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The Pen is a Thing The Hand Already

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THE PEN IS A THING THE HAND ALREADY

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

in the Department of English

The University of Mississippi

by Andrew Freiman

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ABSTRACT

The Pen is a Thing The Hand Already is a lyric epic set in the classroom of an American MFA program. The student's voices as well as the teacher's all act interchangeably to expand and complicate the reader's understanding of self. This is a poem.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

THE PEN IS A THING THE HAND ALREADY 1

VITA 87

Who else? Also Bobbi. Donnie. Yeah, Jay. Oh yeah, Annisa. Or something. Quincey's in here too? All, like very early. Yeah. Yeah, well, like, uh. Really? That's it? The act of water. She said that it was awful. Like, clearly like standing in the middle of, and like trying. Can you? Can you look at those forms again after class? Absolutely. Okay. Sorry, Okay. Liz. Yeah. You sent this thing out, um, to think about teaching in the summer? Right? That was you, right? Yeah, that was forwarded. I pretty much thought—um, is there a place that I can pick up those forms? Um, they were attached to that thing that—it should have been attached. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It was. I was just curious. Yeah. I don't think. Cause I really don't know where to print stuff out here. Oh. Bro, you got an office now. Yeah. What does that mean? It means that you can print on the third floor printer. Or the other printer. Or the first floor. Or the first floor. What did you do all last semester? What is. He was a vagabond. Therapy. Round here. What? Jay. Okay, Okay, I'll, we'll talk about it later. All right. What's this for? It's just a box. Yes, and photocopies. Yeah. Not just printing. Those are. Rare to find. Technology. Those are looked at though, monitored and shit. There, there—somehow, there's like a level where you can't go past. Well, they're roughly kept. The one in the library is not operative at all. Right? Wait? I tried to find that once. It's like a closet, like it's literally like a utility closet, that they. Plugged a printer in, er, a copier. That we don't have to pay for? There's some code. That's why its hidden. Yeah, you do. It had to form somewhere. That'd be a good plot though: “Where in the World is the Free Printer?” Yeah right. Because I did walk around the library, and I was asking people. I think it actually says “Utility Closet” on the outside. That's important. That's pretty funny. Yeah. Hey. Hi, how are you?

Good. Just, silence. Um, well let's go ahead and get started. Um, normally what I would do is introductions, that sort of thing on the first day of class. I don't know how necessary it is for us. Most of you I know. Um. Most of ya'll have a pretty good feel of who you are. What I would like to do though is--remind me of your years in the program.

First.

First year.

Second. Second. Second. First.

First.

Third.

Third year. So you're done this spring?

Yeah.

Okay.

And Bobbi, er, and Jay's first as well.

Jay's first?

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. And the, the reason why I ask, I'm a big, uh—it could potentially be important as—based on the structure of our class, I'm hoping that this class can meet your needs. It's actually definitely dependent on where you are in the program and what sort of work you've produced thus far. I don't anticipate us going too long today, um, we'll see. I have a meeting at five o'clock and if only this was any other day, I would skip the meeting and we'd hold class that entire time. So most likely by the end of the day we'll leave early. Um, but I just wanted to focus on the syllabus, and start some sort of working definition for what this idea of “sequence” or “series” means. Um. In constructing this class, um, I definitely wanted to thank Liz and Donnie um, for your input. This class just sort of spontaneously happened over the last year, which, um, I'm all for. Right? The best things spontaneously happen. And it's, it's, it's a class that I planned and I had hoped to teach within the near future, but I didn't expect to teach it this semester. I'm, I'm thankful that I can get to work with you all. There's a part of me that was a little bit down with the prospect that some of ya'll might not have the opportunity to work with me, or that I wouldn't be able to work with you guys; after meeting ya'll at readings and parties last semester. So it is good that we are all here now. What will keep doing here, we'll look at the syllabus in a second, but what we'll be doing is we'll focus on, um, sort of packets of poems that you submit. Each person will have two opportunities to workshop. I'm gonna

set you guys up in groups of two for that. Um, now that we have seven there might be one group of three. But the way I see it is that during a basic day of workshop we'll spend the majority of our time workshopping those, those manuscripts, or those poems. Um, so let's say next week, Donnie and I were set to workshop, we might spend the first half of class looking at his series of poems, and then a seven minute break, then the second half would be my series of poems. The way I want to approach the workshop is, um, almost like any other workshop except that I want our conversations to initially begin with discussions about the series of poems and how they relate to each other as a whole. We'll do this before we start looking at individual poems, and then based on time we'll start looking at individual poems and we'll talk about your general craft components like line breaks, imagery, symbolism, voice, tone, enjambment; that sort of thing. But I want, again, to have our first and main concerns be with looking at them holistically. And I want us to be thinking about, the progression, the thing and/or mission of the writing that we're producing, not just in this program, but currently throughout the following weeks and months. As far as what you bring in here, it's up to you. I would suggest not bringing in some work that's been published already, no matter how good or badass as it is. But, I guess, I guess these are things that we'll have ongoing conversations about. Our first workshop will be, not next week, not the following week—I'd prefer to do three weeks so that we'll have time to talk about how we'll talk about these sequences of poems. And, and I, I use the word "sequence" loosely. Often when we think of a sequence we might think of something a little traditional. We might think of Whitman or sonnets, something like that, right? But as far as this class is concerned, the final products, whatever it is, whatever it is that you turn in is up to you. Anyways, next week we'll talk about the

series, or packet, or small series of poems more in depth. Before we continue let's look at the syllabus and.

Will we be turning in the same poems twice or turning in two separate series?

It's up to you.

Okay.

So there's a lot of freedom in how we approach this thing. And just to back track a little bit: I think something that I wanted to add this is that these can be poems that you've already written and that you've workshopped before or they can be brand new poems, right? I'll ask you guys to sort of volunteer for what group you'd like to be in, that in turn will decide, determine when you're workshopped. So some of you might get in a group of three and you might not workshop—excuse me—for a month from now, a month and a week or two from now. So that could be an opportune time to pump out five, six poems by then, depending on your work ethic, right? So, I think that the good part of this class is that it doesn't necessarily have to be a class where you're not producing new work, okay? It's up to you how you wanna to utilize the, the constraints of this class or the framework of this class. That being said I think it offers you guys a lot of freedom. Um, so, right, so to answer, to answer your question Quincey.

Yeah.

Your first series will be five to ten poems, five to ten poems. And those'll be poems obviously we haven't seen, right? So then you'll get feedback from us. You'll get feedback from me. And then when you're up again to workshop you can do a revision with, maybe, an additional couple of poems in there or you can do five to ten new poems, right? Your final manuscript, for your final will also be ten to fifteen poems. So you'll decide how someone could rate these poems to each other. All right? Let's—this, hopefully will help, well, I don't know if this help. This syllabus looked a little confusing to me, um, but, we're all smart, so we'll probably get through it with minimal injuries. I'm just gonna read through the syllabus. "English six eighty-two, graduate poetry seminar." Obviously we'll be meeting here Wednesday from three to five thirty. Again my goal is to give you guys one fifteen-minute break, um, halfway through the class depending on where we are. Um, that's making it luxurious. My office is four-seventeen in this building. My office hours are three to four-fifteen on Monday's and Tuesdays. I don't plan on holding office hours on Wednesdays, but, you know, it says by appointment, so I will be there probably prepping for this class. So if anyone wanted to drop in, just let me know in advance so that I don't come to this class unprepared. Right? So that I will know that that chunk of time is gone or reserved for you. This is from a, um, a book regarding sequence. I think this was published in the eighties by Rosenthal, Sally Gall. It says, "A poems depends for its life neither on continuous narration nor on developed argument but on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness. A successful long poem, and the modern sequence pre-eminently, is made up of such centers of intensity. Its structure resides in the felt relationships among them."

And this is, this is something that I want to return to before we'll get out of here today, and then talk about or use, but let's think about what this potentially means for us individually, and/or collectively. Um, the course description: "English six eighty-two is a course designed for advanced students of poetry writing. While the course will function as a craft workshop, our overall scope will be macro. This means we will consider the work of our participants through sequence. Students will have two opportunities to workshop a sequence of around five to ten poems. Collectively, we will consider and comment on narrative and or aesthetic patterns amongst craft concerns. Our goal is to immerse ourselves in an environment that aims to foster creativity, curiosity, and a respect for language." Respect language. "Our course requirements will consist of an essay, two workshops, and a final revised manuscript of around ten to fifteen pages. With your full engagement, by the end of this course you will have a greater appreciation and a truer understanding of the sequence." And again, that term is, is, it's loose, okay? "The ways in which a good poetry collection is constructed and the way that particular, and purposeful, construction creates an impression on the reader. Additional readings will be provided at various points throughout the semester." There will be additional readings throughout the semester, and I will provide you all with those, okay? Depending on the flow of our workshops I planned this to, um, to bring in as much critical writing as we can stand that talks about the sequence and/or organizing, um, a series of poems or a manuscript of poetry. "Texts." Our only text, um, that's required in this course is Thrall by Natasha Tretheway. Um. "Course requirements." This. Has anyone had to get Thrall and just recently got it?

I got it.

Where'd you get yours?

Amazon. Same as her.

Amazon too, okay. I already ordered one, but I haven't heard from Amazon. I'm sure Tower Books should have it already.

Yeah, yeah. They, they have a bunch of copies.

Yeah, okay. Alright. Mine hasn't arrived here. Okay. That's not ya'll's problem. Um. "Course requirements: proposal/explanation of aesthetic," look at this as a prospectus. Um. "Due to the nature of this workshop it is vital that we continuously question and complicate our awareness of the groupings of poems we offer for workshop. So that I am most useful, you are required to compose a proposal slash explanation of aesthetic responding to the following concerns: How do you see the idea of sequence or series functioning in your work? What, e.g. what connec, what connects your poems—content, language, narrative structures, emotions, etcetera. What general themes," um, "tropes and or craft components seem to reappear in your poems? What are your general tendencies? How do to the narrative, conceptual or emotional arcs that appear in the collections of your influences inform the way you approach your own sequences or series organizationally? Be sure to include what these influences are. What do you hope to

discover about your poems and their connections? This statement should be around five hundred words or so.” Um, if it’s more, that’s fine. It’s up to you. This is due next Wednesday.

So all of these questions are to be comprised of something that’s five hundred words, or this last one specifically?

All of these. These er, um, more so guidelines, questions, right? You don’t necessarily have to answer these questions step by step. Basically what I’m asking you all, is to—I hate to use the word “proposal” because I’m not going to reject what you turn in, right? So in a sense your not really proposing much. What you are doing is explaining to me: “This is my aesthetic;” “This is what I do;” “This is, these are my influences;” “This is what I’m hoping to get out of this workshop.” Right? Um, I’m also interested in your tendencies, right? That’s going to help me in commenting on your work. Know that—okay, um—it’s, it’s gonna help me to curve my subjective lens so that I’m more open to what you are doing; like “Okay, oh, I see this is what you were explaining to me that your were into doing.” Right? Um, so that way, I, I, I think I’ll be doing more in depth in my comments. Alright. And again, that’s due next Wednesday. Um, “Poem sequence or series: There will be two dates this semester by which you will workshop a sequence or series of five, ten pages of poetry. It will be up to you to decide which poems will be included in this sequence or series. For example, you are welcome to bring in a revised grouping of poems from your first workshop to be discussed again during your second workshop. Alternatively, you can decide to bring in five, ten pages of poems that we have not yet

seen for your second workshop.” So this responds to your question Quincey. Um, obviously, the five to ten pages you bring in for your first workshop will be poems that we have not yet seen. Um, I haven’t yet seen it, some of your peers might of seen it in other workshops. We can discuss this if this sounds confusing. Does this sound confusing?

I had a question about the last thing.

What’s up?

It’s about the proposal. Um. Do you want us to bring in enough copies for everyone so we all kind of know what we are doing?

What do ya’ll think? I’ve thought of that, and then I didn’t know. Cause here’s the thing, when we workshop, we’ll—I’m assuming that most of your workshops have gone this way, that the writer can’t talk for the first part of our comments and discussions so that we can’t apologize for our work, right? Then after all of that the writer’s allowed to talk. So we’ll run our workshop similarly. Um, we’ll probably spend forty-five minutes to an hour just talking amongst ourselves and then we’ll include the writer for the last fifteen, twenty minutes. Um, my fear is that if everyone received a copy, that, that, could potentially be an apology in itself. Um, and I, um—not that I’m this all-knowing figure, that only I get the privilege of receiving it, but I, I, I am thinking that it could be useful, for me, um in my position—for as—I may find it more beneficial that ya’ll are cold, so that when we do read your work we automatically get more ideas, right? That way you can see more, um,

clearly how your manuscript or series of poems have been or can be read by others. So I think that, I think just to have, I think I just answered that question. After an hour. Is that—are ya’ll cool with that?

Yeah. Yeah. Sure.

Okay. Um, so as far as what we’re bringing in, the sequence or series, does that make sense?

Yes. Yeah, I—are we going to talk some more about, about, like, ideas for doing that, before we actually have our first workshops?

Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. Good question. Yeah. I’ve said it twice already, but, um, it, it’s up to you what you bring in. Again, I, obviously I’m biased, cause I created this course, but I really find it accommodating for, for the student especially, particularly where you all are in your education. Um, if I were approaching this course I might be interested in, or if I was a student in this course, I’d be interested in bringing five that I’ve been working on and bringing five new ones for the first workshop, or four and four, or three and three. Just to sort of flesh out, um, this will show the arch in when, when we, we’ll spend more time talking about what this means “arch,” um, not just narrative arch, but potentially emotional arch, or arch of landscape, right? Um, “Workshop participation: you will be reading and critiquing your peers’ writing throughout the semester. Due to the nature of our workshop, it is vital we make careful and thoughtful comments. While each

workshop member will have anywhere from ten to twenty pages of poetry workshopped this semester, each person will only have their work highlighted on two separate occasions.” And I think that’s important, so, whereas you might have had workshops in the past where each week you have a single poem that’s workshopped—excuse me—you’ll get collectively the same amount of work discussed in here, but it will only be on two separate dates. So I think that, um (we’re graduate students so I don’t, I don’t have to really harp on this), but our, um, um, interaction with the work of our peers is, is, is absolutely vital. And very important, cause we don’t have those make up days, right? Once we give the comments back to that person, that is what they receive from us. It’s only twice. I wanna make sure that we’re taking the appropriate time to comment on these poems. And, um, I will not require that we type up comments, but I would like to see some sort of reflective commenting on or about the, the series of poems generally and then your general comments, your general craft, craft comments on the actual poems. Okay? Um. “This means that we should be sure to provide our peers with an abundance of thoughtful comments slash suggestions. If you are absent on the day a student workshops, it is your responsibility to return that student’s work with written comments. Since we are focusing on the sequence slash series, the majority of our comments should focus on the ways that a particular sequence or series is working collectively, we will use class time in discussing or considering what this means, but in the meantime, think connecting themes, tropes, language, narratives, emotional landscapes, world building, etcetera. This stated, we will still make general craft comments on these poems. Depending on time constraints, we should have time to discuss these as well. This is a graduate course and I don’t anti-anticipate.” I didn’t say that right. “Grad-u-ate.” “Graduate.” Okay. I don’t anticipate it,

but I may ask for verification of comments if I feel we are slacking. And, then I will take them. We don't have to worry about that. Um, "Presentation of sequence or series: good writers are avid readers. Therefore, each student will be responsible for presenting on a sequence or series of ten to fifteen pages of poetry by a poet of their choice. These presentations will be around fifteen to twenty minutes, could go longer, but should facilitate further discussions of the particular sequence or series. The goal is for us to continue to complicate and reconsider the ways that sequence or series can be approached by using published works as examples. Class time will be spent discussing the particular, the particulars of these presentations." The first presentations aren't due for probably a month and a half. Um, so we'll have time to talk about that. But this is your opportunity, um, as not only students, but as teachers of poetry and teachers of literature, to, um, give us some sort of insight into how—I guess I could sort of use our working language, or working tool box of language that, that, that we develop in here to talk about that. But I'm interested in, um, you know, what sequence or series of, or books that you're, you're reading and you're interested in. Um, so all you have to do is you'll make, um, photocopies of ten to fifteen pages of poetry; it could be a section of their book. Um, if you wanted to bring in eight or nine poems or pages that's fine. If you wanna bring twenty that's fine too. Um, you'll hand those out to us and then you'll talk about, um, a lot of the things that, that we've, that we've talked, that we will have already talked about in here: um, the connections and landscapes and arc's and all that sort of stuff, um, that you see happening in your poems with particular examples, specific examples.

Should those be, be like, uh, like, ten to fif—whatever—ten to fifteen pages of, like, continuous

poetry, like the first fifteen pages of the book, or?

Continuous.

Yeah. It has to be contiguous.

Yeah, you know, so, um, and let's say there's a thirty page section of a book that you are interested in and you could take the first fifteen pages and the last fifteen pages of that section. You can take the last fifteen pages of a book, um, and that is something that you'll talk about as well, perhaps briefly talking about how it connects to the poem or, um, the collection. And I mean it: it'd be interesting if we're pulling from different places, right? Some of us will offer our first ten pages of a collection, others might talk about some of the, the back bone, right? Maybe someone will bring in the middle. Some of us will talk about, some of the, the ways we exit a collection of poetry. That could be interesting. We'll, we'll have a lot of time to, to talk about this, um, so, that you have a more firm grip of what exactly I'm asking for. And we'll just shift to the presentations, um, by the time, we, we spend. Um, "Final manuscript and apologia: at the end of the semester each of you will turn in a final revised manuscript of around ten to fifteen pages of poetry, complimented by the structure of your apologia. The apologia will be a four or five page self-reflective essay on what's your procedure proposal slash explanation of aesthetic against the final manuscript revision process" We'll be using class time to discuss this component more in depth. Um, again, you'll turn in a sequence of ten to fifteen poems, um, of your choice, um, to revise, and you'll offer us an introduction. Um,

“apologia,” is, is, is just an apology. Um, but I also want it to have a reflective component, to, um, so that you, so, um—well, I, I, guess—“This is what you are.” I, I hear myself years ago telling that to my freshman composition classes, right? “This is what you are.” And, well there’s the attempt at collected writing; we’re not trying to write the, um, “I once was lost and now I’m found” introduction. Okay? It’s not as simple as “well I wasn’t into, um, putting my poems together, like, in a series before I took this class, and lo and behold! I’m totally doing it all the time.” These aren’t going to be like that. I want really specific shifts, or, um, evolutions, you know, or lack there of, that, that’s occurred this semester; I want you to point these things out, to focus on these things. But again, this, this, we have, we have thirteen or fourteen weeks to do, to talk about this. “Personal conference: I encourage ya’ll to meet with me during the semester, this will allow us to employ in the class room discussions both related and unrelated to your own work. Although it is not a requirement, I strongly encourage it.” Um. Because of the nature of this program, and the relationship between these students and, um, professors that uh, you’ve experienced this far amongst your semesters, this might occur, um, you know, at Restless Winds. Um, um, so it’s, it’s, it’s up to you guys. All I’m saying there is that, um, I’m here to accommodate ya’ll. So, um, if it’s, um, beneficial to be outside of class then I’m definitely open to it. “Assignment format.” We don’t even necessarily have to talk about that. Poems will be single-spaced, anything else will be double spaced. Um. “The evaluation: your final grade consists of the following criteria: final grade and apologia at thirty five percent; poem sequence or series, twenty percent.” That’s ten for each. “Presentation, fifteen percent; proposal and explanations set at ten percent; class participation and attendance, twenty. Will be conducted on a plus minus scale. Classroom

policies: student work must be completed and handed in on time. Written comments on peer drafts must be handed back to the author the day we discuss his or her poem. Late manuscripts will not be accepted. Attendance is important to the success of this class.” Obviously, right? You’d be surprised though. Um. “Therefore, each unexcused absence after one will affect your final grade. Excused absences, such as those for documented illness, tragedy, religious observance or travel for inner-collegiate athletics.” Um, Quincey, your on the basketball team right?

Yes. Power Forward.

You know, we have a sense of humor. These things “will not affect your grade, provided they are excused (either in person or by email) within three weekdays of the absence. Three or more absences may automatically result in failure of the course. The class begins promptly. Please be on time. Students not present when roll is called may be marked absent. Plagiarism.” We don’t necessarily have to worry about that. Um. Okay. So let’s, let’s look at the, the schedule so that—I think this is what—actually I don’t think this is confusing at all, maybe I was just being weird. Um, “First week,” so that’s today, “Brief welcome, expectations for the course.” We just did that. Look at that, already moving along! “How are we defining the sequence or series?” I wanna have that discussion next. Um, “Consideration of the quote that appears at the beginning of this, um, of this syllabus. Our homework is to propose our aesthetic and read “Elegy” and section two of Thrall. Uh, the sections are not numbered in Thrall, but it will be, “Elegy” is the first (I think) long poem, and then there’s the section right after that. Read those two. Okay? There are also

additional readings that I'm gonna give you before we leave today, so I don't know if you need to write that down. Um, that's up to you. Um, but I will provide you with these, and we'll talk about those before you get out. And all that will be for next week. Um, next week we'll talk about "Elegy" and section two from Thrall. We'll also talk about the handouts, that I've got for you all. Um, we'll spend about half the class time talking about the handouts, and half talking about the Tretheway. And then for next week; will be; just come up with questions for George Warro. Um, I know I talked to, I think two of you. Um, George Warro is a poet. He's out of Atlanta. Um, he's, um, I hate to use this, this term because it's, it's, it's, um, what's the word I'm looking for? It can be antagonizing to me. It's the most—it's antagonizing. But, you can call him a "performance poet," right? And he will be here to give you a reading, um. I think he's reading, maybe Thursday? It's either Tuesday or Thursday. But he's gonna workshop the day we'll be in class, and the English Department reached out to me. I was actually on the committee that is bringing him here and asked if we, if they could use this room for the workshop, and my classroom, and so I signed you all up. So, um. So, it says, "Questions for George Warro, and comment on group one's poems." Um. Which is due on, um, February thirteenth. So that's why we're not started the actual workshop until, um, February thirteenth, because that's when we're talking about Tretheway, and then the week after that we're gonna have George Waro's workshop. I want us to think about—I don't know yet exactly how he's gonna work this workshop, but if there's a way for us to pull some questions about, um, series or how he put his manuscripts together, or how he's built his manuscript up from the bottom, or how he arranges poems throughout his manuscripts. Maybe what sort of things does he think about. If there is a way to ask questions about that kind of stuff, to him, I would

hope that we could do that. Um, so then the, the fourth week will be our first workshop. That will be fun. Um, so what this means is that group one will bring in poems, at the latest on February six. Which is, um—so before Waro starts to workshop, um, you're handing out poems to the class. And then will workshop those poems on the thirteenth. And then we're knee deep in the workshop process. So on and so forth. After that first go round, we do presentations. Um, I think presentations will start the week after AWP. I'll be out of town for AWP on the sixth, so we won't have class on March sixth. Questions about scheduling for the first couple of weeks?

Um, when you say, "for next week, comments on group one's poems" but they don't turn them in until the next week, what exactly do you mean?

Um. Basically that is just me preparing, um.

Okay. Duh.

What we do in the coming weeks. Um, if group one wanted to give you guys, depending on who's gonna be in front of you, if they want to provide poems next week, great. That means that we have two weeks to look at them. Um, it's up to you. So that's what I said, "the latest," um, the sixth, that ya'll should provide us with poems. Good question. Any other questions? Ya'll excited?

Yeah. Yep. Yeah. I'm cool.

Bobbi?

I'm.

Ah, hey, we're just waiting for you.

I'm very excited.

Alright! Um, so with that being stated, um, I'd like to get thoughts from two people.

I'll do it.

Elizabeth.

I'll go. Let's try to remind each other.

Now, the way that it's set up is that you all will be connected for the rest of the semester, is that okay?

Yeah.

Okay. Alright. So, for two? I was kind of looking at you guys. That's a trick question.

Donnie. Quincey. So then we'll have Bobbi, Jaime, and Jeremiah for the third week. Um, because we have more students than I initially anticipated, I'll do my very best to ensure that we each are allotted the same amount of time, cause there are three that are workshopping, ensure that the odds are still good. Questions about anything, um, policy driven, or expectations for schedule, the schedule itself, for the next couple of weeks? No? Good. Not as confusing as I thought.

Pretty straightforward.

Pretty straightforward? Okay?

There's a lot of like, uh, a lot of ways to make a syllabi, uh, you know, ram, rambling. A lot of ones that pass through these hallowed halls.

Really?

Yes.

Good.

I've read some super confusing ones where I'm just like, "what?" Like I need a cipher. What are we doing?

Alright, um.

So wait, we're writing poems? I just thought you were about to ask a real question. This is good.

I'm really excited about this class. I'm excited about the number as well. I think we'll get some really productive work in here. With that being stated, I, I was approached over the weekend about an additional component that could be, not necessarily work for us but added to this class, but Jeremiah talked to me on Saturday about the prospect of a project that he's interested in which involves recording our workshops. What would happen is, um (and I'll let Jeremiah explain it cause I'm sure he can explain it better than I could), but my understanding is what would occur is that we'd record these workshops, um, the dialogue, um, that occurs while workshopping. The thing that—if, if this is something that is okay with you guys, Jeremiah expressed the desire to obtain consensus amongst us and if one person isn't comfortable with that, then I don't think we would do this, um, if we're not comfortable. Where I see the benefit in this is that, well, one of the things that Jeremiah and I talked about was how this could allow us an opportunity to reflect on workshop process in a really tangible and, and, I guess, for all sakes and purposes, an organic way As opposed to—much of the writing that, that, I've, uh, read about workshops is reflective writing, which is considering what happened the prior semester after the semester is gone. So there is a lot of sort of filling in of the gaps that we're doing as we're sort of writing those reflections. With some sort of transcript then we can visit the actual language, the actual discussion that was occurring throughout the semester. I'll let you explain it more in detail.

Cool, thanks. Um, so when he was talking about announcing this there's—one of the things that I really wanted to do is, to just to, just to go on it again, I, I want a consensus. Anyone can shut it down. Um, and it is—the way that it's gonna work—I've got an example here that I wouldn't mind if you guys read and these, um, Donnie and Liz have read it. What I've done is I've taken out all of our proper nouns. Anyone who's talking, that is the student body, is going to be a chorus. So we're just going to be together. There's not going to be, there's not going to be any differentiation of who's speaking. Your names will be taken out. If you mention a bar that's in this town, it will be taken out. How, uh. Street names will also be taken out, cause I don't want this to, um, exemplify this school as much as be a general, um, kind of symbolic utterance of the workshop process as it exists in the United States now. Um, it would be an immense work. Um, for sure. And if, if you had a poem that you presented, that you read a line, like I was reading one of Quincey's poems, and I was like, "Yo, this line is awesome" and I read it, that line's omitted. If I happen to say a title of your poem, that's also omitted, because it's not our artistic work that's necessarily important, it's our conversations about poetics and how that's representative of poetic discussion happening at colleges across the country in the U.S. Um, so you're voice wouldn't really be lost on the context of the speaker, I guess. Um, if there ever happened to be a thing (cause I want everyone to be good with this) and you were like talking about a family pregnancy and whatever else, and you really wanted that taken out let me know, and I'll find it. Um, again, that's only if this goes on. This is a conversation, um, that I recorded the other day, um, and it is kind of, uh, it's a, it's a very good example of what this'll be like. Um, you'll notice in there that I am pretty much grabbing all the weird false starts and stutters, um, and those things that I just did like, "um" and whatever. Um, the italics are going to be, that's where

Professor Watkins comes in as, uh, the prof. And there's, there's formatting issues that, um, if this was, if everyone was cool with it, there are formatting issues that can definitely be brought up in a democratic way. Donnie has already, actually, already had a lot of recommendations for me, that, uh, that I immediately glommed on to, and immediately used. Um, one, I was talking to someone else about this as like a abstract idea of being (this kind of depends on what happens, you know what I mean?) uh, and they were saying that it would be interesting too if the professor role or whatever was still put it in italics but then actually just slammed into the text as well, and not actually separated, uh, which then makes it seem a little bit more egalitarian. One of, one of the things that I, I think will be really interesting—the story for how I came up with this idea is there's just so many conversations that are going on about MFA programs, good and bad, but they never really get the pulse, the never really convince me either way. Um, and I definitely came in here being suspicious of the workshop process. Um, we're not in the same boat. This is not, this is not to be something that is going to be suspicious of the process of all. This is just going to be an honest representation of the uniqueness of our own minds, because we all think in different, totally different ways. So what's going to end up happening is there's going to be this situation where the, the chorus, that is these unnamed writers, is going to be very schizophrenic. Um, cause you know I might say something like, “I like this” and then all of a sudden it's going to be like, “Well, I think this” and there's going to be no differentiation. So we'll have these unique arguments going back and forth which I think is emblematic of the present state of, uh, trying to write poetry now. Cause you know, like, I've got—like: “This is me, this is where I'm at,” “Oh, but also like, this is what's going on, this is happening,” “Should I lock into this? Should I do that?” Whatever else, right? We have stances on the line, but also on where we exist as poets and people. Conversations about our bodies, our

politics, our sexuality, all of that matters just as much as enjambment. And so I think there's, there's a lot of interesting kinds of symbolic shifts that are, that could take place in something like this. Um, but, there was a suggestion when I originally, um, talked about this with Donnie like what else could this be, and I've been thinking about that too, like, what else could this actually be rather than just a, a discussion of this. There's, there's books that are already out there, some of which you've probably already know of, um, that kind of look at it—um, and just a, just a point to give you an idea of, just be really, like really open about this, I was a—you know I'm interested in a, you know, the post World War GI bill explosion of, uh, just academia in general how that's affected the poetry workshop in general, starting from the early 1900's, moving through that period, looking at, um, certain effects of Fordism or Taylorism within the workforce and how that might have affected, um, the careerism of, let's say, the Modernists, New Critics L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets or whatever. Um, and then that would come into the more modern era, where I really feel—cause my semester was really eye opening because I was, I came in and I was suspicious of this whole process, and I changed my mind, and—which is funny cause nothing really changed my mind, I just kind of realized, like, this is way more democratic than all of those people that are, like, poo-pooing the system think. This whole thing is about being people in the world just as much as it is being poets in a system of monetary meaning. Um, and, uh, you know—and it's like—when I first came here, and like—you guys know this from seeing my work last semester, here we have the ability to talk about crazy things, we can do crazy things, and, and now we are here and able to talk about a project like this? Just—no matter where it goes from here, just being able to talk about it, is like, goes against all my preconceived notions of what the workshop process was. You know what I mean? That “sacred place” were we learn to be good poets, and it's secret, and it's really sort of bourgeoisie.

Um, and so, that, that's to me is just exciting in and of itself, because I, I feel like there is, there's a place now, the reality of the situation, where it's not good or bad; it's scarier, where it can be anything that you want. It's all on you. And it's all on you, on us. And it's on me. Right? Um, so that's one of the things that I'd wanna, that I'd wanna do in this, um, and just kind of get that real natural vibe of what's going on. Um, but it would definitely exist, if anything, um, just as a, as a piece of, like kind of, pro, er, like post-post conceptual slash confessional poetry, right? Some kind of crazy post-modern lyric, cause we are going to always be saying "I, I, I, I"; we are going to be the fragmented self of the modern, and contemporary poetic reality. But, that's, that's the idea. That's the idea. Um, and again like the—I'm on that consensus tip. Like I don't wanna make anyone uncomfortable, cause that's not the point. It's not the single "us," and like rip open our souls or whatever; it's just to get like, "I really think that your identity in this poem is misconstrued. I think that it's a little fuzzy. Like right here; but that's neat. Blah, blah, blah." Just to show the, the natural words that we all find, like, that we all inadvertently have. Okay.

So what then would happen at the end of the semester?

At the end of the semester I would, um, spend like the rest of my life compiling it. Um, and then, um, I would actually, I would actually look to see if I could actually do this, and do exactly what I just talked about with kind of a histological approach to the, to the process. Um, and then create a thesis.

Okay.

Um, where it's combinatorial.

And if it was a go, then we'd have the opportunity to observe that before anything is finalized?

Sure. Sure. Yeah, that's, that's the thing too, it's like I really want this to like—if you guys have any ideas or any worries or anything like that, like—this—it's—that's one of the things that I, that I like about this idea too, um, is that there's, there is a collaborative movement within a lot of different forms of art right now, where people are making groups, not to be like “We're this school or that school,” but just to help each other to work and, and think of ideas, to be egalitarian, to kind of destroy these weird hierarchical structures that people may be seeing in certain areas, right? This, if we are to do this, I want it to be like that. Like, I want it to be very much, like, us working together. And I think—at first I was worried about it, and I was—cause I was just like “How is this going to affect”—I don't want it to affect our workshop process. What I know this will do for me is that it will make me just, be a better student. To an extent. Cause I'll just be like, “You know, I wanna, I wanna talk about something, I really wanna check out this stuff.” Now, just because of what we're doing together, just, I definitely wanna do that. But because this in and of itself is an art process. Like these workshops—all of us—any workshop we do, whatever, it is an artistic process. Okay? And this is something that I'm asking you guys to be involved in.

Comments or thoughts or concerns?

Are you gonna do one long recording or are you going to record individual days? One for every single class. Okay. My question is can we have copies of the transcripts of our own workshops. Sure, if you want. It would be helpful to have, like, the recording of other people's comments. Yeah, I mean—cause I'm gonna, I'm gonna do it anyways, um, and so, yeah, if you want, sure. But what would, but what would end up happening with, as far as we're concerned, is there would be, like a, like a, an agreement that, that's just yours. Yeah. For now. Cause, you know like, you know—also too, um, this can be easily published underneath a pseudonym. You know what I mean? To like, really just get the, the general idea of like, "This is middle of nowhere America University, blah blah blah" you know? I think you should use this for blackmail. Yeah. Like this is exploding. Um. I just wanna remember, wanna remember Quincey's aesthetic. Yeah, right. That's terrible, I've said such shitty things; it's purely selfish. This isn't recording is it? Oh yeah it is. Oh, okay. I just wanted, I mean, we can scrap whatever, but I mean if we did this we need the entire semester for it to do what we want right? Um, yeah, I guess. That makes sense. Yeah, I mean, one of the things that you'll see in that is like it can be—it's just—as far as, like, the rhetoric is concerned—cause that's, cause like I like, I, I, personally like words to fuse, a lot, like what I read privately. Like, I'm really interested in rhetoric and I'm really interested in just sort of speaking and whatever else. And so this, this is a really unique example. And I've talked to a lot of MA kids and PhD kids, cause I was really worried about this when I first started thinking about it, cause I just, cause I didn't wanna piss anybody off, and of you guys, anyone in the program. Um, and, uh, there seems to be like a lot of, a lot of, uh, at least some interdepartmental interest. And just like, kind of, breaking down the veil and breaking it down in this format and way.

Um. Other comments or questions?

I like it. Really? Yeah, I think it's cool. Me too. I'm excited about it. I kind of think it would be interesting to just do everything. Like, like, um, you know. You mean all of the poems, all of the names? Oh, man. I don't know that would be, that would be crazy. SO it would be an anthology or something, like published like that? I guess, right, Jeremiah? I mean, yeah, fuck, I guess. I didn't think, I didn't, I didn't, that's, like—I'm getting shivers. I mean it's something we can talk about, right? There's legal things with that, right? But then it would be more egalitarian. Yeah that would be crazy. I mean, Jeremiah, we've talked about stuff like this before, you know, and I think, I think, um, it's a great idea, but really, really being there, with our names, and our place, um, that would be cool. If we are down with it, of course. Man, that's nuts. Yeah, yeah. I—shit, that's up to you guys, I couldn't possibly ask, ask that from you guys. I mean. It's something to think about, right? That's cool, cause I think—it, again—like I can't stress this enough, like I do want this to be, like, democratic, to be legit. But, we're, we're talking about presumably a text that is like five hundred pages long. And each class would be set up, first day, second day, third day. Time to lawyer up! Right, right. And I guess we'd just split the money or donate it or whatever. Man, we ain't there yet. True. True.

I, I think it's, I mean, this is what you sent to me this morning right?

Yeah.

Even viewing—I had—um, it's extremely grueling and ambitious work, and, and I

definitely, even for having the gall to undertake such a task, I tip my hat to you. First let's say this: um, at this point is there anyone that is uncomfortable with this?

No, not yet. I mean the full poetry thing, the anthology thing, I'm iffy on, you know, just, like, that's something else, but you know first thought isn't, at least, you know I'm not saying "No" just yet. But I'm good with it so far, I guess is what I'm saying. And yeah, we can work out what we do and how we do, you know? This is all of us not just me or you or whatever. But the class? Right.

What I'll do, so that you can remain anonymous: if you change your mind between now next week or any point this semester, send me an email and you will remain anonymous, um, if you have a concern, and then we'll put the breaks on it and call in the forces.

Yeah, exactly.

Um, but at this point we're fine with moving ahead?

Yeah. One thing too is like, um, when, when this is done, you guys will see it before anyone else does, you know what I mean? Um. And there's if like, if you'd like to, you could do, have the play by play. This is tough.

Let's, let's do this real quick. Let's take a quick seven minute break. Um, we'll probably, after the break, only stay half, half an hour. I don't know about you guys, but I could use

some water. If you guys wanna keep talking about this, or get up and stretch, it's up to you. We'll, um, get back at four o'clock.

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We'll get started as soon as Bobbi gets back.

So when you say that George Warro is a performance poet, did he start off doing slam or what?

I don't think so. I think it is a style. I think—I mean, I'll be frank, I think, it's, it's, um, a comfortable space for academics to push poets that, that have nice reading styles, or nice emphasis, or nice cadences; um, I don't know. I use to slam and I never ran into George Warro. He's um, he's from an older, not older, older generation, not that much older, maybe 1950. So at no point do I remember him being on or in the slam community.

From the circuit.

Circuit. Yeah. Um but, the reason, again why, why I, I said that is because, um, when we three discussed meeting him not too long ago they called him a slam poet. And um, that, that, for me, and obviously, I have my on bias reasons behind that, that's, that's an oxymoron.

But I, but I think the opposite is also true.

What's that?

That there's a lot of poets that aren't performance poets.

Right, right.

Or whatever.

Right.

And, um.

So, um, I have his book in my office if anyone wants to scoop it up between now and then to look through it. Um.

So you just want us to come up with really general questions to ask him?

Yeah, something like that. Again he might—I don't know, we're, we're, we're going to have dinner the night before, so I don't know what he's going to do. Um, so he might come in and have a really strict agenda that, that he is following so we might wanna ask questions from that. So, so, I'll ask him if, if, if, someday, or if its possible that we could

focus on sequence or series writing.

Is this um, is this just gonna be like a guest dude within our workshop or is it gonna to be like our workshop that other people will also be at?

Other people. And it's his show, so if we go an hour you guys are free to go after that. If it goes two hours you guys are free to go. I don't anticipate it going too long. But I'll holler at you guys, you know, as soon as I get more details, I think they are still ironing out specs. Um. Alright, let's um, let's talk for a little bit and then I'll let you guys get out of here. Um, Liz reminded me of, of something that I wanted to share with you and I think that I've shared it with a few of you in different settings. My reason for, for composing or constructing this course is simple. Most of you know that I'm a first year faculty member here and one of my main points of emphasis is to focus on the things that could have been beneficial to me as a graduate student. And throughout my time in an MFA and a PhD program, not once did I find myself in a workshop like this. Um, so for me in trying to—there are two manuscripts that I submitted. I submitted my MFA manuscript; my thesis was roughly eighty pages of poetry, and my dissertation, which was a creative dissertation along with a critical introduction, which was about sixty pages of poetry. Um, and, um, my first book was published while I was a student in the PhD program. And I had thought—so while I was student, maybe first or second year in my PhD program I was submitting manuscripts for contests and trying to get my first book published. And I was receiving “no's” right and left, even though I had these poems that were published already. And the way that I thought about it was like “If I have ten or twelve poems

published this should be a solid manuscript, which means I should be an okay writer,” right? And I wasn’t getting any takers. Thankfully, there was a publisher that was eventually interested in the manuscript and said, um, they had published a few of my poems in their literary journal and said, “Hey, we wanna see more. Can you send us a manuscript? You got a manuscript right?” And I’m like, “Hell yeah I got a manuscript!” But I didn’t. Right? I didn’t really have it. I was sending out what I was sending out. But I didn’t know how to go about it cause, you know, I wasn’t getting good feedback from people or at least, at least not feedback that worked for the manuscript as a whole, just the little pieces of it, right? So they said, “Okay. So when can you send it to us?” So I, I kept just kind of holding them off: “So okay I just wanna make some revisions. Give me two weeks.” Right? Two weeks: “Oh just give me a couple more weeks, I wanna make some revisions.” I, I, I didn’t know what I was doing. I was still a student at the time. I was teaching like you guys are, so I was just trying to figure out what to do with this, this big mass of everything. Um, but eventually what I did was I just grabbed everything that I ever had published, and um, some new stuff that I had been working on and I just threw it together, a bunch of poems, and I sent them the manuscript. I heard back from them about a month later and they called me and said, um, “We like your poems but your manuscript is awful.” And, and, I was really like devastated, like completely deflated, you know? They asked me to see my work so I assumed that they were going to publish this. Um, so I said, “What does that mean?” They say, they said “Patrick, there’s two books here.” Um, they said, “There’s a book about this and a book about this, and you just have them all lumped together, and you just gave it to us.” Right? The good thing is they said that “We want to publish both. But what you need to do is separate the two and start fleshing them

out, because if, if you just separated and tried to publish them individually they have no sort of connectivity.” Right? “So you need to start fleshing them out.” So I spent about a year doing that, um, and I learned so much. And this is learning that did not occur in the classroom. Um, or, um, learning that didn’t—I’m sure it could have, but didn’t occur, um, in discussions with my peers. It occurred on the job and on the fly. And I’m really grateful for that opportunity. So, my thinking was that “I wish I would have had that information before I started sending out my manuscript,” or “I wish I had that information while I was creating my master’s thesis,” that manuscripts should have a certain connectivity to them, something that holds them together. And again, um, like I was just talking to Quincey earlier today, this doesn’t necessarily just mean the narrative, right? It’s not just linear, right? But what are the emotional arcs that are occurring? What’s the landscape? What, what are we doing with language, right? What’s, what’s connecting these things together? And if you think about your favorite books of poetry, I’m sure that these, collections, um, almost feel like the feeling that you get when you watch a movie. And, um, that’s why I wanted to create this course. Obviously we’re not looking at an entire manuscript, but I think that if we can take what we do here and sort of apply some of those principles to our larger thesis. For you Annisa, this is your third year, so this is happening right now. Um, but for those of us that are second year, you know, we have another year. For those of us that are first year, we have two years now to think about this. I didn’t want this to be a class exclusively for second or third year people; I’m happy that we have some first year folks in here so that way you are thinking along those lines. Um. And, and, and, this is not to—which we talked about over the weekend—to put additional pressure on us to “I have to have a publishable manuscript as soon I leave this program.” But we’re thinking about

“How can I make my thesis or my manuscript as strong as it can possibly be?” So that’s, that’s how we got this syllabus thing. Um, let’s look at that Rosenthal quote, um, on the front page of this syllabus. Can somebody read that for us? And, man—I want us to think about what this means as well as what does it mean for us to bring in a packet/series or sequence of poems. I want us to sort of have this discussion all at once. Um, who would like to read?

I’ll do it. “A poem depends for its life neither on continuous narration nor on developed argument but on a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness. A successful long poem, and the modern sequence pre-eminently, is made up of such centers of intensity. Its structure resides in the felt relationships among them.”

Thank you. What’s that mean? And why is it in the syllabus?

I feel like its highlighting what we were just talking about. That, that, uh, it doesn’t necessarily have to be common themes, like, uh, for things to be connected. It has more to do with, uh, the feelings that are evoked. Um. Kind of, where it says, “Its structure resides in the felt relationships among them” that kind of stands out to me.

Yeah what does that mean? Well, two lines up: “intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness as well as felt relationships among them.” Quincey, were you going to say something?

Um. Yeah, I was just going to say that it seems to be arguing against the idea that a long poem or a sequence has to be a story sequence, right? Cause, I mean, that is normally how we think about a lot of things, but, um, or, well, it seems at least that the first sentence is drawing a parallel between the short poem and the longer sequence, right? Cause if it is a poem it depends on these things and a long poem is still part of that.

Absolutely.

I think it's, it's also kind of asking us to look at, uh, look at the, the overall kind of, you used this word earlier, the "holistic" um, ability of the text, um, as far as a collection of things but as one specific unit of discussion. You know what I mean? Rather than having these individual things, like, oh, you know; uh, like what good is a book of poetry, that you know, that has two good poems in it? Those poems that we were talking about earlier that really connects these things, that's like a movie or whatever, you can get done with it, um, and then you have a larger impression that rather than hits you on one thing affects you on a larger kind of spread. Do you know what I mean? It's like the difference between getting poked with a tooth toothpick and shot with a shotgun I guess. Yeah. Yeah. That doesn't make any sense but whatever. Like, like for me, the word "progression" sticks out, I mean just because, I mean that could be, again this is somewhat vague, but you know there's, there's movement, and this is, this is, basic, basically, you know, and one of the things that I sometimes struggle with is like I'll, I'll individually write poems that are somewhat static, emotionally or otherwise, and it's just like, it's intense, but you know,

could I have sixty of those next to each other? It's just this white noise kind of, you know, you know, and I think it might end up becoming this weird white noise, you know? And I just think that whatever you choose it goes somewhere. One thing I think I, I was thinking about this when I, when I first read *These Red Hills* by Claudia Simon, cause her first movement, like, the first section of her book was really, it impacted me emotionally, like I thought it was really a good string going on there. Um, but it was like this idea of the "qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness," that awareness to me is the awareness of a piece of poetry to be able to carve out, like, an emotional space in you, um, whatever. We're kind of working, like if you have, if you have one poem that really, really deals with death, how do you make that moment really work? Is it, it's not necessarily just in that one single poem it's in the surroundings too. Just like in the beginning of *These Red Hills* that whole idea of pregnancy is a movement. And like you get to this point where you are like, "Oh my god, I'm overwhelmed already." Um, but that doesn't happen in a good way. That doesn't happen because of one poem it happens because of those series of poems that. Yeah. Yeah. And I thought, I thought, at least the first, the first sequence, that first whole section was amazingly powerful. It's been a while since I've read it. I think that is what that means about "felt relationships." It, it, it, wouldn't even all have to, have to be about, about one, uh, have to be about one topic like birth or something, but it's, it's talking here more about, um, the intensity or the quality of the emotions, so it could be seemingly unrelated, but, but, like that intensity, um, or the quality of the emotion that is evoked, I think, seems to be central to this definition, you know, to make something work.

Yeah, and one of the, one of the things that you are causing me to think about this is, you know, what's sort of the dialogue that is happening amongst the poems themselves. What sort of interactions are these poems having, and the emotions that they are evoking out of each other?

I was—are you?

No, go ahead.

Ok. Well, that's what I was going to say a second ago, Donnie used the word "build" and that's what I would normally, like my go to would be "the poems build on each other." But I feel like it's more complex than that because it implies that the first poem might be the weakest, and that we are sort of building up from there. And, um, I have to stop myself from saying that word cause I feel like it is more of a dialogue, that the poems can contradict each other or fight with each other or, or build with or on each other or just be talking to each other or whatever, you know? And that is something, I don't know, something that I've been trying to define for myself a lot lately, but, yeah, like that idea of dialogue across, not just between poems that might be side by side, but across a whole, you know, a whole series.

And, and I think this is, I think this is wonderful and beautiful. Um, it allows us a really unique position in terms of placement, right? When, um, I'm thinking about Jay's comment: "white noise," when you said that, you know, did you, I think I heard you say

“heavy poems?”

“Static.” “Static.”

“White static?” You said?

Well I did, I said “static,” and then also “white,” you know, then, it, it, as, as a whole it sort of becomes.

What did you say about the poem? You said that it makes these kinds of poem? What, what was that kind? I forgot what you said. Should we rewind the tape?

It just, I don’t, yeah, they’re like, static. He said that “intensity.”

“Intensity!”

Individual poems that have intensity, that aspect.

Intensity, right? Now that we are recording this class we can go back to the tape, right? Instant replay. Oh, ok. Um. I’m a, I’m a huge music lover, right? And when I think about my favorite albums they are the albums that have maybe these seven minute really intense songs followed by a forty-five second interval. And that interval is so important cause I couldn’t do two, or three, or four of those seven-minute really intense songs back to back

to back. I need that two-minute interlude. Maybe it's a five-minute interlude, but you know, it's, it's a guitar solo or something like that, which sort of brings me to a different space and leads me into the next thing that follows. We can think about the collection, or sequences, or series that we write in here that way. If this was an album how should the emotional, um, I guess, um, progression work here? What would be most beneficial, um, to, to the poems themselves? So what is it that we are thinking about in terms of what we're going to bring in here? We've read what the, um, what the requirements are for the workshop. I'm sure some light bulbs might have gone off, or the hamster wheel started turning. What, what are we thinking at this point in time? How are we viewing this? Obviously, I said this at the beginning of class, I was a bit reluctant to use this word "sequence," because that could connote, um, "Here are five poems about feet," right? That's not necessarily what I mean, you know? A sequence of feet poems or foot poems, right? I mean, I'm not saying that you can't do that. Just think about it beforehand, you know. That's something that requires some thought. That's not necessarily what I mean. That's why I, I use the word "series" as well as "packets." Um, we do want that connectivity, but, you know, it could be as, um, it doesn't have to be this overt connectivity; that's, that's our job as readers to find connectivity and then offer good advice to the writer about how that can pop even more so. So what are ya'll thinking about at this point in time as far as what ya'll are going to bring in here, not aesthetic wise, but the, the poems? How are you viewing the idea of "sequence" or "series?"

Can I say something about how I really like responding to people's work?

Sure.

Um. When you said that just now I was thinking, like, one thing that I really love about this is that, um, I'm going to be able to look at, like, I feel like I know Bobbi's work relatively well, but seeing ten or fifteen pages of it, like, that's going to give me an entirely different feel for what her poems can do. And so I feel like part of it's like being able to understand people's voices or maybe helping us find our voices a little bit more. So not just like what we bring in week-to-week and trying to remember how things connect, you know, if someone has things that they do consistently. But really just smashing it all together and saying, "This is who I am right now. This is what I'm bringing to the table." And getting to, uh, I don't know, yeah, I think that it's just that, that holistic idea again, just being able to sort of see, um, this is a dangerous thing to say, but like who someone is based on a larger sample of their writing. I know that's really—ok—except in the best way possible. Um, but yeah, I don't know, that, that was all I had to say. Just that kind of a response versus, um, just sort of judging things or them piece by piece and not really knowing where someone's going or what they are trying to do or what other works can bring to that single piece that you are reading in the moment.

And I think that's important that you mentioned that because obviously comments are just important as what we bring into class to workshop. Where you going to say something?

Um, yeah. I, just, I, I'm finding it hard to find a starting point to answer this question, um, but, at least in my mind, um, what I would probably do when trying to think of a sequence

that I was going to create is I would first, I would start with a simple question: “What do I want these things to achieve?” Um, and then work from there. How do I do that? Where do I need to do certain things? And then I would start looking at the poems and what I can do in those poems to then create, to reach that original point that’s decided on. Um, and then the question would also be about form, voice, imagery, all of that, you know? How do these things go together? Is it all the same? Are there differences? What are those differences? Is there a balance that needs to be reached? Have I not, like, reached that? Do I care about that?

Right.

Um. You know, things like that.

That’s as important as what I do care about: what I don’t care about.

Right. And then, so I pretty much work backwards in order to produce a sequence, rather than, like, fishing through all these different ideas and writing poems and randomly being like, “Okay. Do these things fit together?” You know what I mean? Cause then I might get down to, like, the week before workshop and then realize, like, “Fuck. This is not a good sequence.” You know what I mean? Yeah. I think it’s actually going to be really difficult to start. Yeah. Um. Because, I think, sometimes I find just in general that, um, I mean, I’m actually more excited about trying to write a sequence than I am about trying to write an individual poem. But, um, and I think, like, thinking about it as an album or something

like that, like the albums that I like or the books that I like, you know, how they fit together, but, um, yeah, I, I think that it's—sometimes I find that I have to start writing before I start thinking properly. But also completely unfocused writing sometimes, you know? I'll spend a lot of time on that, so, and, and you know, I'll end up with a lot that I'm not really committed to, like, I think it helps to have some idea what to start with so that you're kind of more committed to something; that's at least, that's what I'm finding. I use to be able to just completely free write and find something in, in there that I liked but that hasn't been the case, like, recently. I kind of got out of, or started out of. I'm not really sure. So what I'm saying is that I'm not really sure what I'm bringing to the table. I'm, I'm really interested in it though. Um, I think starting, you know finding a starting point is a real challenge. I think having that is a huge part of just starting, you know, having a vision?

Absolutely, and, and, you know, I think it's something that we need not get excited about just yet, cause we will have a few weeks where we really discuss what this means. Um, and also note that these poem-sequences—I, I guess that perhaps the autonomy might be, um, distance our reading in, in a sense, right? I'm telling you that you can do, you can do whatever you want to do, right? So, um, let it be sort of how you perceive the beginning of a manuscript forming, or the end or the middle, right? Or it could just be, “I think these poems work well together,” or “I'm interesting in writing a sequence about canoeing,” right? “So here's ten poems.” Right? Not that you would do that, cause I know that you would prefer not to, but, um.

I'd rather write about feet.

About feet! Yeah, "the foot sequence." Um, so yeah we'll, we'll talk more about—were you going to add something Quincey?

I was just—well, are you?

Yeah.

Well, I was looking forward—I'm not sure what shape this will take, but I, I think I'm composing a long poem now, and then either arbitrarily or mathematically or somehow dividing it into shorter poems, and I've found that one of the problems that I have is that I'm, too much of a tendency to close of the poem, like, "Okay, getting to the end of the page, time to close off the poem," whatever. And it doesn't really allow it to take it to an interesting space. It's more, it doesn't really allow it to be its own performance thing. It just sort of sets it up and then this is where I'm going in the end. So I'm hoping that just by forcing it to be longer, you know, whether that's just a long run-on list of sentences or it becomes like ten sentences or fifteen sentences, whatever, will help break me of that habit. So.

And, and, and, that's really interesting, right? And, when I, when we say "five to ten poems," we also mean five to ten pages.

Right. That's what I was figuring.

Right? So yeah, if it was one poem, you're alright, if it's five to ten pages.

Yeah, I was going to ask about that: like a long poem versus a sequence poem. So either way would be, that would be fine?

Absolutely.

Long poems are hard. Cause you really do get to the end of the page and say, "Okay, I'm done!" Yeah.

Okay. Um. Let me give you guys two handouts that you will read for next week. And, and the way I wanted to start talking about what this means is really, in a really pragmatic way. So there are two sort of, you can call them "how to do essays" or "talking points," um, the first one is by, Jeffery Levine um, and the second one is by Albert Rios. Um. The first one is "On Making The Poetry Manuscript" and that is, um, on his website. And the second one is, um, posted on his blog on October 12th, 2012. So just a few months back. Um, and it's some really interesting stuff. So we are going to start tomorrow, next week, not tomorrow. And we are going to start next week by talking about these handouts. And I think that will allow us sort of a working dialogue when we move into Tretheway. Let's look at them really quick, um, it says um, the name is "The Art of a Manuscript," right? It says, "When organizing a manuscript, you aim to create nothing less than a work of art.

As Frost suggested (in so many words) if there are x number of poems in a book, the book itself is the final poem.” That reminds me of what you were saying Quincey that the final product is one thing to be critiqued. Um. What’s another interesting one? Number three. And you’ll look through all of these in your own time, I just wanted to highlight a few. “When ordering poems in your manuscript, pay no attention to which poems have been published.” Right, that’s where I was making a mistake. “But these are published!—Put a bunch of these at the beginning and a bunch at the end.” Right? “And which poems not. At the conclusion of the contents, I often go back and look at the acknowledgment pages of finalists and semifinalists. I find that most poets place an inordinate and mistaken reliance on their publishing history in ordering poems. Many of us assume that because a journal editor smiled on a particular poem that it is better than the poems not taken or that a poem taken by Poetry or Agni must be better than one taken by a less well-known print or online publication.” Um, when I look at my first book now some of my strongest poems in my estimation were ones that weren’t published, and weren’t published sometimes because I didn’t have an opportunity to send them out because they were kind of last minute poems I was working on to create some connective tissue to the manuscript, right? Um. Few from the Rios. I really like what he is talking about here, this idea of temporal narrative, “that suggests time as your editor. This is an old, but often effective, approach, Time orders things.” Right? So that’s one way of looking at it. And then he also says, um, “H: Link by colors, by smells.” Right? “We’re talking about the senses here, but be loose or open in your sensibility. Include a poem with a red object in it, even, and especially, if the word ‘red’ does not come up in the poem, and pair it with another poem containing something else that is red in it. Link stories or chapters by smells, by tastes, by senses we haven’t

even discovered yet.” Alright, so these are ways that people look at organization. There was another one that I thought was really cool. Um. Let’s look at “S,” the last one. It says, “The old neighborhood is still something to count on, an indestructible, definable, visceral, and tangible home-ness. I’m talking here about place, which (if you know something about one) you ought to consider. Geography is a natural connector and exasperating separator.” Kay? So, again, I want us to, to, to resist the simple old idea of linear narrative structure and think about emotional landscape, visceral sort of connecting ideas as we move through this course. So what we’ll do is we’ll read this for next week. We’ll write the five hundred words, um, and we’ll read the first two parts of Tretheway to talk about Tretheway’s collection, about the first two parts of Tretheway’s collection. Questions? No? Alright. I’ll see you next week.

How ya’ll doing?

Good. Doing good. Decent.

Yeah? Good.

Yeah. These weather changes are killer though. Yeah. I’m sick.

You’re under the weather?

Yeah. Just, just as a heads up.

Well I'll stay over here then.

Yeah. Okay.

For sure. That's twice over the last month or so? Didn't you get sick right before break, or?

Was I? I can't remember.

Sorry about being four minutes late. It's one of those days. I don't know if this happens to you all; those days where you're just a little bit behind and each time you catch up you fall back behind? So it started at ten o'clock this morning with kid stuff and then I finally caught up and then I just decided to download this new album and I was in the shower longer than I should have been and I was like, "Shit! I've got to get out of here!" And then I'm walking to my car about forty-five minutes ago, and it's like a one in a million chance that this happens: a leaf just blows straight into my eye. So I'm in my car, sitting there before I can drive, trying to get this leaf out of my eye. And then I get to campus and the line's out the door for Starbucks. Um, so I'm here though, only four minutes late, so that's not too bad, right?

There's, uh, on the school's website there's a convenient link to where there's a camera where you can check the line at Starbucks. It's like a Starbucks web cam.

Are you serious?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, very serious. It's on all the time.

That could be useful.

Yeah. The camera's horribly positioned, but you'll know. You can see if the line's all the way out the door. Yeah.

Gotcha.

Like into the hallway. Isn't it usually all the way out the door and into the hallway? I've never been there when it wasn't just a little bit. Not, like, now. Not so much. And like whenever, whenever, like, right when they open in the morning. I'm not up that early. I am, but I don't wanna spend the money on it. Tell me about it. With these stipends?

It actually moved faster than I thought it would. It was kind of like a, um, a really um, critical decision point once I just stood in the line. I could barely see, and I'm thinking, "Do I just go to class?" Right? I, I don't wanna be too late. And then there is a part of me that is saying, "You can't do this without your coffee. You're not gonna make it." I figured ya'll would be all right for a minute or two.

We were on the brink of a mutiny though.

I figured, man. I figured ya'll would bail out, man. Ya'll so rebellious.

Yeah, just so you know, it was Liz. The ringleader.

Right. That's why she kept texting me, right?

She gave a very stirring speech on top of the table.

Alright. Um. We're always gonna, for the most part, do the sign in sheet for attendance. Maybe we'll stop at some point. We're such a small group I don't really worry about it. How was ya'lls weekend?

Good. It was pretty good, I should, I should have studied more but I didn't.

Yeah, was that the good part of it?

That's, that's one of my problems, is like, I'm like, "Ah! Finally, the weekend. I'm gonna read and do whatever I want!" And then it's like, "Wait. I've got something other, er, something else to do don't I?"

Right.

That's a problem for me.

Um.

I wrote a poem.

You, you, you what?

I wrote a poem.

I like that. That's good news! How did, how did it go?

Um. Pretty, pretty good. It, it, it reminded me that I can do it, that I can still do it.

Do you guys, ever?

In a poetry workshop. That I can still write.

And, and, to your point: do, do you guys ever get the feeling that you might not ever write another poem in your life?

Yes. After every poem is finished.

“After every poem is, is finished”? And I'm not sure if it's writer's block or a “I just don't know if

I can do it anymore,” kind of thing. I don’t know.

That’s the way, that’s the way I feel. There’s, there’s been, there was a lot of things, there’s-- what’s the word? It’s like, “I’ll never be, I’ll never be able to not do this.” But then there’s moments now where I’m like, “I just don’t, like, have that desire.” Now, now it’s more, like, forcefulness, then like, “Yes. This is how I wanna spend the next hour and a half, like, trying to figure this out.”

Right.

It will just be like, “Kay, you have to do this.”

Or perhaps.

I’m not sure why that is.

Or perhaps getting tired of your own aesthetic? Right?

I think that could be it. Yeah.

“Rather read someone else’s work than read my own, right now.” I don’t know. Um, but, okay.

You had a reading Liz, right?

I did.

How'd that go?

I drank too much there and got a little sick the next day. Um. It went, it went really well.

Good.

Yeah. Um. These guys were here.

Nice.

At it. Um, I feel weird. It was awesome.

It was a nice crowd, right?

It was great. Yeah. There were like forty/fifty people there.

Wow. That's excellent for a reading.

Yeah.

Good. Good. And Quincey has one coming up.

Um. The twenty-third? Yes, more than a couple of days. A couple days? A couple weeks.

Cool.

I, just. No one can understand me. I'm just going to stop talking.

I think it's, it's um, extremely important, you and I had a brief conversation about this, but that you all are reading and being active in the surrounding community. That's, you know, obviously, you guys help with this, it's, it's, important to be part of the extended writing community. Right? Not just what's happening here, or on our computers. I need to get out a lot more now that my son is starting to become a little more manageable. Um, you guys'll start seeing me at more of the events. Um. So, okay. So Jay's not here, he's sick, and Bobbi is at the Grammy's, so. She's actually meeting with a publisher right now in L.A. So she won't be here today. It will just be us today. But that's great news for her for sure. Um, let's start by looking at the course schedule. This is how we'll start class just to make sure that we are on the same page. So we'll discuss "Elegy" and that second section. Again these are two, they're not numbered in the book, but you guys seem to understand what I meant by, "just the second part." Um, I think the next time that we come back to Thrall, um, will be later on in the semester. We'll also obviously talk about the main, the remaining Rios. Um, I don't know what you call these, not quite essays, um, informative writing, but I'm interested to see sort of what you guys thought about the points they mention and how that might either connect to what you've been doing, what you plan to do, or just you're whole approach to your own writing and to your own construction of a manuscript.

So we'll talk about that. Um. We have George Warro's workshop coming up. I still don't have for sure details about how that workshop will be run beforehand. It will be at three o'clock. Same time. It goes till four-thirty. Um, I don't know if it will go over, go over or not. Either way that is what we do next week. Okay, so whenever it's done, we're done. I'll be here so after it's over if anyone wants to talk about anything, I'm down to stick around as long as you'd like. I won't necessarily push you out the door at four-thirty is what I'm saying. If you guys wanna meet to discuss anything I'm all open for that. The reason that I'm still not sure about the details of this, of this workshop is because—you know here's this "come up with questions"; obviously, you know, you guys are smart people, you don't necessarily have to write down these questions, but just think of questions that are related to this class, that are related to some of the things that are in these essays or discussion points and his approach, right? How does he approach, um, his manuscripts or sequence or series of poems that he writes? How does he put together a collection of poetry? What kind of things does he privilege, would be, you know, an interesting question to ask, right? It might also be interesting to ask questions along the lines of, "What, outside of, you know, um, important narrative do you, do you see in connecting poems?" Right? Cause that's the thing that we'll do in this class; we're going to look at things outside of narration or linear patterns that we are all already use to, and maybe, maybe even tired of. We'll look at what other kind of things are connecting poems together. Um, I got his book right here; just got his book *Trumpet Mutes of the Apocalypse*. Um, I haven't read the whole thing. I've read about a third, and it's pretty good. I, I didn't initially draw the connection, but, um, he, he publishes through Rat/Bird Books, which is um, a fairly old independent press, um, out of Boston. I wanna say it started in California. Um. If they didn't start in California, a lot of their early writers started in Cali. When I was in graduate school at St. Louis University, um, a professor there was putting

together an anthology with Rat/Bird Books, um, authors, and--Rat/Bird Books is where Maruca Fareek is—no that's not right. Maybe. I think that's right. I should know this. Um, I got those notes. Um. I gotta check about that. But anyways, um, there was a professor at St. Louis State that was putting together an anthology of poems, um, and I had the, um, I would say “the pleasure” to co-edit that anthology, so I had read George Warro's poems back in 2003, um, when I was helping with that anthology, but I, I forgot this was in fact the same guy. So this is him, um, who'll be here next week, so guys can give it a read, real quick, if you'd like. What else? Group one you all will be bringing poems next week. Okay. So, again enough for the class, so. And we'll start workshopping on the 13th. Questions about anything?

No.

Okay. Okay. Good. Um, it's my birthday the 5th, so we'll be meeting next week on my birthday, so if you wanna bring in something special like scotch or whiskey, I will accept. And just like, just like with the poems, you know, bring enough for everybody, if you bring the Scotch bring some glasses too, but no ice. We gonna drink it neat! Um. Alright. First thing I wanted to do is ask you guys (if there's no questions or comments regarding the course schedule) is, I'd like to hear a little bit about how this process for writing this proposal slash prospectus slash explanation of aesthetic was. First off I'm interested in how you interpreted this assignment being that all documents are documents to be interpreted for the most part, um, so it's not just a thing that reading through the syllabus on some levels can be interpreted in different ways by different folks, right? So the first thing I'm interested in, in hearing about is how you interpreted this assignment. And then what did you produce, or, or what, what was your thinking behind the

production of five hundred words or so?

I, I—like, it seemed pretty straight forward to me, but then when I started like brainstorming it, writing, I realized that I don't know how to talk about my work, or for that matter, or what actually does connect them, and it's like, I'm unable to think, or maybe even not all that interested in the direction I'm kind of going, or at least previously. So I have to start from a really basic level I guess. And it was interesting to, to sort of look at what I, what I'm interested in and writing right now, you know, "writing." I just have really no conception of my work I don't think. I feel like I'm just writing poems. I just can't decide. It's like there's, uh, no real—it didn't seem like there was any real, any sort of connectivity, uh, between them, between my poems that I was looking over. So, I mean, uh, I'm really, really kind of starting from, you know scratch.

What are the things that "basic level" means? "Basic level"—what is that?

As far as like, considering, you know, uh, my work as a collection of some sort, the focus of this class, just like, and, it seems, they all seemed pretty random, but yeah, they seemed pretty random at first, and then I was kind of able to sort of pull things together, uh, to some degree, and I'm still, yeah, It's like I'm still working on what I'll turn in in two weeks, but, um, yeah, I, yeah, I, I, just never had this sort of, er, relationship with my poems before. I thought I had, but it became clear that I had not thought deeply enough or at least with enough in depth consideration.

Yeah. Let me ask you this, and this is not a rhetorical question; I'm really interested in this: so

what sort of negotiations happened internally for you in that discovery, in that questioning: “I’m not sure how they connect. I’m not sure what exactly I’ve been doing up to this point.” Right? It’s always more difficult to articulate what it is that we are doing, regardless of what it is, right? Writing essays: say, “Tell me how to write an essay.” It’s like we know how to do it just fine except when we are asked to talk about how we do that it’s suddenly quite difficult. So, what sort of things did you find happening internally for you?

Um, well, yeah, uh, well, yeah, I, I, I, I had to, like, go back and look at, like, the individual poems and it was just, I guess, like, as far as, like, process, it was just sort of like, like, literally, like, looking, you’re like, “Okay,” kind of, you know, “What language, you know is, is repeated throughout, you know, these?” Um, you know, um, “What kind of sound, or, images?” Um, and it’s, yeah, it’s like, it, you know, and, and it’s sort of like a, I don’t, yeah, the, the mechanics, the nuts and bolts of the work itself, um, and then, and trying to see, like, what sort of uh, kay, sorry for this, I, I can’t, well, yeah, you know, the larger issues, and it’s I guess, that’s why I write more prose poems maybe, so it’s like that, you know like that, I mean that if, you just, that doesn’t, in and, in and of itself that doesn’t constitute, you know, a collection, it’s just a style of writing, you know, it’s a type of poem, so, that, that, you know, well, that’s, I think, important to me, and that’s something that I, you know, sort of, it’s a small structure or at least a structure that I, that I, one that I happen to work in, or on, it doesn’t, in and of itself, make various sort of, uh, arcs, or stories, or anything along those lines, um, I think, I got it, so I’m still in the process of understanding what I’m doing, with it, better, um, you know, awareness of where I’m at and what I want with that.

Absolutely. That's interesting. Other folks?

I always have a hard time matching what I want to do with either what I'm capable of or end up doing. Um, so I, you know, I don't know enough as to which is the problem, not to say, not necessarily the "problem," but the issue that happens. Um, cause I'll often have, I have this very distinct idea of what I want to be able to complicate, accomplish with words, what I even think they're able to accomplish at all, and all of a sudden when I write it.

"Words," means that you're out to accomplish words?

What words are able to accomplish. Um. And, uh, and so then I'll all of a sudden start writing and then I'll look at it and it's just, like, sometimes this matches and sometimes it doesn't and I don't understand why. And I, and I want it to, um, but something else happens, so it seems like there's, there's a disconnect either between what I believe I'm doing or what I'm actually doing, or, I don't know. I'm, sometimes, sometimes I'm very confused, sometimes I'm very pleased, I guess is what I'm getting at.

It's definitely. Hard getting a forecast, right?

Right.

Even when someone asks you a basic question, which is a question that you guys will get for the rest of your writing careers: "What is your aesthetic?" Right? "What type of poet or writer are

you?”

That’s a terrible question.

Right! But it will come!

Yeah. Yeah.

It will definitely come. And it’s hard to sort of get a grasp on the answer to that, because—obviously as writers the way you perceive the world is constantly changing, right? I mean, that happens for everybody, writer, or artist, or not. But for us it changes what we produce. One of the, the, and maybe we’ll talk a little bit about that in relation to this article of sorts, but, uh, the, other interesting things that you may notice is that the time that it takes for you to produce a manuscript and for that manuscript to be published can be pretty large. Often times you’ve already moved on to something different that you’re interested in. You guys might complete a manuscript—let’s say you’re graduating this spring. Let’s say you had this one manuscript that gets published, or gets under contract this summer or next fall, and it might not come out for another two or three years. This could happen to Bobbi right now, right? By the time that people now about it, especially the reading world, some might try to call you this kind of poet, and, and you think, “This is new for you, but this is old for me. I’ve moved on.” Right? So, what I’m asking you all to do now, um, and the things that you’re interested in now could even change in the course of two months, when you approach your second workshop, right? Um, I still find it productive for us to consider what it is that we are attempting to do. What about you folks?

I've had to write these little sorts of proposals or whatever before and usually, um, I write, like, "I hope to blah blah blah in this workshop," you know? It always it feels kind of forced. And so in this one, um, what I decided to do was just spread out a bunch of poems, cause I was also, like, trying to get some together for the reading, figuring out, like, what is my best work, you know? Um, and so I looked at all of them and reread everything and just tried to describe it, using, like, whatever little vocabulary words I have, you know? Um, just describing what already exists, because, um, just going through the process of articulating, um, what I have, really helped me figure out the things that I like about poems that I would like to continue as a series. That's the way that I approached it.

So, was there a contrast with that to the things that you found you didn't like about it?

Yeah.

Yeah?

There were a lot of things that I don't like. Like, "Why did I keep doing that?" You know? But what I, what I—I don't know—Like what I tried to describe in my, uh, little proposal, but, um, I'm not like—I really like the way that I'm associating certain words, or images, and I want that to continue, um, and I, like, I tried to define it a little more clearly on paper. But, um, it became this sort of, like, weird nebulous definition of a series, you know? I'm wondering, uh—I guess I tried to keep it pretty open, so that I wouldn't be forcing myself, trying to force myself into like,

“Let’s stick to this theme,” or, you know, something like that.

Right.

Cause I—I think that would hurt the poem, for me, anyways.

Yeah. This is really good for me to hear, really interesting, um, because I resisted giving you guys too much to write for this assignment. I wanted to leave it sort of loose, um, and see what came out of it for you all. I’m not—at the, at the end of the day I’m also interested in you explaining what it is that you think you’re doing; that’s pretty much it: the way you talk about it or the way that you approach it. I wanted it to be open for you all. Again, that’s why I resisted the word “prospectus” or “proposal.” While that may be a convenient term to use for an, an assignment like this, that’s not necessarily what I’m interested in. Like I said last week, “You’re not technically proposing anything.” Right? Cause we are going to do it. It can’t be denied. What about you two?

Uh, I mean, I found the, the proposal pretty easy cause I’m—at least for the first workshop I’m writing a longer poem, so, like, it, it’s a success, you know, by nature. Automatically. Of course, man. So, um, but it—I found it helped me just sort of—cause I have the idea of where I want it to go but I also—this, this kind of forced me to address what I don’t want it to do. Um. Yeah so, like, I’m trying to adopt various registers and tones, um, and I wanna do that without seeming ironic, you know, where it’s like, “Oh! I’m going to put on this hat for a little bit.” I want it to be as real as possible, to feel that way, so I wrote about that, then, then just sort of tried not to hide

the poets and people that are influencing me at the moment.

How are we—you're remark about "What I don't want to do," um, sort of caused me to question how do we know what it is we don't want our work to do, especially when we are talking about a series of poems or a short collection of poems? How are we—where are we drawing that information from?

What we don't like?

What we don't like.

In published work?

In published work, yeah.

For me, it's about what I don't like, what I don't find, uh, complex enough in other people's work, the work that I read. There are—I don't—I want to have control (this is an impossible thing to do), but I wanna have as much control as I can over the reader's perception of me.

Over you or the poem?

Both. Maybe. I don't, I don't want them to associate me with someone that I don't want to be associated with, if that makes sense. Um, whether that's a poet or the, the president of our

country, whatever, like, I want to be able to somehow mitigate the grey area. And I say that and then I think about the poetry coming out and, like, that happens a lot. Um, I don't—but that's one of the things that I worry about is being associated with certain people or groups or whatever that I don't wanna be associated with, whether that is racial, linguistic, based on form, or some form of school affiliation or whatever. I worry about that. I worry about my poems being associated with a certain aesthetic that I don't wanna be associated with, or for them being, like, logged into this whole category that I don't want necessarily to be, like, sort of painted into. I worry about that all the time, like every time I write a poem. I don't really think about that, I feel like, um, I think I'm kind of, like, more interested in that, the process of creating something, and, I don't know, it seems like it's not particularly, for me, useful to, to, you know, be looking over my shoulder all the time. I'm kind of interested in where I'm going, where, what I'm saying, and I think that if I'm able to do that then it will be correct, you know, it'll be accurate, so.

Okay.

Yeah, I think that's sorta what I find for the most part; I mean, when I say, like, “Things that I don't want my poems to do,” like, I'm less concerned with how, like, they'll be approached, like, then what they are actually doing, you know, so, like, I can't control, like, what someone gets, or “That's cool,” you know, whatever that means. But I can control, like, “That lines sucks,” or that, like, “This is a shitty move and sort of put on here,” whatever, so.

This is really interesting, um, and it's—you guys might tire of my sappiness at some point in the semester, but it's really a privilege to be able to talk to ya'll once a week. This is wonderful for

me.

You're welcome.

What's that?

You're welcome.

I don't have to pay to tuition. I don't have to pay for this class. It's true that there's only so much that we control, but, but we will be aware about how we are being discussed and what is being discussed in the public sphere. That's—I mean, unless—I don't know how we cannot be aware of that. We should be aware of those things if we want to continue to grow, right? I think it's romantic to, to say that, you know, "I don't care how this works, is received or is interpreted." Cause, I, I felt that way before, right? And maybe it's possible, this, this persona of nonchalance and brilliance. I don't know. Whether I say it is. There, at some point, there's a commodification of product right? Folks that read our work will attempt to find which box to put us in, naturally, that's, that's sort of a natural impulse. Whether it is "formalist," or "black poet," or "renegade," or "slam poet," or "conceptual poet," right? Readers of poetry, critics alike. Okay. Um, any, any other comments about this assignment before I collect it from you guys?

I think I thought I had a better idea, or a more solid idea about what I'm doing than I did, than I actually did before I started writing this essay. Cause I'm s'posed to know, right? Like, I'm done at the end of the semester with all of this; if anyone is to know what I'm doing with my poetry,

with my work, it should be me. But there I was, three years after the fact, after all of this and I was a little, a little stumped. I'm supposed to have a pretty definitive idea about, like, what my poems are doing. I really am not sure that I do have that yet.

And I think, I think, I think that relates almost back to what Jeremiah was saying, right? Is, um, there's, there's a space between what we know and talking about what we know, right? There's a gap, okay, and I think that's what makes this difficult for anyone. I think this would be difficult—first off there's the, you know, the sort of resistance to the Narcissus problem: "I don't wanna talk about myself. I don't wanna talk about what it is that I do." Right? "I just wanna produce and allow it to be interpreted as it will." I don't know if ya'll like sports, but I'm thinking about Randy Moss who yesterday just called himself the best wide receiver to ever play the game. And the sports announcers are like, "Who says that? You can't make that determination," you know? "We decide that." Um, right? Going back to what, what Jeremiah had mentioned: being able to find and appropriate the language could be part of the task. Like you said, "Aren't I supposed to know what it is that I'm doing?" Well, I'm sure there's a, there's a large part that does, right? But that could be an emotional knowing, right? There's, there's a—"I understand the emotion of my aesthetic, but how do I articulate that?" That can be surprisingly difficult.

Yeah it's hard to say that in a paragraph too without making me feel like I hate my work. Like, I can write these five sentences that establish the entire body of my thesis, and it just, it just feels so over simplified and small, and, I don't really want that.

So how did you, this assignment, how did you negotiate these feelings or emotions?

Um, I think I started talking about that oversimplification and then, uh, talking about how I want to expand that, and then talking about the project that I'm going to turn in next week, which I have a mediumly adequate idea of what I want it to do right now, or I know what it's doing right now, so I can talk about that really well, but, if, so, in order to talk about my whole body of work, like as a unit.

Right.

It's so difficult to hold in my hand, like, when I try to I make it come together into one space it feel, it feels, like, it's really small. I don't really want that.

How—so you've made the determination, pretty much, of what you're turning in next week?

Yeah. I mean, I have, like, probably halfish of this new series that I'm working on. Which is why I'm taking this class, because I want to work on this project.

Very cool. Alright. Anything else? No? Alright, then I'll collect those from you.

This is in addition: to answer your question, "Anything else?": I forgot to print mine out.

Okay.

I failed, so there's that.

Don't bother coming back then.

I can email it to you. Is that okay?

Yep. And just drop me a hard copy off in my mailbox or something.

Cool.

I'm assuming that I'll be keeping these for a large period this semester, but you will be getting an evaluation from me in the next week or two. Alright. Let's look at the article, essay, quote stuff. First off, what was your overall impression of these two documents?

I wasn't particularly surprised by anything in it. I've heard some of this stuff before like, you know, "Don't quit just because it's published" or whatever. Um, and the Levine stuff was a lot of things that seemed like either self-evident or like stuff that has been repeated before. Um, the Rios was interesting because, like—in that way it wasn't surprising but only cause I was like "Oh, I've seen this book," like, I know what book we are talking about. Four or five books that fit that category. Um, but I wouldn't have identified as much, you know, I'm not going to alphabetize poems, you know?

Right.

I could though. Yeah, I would too on the first read. Um, but, like, limit myself by colors or smells or something, like I never thought about that. Oh, a lot of poets do that. It was interesting to have it all laid out in that way. Yeah, just so simply. I think—cause I was doing the same thing. I was noticing like “Oh yeah, I’ve seen this before.” I didn’t just sit there and say, “Oh wait, this is kind of an orchestrated structure, this is doing this,” however he puts it “razor, razor, razor, sharp sequence.”

Right.

But I mean, you know, those are the ones that I really, really like, that kind of, like, really manipulate me, um, as a reader, like put me in this place: mold, mold, mold, mold. And then all of a sudden there’s this weird payoff that only could have happened because of all these things that I’ve done, with that, with that writing. Maybe that’s not including what’s going on here. I think specifically for that article I read, um, there’s an Erica Miner article on, online somewhere, where she talks about, um, like, how not to organize your poetry manuscript, because she’s seen these things over and over, so it’s, like, the Maurice Manning tribute book where like a little kid grows up, you know? But in those she’s like specifically dissuading you, so, like, first of all the, the one that she mentions early on here is just, okay, cool, um, and also, I, I haven’t seen this, like, as a suggestion, like, a list of how to do this, so much. You know. “Oh this is what he does,” you know?

Right. Right. Um, let's look at the Levine's, the, the first one. I think it's, I think it's fairly interesting—you know, a lot of this is up front and simplistic in its approach but I think it's worthy of discussion. Um, could someone read that first point?

I'll read it: "When organizing a manuscript you aim to create nothing less than a work of art. As Robert Frost famously suggested in so many words, if there are x number of poems in a book, the book itself is the final poem. You want to think about what your book is about, and to include poems that carry those themes that are somehow related that speak to one, to each other. Also, I find it's a good idea to tether poems together that are written more or less in the same creative period, lest they sound that they are written by different poets, different versions of you. By this I don't mean to suggest that a book need be written in any particular time frame, but rather that a book include poems that are written in a period, a year, two years, five, whatever—when your creative strategies have been consistent."

Thanks. There are five things that jumped out to me and I would like for us to talk about some of them. What does it mean that the book itself is the final poem? What does that mean to you? And I guess for the sake of this class we can think that the ten to fifteen pages that we turn in at the end of this semester that's the final poem. What's meant by that?

I mean it seems to be that it should be working together in the same way that the poems themselves are, right? Or at in least a similar way. I mean that was sort of the quote that was on the top of the syllabus. Like, if you have forty poems and, like, you go back and forth to where they were very varied, it would, it wouldn't necessarily be satisfying as a book. You know, like,

I've, you've seen those collections where it is like, it's literally just a collection of poems.

Right.

You know, like, "Okay, cool." There's some good ones in there, but as a book experience it's not as satisfying. So. I kind of, um—the way, the way that I was kind of thinking of it is like the main ways that we talk about poetry. We talk about it from memory. We carry it around with us, inside us. We've read and we have the ability to remember it, and that's where we talk about it, from that memory. And so—and I often kind of look at poems that way, like, like the residue of the poem and what's left, cause it isn't a perfect copy in our heads but this strange shadow, sort of, of the original, right? Um, and then I kind of feel that way about the book being the final poem, the residue of the entirety. Does that make sense? Like where it's this whole thing, this whole remembrance, um, and how it—like that final feeling, when the lid's closed on the box. You know what I mean? Where it's, nothing else can happen next, at least not from the original, if, if, if, you know, if anything else happens, it happens in me, in the dark. When it's finally finished and you've got something that has happened, or hasn't.

Right. Right. As you said, "The lid is closed on the box," where there's this sort of impression that we're left with as readers, right? That lasting impression. I don't know how it is with ya'll but for me personally when someone asks me about a particular book of poetry, the first thing I think about is—there's an emotional reaction I get to that question before I start thinking about single poems in the collection, right? There's a lasting impression that is left. Any other thoughts about that?

I think that's also what I associate with the poet from that point forward, um, like not necessarily—well, if there's, if there's a poet who, you know, I just read one of their books and they come up in conversation or something, like I have this, um, it is this kind of an impression or like a residue sort of thing that I've stored in the back of my brain and that's how I think about that writer. Um, which is kind of what's cool about reading a second book, because then I, you know, start reading the first poem and I'm like, "What the hell?" or like, "Oh, this is so cool. It fits right in perfectly." You know? Like the difference between Mark Levine's Debt, and his other stuff, his later work.

And sometimes that expectation can be undercut, right?

Yeah.

"This is not what I bought!" Right. What I got with the first one. That happens to music a lot. You get a sophomore project, "This is the not like the first album I bought from you!" Right?

Yeah, I really, I really like this idea.

I think it's, I think it's a really important way to think about it, right? If that—you know, like this book Thrall. Thrall is not just a title but it's an identity. Right? It's a name, right? A branding if you will. The second thing that jumped out at me: "Also, I find that it's a good idea to tether poems together that are written more or less in the same creative period, um. Lest they sound as

though written by different poets, different versions of you.” How are we reading, “creative period,” as well as “different versions of you”? I’m thinking of, anybody see the movie “Looper”?

Yeah.

You saw it?

Yeah, like two weeks ago.

Did you get—yeah, I saw it two weeks ago too. I’ll be sure to ruin it for ya’ll.

Great.

It’s a lot better than I’m explaining it right now. But, basically there’s, there’s a guy that comes into contact with his older self. Bruce Willis is the old man. What’s the other guy’s name?

Justin Gordon-Levitt? Joseph.

That guy. Um, right? But they come into contact. They’re the same person. Different versions of that same person, right? If we can imagine ourselves ten years, or fifteen years, or twenty years, or fifty years ago, or into the future right? So what does that mean to you, um “creative period” because that’s ambiguous, right? What does—how are we viewing this idea of a “creative

period” as well as different versions of us?

“Creative period” is really abstract. I don’t, I don’t necessarily know how to pinpoint that word. I mean unless you have a really big change in your aesthetic. Right, like, “Oh that was when I was writing prose poems, now I’m writing in heroic couplets.” And you could just get past it. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That’s the only thing that I can think of there. When you are concerned with a particular poetic technique or idea or a particular type of poetics, um, and if that acts like an arc or it starts and rises in waves and then you move on to something else; that is kind of how I read it. Yeah. I think it’s probably supposed to be nebulous, you know? You would think, “Oh this is my, uh.” You’re blue period. Yeah. Right. Right. “Oh well, now I’m in a rose period, so, you know, none of those.” Um, but then again I can certainly see specific things that I would leave out of a manuscript now from, like, last year, um, based on, like, assumptions that I talked about back then and those that I covered, covered in this proposal. So, like, I’m specifically trying to not write in metaphor, or at least straight metaphor. So any poem that has metaphor in it is out, right? So that’s seems like—that’s a creative choice, creative period. Um, but then that doesn’t necessarily exclude ones that fit with that category but are from, like, two years ago. I can definitely see creative periods, I guess, in my own work. Whether or not I can define it properly. Definitions often turn around on me in a way that I don’t really like. But if I look back in my own work I can definitely see creative periods.

Yeah.

Um, and most of them I don’t like. To put it mildly.

And that happens post-creative-period, right?

Right. Like, like—I have yet to hate a period that I am in.

Did you say “yellow period”?

I said “blue period.”

“Blue period,” right. That made me think of, um, Rita Dove and I were talking. We were on a panel. Rita Dove mentioned that poems have colors, and I was like “What the hell does that mean?” She’s like “There’s red poems and blue poems.” I don’t know that just made me think of it, right. There are periods that have colors.

Is she a synesthesiatic?

No, I don’t think so. And also, the second thing, you, you said, you would leave out a poem this year that you might have included in a final manuscript last year, and why did you say that was?

I mean for me specifically cause I’m not trying to write straight metaphor at all. So, it’s a very clear conscious choice.

I, I think it’s interesting. And, and—you, you guys’ll see this: this entire semester I’ll, I’ll teeter

the fence of how much we should discuss publishing. I will generally try to stay away from that pressure and allow this to be a more creative space. But it'll, it'll, it'll come out from time to time. And, and it—one of the interesting things that you all will think about is, is—when I heard you say that “There’s poems that I would leave out now that I might have included last year,” we’re just talking about a year of time, just a year of separation between the pen then and the hand now. You know what I mean? One of the pieces of advice that I kept getting as I was constructing my first manuscript of poetry was, “This will always be your first book.” Right? And there was a lot of pressure, some that I may have just bestowed upon myself but some of it exists objectively, out there with critics, or peers, or even readers. I don’t know if that was advice or more so a threat, right? So that’s something to think about. I remember talking with a pretty well published poet who’s working on his third book, and I said, “Oh, I didn’t know you had—this was your third, I didn’t know you had a book before this one.” He said, “Oh, it’s shit. Don’t go back and read it.” Right? So that’s something that we have to take into consideration as well, you know, is that this sort of lasting impression. Donnie.

Oh. Yeah. Well, I, I think it’s just like—we—the sophomore book, uh, after, er, you know, being particularly underwhelming, uh, is something, uh, that I kept thinking about, you know, what it is, music, art, whatever. Uh, but I think for me, at least, like, considering, you know, grouping things in this, this sort of time frame is, is useful I guess, cause I think that there’s—to a degree, I mean, it’s important to consider all this stuff, to work maybe hard, well, quickly, but at the same time, uh, I think there’s an element of, like, you know, you can’t be like so derog, I can’t be so derogative, derogatory about this that I will never let go of it. And it’s just, like, just two years. Okay. That’s it, like—and move on. You know it’s like, that, you know, the critics or whoever

will sort out all this stuff later. Um, you know, I, I, you know, like, oh, you know I think, think, like, artists would do that; artists are the ones most drawn to it, because it, I think, you know, it seems like if you ever get to a place where you are just doing, you know, if you where like, “Eh, eh,” if you were a guy somewhere not really thinking, not, not, you know, not, just putting things out there, a dumb machine, an automaton, or, or, yah, you are probably missing the point I guess and it’s, like, you are going to start recycling your own, eventually, start recycling yourself, or cannibalizing your own work and the people who start to do that, I think, you don’t have to be, to do that, that’s just lazy, it’s, I don’t really care for that, so I think there’s this effort, you know, to be able to let go well, let go precisely, not, not blindly; that’s important, and just put some structure on that, and do it. I don’t know if that made any sense at all.

You, you were frowning Quincey, is there a reason?

I got totally lost; I had no idea what you were saying. Okay. It was brilliant, actually. I get what you’re saying now. I think.

Yeah it’s like when there’s no one outside, right? And it’s cold, and, you know, December or January? It’s cold and you decide what gloves to put on, right? And then you go buy some beer or cigarettes on the corner while singing something sad.

I’m lost now. Totally.

Then, there’s, there’s hot chocolate or, or there’s coffee, or tea, right? And they could burn you.

I'm just kidding. I was like—I know what you're saying. That is, that is.

I'm really happy you were joking. I was like, "What the fuck is going on?" "Is Patrick having a stroke or what?"

"Well, here's a good metaphor that'll work." No. Um, I know exactly what you're saying, right. That's a difficult decision, and, and, um—you know there's a part of me that feels like in five years we'll always go back to something that we produced five years ago, and have some problems with it potentially or see something you don't like about it. But there is a balance there, between those two poles, between working hard and then being able to let something go—not too late, not too early.

How important do you feel like it is to establish a certain aesthetic? I guess I'm asking this in relation to yourself or your public, like one that you stick with? Like, Bernstein saying that he's a L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poet or something like that? Yeah, I think that's what I'm asking.

You—okay. I don't know how important that is, but I can tell you—I guess the, the, the common thing to do with your first book of poetry, or this is what I heard a lot at least, is it should be a nod to your heroes in a sense. That's always been my way of understanding the approach. Obviously you don't go to jail if you don't do that, or you don't potentially not have that manuscript published if you don't do that. But that was the way that I was always directed. The first book is often, or should be a demonstration of you're aesthetic and those influences, those folks that influenced your aesthetic. If I look back on my first book, that's something that I did in

a sense, right? It was kind of a nod to a lot of blues poets that had informed my writing, um, and, while also trying to situate myself in a new, um, school of blues poets, I guess. Ironically I, I, I resist the labeling of “blues poet”—I, I don’t—that’s not something that I embrace, but I—that’s what I did with my first manuscript, right? So that’s something that you all can think about as well: are you trying to situate yourself in some sort of—this sounds really dry and it sounds like a drag which is why it’s really hard for me to spout these words, but are you trying to situate yourself in some sort of “camp” of writing styles, or anti-camp of writing styles? From, from what I’ve noticed from my favorite writers it seems that their aesthetic really starts to flower and open up after their first book, kind of that second or third book is when they start to—”Oh, wow. I didn’t know you had this in you.” And that’s when they really begin to refine, you know, their craft. A lot of poets, when I read their, their first project I can totally see those influences: “Oh, this sounds like,” or “These are the same moves that this guy or girl did, you know, forty years ago.” And obviously, I’m of the belief that if we produce it then it will be authentic just by that mere fact that if you try to write, um, poems like Quincey’s no matter how hard you’ve tried they’re still going to be Donnie’s poems, right? Um, so, you’re voice will come out, it has to. But yeah—but you guys decide what you want to do. That’s not something that I wanna direct you guys to do. I’m not going to say something as reductive or prescriptive as “Make sure you give your nod to Sylvia Plath” right? “Show me Pound, Bishop, Giovanni. Show me Wright, Whitman.” That’s, that’s up to you. Ya’ll are your own poets, you’re own people. You already know what you want to do, that’s why we’re here, right? I might, I might be able to say something, to come up to you guys in this class and suggest something that may help, at least let’s hope I can do that, but I’m not going to—in graduate school, you know, this isn’t one of those things where I have, I have all of this very specific, very factual and you-have-to-know-this

knowledge, you know what I mean? I'm not this velvet elbowed, pipe smoking guy that's read the great books, or whatever. I'm a peer. Ya'll will help me just as much as, as, as, I'll help you guys.

I'm not ready for a book that's in any way a nod to Sylvia Plath. Yeah. I'm way too immature of a poet for that.

You said you're "way too immature"?

I'm not poetically skilled enough. I don't have the patience for that.

It's, it's interesting because we're involved in the arts in this romantic way. I don't think we can't be. We may think sometimes that it's apolitical, right? Or that the business aspects, that push to be successful (and by that we're talking about money), that that push isn't as strong as it is. Um, but, this is a space for us to just be creative, for us to just be creative and take risks. The outside world really isn't that much of a worry in here. You, we do what we want in here; that should always be the case. Um, alright let's look at this, more of Levine's points. Were there any of the others of the ten that maybe jumped out at you, that maybe you wanted to give a closer look to?

I really liked, um, number nine, like, cause I feel like I have so many poems that I would consider weak, and I have this tendency to be like, "Okay, well, I need to keep you, I need to hold on to you cause I wrote you, so I'll slip you in here." And, like, I do that even when I send

out poems to journals, you know? Like if they take five or seven poems, I'll be like, "I'm gonna throw this one in, cause I have it and I just wrote it, and I know it's weaker but, you know, when it's surrounded by these better poems it will appear perfect." Or it won't matter? Yeah. That's what I always think, just like, "Eh, they'll forgive it." I feel like, somehow, I'm just rooting for that, and it, it never works.

What do ya'll think about that? I remember receiving the same advice, not this advice, the opposite: "Hey, short poems at the beginning, middle, and end, and just, you know, your weaker poems just kind of get in there." You know? What, what do ya'll think about that?

I don't think weaker poems belong in, like, in a manuscript; that's not a good idea, right? Last fall I was talking to Claudia about—I've already written, I've written all new poems for my thesis since the start of this year because of that.

Since the start of the school year, or?

Yeah. Well. And I was talking to her about that, and she was like, "I know that your older poems are weaker but you could put them in this thesis, like, you could just, like, pad your thesis with these poems." And I'm like, "I'm not going to do that." Like, that's not going to happen. So. I wasn't trying to brag. I'm just—my style changed drastically so I just started writing new poems.

Yeah.

I mean I understand what, like, cause I think when it said, like, when—and maybe “pad” is just, like, that’s a length requirement or something. But here it’s more, it said, like, “Oh, you wanna lead with your punchy poems,” or something. And that’s something that makes sense to me, right? Cause I have poems that are louder in terms of how they’re read by the reader, um, and I would like start with those, you know? Like if I was doing a reading I would include those and not the quieter poems that maybe take more time. Like the subtle poems? Yeah, er, like, like, smaller, softer ones, you don’t wanna start off with that. At least I wouldn’t, er, you know? Right. The mood that you want set up. Right. I, uh, I, I like this one too, a lot. That’s, that’s something I have to tell myself, it’s just like, you know, like Faulkner said, right, maybe, it was him, whatever, “You have to kill your darlings,” or whatever. Um, it’s funny cause I can see this and I, I would like to think that I do this, and I, I may do this to one degree or another, like, there was a summer where I was reading a lot of Creeley, Pinsky, some Zukofsky—Who else? Some other people. And every time. Pinsky? Yeah, don’t ask me why. Um, I was like, I could feel, I could feel Pinsky, like while I was reading tapping me on the head, like, “This is how the line sounds.” It just doesn’t fit with the other two. It doesn’t fit; he doesn’t fit with a lot of things. Anyways. So, anyways, and like one of the—Yusef Komunyaaka was another one—and, but one of the things that I noticed is just that there is a lot of bad poetry here. Um, if, like, if, if, like it might be fine for a little bit, but then I’m like, “What just happened? I just got three really bad poems in a row.” Sometimes more. Right. And it’s like, you know, I might want do this, and do it to one degree or another, but, I don’t know. Well, it’s always. You certainly get that with collected works. Yeah, yeah. The first hundred pages of most collections; I can’t really. Right. Some of them are collected. Yusef wasn’t. Creeley was. Whoever, he wrote, he was Russian, he wrote “Bedbugs,” “Bedbugs” and something else. I don’t know. That guy. Mayakovsky.

This leads me to an interesting question. You said that you read this question where you get these strong poems and then you get three—did you use the term “bad”? Bad poems in a row?

Sure, “bad.” Yeah.

“Weak.” Weak poems.

“Boring.”

If we’re thinking about a collection as a poem itself, how do we relate the idea of lines in a poem?

Well, I think it’s, like, the difference between, like, what Quincey was talking about, like, loud and soft poems, is not the same as strong and weak. Um. And it’s the same thing with lines, right? Like the way that you pull a poem together or the way you end a poem can be really gut punching or it can be really subtle. Um, but that’s not the same thing as ending on a weak line, or ending on a strong line.

What about having weaker lines in the middle of a poem, or lines that aren’t doing much work?

I mean, I think—I always see those, and actually I see them in these book, in this book. Um, where, like, she’ll have a line and then she’ll have like three more words after the line and you

can tell they are trying to explain the line that came before it, and I just want to cut them. I just want to draw lines through them. Um, and that happens, like that happens a lot, like poets do that often, but it frustrates me cause they don't trust the reader with good lines. And I don't want to do that in my own work. Like. Go ahead. I think a big deal is, like, you know, we can, we can look for these things, it's definitely good to be wary of them, um, but I think there's gonna be a couple of them that sneak by us. Right? Maybe? I mean, I've, I've—lots of—I've got weak lines all over the place and they always sneak by me. Cause I'll be like, "Oh, I like this one," even though it's completely unrelated. Like it's, it's not, like, like you said it's not doing any work. It might be sounding pretty, but it's not doing any work. Um, and you should, could view it like a sinking ship, uh, to an extent, not, not necessarily a sinking ship, but one that is bogged down with water and you need to make it lighter, um, so get rid of all the useless stuff that you don't need, um, so that you can keep, um—I don't know.

I think it's worth complicating. This, this notion that we won't have bad poems, or weaker poems, or poems that aren't doing as much work as other poems. I'm not saying that I agree one way or another, but I, I think it's worth a discussion, right? Because if we're thinking about the manuscript as a whole, as one single poem, and then if I think about the poems individually, there's areas of a poem that in order for other lines to be successful we need sort of those lulls. I'm thinking about a boxing analogy, sort of that rope-a-dope, right? We wait, we are quite, or close, or unassuming, and then BOOM: "Now I'm going to hit you with an uppercut!" I'm not, I'm not going to just come out swinging uppercuts for every punch. I'd be tired. Right? You'd be tired as a reader of reading these lines, that are always shocking, or beautiful, or sonically charged and even, even, maybe even if they are all amazing, And I know that we're saying that

some lines are just quieter, but let's just disregard this idea of "quiet" and "loud" and focus instead on the work that the lines are doing. Is it still productive or could it be productive for us to incorporate poems, um—Last week we talked about this idea of interludes, or, um, poems that, connective tissue, that resist being something more than connective tissue.

Well, I, I think it depends on, like, how apt the analogy is, depends on, you know, what, what sort of project you want the book to do, and not in the, like, "tell a story" project, book thing, but like—well, maybe it, it does relate, you know, so, like, Trethewey is making a specific argument in this book with all of the ekphrastic poems, right? So she's gonna have lines in some of the poems that are leading towards what she wants to say, versus someone like Zukofsky, where like, especially the end of "A" where it's just like the best lines you could think of without the sense. But then there's the argument for, like, "Why would you have a line that's very good, or a poem that's not very good?" Or something like that, you know? And so, like, you might have a, a manuscript where you want—And I also, I also wanna think about, like, you know the reader might think you have one intent but you might also have different ones, right? So, like, there could be a poem or a manuscript that's a little jokier, more tongue-in-cheek, and, like, the reader is like "Ah, that's just distraction between the big, you know, emotional poles." But for me as a writer, I want that in there to show dexterity, or at least that this poem is still important to my conception of the book even if it's not, like, the one you're gonna remember and pass on to your friends. You know? I. Yeah, I, I, I do understand that there are places like the interim, like the ability to allow the reader to kind of rest and synthesize information, where you're going to—but I don't see that poem as a bad or weaker poem, it's just serving a different purpose. Um, and just like those certain lines would serve a different purpose as well, um, and I feel like I don't, I don't

have those lines. I just have dead weight that I need to, like, get rid of. Yeah, you used the phrase, “connective tissue” so I’m just gonna carry that body metaphor, like, like, I mean, like, like the body is controlled by tendons, like relationships between tendons and muscles, like on the cellular level both of those things have to be equally solid, in order for it to work.

And I think that this is one of the more important conversations that we’ve had thus far, cause I think these are things that you all should think about in terms of what you bring to workshop and what you turn in at the end of the semester, and ultimately what you do for your thesis, because there’s an interdependence between and with these things, right? These poems are depending on each other, right? You used the, um, that, that, the “kill your darlings,” that statement, or that quote. There’s a lot of intuition there. And what we’re doing right now is sort of figuring out how we’ll talk about the work that’s produced for this class. That’s something I want us to really be aware of, is how not only are these poems connecting, but how are we using poems to connect these poems, or how to link these emotions. Maybe you’re a person that resists short poems, but a nice haiku, or a short four or five line poem might be an appropriate connector in some spots in a ten or fifteen page sequence. If all you have are eight line poems, ten line poems, twelve line poems, a longer poem might be necessary even though that might be something that you don’t feel that you could do successfully, or it might take a little more work, or that might be something that you’re not really interested in. But we should worry about what would benefit the whole, cause it’s about the collection. In this class it’s about the five or ten pages, ten to fifteen pages, and not, you know, our stars. This is a star. This is a star. This is a star. How are they connected, and what’s connecting them. Any others from the Levine?

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