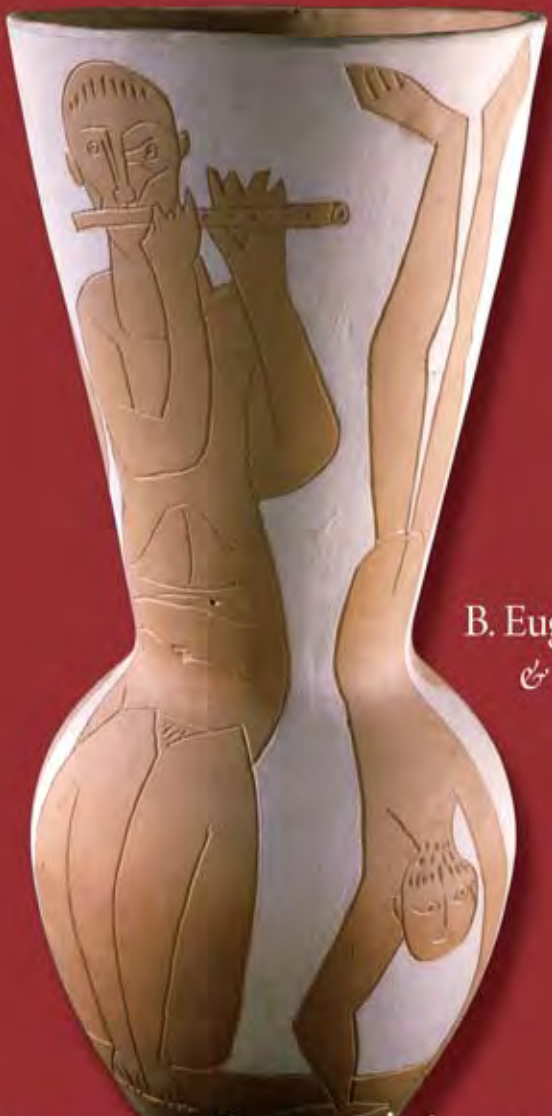
SOUND IDEAS



B. Eugene McCarthy
& Fran Quinn

Hearing and Speaking Poetry

Poetry weds the body to the soul, and *Sound Ideas* is a superb introduction to the manifold ways in which poets touch us to the core of our being. The neglected art of poetry, its forms and physicality, is the occasion for a journey into the musical heart of verse: the dance that makes the world go round. Professors McCarthy and Quinn, a scholar and a poet, respectively, draw on decades of experience in the classroom to explain how a line works, the function of meter and rhyme, the value of metaphor, and a host of other matters, in an engaging style. This should be required reading for anyone interested in poetry, particularly for those who hope to make poems themselves. A brilliant book.

—**CHRISTOPHER MERRILL**, POET, DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL WRITING PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

T. S. Eliot once said that a poem tends to "realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and image." *Sound Ideas* by Gene McCarthy and Fran Quinn suggests that if Eliot is right, then perhaps the usual methods of reading the poem on the page are not enough. As the wonderful pun in the title of their book suggests, ideas are only sound (reliable) when they are embodied in the sounds (music) words make. The study of poems, then, needs to include what this book so aptly provides: instruction in speaking and listening to words since the "sound of a word itself expresses meaning and emotion." While the opening chapters guide the reader (and teacher) through the methodology of reading by speaking—how the use of the line effects meaning and emotion; how a poem's matrix of vowels and consonants embody the poem's meaning; how rhythm is always the motion of the poem's emotional life—the latter chapters work through the more usual aspects of poetry (meter, image, metaphor, form). But throughout, the unique appeal of this book is its emphasis on how to speak and hear the poem. In the end, speaking and learning how to "hear" the poem brings the reader closer and closer to the poem's "sound ideas," that mysterious and startling moment when tongue, ear, and brain are all sounding together.

—**ROBERT CORDING**, POET, BARRETT CHAIR OF CREATIVE WRITING AT THE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

With its sophisticated readings conveyed in plain English and clearly organized into distinct chapters that parse the traditional fundamentals, *Sound Ideas* is full of experience, wisdom, common sense, and, most importantly, enthusiasm for literature. It is the fruit of years spent with poems and students in the classroom. Teachers and professors will find it of use in both literature and creative writing courses, as it contains enough well-chosen works to constitute something of an anthology, with examples ranging from Milton to Boland, from Tranströmer to Etheridge Knight. Students and general readers will find it bracing and refreshing, simultaneously instructive and delightful as well as a guide to wide and varied good taste.

—**ANTHONY E. WALTON**, POET, PROFESSOR AND WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE AT BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Continued next page . . .

Each chapter delves into a key property of language, demystifying and decoding its nuanced claims to literary power. In its combination of formal control and sensual contact, *Sound Ideas* offers poets and lovers of poetry a uniquely useful guide with which to explore the dark, silent cave of human life and the ways that each word can be a kind of sound-flare, a momentary illumination of what's permanently etched in the walls of songs that float ever-just-beyond our hearing.

—**ED PAVLIC**, SHEILE BIDDLE FORD FOUNDATION FELLOW,
W. E. B. DU BOIS INSTITUTE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Sound Ideas appeals to me as a reader, as a poet, as a teacher of poetry, and as a teacher of the writing of poetry. There have been many books about poetry and the craft of poetry in the last ten years, but *Sound Ideas* stands above the others—for sheer insight and joy in its subject—in a way that compares only to Kenneth Koch's *Making Your Own Days*. Yet the subject matter of *Sound Ideas* is unique—and it is all the more praiseworthy that it focuses on what is so often neglected in the study of poetry: the life of the poem in its spoken and heard form. It seems amazing that such a book as this should even be necessary, for what is more fundamental to poetry as it has been understood for millennia than its spoken nature? And yet, today, when poems are taught as "texts" rather than poems, when poets will often read their own poems badly, when performance poetry and hip-hop have stepped in to fill the gap of our craving for the dynamic orality of verse, the need for this book is mighty and acute.

Professors McCarthy and Quinn have written a book that is readily accessible yet sophisticated—which is exactly what the sound texture of poetry is. The book is organized in familiar categories—Line, Imagery, and so on—yet each topic is presented in a fresh way, with incisive attention that merges with devotion. Elements such as pitch and tempo—vital aspects of the poem that traditional metrics are not prepared to handle—are brought to light and discussed with clarity. Furthermore, the discussions are not merely descriptive but functional and performative: poetic techniques are studied for what they *do* in a poem. The excellent chapter on Rhyme, for example, shows how rhyme's gravitational pull on our attention interacts with the complementary pull of syntax. So too, the various techniques discussed, both prosodic and rhetorical, are also brought into relation to each other, most helpfully when a certain poem or passage is illuminated in different chapters. The emphasis, ultimately, is on the whole poem, as the final chapter on Memory makes clear.

Examples of poems are well-chosen from a wide range of centuries and cultures; a person newly approaching poetry will come away with a diverse menu of poems intimately understood, and the skills to explore further. For me, *Sound Ideas* aces the final test of a poetry handbook: it makes me excited about poetry all over again.

—**WILLIAM WENTHE**, POET, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

SOUND IDEAS

Hearing and Speaking Poetry

B. Eugene McCarthy
& Fran Quinn

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Will you come with me?

—Fran Quinn

Introduction

Poetry—Listening and Speaking

Reading a poem on a page is a different process from listening to it, and speaking that poem is yet another kind of process. Reading engages the eyes and mind. Listening requires mind and ears and often sight, as we watch the speaker. When we pick up the poem to read it aloud, our eyes see the words, and our voices and bodies also become active, and the poem begins to take on further and further dimensions beyond its state on the page.

Our intent with this book is to show ways that we can move a poem off the page, which is where we usually address a poem, and *listen* to it, *speak* it. The rationale is our belief that reading a poem for its intellectual content alone leaves much of the poem still untouched, undiscovered. Western poetry originated in orality, but has moved away from it.

Ordinarily when we read a poem quietly to ourselves we seek the intellectual meaning, and such too appears to be the practice when we either attend a class or teach a class on poetry. We two authors have, on the other hand, been exploring ways of teaching poetry with attention to reading and listening to the entire poem, as well as to memorizing and presenting poems, and we have become convinced that such an approach does greater justice to readers and to poems.

In a letter to Sylvia Plath, poet Ted Hughes neatly describes what we have in mind:

> Tonight I read Yeats aloud for about an hour, and I shall do this. An hour in the morning and an hour at night. Up to the inventing of Caxton's press, and for most people long after that, all reading was done aloud. . . . Eliot says that the best thing a

> poet can do is read aloud poetry as much as he can. . . . Silent reading only employs the parts of the brain which are used in vision. Not all the brain. This means a silent reader's literary sense becomes detached from the motor parts and the audio parts of the brain which are used in reading aloud—tongue and ear. This means that only one third of the mental components are present in their writing or in their understanding of reading—one third of the emotional charge. [1]

My own experience amplified this conviction that reading the page is not enough. After teaching John Milton's *Paradise Lost* for some twenty-five years, I had the opportunity to join a group that presents live dramatized readings of the books. Each of us felt we knew Milton quite well, but each of us registered amazement at how much the books changed as we began the process of preparing to speak the poem, and how much we were changed when hearing others of the ensemble speak their passages. Even Adam, whom I had thought I disliked, in Book IX, became a far richer, even sympathetic, character when dramatized, for we heard all his words being articulated with clarity, with emphasis and emotion. At least as important as attending to the drama of the poem, we all realized that the poetry itself became far more alive and richly meaningful. We simply heard a great deal more at all levels. Not that I would give up the classroom study of Milton, but now I know there is something more. The profound change we experienced in the move from page to voice is like that one encounters when first reading a play, and then acting in it, discovering on the stage the characters' tensions and complexities, the enjoyment of the whole work.

If we take up the assumption that we can and should read poems aloud and listen to them being read, questions come to mind: How do we listen to poems? How do we speak poems? Are there good ways and bad ways—even right ways and wrong ways—to read a poem, say, Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," or Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," or a favorite Shakespeare sonnet like "That time of year"? In brief, what is it that we intend this book to add to what most texts and books about reading poetry offer by way of direction or advice in reading?

What *happens* when we listen to poems, speak them aloud, and let them into our bodies? How much deeper can we move into poems; how much more can we hear through this openness? Responses to such questions

will include our assumptions about poetry and literature and art, why it matters, how much we can know of the art of poetry, how we gain meaning and increased value from reading poetry aloud.

With chapter one we make our entrance directly into poems: we start with line. A poem is made up of lines. It is thus different, and looks different on the page, from prose, which is made up of sentences and which is read by moving through the sentences and paragraphs. Our first principle about poems is to respect the integrity of the line. A poem then is not merely "broken-up prose" as some have called it. If we do respect the line as written, we realize that each line ends even though the sentence may not. A line can be a complete sentence ("Whose woods these are I think I know."); it can be a complete clause or phrase with a natural pause at the end ("He will not see me stopping here / To watch his woods fill up with snow."), or a break within a word group, as if Frost had written: "He will not see me / Stopping here to watch . . ." The line creates meaning and emphasis—and more.

Respecting the integrity of the line means we accept that the poet has written these lines in a particular form for a purpose. Speaking lines requires we make some acknowledgment of that break, usually by a kind of pause or by emphasis. Illustrating how one does this is the work of the chapter. We therefore take into account the way the lines move and what sort of expression the lines create. In this way, speaking the words directly assists our understanding of a poem. Stanzas, lines set off in groups, also create certain effects, sometimes developments, sometimes quick reversals, sometimes something else, as the poem moves toward its conclusion. In any case we hear the divisions of a poem into stanzas as expansions or alterations in meaning and feeling.

Our book moves forward step by step in the process of learning how to listen to and speak poems. One consequence of learning to hear lines is that we hear words in a fresh way; we hear their *sounds* and how their sounds contribute and change in conjunction with other sounds (chapter two). All words have sound, not only those words that imitate sound, like a "tinkling bell," for even in our everyday speech we choose words whose sound is part of our expression: "Quiet Please" means something different from "Silence!" or from "Shut Up." If sounds create meaning, we need to know how sounds do so and how they change.

We speak the lines of a poem so that our voice conveys both the

distinctness of each line and the forward movement of lines, sentences, stanzas—a complete poem. Then the sounds of these words reveal the meaning and the emotion of the poem. While we may be uncertain how to discuss emotion in poems, we can, in fact, talk about emotion in ways that are concrete, not merely subjective. Our own emotions are often specific: a certain kind of anger, a distinct memory of a rocking chair. What we learn about the elements of poetry instructs us in the kinds of emotion we hear—and hearing is a physical response, not purely intellectual.

Reading, hearing, speaking lines of a poem with attention to the line and sound bring us to the question of how we realize vocally (i.e., learn to perform) the rhythm of a poem. As lines move down through stanzas and the whole poem, we feel the movement of emphasis, just as in natural speech our voices rise and fall, speed up and slow, emphasize and diminish words. Such a movement is rhythm (chapter three), emotion becoming motion. Of course, rhythm has a number of components, the relative speed, for example, of speaking lines, which we call tempo. These elements—the chapter's subheads treat tempo, pitch, and pause—are distinct elements of rhythm that are essential to our understanding if we are to listen well to poems, and if we are to speak poems so that our auditors grasp the meanings. Meter, a patterned system of accents, has its own chapter (four), for it is not identical to rhythm.

When we speak of traditional poetic terms—such as rhythm and meter, and later metaphor, symbolism, and the like (all the elements of verse which are called 'prosody')—we discuss them in relation to listening and speaking, but in addition, we wish to take them to a new level of understanding. For example, concerning meter, which marks each accented syllable equally, we want to raise the question of how we find and accent the main words in a line, and how each accent may vary in intensity through a line and the poem (an issue relevant to traditional and to free verse). We enlarge the scope of examining meter (what marking metrical patterns does and does not do) because determining the words we emphasize matters a great deal when we speak a poem. Frost's "Stopping by Woods" is a metrically regular poem, that is, the word accents fall evenly on each second syllable—"whose *woods* these *are* I *think* I *know*." But we do not stress each accented word equally. Which words do we stress more, and which less? How do we know for sure?

As we attend to these issues of tempo or pitch, we may realize there should be, at times, pauses or, more importantly, silences in verse, just

as there are silences in our speech (chapter three, subhead "pause"). For silence means the words stop but meaning extends onward, as may happen at the end of a particularly memorable song. A page does not record silence. Our voices and bodies do.

In short, the poetic topics we address are selected not only because they are customary. We address them because they are essential to hearing and speaking poems.

Subjects like those mentioned above, such as imagery (chapter five), come under our purview because they matter to poetry. One could say, "Well, I do not *hear* any metaphor!" True: our ears are more apt to hear word sounds and rhythms. But in a real sense we do hear figurative language—like imagery, metaphor, simile—because we listen in the movement of lines to both what is being expressed and how. Figurative language conveys that *what* and *how*. While we do not separately discuss imagination, it is in many ways the root of poetry and the origin of imagery, metaphor, and simile. Imagination is sometimes seen as irregular or dangerous, but it is very much part of our daily life as a way of making sense of our world, seeing similarities, comparisons, distinctions.

In chapter nine we address the topics of allegory and symbol, neither of which we exactly hear, yet we do, of course. To state the obvious: the more we hear, the more we hear. And the better we say, the more we say. We as readers need to be conscious of the development of, for instance, an allegorical story, so that we can speak it with understanding. One feature about reading aloud is that if we read without comprehension, only getting through the words, it will be immediately obvious to any listener that we are lost. Our voices are remarkable indicators of our comprehension and mastery of a poem.

The form of a poem is often thought to be the poem's external shape or pattern visible on the page. Form can also mean the internal rationale for a poem's movement. Every poem has some kind of external form, which may be invented by the poet, and each has an internal form. A sonnet has a relatively set external form, fourteen lines of a certain length, and an arrangement of rhymes. Other external forms also have relatively set forms of lines, stanzas, rhymes, such as the sestina or villanelle. Each set form, while visible externally on a page, has its own reason for being, has its distinct internal logic and emotional shape. Each makes a certain kind of statement, suited to a certain kind of emotion. That is, one writes a villanelle because one

needs a villanelle; one's particular emotion wants the form of villanelle. Awareness of such forms is an important initial position to take in reading a poem because that understanding will assist our hearing and speaking. Chapter seven takes up a sampling of external forms and explores what is meant by the internal form of each, the internal rationale (sometimes called organic form) by which the meaning or emotion moves.

If these set forms have set rhyme schemes, we need to think about rhyme: chapter eight. When we talk of rhyme schemes, it is not enough, as we said, to identify the pattern, we must also look into what that pattern is doing throughout the poem. For instance, how does an AABB rhyme differ in effect from an ABAB? The amount of time we wait for the rhyme has impact upon the meaning.

The terms mentioned above are mostly traditional ones, perhaps ones we have heard before in classrooms. But while traditional and necessary for our use, they may also present the hazard of seeming too commonplace and thus to have little value. We neither wish to eliminate these terms nor let them restrict our understanding as we press deeper into poems. As was said, we wish to take poetic terms to greater levels of understanding, to expand our comprehension of the capacities of each. We also found that there is a serious need for new terminology to describe those aspects of poetry which have not received sufficient attention. In 1986, Denise Levertov pointed out, "All discussion of contemporary poetics is vitiated by the lack of a more precise terminology."[2]

The terms we introduce, such as tempo and pitch, are drawn from ordinary speech, as we strive to avoid esoteric vocabulary. The terms arise from close observation and description of what is happening in both traditional and contemporary verse forms. Our purpose in this effort is to enable readers on their own to hear and describe what they perceive to be happening in poems, borrowing to the degree needed from prescribed terminology and from our own expanded vocabulary.

Finally, we have learned that one of the most effective ways of drawing a poem into our minds and bodies is to memorize it (chapter ten). Memory directly engages reading, hearing, speaking. That is, we read, we practice hearing the poem, we practice speaking it until its rhythms, its phrasings, with its changing tempos and pauses, sound as near to the voice of the speaker as we can approximate, and the poem becomes part of our consciousness: it speaks to us physically and emotionally so that we hold

in ourselves its complete intellectual and emotional meaning. With Ted Hughes, we urge reading poems aloud. In memorizing a poem, we solve as many problems in the poem as we can so we can speak it like effective natural speech. We place it in our mental bank, we speak it out vocally in the voice of the poet or poem's speaker, and our physical bodies then contain the poem in a singular manner.

Throughout, the center of our search has been the question, "How does this approach help us to understand poetry?" The impulse for our work in teaching and in writing this book has been driven by what we learned to be students' needs—and our own needs—rather than by critical-theoretical strategies. That we have taught all the poems we include here allowed us to discover many of their prosodic pleasures. Listening to a student recite a memorized poem has invariably been an illuminating experience, for whenever mistakes were made, we along with the student were obliged to solve our problems with the poem, as we both trained our ears.

The poems here were not necessarily selected as the best "examples" of simile, for instance, or iambic meter, or sound. Mostly they are poems that we like and we feel are important. With no attempt to be anthology-inclusive, we follow here a practice used in class and workshop: be eclectic; include canonical poems in order to hear them afresh; add little-known traditional and contemporary poems to challenge teacher and student.

We have discovered that our way of approaching poems is basic both for readers already knowledgeable about poetry and for readers contemplating a first venture through the door. While nothing here is difficult, we will not tag the book with a cliché like "user-friendly." We ask for an effort, because we believe that poems deserve our attention and richly reward it, making us attentive and receptive humans. With this *vade mecum* in hand, wherever we go in poetry the principles espoused here will continue to be valid, will assist us in hearing more in each poem than we may have expected, will direct us in further reading, study, and enjoyment—writing, too, for that matter. Our work on poetry has been most exciting and fruitful when in the company of an audience—each other, twenty-five undergraduates, or . . . you.

The two of us who made this book are both teachers, most of our years at college and university level, and some at high school. One of us is a poet, the other a scholar (these terms are descriptive, not claims of authority). Though this book was not co-written in the sense that each of us authored

half, it has been conceptually, and actually, a joint project from the beginning of our work together. The idea of reading poetry in the ways we discuss here grew from a series of team-taught, first-year college poetry courses, from teaching poetry at various collegiate levels on our own, from teaching poetry workshops, and from literally endless discussions and arguments, drinking coffee in diners, sitting in offices, and talking on the phone. Our understanding has been enhanced by the experience of Quinn's poetry workshops in New York, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Boston. In the midst of New England winters, our discussions were a guaranteed source of friction and heat, and finally light.

1. Ted Hughes, *Letters of Ted Hughes*, Selected and Edited by Christopher Reid. New York: Farrar and Giroux, 1956, 50.
2. Denise Levertov, "On the Need for New Terms," *New & Selected Essays*, New York: New Direction Books, 1992, 74.

SOUND IDEAS

Chapter One

Line

When we see poems on a page, they normally appear in the form of lines. A line of verse may be made up of a complete sentence, or it can be part of a sentence, a clause, a phrase, or a part of a word group, for example, a preposition separated from its object. Poems are written in lines because lines can be used for a wide variety of effects, so we begin the process of listening to and speaking poems by examining what these effects are, what line does.

At the very least, breaking a sentence into lines is a way to achieve emphasis. In order to make a point in ordinary speech we might say, "I wish you would not do that!" Our tone of voice and gestures ensure emphasis on the right words. But on the page the words do not show emphasis. In verse we use line to create expression. If we were to write,

> I wish you would not
> do that!

stress falls on "do" because the space, break, or pause after "would not" sets up emphasis on "do that." If we change the line, we change the emphasis.

We begin with line because it is an essential element of verse, and the way we hear and say the line shapes meaning. The line is a unit in itself, whether or not it is a complete sentence. We read the line with attention, and at its end we pause to some degree even when the syntax runs to the next line. Our principle is: *respect the integrity of the line as written*.

Because the word *verse* meant originally a *turn* (as in *reverse*) at the

end of a line, there is an expectation of a turning, a going back, as well as a continuation to the next line, the turn often marked by a kind of pause. The idea of *verse* as *turn* has been at times imaged as the movement of a dancer, stepping across the stage or platform, then pausing before returning. We are aware that in staged Greek verse, the movement and pause of dancers coincided with those of the line.[1] The term *verse* can also suggest the action of a plowman, advancing across a field, then turning at the end of a furrow to head back. Whatever its early senses, verse continues to mean a turn, thus a pausing to denote that feel of turning, continuing to something more. So line suggests a physical movement forward. When speaking verse we acknowledge the turning at the end of the line with a vocal mark, a pause, an emphasis. How that turn can be recognized and vocalized is our concern here.

The first poem we discuss could well stand as the title of this chapter, for it is about hearing the movement of line. Here is Robert Francis's "The Sound I Listened For":

> What I remember is the ebb and flow of sound
> That summer morning as the mower came and went
> And came again, crescendo and diminuendo,
> And always when the sound was loudest how it ceased
> A moment while he backed the horses for the turn,
> The rapid clatter giving place to the slow click
> And the mower's voice. That was the sound I listened for.
> The voice did what the horses did. It shared the action
> As sympathetic magic does or incantation.
> The voice hauled and the horses hauled. The strength of one
> Was in the other and in the strength was no impatience.
> Over and over as the mower made his rounds
> I heard his voice and only once or twice he backed
> And turned and went ahead and spoke no word at all.

The first line, which draws attention to "the ebb and flow of sound," would seem to be a complete sentence, so we are inclined to pause before turning to learn when the sound took place. But the sentence continues to move (for six and a half lines) so we need to pause but not break the movement of the sentence. While Francis's lines lead us forward, each line end has a distinct and different break. In line two "as the mower came and

went / And came again," our slight pause at "and went" slows the mower's action before the change and return, "And came again." The pause at the end of line four is different again because it breaks the verb from adverb: "how it ceased / A moment while he backed . . ." If we do not "cease," we do not hear the moment of cessation, an important dramatizing of the mower's movement.

As Francis's poem comes off the page, we hear how he uses line to shape action and meaning, and we hear the speaker's attention to the action. By means of line (and other verse elements we will come to later), Francis unifies the man and the action, the strength and command of voice with the response of the horses. The sound of the mower's voice is harmonized with the sound of the mechanism, just as my listener's attention is to the man, voice, action, and turn. If "The strength of one / Was in the other and in the strength was no impatience," we understand that the plowman's voice was not contrived but natural, coherent with his horses and his work: "it ceased / A moment." Even at "he backed / And turned and went ahead . . ." there is a physical pause during which he "spoke no word at all." We not only pause at line break, we pause *differently* at each, depending on the way the line prepares us for the next line.

While lines can be of similar length (Francis's are twelve syllables each) or irregular, line breaks occur in order to create voice expression. Take an example: "I don't care what you want." What the sentence means is clear on the page. But the precise vocal emphasis, tone, and emotion remain indefinite. Introducing a line break isolates a word to throw emphasis on it. We can compare these variations:

> I don't care what
> you want.
>
> I don't care what you
> want.
>
> I don't care
> what you want.

Each has the same informational meaning—but very different emotional meaning. Each line break changes the pause and emphasis, and thus makes possible this flexible emphasis in verse—and of course creates a good deal more, such as rhythm.

A line break, then, is an interruption in the movement of the speaker's voice; the voice hesitates, but it also goes on. As we say "I don't care what," the energy of the voice does not drop but holds at "what" and prepares for the next line: "you want." The interruption anticipates what is to come. Silence—a distinct break—can also be articulate. Consider what unmistakable meaning is conveyed in these contrary line-break silences:

> I want to be with you
> forever
>
> I do not want to see you
> ever

If we notice that, in these examples, the voice does not respond the way it did in "I don't care what / you want," or in the earlier "I wish you would not / do that!" we already see there can be no dogmatic rule on line break and pause; more needs to be explored as we go along.

We say that poetry is the art of the line. Prose, on the other hand, is the art of the sentence. While neither definition is absolute—there are prose poems—both point to essential distinctions. The rhythm of verse is not unnatural. In fact, our speech is often closer to verse rhythms than to prose statements. That is, our speech is based on rhythms of phrasing, emphasizing, pausing, quickening and slowing, in tempos that are characteristic of the line breaks of verse. (That is not to say, of course, that the language of verse is the same as everyday speech, for verse is careful in selection, placement, and phrasing of words.) As critic Northrop Frye put it, "The language of ordinary speech . . . has a loose associative rhythm quite different from actual prose."[2] That is, the "rhythm of prose is continuous" through to the end of the sentence, whereas verse has recurrent rhythms[3] that usually correspond to the line. Prose has phrasing, of course, and varied tempo, and emphasis, but prose follows syntactic patterns of simple, compound, and complex forms, and its formality has its own distinct elongated rhythms.

Traditional and Contemporary Uses of Line

Taking a cue from the opening stanza of "Preface" by Czeslaw Milosz, in *A Treatise on Poetry*:

> First, plain speech in the mother tongue.
> Hearing it, you should be able to see

Apple trees, a river, the bend of a road,
As if in a flash of summer lightning.

We may recognize in contemporary verse the phrasing and turns of ordinary speech. Because in older traditional English verse the diction and sometimes the more complex syntax are less familiar to us—sometimes quite foreign to our ears—the expressive phrasing and pauses of, say, seventeenth-century English verse may not appear to be based on natural speech patterns. Pronouncing the words helps us overcome what may seem at times peculiar spellings. We will first discuss line use in a traditional poem to observe how the speaker's voice approximates natural speech patterns in the movement of line and line break.

In George Herbert's "Love," a remarkable conjunction of spirit and body, the lines alternate length:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eye'd Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

"A guest," I answer'd, "worthy to be here."
Love said, "You shall be he."
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee."
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marr'd them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve."
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
"My dear, then I will serve."
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
So I did sit and eat.

The first line slows at "drew back" and the second ends with a period, as if the soul has little to say. But the response of "quick-eyed Love" accelerates the lines and sweeps ahead to contrast with the speaker's reluctance or failure—he falls "slack" at "entrance in," as if with sexual incapacity ("lack"

echoes "slack"). While no punctuation slows us after "slack," that rhymed word surprises us as we turn to expect clarification of this slackening. The line break after "questioning" anticipates Love's sweet voice. At the end of lines 1, 3, 4, and 5 we know each sentence continues, yet the *nature* of that continuation is distinct to each line. We see/hear/feel the difference each line break makes. The turn-pause following "back" is different from that after "slack," not just on account of the comma.

Pause at line end has both *duration* and *quality*: the *length* of the pause, and the *kind* of pause indicated. The dialogue in Herbert's second and third stanzas further adds to the naturalness of speech, for each character speaks in a voice appropriate to each. To sum up our observations on line: we listen to the movement of the line; the nature or kind of its turn; the duration and quality of the pause; the nature of enjambment; and the way the turn controls and varies line speed.

A poem by William Carlos Williams in the twentieth century may seem eons distant from Herbert's from the seventeenth. Yet if our principles stand, line will have an equally crucial effect.

To a Poor Old Woman

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

Comforted
a solace of ripe plums
seeming to fill the air
They taste good to her

The relation between sentence and line is especially marked here, for

Williams exploits that tension to create a remarkable variety of emphases, in a sensory celebration of a ragged old person. He does it in American speech patterns, the way Americans speak and phrase an experience. If we listen to the way the lines move and what emphases they make (there is minimal punctuation), we recognize not only specific details but how and why Williams brings such meticulous attention to each detail: street, bag, hand, taste. In other words, his lines lead us to experience not only *what* he says but *how* he says it, how he arranges lines to create vocal expression of her experience. Each rephrasing of "taste good to her" rings new emphasis, such as that wonderful "good" that begins line seven. The next line, "You can see it by," holds back detail so that the end-pause or turn throws an almost physical weight on "the way" (not on "gives") just as does "one half / sucked." The summing line—now enriched with multiple personal and sensory details—says it straight out: "They taste good to her."

Lines in contemporary verse are more likely than in traditional to vary in length in order to explore a range of expressive emphases and rhythms. In the opening lines of "St. Francis and the Sow," Galway Kinnell expands quickly from two to twelve syllables:

> The bud
> stands for all things,
> even those things that don't flower,
> for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
> though sometimes it is necessary
> to reteach a thing its loveliness,
> to put a hand on its brow
> of the flower
> and retell it in words and in touch
> it is lovely
> until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
> as St. Francis
> put his hand on the creased forehead
> of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
> blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
> began remembering all down her thick length,
> from the earthen snout all the way
> through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
> from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine

down through the great broken heart
to the blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and
blowing beneath them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow.

After identifying "bud," Kinnell follows with the argument: "stands for all things." Two long lines reiterate "everything" and repeat "flower" and, with the delicate "from within," run on to the triumphant "self-blessing." Lines 2 and 3 seem able to stand alone—but the next line adds a fresh dimension. The long second-last line (19 syllables) mimics the breathless sucking of the piglets.

The Effects of Line Use

To pursue the variety of ways that line creates meaning in verse, we will return to another poem of George Herbert, a master of line and stanza forms:

The Church-floor

Mark you the floor? that square and speckled stone
Which looks so firm and strong,
Is *Patience:*
And th'other black and grave, wherewith each one
Is checker'd all along,
Humility:
The gentle rising, which on either hand,
Leads to the Choir above,
Is *Confidence:*
But the sweet cement, which in one sure band
Ties the whole frame, is *Love*
And *Charity.*

Hither sometimes Sin steals, and stains
The marble's neat and curious veins:
But all is cleansed when the marble weeps.
Sometimes Death, puffing at the door,
Blows all the dust about the floor:
But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps.
Blest be the *Architect*, whose art
Could build so strong in a weak heart.

Since we see on the page that the lines in the first four stanzas vary in length (10 to 6 to 4 syllables), we might ask what difference this makes in hearing and speaking these stanzas. Each 10 syllable line has mid-line punctuation, yet each set of lines moves differently and depends for emphasis upon the line-break pause. Each three-line group stresses important words: "stone," "firm and strong" lead to its virtue: "Is *Patience.*" So too "each one / Is checkered" moves toward "*Humility*," as "hand, / Leads" move to the most important virtue, "band / Ties the whole frame, is *Love* / And *Charity.*"

The second group or stanza intensifies the meditation on God's response to Sin and Death. The two 8-syllable lines on Sin and Death are counteracted by the 10-syllable line. The final pair affirms the power of God-the-architect. With a variety of quite natural sounding pauses and stresses on main words, these lines shape our phrasing and word emphasis to bring forth meaning and emotion.

Herbert illustrates how he, and any poet, enjoys the freedom to arrange lines and manipulate his forms even with lines of set length. Can a poet be as free and versatile with a fixed form, like the sonnet with its fourteen ten-syllable lines with set rhyme scheme? Here is Shakespeare's Sonnet 129:

> Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action, and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
> Enjoy'd no sooner but despiséd straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
> Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
> A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,
> Before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream.
>
> All this the world well knows yet none knows well
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

The movement of the opening line leads us to anticipate, with a slight pause, the verb and complement (which come down hard): "Is lust." Repeating "lust" at line-end prepares by pause and emphasis for the devastating list of nine adjectives: "Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody . . ." Word

placements to end and begin lines (as well as word repetitions) are particularly dramatic in this sonnet. Throughout, in the pauses, silences, harshness, we hear the changes of emotional tension. The first quatrain ends with a period, as the second does with a colon. (Shakespeare's sonnets have three quatrains and a couplet; the first eight lines, or octet, usually set the problem, the six, or sestet, solve it or the couplet alone does.) The third quatrain's rhyme words (so–woe, extreme–dream) expose the continued extremity of passion, and the lines too are disrupted: "Mad in pursuit and in possession so, / Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme." Suddenly, the couplet that concludes the poem runs without midline breaks: the sonnet has resolved the conflict—though rhyming "well" with "hell" admits that danger persists.

Here is another of Shakespeare's sonnets, number 29:

> When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state
> (Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,
> For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

The emotional tone of this sonnet is clearly different from "Th' expense of spirit." For one thing the lines move unbroken until six and seven, each ending with a comma. In fact, in speaking them, our speech pattern must hold out across those eight lines as a single sentence until: "Yet in these thoughts." The compound verbs help us to hold together the octet/sentence: "I beweep," "trouble," "look . . . and curse." The sestet in this poem holds the resolution, and line 11 expands into the beautiful lark image to describe "my state," the sound rising up from the morose vowels of earth: "Like to the lark at break of day arising / From sullen earth."

Though both these poems appear to be in the familiar English sonnet form of three quatrains and a couplet, to read each aloud is to hear their distinct character, the frequent pauses and hesitations in number 129, the strong drive of an entirely different emotion in 29.

One more example of the complex yet natural effects line can achieve in traditional iambic verse, John Donne's sonnet conveys quite a distinct tone of voice from the two of Shakespeare:

> At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
> Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
> From death, you numberless infinities
> Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
> All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
> All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
> Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
> Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
> But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
> For, if above all these, my sins abound,
> 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
> When we are there; here on this lowly ground,
> Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
> As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

The grandeur of these lines is enhanced by strong pauses and changes of pace, as Donne exploits the drama of line-end words. There is no question that "blow" emphatically accentuates "Your trumpets." The pause ("Angels") before the repeated "arise" lifts our voices upward, above the low vowels and grim consonants of "From death." The "go" at line (and quatrain) end is easily elongated with wonderful emphasis as he sends souls scurrying off at the Last Judgment to reclaim their long-lost bodies. To run the lines together might not change the literal meaning. But the pause at each line-end word excites a powerful effect that generates the speaker's exuberant sense of triumph: we want to blast that "blow."

Emphasis, Meaning, and Emotion

A line break ordinarily throws emphasis on a word that ends and/or begins a line. Such is the case with Shakespeare's "shame / Is lust" and "lust / Is

perjur'd," and also with the Donne: "At the round earth's imagined corners, blow / Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise . . ." While the stress on such a first or last word may not be the dominant one in the line, it carries a degree of emphasis (more on this under meter in chapter four). Yet when we compare Sonnet 29, the end and beginning words "eyes, / I all alone," "state, / And trouble" seem not to receive the same impact or volume. Words which end or begin lines that are syntactically complete, such as phrases, clauses, or sentences, already possess a certain stress, whereas broken syntax emphasizes other words, as in "arise / From death." (*Syntax means sentence structure*: subject–verb; subject–verb–complement; subject–verb–object; subject–verb–indirect object–direct object; subject–verb–object–complement.)

John Milton was blind when he wrote his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1674)—a considerable trick if you think about it: no touchtype keyboard, no tape recorder, just John and his memory and a secretary copying the lines he recited each morning. This means that in many ways *Paradise Lost* is an oral poem, bearing the marks of spoken-voice expression. There is, admittedly, some hazard in our moving from short, easily encompassed single poems to short passages from a long narrative poem. *Paradise Lost* (in blank verse, ten-syllable unrhymed lines) is a twelve-book epic, 798 lines in Book I alone—and we cannot pretend to treat here Milton's use of line throughout the length of that work. Yet it can be instructive to cite select details of a large work, as we might focus on Monet's brush strokes in only one of his haystack series, or a single theme of a Bach fugue. We cite this and the following examples to illustrate another way line can be used to create meaning and emotion.

> No more of talk where God or angel guest
> With man, as with his friend, familiar used
> To sit indulgent, and with him partake
> Rural repast, permitting him the while
> Venial discourse unblamed: I now must change
> Those notes to tragic; foul distrust, and breach
> Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
> And disobedience: . . . (IX, 1–8)

The speaker's voice begins gently and the turn from "angel guest / With man" is but slightly stressed. There continues a comfortable conversation with good friends with little line-end break. Already, however, hints of tension

creep in, "permitting," "unblamed," as if this chat were acutely temporary. The very relaxed pace of these first lines offers a lesson: danger hovers near. We are literally halted in our voices at "must change" (a pained silence: terrible matters now arise!) and the jarring turn of "breach / Disloyal," echoed in "distrust" and "disobedience."

In a passage concerning Hell, in the first book of *Paradise Lost*, we read:

> yet from those flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible
> Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all; . . . (I, 62–67)

While stress falls emphatically on "No light," "darkness visible" seems to end the clause, meaning there was not light but a tangible darkness. But when the sentence continues, the syntax adjusts to new meaning and what seemed to end the line becomes the subject of the next line's "Serv'd," stressing heavily what the darkness disclosed. The word "peace" hangs at line-end to show it is beyond Satan's reach ("peace" is not the same as "rest"), just as "hope never comes" stands at line-end for us to ponder before the crushing climax: "That comes to all"—all, that is, but Satan. In a preface to the poem, Milton explained that he intended his line to draw out the sense "from one verse into another," thereby adding thought onto thought.

In "The Prelude" (1850), William Wordsworth used the line's deliberate ten-syllable pace to enhance his conversational voice. There is not so much a full pause or stop at each line break but a stress, an assertion of emphasis which that position creates:

> Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
> Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
> Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less
> In that beloved Vale to which erelong
> We were transplanted—there were we let loose
> For sports of wider range. Ere I had told
> Ten birth-days, when among the mountain slopes
> Frost, and the breath of frosty wind . . .
> (Book 1)

The voice lifts somewhat and hesitates beautifully at "up," as it does at "less" and "loose" so that the first words of the next lines carry with their sound crucial syntactic weight, "Fostered," "Much favoured," "For sports," "Ten birth-days." The slight delay after "told" accents the certain pleasure of those "Ten birth-days."

A pause or recognition of the turn at line breaks seems almost always critical in conveying the expressive meaning of a passage, no matter the form or nature of the poem: sonnet or free verse, lyric, dramatic, or narrative. Even in passages of blank verse which enumerate factual matter, emphasis is created by line. In another long work, this time a drama, Shakespeare's King Henry V is instructing the Archbishop of Canterbury to ratify his right to invade France:

> My learned lord, we pray you to proceed
> And justly and religiously unfold
> Why the law Salic that they have in France
> Or should, or should not, bar us in our claim.
> And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,
> That you should fashion, wrest or bow your reading,
> Or nicely charge your understanding soul
> With opening titles miscreate whose right
> Suits not in native colors with the truth.
>
> (*Henry V*, I, ii, 9–17)

The King's salutation seems to encourage the archbishop, but at the line break cautions him: "justly and religiously." Caution continues in line four's "Or should, or should not." In case the Archbishop still does not hear warnings, the King reinforces with "And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord." The line ending "bow your reading" brings ironic weight on "Or nicely charge." That "soul" at line end unsubtly reminds his auditor of religion, God, faith, and threat of damnation—not to mention regal displeasure. If one reads the passage as mere statement, Henry's carefully placed warnings are lost, his character weakened, the drama deflated.

We take a moment for clarification and some history of poetry.

When we speak of verse with so many syllables per line, we do so because we believe that syllable count matters, not because we wish to avoid traditional terms like meter or foot (which we take up in chapter

four). Ten-syllable lines in English verse are typically iambic, that is, five feet (sets) of unstress–stress syllables. There are also shorter lines with, for example, four feet. (While iambic is a basic English foot, there are other feet as well; again, see chapter four.) We observe syllables-per-line because that is an instantly visible measure, and we gain a terminology for comparing longer or shorter length lines. We do not neglect the metrical foot patterns but at this point prefer not to include the issue of metrical stresses per line.

The ten-syllable blank verse line which we have been illustrating did not always exist in English verse. Poets had to develop it through experiment until they achieved a distinct verse line that suited the English language, distinct from Latin verse or Greek. Those languages would have served as natural models, but they were quantitative in form, which means that their verse rhythms were based on the long and short syllables. English does not have longs and shorts the way Latin does; it has accents on syllables. We can of course speak of long or short vowels in English but they have nothing to do with accent. The word "camera" is accented on the first syllable but none of its vowels are long. "Place" has a long "a" like the letter "a." The ten-syllable line was developed as one of the most flexible and effective vehicles for serious poems. It was used for blank verse dramas by Marlowe and Shakespeare, in comedy and tragedy and romance. (Earlier dramatists had tried a fourteen-syllable line which William Blake in the late eighteenth century turned to effective use for prophetic poems.) It was used in sonnets and (much earlier, in fact) in the closed couplet. Its rhythm was predominantly iambic: unstress–stress. This too was deemed the natural meter of English speech.

Long narrative poems are not, we might note here, unique to older traditional verse genres. Poets of all ages have composed long poems, written over many years, utilizing a rich array of versification. In modern times, one could mention as a brief sampling Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (1925–72), William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* (1963), Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* (1953–75), Thomas McGrath's *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* (1962, 1985). One might be tempted to include longish works like Seamus Heaney's fifty-page "Squarings" (*Seeing Things*, 1991), but for that matter many books of poems generate a wholeness and are read as unified works.

Here is a passage from McGrath's *Letter*, Part Two, IV:

Moon in Virgo.
Autumn over the land,
Its smoky light, its . . .
hawkhover
crowhover
its lonely distances
Taut with migrant birds and bodiless calls far—farther
Than noon will own or night
cloaked all in mystery of farewell.
Morning stirring in the haymow must: sour blankets,
Worn bindles and half-patched soogans of working bundlestiffs
Stir:
Morning in the swamp!
I kick myself awake
And dress while around me the men curse for the end for the world.

And it *is* ending (half-past-'29) but we don't know it
And wake without light.
Twenty-odd of us—and very odd,
Some.
One of the last of the migrant worker crews
On one of the last steam threshing rigs.
Antediluvian
Monsters, all.
Rouse to the new day in the fragrant
Barnloft soft haybeds: wise heads, gray;
And gay cheechakos from Chicago-town; and cranky Wobblies;
Scissorbills and homeguards and grassgreen wizards from the playing
fields
Of the Big Ten: and decompressed bank clerks and bounty jumpers
Jew and Gentile; and the odd Communist now and then
To season the host.
Stick your head through the haymow door—
Ah!
A soft and backing wind: the Orient red
East. And dull sky for the first faint light and no sun yet.

These sprawling lines are not of a regular length, like blank verse, but their span creates a wide landscape in which McGrath's natural phrasing has amplitude to stretch out; his phrasing is like natural speech,

I kick myself awake
And dress while around me the men curse for the end for the world.

And it *is* ending (half-past-'29) but we don't know it
And wake without light.

There is space to think, pause, reflect, go on, into what we know is going to be an extensive travel beyond these men into history: "(half-past-'29)."

Flexibility of Purpose in Line

A twentieth-century poet's ten-syllable verse, William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming," opens (in the first of two stanzas) with several whole-line assertions:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

The assertions intensify, some short, some line-length, as they move toward the decisive "everywhere" which drops enormous weight on the line-ending words "drowned" and "worst."

In George Mackay Brown's "Prince in the Heather," the strength of the long lines is undermined by alternating shorter lines about the Scots' bard's despair, despair at the disastrous loss at the battle of Culloden against the English in 1746:

Who would have thought the land that we grew in, our mother,
Would turn on us like a harlot?
The rock where the stag stood at dawn,
His antlers a proud script against the sky,
Gave us no shelter.
That April morning the long black rain
Bogged our feet down
But it did not douche the terrible fire of the English,
Their spewings of flame . . .

We prayed our endless mountain tracks
Would baffle the hunters
But the armies marched like doom on the one road
To the one graveyard.

Another pair of lines is all sorrow, the sound declining abruptly:

(I think it will rain a long time at Culloden
And steel rot under the stone.)

By letting the dread name "Culloden" (near-rhyming with "stone") hang at the line end and in Scots' memory, the consequence of rain and time becomes more painful.

Yusef Komunyakaa, in his Vietnam war poem "Tunnels," changes the speaker's point of view from description of an action to his emotional engagement with a fellow soldier. The poem begins:

Crawling down headfirst into the hole,
he kicks the air & disappears.
I feel like I'm down there
with him, moving ahead, pushed
by a river of darkness, feeling
blessed for each inch of the unknown.
Our tunnel rat is the smallest man
in the platoon, in an echo chamber
that makes his ears bleed
when he pulls the trigger.
He moves as if trying to outdo
blind fish easing toward imagined blue,
pulled by something greater than life's
ambitions. He can't think about
spiders & scorpions mending the air,
or care about bats upside down
like gods in the mole's blackness.
The damp smell goes deeper
than the stench of honey buckets.
A web of booby traps waits, ready
to spring into broken stars.
Forced onward by some need,

some urge, he knows the pulse
of mysteries & diversions
like thoughts trapped in the ground.
He questions each root.
Every cornered shadow has a life
to bargain with. Like an angel
pushed up against what hurts,
his globe-shaped helmet
follows the gold ring his flashlight
casts into the void. Through silver
lice, shit, maggots, & vapor of pestilence,
he goes, the good soldier,
on hands & knees, tunneling past
death sacked into a blind corner,
loving the weight of the shotgun
that will someday dig his grave.

As the speaker watches his buddy's descent, his sympathy becomes claustrophobic and at each line-end he hesitates a little: "down there / with him," the line itself hesitant, "moving ahead, pushed / by a river of darkness, feeling / blessed for each inch." Pulling back a moment with seeming discompassion (line 7), the speaker prepares for the shock at the tunnel rat's ears bleeding . . . from his own gun's blast. The speaker's breathlessness (like the soldier's) increases inside the expanding underwater image. Information and image (river) are coupled, but the complexity of shared terror is borne to a marked degree through the turns of these anxious line breaks. The closing lines of the poem again shock at the harsh turnabout at each line break:

he goes, [. . .] tunneling past
death sacked into a blind corner,
loving the weight of the shotgun
that will someday dig his grave.

Line Use in a Complete Poem

It is time to discuss line in a complete poem. Although attention is chiefly to line, we will introduce a few topics which are yet to be defined and explained.

"Stepping Westward" was written by British-born American poet Denise Levertov. We will listen for the way she uses line and pause to create tone, tempo, rhythm, and meaning. But as we hear her lines move stanza by stanza, we will consider too her use of the couplet. The subject of "stanza" will be taken up at the end of this chapter.

Stepping Westward

What is green in me
darkens, muscadine.

If woman is inconstant,
good, I am faithful to

ebb and flow, I fall
in season and now

is a time of ripening.
If her part

is to be true,
a north star,

good, I hold steady
in the black sky

and vanish by day,
yet burn there

in blue or above
quilts of cloud.

There is no savor
more sweet, more salt

than to be glad to be
what, woman,

and who, myself,
I am, a shadow

that grows longer as the sun
moves, drawn out

on a thread of wonder.
If I bear burdens

they begin to be remembered
as gifts, goods, a basket

of bread that hurts
my shoulders but closes me

in fragrance. I can
eat as I go.

Through the first line our voice remains expectantly high, then drops at "darkens," and pauses (comma) before the mysterious polysyllable "muscadine," whose rising sound seems to challenge the notion that "darkens" is bad: it may mean deepening, ripening like grapes. The next couplet affirms that conviction by placing "good," in a satisfyingly emphatic position (pause before and after). Had she said, "It is good that woman is inconstant," the idea would be similar but she would lose her voice's emphasis and pride. After the first stanza, the couplets enjamb consistently, creating tension, flow, and continual contrast. If we expect the cliché "in season and out" in the third stanza, "now" surprises us, changing the thought, canceling the cliché, sending us into the next stanza which breaks completely in the middle, another surprise, and drives through to stanza six to "good" again emphasized by coming after a line and stanza break. She both negates the clichés and accepts the contrariness they hint at. The following stanzas develop the paradox of "steady," "vanish," and "burn."

A beautiful passage opens stanza nine: "There is no savor / more sweet, more salt"—perhaps a change from the expected sweet–sour. If our voice suspends in anticipation after "than to be glad to be," it is caught off guard by "what" followed by a comma. Our expectations are again challenged so we must watch punctuation and line break to hear the speaker's flow of sense and tone. Fresh emphasis comes at "a woman," and then line-and-stanza break before "and who, myself" continues the syntactic progress. But with "I am" the syntax again has something else in mind than we perhaps expect. The poem has played with contraries of in–constant, ebb–flow, in–out, day–night, sweet–salt. If that is what woman is, the speaker urges, well then, Great, I'm it! The what–who passage suggests a delight in being itself, lifting the context to metaphysical dimensions, reveling in mysterious

wonder. In multiple ways the speaker shows her pleasure in her paradoxical nature and in the contradictions of woman which make her complete, strong, and proud: "I can / eat as I go."

Now the question of the couplets. Couplet suggests unity, two lines that rhyme and often, in traditional couplet verse, end-stop. A couplet makes an explicit argument that one plus one equals a completed statement. "Stepping Westward" is one in a set of ten poems called "Abel's Bride." The speaker (not Biblical but the poet's invention) is ruminating on the nature of her bridehood. Since she sees both a paradox within herself about woman's complexity and a truth about unity in herself, she needs both the couplet unity (also the marriage state) and the irresolution of couplets that are neither completed nor end-stopped. The vocal expression of her speech creates the experiential tone of the whole; we hear in her voice the pairing of each couplet and the movement onward through each. It is her seizing upon those contradictions which define her as woman, and give her joy and pride as she resolves the tensions.

Not only does Levertov write poems with acute attention to the line, but she has carefully thought through what line and line break mean in her verse. In modern poetry more than in traditional poetry, she writes, the line

> incorporates and reveals the *process* of thinking/feeling, feeling/thinking, rather than focusing more exclusively on its *results*. . . . The most obvious function of the linebreak is rhythmic: it can record the slight (but meaningful) hesitations between word and word that are characteristic of the mind's dance among perceptions but which are not noted by grammatical punctuation. [4]

Syntax with its punctuation is the rational, grammatical structure by which we express thoughts and observations. But our minds are occupied with other things simultaneous with the rational which also need modes of expression. We know that we do not necessarily think in linear progression; nor do we always compose and write in orderly fashion, though standard written expression prescribes a degree of this. So if the mind or emotion is wondering, searching, hesitating, how does grammar express these? Linebreak comes into play to record the "mind's dance" through uncertainty, the "hesitations" of the search. Levertov goes on:

> The linebreak is a form of punctuation *additional* to the punctuation that forms part of the logic of completed thoughts. Linebreaks—together with intelligent uses of indentation, and other devices for scoring—represent a peculiarly *poetic*, alogical, parallel (not competitive) punctuation.

She distinguishes between logical/rational thought and the "alogical," what the poet wishes to express which is not counter to logic but simultaneous and different. (Elsewhere she says a line-end pause is "equal to half a comma," but pauses between stanzas are "much harder to evaluate."[5]) We will later take up indentation as a form of line break.

In "The Idea of Ancestry," Etheridge Knight's voice is personal, conversational, candid in his thoughts about how I, here in a prison cell, fit with them out there, my wide family.

> 1
>
> Taped to the wall of my cell are 47 pictures: 47 black
> faces: my father, mother, grandmothers (1 dead), grand-
> fathers (both dead), brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts,
> cousins (1st & 2nd), nieces, and nephews. They stare
> across the space at me sprawling on my bunk. I know
> their dark eyes, they know mine. I know their style,
> they know mine. I am all of them, they are all of me;
> they are farmers, I am a thief, I am me, they are thee.

Through this opening stanza's enumeration of family members, Knight's long lines literally make space. As "They stare / across the space at me," one feels the distance across his cell—the turn literally moving from one wall to its opposite—and his distance from them. But as the lines move down, phrase after phrase, he draws the family together, "I" drawn closer to "them" inside the line, even though both remain physically apart.

In the first stanza of "Circling the Daughter," Knight controls speech patterns by many end-stopped lines: the slash in line one is his device to add a pause of separation that also enforces meaning.

> You came / to be / in the Month of Malcolm,
> And the rain fell with a fierce gentleness,
> Like a martyr's tears,

On the streets of Manhattan when your light was lit;
And the City sang you Welcome. Now I sit,
Trembling in your presence. Fourteen years
Have brought the moon-blood, the roundness,
The girl-giggles, the grand-leaps.
We are touch-tender in our fears.

You break my eyes with your beauty:
Ooouu-oo-baby-I-love-you.

The opening four lines end-stop, the fifth ending in midline, preparing for the I-speaker to begin reflecting. This poem is not about physical space, but about pondering the uncertainties of father–daughter relationships in U.S. history. It is gradual in tempo, sorrowful (Malcolm's death), hesitant in his fatherhood ("Trembling in your presence"), celebrative; then it easily breaks into a sung song, crooned in the italicized stanza.

The Irish poet Eavan Boland says that her line breaks are more like those of the standard Western lyric: they do not illustrate a thought process but establish a mood and emotion. "This Moment" is a remarkably full poem, the brevity of whose lines creates mood by deliberate incompleteness of thought:

A neighborhood.
At dusk.

Things are getting ready
to happen
out of sight.

Stars and moths.
And rinds slanting around fruit.

But not yet.

One tree is black.
One window is yellow as butter.

A woman leans down to catch a child
who has run into her arms
this moment.

Stars rise.
Moths flutter.
Apples sweeten in the dark.

The opening words leave so little said—the speaker's voice stops at each line, and drops, not as if to end a sentence but to create silences, as of the woman listening. In stanza two the lines nervously cite a danger, glancing around with fear. Even her two lines of observation, "stars and moths," are fragments. The middle stanza ventures even less: "But not yet," as if she is scarcely able to look out or assert anything concrete about what she sees. Then come two actual statements, one dark-threatening, the other possibly warm (a home?). And finally the sudden rush of three separate sentences: the child is back, safe, and life can begin moving once more.

To return to Levertov: a line break, she writes, "subtly interrupts a sentence" or "subtly interrupts a phrase or clause."

Boland's poem too utilizes this interruptive power of line to record the mind working through thoughts and emotions.

Line and Vocal Rhythm

If a poem is based on conversational tones and rhythms, even more than the ones seen so far, the speaker's vocal expression—and our voices too as we speak the poem—may require closer attention to sound and emphasis to hear the sense. Here are two poems by Lucille Clifton. Intellectualize them and they roll over and play dead. Speak them and the tone will jump out.

good times

my daddy has paid the rent
and the insurance man is gone
and the lights is back on
and my uncle brud has hit
for one dollar straight
and they is good times
good times
good times

my mamma has made bread
and grampaw has come
and everybody is drunk
and dancing in the kitchen
and singing in the kitchen
oh these is good times

good times
good times

oh children think about the
good times

homage to my hips

these hips are big hips.
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

In "good times," Clifton works without the safety net of punctuation. But that is not a difficulty. Her art guides our voice precisely. This poem begins with three complete assertions, until four moves easily into five, and we begin the delightful refrain-repetition.

Ordinarily a repeated line calls for change of vocal emphasis. When William Blake ended his song, "Little Lamb, God bless thee, / Little Lamb, God bless thee" repetition rings out new meanings: else why repeat? So too here. These are good times. Good times. Good times. Repetition normally prompts us to slow down for richer meanings. The final repetition insists on the same: "Oh children, think about the / good times." If we had any doubt that these are really good times, the repetitions assure us of the celebration.

Clifton's "homage to my hips" quickly enjambs: "they need space to / move around in." Reading the lines straight through cancels the stress on "move," the verbal imbalance of a broken infinitive, and the bodily shift that

accompanies the word. After several end-stopped lines—"these hips have never been enslaved"—she readies the final, decisive physical movement:

> i have known them
> to put a spell on a man and
> spin him like a top!

Only with that pause can she hit "spin" with such delicious meaning, fun, and confidence. The poem is about her physicality and the real physicality of its recitation: the lines make one move.

Poems ordinarily address specific emotional experiences. Since emotional confusion, which unfortunately may not be uncommon, can stimulate anger, depression, sickness—none of them healthy feelings to store in our bodies—we need to understand our emotions. So we strive to describe and express their precise nature. If poems express a wide range of emotions, as wide as our human emotional range itself, we need to consider how poems can carve subtle emotional distinctions out of the welter of confusingly mixed ones.

One day in class we were looking at Robert Hass's "Heroic Simile" (quoted and discussed under "Simile," chapter six) and a student had written on the board from his essay: "A dying hero gives off a stillness to the air." The students were frustrated at finding a way into its tone. Suddenly one of them erupted: "That's misquoted! The line should read

> A hero, dying,
> gives off stillness to the air."

Without question, this was one of the best mistakes of the semester. The error illustrated almost everything essential about line break and word position. The placement of "dying," its declining sound ("*dy*-ing") repeating that of "*he*-ro," set off with commas, the silence after it, the almost soundless second line emphasizing "stillness," revealed the true tone beautifully. There could be no doubt of the exact sense of loss and longing contained in those lines.

But even as we say "loss and longing" we know that such words do not cover the complexity of emotion the lines themselves reveal. What does "hero" mean, to us, to anyone? And a dying one? If the air is still, what is it that we feel, what is missing? As we hear the movement of the lines, and the disconcerting drop at line break, we become able to speak the lines and

feel the distinct emotions expressed through these words. Our point here is multiple: words do mean. The poem's own words create and characterize precisely the emotion(s) which cannot be captured in alternate words. While line is a crucial instrument of this effect, other prosodic elements (such as meter) also have a bearing. One useful (though admittedly strange) way of hearing the impact of line and sound in verse is to make a conscious mistake: change a word or two, rewrite a few lines, or even paraphrase the poem (turning it into prose, which eliminates sound, tempo, rhythm, and other elements of verse).

Here is a set of similar-looking lines that express different emotions. First from Charles Olson's "Maximus, to Himself":

> I have had to learn the simplest things
> last. Which made for difficulties.

What Olson is saying is obvious enough: "I'm a slow learner and that's caused trouble." But how does he *feel* about that fact? The tempo of the first line is methodical, unbroken, the pitch rising slightly on "simplest things," preparing for the abrupt drop to "last." The separate dependent clause that completes the line contributes a sober but not depressing comment.

In the opening of John Logan's "Three Moves," we again find the end of the sentence placed in line two:

> Three moves in six months and I remain
> the same.

This is the same kind of line break. But is his emotion the same as Olson's? Reserving further examination for a moment, line break is used to create meaning through a distinct kind of pause and emphasis.

A third example of this kind of line break, this time from Gerard Manly Hopkins' "Wreck of the Deutschland":

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread.

Hopkins does not begin with a statement like "I have had to learn . . . ," but with an exclamatory phrase. Yet the completion of the phrase, "God" on the second line, is similar in structure to Olson's and Logan's second lines. We continue the second line to complete the statement. If we knew that this poem was about the wreck of a ship called the *Deutschland* in which

a group of nuns were drowned and that Hopkins, a Catholic priest, was concerned how to remember their tragic deaths, would we hear the lines differently? Or is the speaker's emotional tone complete within these lines? More dramatic than in the prior poems, Hopkins's placement of "God" is daring because it risks misreading as exasperated with "God," or sick of being mastered. If our principle is right, we can rely upon line to tell us to be exactly sure what each poem means.

For the sake of contributing to the discussion, we will add a few thoughts on Hopkins, Logan, and Olson. With the Hopkins poem, the word sounds of "mastering me" hold high, accepting the paradox of willing to be mastered; then at line break accepting "God!" there is a rest in faith, a rest confirmed in God as a *giver* of both spirit and body. Were we to exchange "bread and breath," the sound and sense would convey a different acceptance—if any. The tempo of Logan's first line is unhurried, for there is a kind of pulse by which we stress each word group not by pausing but by slight elongation: "Three moves // in six months // and I remain," that prepares for a fall of spirit after "remain," unlike Olson's line break that throws emphasis on "last." Olson's emotion is not as devastating as Logan's; rather, his irritation is tempered with matter-of-factness in the steady tempo of line one. In each case, the structure of the line allows us to hear the exact emotional state of each speaker.

Extending the Line Further

It should not be assumed that every poet would subscribe to the principles of line we have laid out here. Like any artists, poets need to explore ways of extending their craft, their meanings, which may be accomplished by manipulating the line in new ways. To illustrate, we need look no further than the work of the same Gerard Manly Hopkins. Normally, English verse is composed of feet of two or three syllables, iamb, dactyl, and so on (terms to be examined under "Meter"). Hopkins's idea of "sprung rhythm" "is measured by feet of from one to four syllables." For special effects "any number of weak or slack syllables may be used." He also distinguished *running rhythm* which puts stress on the second syllable of a foot, unstress–stress, from *falling* in which the second syllable is unstressed, stress–unstress.[6] In order to achieve his measure of stress he might vary the syllables of lines

and, more to the point, run through line breaks to finish the foot in the next line. Here is "No Worst":

> No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
> More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
> Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
> Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
> My cries heave, herds-long, huddle in a main, a chief-
> Woe, wórld-sorrow; on an áge-old anvil wince and sing—
> Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
> Ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'
> O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
> Frightful, sheer, not man's fathoming. Hold them cheap
> no-man-fathomed.
> May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
> Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
> Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
> Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Line five ends with a stress "chief-"; "Woe" on the next line completes the falling foot. More dramatically, "No ling- / Ering!" radically enjambs a half-word onto the next line. In other poems Hopkins makes it perfectly clear there is to be no pause at line ends. For example, in "To Seem the Stranger" the first lines run:

> To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life
> Among strangers. Father and mother dear,
> Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near
> And he my peace / my parting, sword and strife.
> England, whose honour O all my heart woos, wife
> To my creating thought, would neither hear
> Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear-
> Y of idle a being but by where wars are rife. . . .

Whereas the first line's "life / Among" seems a normal line break, "wear- / Y" is far more strongly enjambed. The word break exposes the rhyme word—dear–near, hear–wear—but the voice moves on toward new meaning with "Y." Hopkins is obviously driving his lines to achieve more

than he believes is possible with line-break pauses, and given the amazing power of his verse, one is quite happy to agree.

Stanza

If the line is a unit, often a unit of meaning, at the end of which there is a turn, a *stanza* is a group of lines usually set off on the page by space, indentation, number, or set rhyme scheme (ABBA), some visible device to mark a discrete group of lines. Stanzas can be of uniform size, such as two lines or four lines, with or without rhyme. Many of our principles about line are equally applicable to *stanza*. That is, there is often a turn or pause at stanza end; enjambment of stanzas (the sentence runs from one stanza into the next) is usually significant; so are changes in the number of lines, in rhyme scheme, line length, and the like. In short, a stanza shapes meaning as line does, and just as lines move forward and down, so do stanzas.

In defining line, it was mentioned that in staged Greek verse, the movement of the line and of the dance often coincided, with a pause at the end. Stanza, too, is allied with dance.[7] The ode, which means song, is a poem often associated with its earliest great practitioner, Pindar. It is a form divided into three stanzas called *strophes*, meaning a turn, as in a choral dance on stage: the *strophe* (move) is followed by the *antistrophe* (return) and ends with the *epode* (stand or end).

Just as lines move and end at certain places, so a stanza may be complete in itself as a syntactic unit, and it may use rhyme to accentuate completion. A sentence can also move through a stanza or a number of stanzas, developing a long arc of relationship and continuity between units. While there are potentially as many kinds of stanzaic form as there are poems, what matters is that we identify the structural unit of the stanza and that we recognize the expressive function of the stanza in the speaker's words. That is, not only *what* it is itself—its length and shape—but *how* it stands in relation to what comes before and what follows, how a stanza moves across and down into the next stanza and stanzas.

Whereas in traditional verse the number of lines in a stanza is often determined by the genre, such as a ballad's four-line stanza (ABCB), stanza size can vary according to the needs of the poem, as we saw in Herbert's "The Church-floor." In Edmund Waller's "Go, Lovely Rose," lines vary four,

eight, four, eight, eight syllables. Changed indentation also suggests variation in tone.

> Go, lovely, rose—
> Tell her that wastes her time and me
> That now she knows,
> When I resemble her to thee,
> How sweet and fair she seems to be.

In twentieth-century and contemporary verse, stanza size is often determined by the nature of the speaker's expression. Boland's stanza form in "This Moment" is determined by the speaker, a taut wariness of the violence she senses lurking. In "good times," Clifton's two stanzas narrate the world of the family, linking first to second by three identical refrain lines: "oh these is good times / good times / good times," and concluding the whole with a summary pair of lines: "oh children think about the / good times." In both poems the stanza is set off by space, but the function of each is unique to its individual expression.

William Carlos Williams's "To a Poor Old Woman" has four stanzas of four lines (the title is included in the first).

> *To a Poor Old Woman*
>
> munching a plum on
> the street a paper bag
> of them in her hand
>
> They taste good to her
> They taste good
> to her. They taste
> good to her
>
> You can see it by
> the way she gives herself
> to the one half
> sucked out in her hand
>
> Comforted
> a solace of ripe plums
> seeming to fill the air
> They taste good to her

The integrity of the first stanza is his seeing her, in a place, acting; the second reveals her reaction to the plums. In the third, his attention turns to her actions, and is delicately enjambed to her consolation in those luscious plums. Each stanza has its distinct function and its link to the rest.

In both line and stanza, pause is measured by *duration*: how long we pause; and by *quality*: how we vocally express the nature of the pause or hesitation (such as with doubt, expectation, sorrow). We hear and speak line breaks and stanza breaks slightly differently. If a stanza closes syntactically, the pause can be as long as the duration of a period or longer to accommodate the stanza's finality and the space before the next stanza. If a stanza enjambs to the next, the duration and the quality of pause will depend on context (of which more below). In the Levertov poem:

> What is green in me
> darkens, muscadine.
>
> If woman is inconstant,
> good, I am faithful to
>
> ebb and flow, I fall
> in season and now
>
> is a time of ripening.
> If her part

The voice drops at "darkens," pauses, and stops at "muscadine": end of line, sentence, stanza. The pause at "faithful to" has a possibly similar *duration*, but the voice quality registers incompleteness before the example of faithful inconstancy in "ebb and flow." Because the voice rises at "and now" to end the next stanza, our pause may be a more dramatic silence of expectation.

In a word, no one factor determines length or quality of the silence. In another word: the movement across each line pauses at the turn of the verse with a kind of downward draw through the poem: across, through, down. Interruptions and/or accelerations in this movement across and down are often achieved by line and stanza.

Marking Stanzas

The various devices for marking separate stanzas indicate different

relationships among stanzas. Numbered stanzas usually indicate a major division. Here Robert Francis tells of "The Swimmer":

I

Observe how he negotiates his way
With trust and the least violence, making
The stranger friend, the enemy ally.
The depth that could destroy gently supports him.
With water he defends himself from water.
Danger he leans on, rests in. The drowning sea
Is all he has between himself and drowning.

II

What lover ever lay more mutually
With his beloved, his always-reaching arms
Stroking in smooth and powerful caresses?
Some drown in love as in dark water, and some
By love are strongly held as the green sea
Now holds the swimmer. Indolently he turns
To float.—The swimmer floats, the lover sleeps.

Once we have the image of the swimmer's action, stanza two expands the figure. Not that it is hard to catch the connection, but the numbered separation allows development of each element of the comparison, as stanza comments on stanza. The silence is crystal clear as we await a transition to applied figure, the turn of each line ("always-reaching arms") held just long enough to hear the click of connecting metaphor.

Obviously, the principle of visible breaks may not always hold. We may wonder whether the breaks in the following poem by Denise Levertov are actual stanza breaks or some other form of division.

That Day

Across a lake in Switzerland, fifty years ago,
light was jousting with long lances, fencing with broadswords
back and forth among cloudy peaks and foothills.
We watched from a small pavilion, my mother and I,
enthralled.
And then, behold, a shaft, a column,

a defined body, not of light but of silver rain,
formed and set out from the distant shore, leaving behind
the silent feints and thrusts, and advanced
unswervingly, at a steady pace,
toward us.
I knew this! I'd seen it! Not the sensation
of déjà vu: it was Blake's inkwash vision,
'The Spirit of God Moving Upon the Face of the Waters'!
The column steadily came on
across the lake toward us; on each side of it,
there was no rain. We rose to our feet, breathless—
and then it reached us, took us
into its veil of silver, wrapped us
in finest weave of wet,
and we laughed for joy, astonished.

Whatever we call these breaks, their visible indentations coincide with a change of the speaker's perception. She is at first a relaxed, vacationing observer: she and her mother are safely seated, and the play of natural light is entirely satisfactory to them. But the single word "enthralled" ends the section abruptly, followed by line and "stanza" break. Indentation begins the next section: "And then, behold, . . . " they see an actual "body." Whatever we call this break, we know something has changed in her condition and observation, more than just her "sensation."

Again at the short line "toward us" we are stopped. Indentation prepares for the voice change to exclamation, recognition, and intensely conscious observation: "The column steadily came on / across the lake toward us; on each side of it, / there was no rain." The lines shorten, the tempo slows and attention alerts to the inexorable advance. The final five line-end words reveal in miniature her experience: *breathless*, *took us*, *wrapped us*, *wet*, *astonished*.

What this stanza form does is separate the stages of her experience; distinguish each level of her consciousness; reveal through line- and stanza-break the movement of the out-there to the in-here; and shift the tone from tourist-in-nature to visionary, an internalizing of that "wet" "inkwash" into bone-deep joy. And these stanza-like breaks do more: they create the experience of vision. As is true of many of Levertov's (and others') poems,

inside the spoken movement of these stanzas resides the meaning of the poem. The pauses are made purposefully, each stanza a segment of experience, the downward flow of stanzas creating the complete event. Allowing this poem to lead us through the speaker's experience replicates her experience into "a defining body."

For a different example of the way stanzas may function, we look at "Adam's Curse" by William Butler Yeats. Somewhat like Levertov, Yeats links stanza one to two by breaking a line after six syllables and indenting the four syllables of the next (like a ten-syllable line).

Adam's Curse

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied: "To be born woman is to know—
Although they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be

So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

Whereas the shortened last line (six syllables rather than ten) of the first stanza of fourteen lines adds a feeling of irresolution and "curse," the last three stanzas are linked by rhyme as if not quite separated (all stanzas are end-stopped): "enough" and "love," "years" and "ears." Each stanza introduces a different speaker or topic as if each stanza is complete, yet the stanzas are uneven in length (14, 7, 7, 6, 5 lines) like broken connections. The connecting and separating of stanzas declare that the curse (part of which is poetry making itself) is complex and not resolved by talking, even for "hours maybe."

Notes

1. T. B. L. Webster (*The Greek Chorus*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1970) illustrates thoroughly the dancers' pause at the end of lines of verse: "The hexameter is a long line with a well-marked pause at the end, and would be sung 'walking.'" There is also "a short line with pause at the end, an admirable 'striding' line which could be used either for marching or dancing." (54–55; cf: "Literary Sources" to ca. p. 87 on Pindar.) See also M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 153 ff.
2. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 8.
3. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 263 f.
4. Denise Levertov, "On the Function of the Line," in *New & Selected Essays*, (New York: A New Directions Book, 1992), 79.
5. Denise Levertov, "Line Breaks, Stanza-Spaces, and the Inner Voice," in *Essays*, p. 90.
6. "Author Preface," Norman H. Mackenzie., ed., introduction to *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 115–116.
7. William Mullen, *Choreia: Pindar and Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 90 ff. See also Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1964), 11 ff.

Chapter Two

Sound

What does it mean to say that there is *sound* in poetry? Does poetry *have* sound or *is* it sound? For instance, sounds are *described* in the line "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day," and in "the tintinnabulation of the bells, bells, bells." We usually identify sound effects by devices like a*ssonance*, repeated vowel sounds; *alliteration*, repeated consonant sounds; *onomatopoeia*, meaning contained in the sound, like "Whack," "Buzz"; or sound links between words, as in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott":

> On either side the river lie
> Long **fie**lds of barl**ey** and of rye,

It is, however, the sound of all words in poetry that concern us. The sound of a word itself expresses *meaning and emotion*. Musical sounds may be described in "tolls" and "knell" but we can also speak of the sound of the expression "parting day." Word choices convey far more meaning and emotion than their denotation. Even in our everyday speech we know the difference between the sounds of "Shhh" and "Shut up."

In chapter one we quoted Robert Francis's "The Sound I Listened For" for the way it describes the movement of line. We can listen to it again for its use of word sounds:

> What I remember is the ebb and flow of sound

That summer morning as the mower came and went
And came again, crescendo and diminuendo,
And always when the sound was loudest how it ceased
A moment while he backed the horses for the turn,
The rapid clatter giving place to the slow click
And the mower's voice. That was the sound I listened for.

Quiet summer-morning word sounds (for example, repeated "m" and "o") fill the opening lines; even the slightly harder consonants of "crescendo and diminuendo" are quieted by the polysyllables. But the consonants become more noisy: "he backed the horses for the turn, / The rapid clatter . . . ," then become quiet "giving place to the slow click / And the mower's voice." In short, the sounds of the poem imitate the meaning of the words themselves, and we too listen for the poet-mower's sounds.

This is A. E. Housman's poem XXXV from *A Shropshire Lad*:

On the idle hill of summer,
    Sleepy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
    Drumming like a noise in dreams.

In this beautiful picture of an idle hill, summer, sleepy flow of streams, the words' meanings harmonize with their mild vowels and consonants. Yet already in "steady drummer" the consonants grow stronger and continue to do so in the disturbing "Drumming . . . noise . . . dream." The poem goes on:

Far and near and low and louder
    On the roads of earth go by
Dear to friends and food for powder,
    Soldiers marching, all to die.

East and west on fields forgotten
    Bleach the bones of comrades slain,
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;
    None that go return again.

Far the calling bugles hollo,
    High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow
    Woman bore me, I will rise.

Chapter Ten

Memory

In the introduction we said that memorizing a poem is an indispensable step to drawing in and holding its complete intellectual and emotional meaning. Through the work of memory, we come to terms with and solve almost all elements about a poem's prosody (line, sound, rhythm, meter, rhyme, and the like), its emotion and its meaning. We cannot dodge the problems of a poem as we learn to speak its words and lines and sentences with meaning, natural expression, and clarity. Most importantly, memorizing a poem draws it into our minds and into our bodies. Mind and body are together engaged: *learning by heart*. Learning how a poem works leads us to know what it is about. Simultaneously, learning what it is about leads us to know how it works.

A classroom episode might suggest the power of memorizing, in this case the personally physical ramifications of taking in a poem's emotion and rhythm. The experiences presented here ought not be viewed as unique to college students or to classroom work. What we describe here is representative of how memory work can be effective for anyone, and can have, as we say, physical and emotional impact. Fran Quinn was teaching war poetry, and one requirement of the course was that students memorize several poems. Though memory work was standard in his courses, the students rebelled loudly and uncharacteristically. They would memorize poems, yes, but not war poems. Why? They claimed they feared, simply, the emotional strain upon themselves of memorizing poems about the experience of war. One student wept as he (at last) recited. Allowing the rhythmic power of

a poem into one's body and mind can be a unique, a changing, a perhaps fearful experience.[1]

Steps in Memorizing

There are no set rules on how to memorize, no golden method that works for each of us. There are, however, a few steps to assist the process of memory work which we have discovered to be effective. A handy dictionary will give the meaning of all the words and their pronunciation. Then as we read aloud we follow lines and the structure of the sentences to be sure how clauses and phrases become part of the whole sentence; in earlier English verse with complex sentence structures this may require close attention.

The first step in actual memorizing is to read the poem aloud a number of times until we grasp how the lines and stanzas move through the whole. This is important for beginners in memory work. During this reading, we correct such mistakes as wrong sentence structure and word emphasis, confused tempo, misplaced pitch, garbled sound effects, mistakes by no means unusual (mistakes are invariably instructive). From everything we have learned chapter by chapter about the elements of prosody, we know we rely on the poem itself to tell us what it means and how to say it. We listen to the way line moves, for example, or how sound directs us to hear meaning, and so on. However, we may also need an audience, someone to say: "No, you are confusing the rhythm with metrical beat." "You do not quite have the voice of the speaker." "Try to sound like a person talking, closer to natural speech."

Reading aloud the entire poem rather than part by separate part helps us to hear the poem as a unit and to forestall interrupting the rhythm and memory.[2]

As we train our ear and develop our abilities to speak and hear poems, we listen to our own voice for self-correction. But the speaker of the poem also has a voice. We try to approximate—not mimic—in our own voice the voice of the speaker. That may be challenging, especially if that voice is unlike our own, from a different part of the United States, or from Canada, or Slovenia. In such cases, we may very likely need an audience to listen for where we stray and tell us what and how to correct.

Achievement of Memory Work

In the process of memory work, some of us are going to be more responsive to sound, some to tempo, others to line breaks. Some may have to slow down hurried speech habits, others may have to enunciate words more clearly, and we all may have to listen better. For when we memorize poems, we have the surprising opportunity of discovering many more things in the poem than we ever thought possible. Memorizing a poem does not mean we are finished with it for good. Instead, the memorized poem continues to stay alive and ripe for further exploration, for we allow it to release more and more and we continue learning. As Czeslaw Milosz put it near the end of his "*Ars Poetica*?"

> The purpose of poetry is to remind us
> how difficult it is to remain just one person,
> for our house is open, there are no keys in the door,
> and invisible guests come in and out at will.

As we speak the poem, the emotional effects of its sounds and rhythms come through our memory and into our body—the very sounding of words rises in our voice with vocal resonance**.** Poet and classicist Anne Carson examines the juncture between oral and written cultures:

> . . . most of the data important to survival and understanding are channelled into the individual through the open conduits of his senses, particularly his sense of sound, in a continuous interaction linking him with the world outside him. . . . To close his senses off from the outside world would be counter-productive to life and to thought.
>
> . . . Reading and writing require focusing the mental attention upon a text by means of the visual sense. As an individual reads and writes he gradually learns to close or inhibit the input of his senses, to inhibit or control the responses of the body, so as to train energy and thought upon the written words.[3]

We will take rhythm as one illustration of the ways physicality emerges in oral recitation of poems. Rhythm is expressed in our voices. But it is also made manifest in our stance, our gestures, our physical movement. The body in fact often *knows* before the mind discovers. That priority became

evident when a group of students was discussing Lawrence's "Snake." The question we raised was, what is being suggested in these lines?

> He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
> And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down,
> over the edge of the stone trough
> And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
> And where the water had dripped from the tap, into a small clearness,
> He sipped with his straight mouth,
> Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
> Silently.

A serpentine movement seemed apparent, but how do we talk about that, how do we isolate where and how it is taking place? The students felt constricted when explaining verbally, so quite naturally they had recourse to hands and bodies, swaying back and forth. Their bodies knew something was happening and gave insight. (In chapter three we explored how rise and fall of pitch in the poem guides the body's movement.)

Memorizing a poem takes us directly into the *experience* of how a poem moves, how part is linked to part, how sound and rhythm are incorporated in it. The poem comes alive inside our bodies, known and experienced, and its physicality transfers directly to our bodies: we move and gesture as we speak.

Take for example Robert Creeley's "The Flower":

> I think I grow tensions
> like flowers
> in a wood where
> nobody goes.
>
> Each wound is perfect,
> encloses itself in a tiny
> imperceptible blossom,
> making pain.
>
> Pain is a flower like that one,
> like this one,
> like that one,
> like this one.

In memorizing this poem we are conscious of pauses and of a need for gestures, as in the last lines: "like this one, / like that one / like this one."

Another poem we read (chapter one), Yeats's "Adam's Curse," shows the way vocal silences allow critical transitions between stanzas:

Adam's Curse

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied: "To be born woman is to know—
Although they do not talk of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,

> And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
> A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
> Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
> About the stars and broke in days and years.
>
> I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
> That you were beautiful, and that I strove
> To love you in the old high way of love;
> That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
> As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

After "The martyrs call the world" a period marks the end of the speaker's statement. Then a distinct stanza-break pause before "And thereupon" prepares for the mild woman's reply (more than two lines occur before she actually begins). At her close and stanza break, the speaker must consider for a moment before he responds: "I said: . . ." Following his speech, a major pause for reflection is marked, like a stage direction:

> We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
> We saw the last embers of daylight die.

The sentiments and tempo here are slow and thoughtful, as they are also in the final stanza. As we memorize and recite "Adam's Curse," the poem tells us precisely when, of what duration, and with what emotional feeling we are to pause so that the drama of the poem lives.

Memory and Insight

Memorizing leads us deeply inside a poem, guiding us to continual discovery of it. For example, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are short poems, often simple in appearance on the page, and simple in their named contents: nurses and babies, mothers and children, woods and pastures, lambs and trees. Sure, there are a few darkish poems, about gritty London and sooty chimneys, a few lost boys . . . , but the melodies are often cheery. Here is the opening poem, "Introduction," of *Songs of Innocence*:

> Piping down the valleys wild,
> Piping songs of merry glee,
> On a cloud I saw a child,
> And he laughing said to me

Nicely upbeat. The trochaic meter (accent–unaccent) is consistent, but the probable pauses in line four may give us some concern. Is the line to be spoken, "And he laughing" or "And he, laughing, said . . . "? The pauses slow or break the trochaic meter, signaling a change to accentuate the child's response and prepare for what was said to him.

Here is the complete poem "The Lilly":

> The modest rose puts forth a thorn,
> The humble sheep, a threat'ning horn:
> While the lilly white, shall in love delight,
> Nor a thorn nor a threat stain her beauty bright.

This seems a simple poem about a flower. But in line three the iambics begin to fade with an anapest before each iamb: "while the LIL-ly WHITE, shall in LOVE de-LIGHT." Were we to read line four as all anapests, "stain" would be unaccented even though its strong sound and its role as verb suggest it is emphatic: "neither one *stains* her beauty."

In this poem the metrical tensions are reinforced by—or reinforce—contrasts within the lines: the rose is modest but has thorns; the sheep is humble but exhibits a horn, as if our notion of such creatures may become simplistic. As we endeavor to speak the poems in natural speech patterns, we perceive that the metrical irregularities are integral aspects of the poems and that they likely illustrate Blake's concept of contraries (or tensions) which he announces in the full title: *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, "Showing the two contrary states of the human soul." That is, when so much about the poems *appears* simple and childlike, their metrical contrariness keeps us off balance and forces us to confront complexity as we speak the lines.

If we learn to speak aloud Blake's *Songs* and thus learn much of what those poems are about, what happens when we look at another of his works, a long poem (comprising 45 hand-engraved and illustrated plates) in fourteen-syllable lines, titled simply *Milton*? Will speaking the poem aloud be in any way different and revealing of its meaning? Reading aloud even the following few lines is a distinctly different experience from intoning "Piping down the valleys wild."[4]

> And Milton said, I go to eternal death! The nations still
> Follow after the detestable gods of Priam; in pomp

> Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.
> When will the Resurrection come, to deliver the sleeping body
> From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?
> (Plate 14, lines 14–18)

What is the effect of our voice moving across lines of fourteen syllables, what rhythms do we hear, how do such lines tell us of the meaning of the poem? Through such comparison of Blake's poems, we reflect that while the metrical difficulties in *Songs* reinforce "the two contrary states of the human soul," the fourteen-syllable line of *Milton* sounds different in many ways: in length of presented statement, in tempo, rhythmic movement, sound, and dramatic effect of line breaks. What seems apparent is that Blake's goal in *Milton* is not to explore contraries but to declaim a prophetic statement, to lift us upward to vision of the Lord. Since one cannot easily declaim and prophesy in short lilting lines, the verse of *Milton* is more declarative, more explanatory, in places more incantatory, thus we say prophetic. It has prosodic muscularity.

Experience and Reflection

Having worked with our poetry students for many years, we were quite certain what their success in learning by heart had been, but we thought it would be useful to have them record their experience. To our call, they responded thoughtfully.

For one student, memorization obliged him to pay attention to "the practicalities" of lines, for upon such specifics he built the "foundation upon which to approach the ideas and broader implications of the work." Another wrote: "the parts which I found difficult were parts where there were nuances in the rhythm and phrasing" that made me realize "the poem had a meaning that differed from its surface level." Passages of a poem that were difficult to memorize often contained problematic prosody: lines might not be easy to remember because a change was taking place in the meter or the tempo, not because one's memory was faulty. One student learned that the voice or speaker of a poem had to be sustained to deliver the experience of the whole; memorizing for her "necessitated attention to each word"; then the "rhythm and flow of the narrative, the maze of words . . . all of a sudden have this final slamming impact." Another reflected:

"a college student like myself is inclined to draw/accept the lines around the subject matter of their lives. . . . [M]emorization encouraged me to engage the poetry from various different physical and mental spaces." Still another felt that memorizing Blake's long poem *Milton* "places you within Blake's mythic world in a way that reading alone does not. . . . Memorizing helps you realize how human and real Blake's concerns are." It was not surprising that our students would respond to memory work with such insight and sureness of understanding, for the mental and physical act of memory draws a poem's experience into personal actuality. "Once you've built your 'memory bank' of poems," wrote another, "reading a poem 'cold' is a much more comfortable and enlightening experience."[5]

As with Fran's student reciting war poetry, recitation can be transformative. One evening after a poetry reading by Ruth Stone, a group of us were sitting around a living room, students (first-year college), teachers, poets, friends, interested visitors. Someone suggested each of us recite a poem. So it started, one after another, the students first, since Ruth, sitting on a chair in their midst, was so encouraging to them. One young woman sitting on the floor said she would do Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle." At her opening phrase, we knew that something extraordinary was taking place. Reciting it flawlessly, she moved so completely inside the poem, it was as if another voice were speaking. As she ended, she sat unmoving. No breath was drawn in the room. It was the most remarkable example of sheer verbal experience I—no doubt we all—had ever witnessed. Later, she said she did not really know what had happened to her or why. It had nothing to do with a death in the family or any recalled experience. It was the poem itself pure and simple. She had understood and felt the rhythms so fully that the poem took over her body and emotions.

Notes

1. In our emphasis on memory work in the study of poetry, we find ourselves in agreement with the observations of a lecture by poet Lucio Mariani:

> Public education in Italy has, for a long time, done away with the practice of memorizing poems, something now branded as a form of regressive pedagogy and a despicable teaching method. As a result, works by greater and lesser poets are only approached through the lens of the critic, who routinely dissects and comments on poems by placing them in theoretical and comparative contexts. . . .

In this way, students do not access the complex emotional pathways that repeated readings and memorization can open up. Thus the Dionysian nerve hidden in each of us does not get to the surface, let alone be stimulated. And as a result, the student does not get to have the admittedly difficult but extraordinary experience of knowing a poem directly, on one's own, even if in the silent mnemonic repetitions that are part and parcel of any and all learning, at every stage of life. Instead, the student will be forced to study the soul and signposts of a poem on the basis of commentaries that . . . [overshadow the poem], while the commentaries themselves become independent objects of study.

Lucio Mariani, "Concerning the Diffusion and Re-creation of Poetry: In Praise of the Lesser Players," *Literary Imagination* 7.1 (2005), 101.

2. In his indispensable book, *Playing Shakespeare,* John Barton points out that during rehearsal, an actor should be "very conscious of the verse" (though self-consciousness may be inhibiting) but should not think of it "in performance," where one has internalized the poem's words, lines, and rhythms, so that the poem flows without the struggle of conscious "memory" at work. (London, New York: Methuen, 1984, 44.)
3. For other aspects to this mind/body unity, see Anne Carson, *Eros, The Bittersweet*, pp.36–37. For important discussions of memory, see James McConkey, *The Anatomy of Memory, An Anthology.*

   The history of memory is itself worth mention. Before printed texts became available, memory was the repository of knowledge. Oral cultures without written texts know this. Oral modes of understanding differ from those of a text culture. Not only Homer created long epic poems to be recited by bards or griots; almost every culture has, or had, a memory tradition. Even now, people memorize entire Broadway shows, song upon song upon song of their favorites: Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Fats Waller, U-2. Pianists memorize hosts of sonatas and concertos; actors memorize roles in many plays. In a remarkable study of medieval culture, *The Book of Memory*, Mary J. Carruthers describes the working of memory in Thomas Aquinas (13th century): contemporaries attest that he composed mentally, then dictated the compendious *Summa Theologica* from memory, without having drafted it first by himself. Such persons were trained to link together a series of texts to a Biblical phrase, ready for quick recall. In fact, well trained minds could compose on several topics simultaneously. Since John Milton was blind when he "wrote" *Paradise Lost* and other last poems, he had to dictate the poems stored in his memory to his amanuensis.
4. Colin Huerter (with permission: Holy Cross class of 2001) put it this way: "Blake seems to work through the body more, contort our faces and our extremities as we recite" the poems. "Just think of how different it is to recite [Wordsworth's] 'I wandered' and the 'Tyger.'"
5. With permission of (in order): Daniel Riley, Lauren Schnare, Sara D'Alessandro, Riley again, Patrick Tigue, Holy Cross College class of 2004.

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About the Authors

B. EUGENE MCCARTHY has a degree in English and a Master's from the University of Detroit. He took his PhD at the University of Kansas in 1965. He taught a full range of undergraduate courses at Holy Cross College until his retirement in 2000. His focus was on Restoration and Eighteenth Century drama, and his first book was *William Wycherley: A Biography* (Ohio University Press, 1979), followed by *William Wycherley, A Reference Guide* (G. K. Hall, 1985).

His interest then moved toward poetry of the 18th Century and he began teaching first-year, introductory courses in poetry, teaming with Fran Quinn to develop an approach to poetry that also informed upper-level literature courses.

As a visiting scholar at Clare Hall at Cambridge University, he researched *Thomas Gray: The Progress of a Poet* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997). Several other publications came out of his study of Gray. "Reading Blake: A Case for Memorization" appeared in *Interfaces: Image, Texte, Language* (2010).

While publishing in African American literature on Richard Wright and Toni Morrison, his most recent work was co-edited with Thomas L. Doughton, *From Bondage to Belonging: The Worcester Slave Narratives* (U. Mass Press, 2007), an edition of eight narratives by ex-slaves who lived in Worcester. He has been an editor of *The Worcester Review* and participates in the Milton Ensemble which offers dramatic performances of books of *Paradise Lost* each year.

In recent years he has taught poetry and literature in the Worcester Institute for Senior Education (WISE) program at Assumption College. Since retirement, he and his wife, Barbara (Humanities Department, WPI), enjoy hiking, foreign travel, visiting their five children and nine grandchildren. They continue their interest in reading, and often, with friends, attend music, film, and theater in the Worcester and Boston areas. His interest in watercoloring absorbs much pleasurable time and attention.

FRAN QUINN has a bachelor's degree from Assumption College and an ABD from U. Mass, Amherst. He taught literature in high schools and in colleges in New England for many years. His interest was always in finding innovative ways to teach poetry to students at various levels—ways to allow the students to

discover and learn, and bring them inside poems, not keep them outside, without emotional engagement.

Most important to this teaching is that he is a poet himself; he published three volumes of poetry, *Milk of the Lioness* (1982), *The Goblet Crying for Wine* (Blue Sofa Press, 1995), and *A Horse of Blue Ink* (Blue Sofa Press, 2005), and has placed poems in various journals. In 2002, *The Worcester Review* produced a special issue for his 60th birthday with forty tributes by such poets as Robert Bly, Eavan Boland, Coleman Barks, Seamus Heaney, and Galway Kinnell. Robert Creeley says, "Fran has been and is the best news possible"; says Donald Hall, "No one has worked so hard for poetry as Fran Quinn. No one has benefitted more poets, with his diligence, his warm heart, and his inventiveness."

One of the founders of the Worcester County Poetry Association in 1971, he organized Robert Bly's Mother Conference for years. In addition to teaching creative writing for over twenty-five years, he was the poet-in-residence and director of the internationally known Visiting Writers Series at Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana for fifteen years, a series that brought in 500 poets worldwide. He now conducts regular poetry workshops in Indianapolis, Chicago, New York City, and elsewhere. Visit his website at franquinnworkshops.com.

Hearing and **speaking** are essential to making poems live. Poems are a physical experience. This book explains how to find your way to the heart of a poem by taking it off the page.

Hard to believe that anyone serious about poetry, either student or teacher, wouldn't want to own this book. Reading *Sound Ideas* is like being in a class with the best poet and teacher of your life. McCarthy and Quinn are those poet teachers, each having fallen in love with poetry, each having given over their lives to its beauty and power. And this book is that classroom, one which comes alive with force and pleasure, with their shared belief that poetry itself comes truly alive when one speaks and hears it, when it enters the consciousness through that breath and release, when it has the power to change lives. This book offers something new and necessary in the study of poetry.

—JOHN HODGEN

The unique appeal of this book is its emphasis on how to speak and hear the poem. In the end, speaking and learning how to "hear" the poem brings the reader closer and closer to the poem's "sound ideas," that mysterious and startling moment when tongue, ear, and brain are all sounding together.

—ROBERT CORDING

Students and general readers will find [*Sound Ideas*] bracing and refreshing, simultaneously instructive and delightful as well as a guide to wide and varied good taste.

—ANTHONY E. WALTON

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—WILLIAM WENTHE

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