

SABBATICAL REPORT: 2003-2004

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SABBATICAL PROPOSAL FOR THE YEAR 2003-2004

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BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

One of the most rewarding aspects of my experience at Mt. SAC has been my discovery of writing and teaching poetry. A few years ago I was lucky enough to have a sabbatical during which I was able to explore the Los Angeles area poetry world and to network very broadly to that world and beyond it. I also investigated the sharing of poetry electronically and the possibility of teaching poetry on-line.

This was a wonderful experience and valuable for my students and the school. I am a known poet in the Los Angeles area and can connect my students with the poetry community. I have also had the chance to meet and work with many extraordinary poet/teachers, including the current Poet Laureate, Billy Collins, the former Poet Laureate, Robert Pinsky, and National Book Award Winner, Lucille Clifton. Such contact has enhanced my own teaching

Also, as a result of my sabbatical I was able to develop an on-line course in creative writing poetry that was one of the first two on-line courses taught at MTSAC. I also am well enough connected that I have been able to take over the task of bringing writers to our campus for the Writers' Day Committee.

Before in my sabbatical I was primarily concerned with the aesthetic value of poetry. This time I want to look at broader, more practical aspects of poetry, ones that can involve the general community as well as serious poets.

I wish to explore poetry and healing, and poetry and recovery. As part of this exploration, I also want to learn about community service projects involving poetry. I additionally want to deepen my knowledge of the personal and social healing found in some Islamic poetry in order to share this poetry more effectively with students.

I will pursue the first part of my sabbatical inquiry that deals with healing by background reading, interviews, observation, and perhaps participation in some community service projects. At the end of the sabbatical I will have summaries of interviews and findings, as well a bibliography that will be useful not only for members of my department, but to other departments, especially those involved in Health Science. This sabbatical will make me effective in teaching students from Health Science and related fields, provide models for community outreach and service through poetry, and enhance the diversity of all my courses. The sabbatical additionally will provide new ways for my department to participate in campus learning communities.

Dorianne Laux
Audre Lorde
William Mathews
Sharon Olds

Poets and/or therapists I will interview will include at least five of the following. They may also include others that I become aware of in my research. (Some of these poets will also be included in other interviews, but the results will be reported separately.)

Ginger Andrews
Jennifer Bosvald
Richard Garcia
John Harris
Joe Hansen
Suzanne Lummis
Holdaday Mason
Robert Mezey
Franceye Smith
Charles Webb
Nancy Wing

The questions I will ask will vary, and will depend on the background of the individual interviewee: The following are some questions I might ask a poet/therapist, such as Charles Webb:

1. How long have you been a therapist?
2. How long have you been a poet?
3. Do you see yourself primarily as a poet or therapist?
4. To what extent do you believe poetry is therapeutic?
5. To what extent is it for you?
6. What is the most therapeutic aspect of poetry?
7. If poetry is therapeutic, why have some poets led such spectacularly unhappy and unhealthy lives?
8. How does one balance the therapeutic and aesthetic aspects of poetry?
9. Do you encourage student poets to write poetry that is therapeutic?
10. Do you ever have clients write poems as therapy?
11. Are you concerned with the aesthetic quality of such poems?
12. If your primary concern is with the aesthetic quality of poetry, how do you handle students who are obviously disturbed and are not using poetry for aesthetic purposes?
13. In what ways is a poetry workshop like a therapy group?
14. How do you handle therapeutic issues when they come up in a traditional class?
15. Do you think a creative writing course might be combined successfully with a course from the health sciences, or a counseling group?

3. The instructor and more experienced members of the group often function as role models for other members who want to "have what they have," recovery and/or publication.
4. The atmosphere is supportive.
5. The ethos is egalitarian.

The similarities are in fact so striking I wonder how writers who are also recovering from various addictions—not a few have noted that writers tend to have compulsive personalities—mix their recovery with their art, whether, among other things, they see them as complimentary or opposed.

I would like to interview some writers who are in recovery and interview some individuals who work in the recovery field as well. There is, however, one problem with these interviews: Because of the emphasis on anonymity in twelve-step programs—"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of this program," states AA's big book-- these interviews will have to be anonymous as well. I can describe the writers to some extent, but I cannot give their names.

I already know seven writers and three recovery professionals that I might interview. There is a great deal of differences in age as well as in achievement. The same is true of the recovery professionals. I would like to interview at least four of these individuals,

Some questions that might be included are:

1. How long have you been a writer?
2. How long have you been in recovery?
3. Which activity began first?
4. Do you still attend meetings?
5. Have you done twelve-step writing?
6. What relationship does this writing have to your twelve-step writing?
7. Have you ever not wanted to work a step because you were afraid it might interfere with your creativity?
8. In what ways is the process of recovery like the process of writing?
9. Do you believe poetry can be used to help those in recovery?
10. Do you believe that writing and reading poetry could be part of a recovery program?
11. Are there particular poets who you believe would be helpful?
12. Are there any ways that you, personally, have found poetry helpful in dealing with the aftermath of 9/11?

Results:

This section of my sabbatical research will be similar to my research on health Summaries of the interviews will present my findings. I will develop an annotated bibliography of poets whose work relates to recovery and writing assignments

II: ISLAMIC POETS: ANOTHER PATH TO HEALING

The investigation of poetry and community service will form a bridge to the next part of my sabbatical, which will deal with poetry's ability to heal in an even broader sense.

Most of us know very little about Islamic culture and literature. I did not know, for example, until I talked to some of my Islamic students that Ramadan is not a grim time of privation, but includes celebration as well.

I have learned a little bit about Islamic poetry because I have fallen in love with one Islamic poetic form, the ghazal. This is a rather complicated issue, but briefly, the ghazal is an ancient poetic form of discrete couplets. Each couplet can theoretically stand alone as its own poem; but they are unified by a refrain, and sometimes by a repeated internal rhyme. The content is often sensual and mystical, and the poet traditionally ends the poem by mentioning the poet's own name. The ghazal has been attempted with varying degrees of success by American poets. Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, and Galway Kinnell, for example, have written ghazals, although whether they actually followed the form has been questioned. It was questioned most vigorously by the late Aga Shaid Ali, an American poet born and raised in Kashmir. Shortly before his death he published an anthology: *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English*. In it he included two of my ghazals along with those of many nationally known poets, and I was somewhat surprised because I feel I am a beginner in dealing with that poetic form.

When 9/11 took place, I found what I knew of Islamic poetry valuable to both to myself and to my students. One of the first things I did was share some Islamic poetry with my students as a balance to the horror and anger they felt. This sharing, I believe was in keeping with MTSAC's valuing diversity, lifelong learning, and a positive spirit.

It is sadly obvious that such sharing will be necessary in my classroom and many other classrooms of the future. That is why as the final part of my sabbatical I want to study Islamic poetry. I feel it will help our community continue to celebrate diversity and tolerance in difficult times and provide poetic healing in a social, as well as individual sense.

I want to read some Islamic poetry deeply--a few poets and documents, both from classical and modern authors: They will include at least the following, which are listed in approximate chronological order:

The Koran

Rumi:

(The great mystic whose work in translation is among the best selling poetry in the United States)

Haiz:

(Considered the finest lyric poet in Persian)

Ghalib:

(The inspiration for Adrienne Rich's *Homage to Ghalib* and said to be to Urdu literature what Shakespeare is to English)

Nazim Hikmet:

(Turkish poet, playwright, novelist, and political prisoner)

Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

(An adapter of the ghazal for political purposes, and a translator of Hikmet into Urdu.) He is called by his English translator, Naomi Lazard, the most important contemporary poet of India and the subcontinent.)

Agha Shahid Ali:

(American poet of Kashmirian background and another translator of Faiz)

Naomi Shihab Nye:

(American poet of Palestinian background and one of the subjects of Bill Moyers' series on poetry, *The Language of Life*.)

I will begin by looking at these poets as they are represented in such anthologies as *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, Tony and Willis Barnstone's *Literatures of the Middle East*, and Carolyn Forche's *Against Forgetting*. I will also read at least book by each poet and will keep a "common-place" journal of these writings, copying down or photocopying poems and/or passages that seem especially important. (This approach is similar to one used by Robert Pinsky for all his students.) I will comment on my selections and devise writing assignments and discussion questions from this material. I will especially note the poems that will facilitate the appreciation of the cultures that produced this work.

Results:

I will have summaries of my study of this material in my report. In addition particular important poems and those which will promote cultural understanding and the celebration of diversity will be identified. The report will also include samples of writing assignments, discussion questions, and of my journal entries.

October:

More interviews on healing emphasizing recovery. Begin with three recovering writers I have contact with. If possible observe the use of poetry in healing situations. Make notes on these experiences.

November

Contact with service organizations. Interviews with directors of those organizations. Observation of some of their community outreach programs.

December:

Continue work on poetry and healing, wrap up interviews; do further observations. Review notes. Finish annotated bibliographies on poetry on health and poetry and recovery.

January:

Reading and responding to *The Koran* Use the selections in Barnstone's *Literatures of the Middle East*, and in *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. Identify especially important passages and begin devising writing assignments and discussion questions.

February:

Reading and responding to Rumi, Haiz and Ghalib. Begin with in *Literatures of the Middle East, The Norton Anthology of World Literature*.

March:

Reading and responding to Hikmet, and Faiz Amed Faiz and possibly one author discovered in my research. Begin with selections in *Literatures of the Middle East* and in *Against Forgetting*, ed. Carolyn Forche. Go on to read one book by each author. Continue note taking.

April: Reading and responding to Aga Shahid Ali and Naomi Shaid Nye, and possibly one or two authors discovered in my research. Begin with Ali's *A Country with No Post Office* and Nye's *Fuel*. Complete the development of class materials.

May:

Review and revise notes. Write up sabbatical report.

PART I: POETRY AND HEALING

OVERVIEW:

My exploration of poetry and healing was conducted as planned by reading and interviews. My proposal listed authors I intended to read, as well as others I hoped to interview. I hoped to read at least five of the authors mentioned. I, in fact, read material by nine of the authors mentioned in my proposal, as well as many other authors I discovered after my proposal. The nine authors mentioned were Ginger Andrews, Doug Anderson, Raymond Carver, Lucille Clifton, Jack Gilbert, Tony Hoagland, Dorianne Laux, William Mathews, and Sharon Olds. I also interviewed eleven of the writers mentioned as possible interviewees. The general results of those interviews will be presented below. Appendices A and B present summaries of individual interviews. An annotated bibliography, which may be shared with students and colleagues, is in Appendix C of this report. (This annotated bibliography combines material appropriate to the health sciences in general with material more specifically appropriate to chemical dependency, since there was frequent overlap.) Appendix D presents possible assignments, some of which I will be using in writing classes this fall. (This appendix also combines material appropriate to both health sciences and chemical dependency.)

Although I did read material and interview writers mentioned in my proposal. The most rewarding of this aspect of my investigation was the discovery of additional material to read and new individuals to interview. Several texts were key discoveries: Rafael Campo's *The Healing Art: A Doctor's Black Bag of Poetry*, Ernest Kurtz and

programs—in particular the somewhat literary approach that such programs took. Because of this some interviews were with writers who were in 12-step program. One of the first writers I interviewed suggested I look at *The Spirituality of Imperfection*. What I learned was very helpful and re-enforced Campo's remarks on narrative.

Kurtz maintains that Bill W, and the other founders of Alcoholic Anonymous had, in fact, rediscovered a spiritual tradition that appears in many religions. In the process of developing his ideas Kurtz ranges over a wide variety of writers and religions, everything and everyone from the desert fathers to Sufi mystics, from Zen Buddhism to Hassidism. Key to all these traditions, he maintains, is the sharing of stories. In developing his ideas Kurtz shares many stories himself, such as the Hassidic tale which maintains that God created humanity because "God loves stories." One of the essential elements in 12-step programs, Kurtz believes, is that those recovering from alcohol and other addictions share their stories. It is the story that heals.

Gregory Orr's "Poetry As Survival" tied healing and narrative to poetry by his discussion of what he calls "the personal lyric." Orr is a professor of Creative Writing at the University of Virginia, the author of eight books of poetry, and the editor of the *Virginia Quarterly*. He is also a survivor of a terrible childhood event: "When I was twelve years old I was responsible for [a hunting] accident in which my younger brother died." (Orr 6) His parents were so traumatized that "they were unable to offer me any consolation for my deed, or even speak with me about it." (Orr 7) Other people told him that this was an accident, but that was little comfort: "Who could live in a world composed of accidents so terrible as to leave your little brother, who was standing beside

the personal lyric urges the self to *translate* its whole being into language where it can dramatize and restabilize itself in the patterned language of the poem. The personal lyric takes the physical terms of human crisis (the characters, the setting, and the sensations) and brings them over into language: it takes body and makes it "body" takes tulips and makes them "tulips." Takes the self and makes it "I" takes another self and makes it "you" or "she" or "he."(29)

In other words, the self is able to retain its wholeness, when events threaten to shatter it—to be, if not "cured" healed. Of course the story-telling capacity of the personal lyric is important. In telling a personal story, whether or not the story is completely accurate, we regain a kind of control over the events and feelings that threaten to overwhelm us:

"Any sorrow can be borne if it can be made into a story, or if a story can be told about it," wrote Isak Dinesen, the Danish author of *Out of Africa*. No quote I know more perfectly expresses the survival function of story-making: it helps us to live. (21)

In addition to its story-telling capacities, poetry, according to Orr, has a particular healing capacity because of its metaphoric, symbolic, and, most importantly, its incantatory qualities:

Abercrombie is novelist and poet, who teaches fiction in the U.C.L.A. Extension program. She also conducts monthly writing workshops for The Wellness Community, a cancer support organization. Her book emerged out of these workshops, as well as from her own experience with cancer:

Her book is simple and direct. She discusses stages of her experiences with cancer, presents passages from writers, predominantly prose writers, who have had similar experiences, and then invites her readers to write brief exercises, usually on the stage of the cancer experience that her examples have illustrated. I have attended her workshop, and her approach in them was even more direct and simple. Following a reading of some examples, students would engage in five-minute writing exercises and then share their work. These exercises, of course, were not poetry, but the time compression seemed to make many of the responses poetic. Her workshop produces deep feelings and eager sharing.

Abercrombie certainly gives some hints as to how a healing workshop might be approached, but the results of such workshops, and the very meaning of the term "healing" is another question. Can poetry lead to cure as well as psychological healing? Who knows? Occasionally there is some evidence, according to Orr, for example,

Although conclusive scientific experiments in this area are difficult to design and control, there is mounting evidence that disclosure of painful or traumatic experience in writing or speech, has a stimulating effect on the body's immune system. (89)

Mandela, Hikmet does not seem to be embittered by his years in prison, nor by his poor health that led to two heart attacks and his eventual death from a third. Here, for example, is a poem that records a small joy:

The Cucumber

to Ekber Babyev

The snow is knee-deep in the courtyard
and still coming down hard,
it hasn't let up all morning.
We're in the kitchen.

On the table there's a very tender young cucumber
pebbly and fresh as a daisy.

We sit around the table staring at it.

It softly lights up our faces
and the very air smells fresh.

We sit around the table staring at it
-----amazed,

thoughtful
optimistic

as if in a dream.

On the table, on the oilcloth, hope--
on the table, beautiful days,
a cloud seeded with a green sun,
an emerald crowd impatient and on its way
loves blooming openly--
on the table, there on the oilcloth, a very tender young
cucumber,
pebbly and fresh as a daisy.

The snow is knee-deep in the courtyard
and coming down hard.
It hasn't let up all morning.

*March 1960
Moscow*

(Hikmet 234)

In another poem Hikmet faces imminent death with grace and humor.

Rafael was treating a patient whom, he discovered, had advanced breast cancer. As he sat across from her, trying to summon the courage to tell her the dire prognosis, she reached across and touched his left arm:

We stayed linked for a few minutes, communicating deeply and wordlessly. I felt the terror in her touch, and its gentleness until I rediscovered my own narrative. When I told her not to be afraid, when I explained to her what she already knew was inside her, when I guided her hands to her breast to show her exactly where, what I was really telling her was a version of my own story. (Campo, *Desire to Heal* 226)

Campo began to tell her his own story. When he was a teenager, he had suffered a severe compound fracture of his left arm. The trauma was more than physical since it was mixed with Campo's struggles with being gay. Without his parents' permission, Campo had gone on a skiing trip, with a man he hoped would be his first lover. When Campo fell, the man skied on and left Campo on the slope. Campo's convalescence from the broken limb was long and seemed to intensify all his other anxieties. Even after the cast was removed, Campo had limited use of his arm, and for a time he was a literal version of the limp wristed stereotype that he had always feared.

Eventually the arm healed enough for Rafael to have full use of it. He graduated from Amherst and Harvard medical school. He became a poet. He entered into a monogamous relationship with his first lover—a relationship that he continues to

4. Abercrombie gives practical suggestions as to how poetry may be used in a healing situation.

5. Hikmet's work gives a stunning example of the use of poetry to cope with extraordinary difficulties

Most of my interviews and investigations only confirmed the insights of these authors, and alone they could probably form the basis of a program on poetry and healing.

SUMMARY OF POET/ THERAPIST INTERVIEWS

Procedures:

In my proposal I indicated that I would interview at least five of the poets and poet/therapists listed. I interviewed nine individuals. I also interviewed six poets who were involved in 12-step programs. (These interviews will be dealt with separately.) These poets included over five poets from my original list, among who were Ginger Andrews, Richard Garcia, Holaday Mason, Charles Webb, and Nancy Wing. Other individuals from my proposed list were also interviewed, but they were part of my twelve-step poets, and in keeping with the anonymity of twelve-step groups, cannot be identified. (I had originally thought I could separate the twelve-step part of these interviews from the more general issues, and include the responses, along with names in this part of my report. However, it became obvious that I could not do this without making it possible to identify the poets in the 12-step interviews). Additional poets I interviewed were Barbara Abercrombie, Mifanwy Kaiser, Anne Silver, and Cecilia

situations. Most, but not all, did not believe in emphasizing craft or form in therapeutic situations. All agreed that poetry was helpful although some well-known poets, such as Sylvia Plath, had led difficult and self-destructive lives. Many had specific suggestions for workshop approaches. Most thought that poetry could be valuable for students in counseling or the health sciences. They also believed that it could be used for community outreach and service learning.

Poetry Experience

The poets came to poetry by different paths. Charles Webb, who has also written fiction, concentrated on poetry because it contained the most intense and rewarding use of language. Nancy Wing and Richard Garcia first used poetry extensively as an expression of the sorrows and joys of love. Ginger Andrews wrote her first poem at nine after her mother's death. Cecilia Woloch, Mifanwy Kaiser, and Anne Silver were inspired by teachers.

All of the poets had found poetry personally helpful and in the broadest sense therapeutic. When interviewed, Nancy Wing was writing to help her deal with her brother's recent death. Charles Webb found that poetry gave him self-knowledge, and that when he went into psychology he had an obvious advantage. Cecilia Woloch still finds poetry so personally significant that she sometimes cries when she reads a new poem. Anne Silver used poetry to help her deal with breast cancer. Moreover, four of the 12-step poets, whose interviews we will deal with later, credited writing poetry with helping them with depression. (One of them, in fact, worked with her psychiatrist, by writing poems for each session.)

according to most of my informants, is poetry's relation to physical experience. Former poet laureate Robert Pinsky said in a poetry workshop that I attended "a poem is a column of air, and I mean that literally." Moreover, according to Pinsky, poetry is the most intimate form of art "because you take another person's breathing into your body." The poet's I interviewed agreed that poetry was physical, and several, including Nancy Wing, Mifanwy Kaiser, and Cecilia Woloch, suggested that poetry's incantatory and rhythmic qualities were especially valuable and healing.

The professional psychotherapists interviewed agreed that poetry was therapeutic, although not all of them used it in their work. Charles Webb has sometimes assigned a poem to a client. Moreover, he feels that poetry workshops and therapy groups are quite similar. Nancy Wing, as previously mentioned, uses journaling with her clients but encourages them to write in a fragmentary and poetic manner. Holaday Mason, on the other hand, would never use poetry in therapy because she is an analyst, seeing patients repeatedly during the week over a long period of time, and "that [poetry therapy] is not the kind of poetry I do." Asked if therapy and poetry were similar, she replied, "Oh, God, I hope not."

Craft And Healing:

Usually poetry workshops attempt to improve the poet's work by criticism and rewriting, by working, in other words, on craft. The question is whether workshops that are primarily directed toward healing should work in this way. A related question is whether such workshops should ever deal with specific forms—the sonnet, for example, or the haiku.

responses. Richard Garcia felt that the whole idea of the suffering, unhappy poet was old-fashioned romantic nonsense. Most of the poets he knows live happy lives. Mifanwy felt that there were more happy than unhappy poets. Cecilia Woloch believes that being a poet in a society that does not support poetry is hard. Ann Silver thinks that poets who do not have good feedback from a teacher and/or workshop can be bogged down in negative emotion. Charles believes that the group of people who are drawn to poetry is far from representative. Poets, according to him, are more introspective, and being introspective is not necessarily helpful. Almost all of those interviewed believed that even those poets who were unhappy and self-destructive were probably helped by their poetry and probably held together by it longer than they would have been without it.

Other Concerns

A few of the poets noted that they turned to poetry for consolation after 9/11. This, however, was not always true, nor were all of the poets deeply affected by this event. Nancy Wing, for example, believes that the on-going destruction of the Tibetan people and culture had affected her, and continues to affect her more deeply. So many of the poets had so little to say about the aftermath of 9/11 that it was not fruitful line of questioning. Perhaps they, like much of the world, have moved on to other disasters.

All of those interviewed thought a course on writing poetry could easily be combined with one on counseling or from the health sciences. Cecilia Woloch and Barbara Abercrombie, in fact, mentioned combined courses they had taught which had been successful. (These courses did, however, deal with other subjects.) All also felt that poetry might be made part of community outreach or service learning. Richard Garcia

Backgrounds:

The poets ranged from older poets near eighty who had been part of the Los Angeles poetry world for years to emerging poets whose work has more recently begun to be celebrated. All had many years of sobriety. The shortest sobriety was ten years. The longest was over thirty years. Some had written poetry before sobriety. Two had taken up poetry in sobriety. One returned to it after a long, drunken hiatus. One poet is in another 12-step program. Since only initials are given, perhaps it would be easier to keep the poets straight if I summarized their individual backgrounds.

Poet B is a very active emerging poet in the Los Angeles area. He is a dynamic performer and has been part of the "slam scene"—poetry competitions that are judged on delivery as well as content. B has been in recovery for 14 years, since his early twenties, from drug addiction and alcoholism. He started working on poetry about two years into his recovery.

Poet D is a recovering alcoholic and addict who has been sober since 1973. He has been writing poetry only for about four years. After turning to poetry, he found it helpful in dealing with depression. He is also a professional jazz musician and has played with Stan Kenton, Janis Joplin, and Sonny Rollins.

Poet R is an amateur poet who has won many writing awards. He has been a poet for over 64 years. He has been in A.A. for 10 years. According to R, he became a poet because he had a talent for it.

Recovery:

All of the poets interviewed had many years of sobriety. Most of them were enthusiastic members of A.A., had "worked the steps," and continued to do so. Poet B, for example, although only in his late thirties, had been in A.A. for 14 years. He attends three meetings a week and sponsors other individuals. Since one of his sponsees is deaf, he has learned sign so he can communicate with him. B. has done all the 12-step writing and is currently working on a new "inventory" centered on his father. K, as another example, also attends meetings regularly, continues 12-step writing, and sponsors other alcoholics. Poet R., on the other hand, has never completed the 12-step writing, but he does attend five meetings a week. Only F. is not active in her program. She is not attending meetings, and she never did any 12-step writing because "I don't write on demand."

Poetry and Recovery.

Most of the poets interviewed found that A.A. and twelve-step writing only enhanced their poetry. K, in particular, found her twelve-step writing and work helpful because much of her poetry deals with alcoholism.

Poet J, on the other hand, had "writer's block," for over ten years after becoming sober. He did not mind this because sobriety was his main concern. Moreover, he was

sobriety, and had studied with important poets at Wellesley. As her alcoholism advanced, however, she stopped writing. Then, after years of sobriety, she found herself suffering depression, partly because of the stresses of her work for the Alcoholism Counsel of Greater New York. She was additionally having physical difficulties. K returned to poetry. She was also in psychotherapy, and because of an infection, her vocal cords became paralyzed, and she could not speak. Her therapist, however, told her he would not let her out of therapy. He had her write poems for every session, and then he would comment on them. This, and the discovery of poets, such as Sharon Olds, who wrote directly out of their lives, made her continue with poetry. She feels she wrote her way out of a major depression. She incidentally, feels that 12-step work has helped her more with writing than psychotherapy. Writing, she feels is much like 12-step recovery in that it demands absolute honesty and the crushing of the ego.

Healing

K obviously found poetry therapeutic and healing in the broadest sense. She also believes that it has helped her with physical difficulties, such as rheumatoid arthritis. The other poets' experiences were not as dramatic, but they all thought that poetry was therapeutic, and could help individuals in recovery. D did say that "poetry has a bad rap" with many people and is rather intimidating. He suggested that journaling might be better for some. He did note, however, much like K, that poetry was similar to recovery in that it is difficult, and a discipline. "There is no free lunch." Some of the poets seemed to view poetry as something that helped them live life after sobriety without alcohol or drugs.

Being accessible, as a matter of fact, was important to the poets interviewed. For poet J, for example, the most gratifying result of giving a reading is when someone tells him that he or she can "relate" to what he has written, when they say: "I know what you are talking about. Thanks for putting it into words." He, like many of the poets interviewed, had little to say about 9/11. But he did note that for him the object of poetry was to give a voice to those who do not have one.

Poet F certainly has a voice, and like everything else about her, it is unconventional. F. did not turn to poetry after 9/11, although she was aware of some poems that circulated, such as one by Auden. She was not particularly shocked or angered by the event. The buildings were such "a monument to American hubris that the attack on them was no surprise" as far as she was concerned.

(For more details of individual interviews, see Appendices A and B.)

INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNITY SERVICE:

Procedures:

In this part of my sabbatical I planned to make contacts and perhaps do observations which would teach me more about community outreach involving poetry, in particular running poetry readings, and about bringing poetry workshops to the community. Hopefully this might result in some ideas for service learning and poetry. The community service part of my sabbatical proved to be the most challenging, but the challenges were instructive.

homes. Nevertheless, she does not hesitate to control the reading and to let even important readers know if they are exceeding their allotted time.

Poet B. thoroughly disliked everything about running a poetry venue except when the reading went well and he felt he had contributed to something beautiful. He felt it was important to get as many people involved in running a reading as possible. In particular he felt it important that there should be one person whose sole task was publicity. (Having at one time run a reading by myself, I very much concur.) Finally, B felt that anyone running a reading should "not be afraid to have standards," even when it came to open readers. (Open readers are those from the audience who sign up ahead of time to read briefly during the program.) Some reading hosts try to be very gracious and egalitarian, but there are limits.

Wendy Herbert has enjoyed conducting the dA's readings. She particularly enjoyed running their fundraising contest this year and working with their judge, Charles Webb. She found publicity time consuming and difficult. Wendy has an MBA and feels that promoting a poetry reading such as the dA's, without an established following, is like creating a new market. This, as she learned in business school, is much more difficult than "stealing a market that is already there."

Many individuals interviewed for other aspects of this sabbatical have been extensively involved in teaching poetry in the community: Richard Garcia was for a long time poet-in-residence at Children's Hospital. Cecilia Woloch has taught extensively in the public schools as part of Poet's in the Schools, and at one point she worked with individuals at Patton State Mental Hospital. Poet B has taught recently in the inner city. Mifanwy Kaiser is currently teaching a workshop for homeless women, and Tebot Bach

There were, of course, slight differences in the individual poet's experiences. When Cecilia Woloch worked with people at Patton State Mental Hospital, who had been judged "criminally insane," she made a point of never learning what they actually had done. Richard Garcia is sure that working with dying children took a psychological toll, although he has little awareness of how deeply such work affected him, and has never written about it in his poetry. Richard advises that if students and others want to do community teaching, they should never do it alone.

Observation and Participation

This aspect of my sabbatical proved the most challenging. I was able to observe Barbara Abercrombie's workshop, but could do little else directly. I already knew Mifanwy Kaiser, and I was aware that Tebot Bach was starting community outreach project and needed facilitators. I thought I might be able to become involved in this, or at least observe one of the projects that was on-going. Moreover, after my sabbatical began, it seemed that I might be able to do some work myself through the Wellness Community at their site in Pasadena.

My hopes for learning through Tebot Bach did not materialize. Tebot Bach had planned to give honorariums to the group leaders, but the funds did not come through, and even though I was willing to wave an honorarium, they felt being able to give an honorarium was important to their organization.

Working through the Wellness Community seemed an even better opportunity. My wife has lymphoma, and just before my sabbatical was accepted, I found out that I have aggressive prostate cancer. (I was assured by my physicians that I would be able to

some of my creative writing students in that project. Extensive community outreach should involve other instructors and, as mentioned, the help of Service Learning.

drafts of the fall schedule, this designation never made it into the final draft.) I will also use some of the assignments that touch on recovery.

2. I will share some of the findings of this sabbatical with creative writing students.
3. The above actions will begin the process of moving toward the more long-range benefits of my investigation.

DEPARTMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS:

1. I have bibliography, assignments, and summaries of interviews that I will begin to share with members of my department and with members of other departments.
2. As noted in my proposal the Chairs of the Departments of Nursing, Radiologic Technology and Mental Health Technology have already invited me to department meetings. I have also been invited to by the Director of the Drug and Alcohol Counseling Program to speak to his students on the relation between writing and recovery. This school year I will begin following up these invitations and present appropriate material to each group.
3. I believe I have much to say, and the materials should be useful. Ideally there will be some of the long-range effects envisioned in my proposal. and that these effects will carry on after I have left MTSAC.
4. I will also share with interested members of my department what I have learned about poetry and community outreach and service. I will share some of this material with students and with Service Learning. Hopefully, this sharing will

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PART II: "ISLAMIC" POETRY

OVERVIEW

In this sabbatical I proposed to read some "Islamic poetry" since I believed it might contribute to healing my students and myself in a broader, social sense, and thus increase the understanding of cultures that many of us fear. I hoped to identify particular material to share with my students and colleagues. I also hoped to increase my small knowledge of the ghazal, a traditional Islamic poetic form.

This part of my sabbatical has been a fascinating. In addition to the texts and authors that I proposed, I made side-trips into modern Arabic literature, as well as the pre-Islamic ode. As I read more deeply, I frequently wished I had chosen only a portion of my proposal for my research—the Koran, or the work of Rumi, perhaps. In the end, my work seems mainly to have redrawn the boundaries of my ignorance. I discovered, for example, that the more accepted spelling for "Koran" is "*Qu'ran*", and that I would have little sense of the Islamic experience with that text since I do not know Arabic and had not heard its "poetry," recited for years. (The *Qu'ran* is rhymed, although not metered.) I also discovered that the term "Islamic poetry" is not accurate. Some writers, such as Nazim Hikmet, were not believers. More importantly the odes, which I have referred to above, and which have important influence on later literature, were written before the birth of Islam. Moreover, some modern Arabic authors were Christian. I retain the term "Islamic Poetry," because that was used in my proposal "Poets from Islamic Cultures" might be more accurate. But this does not include the pre-Islamic Odes. Nor does it include the work of Gahlil Gibran, who was a major figure in modern Arabic literature.

perhaps, with which I was familiar. I was wrong. I knew little of the origin of the *Qu'ran*, nothing about its structure, and less than nothing about its acoustical or incantatory qualities.

The Bible, although a sacred text, was composed over many years by many individuals. (Or at least that is the common scholarly view.) Moreover, there are different versions of *the Bible*. There is existing material that was not included in the "cannon," and there are many different translations, even in a given language. In addition, *the Bible* is, for the most part, a chronological document, detailing a long history of human interaction with the divine.

The *Qu'ran*, according to Muslim belief, is the words of God, recited by the Archangel Gabriel to Mohammed, who was apparently illiterate, and who then recited these words to others. ("*Qu'ran*" literally means "recitation.") These recitations took place over many years. Mohammed is not the author of the *Qu'ran*. (This issue is addressed over and over in the text.) Mohammed's recitations were memorized during his lifetime, and some, according to tradition, written down on palm leaves. "The various chapters or "Suras" were assembled after Mohammed's death "in 651-652 CE under the Caliph Othman. All alternative versions were destroyed, thereby fixing the canonical text that has been passed down virtually unchanged to the present." (*Bedford* 2, 101-2)

The "Suras" were not, however, assembled in chronological order, but in order of length—longest to the shortest, even though the earliest Suras were often short. *The Qu'ran* is, moreover, as Barnstone says in *The Literatures of the Middle East*, "oral literature confined to text." (239) Like, other fixed oral works, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, it is quite repetitive. (The *ghazal*, by the way, is non-linear and repetitive.) The

was appalled: "Now none of God's creatures was more hateful to me than an (ecstatic) poet or a man possessed . . . I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest. (*Bedford* 139) Eventually Mohammed saw his mission differently, but he continued to oppose the poets and also the polytheism that was practiced in Mecca. Finally, this led to Mohammed and his followers being driven out of Mecca to Medina. The Suras, consequently, are sometimes divided by commentators into those received early in Mecca and those received later in Medina. Despite Mohammed's dislike of poets, the literary qualities of the *Qu'ran* are considered extraordinary and very poetic. So extraordinary are these literary qualities that they are mentioned in *the Qu'ran* as one of the proofs of the direct divine origin of the book: If we think the *Qu'ran* was written by Mohammed, we are challenged to produce even a short work that is anything like it. The *Qu'ran*, thus, is miraculous in and of itself.

I began my exploration of the *Qu'ran* by reading selections from various anthologies, as well as the commentary of the editors. (The remarks above are, for the most part, based on such commentary, and are not always referenced because there is so much unity among the commentators that these remarks could be considered common knowledge.) Since all the anthologies used the translation by N.J. Dawood. I obtained a copy of his translation and read it cover to cover, despite the fact that Dawood warns against this approach: "It is recognized that reading the Surahs in their traditional sequence . . . is not essential to the understanding of the Koran. Readers approaching the Koran for the first time may therefore find it helpful to begin with the shorter and more poetic chapters." (5) Dawood was correct. The early Suras were difficult. Sura 2, for example, has been described as a combination of "Leviticus" and "Revelations." I did not

the *Qu'ran* in its written form . . . As the students learn these Sutras, they are not simply learning something by rote, but rather internalizing the inner rhythms, sound patterns, and textual dynamics—taking it to heart in the deepest manner. (11)

These are, of course, only one scholar's opinions, but I paid particular attention to them because they corresponds to much of what I have been taught by Robert Pinsky and others about poetry: that a poem is sound; the words on the page are like a musical score. Sells emphasizes the importance of the recitation of the *Qu'ran* in Islamic countries:

One afternoon in Cairo, I found myself in an unusual situation. The streets of this noisy, bustling city were suddenly strangely quiet, yet the cafes were crowded with people clustered around televisions. For special events—the death of a great figure, an important soccer game—one might expect to find people in cafes following the vent on television. What had drawn people from the streets into the cafes today was the appearance of one of Egypt's popular *Qu'ran* reciters. When I returned to my hotel, the lobby was filled with men, some of them Egyptian Christians, watching and listening to the televised recitation with intense interest. (1)

What this suggests is that *Qu'ran*, like a poem, is not merely a system of ideas, or an object, but an experience. (This view has been repeated to me many times by one of my mentors, David St. John.) After this introduction, Sells goes on to translate and explicate many of the Meccan Suras. He includes the Arabic and comments extensively

1. The power of the imagery, and especially the metaphors and similes and metaphors of the *Qu'ran*—power that was especially frightening in some of the passages dealing with the last judgment and hell.
2. The importance of water in the references to paradise and the way this may reflect the experience of a desert people.
3. The emphasis on alms giving.
4. The variants on material appearing in *The Bible*. (In the *Qu'ran*, for example, it is Ishmael, not Isaac, whom Abraham almost sacrifices.) Comparing different versions of these stories would provide endless opportunities for student work and might provide a gateway for understanding the similarities and differences between cultures.

A few journal entries will follow. I have selected those that include ideas for student assignments. For more sample entries see Appendix F. For additional assignments, see Appendix E (Unless noted otherwise, all quotations are from the Dawood translation.)

SAMPLE ENTRY #1: From Daybreak: Sura 113, one of the early Suras:

I take refuge in the Lord of Daybreak from the mischief of His creation; from the night when she spreads her darkness, from the mischief of conjuring witches; from the mischief of the envier when he envies.

trans. Dawood

Comment: This is strange and wonderful. Oddly enough it reminds me of the Navajo and their skin walkers. Probably the translation is very important.

1. How much freedom do human beings have?
2. What is God like, and how supreme is God?
3. What is horrible in the words?

READING RUMI:

(Mawlana Jala al-Din 1207-1273)

This sabbatical is not meant to be a comprehensive study of Islamic poetry, only an examination of some important writers, many of whom employed the ghazal. After the *Qu'ran* and material relating to it, I went ahead 600 years to Rumi, one of the great mystical poets. Interestingly enough, Rumi, through the efforts of translator Coleman Barks, is one of the best-selling poets in the United States today.

I read selections and commentary from the Norton and Bedford anthologies, as well as Barnstone's *Literatures of the Middle East*. All of these used Coleman Barks's translations contained in *The Essential Rumi*. Their background commentary was quite similar and is the basis of these remarks. After the anthologies I went to Barks and to another translator, Kabir Helminski

Rumi was a Sufi, a follower of what is often called the mystical branch of Islam. Sufis, through various practices, including poetry and dancing, attempt to achieve union with the divine. (The word "Sufi" means "wool," and refers to the wool cloaks the Sufi wore as part of their simplicity.) Rumi was, moreover, a theologian, teacher, and the founder of a still existent Sufi order, the members of which are sometimes called "whirling dervishes." His own poetry, according to tradition, was recited as he whirled. For his poetry, he used ghazals; a series of discrete couplets, usually used for love poetry,

disciples. Rumi again wrote poems of longing--poems that recall the longing for the lover in the pre--Islamic odes.

As already noted, in addition to Bark's translations, I read those of Kabir Edmund Helminski, a member of the Sufi Melvani order His introductory remarks underscore the importance of Rumi as a religious figure: "In the Islamic world he is held in the highest esteem not only as a literature figure, but as a saint whose personal example inspired the founding of a major religious order."(5) Rumi is a major religious figure. It is as if St. Francis were also a great poet, another Blake, perhaps. Rumi wrote in Persian, as did many Sufi poets, and his *Mathanwi*, is sometimes called the Persian Qur'an.

He also shows a distinctly ecumenical tendency. ." Among those present at his funeral procession were people of different religious traditions, each of whom claimed that Jelasluddin [Rumi] had brought him a deeper understanding of his own faith. "
(Helminski 6) Rumi was influenced by Neo-Platonic thought and may even have come in contact with Buddhism since Balkhu; the place of birth--now in Afghanistan-was on the silk road to China. Later the family moved to Konya in present day Turkey to avoid the Mongol invasion. Rumi's ecumenicism, along with his talk of wine and love, may not be unrelated to his appeal today. Rumi is a very complex figure, and could have provided the basis for a whole sabbatical, or, in the case of Barks, the basis for a career of scholarship and devotion.

As with the *Qu'ran*, I kept a hand-written commonplace journal which filled one hardbound book and overflowed into additional pages: I copied passages, commented on them, and added possible assignments: Two typical passages, each containing assignment

become all hearing with an ear and gain a Ruby earring
 Dig a well in the well of this body
 or even before the well is dug
 let god draw the water up.
 Always be at work scraping the dirt from the well
 To everyone who suffers perseverance brings good fortune
 The Prophet has said that each prostration of prayer
 is a knock on heaven's door.
 When anyone continues to knock
 felicity shows its smiling face

(Helminski 14-15)

The poem shows not only Rumi the poet, but Rumi the teacher and mystic. As a poet Rumi constantly uses metaphor and paradox. As a Sufi Master his aim is the merging of the individual with the divine—the subject with the object as in Zen. Not surprisingly he uses metaphor because metaphor merges two objects or experiences. Paradox does the same. In Rumi metaphor and paradox are signs pointing beyond the poem.

I wonder how students who belong to the "Church of Self-Esteem" will react to this poem. Will this all be only co-dependence for them? Another aspect of this poem that may be disturbing is Rumi's insistence on self-denial.

SOME QUESTIONS:

1. How can the lover and the Beloved be one? Is this nonsense? Is it co-dependence?
2. We are told constantly that we should love ourselves? What would Rumi say to that?
3. What is wise in this poem? (If anything?) What is foolish?

COMPARISON:

1. Compare this poem to George Herbert's "the Pulley."
2. Compare this and other Rumi poems to passages in Whitman's "Song of Myself."

SAMPLE ENTRY #2

(From *The Essential Rumi*. trans. Coleman Barks.)

A Basket of Fresh Bread

The Prophet Muhammad said:

"There is no better companion
 on the way than what you do. Your action will be
 your best friend, or if you're cruel and selfish

as though your chest were filling with light
as when God said:

Did we not expand you
(Qu'ran 94:1)

Don't look for it outside yourself.
You are the source of milk. Don't milk others.

There is a milk fountain inside of you
Don't wander around with an empty bucket.

You have a channel into the ocean, and yet
you ask for water from a little pool.

Beg for that love expansion. Mediate only
on that. The *Qu'ran* says: And he is with you
(57:4)

There is a bucket of fresh bread on your head.
And yet you go from door to door, asking for crusts.

Knocking on your inner door, no other.
Sloshing knee deep in fresh river water, yet
you keep wanting a drink from other people's water bags.

Water is everywhere, but you see only
barriers that keep you from water.
The horse is beneath the riders thighs, and still
he asks, :"Where is my horse?"
Can't you see?
"Yes, I can see, but whoever saw such a horse?"

Mad with thirst, he can't drink from the stream
running so close by his face. He is like a pearl
on the deep bottom, wondering inside his skull
Where is the ocean? His mental questionings
form the barrier. His physical eyesight
bandages his knowing. Self-consciousness plugs his ears.

Stay bewildered in God, only that . . .
simplify your worrying lives. There is one
righteousness. Water the fruit trees
and don't water the thorns. Be generous
to what nurtures the spirit and God's luminous
person-light. Don't honor what causes
dysentery and knotted tumors.

4. Rumi says that the seeker will find everything he needs inside . How does he support this?
5. There are elements of the sermon and lecture in this work. There are also elements of the poet. Is this work a sermon or a poem? Why?
6. How much of this poem is indebted to Islam, at least as we know it from this course? (For World Lit.)

READING HAFIZ

(Khajej Samsoddin Mohammad Hafez-e Shirazic.1320-1390)

After reading Rumi, and briefly glancing at selections from other Sufi writers, such as Sadi (c.1184-1292) and Attar (c. 1120-1220), I turned to Hafiz. First I read selections from anthologies, especially *Literatures of the Middle East*. Then I turned to two texts: *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master* translated by Daniel Ladinsky and *Drunk on the Wine of the Beloved: 100 Poems of Hafiz* translated by Thomas Rain Crowe. Both books provided extensive introductions.

Hafiz, as Ladinsky's title indicates, like Rumi, is considered a Sufi saint, a "Perfect Master." (*Gift* 17). (His poetic name, "Hafiz," by the way, is a title given to one who has memorized the *Qu'ran*.) Like Rumi he employed the ghazal and is considered a master of that form. Stories also emphasize the intensity of his spiritual search. According to one, Hafiz began, as the Platonic lover begins, or as Dante began, with devotion to a beautiful human. He was a baker's assistant and delivering bread to a rich family when he saw and fell in love with their daughter. She was, of course, far beyond his reach. However, legend said that anyone who could keep a vigil every night for forty nights at a particular saint's tomb would be granted whatever he or she wanted. Hafiz kept the vigil, still working in the bakery during the day:

CROOKED DEALS

There is

a madman inside of you

Who is always running for office—

Why vote him in?

For he never keeps the accounts straight.

He gets all kinds of crooked deals

Happening all over town

That will just give you a big headache

And glue to your kisser

A gigantic

Confused

Frown

(108)

Thomas Rain Crowe's translations, at least to my knowledge of the ghazal, seem to me more accurate. They are in couplets, as is the ghazal, and they mention the poet's name in the last couplet, as is traditional. (This accuracy, however, might seem a bit monotonous to students.)

As with reading other poets, I filled my common place journal with copious quotations, comments, and suggestions for student assignments. Here are two entries.

Winebringer, don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.
 Bring me proof from the Book of Life that my future and
 my fate are written in blood.

Hafiz says: If it's illusion that you want go get up on that screen!
 You'll find one on the Winestreet laughing, drunk on his perfume.

Comment: I love the first two couplets. The Beloved, the Winegiver, and the wine seem almost like the same thing.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you make of this poem as a poem about earthly love?
2. What do you make of it as a poem about divine love?
3. Which lines seem the most effective?
4. Which are too extreme?
5. Are the Beloved and the Winebringer the same or different? Why?

READING GHALIB

(Mirza Asadullah Khan) 1797-1869

It is a long jump from Hafiz to Mirza Khan, whose pen name 'Ghalib' means "Conqueror." This sabbatical, once again, is not meant to be comprehensive, but to explore a few very significant writers. Ghalib is certainly significant. He is widely acknowledged as the Shakespeare of Urdu poetry and was a master and modernizer of the ghazal. He also read and wrote in Persian and was a direct literary descendant of Rumi and Hafiz. But Ghalib lived in very different times.

Rumi and Hafiz wrote near the height of Islamic glory. Ghalib lived when that glory was diminished. As the *Bedford Anthology* notes "Behind his work is his own troubled times and life--his financial insecurity, and the terrible results of the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-1859." (5. 955) After a life of financial problems, Ghalib was appointed court poet and later "tutor in versification," to Babadur Shah, "the last Mughal

writes Dutta, "where they use the words 'wine,' and 'taverns' mean the state of the soul, but when Ghalib uses these words he means wine and taverns." (64). As a matter of fact, when asked if he were Hindu or Muslim by English authorities, Ghalib supposedly replied that he was half Muslim. When asked what that meant, he said: "I don't eat pork, but I drink." No one ever suggested that Ghalib was a Sufi saint. As Ghalib writes: "It's difficult to find a person who has no opinion about Ghalib/He is a good poet but the dark rumors about him are more than enough." (*Lightning* 43-44). One of the great accomplishments of Ghalib, according to some, is the taking of a very traditional and form, the ghazal, and recasting it for more personal expression. (It seems to me that the arc of the ghazal is one that moves from spiritual and religious symbolism to personal and even political expression.)

In some respects, however, Ghalib's ghazals seem more typical of the form than the translations of Rumi and Hafiz that I have read. The ghazal is, as has been mentioned, a series of couplets that employs an intricate rhyme scheme or refrain, but, more importantly, it is organized not in a linear or narrative fashion, but in an associative manner. (Quite possibly the lack of linearity in the *Qu'ran* has some influence on the ghazal.) Each couplet or "ser" theoretically is a poem in and of itself and should be able to stand alone. Bly illustrates the nature of the ghazal by rewriting of Frost:

Something there is that doesn't love
a wall

I love few things. . . when I do
they turn their stone face to me.

Good fences make good neighbors
his father said

We have our own chests to dig in; why bother traveling to the mines. (52)

Comment: This poem is absolutely stunning. Ghalib is hard--all the many dislocations. I have to read him several times and still can't read him when I'm sleepy. David St. John, my teacher, says that a poem is a consciousness moving over experience. And what a strange, melancholy mind. The only one I can compare it to is that of Cavafy--a twentieth century Greek in Alexandria--one who also tasted the dregs of a great culture--Ghalib's imagery also affects my prose. And, of course, there is an ecumenical impulse that is very surprising considering his background. So modern. So post modern in fact.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is surprising in this poem?
2. Which "sers" or couplets seem foolish?
3. Which seem wise?
4. What do think Ghalib would say of 9/11? Why?

POSSIBLE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Research the Sepoy Rebellion. Which, if any, of Ghalib's poems that we have read seems influenced by it?
2. Read Naomi Shihab Nye's "Fundamentalism." Compare it to this poem by Ghalib.
3. Read Cavafy's "Walls," and "Waiting for the Barbarians." Compare them to poems we have read by Ghalib.

SAMPLE ENTRY #2:

(The most striking thing about Ghalib is how powerful certain couplets or lines are alone. For example, " I know that Heaven doesn't exist but the idea/ Is one of Ghalib's favorite fantasies. " He seems to wear his despair so well, with such serenity.) Some more couplets:

In the first skirmish of my love battle, I got wounded in the feet
Now I can neither run away nor remain standing up. (Bly 37)

For the love of God, please don't lift the curtain over the Ka'bah
Perhaps in the spot we may find an ordinary stone. (Bly 39)

The drop grows happy by losing itself in the river.
A pain beyond human range becomes something else.
We love seeing the beauty of poppy and lilies
When the eyes lose themselves in colors, they are seeing at last. (Bly 45)

Assignment: Have students select, either individually or in groups 3 to 5 couplets that seem striking and explain why. (This assignment could have endless variations)

quoted in the section of this report dealing with poetry and healing, but it is worth quoting repeatedly:

MY FUNERAL

Will my funeral start out from our courtyard?
 How will you get me down from the third floor?
 The coffin won't fit in the elevator,
 and the stairs are awfully narrow.

Maybe there'll be sun knee-deep in the yard, and pigeons
 maybe snow filled with the cries of children,
 maybe rain with its wet asphalt.
 And the trash cans will stand in the courtyard as always.

If, as is the custom here, I'm put in the truck face open,
 a pigeon might drop something on my forehead: it's good luck.
 Band or no band, the children will come up to me--
 they're curious about the dead.

Our kitchen window will watch me leave.
 Our balcony will see me off with the wash on the line.
 In this yard I was happier than you'll ever know.
 Neighbors, I wish you all long lives.

*April 1963
 Moscow*

(trans. Blasing and Konuk)

The generosity of this poem, especially in the last stanza, seems to me wonderful, as is the enjoyment of small details of a rather shabby existence. But the key lines are "If as is the custom here, I'm put in the truck face open/ a pigeon might drop something on my forehead. It's good luck." What might be humiliating and comic becomes a source of joy.

We're all kith and kin/Not "Cogito ergo sum" my sun-eyed love/ but in this distinguished family, we think because we are." (Hikmet 119) The poem's dated and didactic, but certainly ambitious, and again expresses love of physical existence. "Clear as glass, an unspoiled winter day----/to bite into the firm white flesh of a healthy apple!/ My love, it's like the joy of breathing /in a snow pine forest/ This loving you." (121).

I don't know how Hikmet retained his love of life through his sufferings. He was not a man of faith and claimed he had not been in a mosque since he was twenty-one. His prison poems are radiant, and very different from those of Mahamoud Darwish and other Palestinian writers who spent time in jail. (Darwish is also dealt with in this sabbatical.) It is hard to believe that Marxism sustained him to the end, for he must have sensed its oppression and its crumbling. He is a wonder and a rarity--a truly inspirational modern poet. If there were one thing I could give my students, colleagues, and friends, it would be his work.

Forche's *Against Forgetting* and Barnstone and Barnstone's *Literatures of the Middle East* provided a good introduction to Hikmet, but most of my time was devoted to a recent collection, *Poems of Nazim Hikmet*. I made many journal entries, both by hand and by computer. Two slightly edited computer entries follow:

SAMPLE ENTRY #1

"Letter from a Man in Solitary," (494) is very moving because it is addressed to his wife. This can especially be seen in the last stanza. (Quoted above)

COMMENT. The plainness and the directness of this poem is overwhelming, as well as where it goes--just a love of the earth. I have felt such a love deeply after some bad medical news.

the earth has gone around the sun ten times.
 And I repeat once more with the same passion
 what I wrote about THEM
 the year I was thrown inside:
 "They who are numberless like ants in the earth,
 fish in the sea
 birds in the air,

 who are cowardly, brave,
 ignorant, wise,
 and childlike,
 and who destroy
 and create,
 my songs will tell only of their adventures."
 And anything else
 such as my ten years here,
 is just so much talk.

1947 (trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk)

(Against Forgetting 502-503)

COMMENT:

This poem to me is stunning, mainly, I believe, for its lack of bitterness and self-pity. How has this man done so? By perspective I believe.

QUESTIONS:

Read "Since I Was Thrown Inside." Journal or discuss the following:

1. What was horrible about the speaker's imprisonment?
2. How does he feel about it?
3. What helps him, if anything in his imprisonment?
4. What is admirable in the poem?

WRITING:

Again compare him to Darwish.

is Faiz's translation of "Vera," a poem of Nazim Hikmet's originally written in Turkish. The same poem was later translated into Arabic by Mahamoud Darwish, the "Palestinian Poet Laureate," and appears in an English translation of Darwish's work that I shall discuss later. In addition to their concern with each others work, many of these poets come from Islamic countries, and many are in dialogue with the *Qu'ran*.

I had some familiarity with Faiz, largely through the work of Agha Shahid Ali. Nevertheless, I first looked at Faiz's work included in Carolyn Forche's *Against Forgetting*. This remarkable anthology of twentieth century of world poetry, unlike many anthologies is not organized by country or by language, but by catastrophic event. It begins with the Armenian Genocide, then goes on to World War I, then goes on to a number of disasters, including the holocaust, World War II, Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, and the events in Tiananman Square. All the poetry is by direct witnesses to these terrible events. (It is, I believe, one of the most important documents of the last century, containing work by most of its major poets, and covering most of its most tragic events. A number of the poets in this sabbatical were first discovered in this anthology.)

After Forche, I went on and read and reread Agha Shahid Ali's translations in "*The Rebel's Silhouette: Selected Poems*. Agha Shahid's introduction was useful. The bilingual edition with the original Urdu in Arabic script, gave a sense of the graphic beauty of the work. As usual, I took notes. I did not always copy entire poems. Sometimes I simply referred to poems.

READING MAHMOUD DARWISH

Darwish (b. 1942) is one of the poets discovered in this sabbatical. I should have already known about him since he is considered the foremost Palestinian poet and in fact, the Poet Laureate of Palestine.

His village was destroyed in the 1948 conflict that involved the creation of Israel. When he began to write poetry as a young man, he was sometimes jailed, and often in exiled. Eventually, he became a leader of "the Resistance," a group of Arab poets writing in response to the Palestinian-Israel conflicts. At one time he was on the Executive Board of the PLO, but resigned in protest against the Oslo Accords.

I encountered his work first in anthologies, and in the references of other writers, such as Agha Shahid Ali. These sources, for the most part, presented his early protest poems. These were simple, direct, and powerful. Later I discovered a recent edition of his work: *Unfortunately It Was Paradise: Selected Poems Mahamoud Darwish*, translated by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forche. Here was more recent and demanding work and a sense of the evolution of his poetry. Forche notes his evolution in her introduction:

Mahamoud Darwish is a literary rarity. Critically acclaimed as one of the most important poets in the Arabic language and beloved as the voice of his people. He is an artist demanding of his work continual transformation and a living legend whose lyrics are sung by fieldworkers and schoolchildren. Few poets have borne such disparately bestowed adulation, and survived such dramatic vicissitudes of history and fate as

(I quote Shihab Nye not only because what she says is well put, but because she is referred to elsewhere in this report, and her comments are only another example of how many of the writers dealt with in this sabbatical are in dialogue with each other.)

In this sabbatical I have become aware of Darwish's importance and of his range-- from direct protest poems in his early years, such as "A Soldier Dreams of White Tulips"--a powerful description of the psychological impact of war published in 1967-- to "Walls" a recent fifty page poem every bit as difficult and allusive as Eliot, although it alludes to a very different tradition. I will now be able to make students my students and colleagues more aware of Darwish.

SAMPLE ENTRY #1:

Victim No. 48

He was found lying dead on a stone.
They found in his chest the moon
 and a rose lantern
They found in his pocket a few coins,
 a box of matches, and travel permit
He had tattoos on his arms

His mother kissed him
And cried for a year. Boxthorne tangled in his eyes
And it was dark

His brother grew up
And went to town looking for work
He was put in prison
Because he had no travel permit
He was carrying a dustbin
 And a box of matches down the street

And the martyr does recite his own testimony. (123)

Question: This is very poetic. How can it be true?

There are only little islands of meaning here--poking through a sea of lyricism.

"Death, wait while I pack my bag: a toothbrush, soap, a razor, cologne
and clothes.

Is the weather mild there?

Does the weather in white eternity change?

Does it stay as it is in both autumn and winter?

Will one book be enough for me

to kill the no-time, or will I need a full library?

What language do they speak there,
common colloquial or classical Arabic? (137)

ASSIGNMENT: (FOR CREATIVE WRITING STUDENTS)

Write a series of questions to death. Organize them into a poem.

READING ADDITIONAL MODERN ARABIC POETS

I had begun this sabbatical wanting to discover some poets I was unaware of.

Therefore, I paid particular attention to the modern Arabic poets represented in

Literatures of the Middle East, and *Against Forgetting*. I looked at the sources of the material in these books, and found much of the poetry included in *Modern Poetry of the Arab World* edited by Abdullah Al-Udhari and *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi. The selections of these two books were similar, and their introductions were informative. By reading them I was able to get some sense of the curve of Arabic poetry in the previous century. There were some surprising discoveries in my reading, and I learned once again of the extent of my own ignorance.

First was the importance of Kahlil Gibran and a group of Arabic poets writing in New York City in the beginning of the twentieth century. This was stunning. I had

I especially looked at her work since Naomi Shihab Nye has translated a number of her poems.

As the Arab-Israeli conflict continued, a few group, known as the "Resistance" emerged. Mahmoud Darwish, dealt elsewhere in this sabbatical, became their key spokesman.

This section of my sabbatical taught me much, and, of course, some of that I will share, especially what I learned about Gibran. I, of course, wrote many entries in my journal:

SAMPLE ENTRY #1

Adonus (Ali Ahmad Sa'd)

A Mirror for the Twentieth Century

A coffin bearing the face of a boy

A book

Written on the belly of a crow

A wild beast hidden in a flower

A rock

Breathing with the lungs of a lunatic

This is it

This is the Twentieth Century

(Barnstone 522)

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Before reading this poem, discuss what the last century was like.
2. What does not make sense in this poem?
3. What does?

(What strikes me here is the surreal imagery--the kind of imagery that Amichai , the great Israeli poet, also uses.)

Perhaps students could compare this to Wislaw Szymborska's poem "The Century's Decline."

read sometime at a college which has "San Antonio" in its name. We also played a game of "horse" with her twelve-year-old son. He won.

After 9/11, I e-mailed Naomi, sending a poem and saying I was thinking of one of hers, "Fundamentalism," which ends with the lines:

The boy with the broken pencil
scrapes his little knife against the lead
turning and turning it as a point
emerges from the wood again

If he would believe his life is like that
he would not follow his father into war.
(*Fuel 51*)

(This poem, by the way, appears to be about Islamic Fundamentalism.) Though I hardly knew Naomi, she wrote back saying she was very moved and ending with this farewell:
"Sorrowing, Naomi."

In this sabbatical, I read Naomi's work from a very different perspective. Since I was somewhat familiar with it I went directly to such books as *The Words Beneath the Words and Fuel*. Then I discovered a more recent volume, *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*, which was published after 9/11. For the most part it republished earlier poems which were about her background and her visits to the Middle East, especially Palestine. However, there were poems, as well as a long essay written after 9/11. Naomi provides much, for myself, and for my students, as I hope samples of my journal entries and assignments show:

SAMPLE ENTRY # 1:

Flinn, On the Bus

Three hours after the buildings fell

I could not. He'll find out
soon enough. Flinn take it easy.
Peace is rough

Sept 11, 2001

(2-3)

COMMENT:

What a wonderful poem--the seeming simplicity, the control of line breaks, as simple and direct as she is face to face.

QUESTIONS:

1. What does Flinn have to do with 9/11
2. Why doesn't the narrator tell him about 9/11?
3. Was she right?

Writing Assignment (for creative writing)

Consider what you were doing on 9/11. Write a poem about it.

ENTRY #2 (edited)

From an essay on 9/11 (much of which I copied)

For some reason I kept remembering a gentle Egyptian basket seller from the streets of Cairo, and an elegant Arab man, an expert on brocade in the old City of Jerusalem. . . I remembered simple Arabic village breakfasts, creamy labneh fresh from its cheesecloth with delicate sliced cucumbers and scattering of thyme. . .

Messages poured in like waterfalls, tidal floods of messages all over the country. . . (I wrote Naomi a message.) . . . Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases details. We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing. . .

COMMENT:

I think of her saying that poetry gives us details. This is what I see tonight reading Hikmet--the details of the world that seem to bring him sanity.

home of multiculturalism and poetry. This he makes clear in his introduction to his translation of Faiz

Poetry was part of the air we breath. In Srinagar during the summer of 1989 (when my mother helped me to translate Faiz), my grandmother, then eighty-eight, quite by chance quoted Milton during a conversation. In English. Ever since I can remember, she quoted Shakespeare, Keats, and Hardy in English, Hafiz and Rumi in Persian; Ghalib and Faiz in Urdu; Habba Kharun, Mahjoor, and Zinda Kaul in Kashmiri. I was ecstatic: once again I didn't need proof of my rights to the English canon (which, in any case, was created in India--i.e., the British established English literature as a subject in the curriculum in India quite some time before its institutionalization in England). Significantly, not only was my training in school in English (I mean that I grew up with English as my first language), but, paradoxically, my first language was/is not my mother tongue, which is Urdu . . . I grew up breathing Urdu in such a way that it is entitled to being called, at a culturally emotional level, my mother tongue, even though I used and use English for all practical and creative purposes. . . When I wrote my first poems, at the age of ten, they were in English. I did not "choose" to write them in English; it just happened that way. Naturally. (*Rebel's Silhouette* xi)

self-determination. The resulting devastation—large scale atrocities and death, by some accounts, of 70,000 people—has led to despair and rage, then only rage, then only despair . . . The ongoing catastrophe—the focus of *The Country Without a Post Office*, my previous volume of poems—provides the backdrop to this volume. In January 1996 my mother came to the States for treatment of brain cancer. Till her death—in a hospital in Northampton, Massachusetts, on 27 April 1997—we were with her at my brother's home in Amherst. (16)

Agha Shahid and his family took his mother home to Kashmir to a Shiite funeral, which like all Shiite funerals involves Karbala, now an Iraqi city, and the death of Hussain, the Grandson of Muhammad. Agha Shahid explains this history in a section "Karbala: A History of the 'House of Sorrows.'" (I took extensive notes on Shahid's work, this time on computer, and parts of them are incorporated into my remarks.)

The Shiite faith finds its origin in a question of succession. Mohammed had nine wives, but no male heirs. He did have Ali, a nephew who married Fatima, Mohammed's daughter. Ali was passed over for as Mohammed's immediate successor, until he was finally appointed fourth caliph and eventually assassinated. The leadership passed out of Mohammed's family and moved, first to Damascus and later to Baghdad. Hussain, Ali's Grandson, tried to recapture the caliphcy and was killed in Karbala, a central event for Shiites.

tears. I was puzzled, then very moved. Since she was a girl she had felt Zainab's grief as her own.

At my mother's funeral a mourner sang one of her favorite Kashmiri elegies, given to Zainab, in which her exile is nearly unbearable. Those words are now my mother's, for she too was tired fighting death, from hospital to hospital, from city to city. (26)

Reading this time, of course, was very different. As I read Agha Shahid the fighting in Iraq grew more intense. The name Karbala came up as well as the name of Montada al' Sadr, a young Shiite cleric whose father was assassinated by agents of Saddam. At the beginning of this sabbatical I wondered whether it would give me any insight into the conflicts that are happening in this world involving at least some Muslims. I believe now that this was hubris-- that I am no more in position to make broad generalizations than one who had read the *Bible* and a few poets could make generalizations about Europe or the United States. Still, I can't help but notice a sense of injustice in Shiite faith, as well as a long memory. If Karbala is braided into Shiite funerals, I can't help but wonder if Sadr is remembering Hussain. I also wonder why I have heard too little about these historical events. Perhaps these are things that we should know. I was also struck, because I knew so little about Kashmir and events there, by how one disaster blots out another. But not for every one. Even as I write these words this June morning I notice a story about an attack on Indian tourists in Kashmir.

Besides the political context of Agha Shahid's work, I was also more aware of his multi-culturalism, and of his skill with poetic forms. To give an idea of his cultural range,

ASSIGNMENT:

1. Discuss this poem. Is it funny, sad, cruel, or what. What does it show about the speaker? Why?
2. Read the next poem in the book:

Suicide Note*

I could not simply myself

*found poem"

3. What, if anything, does the poem mean? What is a found poem? Why does the author bother to tell us that this is a found poem?

SAMPLE ENTRY #2

Here is a sestina that more than shows Agha Shahid's skill. It deals, among other things, with the interruption and resumption of the mail in Kashmir:

The Floating Post Office

Has he been kept from us? Portents
of rain, rumors, ambushed letters
Curtained palanquin, fetch our word,
bring us word. Who has died? Who'll live?
Has the order gone out to close
the waterways. . . the one open road?

And then we saw the boating rowed
through the fog of death, the sentence
passed on our city. It came close
to reveal smudged black-ink letters
which the postman—he *was* alive—
gave us, like signs, without a word,

and we took them, without a word.
From our decks we'd seen the hill road
bringing a jade rain, near-olive,
down from the temple, some penitent's
cymbaled prayer? He took our letters,
and held them, like a lover close

RESULTS AND BENEFITS FROM INVESTIGATION OF ISLAMIC POETRY:

Results:

- 1. Extensive summaries of experience with many writers and texts. (See Summaries above.)**
- 2. Important passages identified and often recorded in common place journal.**
(Above. As well as Appendix F.)
- 3. Possible Assignments for student writing and other activities. (See sample assignments in the body of this report, as well as in Appendix D.)**

Student Benefits.

- 1. I will begin using materials I have developed in all my classes. Some of them will be appropriate to every course I will be teaching.**
- 2. They will provide variety both for myself and for my students.**
- 3. Hopefully they will lessen the fear and prejudice toward Islamic cultures that I have anticipated in my proposal.**

Departmental and Institutional Benefits:

- 1. I have already begun to share the results of my investigation of "Islamic" poetry with my colleagues informally. (Ask them about the department member who stops them in the hall and starts talking about the music of the Qu'ran or the importance of Kahlil Gabran to modern Arabic poetry.)**
- 2. I will also share some of my written materials with department members.**

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL POET/ THERAPIST INTERVIEWS

The following are interviews with a number of poets whose work, either as poets or as teachers, touched upon issues of poetry and healing. Originally I listed a number of poets and indicated I would interview at least five of them. The summaries below contain interviews with five poets so listed. (I actually interviewed more than five of the poets listed.) However, these individuals were also interviewed as recovering alcoholics. I realized later that if I identified them in summarizing any part of their interview that might reveal their anonymity. I have additionally interviewed a number of poets not included on my original list.

For the most part I followed the questions included in my proposal. However, in these summaries I have categorized these responses more simply: Not all poets are the same and, consequently not all of these interviews are organized around the same categories.

BARBARA ABERCROMBIE: WRITER/TEACHER, BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR

BACKGROUND:

Barbara Abercrombie has published novels, children's books, articles, personal essays, and poetry. She teaches in the Writer's program at U.C.L.A. Extension. She also conducts writing workshops at the Wellness Community, a nationwide cancer support

She realizes that although writing is therapeutic "there are a lot of unhappy and crazy people who are writers." Probably the people who turn to writing are crazier than the general population.

THERAPUTIC WRITING, CRAFT, AND TEACHING

In her regular classes Barbara pays very close attention to craft and improving student writing. But in her work with cancer survivors, she sets this aside. But she does note that "in other situations writing about yourself can be come indulgent." Other types of writing are more focused on communication. It has to be something that the rest of the world can connect with.

Although she believes that form sometimes works in other writing situation, she found that in her work with the Wellness Community this didn't help. She does use short five-minute freewrites in these workshops, and she supposes that they are a kind of form. The exercises simple exercises work, she believes, since "people love to write about themselves."

In her regular classes, however, she does not encourage students to write therapeutically. As a matter of fact, she does not let students talk when other students are commenting on their work. A workshop, however, "is always a balancing act." The major concern in a conventional workshop is "what can this be crafted into?"

When therapeutic issues come up in a regular class they have to be handled very carefully. She does, however, believe that in some ways a writing workshop is like a therapy group: "They are similar in that the group becomes close. They become bonded.

Ginger wrote her first poem when she was ten after the death of her mother. Why she wrote a poem is a mystery because she didn't come from a very literary family. The poem wasn't a very good poem, but it made her feel better.

POETRY AND HEALING

Ginger's poetry often has dealt with illness, death, and addiction. She feels poetry has helped her with such difficulties. Writing poetry, according to her, is a process of discovery. "If you're saddened, {poetry} gets you someplace you didn't know you were going." But "sometimes it stays dark and that doesn't happen." Ginger's poetry is often very funny, and she believes that helps. However, she also believes she is the least funny person in her family: "They help me laugh." Naturally, she believes poetry can be therapeutic, often for the reader: "Poetry helps people a little more in denial than the writer." Additionally, when you condense experience in a poem "it packs more of a punch." She also believes it is important to ask if "what you're writing is true" or at least 93 % of it. She feels her poetry is "a poetry of witness."

TEACHING

Lately Ginger has been teaching in rural schools. She feels the honesty and accessibility in her own writing helps her there. She models, and they "spill their guts, get out anger. They are not shy." She also "mixes it up, keeps it easy," uses a letter poem, for example.

Asked about the feasibility of teaching to a cancer support group she suggested "breaking the rules," writing, for example, without using the word "cancer." One poet she

read a poem of that sort. (He did enjoy other reading as a child.) One of the next times he wrote was when he was quite ill with rheumatic fever. He wrote very strange, almost surrealist poems. (His poems still have a touch of surrealism.)

Dreams eventually became a major part of Richard's writing. The only book he remembers in his household was a non-academic book that interpreted dreams. Then at some point he read Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*. The book mentioned Carl Jung, and the footnotes led Richard to "a whole body of literature." Richard learned that he "was a Jungian . . . but didn't know it." After reading Jung, his dreams became more intense. Eventually Richard became a "lucid dreamer"—a person who is aware that he is dreaming and can control his dreams.

Richard feels that poetry "makes you more observant in your dreams." He encourages his students to become aware of their dream life because "poems come from dreams." If students don't become aware of their dreams, they are "shutting themselves off from half of their lives." He feels that, like James Tate, one of the most celebrated of today's American poets, he sometimes writes in a trance state and that is why if people call him after he has been writing, they sometimes ask if he has been asleep.

TEACHING

Richard has been teaching for about fifteen years, almost from the time he began writing poetry. He joined Poets in the Schools, and they trained him to work with children. The current anthology produced by Poets in the Schools has an introduction by Richard, and he repeated in the interview a story that he told there. Richard had been working as a house painter, but decided to change and work as a night custodian to have

conduct the rest of the group. Richard felt he didn't really know what he was doing In addition, working with students with compromised immune systems required extreme caution.

This kind of work can be hard and some people can take it better than others can. (As a matter of fact, Richard got the job working there because his friend, Cecilia Woloch, could not handle the situation.) He admits, "It's hard to take. You see things that you can't reconcile. . . the capriciousness of fate.. You see the best and the brightest dying." You also see changes. When Richard first worked at Children's Hospital all the AIDS's children died. Later many of them survived. Richard suspects working there took more out of him than he knows. He has never written poetry about his hospital work.

There is, of course, opportunity to work in such situations. At Children's Hospital he had volunteers and interns. One of his students, Shelly Berger, is now poet in residence. One of the first things you have to find out in any medical facility is whether there is anyone in charge of an art program. Sometimes you can be involved in projects with a class. At Children's Hospital children's art and poetry has become a permanent part of the building. Richard has helped construct fantasy rooms at the hospital.

HEALING AND THERAPY:

Despite, or perhaps because of his work in Children's Hospital, Richard doesn't like the idea of the poet as healer and finds much of the work done in "poetry therapy" very dissatisfying. As far as he is concerned, the healers are the doctors. In the broad sense of the word poetry can be healing, but "the vision of poetry therapy seems pretty awful. " Perhaps it can add meaning or "be a form of prayer." But Richard doesn't "go

OTHER CONCERNS

Richard thinks that a creative writing course could certainly be combined with a course in the health sciences or counseling. "Anything's workable if you figure out a way to do it. I was always looking for ways to combine things."

He also thinks that working with the elderly, particularly on memoirs, would be a good idea, although he has never done it.

MIFANWY KAISER: POET/TEACHER/COMMUNITY POET

BACKGROUND:

Mifanwy has been a poet for forty-five years, and became one largely because of a wonderful fourth grade teacher. This teacher helped her students assemble what Mifanwy now knows was a chapbook.

There were some interruptions of her writing poetry, of course, including a ten-year hiatus. She has taught poetry on many levels, including, high school and college. She has also taught poetry in non-traditional situations, such as in a men's prison. In recent years she has become involved in community outreach through an organization she helped found, Tebot Bach.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As indicated above, Mifanwy has long been involved in presenting poetry to the community in many and in supporting other poets. Her involvement began in the early

Kaiser conducts these workshops for these women more or less the same way that she does other workshops. She may do some sharing at the beginning of the class. For example, she may have the students say something about how their week was. She may read a couple of poems, and there will be exercises. Then the students read what they've written. The comments are constructive. Sometimes they bring in what they have written outside of workshop. The focus in the class is the poetry, although sometimes the students may talk about issues in their lives.

She feels that the kind of community outreach Tebot does would be appropriate for service learning for community college students. However, if they are working with the homeless and those who are incarcerated, they should not do it alone.

HEALING AND POETRY:

Ms. Kaiser feels strongly that poetry is therapeutic, and that any art form, as a matter of fact is therapeutic. Poetry certainly has been therapeutic for her. Poetry may be especially therapeutic because it is the oldest art form. The rhythms of poetry are as important as the compression. The precision of poetry is also very important. In poetry every word has to be perfect. "The word will explain the situation. It does it more so in poetry." She recommends Gregory Orr's *Poetry and Survival*. (A book that is discussed in this sabbatical.) It is true, she admits, that some poets have led and are leading difficult lives, but she feels that such poets have been in the minority from 1950 to 2003. As far as the minority is concerned, "That's the way they are. Probably the sheer act of poetry kept them alive."

She is also an analyst, and does long term therapy dealing with unconscious material and sees her patients many times a week—a process that she says is hard on her patients and on her. She has been a therapist for 10 years.

She has been a poet, however, since she was a small girl. She has also written two novels, a romance novel, and another more literary novel. About ten years ago she started working on poetry more formally. Without psychoanalyzing it, she finds it hard to say why she became a poet. She finds poetry physical and incantatory, although she doesn't like rhyming poetry and doesn't work in forms. She sees herself both as a poet and a therapist and wouldn't choose between the roles.

POETRY AND THERAPY

Holaday believes that poetry can be therapeutic. It can serve many purposes, and can help deal with psychologically undigested material. As for herself, she believes that poetry is therapeutic: "I have to write. There's something about the focus. The poems are something that needs to be expressed." She believes its also therapeutic for people to read poetry. Poetry may be as therapeutic as prayer because poetry is close to a state of prayer, and research has shown that there are changes do to prayer. Poetry is in the body.

Holaday, of course, has noticed that some poets have spectacularly unhappy and unhealthy lives: "That's what's been tripping me up. I wonder about two things: If someone is out on the edge, [are] the poems . . . holding that person together. [Or] If there isn't a need of keeping things haywire to produce."

Although Holaday believes that poetry is therapeutic, she doesn't have clients write poetry because "I don't work that way. It's a very different kind of therapy." She

her cancer she has to use the metaphor of a garden, not a battle. The compression and the imagery of poetry also help. Anne wrote every morning during her cancer as a way of bearing witness, and poetry certainly was helpful to her.

Poetry is more powerful than prose, and poetry usually helps, but according to Anne, bad poetry can hurt. For example, she was hurt recently by a bad poet who defended the Palestinians. "Sometimes," according to her, "poetry can dig you further into a rut." For example, "a depressed poet may write in circles of depressed poetry." According to Anne, you need a guide, a teacher, or a writing group who will confront you.

HEALING AND CRAFT:

Aesthetic concerns, Anne feels, are important even in poetry that is primarily therapeutic. It is the absence of aesthetics is what she doesn't like about John Fox's approach. (John Fox is a prominent "poetry therapist.") Form, Anne feels, can "drive you deeper, be a crucible." The problem with some people in "poetry therapy" is that they just write.

OTHER CONCERNs

To find out how poetry might work in a healing situation, Anne recommended that I get in touch with Barbara Abercrombie, who does workshops for the Wellness Community in Santa Monica. A poet she felt would be helpful for people dealing with illness is Linda Pastan.

well in interpersonal stuff." He feels he had a real advantage in being a poet and then becoming a therapist because poetry had given him so much self-knowledge.

Poetry not only gives self-knowledge, it enables one to tell his or her story. It has some similarity to "narrative therapy" where one changes the story of one's life. Sometimes Charles has prescribed a poem. He thinks writing may help to "empower" people who have illnesses. He believes poetry can go deeper than prose.

Of course, some well-known poets, Sylvia Plath, for example, led unhappy and unhealthy lives. This does not mean poetry is not therapeutic. "Poetry," according to Webb, is "not a cure-all." A lot of this has to do with the population. People drawn to writing probably have more problems. Sylvia Plath, for example, was probably bi-polar. There is nothing wrong with not being introspective. Sometimes introspection can be a curse. (The best athletes, for example, are those who don't think.) Webb also believes that some of the sick poets were probably less sick because they wrote.

THERAPY, CRAFT AND TEACHING

The aesthetic concerns and the therapeutic concerns in poetry are quite different. Sometimes they meet, but often they do not.

Sometimes structure, form, for example is helpful in poetry. One, according to Webb, can't try to go too deep in poetry. "It's like trying to hit a home run. The best hitters don't do that . . . they try to hit the ball." Whether form is helpful, however, is an individual choice. When writers use form well, it is good.

Dr. Webb does not encourage student poets to write poetry that is therapeutic, but if they do so he is gentler with them. He also directs them to counseling. On the other

NANCY WING: POET/THERAPIST

BACKGROUND:

Nancy Wing is a therapist and a poet. Nancy has been a therapist for nearly thirty years. Her work focuses especially on women and on women's needs. She has been a poet for about fifty years. She first became interested in poetry during her twenties and thirties when she was going through romantic relationships that gave her much sorrow. At the time I talked to her she was grieving the recent death of her brother.

POETRY AND HEALING:

Nancy believes that poetry is indeed healing. It helps makes one become whole, and helps the self expand and change when it is faces with crisis. She believes that the healing power of poetry may be seen in the discussion of the muse in Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. She acknowledges that poetry is healing because the opportunity it gives the writer to tell her story, but more important are the incantatory and prayer-like aspects of poetry. Poetry is old. Poetry is oral. It is close to song and predates writing. This can be seen in children's games, which so often are in rhyme. For her, nursery rhymes have a great power, and much of the goal of therapy is to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. Poetry is also useful because it is so connected to the body and to the breath. It is

OTHER CONCERNS

Nancy feels that a course combining creative writing and counseling or the health sciences would be a wonderful idea.

She did not turn to poetry more than usual after 9/11. There are so many catastrophes that for some reason it did not move her that greatly. She has been devastated by the destruction of Tibet's culture and people, and nothing has quite compared with that for her.

Asked if there was anything that I should have asked her but didn't, Nancy suggested that I could have asked if she thought the reading of poetry could make a difference in the world. She feels, despite everything, it could.

CECILIA WOLOCH: POET/TEACHER

BACKGROUND:

Cecilia was until recently a Los Angeles poet and teacher. She has published three books. Her most recent book is *Late*. Currently she is living in Atlanta. She is the head of the Idyllwild Arts Summer Poetry Program; Cecilia has taught for many years and is widely respected.

Cecilia has written poetry since she was a teenager, and written seriously since she was in her twenties. She has been a teacher since 1986. She became a poet because she was in love with language and because poetry became a means to express herself. She

patients at Patton write directly about being institutionalized. But sometimes she found that they wrote about being institutionalized in a round about way. It was very important that she didn't find out what they were in for since she needed to deal with them as human beings.

She thinks she taught differently in the non-traditional situations. The students were simply reading out loud, and it was impossible to do close criticism. She would make notes and give feedback on what was really powerful in the work. Sometimes she would have them revise and type their poems up for next time. Basically, however, she followed her usual teaching procedure--come with a model poem, and have an exercise based on it. This she thinks is a good way to handle a non-traditional classroom. She believes this would work quite well, for example, in a support group for cancer patients.

THERAPUTIC POETRY

Cecilia believes that poetry and all creative work is healing: "Art is redemptive." She currently has someone with a handicapped child in one of her workshops, and she can see how this process is working in her. It is "the darkest places that cry out for redemption. Just by rendering an experience into art you redeem it." She believes that art in general and poetry in particular redeems because it gives meaning to experience. She saw this in all the poems that were generated by 9/11.

She also agrees with others who say that poetry heals by giving people an opportunity to tell their stories. Cecilia believes this is especially important because in our media dominated society people's own stories are devaluated. Cecilia finds poetry

Cecilia feels there is not really a conflict between aesthetic and therapeutic considerations: "For anyone poetry is therapeutic. And for everyone writing better is an issue. Even if you're writing for yourself you want to get better. Lots of people play music which is something people often do only for themselves, but they learn to play the instrument, they don't make noise at random." What one needs to do is to "meet people at their level, raise them up." Cecilia feels she learned a lot from her own dance teacher and how she handled people who were not that gifted. Everyone wants to get better.

Of course, therapeutic aspects sometimes come up in a traditional class. Sometimes this happens. "You have to pay attention, listen closely; you have to create an accepting atmosphere." Cecilia tries to models these things in her class.

OTHER CONCERNS

Cecilia thinks a creative writing course might be combined successfully with a course from the health sciences, or a counseling .She once worked with a field biology class.

She also feels poetry could be part of service learning. She believes this would be excellent and is a wonderful idea. Everyone wants to go to the next level. Years ago she took kids from a Hancock Park elementary school to a Senior Center, and they had a group reading

Cecilia went on to comment at more length on how a workshop should operate. Working with young people is wonderful: Her friend poet Ralph Angel says "Young people give me heart and courage; they break open on the page. They reignite the fire in

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS WITH 12-STEP POETS

The following are summaries of the interviews I conducted with six poets who had been involved in 12-step programs. The poets I interviewed varied greatly as to background and accomplishment. Two, for example, were older poets who have been active in the Los Angeles Poetry world for many years. One is an ex-MTSAC student. Another is an emerging Los Angeles poet who has received much attention locally, and who I am sure will receive national attention before long. Some of the poets below were originally on my list of poets to interview for this sabbatical. I had thought that it would be possible to interview them simply as poets for one section of this sabbatical, and then interview them anonymously as recovering alcoholics in another. It soon became apparent that they might be identified if I followed this procedure. Therefore, I have included all their interviews here anonymously. One note: a poet I had hoped to interview never showed up despite repeated appointments. She appears to have gone back to her addictions.

Some of the following interviews were conducted in person. Many were conducted over the telephone, for convenience, and because Los Angeles traffic has become so bad. For the most part the interviews followed the questions indicated in my proposal, which were

1. How long have you been a writer?
2. How long have you been in recovery?
3. Which activity began first?

J has written poetry for almost for about thirty-five years, beginning in the 1960's when he had contact with the beat poets who were active then.

POETRY AND RECOVERY

J has been sober for over twenty-five years. J still attends regular meetings, and he has done and continues to do 12-step writing. This does not interfere with his poetry now. However, at one time it did.

When J got sober, he stopped writing poetry, and, in fact, had a "writer's block for over ten years." He didn't really mind or want to write poetry, and since he was involved in publishing, he thought he was still doing something creative. J. didn't mind his writer's block since he didn't want to write poetry because he associated writing poetry with the life style of the poet. He remembers Bukowski telling him, "You can't write like me because you can't drink like me." J. comments, "I guess that was right." (Bukowski also said that drinking was a form of suicide from which you wake up every day.)

Lately, however, J feels that his writing may be another way of working the program because his poetry has "an origin in my life." J. is a narrative poet and notes that in poetry we tell our stories and "in recovery we tell our stories." He also says that recovery is a process in which we never reach a goal—that is, we are never cured of our addiction, although we may not practice it. In recovery we "do the footwork and leave the results to someone else." This is much the same way that J experiences his writing. He sees the process of writing, not the product, as important. (He added later that he tried reading the A.A. "Big Book," and tried substituting "writing" for alcohol and it worked.)

OTHER CONCERNS:

'One book J recommended was "The Spirituality of Imperfection" by Ernest Kurtz. This book emphasizes the importance of story-telling in recovery and in spiritual growth. This book eventually became a great help in this sabbatical.

COMMENTS:

One issue, it seems to me, that one needs to be aware of in a recovery situation is that some artists may at least temporarily find it difficult to create. Perhaps some poems might be compiled that would help individuals get in touch with their own stories. Perhaps they might even be arranged around the twelve steps of A.A.

RECOVERING ADDICTED POET F:**BACKGROUND:**

F is a veteran Los Angeles poet. Poetry is the center of her life and has been for many years. Although she has known many alcoholic poets, such as Charles Bukowski, She is not an alcoholic. She is, however, the member of another 12-step program, Debtors Anonymous. Her problem with compulsive spending was severe, involving frequent bounced checks and "maxed out credit cards." This resulted in self-loathing and financial crisis. D.A. has been a help to her.

OTHER CONCERNS:

F. did not turn to poetry after 9/11, although she was aware of some poems that circulated, such as Auden's. She was not particularly shocked or angered by the events. The buildings were such "a monument to American hubris that the attack on them was no surprise" as far as she was concerned.

COMMENTS:

F's remarks did not quite fit my expectations, but then Again, F. has spent her life not meeting other people's expectations. She, of course, has been exposed to other approaches to addiction since she visited Synanon frequently when it was very popular. Her comments on Bukowski were interesting. Bukowski drank. But he could stop drinking when he needed to. He did when he had T.B., and he did at the end of his life when he had leukemia. His giving up drinking didn't seem to affect his writing. "They were still Charles Bukowski poems."

RECOVERING ALCOHOLIC POET R:**BACKGROUND:**

R is an amateur poet, but has won many writing awards. He has been a poet for over 64 years. He has been in A.A. for 10 years. He became a poet because he had a talent for it.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

He thinks a class combining creative writing with a course dealing with health science or a counseling group might be a good idea.

RECOVERING ALCOHOLIC POET D

BACKGROUND

D. is a recovering alcoholic and addict who has been sober since 1973. He has been writing poetry only for about four years. He turned to poetry about four years ago, and found it was helpful in dealing with depression. He is also a professional jazz musician and played with Stan Kenton, Janis Joplin, and Sonny Rollins. He had much more to say about sobriety and music, and those remarks also have been included here. The interview was rambling since he had much he wanted to share. Because D's interview was different, the categories used in summarizing it were also different.

POETRY:

D. came to poetry through other interests. He is also a professional astrologist and massage therapist. (He characterizes himself as "a pretty fringy guy.") He began interested in poetry because of writing he was doing related to philosophy and astrology. Then he took a class with poet Jack Gapes. By then he was finding it harder and harder to "to keep my chops up as a jazz player." Poetry, he believes, is "shorthand of the soul. . . . It was another door that opened."

learned. Finally, however, he "got away from the [music] scene" because he was bored with it.

POETRY AND HEALING:

Poetry was very therapeutic for D. For eighteen years D was on "a pink cloud" with sobriety—elated and happy. Then he went into severe depression, which he partially attributes to his having to give up running, to which he had become devoted. He saw a therapist, had some help through medication, but poetry was a particular help: "Depression opened the door to poetry. It was the only door that seemed open for me. Suicide was not an option."

He believes that poetry can be therapeutic for everyone: "It makes me happy, makes me excited." It's the same in music "when you discover a new way, it gets you back to do it. Writing poetry is very difficult. It can be a spiritual discipline" Poetry is like recovery in that "there's no free lunch. . . you have to show up everyday . . . there's no free lunch."

Poetry, according to D, is "the short hand of the soul." It is a way of doing the eleventh step—increasing one's contact with God.

Of course, many poets have been crazy, but "maybe they lived as long as they did because of poetry, just the same way that jazz kept Bird alive."

Poetry can be used in recovery, but D feels maybe journaling would be better:" Poetry is intimidating. It has a bad rep."

A poet that D found especially helpful was Dylan Thomas. He compares Thomas

POETRY AND RECOVERY:

After her recovery, she was working for the Alcoholism Council of Greater New York. This was very stressful and unpleasant. She turned to poetry again. She was also in therapy, and because of an infection her vocal cords became parallelized. Her therapist told her he would not let her out of therapy. He had her write poems for every session, and then he would comment on them.

Eventually she took a creative writing course at N.Y.U. and discovered the poetry of Sharon Olds, who taught there. K. is in her late fifties, and had gone to Wellesley at a time when poetry, largely under the influence of T.S. Eliot, was very impersonal and intellectual. (It was also almost exclusively about the work of men.) Sharon Olds taught her that she could write her own story. She is still doing that.

K. has been in recovery for almost 34 years, and she continues to be very active in A.A.. She still attends meetings and sponsors other women. K. did twelve-step writing and continues to be involved in the steps. A.A. in no way interferes with her creativity, and, as a matter of fact, she feels it supplements work. (Much of her poetry deals with alcoholism.)

AA has helped her develop the habit of introspection, to be honest, and to take responsibility for her life. In the last respect, A.A. has been more helpful than psychoanalysis. The emphasis on honesty in A.A. has been especially beneficial because in her view "the job of the poet is to tell it like it is." In some ways K. feels that the process of writing is like the process of recovery. Both are hard. The most difficult part of writing is the loneliness. To elect to be alone is extremely difficult. Another way that

B is not entirely sure why he became a poet. However, he did start getting validation almost "by accident." And then he began to be aware of "having done more "[with poetry] than with anything else" he had tried.

His becoming a poet may have had something to do with being in recovery: "In the first two years I was very busy. There was this mad dash to decide what my life was going to be. The credits wouldn't roll."

After three or four years of sobriety he had "real flashes of existential depression. There were night terrors." His marriage was falling apart. But the writing helped: "Instead of medicating myself the writing really kicked off." It seemed to supplement the twelve-step writing and to help it from being a "morbid preoccupation with self."

RECOVERY:

B. is dedicated to A.A. He still goes to meetings at least three times a week, and he sponsors several individuals. One of his sponsees is deaf, and B. has learned to sign so he can communicate with him. Unlike some poets I interviewed, B has done all the usual twelve-step writing over and over. He has "worked the steps" and continues to do so. Right now he's especially working the seventh and eleventh steps. "Prayer," he says, "I've got. Meditation is harder. I'm constantly turning stuff over to God." He has never found that 12-step writing has in any way interfered with his poetry.

POETRY:

B. believes that writing and recovery are complementary and have similar patterns. Recovery is "not stopping drinking. It gives you a way to live sober with the

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

At one time B. was involved in running a reading series, so I asked him some questions about this experience. Although his answers were quite specific, I cannot be too specific here in order to protect his anonymity.

B. found being involved in facilitating readings very stressful and "hated everything except a good reading." Then he felt gratified because "I had helped to create something beautiful." For those who might run poetry readings he had three suggestions:

1. Get as many people involved in running the reading as possible. Running a reading is far too much work for a single person.
2. There should be one person involved in running the reading whose sole responsibility is publicity.
3. Don't be afraid to have standards and to enforce them, especially if you are having an open reading.

Ginger comes from a family in which addiction and alcoholism was a major factor. She describes her father, for example, as dying from a combination of "cirrhosis liver: and "terminal stubbornness." What is remarkable about this book is her ability to accept and to love these imperfect individuals. Her lack of bitterness and a sense of victimization are especially remarkable. Her relationship with her alcoholic father might be compared to that Sharon Olds. (See the comment on Sharon Olds below.)

Besides her father, Ginger also writes of the death of her sister from cancer and remembers her mother's death when Ginger was a child. Her use of humor and her lack of self-pity make her work entertaining and admirable.

****Bellows, Kevin. *Taking Your Own True Nature*. Los Angeles: Lake Champlain Press, 2004.**

These autobiographical poems deal, among other things, with the alcoholism of the author's father, and her eventual recovery from her own alcoholism. "The Morning After," "Spiritual Awakening," and "River Jordan" are especially effective.

****Blood and Bone. Eds. Belli, Angela and Jack Coulehan. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998.**

This anthology of poetry by physicians views the medical experience from the doctor's perspective. The writers are distinguished, and include, for example, Robert Coles, a psychiatrist known for his work with children. Almost anything in this anthology would be appropriate for students in the health sciences. "Talking to the Family," and "Candor," for instance, both deal with doctors giving bad news and may be contrasted with Raymond Carver's "What the Doctor Said." "Two Suffering Men" by Eugene Hirsch gives a vivid picture of alcoholism, both in-patient and in doctor.

Campo, Rafael. *The Desire to Heal: A Doctor's Education In Empathy, Identity, and Poetry*. New York: Norton, 1997.

Rafael Campo is an internist who practices at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Medical Center. He is involved in the education of medical students. Campo is also a nationally known poet, who takes the healing possibilities of poetry very seriously. This book is a collection of essays, which trace the development of a young, Hispanic, gay doctor fighting AIDS, shame, and more.

One of the most interesting essays, for the purpose of this sabbatical is "Rhymes With Dancer," which deals with Rafael's own encounter with the possibility of cancer. The day before the biopsy and possible amputation of his left arm, Campo poured out his feelings into 32 sonnets, which helped him face the procedure.

_____. **Diva. Durham and London:Duke UP, 1999.**

_____. *Finding What You Haven't Lost*. New York: Tarcher/ Putnam, 1995.

Much the same material as in *Poetic Medicine*.

****Ghalib, Mirza Asadullah Khan.** *The Lightening Should Have Fallen on Ghalib*, trans. Robert Bly and Sunil Dutta. Hopewell: Ecco Press, 1999.

Ghalib, lived in India the nineteenth century, and is known as the Shakespeare of Urdu poetry. He was a master of the ghazal, a challenging poetic form used by Sufi mystics, such as Rumi and Hafiz. In this poetry, wine and drunkenness is used as a symbol of a mystic union with the divine. However, in Ghalib's case this symbolism is considerably less dominant and the real experience of alcohol more present. According to tradition, when asked if he were Muslim, Ghalib replied that he was half-Muslim because he didn't eat pork, but he drank. Some poems seem to reflect this directly, and may be read against contemporary literature with interest.

Gilbert, Jack. *The Great Fires*. New York: Knoff, 1997.

Brief, accessible, and extremely moving poems about the death of his wife, Michiko Nogami. See especially "Married," "Alone," and "Michiko Dead." Few poems of grief and loss are more moving. This is Gilbert's most recent book. I hope there will be another soon.

*** *Harrison, Jim and Ted Kooser.** *Braided River*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon, 2003.

This is a poetic correspondence between two writers. The particular author of each short poem is not identified. Ted Kooser has been diagnosed with cancer. The poems are short, funny, and easily imitated. There are many that deal with aging, illness, and drinking. Could be used in many courses. Highly accessible.

Hikmet, Nazim. *Poems of Nazim Hikmet*, trans. Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk. New York: Persea, 2002.

Hikmet was probably the most important Turkish poet of the twentieth century, and spent many years in prison for his political views. Yet, somehow, he was not embittered and retained a love and joy in life. "While I was Inside" is an accurate, but surprisingly serene account of prison life. The poems written toward the end of his life, such as "My Funeral" are radiant and may be compared to those of Raymond Carver. Hikmet suffered from heart disease, which eventually killed him. Some of his poems on his medical difficulties would be very helpful. No one is better.

****Hoagland, Tony.** *Sweet Ruin*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

after a two-year battle with the illness. Her life was made into a best selling novel and a commercial film.

****Olds, Sharon. *The Father*. New York: Knoff, 1993.**

Sharon Olds has written much of her troubled childhood and her personal life. This is one of her strongest books. It deals with the death of her alcoholic father from throat cancer, and of her becoming close to a man she had sometimes hated. Many very strong poems. "The Glass," for example, is unforgettable.

Orr, Gregory. *Poetry As Survival*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press 2002.

Orr's academic credentials are impressive. His personal credentials are even more so. He is a professor of English at the University of Virginia and poetry editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. When he was twelve he accidentally killed his brother in a hunting accident. It wasn't until he discovered poetry in high school that he was able to deal with this. Orr believes that the personal lyric can help the self maintain itself and find meaning when it is threatened by outer and inner chaos. He supports his ideas by a brilliant, and at times scholarly, performance that ranges from Keats to Eskimo chants. Superb. Inspiring without being a threat to the emotionally diabetic.

***Poems to Live by in Uncertain Times*. Ed, Joan. Murray. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.**

This was assembled by the editor after 9/11. It contains material from many poets from Auden to Yeats. Its six division are "I Think Continually of Those: *Death and Remembrance*; In a Dark Time: *Fear and Suffering*; Try to Praise the Mutilated World: *Affirmations and Rejoicings*; We Are Running: *Warnings and Instructions*; The End and Beginning; *War and Rumors of War*; Little Prayers; *Meditations and Conversations*." This book provides material that would be appropriate for almost any class and help with almost any suffering. Adam Zagajewski's "Try to Praise the Mutilated World," for example, is a wonderful version of what 12-step groups and others call a "gratitude list."

Pereira, Peter. *Saying the World*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003.

"Peter Pereira is a family physician in Seattle and founding editor of Floating Bridge Press. . . He currently provides primary care to an urban poor population at High Point Community Clinic in West Seattle." The poems in this book let the reader into the physician's experience wonderfully. They also recount medical education in detail, as in "Intern," and "First Crash Cesarean" " Such poems would obviously be appropriate for students considering the health sciences, although a few of them might change their aspirations. "Suite for a Sister," is marvelous reaction to the death of the author's sister, which was one of the motivations for the author's medical career.

APPENDIX D SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS POETRY AND HEALING

The following are ideas for student writing and discussion based on material read during this sabbatical. Most are derived from extensive marginalia written during my reading. Usually they are based on particular poem or poems. Some of these poems are included here. Others are only referred to briefly. All of these assignments would need refining for specific classes and situations. (For example, another instructor or I might attach photocopied to some of these assignments)

This material is arranged by author or text, so material not quoted here can be accessed more readily. For the most part, these assignments follow the annotated bibliography included in this report, and assume that other instructors who look at this material will have the annotated bibliography available to them. Like it, they deal with poetry and healing in the broadest sense of the word healing, so they also include material appropriate for those studying chemical dependency. (Such assignments are presented in bold lettering.)

Andrews, Ginger. *An Honest Answer.* Ashland, Oregon: Storyline, 1998.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1:

Ginger Andrews first book centers on her family, and among other things, addiction, poverty, illness and death—that of her father from diabetes and other problems. Oddly enough, it is often very funny.

Here are two poems about her father:

Come to Papa

Sitting in a rusty-armed law chair
in Dad's overgrown backyard, worried sick
over what direction my life might take. Afraid
to burden this dying man, afraid he'll tell me
I've made my bed and I'll have to lie in it, or preach
bout how folks with good common sense know better
than to jump out of a fire and into a frying pan.

We sit quietly till he looks me straight in the eye slowly
crosses one skeleton-thin leg over the other and says, hell
is being old, sick, and alone. He offers the other half of an apple
he just can't eat. But Dad, I say, it's rotten.
For christ'sake, kid, cut out the bad part

is my not so young,
not so beautiful sister
who's flat broke,
divorced
and has cancer

Saddest of all is the fact
that I pussyfoot around
telling her that it's never too late
to let go and let God.
Wouldn't want to preach
her a sermon or anything.

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Ginger regrets giving her sister a reassuring religious message. Why do you think she regrets saying that? What might she have said?
2. Is it a good idea to give someone who is ill false comfort? Why or why not?
3. What does Ginger seem to be saying in this poem that you agree or disagree with? Why?
4. Read the next poem in Ginger's book, "I Punch Out Jesus," dealing with the feelings that come to her while teaching Sunday School. Compare it to the poems about her sister.
5. Read all of Ginger's book. Discuss the part that religion plays in her life in a composition.
6. After reading Ginger's entire book, reflect on what helps her get through life's difficulties. Write a multi-paragraph composition on this topic.

****SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #4**

After Reading *An Honest Answer*, consider the following:

FOR DISCUSSION, JOURNALING, AND WRITING

1. What negative situations has Ginger experienced in her family?
2. What positive aspects are there in her family?
3. Ginger has obviously had a difficult life. What has gotten her through it? Be specific. Refer to particular poems.
4. Perhaps you have gotten through some difficulties, perhaps those difficulties are similar to Ginger's. Compare how you and Ginger got through your difficulties.
5. Write about questions 1 and 2 again, using more specific details.

***Bellows, Kevin. *Taking Your Own True Nature*. Los Angeles: Lake Champlain Press, 2004.

life offers I vow to refuse the next fifteen/Yet when they wheel me out/and ask "How yaw doing?" I answer "Nothing beats it?"(17)

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What is the MRI like?
2. How does the patient experience it?
3. Does the technician do a good job of preparing the patient for the experience? Write one or two paragraphs on this.
4. Have you ever had an MRI? Compare this poem to your experience.
5. If you have had another complicated medical procedure write a description of this. Try to make this description accurate medically and personally. (You may have to do a little research on this.)
6. Write a poem about this procedure.
7. Research this procedure at length, including its development and uses. Present this as a research project, but include your personal experience as well.
8. Read "MRI of a Poet's Brain" (p. 43) Compare it to the previous poem.
9. Suppose there is a machine that can discover the poetry in a poet's brain. What does it find? Begin by free writing around the phrase "In the poet's brain is _____ Turn what you accumulate into a poem.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #3

Consider these lines from Dannie Abse's "X-Ray"

Harvey, the circulation of the blood
and Freud, the circulation of our dreams,
priyed honorably and honored are
like explorers. Men who'd open men

And those others, mother, with diseases
like great streets named after them: Addison
Parkinson, Hodgkin—physicians who'd arrive
fast and first on any sour deathbed scene.

I am their slowcoach colleague—half-afraid
incurious. As a boy it was so: you know how
my small hand never teased to pieces
an alarm clock or flensed a perished mouse

And this larger hand's the same. It stretches now
out from a white sleeve to hold up, Mother
your X-ray in the glowing screen. My eyes look
but don't want in. I still don't want to know.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #5

The Goddam Street

I know her children
 have seen them getting ready
 for what she calls
 "the god dam street"
 Each child has been held
 and breast-fed in ways
 well-nourished mothers might envy.
 In the cold rat-infested flat
 there is lively warmth
 between mother and babies
 songs, smiles, sighs.
 "I don't know how to do it,'
 how to keep my kids from getting stained, ruined
 I keep them close to me
 I can tell how much
 I want for it to be good,
 so, I hope they'll make it,
 and I stop, say a prayer—
 not expecting prayer to bear
 answer, not around here."

Robert Coles

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What is this mother like.
2. What difficulties will her children have?
3. What do you make of the last line of this poem?
4. How does Coles feel about her?
5. Write a letter to the mother. Tell her what you think will help.
6. If you know someone who has also tried to raise children in very difficult circumstances, write about that person and compare that person to the mother in this poem.
7. Coles is a very well known psychiatrist who has studied children, especially children in social difficulties, for many years. His *Children of Crisis Series* won the Pulitzer Prize. Find out a little bit about Coles' work. Relate it to his poem.
8. Write a research paper on Robert Coles.

3. If you are planning to be a professional, and assuming you are a "stay-at-home", how are you and your spouse going to handle the issue of childcare.

Carver, Raymond. *All of Us: the Collected Poems*. New York: Knoff, 2000.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1

Below are two poems written by Raymond Carver while he was dying of cancer. Carver was also a celebrated short-story writer and an alcoholic. Carver died at an early age. Here are two poems written near the end of his life

Gravy

No other word will do. For that's what it was. Gravy.

Gravy, these past ten years

Alive, sober, working, loving and
being loved by a good woman. Eleven years
ago he was told he had six months to live
at the rate he was going. And he was going
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?

After that it was *all gravy*, every minute
of it, up to and including when he was told about
well, some things that were breaking down and
building up inside his head. "Don't weep for me,"
he said to his friends. "I'm a lucky man."

I've had ten years longer than I or anyone
expected. Pure gravy. And don't forget it."

(292)

No Need

I see an empty place at the table.
Whose? Who else Who am I kidding?
The boat's waiting. No need for oars
or a wind. I've left the key
in the same place. You know where.
Remember me and all we did together.
Now hold me tight. That's it. Kiss me
hard on the lips. There. Now
let me go, my dearest. Let me go.
We shall not meet again in this life,
so kiss me goodbye now. Here, kiss me again.

2. Tess Gallagher has written extensively about Carver's death, both in poetry and prose. Research her writings. Compare her experience of Carver's cancer to his own. To make this even more of a research paper you might do some reading on caretakers and apply it to this situation. For an even more extensive project, you might read the work of Donald Hall and Jack Gilbert and discuss their caretaking as well as Gallagher's. (You may want to see your instructor. Some of Gilbert's work is a bit difficult to find.)
3. Part of *Another Path to the Waterfall* based on passages from Anton Chekov, the great Russian playwright and short story writer. What is Chekov doing there? Reach Chekov to find out. In an essay present what you find. (Chekov, you will learn was a doctor. As a short story writer Carver was often compared to him.)
4. Carver was actually much better known as a short story writer than as a poet. One of his most moving stories is "A Small Good Thing," which deals with the illness of a child. Read the story consider the picture of the medical experience given in this short story. How are the doctors similar to those in "What the doctor said"? If you know something of the medical experience, especially of the difficulties for some families, you might bring that in. If you wish to do research on the subject, you may do that also. Perhaps you may additionally attempt to determine if the story fits Carver's credo of "without hope, without despair." Write an essay that is the result of your investigations. (This story, as well as other Carver stories, is woven through Robert Altman's film *Short Cuts*. It might be interest for you to rent it, but you should bear in mind that the film is very different from the short story.)

Clifton, Lucille. Blessing the Boats. New and Selected Poets 1988-2000. Rochester: BOA, 2000.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1

The following poems deal with Lucille Clifton's struggle with breast cancer and the side effects of treatment. Read the poems, then go on to the questions and writing assignments.

amazons

when the rookery of women
warriors all
each cupping one hand
around her remaining breast

daughters of dahomey
their name fierce on the planet

when they came to ask
who knows what you might have
to sacrifice poet amazon
there is no choice

when I wok into the winter
of a cold and mortal body

thin icicles hanging off
the one mad nipple weeping

have we not been good children
did we not inherit the earth

but you must know all about this
from your own shivering life

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Who is the you she is addressing?
2. Would it be possible for a white male to be moved by this poem?
3. How does Clifton use metaphor and imagery in this poem? (You may have to do some writing to find out what these terms mean.)
4. In stanzas three and four Lucille makes some very definite statements about lies or danger. Pick one or two of these statements, write a multi-paragraph composition where, based on your own experience, you agree or disagree with them.

dialysis

after the cancer, the kidneys
refused to continue
they closed their thousand eyes

blood fountains from the blind man's
arm and decorates the tile today.
somebody mops it up

we are not supposed to hate
the dialysis unit. . . we are not
supposed to hate the universe.

this is not supposed to happen to me.
After the cancer the body refused
to lose any more, even the poisons
were claimed and kept

until they threatened to destroy
the heart they loved in my dream
a house is burning.

(Braided River 36)

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What does this poem do that saying "When it hurts in the night, I'm frightened," does not do?
2. What is frightening in the poem, especially the last line?

The Pain

From someone unsought somewhere
in the raucous transactions
of my life, the pain has scraped
acquaintance, selecting its
spot, nestling in the backroom,
down in the basement of my bones.

Mostly it's unobtrusive, keeps
out of my bedroom and parlor.
But I still sense it out there,
perched on the hot back stoop in wait.
So when company comes I slip it a
drug for dinner, and for a time

there's not a peek from it. And I
start to dare, scarcely to hope
it's at last sulked out by a
back exit from my place, seeking
more congenial rooms. Then over
the birdcall I'll wake to

its dull knock on the dark
door and, if I dare disregard it,
flinch to insistent thump of
knuckles on my ceiling, clunk upon
my skull. Then I know to lay
its place again at table.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What stage of illness is the speaker in?
2. Is it the same stage as in the previous poem?
3. What does the speaker compare pain to?
4. What was the worst pain you ever felt? Describe it.

5. Write a brief poem of your on alcohol.

CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

Pick another person in the class. Have a poetic correspondence for a month. (All poems should be no more than 4 lines long.)

**Hikmet, Nazim. *Poems of Nazim Hikmet*. trans. Randy Blasing And Mutlu Konuk.
New York: Persea Books, 1994.**

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1

Consider the following by one of Turkey's greatest writers.

MESSAGE

My fellow

patients

you'll get well

The aches and pains will cease

Ease will come

softly, like a warm summer evening

descending from heavy green branches.

My fellow patients,

hold on a bit longer, hang on.

What waits outside the door is not death

but life.

Outside the door

is the whole bustling world

You will rise from your beds

and walk.

You will discover all over again

the taste of salt, bread, and the sun.

To turn yellow as a lemon, melt like a candle
or collapse suddenly like a rotted sycamore—

my fellow patients,

we're not lemons, candles, or sycamores

we're people, thank goodness.

We know how to mix hope with our medicine---

how to put our feet down

stand our ground

and say,

"we must live!"

- 4. These poems seem very positive and optimistic. But sometimes it's very hard to tell the difference between optimism and denial. As someone once joked, "If you can keep your head while all those around you are losing theirs, perhaps you do not understand the gravity of the situation." Write a multi-paragraph composition in which you make the distinction between optimism and denial by discussing these poems. (If you like you may bring in personal experience.)**

Further Sample Assignments:

Read : "My Funeral," "To Lydia Ivanna," "Things I didn't know I loved, "Since I Was Thrown Inside"

DISCUSSION AND WRITING:

1. What, if anything, is funny, sad, and inspiring about "My Funeral"?
2. Hikmet suffered from heart disease, which finally killed him. "To Lydia Ivanna" was his doctor. Was Hikmet a good patient? What, once again, is optimistic about this poem and what is denial? Pretend you are Lydia Ivanna. Answer his letter. (If you like, consider answering in a poem.)
3. **Hikmet was imprisoned for many years, and "Since I Was Thrown Inside" is based on that experience. What are some of the horrors of his imprisonment? How might the attitude shown in this poem have helped him survive? If you are familiar with the 12-step advice that one should realize "It's not about me," you might bring this into your discussion.**
4. "Things I didn't know I loved" was written near the end of Hikmet's life, and is built around the phrase "I didn't know I loved." For example: "I didn't know I loved the earth/ can someone who hasn't worked the earth love it/I've never worked the earth/ it must be my only Platonic love. Start with the phrase "I didn't know I loved," or "I didn't know I hated" Freewrite quickly, coming back to that phrase over and over. If you like rearrange this into a poem.
5. Research Hikmet's life. Try to find out how he was able to meet his difficulties with such serenity and grace. For a longer paper, research Nelson Mandella, who, like Hikmet, seems to have neither broken nor embittered by years of imprisonment. Compare the two.
6. Compare the serenity with which Hikmet faced death with the serenity with which Raymond Carver faced death in his poem "Gravy." Who seems most admirable. Why?

Olds, Sharon. *The Father*. Knoff.: New York, 1992.

This book describes the death of Sharon's father from throat cancer. Sharon's father was an alcoholic, and they were not close when she was a child.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #1 Read the following poem from *The Father*,

2. Sharon's father was an alcoholic who died of throat cancer. What in this poem hints at his alcoholism?
3. Read about throat cancer. Apply what you have read to this poem.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #2

Ginger Andrews' book, *An Honest Answer*, also describes the death of her father, in part from complications of alcoholism. In an extended essay compare the two writers' experience of their father's deaths. If possible read something about alcoholic families or the children of alcoholics. Apply it to your essay.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT #3

Read this poem, also from *The Father*.

His Stillness

The doctor said to my father, "You asked me
to tell you when nothing more could be done.
That's what I'm telling you now." My father
sat quite still, as he always did,
especially not moving his eyes. I had thought
he would rave if he understood he would die,
wave his arms and cry out. He sat up
thin, and clean, in his clean gown,
like a holy man. The doctor said,
"There are things we can do which might give you time,
but we cannot cure you." My father said,
"Thank you." And he sat, motionless, alone,
with the dignity of a foreign leader.
I sat beside him. This was my father.
He had known he was mortal. I had feared they would have
to tie him down. I had not remembered
he had always held still and kept silent to hear things,
the liquor a way to keep still. I had not
known him. My father had dignity. At the
end of his life his life began
to wake in me.

(3)

FOR DISCUSSION, JOURNALING, WRITING

1. What does Sharon learn about her father and his alcoholism?
2. What does she learn about herself?
3. How typical is Sharon's father in his alcoholism?

the overhead of a code being called,
cardiac surgeons cracking open the chest
of a post-op as if it were a Christmas turkey,
injecting the epinephrine needle directly into the heart,
I remember O2 stats and blood pressure bottoming out,
eyes rolling back and the sickly ashen color
of a face before death.

At best it was Star Trek: The Next Generation,
our team marching the pristine halls of a great
Medical Center in the Sky, no disease immune
to the perfect rays of our healing weapons.
At worst it was Dante's *Inferno*, stuttering fluorescents
dimly lighting each unhealed foot ulcer
and abdominal wound dehiscence
as we worked without rest for days on end,
sometimes never stopping to see the sun.

I remember one June morning the last week of call,
a woman who'd been laboring all night
panting and screaming and begging for us
to *take the baby now*.
oxygen mask strapped to her face
like a plane passenger in a nosedive,
fetal monitor in a Brady, her legs wide open,
my handshaking as I placed the forceps
on the vermin-smeared vertex and pulled. . .
and pulled. . .and pulled.

(9)

FOR DISCUSSION, JOURNALING, AND COMPOSITIONS

1. This poem gives a very specific picture of an intern's life. What details are especially effective.
2. Based on this poem, what do you think is especially hard about medical education. If you have ever considered a medical career, what do you think will give you the most trouble? How will you deal with it.
3. This poem never says that being an intern is hard, yet through very specific details we know that it is true. The poem, in other words, shows instead of telling—something that beginning creative writers are counseled to learn. Have you ever tried to do something difficult? (sports may perhaps give a topic). Write a composition in which you try to show that difficulty rather than stating it directly. Perhaps you might also try writing a poem.

FURTHER ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTIONS:

1. "Hydrocephalic," and "Echolalia" like "Nosophilia," are based on a technical term for actual medical, or psychological conditions. Read about these terms, then write on how accurate the poem is medical and what, if anything the poet has added.
2. Read a technical description of a Caesarian. Compare it to "First Crash Caesarian"
3. Read "Suite for a Sister.." Consider how the death of his sister affected the author and his family. Did the parents handle it badly or well? What did have to do with the author becoming a doctor. How are the dream passages different from the rest of the poem? What is their significance? Based on your answers, write an essay about this poem.
4. **Did a death or other tragedy have a deep and long lasting effect on your family? In a multi-paragraph composition describe this event and its results. If possible, compare your experience to the poet's.**

Poems to Live by in Uncertain Times. Ed, Joan Murray. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

This book was assembled by the editor shortly after 9/11 and hopefully contains work that is consoling in many ways.

ASSIGNMENT #1

Read "Otherwise" by Jane Kenyon and "Try to Praise the Mutilated World."

1. What is positive in these poems?
2. What is negative?
3. Which poem seems the most consoling, Why?
4. Write a short comparison of the two poems.
5. Do a freewriting around Kenyon's phrase "it could have been otherwise" Turn that free writing into a poem.

ASSIGNMENT #2

Read Michael Bluementhal's "What I Believe." (p. 36) Using the phrase "I believe" over and over freewrite for 10 minutes. Turn the results into a composition or a poem. (It will probably be more effective if you do not refer to any codified system of beliefs.)

ASSIGNMENT #3

We have been reading *Poems to Live By in Uncertain Times*. These poems were assembled by the editor after 9/11, but many of them might be beneficial to those facing any disaster or brief. Suppose you are facilitating a group on grief counseling, cancer support, or recovery from chemical dependency. Pick five poems from the

(23)

Changing Partners

I slept while a cancer feasted inside of me
 My lover, finding the noise disturbing left.
 With no one weighing me into sleep,
 darkness has become my lover.
 He holds me, promises not to leave

(24)

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. All of these poems deal with the isolating effect of illness, with the way it is a table set for one. In what ways is this true? In what ways is it exceptional? (Base your answers on your own experience or on reading.)
2. Silver's lover leaves her after he finds out she has cancer. How unusual do you think this is? Are there any other reasons for his actions besides selfishness and insensitivity?
3. Why do other people have difficulties with those who are ill?
4. What is funny about these poems? What is sad?
5. Write a composition or journal entry based on your answers to these questions
6. Begin a free-writing with the phrase "illness is" Write quickly accumulating many answers to that question. Pick three or four of your answers and explain them at length. (You may probably want to devote a paragraph for each answer.)
7. Take your free-writing and develop it into a "list poem." (If you do not know what this is, you may want to ask your instructor.) A good example of a list poem is Raymond Carver's "My car" or Ginger Andrews "Divorce Poem."
8. Take one of your answers and develop it into a short poem like Anne's.
9. Suppose Anne's ex-lover reads her poems and writes an answer. What does he say.?

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS #2

Here are four more poems written after Anne's recovery:

Haiku

Radiation hums
 infuse the room.
 My breast fills with bees.

(60)

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. How has her cancer changed the speaker
2. What is positive in these poems? What is not?
3. If you ever had a serious illness? How did it effect you?
Write a brief composition on this topic.
4. For a longer composition, compare your experience to Anne's.

FURTHER READING AND WRITING

1. Much of Anne's writing is humorous? Read more of her work. Write a composition on how Anne uses humor in dealing with her pain
2. Ginger Andrews also uses humor in dealing with difficult situations. Look at "An Honest Answer," and compare her work to Anne's.
3. There is been much written by many individuals, such as Norman Cousins, on the use of humor for healing. Read some of the material. Write a composition that applies it to Ginger, Anne, or both.
4. If you have read Raymond Carver's or Lucille Clifton's responses to their cancers, consider how their responses compare with Anne's. Who seems the most admirable, why?
5. If you have read Nazim Hikmet's responses to his difficulties, compare them to any of the poets just mentioned.

*Guide us to the straight path,
 The path of those whom You have favored,
 Not of those who have incurred Your wrath,
 Nor of those who have gone astray*
 trans. N.J. Dawood

FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR WRITING:

1. How is this Sura similar to the lord's prayer? How is it different?
2. These two translations are somewhat different. What are some of the differences?
3. You probably do not know Arabic, but if you had to choose one of these versions, either as a poem or as a prayer, which would you choose? Why?

ASSIGNMENT #2

Preparation for reading: What are the most memorable incidents for you in the Christmas story?

Sura 19, gives an account of the birth of Jesus. Read this story carefully. The account begins:

And you shall recount in the Book the story of Mary: how she left her people and betook herself to a solitary place to the east.

We sent Our spirit in the semblance of a full-grown man. And when she saw him she said: "May the Merciful defend me from you ! If you fear the Lord, leave me and go your way."

"I am but your Lord's emissary," he replied, 'and has come to give you a holy son.'

"How shall I bear a child," she answered, 'when I have neither been touched by any man nor ever been unchaste?"

"Thus did your Lord speak," he replied. "that is easy enough for Me. He shall be a sign to mankind and a blessing from Ourselves. Our decree shall come to pass."

Thereupon she conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And when she felt the throes of childbirth she lay down by the trunk of a palm-tree, crying: "Oh, would that I had died before this and passed into oblivion!"

But a voice from below cried out to her: "Do not despair. Your Lord has provided a brook that runs at your feet, and if you shake the trunk of the palm-tree it will drop fresh ripe dates in your lap . . . "

trans. N.J. Dawood

1. What is this Mary like? Is she different from the Mary of the New Testament? How?
2. How is the story different from the Christmas story?
3. Some commentators believe this story reflects the desert experience and other aspects of Arab culture. Why might they think this?
4. Suppose you are an alien visiting the earth from the planet Zog. You hear this story and the New Testament versions of Christ's birth. Which account entertains and interests you more? Why? Write in your Captain's log about these two stories.

5. Robert Pinsky has written a poem based on the stories of Jesus animating clay birds as a child. Read this and compare it to the versions of this event from the *Qu'ran*.

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS FOR RUMI

ASSIGNMENT # 1 SOME OPENING QUESTIONS: (FOR DISCUSSION, ETC.)

1. What is a poet?
2. What is a saint?
3. What is a mystic?
4. Are all mystics saints?

Continuing journaling and discussion concerns:

1. What in Rumi is poetic?
2. What is mystical?
3. What is saintly?
4. Why is Rumi so popular today?
5. If you belong to a faith community, would you like Rumi to preach to it? Why or why not?

ASSIGNMENT # 2: LOVE AND WINE

1. Rumi often writes about love. What in the poems we have read seems sensuous? What seems mystical?
2. Is wine in Rumi a symbol, or real wine? Does it matter?

ASSIGNMENT # 3:

Read "Only Breath," (trans. Coleman Barks, *Bedford* p. 431 or *Essential Rumi*)

This poem begins:

Not Christian, or Jew, or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, Sufi, or Zen. Not any religion

or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know

ASSIGNMENT #6

Consider the following from Rumi

Don't come without bringing music
 So celebrate with drum and flute
 With wine not made from grapes
 in a place you cannot imagine

Moyne and Barks translators
Norton Anthology, p. 82

1. What kind of music or wine is this?
2. How does this relate to Sufism? (You may have to learn a little about the subject)
3. Compare to Emily Dickenson's "I tasted liquor never brewed"

ASSIGNMENT #6

1. Research Sufism. Apply what you have learned to three of Rumi's poems
2. Research modern attitudes towards Sufism from non-Islamicals to Islamic fundamentalists. Is this a growing, viable movement, or something that happened many years ago? (There are modern Sufi orders, including some in the United States. Perhaps you could find a way to contact one.)

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS FOR HAFIZ**ASSIGNMENT #1:**

Read the following poem by Hafiz

GOD JUST CAME NEAR

No
 One
 In Need of Love

Can sit with my verse for
 An hour
 And then walk away
 Without carrying
 Golden tools
 And feeling that God
 Just came

near

trans. Ladinsky
(Essential Hafiz, 31)

I know the Innkeeper
 In this part of the universe
 Get some sleep tonight
 Come to my verse Again
 tomorrow
 We'll speak to the Friend
 together

I shouldn't make
 any promises right now
 But I know if you
 Pray
 Somewhere in the world
 Something good will happen

God wants to see
 more love and playfulness
 in your eyes
 For that is your greatest witness to him

Your soul and my soul
 Once sat together in the Beloved's womb
 Playing footsie

Your heart and my heat
 Are very, very old
 friends

MISMATCHED NEWLY WEDS

Like
 a pair
 of mismatched newly weds
 One of whom still feels very insecure
 I keep turning to God
 Saying
 Kiss
 Me

WHAT THE HELL

The
 Real love

About my Poems

I agree, Oh heart, that my ghazals are not easy to take in.
When they hear my poems, experienced poets

Tell me I should write something easier to understand.
I have to write what's difficult, otherwise it is difficult to write.

(Bly 32)

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What is Ghalib suggesting here about his poetry?
2. Based on what you have read, do you agree?
3. Is this a good defense of his work?
4. Try writing, if you like, two couplets that answer what Ghalib has said

ASSIGNMENT #2 (Based on the selections in the *Bedford Anthology of World Literature*.)

For many reasons the ghazal is difficult to translate. (The internal rhyme and refrain, for example, is almost impossible to render in English.) Here are lines from different versions of the same ghazal as they are presented in the *Bedford Anthology*:

Here are the first two couplets of those versions:

The happiness of the drop is to die in the river
When the pain exceeds bearable limits the pain itself becomes the medicine.

Our weakness is such that tears have turned into mere sighing
Now we really believe that water can turn into air.

(Literal translation by Aijaz Ahmad 966)

Waterbead ecstasy: dying in a stream
Too strong a pain brings its own balm.

So weak now we weep sighs only;
Learn surely how water feels to turn to air.

(trans. Thomas Fitzsimons 967)

The drop dies in the river

FURTHER ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Largely because of the work of Robert Bly and his friend Coleman Barks, Rumi has become the most popular poet in the United States. Based on the poems that you have read, do you think Ghalib will become popular as well.? (Be specific.)
2. Supposedly when Ghalib was asked whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim, he said he was half Muslim and explained, "I don't eat pork, but I drink." Based on the ghazals that you have read, what would you say about Ghalib's religiosity? Or to put it another way, how are they indebted to Muslim tradition--the references to the Ka'bah, for example--and how do they depart from or question that tradition. (A good poem to look at is Bly's translation of "My Spiritual Condition.")
3. Both Rumi and Hafiz are considered Sufi saints. Ghalib isn't. Why?
4. Each couplet in a ghazal is considered a poem in itself, and people often learn individual completes. Memorize five couplets from what we read be prepared to explain your choice.
5. Ghalib is also noted for his realism. Read "The Sword Wound. " (Bly, Bedford 972-73) Be prepared to discuss what seems realistic and overstated in the poem. One place you might start is with these couplets:

Your lover might not be faithful, but she is your lover.
We could mention the beautiful rolling way she walks.

Spring doesn't last long but at least its spring.
It would be good to mention the scented winds that move through the garden.

(Bedford 975)

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS FOR HIKMET

ASSIGNMENT #1 Read Nazim Hikmet's "My Funeral." (This poem will be supplied.) Especially notice his lack of self-pity.

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What could he feel bad about? Why doesn't he?
2. Read Raymond Carver's "Gravy"--one of his last poems. (This poem will also be supplied.) Carver wrote this poem when he was dying of cancer. Which poet has the best attitude? When your time comes, which poet would you rather be?
3. Write a poem about your own funeral (It's never too early.) Begin by free-writing around the phrase, "At my funeral ----," At my funeral----

ASSIGNMENT # 2 : Read the following two small poems by Nazim Hikmet:

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What kept this poet going?
2. Were his beliefs true?
3. What keeps you going?
4. Do some reading on Hikmet. Answer these questions at more length.
5. You may have been given some of the work of Ginger Andrews. Both she and Hikmet had considerable difficulty in their lives--Hikmet especially. Yet neither of them seems to display self-pity. Why do you think that is?

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

1. Read "The Last Bus," (Poems 195-196). This poem deals with Hikmet's sense of approaching death. What is sad about the poem? What is beautiful? How does approaching death affect the poet? Is this poem spiritual despite the fact that it never mentions God? If you like, compare this poem to Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar."
2. Read Hikmet's "Rubiyat" (Poems 117-122). The word "rubiyat" refers to a certain four line poetic stanza. Rubiyats are often used to express philosophical ideas. (As in the *Rubiyat of Omar Khayyam.*). Hikmet felt he was doing something very different, writing a rubiyat to express the ideas of "dialectical materialism."--the basic philosophical position behind Marxism. Read about dialectical materialism, and show how it is expressed in some of the stanzas of this work.
3. Read "To Lydia Ivanna", a poem written to his doctor. (156). Consider what kind of patient Hikmet was and whether his attitude was good or bad. How do you think his doctor would have taken this letter? If you like, write the doctor's reply.

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS FOR FAIZ AHMED FAIZ

Note: Most of the poems found here can be found in *The Rebel's Silhouette*

ASSIGNMENT #1

Consider the following poem, part of which is reproduced here.

Don't Ask Me for That Love Again

That which then was ours, my love
don't ask me for that love again.
The world then was gold, burnished by light--
and only because of you. That's what I believed

.....

But there were other sorrows, comforts other than love.
The rich had cast their spell on history:

water, earth--all have pledged such dawns, such gardens to him.

Your feet bleed, Faiz, something surely will bloom
as you water the desert simply by walking through it.

(17)

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. How is this poem like other ghazals we have read?
2. How is it different?
3. See if you can find out the significance of the title.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Find two or three ghazals by Faiz that seem political. Discuss them.
2. Read "Prison Daybreak" (21) Compare it to Nazim Hikmet's "While I was Inside", which is one of his most anthologized poems. Which view of prison is the most horrible.

~~POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS MAHMOUD DARWISH~~

ASSIGNMENT #1

Read the attached poem "A Soldier Dreams of White Tulips."
(Poem will be supplied when assignment is given out.)

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. This is a conversation between the soldier and the narrator, Mahmoud. What does the speaker seem to expect of the soldier in terms of his loyalty to his "country," and his feelings about war? Be specific.
2. How is the soldier different from the poet's expectations?
3. Is the soldier patriotic?
4. Is he brave?
5. Why does he dream of white tulips?
6. Have you ever known anyone who has been involved in war, or have you been involved in one yourself? What in this poem seems true and/or false in this poem?
7. Mahmoud Darwish is a Palestinian, and, at least from the date this seems to be about the "Six Day War" with Israel. Does this information matter in our appreciation of the poem?

3. Darwish has written frequently about prison. So has Nazim Hikmet, in such poems as "While I Was Inside." or "How It Is." (You may have already been shown some of these poems.) Compare one of Darwish's poems to Hikmet.

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS MODERN ARABIC POETS

ASSIGNMENT #1 NIZAR QABBANI

Qabbani is one of the most popular Arabic poets. Yet when his poem "Bread, Hashish, and the Moon' appeared, he " was threatened with prosecution for its anti-Arab sentiments." (Barnstone 416)

In the poem he describes his people as being entranced by the moon and living self-destructive lives:

In my country
 Where people live without eyes
 Where the innocents weep
 And pray
 And fornicate
 And live on fatalism
 (They have always lived on fatalism)
 Calling to the moon

The millions who run off without shoes
 And who believe in four wives
 And the Day of Judgment
 The millions who never find bread
 Except in dreams
 Who spend their nights
 in houses made of
 coughs
 Our East that regurgitates its history
 Lazy dreams and ancient superstitions

.....

(Barnstone 416)

This is not the entire poem, but it is enough to consider. If you would like the whole text, you can be given a copy, or you can find it in Barnstone's *Literatures of the Middle East*.

and facing sullen tanks with a stream of stones.
 With plain rejection they now shake the gallows of the dawn
 assailing the night and its deluge.
 They've grown, grown more than the years of a lifetime
 become the worshiped and the worshiper.
 When their torn limbs merged with the stuff of our earth,
 they became a legend.
 They grew, and became the bridge
 They grew, grew and became larger than all poetry.

(trans. Naomi Shihab Nye, *Against Forgetting*, 540)

FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. Which lines in this poem are realistic?
2. Which lines use metaphor or simile?
3. What does this language do?
4. Do some research and find out what events this poem refers to. Relate them to the poem.
5. Events in Israel have moved far beyond this poem. Is it still worth reading? Why or why not?
6. Read Yeats' famous poem "Easter 1916," which deals with a key event in the struggle for Irish independence. (You may also want to find out a little about this event.)
7. Compare the two poems. (In doing this you might want to consider the fact that some of those who participate in the Easter Rebellion, most notably Michael Collins, later became terrorist, just as some of the boys Fadwa praises in her poem may well have done. Does this fact make any difference to the poems, and to the bravery that they describe?)
8. Yehuda Amichai, the great Israeli poet, has written about the suffering that is part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Find one of his poems and compare it to Fadwa's. (You might consider "Memorial Day for the War Dead," which is posted on the website of the American Academy of Poets www.poets.org in the section devoted to Amichai. In your comparison you might want to consider Amichai's use of language.)

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS NAOMI SHIHAB NYE

ASSIGNMENT #1

Consider the following poem by Naomi Shihab Nye;

Blood

"A true Arab knows how to catch a fly in his hands,"

2. Is Naomi trying to say anything in this poem? What would that be?
3. Do you believe this encounter really took place. Why or why not?
4. Does it matter?
5. The narrator never tells Flinn about 9/11. What do you think Flinn felt and did when he found out. Write a story or poem about it if you like.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

1. In an essay about 9/11, Naomi Shihab Nye says that poetry helps us heal because "Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases details." We have read her poetry. Pick three or four poems and discuss how they "cherish small details."
2. What small details of your existence comfort you? Write a paragraph or poem about them."

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTIONS FOR AGHA SHAHID ALI

Note: ~~Most~~ of these are difficult assignments, for Agha Shahid Ali is a difficult poet. It is not for nothing that he has written a book on T.S. Eliot. What is especially difficult, as well as rewarding is that his allusions refer to more than one culture. (For example, the line "Call Me Ishmael Tonight," which at once alludes to the opening of *Moby Dick* and to the very different view of Ishmael in the *Qu'ran*. It is Ishmael, not Isaac that Abraham nearly sacrifices to God.

SUGGESTION #1

The following is a ghazal, which, in my opinion, sums up much of Agha Shahid's project as a poet. It follows the ghazal form very carefully and it ranges over many cultures. Students should be given some idea of what the ghazal is. There is an excellent discussion in his anthology *Ravishing Disunities*.

Read the following poem very carefully. Do not try to make sense of it as a whole. Concentrate only on the individual couplets:

ARABIC

The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic—
These words were said to me in a language not Arabic

Ancestors, you've left me a plot in the family graveyard—
Why must I look in your eyes, for prayers in Arabic?

ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTION #2:

The following selection is part of the opening of Agha Shahid Ali's book *Country Without a Post Office*. It is what has been called a prose poem.

And after the night's sun there in Strinagar? Guns shoot starts into the sky, the storm of constellations night after night, the infinite that rages on. I was Id-uz-Zula: a record of God's inability, for even he must melt sometimes, to let Ishmael be executed by the hand of his father. Strinagar was under curfew. The identity pass may or may not have helped in the crackdown. Son after son—never to return from the night of torture—was taken away.

(16)

QUESTIONS:

1. Look at this prose poem. What is prose in it? What is poetic? Be specific
2. Look at the allusion to Islamic beliefs used in this poem—this will require research. How are these allusion used? Are they used ironically, as in Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est." Or is it used different?

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTIONS:

1. Research the conflict in Kashmir. Relate it to Agha Shahid's work?
2. Pick almost any Agha Shahid poem. Explicate the allusion and discuss how they are used.
3. Read Agha Shahid's translation of Mahmoud Darwish's "Eleven Stars Over Andalusia," which deals, at least in part, with the Arab departure from Andalusia. Relate it to Arabic being a language of loss.

SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRIES FROM THE QU'RAN

Reading the Qu'ran and other material I kept a "common place book," writing down passages that struck me, commenting on them and sometimes writing notes for assignments. For the most part, I wrote by hand with a fountain pen, a small pleasure I give myself in journaling. I began in a hardbound journal, approximately the size of a book, and the entries flowed over into a ring binder. The following transcribed entries that follow are not meant to be a summary of the Qu'ran. They are only passages that caught my attention as I read and reread my journal: They are given primarily as documentation of my journal keeping. Unless otherwise noted these passages are from Dawood's translation. They are sometimes referenced by page number, more often by Sura and verse. (Transcribing these entries proved be a very time consuming process; therefore, in dealing with other texts, I have, for the most part, simply Xeroxed my journal entries, and limited transcribing to those entries that immediately follow summaries in the main body of this report.)

"If you doubt what we have revealed to our servant, produce one chapter comparable to it"

p. 12—from "The Cow," 2:23

Interesting—proof ;by literary worth.

"Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing, although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you. God knows but you know not." 2:216, p.32

They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say: "There is great harm in both, although some benefit for men, but their harm is far greater than their benefit." p.32

"Such men are like rock covered with earth: a shower falls upon it and leaves it hard and
re" p.39

Comment: The Qu'ran distrust the poets as much as Plato.

"Why will they not ponder the Koran? If it had not come from God, they could have surely found in it many contradictions." 4: 20, p.69

Comment: Again, profit by literary worth.

"Moses said to Aaron: 'Why did you not seek me out when you saw them go astray? Why did you disobey me?'

'Son of my mother,' he replied, 'let go, I pray of you, of my beard and head.' " 20:95, p224

Assignment: Compare this to the biblical story of the Golden calf. Which is more dramatic?,

From Sells:

"The Qur'an which in later passages bans wine, was to make of heavenly wine mixed with the purest spring water (an image of unbearable beauty to a desert inhabitant.) a key symbol of the paradise to come" p.57

Back to Dawood:

Do not say of anything I will do it tomorrow without adding, "If God wills." p.207

"Coin for them a simile about the life of this world. It is like the vegetation of this earth that thrives when water by rain." 18:39

"It was not for sport that we created the heaven and the earth and all that lies between them. Had it been our will to find diversion, we could have found one near at hand."

Comment: God as scold?

From The Disaster: Sura 101

"On that day men shall become like scattered moths and mountains like tufts of carded wood." 101: 1 , P.431

From Sura 99:

"Whomsoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it also"

99:8, p.430

Comment: This reminds me of a line from an old hymn: "go to meet the deeds that I have done/ where there is no setting sun.

Sura 103—The Epoch

By the age, the epoch
 The human being is always at a loss
 Except those who keep the faith
 who work for justice
 who counsel one another to truth
 and counsel one another to patience p. 114

Sells says "This is a condensed version of the ethos of the early Meccan revelation:"
 Moreover " there is no doctrine of original sin in Islam... Instead the Qu'ran affirms that humankind is in a state of forgetfulness, confusion, and loss, and in need of reminder.
 pp.116

Comment: I am tempted to say that this is good and his prophet as nag.

Assignment: Have the students make a list of virtues before reading this sura. Then compare. They might also compare it to Franklin's list in his autobiography.

More from Dawood:

"The penalty for a broken oath is the feeding of ten needy men with such food as you normally offer to your people, or the clothing of ten needy men, or the freeing of a slave. He who cannot afford any of these must fast three days"

5:88, p,89

Comment: There is a sympathy for the poor here that sometimes is missing from American Protestantism—at least as it comes from the Puritans and their idea that success is a sign of election. Poverty is not a sign of sin, but an opportunity for redemption.

I have put duality away
 and seen the two worlds as one
 One I seek. One I know.
 One I see. One I call
 He is the First. He is the Last
 He is the Outward. He is the Inward
 I know of nothing but Him
 none but him
 Intoxicated with the cup of love
 two worlds slip from my hands
 I am occupied with nothing
 but you and caring
 If once in my life I pass
 a moment without you,
 I repeat my life from that moment on
 If once in this world
 I should miss a moment with you
 I will put both worlds under my feet
 and claim forever in joy
 Oh Shams of Tabriz, I am so drunk
 in this world
 that except for red remedy and intercession
 I have no tale to tell

(1) Except for Shams Tabriz, that most
 so poor
 no one who ever was infatuated
 distraught, and
 in love.

p 58

These two poems seems to me
 representative of Rumi's love poems,
 and Divans -¹ Sons Shams, Tabriz

An hat:

Both poems describe a land
 that is beyond, beyond all
 distinction and categories -
 that can be hinted at in words
 not only experienced in dance
 and Joy - but that is the super
~~joy~~ goal, or complete
 complete merging with the divine
 where I referenced of our
 pronouns He, You, and
 here I become in distinct

that is beyond God and from God, the Divine that is everything and shams. It is also obvious that there is the influence of Plato and Neo-Platonism in Rumi's work — the progression from human to divine love.

It is also easy to see why Rumi has had such a multi-cultural appeal on our own times and in early times. I am told that people of many faiths came to Rumi's funeral and testified that he deepened their faiths.

I think it is this ecumenical quality that is what appeals to many people today. If the divine cannot readily be named, but only pointed to with words, then many words will do.

QuestionsDiscussion & Journaling

- ① What makes sense in these poems. What do I have to understand.
- ② Who is Shams?
What is Shams?
- ③ Is Rumi a Muslim?
- ④ What would Rumi say to your answer?

These students write
about poetry - because
they feel about it. Why
do they think - They
like it.

His daliit 1320 -
1389

(2) " Meha Baba says / answer
that the love poetry of Ravi
contained all the subtlety
of the spiritual with the
sensitivity in love. /
/ O

In these cults yes -
Mystic is 'Mystic' as
because there is no
as one thing to say.

" I in the West, Sufis
I usually refer to such
as a form of Islamic
mysticism. However,
the Sufis themselves
say there "we say"

has always has always
left intact, is never made
names, in many lands,
associated with the
mystical dimension
of poetry. Of course
by itself. - In Greece
" Magos," as and Platoo
of Jesus" [last]

2134

Walt Whitman
seems to be a finger
pointing to something
the poet has seen -
but that the reader
has not seen at all.

III. The Poet.
This is a spiritual
utopias that he
wishes not fully planned
in poems also

Verses of Walt Whitman

I choose this group
to copy because it
is the Wonders of
specific details of a
selection of angels

Assignment
I have students
select 3 or 4 poems
from a selection
of poems.
Comment: Other
poetry seems to
claim great importance
to its subject

236

~~Song of Solomon~~

Cold winds to see
My love and playfulness
For that is your greatest witness to him

Your soul and my soul
One shot together in the beloved memory
Playing footsie

Your heart and my heart -
Are very, very old

Fleeting

Common, bounts
the boughs

a pair
of my married twenty weeks

One of who still feels very these
I keep thinking to God

Saying

Kiss

Me - up

40.

Commentary
Day full, honest

23

Leave me alone at the Zaws Zam
 Well; I won't drive the Kal
 The wine stains on my robe are
 already numerous enough

If we can't resolve this, it
 will be a great injustice
 She is not willing and my desire
 is more than strong enough

The blood of my heart has not completely

revived through my eyes
 Death, let me stay a while, the work
 we have to do is
 abundant enough

It's difficult to find a person
 who has no opinion about Ghalib
 He is a good poet but the dark
 rumors about him are more
 than enough 43-44

Lying more

My Spiritual State

When I look out, I see no hope for change.
I don't see how anything in my life can end well.

The funeral date is already decided. Still
people complain that they can't sleep.

When young, my lone-disasters made me burst out laughing,
now even funny things seem to take me.

I know the answer - that's what keeps me quiet.
Beyond that it's clear I know how to speak.

Why shouldn't I scream? I can stop perhaps screaming
The Great One Notice. Ghalib only when he stops.

This is a spiritual state I am in:
about myself there isn't any news.

I do die; the longing for death is so strong it's
killing me.

such a death comes, but the other death doesn't come

What face will you wear when you visit the Kaaba?
Ghalib, you are shameless to even think of
that

This poem is sad. But somehow it soothes me. I wonder why?

Question:

(1) What is negative in this poem? What, if anything, is positive?

How does this poem make you feel? Why?

(2) What is his spiritual style?

The Clay Cup.

If king Gomshid diamond cup breaks,
that's it
But my clay cup I can easily replace,
so it's better.
The delight of giving is deeper when the gift hasn't
been demanded.
I like the God-seeker who doesn't make
a profession of he

when I see God, color comes into my cheeks.
God thinks - this is a bad mistake. I think I'm
IN good shape.

When the drop falls in the river, it becomes the river.
When a deed is done well, it becomes the fit.

I know that heaven doesn't exist. But the idea
is one of Ghali's favorite fantasies.

Kai (2) 246

Parties of free salient accent
in 1945)

"We ate an allegy for the Prescleys
We who awoke & exalted"

P xi - His grandmothers -

What more fine cultural differences
I presume Lazard had to learn.
the nuances of the language images
that would slip too high to an American
poet - images that occurs shamelessly
in Vedic poetry, among them
The moon, the vase, the moth,
The flower." p. xi

"For example, the Beloved - an
archetype in Vedic poetry - can
mean friend, woman, God, Fair
not only I apped at Paul Meier
but extended them so that the
Beloved could figure as The
Devotion. The reader begins

He then lived in Beirut until the
Iranian invasion of 1982, and
edited *Lutus*, the journal of
the Afro-Asian Writers Association.
P. xxv.

"Ghalib is ghazals, for example,
reveal a great tragic poet, and
Fazl is a great political one.
In the most generous, indeed
sense of the word.

Comparative

Compare Dondeh rice for local
affair.

* Revolutionary

From Hikmet

250

Early Fall

This year, early fall in the deep south,
I sleep myself in the sea, sand, and sun,
in trees

and apples as if in honey

At night the air smells like harvested wheat
the night sky meets the dusty road,
and I blend with the stars

My nose

I've gotten so close
to the sea, sand, sun, apples,
stars

Now it's time I got lost
in the sea, sand, sun, apples stars

8 September 1958
Archip, Osipovka

A Bit More From Hikmet
Letters From My Wife

want to die before you.

Do you think the one who follows
finds the one who went first?

I don't think so.

It would be best to have me buried
and put in a jar

over your fire place
Make the jar

clear glass,

so you can watch me inside . . .
you see my sacrifice

I give up being earth

I give up being a flower

just to stay with you
And I become dust

to live with you

Then, when you die,

you can come into my jar

and we'll live there together,

your ashes with mine,

until some dizzy haid

or wayward grandson

loses us out . . .

Comment: This man is amazing. It's a privilege to exist in the same world that he was in. Why is there so little bitterness? Mirrored Dariush is so much more bitter. But the Dariush has so much less hope as Naomi says:

If he could believe his life
could be like this he would
follow his father into war.

Student Activities

① Prereading: What arrangements would you like made after your funeral?

② Discuss: what is hopeful and uplifting in this poem

③ Who is speaking in this poem? One person or two

④ Why is this poem a letter from my wife

⑤ Hikmet had many wives in his life. Does this make his poem less beautiful

question: Agha Shaid says Arabic is the language of loss. Apply this to Darwish, especially to Eleven Stars Over Andalusia.

"So enter our houses, conquerors, and drink the wine
of our mellifluous *Mouwasbab*. We are the night at midnight
and no horseman will bring dawn from the sanctuary of the last

Call to Prayer...

The beds are of green cedar, fall on them,
following this long siege, lie down on the feathers of our
dreams.

The sheet are crisp, perfume are ready by the door, and there
are plenty of mirrors

Enter them so we may exit completely. Soon we will search
in the margins of your history, in distant countries,
for what was once our history. And in the end we will ask
ourselves

Was Andalusia here or there? On the land... or in the poem?

pp. 79-80

This all makes me want to read the history to learn more, what was this siege about?

ASSIGNMENT: RESEARCH THE POEM. HOW ACCURATE IS IT.

Again reading this I think of how allusion and history is used in modern Arabic writing.
It is not an ironic frame for the present, but a foil that makes us look more deeply.
Behind this poem, of course, is Darwish's own exile from Palestine.

FOR DISCUSSION: HOW WOULD A NATIVE AMERICAN OR A MEXICAN RELATE TO THIS POEM.

The third section:

3. There is a sky beyond the sky for me

There is a sky beyond the sky for my return but
I am still burnishing the metal of this place, living in
an hour that foresees the unseen. I know that time
cannot twice be on my side, and I know that I shall leave e—
I'll emerge , with wings, from the banner I am, bi9r
that never alights on trees in the garden—

10: I want from love only the beginning

I want from love only the beginning. Doves path,
over the squares of my Granada, this day's shirt.
There is a wine in our clay jars for the feast after us.
In the songs there are windows: enough for blossoms to explode.

I leave jasmine in the vase; I leave my young heart
in my mother's cupboard. I leave my dream, laughing, in water:
I leave the dawn in the honey of the figs, I leave my day and my
yesterday
in the passage to the Square of the Orange where dove fly.

.....

on its details to stay afloat

For some reason I kept remembering a gentle Egyptian
haberdashery-seller on the streets
of Cairo, and an elegant Arab
man, an expert on kiosks
in the Old City of Jerusalem, who
gave us twice the amount of
cloth we asked for.

I remembered simple Arabic
village breakfasts, or any
labneh fresh from the
cheese cloth with delicate sliced
cucumbers and scattered
thyme.

Messages passed in like
waterfalls, tidal floods of
messages all over the country,
from one country to another.
Are you okay?

[I wrote Naomi a message
sent her a poem and told

comfortably into experience, holding and cominging it more successfully than any news channel we could name.

Perhaps Asab Amur can next say, true as clearly as anyone else, that we deplore the unbelieveable, senseless savagery ~~and~~ caused by people from the Middle East.

But also we must remind others never to forget the innocent citizens of the Middle East who havent committed any cruel

I think of my Palestinian grandmother who lived till she was 100. She did not read or write but was famous for her offbeat stories, fabulous stories and her offbeat wit and wisdom.

The only place beyond

To those I care about

your job. Speak for me too. Say
how much I hate it. Say this
is not who we are."

Peace, friends. Please don't
stop believing.

Naomi Shihab Nye

December 2001

Jane Antonio Poetry

XV - XVIII

Comment:

I think of her saying
that poetry That gives us details
this is what I see tonight of Lady
Hikmet — the details of our
World that seem to baffle our
sanity

Her reference to her father

"my father edited one of the longest
newspapers in America"
wordly unlettered

We promise now again to answer questions dashed across a phone line. Write it down. Always write it down. Say it slowly. Say it the way you learned words. Say it as if words count.

One two. The shoe still has a backtie.

This is

Comment:

This is the last poem in 19 Varieties of the Magazine, a book that seems to have been assembled after 9/11, so I assume that Naomi was interviewed after 9/11 and probably regretted the interview. I wonder what happened? Should I e-mail her and find out? Would that be presumptuous?

Assignments # 1

- ① What does Naomi seem to be saying?
Summarize it briefly
- ② Does she seem to be correct?
- ③ (This should be the first question.) Has something you said ever been distorted?

But could only find his grief
 And they rewarded his grief
 But could only find his prison
 And they rewarded his prison
 But could only see themselves in chains

Tras. Abdulla Al-Udaybi
 EN Fable - against Forgetting
 Pp. 362-363

This for me is a beautiful poem.
 The analogy is a stopper.
 It goes beyond its political
 Persuasion through its
 Poeticism.

- ① How is this poetry?
- ② How is it a political statement?
- ③ Do you believe that R.
says because he says " "
- ④ Why, in your opinion, ~~what~~
are they in jail?

Questions

- ① what is bad about prison
- ② what is good

Writing: Compare & Contrast

Ghazan: 1883-1931

The first real break with neoclassicism came from the Arab poets who had emigrated to North America. Their leader, Mihman Khalid Gahzani was the single most important influence on Arabic poetry and literature during the first half of this century.

The Major Modern groups

"Ghazan was not a great poet in verse, and most of his prose poems . . . However, in his prose poems and poetic prose, he released poetry from its neoclassical limitations and introduced a great courage among Arab poets to use words and images in completely unprecedented ways."

He was influenced by Western culture

Despite that, I
hate his poetry.

The language is stiffed
and hard to bear.

The romanticism in all
poems of G. is as bad
as false as Arabic as us
English, at least for me.

For example from "The Poet"

I am a stranger in this world
I am a stranger. There is not
one man who grasps so much as
one word of my soul's knowledge.

I walk in empty wastes.
I see little stumps flowering up ward
from the deep recesses of the
valley to the mountain top.
I see naked trees luxuriant
in flower and fruit and scalles
their leaves in one brief
moment. Then their

translated by Alyn
Hawad and Michael Beard
pp. 75-76

Comment

I find this pretentious
slog - the kind of thing my
students sometimes write -
the view of the poet I want
them never to take. Yet,
when it was written, this
was original, radical and
of course, as an Arab poet
living an American and
writing in Arabic, Ghazi Ghabra
was a statesman. I would
like to know more of his
life - much more. He
is a curious example, of someone
living in our culture yet trying
to maintain his own identity.

Questions:

(1) What seems true about the poem
(2) What is overstated

Preatory question
What is a poet

LBN Garrison
For
Comparison

Sometimes pus

Sometimes a poem

Something always bursts out
And always pain

My father was a tree in a forest of fathers
Covered in green cotton wool

Oh widows of the flesh; orphans of the blood
I must escape

Eyes sharp as tiroperous
Opened heavy secrets.

But through the wound on my chest—
God peers into the world

I am the door
to his apartment
To Assia Cutman

Yehuda Amichai— Israel's most
Noted Poet
1924—