.

A Darkening in Color

1.

As you stand before the sink
with celery stalks in your hands,
I ask about your plans for a garden.

Showing your frown, you turn
and count the months until summer,
when you could load your dress
with vegetable reds and greens.

You now ask why a summer morning
will still bring you to stairs
that carry you from the hallway.

I tell you about lulls of drizzle,
plump seeds that redden and fall,
and how your clothes form pools
as you come naked from the garden
to give me the opening of your body.

2.

As if by burning maps, you built
a world among rooms, where windows
opened onto a meshwork of branches.
March swept my steps from your door.

In April, your clothes fell away
like petals as leaves trapped light
and shaded sound. Your skin's scent,
you said, told about smells a breeze

lifted from fields waking with seed.
You took my hand to show me earth,
when it hungers for rain and plants
to fill its soil. From the window,

we looked onto storms when warm air
pressed cold to migrate. You pointed
out plants and wind that spilled
their seed to thicken air like heat.

By stairs, in September, you sank
to streets as frost crept over land.
And as evening soaked your clothes,
I saw your coat grow dark like fur.

II.

I am a part of all that I have met

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

How Autumn Colors a World

Concordia, Kansas

Here stars drench the autumn sky.

A train's horn now bursts the air

like rising wind that hurries a rain
of leaves. As frost stretches sound,

I shunt my passage off to a street,
where trees lean nearer to winter.

Darkness thickens and slows my steps
as though for climbs past rubble,

for views opened by crumbled walls.
Stopping at rocks, I look for fire

that bolts and leaps across roofs
like a frenzied beast glad to flood

the night sky with flames. Turning,
I graze my coat against darkness,

and come to rooms when a horn again
sunders the air. With tea, I move

before the stove and glance at maps
of land that dusts me with its ashes.

To Normandy via Jazz

As I drink coffee at the Red Moon,
a waiter unfurls the striped awning
over the terrace, where a blind girl

kneels beside her case and lifts out
her horn. She holds it in her arms
like a snake brought from its basket.

She pets its sides and blows notes
like a gypsy commanding a brown bear
to dance. Rising into the air,

pigeons grow meshed in her music,
reappear as gulls sailing toward land.
From under an awning on a promenade,

I watch a fisherman painting
large dark eyes onto his boat's bow
for scudding through clouds at dusk.

I turn and hear his horn mimic
a mist that slips past the seawall,
as gulls grow veiled in their flight.

Victor Alert: Post Sixteen

Each night storms build in the west,
rising skyward like planes whose flares
burst open and rain onto the ground,
as bombs explode and scatter sound.

Each night I wait to hear the windows
rattle around me. Nothing else slips
past the barbed wire and chain link fence
but the static that crackles on the radio
hidden in my coat, near the hashish
I crumble and burn. Hiding the glow
from post fifteen, I kneel on the floor,
sometimes rising to look around me,
like an animal ready to stop its feeding.

Now I take my seat and stare ahead
at the three planes sheeted with light,
each one clasping a bomb to its belly,
as the clouds overhead begin their barrage,
cratering the tarmac like a moon.

Sitting Alone, Listening

Since Montana, I have come to know
nights marred by sound, beginning with
trains wailing as they slide through town,
their moans clogging the air like smoke,
as they are pushed toward the Rockies.

I heard trains in England switching lines
and clacking over rails at 2:00 a.m. to Ely.
Foghorns in San Francisco spewed out
the sound of cows grazing in a far pasture,
as though boats churn the ground in Kansas,
where in five towns I have heard trains
rise though the night and blow like whales
before diving back into farmland. On Adak,
an island next to a volcano venting steam,
silence broke when tremors shook the ground
like four diesels coupled together
and pulling a hundred cars into the ocean.

Incinerating the Night

I lift out the ashes and place them
in a barrel, trying not to inhale
the dust through my mask as it rises
into the air. I twist on the flame
and begin throwing in empty boxes,

watching them melt like model planes,
before I add plastic bags of trash.
With enough heat for an aerosol can
to explode like a flare shot indoors,

I push in boxes bursting with glass
and others with no sound from the Lab,
leaving them to burn as I go stuff
my cart with trash from the floors,
where the nurses look away as I pass.

Now I stoke the fire and shove in
boxes of afterbirth. I set the flame
and break for lunch with the women
who turn from me, as though I come
up to a glass door and find it locked.

A Model for Renoir

After your bath, you come
into the room with a towel wrapped
around your body. You move before
the dressing table, and as you start
to brush your damp hair, the towel slips
from your breasts, tumbles onto the floor.

Now with each stroke your breasts sway
like ripe, heavy apples stirred by a breeze.
Wrapped within the scent of your body,
you cannot see me reflected in your mirror.

Lying across the bed, I watch you
stand at the window to let the sun
touch your skin. You rub its heat
along your arms and down your breasts
as though sponging yourself with summer.
Showering the rug, you grab your robe
and walk from the room, leaving me alone
to draw a still life of a single flower
that has dropped its petals and faded
from the mirror.

The Lutheran Rectory: January 2, 1984

Interrupted by my sister,
who came to the door and asked you
to move your car, we dressed and drove
into Hartford, where you took me

to the party at the rectory and told me
that we had been promised the spare bedroom.
I waited for you to tire and everyone else
to leave, then followed you up the stairs.

You padded the wooden floor with blankets
and flipped off the light. I watched
you stand naked at the window and pull
open the curtains. You let the figures
in the stained glass window of the church
next door watch over us. The next morning,

as the sunlight rose off the snow and lit
the room, you knelt over me as in prayer,
blessing me with your body, and then gathered
your clothes and dressed in the bathroom,

(stanza break)

leaving me alone and naked with the figures
in the stained glass window. You let me
off at the school a block from my sister's,
before waving and driving down the hill
to your husband and house in the country.

Serving Time in Wichita

Two doors from the morgue,
I start by wheeling in another cart
from outside in the corridor. I stand
before it and work my way through bag
after bag of laundry, tossing behind me

into one basket the sponges soaked with
the blood of a woman in labor. I remove
the clamps left clipped onto the cover
after her skin was sewn together, wad up
the clotted sheets and throw them into

the next basket. I come to diapers,
carry them daintily to the end basket,
as though I pick up the sheepskins
that padded the bed of a man who lost
control of his body, before security moved
him onto their cart and pushed him down

the hall. I sort through everything
forced down the chute and loaded onto
my cart, throwing out the shoe covers
and facemasks, but pocketing the bills

(no stanza break)

and coins left in the doctors' scrubs.

Emptying the next bag, I look around

and hide the clamps that I'll clean

before leaving. Then I'll clip them

onto the joint that I light in the bath,

stretched out until the water turns cold,

and keep using them as I sit waiting

inside for a woman to knock on my door.

A Summer at the Baron's

Concordia, Kansas

I sit in a chair by the window
and stare outside, waiting for someone
to come. No one moves at the signal
as the light on the corner turns green.

I watch the insects at the streetlight
swarm as though hungry for a mate.
The clock at the bank reads 3:16,
switches to 85 before a minute passes.

Four blocks north, a train halted
at midnight and rolled onto the siding.
Its crew took rooms near the woman
who rents her body by the half-hour.

She listens for a knock on her door
whenever anyone climbs the stairs
and walks down the hall toward her,
but no one knows that she lies waiting.

(stanza break)

Now the insects encircle the queen
outside the window with their songs,
as I sit inside watching them die
and litter the street with their bodies.

Souvenirs of Weather

Visiting Ireland, I stand at the water
and watch the clouds drop over the lough,
before they shower me with mist. I see
the clouds at night scud overhead, quilting

the moon, as the wind pushes them off
the Atlantic. I saw the waves of fog
in England roll at dusk across the Fens,
flooding the land and muffling all sound.
One winter in Istanbul snow swept

out of Asia and thundered over the city,
conquering it intact. Summer storms
in Montana challenged the sky and clashed

over the prairie, dropping a burst of hail
and inches of rain in defeat. Each spring
over Kansas warm air battles with cold,
each one slamming against the other,
and I wake at night when the sirens wail.

Setting the Table

1.

Shipped to Great Falls, Montana,
I stood alone at night under the wing
of a tanker that sat waiting for orders
to rendezvous over the Arctic. I waited
for the bus into town each Saturday at noon

and spent hours reaching into the shelves
at Marie's, taking down books and opening
their bellies, as though I were cleaning
my catch and tossing the guts into the sea.

Whatever I kept was left in my locker,
uncooked and uneaten. But I felt the words,
the texture of raw flesh, and sometimes took
hunks into my mouth as I sat in the park,

until stopping to watch the women in shorts
pushing strollers or trains hauling carloads
of wheat from the Dakotas.

2.

Now fat, I sit up at night in a room
filled with books, gorging myself
as though each night I hold a banquet.

No one comes to my door and no one calls,
wanting me to share or to ease their hunger.
My wife sleeps in the next room,
using her pillow to muffle my belching

and I start to make a meal of my flesh--
my arms, my legs, and even my stomach,
not stopping until nothing of me exists
but a dot on the page marked Montana.

CRITICAL APPARATUS

Introduction

Sitting Alone. Listening is a collection of lyric poems that span a period of nine years. These poems mark my apprenticeship to the craft of poetry and reflect my subsequent growth as a poet. A few of these poems come from the last year of my undergraduate education, when I was acquiring a sense of the literary tradition. Just as a painter, if he wishes to do more than express himself, cannot paint seriously without a knowledge of, say, the reaction against Classicism in nineteenth century France by Eugene Delacroix, or the later reaction against Romanticism by Gustave Courbet, a poet cannot write seriously without having studied the experiments of William Wordsworth and Robert Browning, or the reaction against Romanticism by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. For this reason, I have chosen not to include my poems over nine years old. My earliest poems, in fact, were discarded in 1976, when after writing for eight years, I discovered the importance of craft and began reading the books of some of the younger contemporary American poets, including Norman Dubie, Albert Goldbarth, Daniel Halpern,

Dave Smith, and David St. John. Intrigued by their books, I returned to college in 1977, after a three year absence, and enrolled as an English major. Beginning in 1981, I began to write the poems that make up this report.

Because lyric poems are intensely personal, and because all of the poems in this report arise out of personal alienation, if I am going to comment on my poetry, it is essential that I add a few details about my own life. Until the age of twenty-seven, I had no permanent "home." After my birth in Morocco, I lived in America, England, Germany, Scotland, and Turkey. My father, a career naval officer, usually spent only two years in each assignment and had only one four-year assignment, when we were living in Maryland. Even as an adult, I spent the first nine years after high school traveling overseas and within America. This homelessness as a child and as an adult made it difficult to make friends, because remaining alone was the easiest thing to do. Until I settled in Kansas, I thought that I belonged nowhere. Even so, it took me ten years of living in Kansas to accept America and not wish that I was living in Europe, where my parents made their home in 1973 after my father's retirement from the military.

I have also felt alienated by having had thirty-two different jobs before I discovered teaching. Once I began substitute teaching in 1984, at the age of thirty-three, I suddenly realized that I had found employment that was both pleasurable and satisfying. Before then, I had had a variety of menial positions, including janitor and linen sorter, and never stayed in any one job for very long. Consequently, I often found it difficult to survive financially. Although I never have been homeless, I have known extreme poverty, including having to go hungry on occasion.

Most of all, I have felt alienated because of a childhood illness which--when combined with my homelessness--stunted my social development. When I was six and living on Adak, one of the Aleutian Islands, I began losing my hair over all of my body and remained totally bald for two years. Once I returned to the continental U.S., I began seeing a variety of specialists, all of whom were stumped as to the cause of my illness. Having felt apart from my peers during the early years of school, I chose not to make friends when I was a teenager. This childhood problem resurfaced when I began to go bald prematurely as an adult. All of the stares, comments and gestures by other people

brought back the pain that I once experienced and caused me to seclude myself intentionally from other people, including women. All I had, then, was my imagination.

The poems in this report attempt to deal with my feelings of alienation. Section I, however, contains poems in which I transcend my own life. Like Robert Browning, who masked his feelings by writing dramatic monologues after his early poems were criticized in a review by John Stuart Mill, I disguise my feelings in my early poems by treating them vicariously. Through the use of third-person narration and through the use of metaphor, I deal with feelings of homelessness, loneliness, separateness, and sexual frustration, but the poems themselves are not obvious musings about these subjects, because I disguise the triggering subject in order to create poems which, like paintings or musical compositions, can exist as objects independent of their maker's biography. These early poems, then, are much more a part of the modernist tradition, because I create a kind of wish fulfillment and overcome my feelings imaginatively. Section II, in contrast, deals with my feelings more directly and contains poems in which I attempt to order my experiences. These poems are more

characteristic of postmodernism, because I no longer seek to escape from my feelings.

Aesthetics and Influences

Even though the poems in Section I of Sitting Alone, Listening express my feelings indirectly, all of the poems in this report are lyrics. Traditionally, a lyric poem expresses its author's thoughts and feelings. The earliest form of a lyric, however, is a song meant to be accompanied by a lyre. What these poems have in common is an attention to sound. In fact, underlying these poems is my effort to invoke a musical analogue. Initially influenced by contemporary jazz, I have tried to duplicate the fluidity that characterizes European jazz. Yet, my training in the literary tradition has taught me to make use of prosody, particularly alliteration, assonance, and a pattern of accented syllables, in an effort to follow the conventions associated with lyric poems.

As a young poet, I was particularly intrigued by the fluidity and melodiousness that I was hearing in jazz music, and I wanted to create the same kind of fluidity in my poems. Somehow I thought that I could manipulate language to create music. Two of the records which I found most fascinating and most influential were Jan Garbarek's Dansere and Eberhard Weber's Yellow

Fields. Reviewing Dansere in Downbeat, Mikal Gilmore says that on the title track Jan Garbarek, a Norwegian saxophonist influenced by John Coltrane, "etches a long, slightly eerie arabesque theme over a mercurial percussive crest" (16), while Bobo Stenson, on piano, adds "crystalline arpeggios" which "slowly frame a recurrent ostinato that is meditative and thoughtful" (16). A similar contemplative and haunting quality appears on Eberhard Weber's "Sandglass." The German bassist transforms the flow of sand in an hourglass into music and creates, according to Gilmore in his review of Yellow Fields, "a floating, calm state of trance" (22). Somehow, I hoped to write poems that would equal the melodiousness I heard on Dansere and Yellow Fields. Perhaps, unknowingly, I even wanted to recreate my associations of the sea, its ebb and flow against the shoreline, and the cries of seagulls.

Recognizing the importance of music in poetry, Donald Hall discusses the origin of the lyric poem in "Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird." Hall believes that the psychic origins of poetry are preverbal and first appear when we are infants. The pleasure found in nonsense sounds, what Hall defines as "the small cooing and purring and

bubbling" (33), is "Milktongue," which appears in poetry as alliteration, assonance, and consonance. In moving his legs, letting them "contract and expand in a rhythmic beat" (34), the infant has discovered "Goatfoot," which is the pattern of stress in accentual-syllabic poetry. And once the infant examines his hands, which are "mirror images of each other" (34), and which move at will, the infant has discovered "Twinbird," the use of rhyme. Hall believes that these three elements of poetry "have always lived in the lyric poem, for poet and for reader" (35). He adds that they "keep pure the sensual pleasure that is the dark secret shape of the poem" (35).

Sound, then, whether through alliteration, a pattern of stressed syllables, or rhyme, is what one responds to initially when either reading or writing a poem. As a young poet, I had falsely assumed that I could recreate the entire melody heard in jazz, not realizing that the melody was created by separate instruments. To use an analogy, I would have to have been a one-man band: The drum on my back would have been Goatfoot, the harmonica at my mouth, Milktongue, and the guitar, Twinbird. My own poems suffered because they were predominantly composed of Milktongue. I also came

to realize that my own poems were not written for the page, as they should have been, and that their meaning was inaccessible.

In college, I became aware of traditional prosody. I was particularly influenced by the English poets of the sixteenth century. This influence can be illustrated by Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" and Sir Philip Sidney's "Ye Goatherd Gods." Composed of a variation of the four-line ballad stanza, rhyming aabb, and written in iambic tetrameter, Raleigh's poem is heavily alliterative. In fact, nearly every line contains at least one instance of alliteration, while line three contains two instances of alliteration--the repetition of the letter p in "pretty pleasures" and the repetition of the letter m in "might me move." The one line devoid of alliteration, "and Philomel becometh dumb" (line 7), makes use of assonance in the repetition of the vowel in "becometh dumb." Similar vowels are occasionally repeated within the same stanza, but over several lines. Raleigh also makes use of assonance in rhyming the endwords "dumb" and "come" and "move" and "love" in stanzas two and five, respectively. Sir Philip Sidney's "Ye Goatherd Gods" also makes use of alliteration,

although the repetition of similar letters in a line occasionally spans several feet. Line three of the first stanza alliterates the word "free" with the endword "forest," yet this instance of alliteration spans two feet in the iambic pentameter line. While some occasions of assonance are contained within the same line, as in "monstrous mountains" (line 16), Sidney also has the repetition of similar sounds and similar meanings occur over several lines. The word "woes" in line five, for instance, is paired with "dolor" in line six, just as the word "fowl" in line seventeen is paired with "owl" in line eighteen. "Ye Goatherd Gods" differs from "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" in its absence of rhyme. Even so, Sidney's double sestina contains a kind of rhyme in the endwords and sets up a recurring pattern based on the form of a sestina.

One poem in which I use some of the elements of traditional prosody is "An Evening Among Poets." While writing the poem, I discovered that I could tie some of my lines together by using both alliteration and assonance. Connected by the word "terrace" in the first and the last line, the first and final stanzas are also connected though the alliteration of the letter m. The phrase "music

that mingles" in line five is paired with the phrase "meteors that melt" in line thirty-three. Line thirty-two of the final stanza is also heavily alliterative in its repetition of the letter w, in the phrase "where a woman," and in the repetition of the letter s in the words "signs" and "sky." Yet, the strongest appearance of alliteration comes in stanza two, beginning with the repetition of the letter a in line seven. Further, a repetition of the letter g connects the entire stanza, because it appears five times in lines eight through eleven. Stanza two also contains several instances of assonance, particularly in the words "man," "woman," and "hand," and in the words "takes" and "phrases." Even though other instances of assonance exist, the entire poem makes irregular use of traditional prosody. Similarly, there are only a few examples of iambic pentameter in the poem, particularly lines twelve and sixteen. Rather than make the poem entirely regular, I instead write a free verse in which I maintain a sense of order by relying occasionally on the conventions associated with lyric poems.

While still written in free verse, some of the lines in "At a Kansas Farmhouse" are ordered by relying on iambic tetrameter. The first line

contains a regular pattern of iambic tetrameter, yet in the second line, I start with a trochee, add a spondee, and then have the equivalent of two feet in iambs. The next three lines are irregular, but a variation of iambic tetrameter appears in line six. The first four syllables are iambic, then I add a trochee before returning to an iamb in the final two syllables. Line seven continues in an iambic pattern for the first six syllables, but the line ends with an anapest. A regular pattern of iambic tetrameter reappears in line ten. Line eleven, however, begins with a trochee. The next regular pattern of iambic tetrameter appears in line sixteen. The entire poem essentially plays with a regular meter. The poem was, in fact, partly influenced by Andrew Marvell's "A Definition of Love," a poem written in iambic tetrameter, and a poem which shares the idea of spiritual love described in "At a Kansas Farmhouse." My poem differs from Marvell's in describing a physical love; my poem also allows me to consummate my relationship with a woman imaginatively.

What I often risked in using even a loose metrical structure in my poems was a stilted language. I wanted to include in my poems my own voice, the voice I use when writing prose, while

still maintaining my attention to sound. Even though I believed that a strict metrical pattern restricted my language, I was amazed at the ease with which William Butler Yeats uses iambic tetrameter in "The Song of Wandering Aengus." Written during the time that Yeats "tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech" (Dougherty 9), "The Song of Wandering Aengus" artfully employs an accentual-syllabic pattern. Similarly, I had to read "Adam's Curse" many times before I realized that the poem is made up of rhymed couplets. Although I maintained my belief that free verse is the form most characteristic of postmodernism, I wanted to write a poetry that would be composed of what in "Adam's Curse" Yeats calls "sweet sounds" (line 10). What I found most instructive, and most suitable to my own purposes, was Yeats's later poems.

Something that I discovered in "The Wild Swans of Coole" is a pattern of stresses with a varying amount of syllables in each line. In the first stanza, lines one and three each contain four stresses and nine and eleven syllables, respectively. Lines two, four, and six contain three stresses, with the number of syllables

varying between five and six. Line five has five stresses, but eleven syllables. Over the next four stanzas, this pattern of stress is maintained. While it is true that many of these lines are composed of iambs, because of the variation in the number of syllables, one cannot say that the poem has a regular foot. The poem instead follows an accentual pattern, and has its own structure based on the regularity of stress in each stanza and on the rhyme scheme, which is abcbdd.

Some controversy exists as to whether Yeats has indeed used an accentual pattern in his later poems. Adelyn Dougherty in her structural analysis, A Study of Rhythmic Structure in the Verse of William Butler Yeats, finds a high degree of metrical regularity in Yeats. Harvey Gross, however, in Sound and Form in Modern Poetry, notes that Yeats in the later poems "pays little attention to syllabic count" and "clearly moves away from syllable-stress to strong-stress metric" (54). Steven Putzel in Reconstructing Yeats agrees with Gross and finds support for Yeats's later use of a strong-stress meter in the poems written in hexameters and included in Yeats's The Wind Among the Weeds. In scanning "The Valley of the Black Pig," Putzel notes that Yeats uses "a spread stress

amhran" (164), and thus has a pattern of four stresses in each line.

In any case, the accentual pattern in "The Wild Swans at Coole" allows Yeats to achieve "passionate, normal speech" in the poem. While using the language of poetry, Yeats has managed to make his language as "direct and natural as spoken words" (Dougherty 9), a characteristic which distinguishes his mature work. Using Yeats as a model, I have been employing a strong-stress meter in some of my more recent poems for two reasons. First, I believe that it provides justification for the length of my lines. Second, and more importantly, I believe that it provides a sense of freedom, because it allows me to use my natural voice, while letting me avoid the language of prose.

"Incinerating the Night," the first poem in which I consciously make use of a strong-stress meter, contains an irregular pattern of three and four stresses per line. The poem opens with four stresses, with emphasis on the words "lift," "ashes," "place" and "them" in the first line. The next line maintains the pattern, but lines three and four each have three stresses. Lines five through ten are regular. Yet, this pattern is

broken in lines eleven, twelve, and thirteen. After returning to the regular four stresses per line in line fourteen, I alter the pattern briefly in line fifteen. Even though line sixteen is regular, I change again to three stresses in line seventeen, but end the poem with four stresses in lines eighteen and nineteen. While only the first three stanzas start with a four-stress pattern, each of the four stanzas ends with a regular pattern. Such regularity, I hope, adds a sense of completion to each stanza. I also hope that the irregularity at the start of stanza four makes the next line more forceful. I want the stress on the word "birth" in line sixteen to add a sense of the speaker's separateness, the sense that even though he deals with the waste of women in labor, he knows only distance and coldness when he encounters the nurses on duty. The speaker is engaging in a kind of phallic activity when he burns trash, but he is impotent in his relations with women.

Similar in theme to "Incinerating the Night," "Serving Time in Wichita" also contains an irregular pattern of strong-stress meter. Opening with three stresses in the first line, the poem switches to four stresses in the second line. Although the next line contains three stresses, the

majority of the poem--nineteen out of twenty-eight lines--is made up of four-stress lines. Each of the five stanzas ends with a strong four-stress line, but only stanza three begins in the same pattern. All of the other stanzas build up to this pattern, the slowest of which is the last stanza, because the regular pattern is delayed until line twenty-six, the fourth line of the stanza. This holding back of the regular pattern is intended to create anticipation and to make the ending that much more forceful. The filth with which the speaker has come into contact elsewhere in the poem is washed away in line twenty-six. Even so, the speaker can only delight in bathing and marijuana, his two sensuous pleasures, and only knows of birth, life, and death vicariously.

One other poem in which I make use of a strong-stress meter is "The Lutheran Rectory: January 2, 1984." Like the two poems discussed above, "The Lutheran Rectory: January 2, 1984" also varies between three and four stresses per line, yet the poem is the most irregular of these three poems, with fourteen lines containing four stresses and nine lines containing three stresses. Similarly, there is no regularity among the stanzas. The last two stanzas, however, both begin

with a four-stress pattern and end with a three-stress pattern. In essence, this languorous pace parallels the postcoital events of the poem. The overall irregularity may be accounted for by the conversational tone and the matter-of-factness in the poem.

* * *

Up to this point, I have been discussing a concern for sound in my poems. Yet, for a poem to have meaning or sense, it must have more than sound. One way in which a poem acquires sense is through figurative language, particularly through metaphor. The most basic definition of a metaphor is a correspondence between two things, one of which is the tenor, the thing itself, while the other is the vehicle, the thing with which the tenor seems to share a similarity. This correspondence may be either implicit or explicit in a poem, because a word may acquire figurative meaning, a metaphor within the poem may suggest a larger correspondence, or the poem may be an extended metaphor. While reflecting the influence of John Milton, D.H. Lawrence, and Robert Frost, my own poems rely heavily on metaphor.

John Milton has made me aware of the figurative value of language. Using words for

their original denotation allows Milton to draw on both their literal and figurative meaning. This skill with language can be illustrated by one particular passage in Paradise Lost. After Satan has regained consciousness in Book I, Milton describes Satan's bulk by comparing him to a sea serpent, beside which an unsuspecting pilot has anchored his ship, believing that he is next to an island. Near the end of the epic simile, Milton gives us the perspective of the pilot by saying, "while Night / Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delays" (PL 1. 207-8). In making use of the original Latin meaning for the word "invests," Milton is saying that the night has literally clothed the sea with darkness. Yet, Christopher Ricks in Milton's Grand Style points out that Milton's Latinate words are used intentionally, because Milton "does not discard the English meaning" (63). Figuratively, then, Milton makes use of the English meaning by saying that the sea has also been furnished with power. The pilot, aware of his mistake, has discovered the power and evil that the sea contains, and while wishing for morning, he must wait out the hours. In referring to Satan, Milton is suggesting that even though Satan may seem alluring, and perhaps even

innocuous, he remains powerful and will destroy everything good once he escapes from the darkness of hell.

Through Milton's influence, I have been employing words for both their literal and figurative meaning in my own poems. One poem which may illustrate this practice is "At a Kansas Farmhouse," whose setting and description of physical love was partly influenced by Paradise Lost. Required by the meter to use a one-syllable word for shadow in line ten, I chose the word "shade" because of its original meaning, even though it is not the most common usage. Literally, in the line "the man crosses the yard with shades at dusk," shadows are spreading over the lawn, just as the man crosses it, while his shadow reaches the woman before he does. Yet, figuratively, the word "shade" applies to the setting, because this isolated and secluded farmhouse is both out of direct light and screened from view. Further, this word foreshadows the approaching thunderstorm, when the cumulonimbus clouds hide the stars and overshadow the earth. With its denotation of a specter or ghost, the word "shade" also foreshadows the woman's out-of-body experience at the end of the poem. The woman,

however, is not a source of terror. She instead is terrified by the thunderstorm until the man comforts her. Using the denotation of to change from one thing into another, the word "shade" also suggests the transformation of physical love into spiritual love. By appearing in the fourth stanza, this word ultimately ties the poem together and connects the first three stanzas with the final three stanzas.

D.H. Lawrence makes use of figurative language to emphasize and to contain present experience in "Gloire de Dijon." While describing a woman bathing before a window, the speaker at the end of the first stanza compares the swaying of her breasts to "full-blown yellow / Gloire de Dijon roses" (lines 9-10). This initial correspondence between the woman and roses is enlarged in the second stanza when the speaker says that her shoulders "crumple up / like wet and falling roses" (lines 12-13). Finally, at the end of the second stanza, the speaker enlarges the tenor even further by saying that the woman's reflection in a window full of sunlight "glows as / mellow as the glory roses" (lines 17-18). The speaker varies the tenor in the correspondence between the woman and roses, as his eyes move from her breasts to her shoulders

and to her reflection. Throughout the poem, the speaker is looking for a correspondence between the woman and roses. Lawrence is essentially emphasizing the woman's sensuality in comparing her to a flower. In finding a correspondence between the woman and nature, and in noticing her "golden shadow" (line 16), Lawrence is also suggesting a correspondence between the woman and divinity, because, for Lawrence, nature and sex is all that we know of God.

"A Model for Renoir," a poem partly influenced by Lawrence's "Gloire de Dijon," also makes use of metaphor to suggest a larger correspondence within the poem. Much like Lawrence's poem, "A Model for Renoir" describes a woman sitting before her dressing table after her bath, while the speaker observes her from within the room. Yet, the speaker in my poem is much more observant of the distance separating him from the woman, because she has wrapped herself "within the scent" of her body. The woman's scent in this metaphor is the vehicle, while her self-absorption is the tenor. Such a correspondence becomes more crucial at the end of the poem, when the woman leaves the speaker alone in the room. As her scent fades, the speaker sees a correspondence between

what little he has of the woman and a dead flower that has "faded from the mirror." Here again, the tenor is implied. Even so, the entire poem becomes a metaphor for the distance between the woman and the speaker. The speaker delights in her body and her sensuality, but he is still reminded of the distance between the two of them and seems to regret this separateness.

"Victor Alert: Post Sixteen" is similar in its use of metaphor. The speaker in the first stanza makes a correspondence between a thunderstorm and aerial bombardment, with the lightning as flares lighting the target and the thunder as bombs exploding on impact. This metaphor returns in the final stanza, when the thunderstorm overhead begins its "barrage." Yet, through its proximity with lines fifteen and sixteen, this correspondence enhances the poem and adds meaning, because what the speaker anticipates is a nuclear holocaust. Each of the three planes he watches over carries a nuclear bomb. As a security policeman, he waits to hear the windows in his gateshack rattle, not so much because of a thunderstorm, but because of the roar of jet engines starting up and taxiing onto the runway. The speaker, however, makes an effort to transform

his environment by smoking hashish, which is a defiant gesture in the poem.

Of the three poets who have influenced my use of metaphor, Robert Frost makes the strongest use of metaphor in his poems. For Frost, poetry "is metaphor" ("Constant Symbol" 24), because it provides a way of speaking indirectly. Frost uses an extended metaphor that spans fourteen lines in "The Silken Tent," an English sonnet. The poem opens with both the tenor and vehicle in the first line, where the speaker compares a woman to a silken tent. This correspondence is then developed over the next thirteen lines. Yet, the poem contains other metaphors which correspond with the woman. After introducing both the tenor and vehicle, the speaker says that the woman is gently secured with the guy wires of either marriage or a relationship in the first quatrain. Even so, the speaker adds that her "central cedar pole" (line 4)--her soul--ensures her inner strength in the second quatrain. While seeming to move freely and independently of her guy wires, the woman is instead "loosely bound" (line 9) by her ties of "love and thought" (line 10), which create an inner harmony and a oneness with nature. Only when one of these ties goes "slightly taut" (line 13), the

speaker adds at the end of the third quatrain, is the woman aware of the ties which love creates. Perhaps only through distance or through her mind's wanderings is the woman made aware of her bondage. Frost's use of metaphor in the poem lets him express his feelings indirectly, and thus provides him with a way of "saying one thing in terms of another" ("Constant Symbol" 24).

Similar to Robert Frost's "The Silken Tent," "An Evening Among Poets" is a metaphor in which I attempt to overcome my feelings of isolation as a young poet. My poem differs, however, in not containing the tenor in this correspondence, although how Josef makes use of his life in his own poem parallels what I have done with my poem. Basing his poem on Van Eyck's "Giovanni Arnolfini and his Bride" allows Josef to show the relationship between art and life. Rather than literally transcribing what he sees, and rather than writing an elegy, Josef instead imaginatively alters the couple posing in Van Eyck's painting and adds his own feelings about his deceased wife and stillborn child. Similarly, I have chosen not to bemoan my sense of isolation and have instead created a community of poets who sit outside a cafe based on Van Gogh's "Outdoor Cafe" and the epigraph

from George Wickes' Americans in Paris. Both Josef and I are able to transcend our feelings in the poem.

One often risks riding an extended metaphor much too far. Another risk in using a metaphor is that one can sometimes create an esoteric metaphor. "How Autumn Colors a World," for example, may fail for these two reasons. The poem describes my feeling of an otherworldness while living in Concordia, because I often imagined that I was living in Europe rather than America. Through metaphor, I hope to show this otherworldness and this commingling of place when one has traveled. Beginning in line seven, I create a correspondence between darkness and rubble and then ride the metaphor further in line ten, when I introduce fire. Yet, the metaphor breaks down because even though there is a clear relationship between rubble and fire, the tenor cannot carry both vehicles. Another problem is that the metaphor is not common to all readers. Probably not many of my readers associate Europe with the destruction that occurred in Germany or Poland during World War II, whether it be the firebombing of Dresden or the destruction of Warsaw. Robert Frost admits in "Education by Poetry" that one must be "at home in the metaphor"

(39) and implies that a certain responsibility rests with the reader. Yet, one must not abuse the metaphor when writing poetry if one seeks to be a careful and responsible craftsman.

Problems Encountered

Finding a subject matter has been the most serious problem encountered in writing the poems for this report. I had to accept my own isolation and alienation before I could write many of the poems that make up Section II. The frustration of not writing at all for three years provided some of the incentive I needed to accept everyday experience as the material for poems. Even so, learning to use everyday experience is not something that I have achieved on my own, because I have had to read a variety of contemporary poets to see how they treat their own experiences. Two poets who have been most influential are Anthony Sobin and Jonathan Holden.

Many of the poems which transform experience in Section II are influenced by Anthony Sobin, whose poems of transformation in The Sunday Naturalist, his first book, imaginatively alter the triggering subject. In "The Winter Sky," for example, the speaker describes the static electricity of a cat's fur when touched. Both the speaker and a woman have returned from a night of drinking and once in bed, the cat demands attention:

the cat tromps across your sleepy frame

wanting to be petted, her cold feet
pressing hollows into your breasts.

You scratch her ears
the sides of her face
and thousands of quiet sparks
begin flowing through her fur. (lines 6-12)

Making an associative leap in the next stanza, the speaker discovers that the cat changes, when "suddenly she is a black meadow in summer / alive with fireflies" (lines 13-14). Because the light from the cat partly illuminates the woman's form, the speaker leaps again and equates the cat with a constellation "low on the horizon" (line 21). As the poem ends, the reader has come to share in the speaker's imaginative transformation of everyday experience.

Similarly, "To Normandy via Jazz" is an urban poem which attempts to recreate the imaginative transformation that I experienced in San Francisco when hearing jazz played by a street musician. The blind musician in the poem is both a gypsy and snake charmer because her saxophone alters the urban environment. Like the music itself, the poem alters reality and attempts to have the reader

share the speaker's associations. For the speaker, this music suggests the coast of France, particularly a coastal village where one drinks coffee on a promenade that overlooks the sea, and where the mournful sounds of a boat's horn resemble mist and fog. Both sounds--the music and the boat's horn--convey associations which I hope the reader can share.

"Sitting Alone, Listening" also contains an imaginative transformation of sound. The poem attempts to order experience by singling out the sounds heard at night. While wanting silence, the speaker must sort through his experience by remembering specific sounds, since only sound will allow him to create meaning. Because all the places where he has lived commingle within his imagination, the speaker risks chaos. Yet, through synaesthesia, the speaker transforms the aural into the visual, as a way in which he controls his imagination. For this reason, the sound of foghorns correspond with the lowing of cows in Kansas, where trains are compared to whales that dive "back into farmland." Still, the poem ends ominously with the image of four diesels "pulling a hundred cars into the ocean," because the speaker may well be overwhelmed by his imaginative act of

listening.

Another poet whose poems have been particularly enlightening is Jonathan Holden. Speaking of Holden's poems in the Foreword to Leverage, W.D. Snodgrass says "Holden offers us the ordinary, the commonplace, the 'redundant,' but with the juice flipped on--brings us the jolt of the diurnal, switched on; the shock of the normal, plugged in" (v). Snodgrass also adds that Holden "connects things so rightly that we glow and illuminate ourselves" (v). What Snodgrass intimates is that we can make sense of our lives through Holden's use of particular experiences by recognizing ourselves in his poems.

One poem in which Jonathan Holden deals with ordinary experience is "Visiting Pre-school." The speaker is one of many fathers who is participating in a father-teacher conference, possibly one that comes at the end of the school year. Divided into two stanzas, the first stanza is set outside on the playground, where the fathers experience the physical restrictions of adulthood:

we fathers, pumping
cautiously, try out the air
against our faces.
Almost too wide for it,

we ease ourselves
bumbling down in stages
by squeezing the railings of the slides.
(lines 4-10)

Unlike children, who are accustomed to the air and know no restraints when playing, these fathers are removed from childhood experiences and are bound by their maturity. Moving inside the classroom, the second stanza again shows us the difference between childhood and adulthood. "Bunched in toy chairs" (line 12), these fathers accept the pain of sitting upright, even though their "spines ache" (line 20). Like the stoicism that is characteristic of adulthood, these fathers are also separated from their children in their awareness of the teachers' sexuality, particularly in how "the young teachers stand / over us, breasts / almost within reach" (lines 23-25). The speaker's awareness of adult sexuality appears earlier in this stanza, however, when he says "It's May / the parched tongues of the magnolia / going up in flame outside" (lines 16-18). Spring itself is a time of fertility in nature, yet the magnolia also takes on sexual connotations by seeming to be engorged with blood

and rising like a phallus. Ultimately, the speaker comes to realize the formality of education and how they are entrusting their children to this system. Through the poem, the reader re-discovers the differences between children and adults and becomes aware of how children are placed within a world that lacks spontaneity. The reader also comes to recognize that we adults have lost the spontaneity so characteristic of children.

The subtlety of "Visiting Pre-school" and the use of everyday experience is something that I admire. My more recent poems are similar in a variety of ways. Both "Incinerating the Night" and "Serving Time in Wichita," for example, deal with my employment at St. Joseph's Hospital and Wesley Medical Center in Wichita in 1974 and 1975, respectively. "Incinerating the Night" focuses on the experience of burning trash and opens with the routine of the job when I first started my shift. Besides describing the job itself, the poem has an underlying theme of sexual frustration. This idea first appears in the aimless phallic activity of stanzas two and three. Yet, the underlying theme is strengthened in stanza four, because there is a barrier between the women in the poem and the speaker. The job itself makes one a pariah and

because of the job, there is little chance of the speaker breaking out of his isolation. All the speaker can expect, then, is his vicarious knowledge of birth through the burning of afterbirth, since he cannot know the act of sexual intercourse while remaining a pariah.

"Serving Time in Wichita" is related in theme to "Incinerating the Night." The poem describes my experience as a linen sorter. Like "Incinerating the Night," the poem opens with a description of the job. The speaker deals with the remnants of birth and death and only knows them vicariously through sorting the linen soiled with the blood of birth and the feces of death, when one loses control of one's body. The speaker's sense of isolation in the poem is projected through its setting, because that which is least pleasant about a hospital is separated from what both visitors and patients see. The speaker's sense of alienation is also projected through the setting. The speaker is separated from more lucrative and more prestigious forms of employment and is reduced to pocketing the money doctors leave behind in their surgical scrubs. Even though the speaker initially delights in his time away from work, he must seek solace in the use of marijuana and only dream about knowing

life through the woman who never comes to his door. Not only isolated by the job itself, the speaker is also isolated by his drug use and his poverty--something which is hinted at by his lack of mobility. Because the speaker is separated from life, he must serve his time, and imprisoned by the cycle of poverty and drug use, he can only dream about release.

One poem in which I deal more directly with my experience is "The Lutheran Rectory: January 2, 1984." The poem also differs from the poems discussed earlier by being both straightforward and accessible to any sophisticated reader. What the poem describes is an adulterous affair, particularly the time during which the relationship is consummated. While seemingly confessional, the poem is not totally artless. The placement of the second person pronoun is intentional, because I hope to show how the woman manipulates the relationship for her own aims. The woman also controls the action of the poem and becomes the aggressor in this reversal of traditional roles. It is, then, quite apt that the speaker leaves the woman outside a school, as the speaker seems to have only recently acquired amorous experience, or at least the experience of an adulterous liaison.

There is also a sense of suspense present until the final line, when the reader suddenly discovers that the woman in the poem is married and is now returning to her husband.

Because I have completed my apprenticeship to craft, I am now able to draw on my experiences as a subject for poems. My life has been a jumble of numerous sensory impressions, feelings, and experiences. My only recourse is to attempt to make life meaningful by ordering these things, in an effort to achieve what Robert Frost in "The Figure a Poem Makes" calls "a momentary stay against confusion" (18). What the poem provides is a vehicle through which I can manipulate my material, letting the imagination find connections which otherwise would not have been possible. Even though I must now write out of particular experiences, I hope that my reader can find pleasure and meaning in even my most personal poems.

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SITTING ALONE, LISTENING

by

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ABSTRACT

Sitting Alone. Listening is a collection of lyric poems which arise out of personal alienation, with their themes including such subjects as homelessness, loneliness, separateness, and sexual frustration. Section I contains poems which metaphorically transcend this alienation, while Section II is made up of poems which imaginatively alter everyday experiences and poems which impose order and meaning onto everyday experience.

The Critical Apparatus opens with a brief description of my personal alienation as a preface to the discussion of the poetry. Then the Critical Apparatus examines an attention to sound in the poetry and how my efforts to invoke a musical analogue were initially influenced by contemporary jazz. This examination pinpoints the influence made upon the poetry by the literary tradition, particularly through W.B. Yeats's use of strong-stress meter. Attention is then given to how I attempt to create meaning or sense in the poetry through metaphor, with a look at the influence of John Milton, D.H. Lawrence, and Robert Frost. After this discussion of sound and sense, I look at the problem of subject matter and discuss how I have come to use everyday experience in the poetry.