DOUBLE HELIX

A Dissertation

by

JEFFREY DAVID STUMPO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Paul Christensen
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ABSTRACT

Double Helix. (May 2011)
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Double Helix approaches the conjunction of visual poetry and long poetry from two distinct but related viewpoints. The first is a scholarly examination of the techniques used to make a long poem visual or a visual poem long. The second is a production of an original long visual poem exhibiting these techniques.

The first part, "The Look of the Long Poem," posits that there are five major techniques which are used in long visual poems: line breaks, imagetexts, white space, page division, and collage and montage. These techniques are grounded in the theoretical work of, among others, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, W.J.T Mitchell, Marjorie Perloff, and Johanna Drucker. The techniques are examined in detail as they play out in the work of Anne Carson, David Daniels, Christine Wertheim, Johanna Drucker, Langston Hughes, Ed Dorn, Lisa Jarnot, and Tom Phillips.

The second part consists of an original sixty-four-page long poem / poetic sequence titled "diluvium." "diluvium" utilizes all the techniques analyzed in the previous part, attempting furthermore to educate the reader in the process of negotiating its parts as it is read – that is, to act as a poetics as well as a poem.

DEDICATION

This work, “diluvium” in particular, is dedicated to my wife, Kate, who has offered both practical assistance and high-minded inspiration during its creation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF POEMS

POEM Page

POEM Page

POEM Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Double Helix comprises two parts, quite separate in their approaches, but united in their theoretical underpinnings. The first part is a scholarly examination of visual long poems. Both long poems in the tradition of oral epics and visual poems in the tradition of verse made to look like an object have long histories, but these histories rarely intersect. I delve into the history of visual poetry, arguing that the definition of such poetry must change over time, as the degree to which a poem is self-consciously visual changes. These roots begin with the introduction of the line break to English verse in the Middle Ages and extend through the centuries of pattern poems, ideograms, and more advanced imagetexts. Their development, which is not necessarily an evolution, is bound to the materiality of printing, from the printing press to the word processor. The poets on whom I concentrate most wrestle with a fundamental series of problems: how does one create a poem that takes place both spacially and chronologically? How does one restore the fluidity of spoken poetry to something inked on a page? The primary techniques involved are the line break, imagetext, white space, page divisions, and collage and montage. The second part of *The Look of the Long Poem* is my effort at creatively

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This dissertation follows the style of the Modern Language Association.

involved are the line break, imagetext, white space, page divisions, and collage and montage. The second part of *The Look of the Long Poem* is my effort at creatively enacting these methods. *diluvium* is a 64-page long poem that is highly visual, drawing on all of the techniques discussed and with a certain degree of intellectual debt to many of the works used as examples. My goal, in other words, is to present a coherent anatomy of long visual poems, demonstrating the relevant techniques through both previously published works and my own creation.

The long poem is traditionally measured in terms of length. In and of itself this seems obvious, but the implication is more drastic. By saying that we measure a long poem by its length, what we are really saying is that we are measuring it over time, that it owes its construction to orality, for which time is the primary dimension. That is to say, when poetry is spoken, it exists in that moment and thenceforth only in the memory. It works in time and over time, even as there is a physical body producing its sounds and perhaps augmenting the telling with gestures. From the violent epic *Beowulf* to the incantatory *Howl*, from the jazz of *The Waste Land* or *Montage of a Dream Deferred* to the stutter-steps of *The Descent of Alette*, the vast majority of long poems owe their primary debt to the voice.

There is a smaller and more variable group of long poems, however, for which the primary dimension is space. These are poems that exist foremost as elements on a page, drawing on our visual rather than oral sensibilities. I say these poems are variable because what was once a revolutionary import from Latin into English poetry, the use of

punctuation and line breaks, is now standard. To classify every poem that contains line breaks as a spatial poem is somewhat disingenuous. The sonnet contains line breaks, in most cases, as a means to augment the rhyme (a vocal device). The early examples, then, are truly spatial poems, but it requires a greater degree of spatial manipulation as time goes on to classify a poem as such.

"Pattern poems," as Dick Higgins calls them, are not as common as vocal poems but nonetheless present in most any language associated with a large civilization. Examples hail from ancient Greece (e.g. a poem in the shape of a double axe) through and beyond the standardized geometric poems of Early Modern England. In a different but related category from "pattern poems," which use a standardized set of letters to reproduce an iconic shape, are ideograms, which produce a more complex icon. Both of these will be subsumed under the term "imagetext." The vast majority of these English works are, furthermore, quite short.

Because most spatial poems in English are pattern poems, they stand as brief and individual pieces. A poem representing a rose appears on one page as the petals of a rose. A poem about rain streaks down the page as though the page were a window. Even those poems that suggest motion are usually contained on a single page – consider most of the work of the Italian Futurists. A handful of works, however, are both long poems and spatial poems.

In the following treatment of long visual poems I will call particular attention to works by Anne Carson, Ed Dorn, Langston Hughes, Johanna Drucker, Christine

Wertheim, David Daniels, Lisa Jarnot, and Tom Phillips. These authors have penned works which are both long poems and poems which simultaneously call attention to their lineation and/or use of white space and/or division of the page and/or of characters in an illustrative manner and/or incorporation of images. Attention will be given throughout to examples of both long poems and spatial poems that do not fit into both categories but will serve as introductions to the poems of greater complexity. The project will be divided up by style, not chronology, as many of these techniques, beyond their initial development, do not owe their evolution to their forebears except in the most indirect of lineages. That being said, I will often begin with the furthest point from my "culmination" works as the nascent moment for a given category. For example, lineation and white space in English are really traced to Old English manuscripts, where English is not the English we speak nor write, and where the differences between orality and literacy are just emerging. The consideration of lineation and white space takes a necessary detour through the Futurists before emerging on the far side of the Concretists and coming nearly full circle with Anne Carson's *Plainwater*. My project is not an exhaustive one in all languages – a task beyond my linguistic capabilities. Rather, I have picked and chosen from among theoretically significant developments that highlight techniques used by the culmination authors, even when these theories are not expressed by the culmination authors themselves.

To begin, I would like to briefly outline the concepts of the visual poem and the long poem, paying particular attention at this juncture to the "pattern" poem. I will then introduce specific techniques and theories in succeeding subchapters.

CHAPTER II

THE LOOK OF THE LONG POEM

Visual Poetry (Vispo)

The most wide-ranging work on visual poetry has been done by Dick Higgins and Johanna Drucker, themselves visual poets as well as critics. Higgins's 1987 book *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown Literature* concentrates on what he terms "pattern" poems, a specific kind of visual poem written in the West prior to the 20th Century. These poems reproduce a particular shape, be it geometric or organic, with their letters.

He traces the earliest pattern poems to the "Phaistos Disk," a disk inscribed in Minoan A in a spiral pattern. Higgins admits that, as no translation for Minoan A exists, there is the possibility that what is on the disk is not actually poetry. The likelihood of using a spiral pattern to record a mundane event like a business transaction is extremely low, however. (4)

Next come "six Hellenistic Greek pattern[s], evidently composed between 325 B.C. And A.D. 200, and shaped as two altars, an egg...a pair of wings...an axe, and a syrinx" (5). Here we see a possible transition from inscribing poems on actual objects – such as altars – to creating abstract representations of objects out of letters.

Higgins notes that no examples of Classical Latin pattern poems have survived the ages, though reports of them do. However, Optatian alone composed at least twenty-five pattern poems, "rectangles for the most part, sometimes called 'carmina quadrata,' with secondary texts within the body of the main one, cancelled [sic] out from the background (so that they are also 'carmina cancellata')" (6). The level of complexity of pattern poems ramps up rather quickly, in other words, though it then stalls for the next few centuries, consisting mostly of rectangular (generally carmina cancellata) or cruciform shapes.

By the eleventh century, pattern poetry is "close to being a void," but the twelfth century sees a resurgence (7). By the time of the fourteenth century, serious innovations are once again being made, especially embodied by Iacobus Nicholae de Dacia, who produces "a triangle, a series of concentric squares, a geometrical construction on squares...a complex star, and a wheel with concentric circles" (9). These innovations still take work within geometric boundaries, but they represent yet a new level of complexity.

Pattern poetry falls off again in the fifteenth century, but the sixteenth sees a revival that is both widespread (with the largest body of pattern poetry of any century) and formalized (with critic/authors such as George Puttenham claiming in *The arte of english poesis* that there are only fifteen geometric shapes appropriate for pattern poetry) (Higgins 10). Puttenham's fifteen shapes do not account, of course, for the great variety of pattern poems in other languages – Higgins notes that "although early Neo-Latin pattern poems tend to follow classical forms (with the addition of suns and columns to

the standard images), by the late sixteenth century a wealth of inventiveness is found" – let alone the strange exclusion of cruciform poems, present even in English (38). Neo-Latin pattern poems alone appear as axes, chalices, globes, labyrinths, trees, temples, stars, and, perhaps most impressively, a "palindromic sceptre and mitre" (38).

Interestingly, more attacks on pattern poetry arise in the sixteenth century than any other, with the invectives coming from authors ranging from Gabriel Harvey to Ben Jonson, who "dismissed pattern poetry as 'a pair of scissors and a comb in verse'" (14). These attacks carry through to the nineteenth century, culminating, as it were, in the titillating reaction of Petöfi Sándor to a cruciform piece by Bulyovszky Gyula: "If possible, for goodness sakes, don't bring out such heaven-shriekingly bad stuff as the poems of Bolyovszky and Halha or whoever the author of the poems was. When I read it I had diarrhea, committed, and became consumptive..." (15).

Higgins dates the death of pattern poetry in English to the eighteenth century, qualifying that with a few nineteenth century examples of comic or light verse, such as Lewis Carroll's tale/tail of the mouse. Any pattern poems at all that appeared in England during the 18th century would have been written in Latin and, furthermore, would likely have been published anonymously. As Higgins puts it, "one might speculate [the English] were by then giving into an instinct in the making of pattern poems by which they were slightly embarrassed" (95).

To recap: we witness an overall increase in the complexity of visual poetry from its earliest examples to the middle of the second millennium, then see an increase in

attacks upon it by other poets, with the form fading out (though to what degree this is cause-and-effect is inconclusive) in or by the nineteenth century. In English, these poems appeared in books rather than broadsides (95), perhaps in an effort to make them less ephemeral/occasional. As pattern poems, these pieces generally hold to inorganic shapes such as geometric designs, crosses, and altars. However, there are stunning exceptions portraying organic subjects, such as a rose (62), wings (100), and even a bear (86). Still, these are without a doubt the exception to the rule.

In the twentieth century, we witness two near-simultaneous experiments/developments in the visual poem. The first, best represented by the ideograms of Guillaume Apollinaire, is a greater variety in the subjects suggested – lips, a woman in a broad-rimmed hat, a horse pawing the ground. The second is the suggestion of motion, also present in Apollinaire's famous “il pleut” but best embodied by the work of the Futurists, particularly the Italian Futurists. Of additional note is the cutup/collage technique used by the Dadaists, in which the content of the text may or may not make sense, but its physicality is informed/performed by detritus from previous uses of written language. In the mid-century, these developments are joined by “concrete” poetry, a form that delineates the border between visual art that merely uses letters as its medium and actual poetry that has a visual component to it.

Rather than continue this study chronologically, however, I would like to split off into discussions of theoretical points, techniques, and styles. My reason for doing so is simple if somewhat arbitrary – the “culmination” poetry with which I will end does not

necessarily follow an evolution from Dada to Futurism to ideogram to concretism (or some other arrangement of these movements). Rather, each of these movements, while taking something from the ones that precede it, were meant to be ruptures with previous poetry. As much as was taken on was discarded by the creators. And at the end of the century, poets have been able to pick and choose from among the various movements without one or another really seeming more outmoded than any other – all were passed by in history. None had a lasting impact on poetry in general the way the development of, say, the line break did (see the appropriate subchapter for more on this development). We can point to a huge cross-pollination between Futurism and modern advertising, but as far as poetry is concerned, these are side shows. Vispo has metamorphosed far beyond its beginnings with pattern poetry. With that in mind, I will concentrate on the use of the poetic line, use of imagetext, use of white space, use of page divisions, and finally the techniques of collage and montage.

I would like to note that I will not be including poetry of the so-called "new media" - video poems, whether produced as standalone videos or as manipulable flash videos on computer. It is my contention that, by no longer implying motion but actually containing motion, these poems represent a return to Time rather than Space. There are some poems which may straddle the boundary, but as I am already working with a small cross-section of poetry, I concentrate my efforts on those poems which appear on the page.

The Long Poem

I had initially intended here to draw upon likewise disparate sources to define the long poem, to delve into its history. I had *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* by M.L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall at the ready. I had Eliot on Poe. I had opinions on Medieval epics and postmodern sequences. I had a train of 20th Century writers of long poems ranging from Thomas Hardy to Frank Stanford, stopping along the way to pick up T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, Hart Crane, George Oppen, Wallace Stevens, H.D., Robert Hayden, Allen Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima, Robert Lowell, Charles Olson, William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Ezra Pound, Charles Reznikoff, Louis Zukofsky, Rita Dove, Jimmy Santiago Baca, and Alice Notley (from the turn of the century to its end, in other words) and still missing plenty of worthy long poems. I then realized two things.

One, there is no singular vision of what constitutes a long poem, let alone a successful one. Is a poetic sequence the same thing as a long poem? Does a long poem have to include a narrative? Do long poems have a minimum number of lines or even pages? Does one have to have one foot in History/Myth to pull it off? Can there be an intensely personal/emotional long poem?

Two, I am not dealing with "normal" long poems, if one can even find a "normal" specimen in a field that has such fuzzy boundaries. Some of the poems in question are long poems. Some are sequences. Many combine aspects of the two, spilling over from one page to another with one set of poems, while on the same pages

one sees discreet, self-contained verse. What I must do is what it appears most writers of long poems have done: set the boundaries myself (and hope that the reader will play along within those boundaries).

Here, then, are the qualifications for long poems such as they will appear in this project. They will be longer than one page. That might seem exceedingly short, all things considered, but keep in mind that the standard visual poem exists only on one page. This method culls most visual poems right away. Even a poem I would find fascinating to bring into the conversation, Steve McCaffery's "Carnival," exists on multiple pages but goes off in different directions all at once. It is, despite appearing on multiple pages due to space constraints, a one-frame visual, which one can see online in the "view assembled" or "view map" versions of the piece in the archives at the Coach House Books website. This brings us to the second qualification – linearity. Not all of these poems will proceed A-B-C. Some will jump around, and indeed, the concept of the montage will be covered at length. However, there is some narrative present in each work, a story or prescription that takes the reader from position A to position Z somehow. More often than not, there is at least one character present, and, more often than not, one or more characters go through a change, be it emotional or intellectual or physical. Sometimes there are many characters, and it is their rotating experiences that engender in the reader the changes necessary to call the poem narrative.

The Line

In her thorough study *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe tracks the transition from oral poetry that merely happens to be written down into poetry that is specifically meant to be viewed on the page. Her examples are all from Old English, which in all practical terms places it outside the scope of my English-language examination. However, much as I will necessarily have to refer to extra-Anglo developments in the 20th Century later on, here I must delve briefly into a tongue for which I need a translator's dictionary in order to understand. Specifically, I will touch on the appearance and standardization of line breaks and lettering in (Old) English.

Latin poetry and Old English poetry were not rendered the same way in the eighth century. O'Keeffe examines actual manuscripts and notes that the Latin appears much the way we modern (if not postmodern) readers are used to seeing it. The poetry is divided into lines, generally broken at a metrical point, and initial letters are capitalized. We are meant to see the difference between lines, between words, for that matter.

On the other hand, the earliest renditions of, say, “Caedmon's Hymn” are not lineated. In some versions the words are even broken at odd points, such as between morphemes, or have no more space between words than between letters. O'Brien O’Keeffe concludes that these writings of “Caedmon's Hymn” owe their existence to oral transmission. Whether they were recited or read aloud by a master scribe or monk, the scribes who recorded them recorded them in such a way that they must be vocalized

to be sensible. That being said, O'Brien O'Keeffe is careful to point out that "orality and literacy are 'pure' states in a theoretical sense only, and that, in fact, cultures and individuals find themselves in a continuum whose end-points are orality and literacy" (25). In this continuum, her primary marker is conventionalized spatialization – lineation, spacing, capitals, etc.

The difference between orality and literacy is something the author of *Solomon and Saturn I* took seriously. The poem is presented as "an oral event, a dialogue in which Saturn asks Solomon to enlighten him about the power of the Pater Noster" (48). Solomon explains but does not utter the prayer, simultaneously making an object of the Pater Noster (i.e.. its letters are committed to the page) and emphasizing that its power, as O'Brien O'Keeffe puts it, "can only be *used* by one who speaks or sings the prayer" (50). Knowing about power is different than having power, and speech is specifically rendered as actual power in this situation. The letters of the prayer have power when uttered, but written versions are merely signs that point to the "real" letters, a process of "alienation" and "memory" (52). The author goes so far as to split speaking into the realm of Good, the utterance of Christ's Logos, and writing into an art of the devil, who "inscribes on a man's sword deadly letters to weaken its force...whose effect can only be countered by reciting the Pater Noster" (56-57).

In her analysis of the grammar, syntax, and lexicon of *Solomon and Saturn I*, O'Brien O'Keeffe concludes that its written transmission parallels that of oral transmission in its use of formulae. She demonstrates that "formulaic guesses" were an

essential part of reading and that the scribes "naturally and quite unconsciously substituted other alliterating words which were also metrically correct" for words in the prior manuscript, or perhaps in the prior dictation (76). This resulted in variations across manuscripts much like ones found in oral poetry, the formulae providing a point of connection between the two. In fact, O'Brien O'Keeffe comes to call both oral and written transmissions "performances," a useful term later on as poets of the 20th Century (ironically?) attempt to break with what they view as formulaic writing.

Next, in turning from the *Metrical Preface* to Alfred's *Pastoral Care*, O'Brien O'Keeffe makes yet another point pertinent to this study. She calls for a disentangling of "'literacy, a word which refers to a condition of living within a society and a technology, from 'reading' and 'writing,' words which refer to an individual's ability to decode written language to spoken and spoken language to written. The separation of condition from praxis helps to clarify the fact that literacy is not a single phenomenon, but rather multiple phenomena which are place- and time-specific" (79). This is to say, the ability to translate the written word into the units of sound which precede it in learning does not mean that said individual can now render sound into words on a page. Furthermore, to be literate requires a complex relationship with the written word, a dance, if you will, on the page. A piece like the *Metrical Preface*, O'Brien O'Keeffe argues, was composed by someone who could certainly read, but this does not necessarily point to literacy on Alfred's part. He may very well not have been able to write, much as Charlemagne never mastered the latter art, and this would have produced in him a different relation to text and composition than someone who could write for the page. She reintroduces the

continuum of orality-literacy here, noting that the *Metrical Preface* is closer to literacy than “Caedmon's Hymn” was, but that it is certainly not a completely literate composition. Alfred uses formulae from elsewhere in English verse that reliably suggest he composed orally, even as he himself could read.

While O'Brien O'Keeffe concentrates on a problem, namely the reduction of variant manuscripts to a single text (i.e. ignoring the manuscripts' differences), she strikes at the heart heart of the evolution of the orality-literary continuum in her conclusion to this chapter: “With its imposition of modern presuppositions about the meaning of space, the purpose of graphic cues, the nature of 'word' or even of 'text,' it gives us a readable text...” (94). She notes that in fact we have several readable texts/manuscripts, though each is a sign of individual reading/writing by scribes, not a sign of an encompassing literacy. The complexity of the written word has grown, in other words, but it is an experiment by individual scribes, not programmatic. This will be echoed in later years, in further attempts to make the written word more than just a guide to the spoken.

In her chapter on the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, O'Brien O'Keeffe brings to our attention the spacing of letters. There are four manuscript version of the *Chronicle*, and she points out that in all four “one is struck by the elasticity of the concept 'word.' The writing of a space is not yet fully significant, an inference to be drawn from the lack of a graphic concept of 'word' as a fixed visual unit” (127). Lineation has been somewhat standardized by this point.

Poems with line breaks are the normal state of affairs for the ensuing centuries. Actually, they remain the norm, but they are – for the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the early Modern period – the only game in town. Line breaks are first challenged, in the West at any rate, by French writers in the 18th Century. Upset with the strict rules being applied to poetry by the Academy, some poets began composing in prose that was still lyrical, a direct challenge. While the initial battles took place in the 1700's, it was not until Baudelaire (*Spleen de* Paris, 1869) and Rimbaud (*Une Saison en Enfer*, *1873*) that prose poetry saw any kind of popularity.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Walt Whitman was producing the first edition of his *Leaves of Grass,* a work which stretched the line to its limits, especially in that first edition. Whereas later editions of *Leaves of Grass* were in small, standard-sized volumes (which Whitman later preferred, see Reynolds 352), the first edition is a nearly broadside-sized collection of merely 95 pages. Whitman's characteristically rolling lines run out to their full length, making the dimensions of the book a design to hold the poetry. Whitman's verse, in other words, was not just bombastic, did not just use long lines, but was so revolutionary that the book containing it had to be changed to accommodate it.

Presumably for economic reasons, the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* has rarely been emulated other poets. Prose poetry, however, has gone on to periods of growth and loss, perhaps because the physical boundaries of a prose poem mold themselves to a page, rather than vice-versa for Whitman's first edition. Some of the modernists attached

themselves to it. Gertrude Stein, in particular, focused on the possibilities of the form when she created *Tender Buttons*, an extended meditation on / reinvention of four themes: objects, food, rooms, and language itself. These were still small poems, however, instances that linked to each other by theme, not by narrative.

If we fast-forward to 1971, we have the first true sequence of prose poems in Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. Hill intertwines a story of childhood and of the Anglo-Saxon king Offa:

> The princes of Mercia were badger and raven. Thrall
> to their freedom, I dug and horded. Orchards
> fruited above clefts. I drank from honeycombs of chill sandstone.
>
> 'A boy at odds in the house, lonely among brothers.'
> But I, who had none, fostered a strangeness; gave
> myself to unattainable toys. (110)

These lyrical musings extend into thirty numbered poems, each consisting of one to four stanza-paragraphs. With one exception, a line in "XXX" that contains something akin to a caesura - "he began to walk towards us he vanished" - Hill's poems are distinctly proselike (134). Hill himself referred to them as "versets," but most others who treat them refer to them as prose poems, among them Brian McHale in his chapter on Hill and Armand Schwermer in *The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems* (Haffenden 21; McHale 97). Hill performs a double-archaeology, the phrase archaeology borrowed from McHale, in that he excavates both the history of Offa and the story of the child doing the excavating in a series of layers,

each poem or short grouping of poems providing another layer. In short and in sum, Hill's sequence is both prose-poetry and narrative.

By 1995, we find Anne Carson's *Plainwater* playing with the division between prose and poetry quite directly, interweaving lyric essays with lined and prose poems until, by the end of the volume, one is unsure whether the text at hand is lyrical non-fiction, narrative and personal prose poetry, or some subtlety that perfectly marries the two.

The collection opens with a multi-part section titled “Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings.” These in turn begin with a simultaneously fractured and run-on series of poems, presented as fragments in translation. The first, “fr. 1 // What Is Life Without Aphrodite?” captures the feel of all twenty-three fragments well:

> *He seems an irrepressible hedonist as he asks his leading question.*
> Up to your honeybasket hilts in her ore—or else
> Death? For yes
> how gentle to go swimming inside her the secret swimming
> of men and women but (no) thenceforth
> the night hide toughens over it (no) then bandages
> Crusted with old man smell (no) then
> bowl gone black nor bud nor boys nor women nor sun no\
> Spores (no) at (no) all when
> God nor hardstrut nothingness close
> its fist on you. (3)

Note the emphasis on lineation, how alternate lines are indented to increase the sensation of movement and disorientation as the sentence, really a run-on fragment, winds up. Almost all the poems in this section reprise this theme, even those as short as two lines.

Of the exceptions, three are but a single line, one is all left-justified, and the final one actually indents the third line twice.

As if to cast form in relief, the second part of "Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings" is absolute prose, an essay, in fact, called "Mimnermos and the Motions of Hedonism." Carson's language is at times poetic - "Sun is the only pulse that runs by itself" - and at times scholarly - "Exactly at the middle of the poem, which consists of ten verses organized in five elegiac couplets, time cuts through the narrative of flesh: '*but (no) then*.' It is a very unusual caesura, notably nonlinear psychology" (13; 15). On the whole, the tone of the essay is learned, but it is the lines that interest us at this moment. It's what one would expect of an essay: paragraphs, proper indentations, prose.

Not content to stick with even two forms, the third and final part is a mock interview between an unidentified interviewer and Mimnermos himself. The sentences here spill into each other, not quite fragments or run-ons but streaming thoughts that exist without the usual editing by the interviewer, though of course the paradox is that these are highly-edited productions. A sample exchange looks like this:

> I: Do you dream of her
>
> M: No I dream of headlights soaking through the fog on a cold spring night
>
> I: Now it is you who is angry
>
> M: I'm not angry I am a liar only now I begin to understand what my dishonesty is what abhorrence is the closer I get there is no hope for a person of my sort I can't give you facts I can't distill my history into this or that home truth and go

> plunging ahead composing miniature versions of the cosmos to fill the slots in your question and answer period... (25)

Here we observe Carson testing the boundaries of a familiar form. “The Interviews (3),” from which I've drawn this sample, reveals the text to be a direct audio transcription, evidenced by the “[tape noise]” at its start (24). Still, the absolute breathlessness of Mimnermos's words in the above sample strongly suggest that Carson removes punctuation specifically to increase that breathlessness. This contrasts with the line breaks, which give plenty of room for differentiation. It is a study in opposites, structurally, but ultimately works as an interview.

In the next section of *Plainwater*, “Short Talks,” Carson presents a series (but not sequence) of prose poems on various subjects, all beginning with “On.” “On the Mona Lisa” runs

> Every day he poured his questions into her, as you pour water from one vessel into another, and it poured back. Don't tell me he was painting his mother, lust, et cetera. There is a moment when the water is not in one vessel nor in the other—what a thirst it was, and he supposed that when the canvas became completely empty he would stop. But women are strong. She knew vessels, she knew water, she knew mortal thirst. (37)

Besides the fact that Carson has thus far exhibited exceptionally strong writing, we need to note that she has done so in four different forms: lined poetry, essay, interview, and prose poem. All treat the line in a different way, and all are fairly clearly delineated – even the essays and prose poems.

Section III, “Canicula di Anna,” returns to the lined poetry, then essay format. There is a difference in this closing essay, however, in that it is told in the first person. Rather than taking a completely objective stance, Carson lets emotion show through: “You do not know how this vague wish of yours fills me with fear...I have worn it around my throat like a fox collar since the moment I said '*Vediamo*'” (88). Subtle as it is, this is our first real blending of the styles that have preceded it.

Section IV, “The Life of Towns,” produces yet another interesting variation on sentence structure, carried out through an odd combination of punctuation and line breaks, as in “Wolf Town”:

> Let tigers.
> Kill them let bears.
> Kill them let tapeworms and roundworms and heartworms.
> Kill them let them.
> Kill each other let porcupine quills.
> Kill them let salmon poisoning.
> Kill them cut their tongues on a bone and bleed.
> To death let them.
> Freeze let eagles.
> Snatch them when young let a windblown seed.
> Bury itself in their inner ear destroying equilibrium let them have.
> Very good ears let them yes.
> Hear a cloud pass.
> Overhead. (99)

Once again, Carson muddies the waters as to what a sentence is, what job a line does. The poem evokes memories of Gwendolyn Brooks's “We Real Cool,” but goes one step further. Besides placing the repetitious phrase at the beginning of each line and carrying sentences from one line to the next, there is a full stop at the end of each line. This

forcefully emphasizes the line as endpoint, yet the sentences continue her earlier run-on motif. The line break is, in a sense, broken by these poems, made schizophrenic. And what erupts or evolves from this new status?

"The Anthropology of Water," *Plainwater's* final section, is told in seven parts and is the longest single section of the book. All of these seven parts are told primarily in prose, or so it seems.

Carson begins with a brief essay, "Diving: Introduction to the Anthropology of Water," which recounts the poet's informal introduction to anthropological studies, as well as an aspect of her own scholarship – Classical mythology, specifically the tale of the daughters of Danaos. There is little that draws our attention here, except that she begins the section with an epigraph from Kafka. Epigraphs have appeared elsewhere in the book, but they are about to take on a structural significance.

The second part of "The Anthropology of Water," "Thirst: Introduction to Kinds of Water," starts with an epigraph from Thales, then tells the poet's lyrically-guarded story of a troubled relationship with her father, who had by the time of the story "lost the use of some of the parts of his body and of his mind" (119). His dementia results in word salad, in rage, in confusion and odd solutions for new problems, such as Carson's mother telling her father it was six o'clock when it was actually five, hoping that he would then write six on pieces of paper until it was time to come to dinner (121). Carson's explicit themes here are fathers and daughters, sanity, and penance, the last of which she explores at length in the following part. But strongly at work here, too, is the idea of the

broken line, the broken mind, the mind/line that doesn't know where to stop and the mind/line that is shut like a trap. We begin to realize that, while her relationship with her father may not be the most important force behind the entire book, the idea that the world does not operate on an "either/or" but on an "and" basis is strongly at work. The structure of what has come before all leads up to this moment, all the various forms crystallize here.

"Kinds of Water: An Essay on the Road to Compostela," appears straightforward at first. Each entry begins with a date, a day on which she is going on a pilgrimage across northern Spain. This is followed by a haiku or other brief poetic statement by a Japanese poet. This is in turn followed by a description of what Carson did on that day, often set in relation to "My Cid," the man with whom she finds herself traveling. Most days end with an aphorism about pilgrims.

What is interesting about the form is the beginning poems seem to have the effect of Baudrillard's Disneyland, set there to convince us that what follows, since it lacks line breaks, is prose. But the lyrical quality of much of the description is certainly poetic. Consider "No one eats black bread here. Spanish bread is the same color as the stones that lie along the roadside—gold. True, I often mistake stones for bread. Pilgrims' hunger is a curious thing" (134). Are these lines really so different than the ones we encountered as prose poems back in "Short Talks?" The prose of the volume has increasingly become this poeticized prose, even when not marked as poetry. Further, there is a parallelism in the start and the end of each day – haiku on one side, aphorism

on the other. Each is a brief, sometimes lyrical, often thoughtful utterance. On that same day, Carson ends by describing pilgrims as "people whose recipes were simple." Two days later, an even more haiku-like phrase ends the ostensible-prose: "Pilgrims were people who carried knives but rarely found use for them" (137).

What we see here is a blending of poem and prose, conducted over the course of the volume by increasingly stressing the line and the work it does. Initially clear poetic lines and prosaic, well, not-lines mix up, start to spill over or stop short. Sentences are called into question, and eventually the purpose of a line break is confirmed and rebuked at once. Then we arrive at this final section, wherein clear differences in poetry and prose, expressed expressly through line breaks, are in fact red herrings. Everything is poetry here.

After a brief definite-essay, Carson condenses the forms further, now interweaving translations of "Chinese wisdom," bits of poetry and advice her lover tells her, song lyrics, and the story of a relationship into one-to-two sentence-stanza pieces organized by location. The appearance of this section harkens back, not to the essays, but to the poems, arranged as they fit on the page, sometimes one, sometimes two, beginning and ending where they will, as opposed to each beginning at the start of a new page. This part, "Just for the Thrill: An Essay on the Difference Between Women and Men," ends with a numbered list of map locations and an "inscription" "found" on one of the maps.

The final two parts of "The Anthropology of Water" are possibly prose poems. They are possible extremely tiny lyric essays. They are called essays in the final title,

"Water Margins: Essays on Swimming by My Brother." The first, "*Friday. 4:00 a.m. Not swimming.*" reads "Black motionless night. Bushes. The swimmer stands at the window. Ducks are awake down by the water's edge" (248). It may appear clear, if one were simply to flip to this point in the book, to decide what sort of literature one was reading. But taken in context, in light of the ever-shifting place of the line, we simply cannot be sure what we are encountering here.

From its non-use in Old English verse to its clever and dazzling obfuscation in Carson, the line has come full circle. Of course, it remains the preferred method of marking poetry by the vast majority of writers and readers. But there are those who call attention to it as a marker, who celebrate the line and who challenge it. It is not the end of the story, of course. There are ways of presenting text that go beyond simple left-to-right lines.

Imagetext

In his excellent *Picture Theory*, W.J.T. Mitchell coins/refines the term imagetext in several variations:

> the typographic convention of the slash...designate[s] "image/text" as a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation. The term "imagetext" designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text. "Image-text," with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and verbal. (89)

That is to say, when text and image appear together in a discordant manner, we are witnessing image/text, something divided. When they appear in concord, we have imagetext. Image-text simply reveals that there is some relationship between the two. This section of my study examines a litteral (to borrow a term from scUm, the society for cUm|n linguistics) version of imagetext, wherein the words themselves either are images (a rarer case) or the letters are arranged to form images, implication of motion, etc. (far more common). I would like to concentrate in particular on three relatively recent works - *+|'me's-pace: an examination of the English Tongue from the viewpoint of poetry*, by Christine Wertheim, *THE WORD MADE FLESH*, by Johanna Drucker, whose theoretical examinations of typography will also be discussed, and *YEARS*, by David Daniels. Before getting into these works, however, I would like to comment further on the history of the materiality of printing and offer up a context for what is primarily a 20th/21st Century phenomenon, as well as introduce some minor (in terms of this study) examples of imagetext in long poems.

The significance of the printing press, or rather moveable type, or rather a hand mold for the casting of type, cannot be underestimated. Though the transition from a scribal culture to one of the printing press was gradual – some scribes became printers, and many others worked for clergy and governmental bodies long after presses were available – the shift in mental state is a huge one.

And yet certain ideas remained the same, not to be challenged until the days of Whitman, and not to have a full fusillade until the typographic experiments of the

Futurists. I refer to the concept of the divine (specifically a Christian God). In *Gutenberg: How One Man Remade the World with Words*, John Man describes Gutenberg's attention to detail, down to the particular use of hyphens in his famous bible, as "super-scribal, super-human, and therefore with a touch of the divine" (171). The proportions of the page are classical at roughly 5:8, and the text occupies a space with the same proportions. The attempt here is, put another way, to remove oneself from the printing process as much as possible. Letters are all equal (at least without magnification), stylistic quirks are at a minimum, and lines are clean. As Johanna Drucker puts it in *Poemuring the Word*, "the text which is unmarked (the Bible) seems to speak itself, be **present**, and has always been, **uninflected** and unchallenged...transcending all particulars to be part of the general realm of truth" (139).

It is no coincidence that the Reformation occurred within a century of the spread of the printing press. Without easy access to the masses, Luther's message would have been confined to specialists, and he would have been segregated and burned like so many so-called heretics before him. But his books took hold all across Germany, and soon farther than that. This is the power of printing, of the printed-not-written word, that has been relied upon by so many revolutionaries, heretics, and poets since. It is the power of multiplication (for more on Luther and the power of the press, see Chapter 10 of John Man's *Gutenberg: How One Man Remade the World with Words*).

Hand in hand with multiplication is precision; the printing press allowed for greater similarity than ever before. The spelling of one manuscript might differ from

another. For that matter, in different dialects, entire passages might be rendered with different words. Printing was transmission with less loss than writing, perhaps even on par with oral transmission in cultures that held the spoken word sacred (e.g. Islam). It introduced an era in which people at one end of a country would write the same as people at the far end, in which the information doled out by kings or revolutionaries, clerics or heretics, could reach the masses (and before that, the elites) in its precise form. And the information was held in the word.

Books were increasingly vehicles for thought rather than a combination of thought and material production. The idea of beautiful books slowly became separate from the idea of books, period. Eventually, books could be made cheaply, distributed on cheap paper, printed with cheap type, consumed (in various senses of the word) by an eager populace. And all this time, with a handful of artistic exceptions like William Blake, the type is ever playing second fiddle to the content. Twin walls had been erected – one around the mind, one (invisible) around the text on the page. The invisible but omnipresent God who cannot be named, cannot be contained by mere letters.

We should not pretend that the 20th (or 21st) Century is the only one to see shifts in religiosity, in various attempts towards agnosticism or atheism. We can, however, mark an interesting comparison between the worldly ideals of the Italian Futurists, with their emphasis on airplanes, radios, bombs, machismo, etc. and the materiality of their poetry. As opposed to the previous centuries, in which the text was meant to fade into the background, foregrounding the idea, F.T. Marinetti and his compatriots developed a

style of poetry that foregrounded the power and immediacy of the letter. Their volleys, and stylistically-related but philosophically-quite-disinct ones from the Dadaists, did not laud God. They stormed into the world as beings of the world, and the frenetic/dynamic cover page of Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tumb* was their clarion call.

This is where I feel the strongest line has been drawn between the secular and the divine in poetry, and it is no coincidence that the letter is the medium of change. Due to my own limited language skills (and necessity to draw boundaries somewhere), however, I am dealing with English-language poems. Thus, while Marinetti's masterwork fulfills the requirements of being both visual poetry and long, narrative poetry, I will at this point examine some contemporary examples of the form in English. For more on the typographical revolution in Futurism and Dadaism as it occurred in other languages, see Johanna Drucker's *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923*.

The first of the smaller works I would like to consider is Qwo-Li Driskill's “Map of the Americas.” Driskill's poem is straightforward and yet, perhaps, deep in its theoretical stance. “Map of the Americas” appears in his volume *Walking with Ghosts* and goes for only three pages. Of those three pages, only the middle page has any visual poetry. And yet, the result is fairly profound. An address to a lover, the poem uses the time-honored trope of comparing the body to a landscape. Here, though, there is the added layer of Driskill's background, a self-described “Cherokee Two-Spirit/Queer writer, scholar, educator, activist, and performer also of African, Irish, Lenape, Lumbee,

and Osage *ascent* [hir emphasis]" ("Qwo-Li Driskill: Dragonfly Rising"). The poem's initial lines, "I wish when we touch / we could transcend history," are not Romeo and Juliet imagery, but grounded in genocide, which s/he then goes on to describe (9). At the end of the first page, Driskill declares, "Look: my body curled and asleep / becomes a map of the Americas," setting off the second page of the poem, which is a description of the narrator's body arranged in the shape of the Americas. Either of these sections by themselves are, to be honest, nothing particularly original. The first part mourns, the second part, as noted earlier, compares topographical features to bodily ones. Taken together, however, the body is not just a landscape, but a particular one, scarred and scared and full of history. The narrator embodies the history of hir people – to touch one is to remember the other, is to walk with ghosts, so to speak. The markers Driskill uses are not merely erotic, though they are, but evocative of pre-Conquest culture – lips tasting of maize, venison, and wild strawberries, for instance (11). For this short duration, the narrator is Whitmanesque, is the whole thing, a hemisphere/history/lover/survivor, is the shape of things that have been and that could be.

This is a fairly traditional take on imagetext – the text literally (litterally) forms an image. An extended example of a similar process is the *Years* series by David Daniels. Each poem recounts/represents a year of his life, from 1933 to 2002, with one forward-looking piece set in 2133. Most of the images created are recognizable shapes. "1933," for instance, which describes his coming into the world, is in the shape of an upside-down baby. Even the simple images often do double-duty, however. Take that

upside-down baby, for instance. In the narrative content of the poem, things are inverted. Daniels is not just born; he “fell from beyond the stars.” His mother, who has been advised to get an abortion since this would be her fourth child, born during the Great Depression, challenges instead that she will love her child like no other. The result, in Daniels's words: “My mother's main love model was to to prove to me to be so abusive, weird, and stupid, I am shuddering to think of mom's idea of hate.” The imagetext baby is not just a baby, but a baby in a topsy-turvy world.

Jumping ahead to “1943,” we have what is initially a simpler imagetext. The words on the page are divided into rough V shapes, three of them. The narrative recalls an incident when Daniels spoke out in class against his “stooged and brain dead teachers.” He is dragged to his older brother's classroom and publicly berated. Later on, his brother, unlike “in war movies,” tells Daniels to “Poemht [his] own battles.” Here the V shapes are working on several levels at once. In the first place, they represent a manifestation of an image from the poem. Daniels recalls looking at a window and thinking the panes looked like flying Vs. They also represent V for Victory, as telegraphed (pun intended) by the dot-dot-dot-dash that closes out the poem, the Morse code for V. It can be noted that Daniels also heard the beginning of Beethoven's fifth symphony upon looking at the windows, and this was the very piece of music that accompanied broadcasting of the V Morse code by the BBC during WWII, which of course was ongoing during 1943. It is not just a historic allusion, however. There is a split in the poem, a psychosocial one between the poet and his school and the poet and his brother, and this reveals the V for Victory to be a somewhat hollow gesture, perhaps

even a mockery. Daniels wins a moral victory over his idiot teachers, but his own family will not help him, and at the end of the day he is still downtrodden. He is an outcast, split off, ostracized.

In “1953,” we see a trawler or small boat atop a sea of words. “1962” is a swirling, surreal production, both in terms of narrative (with its odd and spiteful characters like Sinfan and Sir Archibald Blood, called Bloody) and its images. This year is divided into seven “antos,” in which Daniels might use an easily recognizable outline, such as a body against a wall, though it should be noted that he is more creative than viewing the body/wall from the side – rather, they are seen head-on, distinguished from each other by the use of boldface and italics – and might create something that at first appears to be a tree branch but, as one scrolls down the page, turns out to have human legs, nearly a Bosch-like creation. In “1963,” we have an apartment building, and a face in the sky that may be the sun, and actual icons used, such that the word “bus” does not appear, but there is a text-sized image of a bus next to the apartment building made of words. And so the sequence goes, adding little by little to Daniels's life, piling images atop images, changing out techniques as necessary to make a point or points. Some of them are, as in the examples I highlighted above, exceptionally complex, while some merely accompany the narrative.

Some works are not quite so straightforward in their representations. Their imagetext is in fact imagetext, concordant, but they are more abstract in their use of typography. Most of these are not particularly easy to find, either existing entirely online

(but known only to those with their fingers distinctly in the pie of contemporary vispo, such as members of the Spidertangle listserv) or in artists' books. *THE WORD MADE FLESH*, by Johanna Drucker, for example, can be found at a handful of university libraries. A personal copy will, at the time of this writing, cost over a hundred dollars for a volume that is roughly the dimensions of a children's picture book. This is no tangent – just as I began by talking about the materiality of printing, here it rears its head again. To own a physical copy of many of these books requires one to be a collector, not a mainstream consumer. To make the work available more widely is possible, but that requires putting it online. This creates a double-bind. One, it is hard to make any profit at all, even the small profits of a small press. Two, and perhaps more importantly, the stability of these volumes is vastly decreased, liable to disappear entirely should a particular website go under or a single box get caught in a flooded basement.

Of the longer physical volumes of narrative vispo, two stand out to me. One is the previously mentioned volume by Johanna Drucker. The other is *+|'me's-pace: an examination of the English Tongue from the viewpoint of poetry*, by Christine Wertheim. Like Daniels, Wertheim uses the individual letter as the basis for her visual composition. Instead of concentrating on letters as interchangeable building blocks in a larger picture, however, she returns to the notion that letters are symbols and, as such, can be rendered in such a way that they mean more than one thing.

For example, the lowercase "t" is replaced in most of the work by a plus sign: "+." This does not mean that the meaning of lowercase t disappears, though. Instead, it is

a signifier working for multiple signifieds. + means “t” as well as “and” or “plus,” and certain passages are written explicitly to reveal where a word can be made to have both meanings at once. The repetition of the textimage “+|me,” which spells “time,” also uncovers the pattern “+|me +|me +|me,” or “me + I” (34). Wertheim later adds an apostrophe to the textimage, +|'me, giving us “I'm me” and even “I'm time.”

Page 34 is one of several moments in the volume when she lays out a progression meant to help the reader process the metamorphosing phrases. Ignoring line break for a moment, we get the sequence “space-time to time-space to +|'me'S-pace.” We have the additional readings now of “time's pace,” which is then given the synonym “rhythm,” run through a couple more iterations and eventually putting forth “|+me=rh|thm.” I plus me equals rhythm. The narrative, such as it is, is a strong proponent of an actualized self, describing how one is both the active I, which is placed in the subject portion of a sentence, and the passive me, which is placed in the predicate portion of a sentence. From this simple grammatical beginning, the instructions and examples wheel faster and faster, bringing in more and more iterations, including letters as characters in a theatrical production and a psychological/mythological reading of the word “+he-M-O+her” that emphasizes its Otherness and multiplicity (chapter 7). Mother includes other, meaning the mOther is constructed in opposition to the I, which is masculine. It also ends up paired here with “them,” as in “them others.” This is in opposition to the “the|'Sone,” or son, or “they's one,” which brings all things together in itself. Part of the goal of Wertheim's/scUm's project is to recover the mother, the Other, and the other part is to

explode the very language it creates, undermining single definitions for words, even when those are definitions the project develops on its own.

The final pages of chapter 7 portray an incredibly layered set of imagetexts that sum up and/or undermine and/or illustrate and/or obfuscate the lessons of all that has come before in the volume. Even rendering one line gives us such possibilities as “they is songs I is not,” “the son's eye is snot,” or even “this song's I is no and” (102). Far be it from me to say all the permutations make sense, but the fact that they exist is part of the exercise. Decoding the language, recoding it, then exploding it.

Johanna Drucker also takes the word by the letter, occupying a philosophical place near Wertheim, it would seem, in that she attempts to coax multiple uses out of a single letter/symbol rather than condensing multiple letters/symbols to a single visual (as per Daniels). Her technique is somewhere between the two, more visually artistic than Wertheim but more letter-centered than Daniels. In *THE WORD MADE FLESH*, the letters we first pay attention to come in various shapes and sizes. Drucker plays with typeface to render a small capital “I,” for instance, then adding on the next page a massive uppercase T that dominates nearly a quarter of the page (and the pages themselves are large; over ten inches tall and over twelve inches wide), creating the word “IT” (5-6) (NB: the pages in the volume are unnumbered, and thus I am numbering them myself beginning with the first page, despite it being a blank endpaper)**.** One page later, the first possible sentence is formed: “the tongue IT LAY.” I say possible because of the unusual spacing of the words. The “T” still dominates, though the “I" has grown

somewhat and is matched by the word “LAY.” “the tongue” hovers to the right of the “T”'s crossbar, such that one would initially read something like “IT LAY the tongue” if reading left-to-right, but if reading top to bottom, one would get either “the tongue IT LAY” or “T the tongue I LAY.” This is one way in which her text progresses, bends back on itself, makes its reader work, and makes makes of itself more than just a broadside or single-panel visual poem. There is a progression here.

There is another progression that begins on page ten. Beginning with the words “ALL THE WATERS, ELEM / ENTS AND PRIMAL FISH,” a series of evenly spaced red capital letters appears. They are evenly spaced both vertically and horizontally on the page and, if they are interrupted by another letter, such as that large “T,” they stop and pick up again on the other side of the letter (10). This series of statements runs on for the entire work, ending at last with the word “TONGUE.”

The visual nature of the words only increases as the pages go on. On page 11, A large T does double-duty, serving as the initial letter in the opening statement “To exert authority upon the unbecoming modesty of the unsuspecting muscle” and a middle letter in the next part of the phrase, “WITH a deliberate intention.” The H in turn is part of “WITH,” THIS,” and “THING.” In contrast to one sentence rendered on the page, “This is a thing which refuses for some reason to point to itself,” this page is constantly pointing at itself, pointing at its type, its letters and their bravado/flexibility.

Drucker is an artist by training and a professor by trade, but her interests over the years have ever turned to language and letters, to poetry. She remarks in *Poemuring the*

Word that, "Writing the **visual** is the continual appearing coming into being of lines of text made on the page as the sometimes linear sometimes spatial and temporal accretion of **activity** which holds its own across time and space as an artifact of **language**, not merely an incident" (139). In other words, to produce letters the way she does is to create a language that is constantly coming into being. A letter means one thing in one context, and a new thing if perspective is shifted a line down. The letters are spatial, appearing all over the page but always in an order that can be decoded. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the letters are not just the residue of verse; they are the things that make it possible. Drucker, in her creative and scholarly work, cannot/will not separate the form and the function. *THE WORD MADE FLESH* is a long poem that completely embodies this philosophy, even teaching something like it if one works through all the permutations.

We have thus far looked at positive aspects of vispo, that is to say, things that appear on the page. Just as important, however, is awareness of things that do not appear, or at least that manifest themselves as background data to the reader. The next two subchapters examine examples of those qualities in the form of white space and page divisions.

White Space

Throughout O'Brien O'Keeffe's study, space is of the utmost importance – space between letters, after lines, around the edges of pages. Space itself has character (and boundaries) in a way that the silence that precedes or follows speech does not. Silence exists a priori, whereas it is evident that even the space on a page is a made thing. What we are concentrating on as critics of visual poetry is the increasingly deliberate use of white space. It passes from an almost nonexistent entity, a true lack, in the earliest English manuscripts to a stand-in for silence to a proper player in the poem's construction by the 20th Century. The space around verse is sometimes penetrated by marginalia, but these are intrusions of readers, not inventions of the author. Between the late Middle Ages and the 20th Century, we don't see a great deal of development in the use of white space. Page borders are regularized according to the devices I have laid out – poems use white space to indicate individual words, to indicate the ends of lines, and in doing so to indicate pauses in breath/voice – and because of the physical necessities of printing using a press – the chase (the outside frame of the forme, spelled with an “e” at the end when referring to the printing press technology) creates a boundary wherein nothing will appear, and the furniture and quoins that hold the type in place create unillustrated white space within the page. There are outliers in this vision: consider the self-illustrated works of Blake, for example, who fills what would be his white space with further visions, beautiful watercolor drawings. Consider also (again) the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, produced in long, flowing lines with vast expanses of white space, some of which, at the very beginning of the volume, is taken up

by the (in)famous cocky image of Whitman himself. The work that most impacted the explosion of poetry aware of its white space in the 20th Century, however, was Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard.* This long, highly-visual poem anticipates/influences/creates 20th Century visual poetry, possibly even free-verse poetry. Using long breaks in between lines, spacing words and phrases at opposite ends of the page from another, and using a healthy dose of indentation, Mallarmé controls the descent of the reader's eye down the page. It is less about translating these spaces into breathing pauses and more about letting them be physical, taking up room. However, the major shift in technique and mindset comes with the Futurists, who took advantage of developments in printing technology, specifically the Monotypecaster, to mold white space into a character itself (Cundy 349). Of their leader, F.T. Marinetti, Clara Orban writes, "Marinetti literalizes the white space; it represents space *and* time, and has a true iconic character" (45) [my emphasis].

This is to say, white space is not necessarily an absence anymore. It acts as meaningfully as do words in a highly visual text. But what is its meaning? Space and time in one poem are not necessarily the same as in another, so what does white space produce for Marinetti the Futurist? Says Orban:

> Another essential characteristic of white spaces is their function as silence. In a text that activates the acoustic dimension of language with the buzzing of explosives, the blank spaces represent a pause, a moment of silence for the eye and for the ear. They constitute a lack, the separation between word and image, between production and reception. The white spaces are lack of visual stimuli, but interestingly, Marinetti transforms them into images which have the semantic weight of space and time, the physical parameters of this voyage through simultaneity. (99)

Orban introduces a contradiction here, white space as a lack – which is actually its traditional role, as we have seen – versus white space as "images." What Marinetti rediscovers is the potential for the shapes of words to affect our acceptance of them. His great leap over previous, static poems, though, is the use of motion and dynamism in his creations. While the space after, say, "ZANG" (see Poem. 1.2) does not go away, the implication that it is temporary, that it is moving on the page, is distinctly present. Poemuratively speaking, the letters and white spaces move in and out of each other.

While I disagree with Orban that the white spaces constitute a lack in this particular instance, she hits the nail on the head regarding production and reception. Just as our Medieval scribes interacted individually with the manuscripts they copied, leading to variations, the Futurists (and Dadaists) sought out methods of producing the spontaneity of spoken word (and other sounds) in a written format, with plenty of room for interpretation. They pared down language to essential bits and sometimes farther, resulting in something that might be read one way by one reader and a very different way by another. In this worldview, letters themselves could be interpreted as being

temporary, despite being pressed to the page, in that they are assumed to exchange places with white space. This leads to a compelling possibility.

In the design and examples I have just discussed, white space is something produced by the writer, a letter that is not a letter. It is also interesting to consider that white space is something that Marinetti/Whitman/Blake do not create. It exists, as it were, on the page before words, in between words, and after words. The poet arranges his/her simultaneous vision within the boundaries of white space. It is not him/her. This might seem obvious at first glance, but it carries profound implications for the visual poet. It requires an acknowledgment that the poet's creation exists in tandem with something not of his or her creation. Every page is a binary, every poem a balance between that which is created and that which exists.

So what stands on either side of the equation? What is at stake in filling or not filling a page? Here is where Alice Notley introduces an awareness not present in Marinetti even as it plays out in his opus, nor in the Medieval works, nor in the authors of the pattern poems. Notley ever so briefly notes in a parenthetical aside in "American Poetic Music at the Moment," "(What's the point of all that white space? someone once wrote to me in 1973. It defines, I thought, as well as being a non-narcissistic possibility)" (132). It is the "non-narcissistic possibility" that grabs me. To fill the page completely, something we find in both the Old English manuscripts and in the Futurists, is to completely impose the writer's ego on the page. Or, if we consider the scribes, there is something akin to a collective superego, in which the desire to fill the page completely

is one brought in from outside the individual scribe and made common to all those writers (who are not necessarily authors). White space is something to be filled, an interpretation that dovetails nicely with the machismo/chauvanism of the Futurists. But in the pattern poems, and in some later works, the increased attention brought to white space by the unusual shaping suggests a poem/poet accepting a position of smallness, of humility, perhaps appropriate with their often occasional subject matters. Note that this white space post-Futurism is not the same as white space prior – in the later work, there is a conscious decision to *not* use white space, making it not just an artifact of the printing process, but a consideration of...what?

Tim Mathews turns to white space somewhat unexpectedly in "Poemure/Text," which is primarily a rumination on Foucault's reaction to Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Much of the essay is the process of making Magritte's point(s) less elegant, but of use to us at the moment is Mathews's attention to Paul Klee's notes on white and black in painting:

> "Dealing with the creative clash between the given, or passive, white and the 'acting, futural black' that the arrow gives form to, [Klee] writes: 'In a well-arranged equilibrium of both characteristics, the direction of movement manifests itself so forcefully that the ambiguous symbol (arrow) may be eliminated.' What might appeal to Foucault is the emphasis on action in the spectator's as well as in the painter's interventions." (35)

In this view, white space is the moment/space of implication, not quite direction, and it is precisely the moment/space during which the reader takes over. White space is our gift to the reader, in which s/he can impose interpretation. The page becomes a dialectic of

sorts, requiring negotiation among its parts. The very division of the page is part of the structure.

Page Division

Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, by Langston Hughes, asks its reader to negotiate a two-part page and a series of liner notes. Taking up most of the space, starting on the left-hand side of the page, are lyrics weaving in and out of the tune "Hesitation Blues." On the right-hand side are stage directions in italics. Music is strongly incorporated into both sides. Early lines in "Cultural Exchange," the first "mood," read "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES / WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER / DUST OF DINGY ATOMS / BLOWS A SCRATCHY SOUND" (477). The accompanying stage directions read, and here it is useful to present them with their line breaks as they appear in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*:

> *The*
> *rhythmically*
> *rough*
> *scraping*
> *of a guira*
> *continues*
> *monotonously*
> *until a lonely*
> *flute call,*
> *high and*
> *far away,*
> *merges*
> *into piano*
> *variations*
> *on German*
> *lieder*
> *gradually*
> *changing*

into
old-time
traditional
12-bar
blues
up strong
between verses
until
African
drums
throb
against
blues (477-478)

To better understand how these pieces interact, it is worth momentarily rendering the right-hand text as prose: *The rhythmically rough scraping of a guira continues monotonously until a lonely flute call, high and far away, merges into piano variations on German lieder gradually changing into old-time traditional 12-bar blues up strong between verses until African drums throb against blues.*

Contrasting the version with line breaks with the same text rendered as prose reminds us of the importance of the line break in controlling speed and, therefore, impression. The text unfolds an instant at a time, allowing the jazz musician/reader to play with the breath of a word at will. That is to say, even though the word "rough" is only one syllable and "rhythmically" three-to-four (depending on one's accent), in music they could be meant to take up the same number of measures, the same amount of time. This passage works primarily in the traditional, oral sense.

When we examine the two sides of the page together, however, this work clearly owes a great deal to visual poetry. We remember that the jazzlike presentation of the

words on the right-hand side are not in fact lyrics at all, but stage directions. They don't take the usual space accorded stage directions, which would be in-line with the lyrics, because that would interrupt the poetry. Two goals are at work here. One, this is the best way to present jazz instructions, which follow a scheme, a melody, but not necessarily an inscribed set of notes. This is an aural goal. Two, this method maintains the body of the poetry/lyrics, such that they can be read as poetry without interruption. This is a goal of the eye, not the ear. By "Ride, Red, Ride," Hughes has used other indicators of page poetry, namely parentheses and italics. He even goes so far as to print dollar and cent symbols through "Horn of Plenty," symbols which are not pronounced out loud (498-499). However, throughout *Ask Your Mama,* it is this division of the page that clearly reminds us of the music/poetry divide. As if to further cement this as a visual work with strong aural components, there are "Liner Notes" at the end of the work, written, as Hughes puts it, "For the Poetically Unhep" (526). Pages must be flipped back and forth. It isn't just the line breaks, but the physical interaction with the collection that guides us through *Ask Your Mama*.

Page division, however, appears in no work more clearly than it does in Ed Dorn's *Languedoc Variorum: A Defense of Heresy and Heretics*. Unfinished at his death in 1999, *Languedoc Variorium* is the most structurally creative of Dorn's works, something far different than his famous *Gunslinger,* which was also a long poem, but one in the tradition of the long narrative. Here we have a sequence of poems, prose, and aphorisms, linked and yet separated, extending over the course of many pages. What

Dorn did finish can be found in the pages of the posthumous *Way More West: New and Selected Poems*, edited by Michael Rothenberg.

At the top of each page of *Languedoc Variorium* is free verse, a poem regarding some historical heresy and/or religious abomination. The first, "Jerusalem," recounts the aftermath of the first Crusade, after which

> ...The Christians
> Waded up to their ankles in blood. The Jews
> Were burnt in their synagogues.
>
> Seventy thousand Mohammedans
> Were put to the sword. Within days
> The infection from the masses of bodies and gore
> Produced a wave of pestilence
> Biblical in its power and repulsion, yet
> Even so, less than the preëmptive AIDS
> Of Sodom and way prior to the dark Ebola.
> The savagery was Ruandan and Ugandan. (267)

Dorn seems to be at his full political stride here, commenting on modern day massacres as he was wont to do, dipping into organized religion, particularly Catholicism, as an enemy of the people. As in previous works, he mixes time periods, works in a style nearly prosaic but with sparkles of poetic language (the subtly rhymed "sword" and "gore," the transformation of Rwanda and Uganda into ultimate adjectives). There is nothing, in other words, particularly innovative (though one might enjoy the product).

In the middle of each page, however, is a section separated by a row of the sign for a new paragraph: ¶. Whereas poems in the upper portion of *Languedoc Variorium* begin and end, usually lasting several pages, the middle and lower sections fall under the heading "SUBTEXTS & NAZDAKS," with the subheading "a cruois" (i.e. a

crucifixion), and continue through the remainder of the work without break. The so-called Subtexts are prose paragraphs directly relating Dorn's thoughts on religious and political matters. If the poetry in the upper section seems fairly clear in its intent, there is no mistaking the language of the middle section:

> ¶ The struggle between the dominant one-god systems has a great deal to do with class and œconomic oppression and very little or nothing to do with religion and theology. And in fact the hierarchs of each system conspire at the top. They show up at one another's funerals and they all participate equally in the satellite auctioning of the public's "privatised" property. The Sheiks of the Gulf have long rendezvoused in the Riviera and the Seychelles, the domain of the Romanist dopers and drinkers. And they collect in the floating capitols of transnational capital—it's really the one and only culture. However, the nonempowered just try to get on with their Jihads or the daily reading of the Bible as a realtor's prospectus to the Holy Lands. Unlike the hierarchs, they haven't got theirs, have never had and won't ever have. To them, "*Peace Brother*" is just another exhortation to cease and desist from messy and disruptive attempts to take a little weight off the other end of the balance. Hijack a Concorde with a kitchenknife would be the ultimate lo-tech solution. So it is, so it increaseth. The police proliferate, the prisons multiply. Monotheism grows every more desperately cruel and bloody and implacable, battering the countless hapless against the stone wall of its singular will. (269)

This is not to say that Dorn's language has no sparkle in these sections. There are still moments of obvious lyrical creativity interspersed with often-disquieting directness (e.g. Dorn's near-foreshadowing of the events of 9/11), but, more importantly to this study, the form has changed. Instead of free verse spilling from line to line but within contained poems, we have paragraphs that are contained by each beginning with the ¶ sign, but which are relatively unbounded in the whole of the longer work.

The third and bottom section, the "Nazdaks," read like a ticker-tape across the bottom four lines of each page, uninterrupted. They are separated from the "Subtexts" by a row of crosses, a symbol for which it is difficult to not imagine intentionality on Dorn's part. A typical expanse of Nazdaks, and I use the term "typical" lightly, as these are by far the most wide-ranging utterances in the poem, runs "GENDER FASCISM UP 90%, INVESTMENT IN PROGRAM FOR EUROAMERICAN MALES—ACADEMIC MARXISTS STEADY ENTRENCHED PRICING—REPRESSION OF THE MARKET IN STANDARD WORKS—NAZDAQ PLUNGES, LITERATURE FORCED INTO BANKRUPTCY—BURGHERS OF THEORY REPLACE SAMURAIS OF LITERATURE" (270). While ultimately deriving from ticker-tape itself, the Nazdaks better approximate cable news, whereon headlines are displayed in a running fashion at the bottom of the screen.

What fascinates me most about the structure of *Languedoc Variorum* is how it asks, perhaps even demands, that the reader negotiate among its sections. We give prominence to the the top of the page, for example, because we read from the top down. That which comes first gets first billing, as it were. And yet, we give weight to clarity, and it is in the Subtexts that we find Dorn's points addressed most clearly. We perhaps still cling to the Medieval manner in which fiction was related through poetry and nonfiction through prose. Which do we choose? The poetry or the prose? The story or the truth (that is, what we default to as "truth")? Consider also that the prose physically overshadows the poetry even as it runs concurrent. The prose does not end, is not split into three-page bits (yes, paragraphs, but the Subtexts section goes on and on). We have

yet to think about the Nazdaks as well. While at the bottom of the page, they are presented in all capitals, the typographic equivalent to shouting at the reader. They grab our attention away from the larger, upper sections because of that typography, appearing to carry more weight. They are also the wittiest selections, often punning, as opposed to the conventional (or, at best, metaphorical) language of the top two sections. How does humor fit into our desires as readers? Are we compelled to the bottom of the page by its visibility and then prompted to stay because of its content? And are these three sections at war with each other, or do they somehow link up?

Looking at a page *in toto*, connections exist as tendrils and webs, rarely 1:1. References on one page of the poetry may not be "fulfilled" in the lower sections for many pages. An opposing example would be the page on which one finds the beginning of "Tomás Torquemada—first Inquisitor General for all Spanish Πossessions and Master of the rooting out of disbelievers" (275). Throughout *Languedoc Variorum*, Dorn references the three major monotheistic religions, but the players in them are often of a different piece. If he is referring to a heresy of the Middle Ages, for example, his Subtext may likely refer to the Bosnia-Croatia-Yugoslavia war(s) of the early to mid 1990's, a conflict for which he was firmly on the side of the Serbs. Here, though, the modern world takes a back seat, serving only to introduce the more important historical context. Dorn meanders at first in the 20th Century, recalling parts of the Birdie Jo Hoaks hoax, wherein a 25-year-old woman posed as an abandoned 13-year-old boy in Salt Lake City, which initially got her an outpouring of support and two trust accounts. Dorn quickly leaves this scene/scam, however, taking part of Hoaks's story as a launching point into

Torquemada: "...[Hoaks's character's] father dying of AIDS, the plague of the Cross par excellence, the modern torture from Aragon, the biomechanism Torquemada wouldn't have dared dream of in the wildest desperation of his Spanish peninsula mountain night sweats..." He tightens the connection even further by bringing his epitaph about the twisting of religion for political purposes to light, making it clear the associations among crown, Christopher Columbus, and Christianity (specifically Catholicism). The Nazdaks here admittedly do not link up particularly well; they are in fact far less likely to connect to anything else on the page than are the proper poems and the Subtexts.

I don't wish to indicate that there is a proper way to read the work. There are traditional and nontraditional ways of going about it, but Dorn specifically designs his page such that the reader is taking part in a decision-making process. Even during the poet's most blatant harangues, the reader has the option of going somewhere else, of turning to another section of the poem. Railing against authoritarianism, Dorn creates a work that simultaneously celebrates his creativity and actually offers a path through which the reader can reclaim a certain degree of autonomy from the author. It is in fact the structural elements of the poem that offer the clearest path to freedom.

The overall structure of the poem is the final thing to consider, and here we encounter head on the question of how a visual poem can also be a long poem. The final examination will be of collage – putting together disparate materials into a new whole – and montage – cutting from one scene to another in a temporal sequence.

Collage and Montage

Going in a very different direction from the past two subchapters, we find the work of two poet-artists who nearly eliminate white space from particular works of theirs. On the one hand, we have Lisa Jarnot's *Some Other Kind of Mission*, which intersperses a Gertrude-Stein-esque series of prose poems with black and white collage poems (often on graph paper), the whole thing remixing the story of Helen of Troy with a contemporary (?) relationship on the rocks. On the other hand, we have Tom Philips's *A Humument*, a brilliant (in the senses of both color and imagination) found narrative of sorts, produced by drawing and coloring over the pages of a Victorian novel – the story/poem is the words left over.

Reviews of *Some Other Kind of Mission* are incredibly mixed. Whereas John Ashbery wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* that Jarnot's volume was a sign that "Language Poetry may be mutating, back to the modernism of Stein and Joyce, having been permanently inflected (or deflected) by a late twetieth-century [sic] sharpness and exasperation.... These are haunting, perplexing narratives of the inenarrable" ("Lisa Jarnot"), Crag Hill, looking at the poems for *Jacket* years later in a reprinted edition, thought them merely "a rudimentary map of Jarnot's current praxis." I find it unfortunate that both reviewers concentrate on the prose poetry sections, mostly ignoring the visual aspect of the work.

Hill argues that there was better "vispo" being created at the time Jarnot was writing, citing a laundry list of journals: "*Generator*, *Score*, *Kaldron*, *Ligne* (Australia),

Lost and Found Times, *Terraz Mowie* (Germany), *Doc(k)s* (France), *Dimensao* (Brazil), *O!!Zone*, *Das Froliche Wohnzimmer* (Germany), *Gestalten*, *Industrial Sabotage* (Canada) " and "many more." There was, and is, a great deal of visual poetry being created. The question is, how much of it is narrative? How much of it is long? I readily admit that my instinct was to suspect there would be a paucity of work. The idea of combining such opposite effects, Time and Space, is certainly far less common than working in either "genre" exclusively.

Jarnot's technique is cutup, cut-and-paste, both in her prose poems and in her visual poems. From the title page, where the word "texture" appears where the eye naturally falls after reading the title of the book, which in turn is pasted over other text, to the last page, an "index" with the page numbers and other material blacked out, Jarnot writes over writing. Meaning, itself, is hidden under layers here, thanks to the Stein-esque repetition over the course of multiple poems, woven in and out of the visual pieces. The whole narrative is more than a little confusing. Whereas Stein in, say, *Tender Buttons* primarily contains her technique to a single object at a time, Jarnot's story is evidently meant to be a story, with characters who do things over time, over pages. Our means of following that story are split into two types of poems. The prose poems give us the same words over and over in new (?) contexts, building up a pattern that runs the risk of never actually forming a vocabulary. The visual poems often emphasize lack, as things are crossed out, rendered unintelligible due to size or handwriting or distressing of the letters, or pasted over by some other text. It would be wonderful if the visual poems showed a clear arc, such as becoming darker as they go on

(it seems for a while as if this will be the case, only to have huge swaths of clear writing appear intermittently late in the book), but we cannot ascribe that sort of intentionality to Jarnot's book. Instead, we have a bit of a mess. I don't say this to necessarily demean the work, as the resulting mess is absolutely fascinating, but this is a story that reads better as a tone poem. It creates definite effects emotionally and intellectually, but the story never quite becomes a true story. That being said, it's still a long poem, one with an implied long narrative, and thus deserves a close examination in this study.

Marjorie Perloff has an essay on collage titled “Collage and Poetry” which first appeared in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* and can now be found on her website. Her attention to collage is split, seemingly, between the pictorial collage work of the Futurists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists, and the Cubists on the one hand and on the other the textual collage work of poets like Eliot, Pound, and Ashbery. She further draws a distinction between the modernist and postmodernist approaches to poetry-as-collage, noting that in Ashbery's work “the technique of juxtaposing citations or fragments of conversations has given way to what looks like a more seamless and continuous discourse–often a narrative–but which, on inspection, cannot be decoded as yielding any sort of coherent meaning. It is as if the individual units are 'always already' collaged to begin with.” This is opposed to the disparate narratives produced by Eliot and Pound, narratives obviously pieced together from other sources but having some discernible continuity. In fact, Perloff early on quotes from the Group Mu manifesto, noting that

> Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to

> its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality. The trick of collage consists also of never entirely suppressing the alterity of these elements reunited in a temporary composition.

For the Ashberian collage, there is not necessarily an original, merely the appearance of text having been cut from one place and pasted into another.

Jarnot seems to be playing in both fields in *Some Other Kind of Mission*. The text itself draws on Ashbery's sensibility as much as Stein's – the repetition of phrases appear cut and pasted into each other, layered atop each other, burying and birthing each other. The phrases come off as rather seamless, nearly stream of conscious, and yet what do they mean? What of these crawfish and trucks and motels? Something is amiss, certainly. There are characters, certainly. There is a story here, certainly. But exactly what it is? Incoherence. On the other hand, the collages that combine images and text seem to delve for a moment into Eliot's or Pound's world, referring to Helen (of Troy), to Paris (of the same), to WWII Poemhter planes. These are references grounded in mythology and history, much more the realm of modernism. Yet, again, exactly how these tie together is indeterminate. Again, there are effects on the reader's emotions, on his or her mindset, and there is the distinct sense that a separate but related (?) story is being told here. I would wager that it is in fact the story of the abduction and pursuit of Helen to Troy, full of false promises, of men being stereotypically manly, of war. But this is not a sure bet.

Consider the page/poem “Introduction.” How do we interpret this page? There is text, so we begin with it, expecting, after all, a book of poetry. “lucky pierres,” it begins,” he they say will come again and he i say / sells hoovers.” Is this a cynical Christ image? Returning to the introduction after discerning the Helen link, is it a connection to Troy – Pierre, leading us to France, leading us to Paris?? Looking again, we see this “letter” is signed “pierre,” perhaps making the author of the note one of a kind with those he addresses. To the right, we see graphing paper emerge. Upside down on it, a rectangle labeled “OUTDOOR gAMES.” Also upside down, the phrase “his hid event,” perhaps meaning a secret? The abduction of Helen? And the word “halo.” Do we take meaning from the fact that the halo is inverted? I think yes, but it seems to be a tonal production rather than a literal one. Handwritten and partially hidden by a darker portion of the page and being collaged over: the words “fuckers.” “dogs – / and” and “of machine gun / of dogs.” Guards? And what to make of the bottom of the page, which at first appears to be staffs of music with the notes cut out, only upon closer inspection we realize that it is strips of paper with holes cut in them, those layered atop the staffs. Missing music as present music?

Some of these motifs will return, both the textual and pictorial ones. The graph paper appears again on a regular basis. The handwriting is the same later on, though with different words. “pierre” comes back. The language of violence is not yet ended. Other elements, such as the “chinese (ancient)” do not appear again. The music does not return, either.

As Perloff says, there is a discourse here. There is quite literally a discourse, as one character is addressing others. The closer we get to inspect it, though, the more it is as though we're pulling too close to graphing paper, ending up somewhere between the lines.

It is worth mentioning that Perloff suggests her readers consider collage and montage to be two sides of the same coin. Perhaps it is worthwhile to do so here, particularly as a transition into Tom Phillips's work. Collage is traditionally viewed as something kept to one sheet/page. The artwork exists on that surface, in that space. Montage is traditionally viewed as a filmic technique, a juxtaposition in time. In *Some Other Kind of Mission*, Jarnot appears to be trying out both. There is collage, collecting and layering of material. But there is also montage, the turning of pages to see new "frames" that are related but not necessarily chronologically (or even coherently) linked to the frames on either side of them. Because of this, I would argue, we are doubly-displaced. We are attempting to reach out of an individual frame and find outside meaning before placing a phrase or object in its new place. We are attempting to reach out of time and find the narrative that precedes and follows any given frame. Only upon re-reading Jarnot's volume can we even come close to doing this, however. The mythic connection is thin, as is the historical connection. The story has the sense of being grand and tragic, but it intentionally undercuts its sense of grandeur at every pass, opting instead for mystery. And perhaps, in the end, that is what is best exemplified here. Collage and montage, techniques of reference and implication, used to cloud and magnify (into obscurity) what might otherwise be an average and boring tale.

Something similar seems to be going on in Tom Phillips's *A Humument*. To call it a story is almost a false definition. There are a handful of characters – the main ones being bill toge (generally identified only as toge, and who appears only when the words "together" or "altogether" appear in the original text from which Phillips works), Irma, and, as Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor rightly points out, Tom Phillips himself, albeit in a fictionalized form. These characters do things, have conversations, have fortunes that rise and fall. But to call it a narrative? Only in the most fractured sense. The assertions of "Tom" are obsessive and repetitive, coming back again and again to art, infinite (more on this in a moment) variations on the place of art. What toge does on one page might not have repercussions for fifty more pages. It might not ever have repercussions. The same goes for Irma. In fact, in late 2010 a version of *A Humument* was released for the iPad, and the app includes an interesting function ("fun"ction?) - Al Filreis points out in his blog that there is an "'oracle feature.' Using a chosen date and a randomly generated number the oracle will cast two pages to be read in tandem. You may receive direction, encouragement or warning." If the messages of the book can be rearranged at random, can we really point to anything and call it narrative?

Much has been done already with *A Humument*. Besides Wagner-Lawlor's excellent essay "A Portrait of the (Postmodern) Artist: Intertextual Subjectivity in Tom Phillips's *A Humument*," we have another treatment of subjectivity by James L. Maynard, a Derrida-derived exploration of Phillips's work creating a new (post-speech!) language by Paula Geyh, the use of translation and nonsense words in the piece as explored by Mary Ann Caws, a handful of essays on various subjects that can be found

at Phillips's own website (www.humument.com), and three dissertations that bring up *A Humument*'s status as an artist's book. My purpose here is not to cover the same ground of these able scholars, and those who wish to pursue a broader survey of Humumentist literature are advised to track down these sources. I would instead like to bring to bear a synergy among Wagner-Lawlor, Geyh, and Perloff.

Wagner-Lawlor agrees that Phillips's narrative is "only weakly linear." This is not, however, a weakness. She expounds:

> the romance plot involving Toge and Irma is juxtaposed, or often plaited, with Tom's self-portrait of the artist. This latter strand of the text is far less linear in its organization, mingling as it does "the present" with references to the past through the flexibility of the mixed-media nature of the work. Phillips opens his work to all possible relations, without prioritizing, temporally or otherwise. "The life" is seen in this text...as a labyrinthine movement through shifting contexts that are created by the mind's own endless capability for new associations."

Geyh refers to *A Humument* as "a hypertext or, more generally and more accurately, a parallel-interactive text, a text open to parallel-interactive processing" (204). She draws on Derrida and Deleuze for most of her theory but acknowledges on page 206 that the volume incorporates both modernist and postmodernist techniques. Finally, recall again Perloff's thoughts on collage and montage.

What we have in *A Humument* is another collage/montage work, a piece of art that is static and in motion all at the same time. Each frame contains a horizontal reference, either to something else in the volume, to one of Phillips's other works, to

literature (Virgil is pointed out by multiple critics as a source of inspiration), to all manner of 20th Century art. The reader, who must be well-read (increasingly so as the years go on), is constantly shifting outward in perception, that is, thinking laterally, looking for references outside the self. This is the collage. And yet there is some manner of story, if not so much in the rendered volume, then in its adherence to the form of the original book, *A Human Document*. The pages continue in the original order so that, even as they are crossed out, drawn upon, cut up, they proceed one page at a time. This creates a montage of the lives of the characters, or at least their thoughts. The book operates in time as well as space.

Going one better on *Some Other Kind of Mission*, the collage/montage that is *A Humument* doesn't just exist in time vis a vis the reader turning pages. Phillips has reworked the volume in its entirety several times over, each time publishing a new edition when all the pages have been modified. New "current" events crop up in the pages. For example, there is a reference to US President George W. Bush in the most fourth and most recent edition, the one from which I'm working. At his website, Phillips maintains images of his most current variations. The production/reproduction of the work remains an ongoing process, making it a sort of montage modified *as the viewer watches*.

Conclusion

Long visual poems are more common than one might expect, even given the somewhat generous criteria I have used in this study. We have seen examples of the

major techniques brought to bear in these pieces, and it should be noted that most of the works incorporate multiple techniques; I have singled them out merely for clarity's sake. What do we take away from all this? As bold as it sounds, works like these are the most direct queries as to what poetry can do. There are twin traditions, each of which has its champions and its hangers-on, and rarely do they cross over into the other tradition. Here, though, we challenge Poe's assertion that long poems cannot work head-on by combining the long form with the most immediately impacting form. The poems work on several levels at once, sometimes communicating information before the reader even begins to read. If there is such a thing in the world of entertainment as a comic's comic, then these are a poem's poems. They expose the workings of poetry like very few poems do, making every visual long poem a metatextual consideration of some sort. Finally, and this point must be made, they are more often than not amazing to read. Reacting with the brain at those different levels forces the reader to dialogue with the poems, to work with and at them in a manner that most readers would find more pleasing than teasing out the historical allusions of a Pound piece, since it carries with it the joy of solving a tactile puzzle. And that is what these are: puzzles of varying length and style, but very much hands-on poetry. In the next chapter, I will present a puzzle of my own, an original creative work that utilizes all the techniques examined in this first chapter.

CHAPTER III

DILUVIUM

Introduction

Existing somewhere among the techniques and styles discussed in the first chapter is my own creation, *diluvium*. *diluvium* is a 64-page poetic sequence / long poem, centered on the myth of the Flood from Genesis. In the center of each page can be found a minimalist 8-line poem in slant rhyme (ABCB DEFE). These poems are the conscious utterances of either Noah or his wife as they pass their days on the ark. The central poems also provide the narrative continuity that makes this a long poem – the characters interact with other each, change their roles and their beliefs, and ultimately grow into better versions of themselves. Surrounding the central poems is an "ocean" of concrete- and free-verse poetry. These bits and pieces represent the subconscious thoughts of the main characters, or perhaps even a collective unconscious (a la Jung). These pieces are sometimes limited to one page and sometimes spill over from one page to another. Finally, there is a W that flies in circles around a number of pages. This W is citizen crow, unnamed as such in the text but referred to specifically as "the raven," a creature that carries the naïve hopes of Noah and his wife, constantly moving but always constrained by the borders of the page.

The central poems are what make this a long poem. We are introduced to the characters as they question God, “O Lord, how many days will this Flood last?” A voice, purportedly God, responds “Three and three hundred, three and three thousand.” This dialogue continues, the petitioners asking how many days, God reducing the number to one hundred fifty, then forty, then one. Beyond the obvious setting of the stage, placing this in the Flood of Genesis 6, this passage is an allusion to the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, in which the sage Yãjñavalkya responds to a repeated series of questions as to how many gods there are. While it is also meant to be taken seriously, this is, in my opinion, one of the great comic moments in Hinduism. It also neatly reflects the general confusion over just how many days the Biblical Flood lasted – the most common answer is forty days and forty nights, though that technically only refers to how long it rained. One hundred and fifty days is another answer that could be supported based on textual evidence (and I should point out there that I'm going solely by the textual “evidence” of a myth, not having found any empirical evidence for the event). Over a year is still another. Here, I present sixty-four pages, which might be days, might be days and nights, might be incidents over a greater period of time. Perceptions will be altered, and this is the first warning to the reader.

At the bottom of the first page is an angled piece of text that reads “it's raining.” This is a translation of the first part of Apollinaire's famous *calligramme* “il pleut” (“it rains”), also copying the look of the original poem, in which the words streak down the page like raindrops against a window. It is the entry point both into the narrative of flood, the moment at which the rain begins, and our entryway into the realm of visual

poetry. The line continues on the second page, “women's voices as though they were dead even in memory.” Here, the ocean mixes images of death and confusion with a heartfelt birth/Genesis 1 metaphor present in the central poems:

> You have delivered us
> into a new world,
> washed clean,
> as we were
>
> in the Beginning,
> no more than a gleam
> on the Surface
> of the Deep. (Poem. 2.1)

Expanding on Apollinaire's visual aspect, the rain “hits the page” and creates ripples. These ripples are themselves made of text and, in turn, straighten out on the third page and become free-verse surrounding the central poems. Thus, over the course of the first three pages, the poem transitions from visual poetry to poetry that is not what one would currently treat as vispo, but nonetheless now calls attention to its typographical nature. The first three pages also establish a basic growth pattern. Each page acts as roughly one year in an Eriksonian development cycle – Erikson's terminology in fact appears in one of the early poems, scattering about the page such dichotomies as “trust/mistrust.”

However, unpacking the individual allusions of *diluvium* is better left to another scholar working with a different scope. My focus on others' long visual poems has been precisely that – how they are long and how they are visual. For the remainder of my discussion of my own work, I will be concentrating on the visual techniques employed and on the manner in which the narrative unfolds as a poetic sequence.

The first theme of the visual poetry in *diluvium* is rain, as I have pointed out above. The second them is separation – mirroring the central texts, which begin with both Noah and his wife speaking together but, in their ninth year/page, splitting into two voices. The ocean builds up into thicker and thicker incarnations, eventually forming a wall of words that borders the central text. At the pages on which the split takes place (see Poems. 2.8 and 2.9), the ocean text starts on (what is now) Noah's side and carries over onto (what is now) his wife's side, placing the wall between the two. Were the collection to be printed as a book, this wall would appear in the page divide, with Noah on the lefthand page and his wife on the righthand page.

It is at this moment that the characters divide into (stereotypical) gender roles as well, and the theme becomes that of separation. Each character muses on his or her position in the world – Noah as a "man of God" given to high-minded thoughts and his place in history, his wife going about the more mundane tasks like cleaning the ark. The primary visual weight for this section of poems is conveyed through typography itself. Previously there had been a single font used for the words spoken by both characters. On the pages where the split takes place, Noah and his wife each begin speaking in new and separate fonts. Noah's is sans-serif, representing a more mechanical view of the world, while his wife's is serif, representing a more artistic worldview. This will continue for the remainder of the sequence. The ocean is somewhat more passive during this section, making itself obvious when it forms a box around the wife as she begins railing against the physical confines of the ark and, by metaphorical extension, her restricted role (see

Poem. 2.19), and when it explodes upward, again during one of the wife's laments (see Poem. 2.25).

Now the text setting loose the raven (see Poem. 2.26) on page 26 shifts outward to the edges of the page (see Poem. 2.27). This begins a slow burn during which the text encroaches on the center poems, getting closer and closer until it actually touches and lightly obscures the central poems (see Poems. 2.39 and 2.40). This is the first of two sections of crisis – Noah and his wife harp at each other, question God's plan, wait for the raven to come back, despair, and generally lose faith in God and each other. The section closes out with two nearly identical poems, each character asking what his/her place is now that s/he has lost the other. It mirrors the similarities of the poems during which they split into gender roles, only now it reveals their physical split. They will be in separate areas of the ark, with the ocean doing very different things, for the next section.

At this point in the narrative, Noah and his wife are no longer speaking to each other; instead, they are engaged in a series of monologues. His are increasingly narcissistic, while hers are increasingly introspective. Both "bottom out" as it were, reaching the darkest points of their personal reflections. Drab colors appear in the conscious musings of Noah, who refers to the horizon as a "gray plane" and to his wind-blown hair as "this gray halo" (see Poem. 2.43), and in those of his wife, who emotionally blurts, "The dark hold full and / yet I feel hollow. Lit / by nothing. Were the moon here / I'd swallow it" (see Poem. 2.44). Noah expresses increasing isolation from a

chaotic world, while his wife feels increasing pressure from the role to which she has been relegated, whether with or without Noah.

The ocean reflects both sentiments. On Noah's pages, the exterior text gradually twists into a hurricane-like shape that surrounds, buffets, and eventually obscures the central poems. A lowercase “i” is a recurring Poemure here, sometimes repeated ad nauseum to create an entire arm of the hurricane, representing the selfish undercurrents of his thought process. Stylistically, the hurricane harkens back to the Futurists and their desire to capture movement more than objects in their visual poetry. His wife is likewise surrounded, but instead of a violent and shaped visual poetry, the words multiply and write over each other, forming a solid barrier that traps her central words in the middle of the page. Her moment culminates when she finds herself completely surrounded (except for a small shaft of white space) by the overlapping names assigned to her in various traditions. It is worth noting here that Noah's wife is not given a name in the Bible, has no “self” to speak of there. In rabbinical and folk traditions alike, however, she is given seventeen different names. She makes a metatextual point of noting this, as well as pointing out that she has no say in choosing a name for herself in this scheme (see Poem. 2.50) Two pages later, her subconscious has converted the burying words into ground from which springs, in the shape of a flower, the phrases “i am not womb alone” and “i shall be what i shall be” (see Poem. 2.52).

We've now traveled through the climax of the narrative, and there is just dénouement to cover. What comes next is a settling action. In the central poems, Noah's

wife “becomes wise,” as my wife put it after reviewing the poems. She (Noah's wife, not mine) talks Noah into a position of understanding and acceptance, not of the grand mythological/androcentric narrative that he thought himself a part of before, but of simply being. It's a fairly Buddhist twist on what began as a Biblical story. The tone becomes less emotional, more calm, and the ocean especially reflects this. The hurricane is blown away along with the “petals” of the wife's flower. The ensuing pages see white space emerge further and further – the non-narcissistic space of Alice Notley – until there is no ocean. The second to last page sees the rainbow, which reads, at the bottom of the page, “my love, my dove.” The final poem closes out with only central text referring to the experience as a “dreaM,” the M capitalized and colored violet. I had originally intended to reveal the ROYGBIV spectrum of light over the course of the poems, beginning with the the red first letter of “O Lord.” I have settled on an implied spectrum, made up of red, blue (as mentioned but not shown as a color in Noah's wife's poem), and violet, as working the other colors into the central poems kept running contrary to their tone. Additionally, there was no place for the grays and blacks that dominate the days of separation.

Looking at *diluvium* as a whole, I use a variety of visual techniques which I previously discussed in reference to other visual poets' works. There is something of the cut-and-paste insofar as I borrow selections of poetry from other poets, there is the imagetext of Apollinaire and his disciples in the rain streaking down the page and forming ripples, there is the motion of the Futurists in the hurricane and its dissipation, and there is the abstract visualization of Mallarmé in the vast majority of the ocean. Still,

there is something here that I dare propose as unique, and that is the mixing of traditional and visual poetry to augment/contrast each.

The mixing of styles exists to a certain extent in *Plainwater*, and a to greater extent in *Some Other Kind of Mission*, but in neither case is it used to such deliberate effect. By casting the conscious as traditional, rhymed poetry, I am making a statement about the nature of consciousness and professed language. By casting the subconscious as visual poetry, whether concrete, pattern, or free-verse, I am making a statement about the nature of subconsciousness and unspoken language. I do not believe that either one "wins out" in the end. While the words of the ocean disappear at the end, the presence of the white space remains a strong calming factor. While the words of the central poems carry the story, nearly all of the emotional impact/change of the characters is felt in the wilder and unwieldy oceanic verse. They are a symbiotic relationship, feeding off of each other, allowing the reader to compare and contrast them and, this is important, develop his or her own hierarchy. Just as negotiation is required in *Languedoc Variorum*, the reader must decide what to read first, what to value more. It becomes a minor Rorschach test. They also pull a postmodern trick, embodied most wonderfully, in my opinion, by a scene in *The Muppet Movie*. In this scene, Kermit and Fozzie are lost on an excursion through America, fall asleep near a church, and are awakened by raucous music coming from within. They enter and identify themselves and their predicament in part by handing over the screenplay to the movie itself. It's a cute gimmick, but it's more than just a gag. By identifying themselves as actors in a movie, that is, fakes, the muppets make themselves "real." It's Baudrillardian, only fun. By casting the central

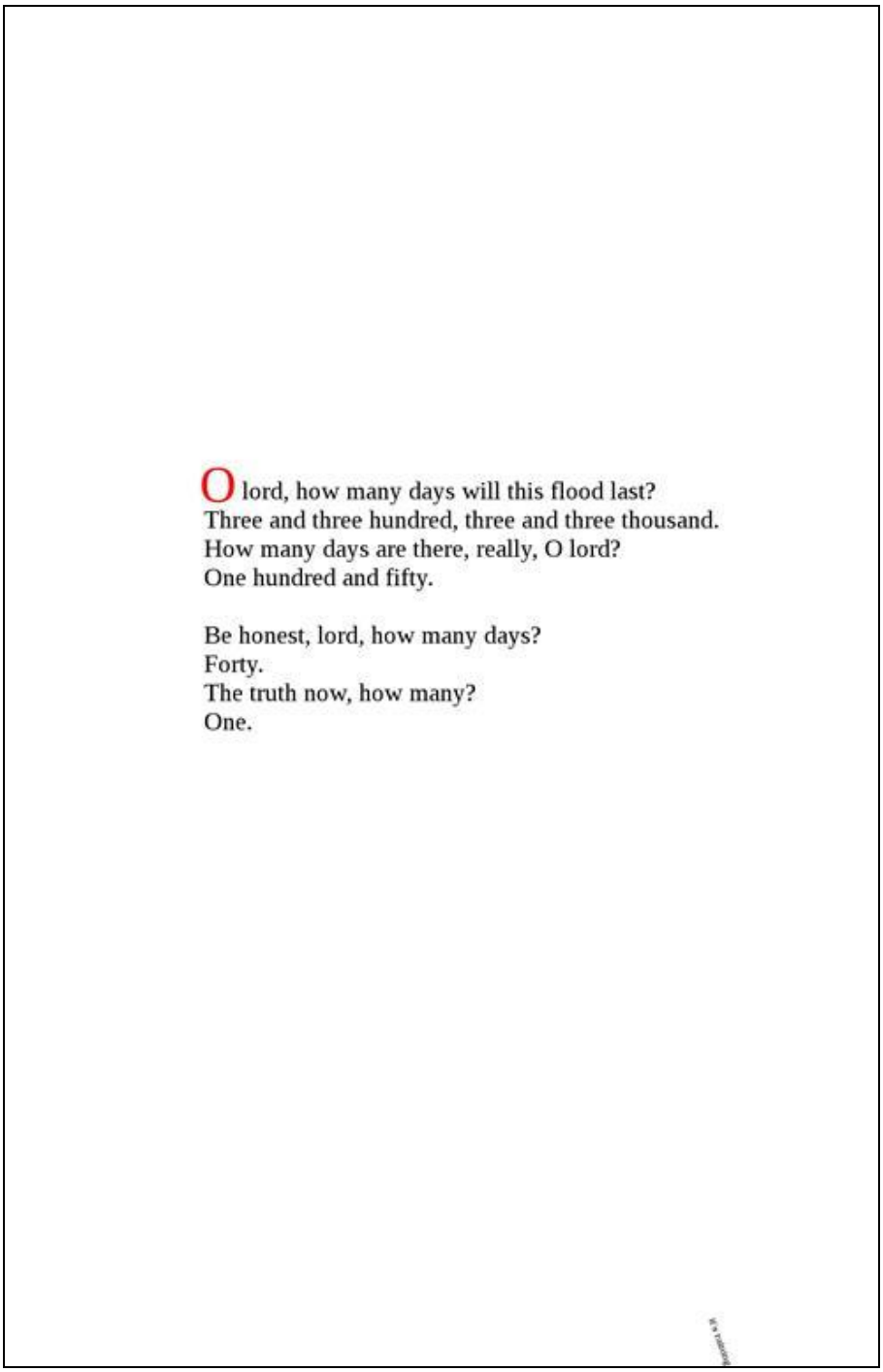
poems as “constructed” and the ocean poems as “free,” I've drawn a false dichotomy in a work where everything has actually been processed, revised, and revised again (and again).

In trying to find a place for my own work within the types of long visual poems I outlined in the first chapter, I have a slight bit of difficulty. It's not particularly avant-garde, for instance. The techniques I use in the ocean can all be traced back to at least the turn of the (19th-into-the-20th) century. More innovative typography has been exhibited by Johanna Drucker, more art history by Tom Phillips, more L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E-like verse by Lisa Jarnot, more velocity by F.T. Marinetti's band of Futurists. *diluvium* sidles up to but is not in the heart of contemporary vispo alongside the poet-artists of mIEKAL aND's Xexoxial Editions and/or Granary Books and/or even self-publishing authors in the Spidertangle network. What place does this work really hold?

I believe *diluvium* is a stepping stone. The downside to nearly all the other works I have mentioned in this brief study is that they throw the reader into the deep end of the pool, *+|'me'S-pace* being the major exception. If one reads one of the Futurists' manifestos, there is a better chance of understanding the work. But most of the experimental typographical/visual poetry of the 20th century requires one to have some kind of insider knowledge to “get” what is going on. One must have studied the theory or been immersed in the community. What *diluvium* offers is a gateway. It has a story that is relatively easy to comprehend, lyrics that will be familiar in style to even recent

comers to poetry, and it *combines* these things with visual poetry. It allows, as I said earlier, the reader to negotiate among styles on his or her own terms, using the sequence as a self-instructing poetics, not just a poem. I won't know for certain if I have succeeded until *diluvium* is out in the wild, among readers who haven't been reviewing it, editing it, reacting to its inception, but I have hopes that it is a bridge between Time and Space.

diluvium

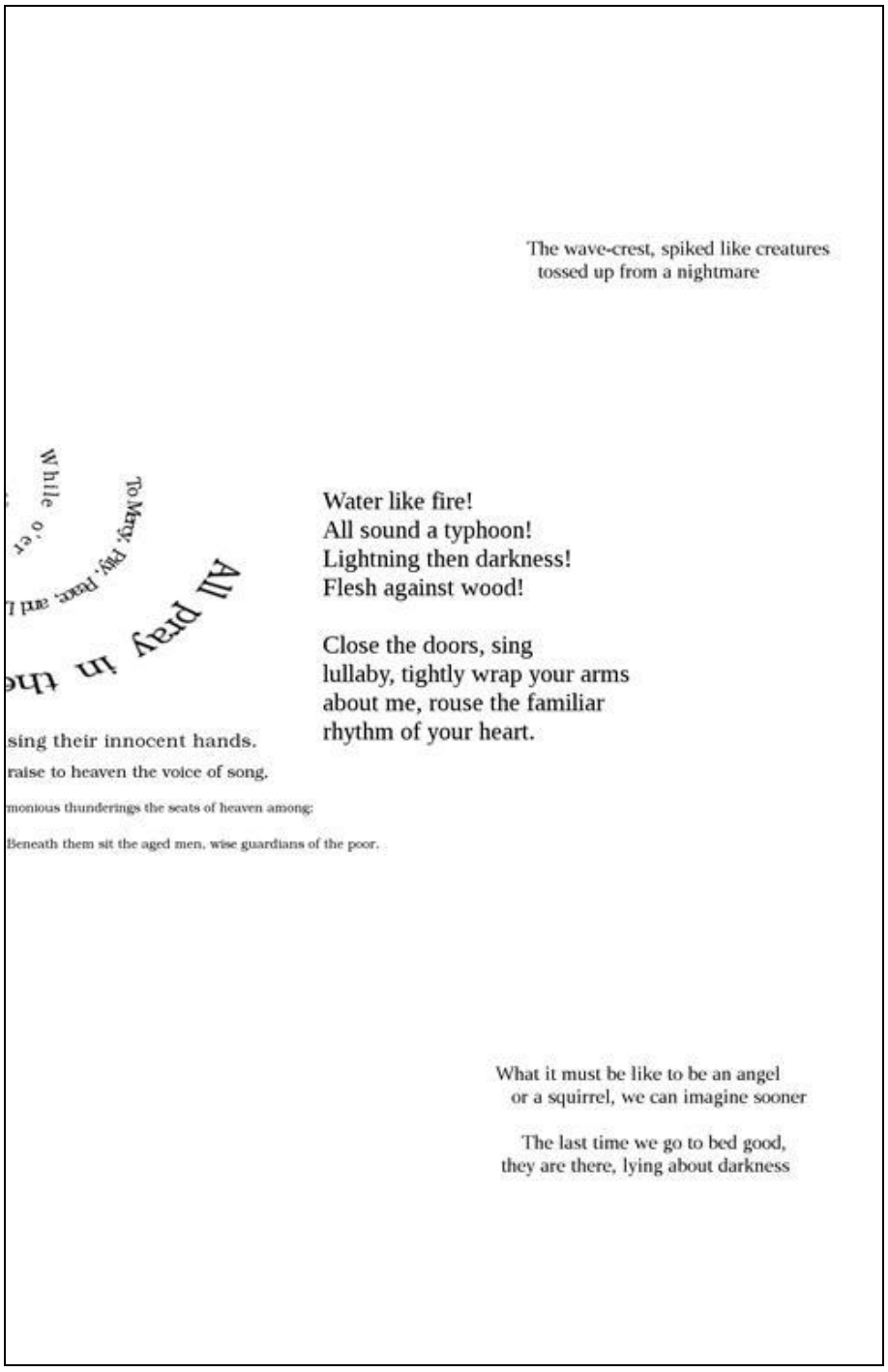


O lord, how many days will this flood last?
Three and three hundred, three and three thousand.
How many days are there, really, O lord?
One hundred and fifty.

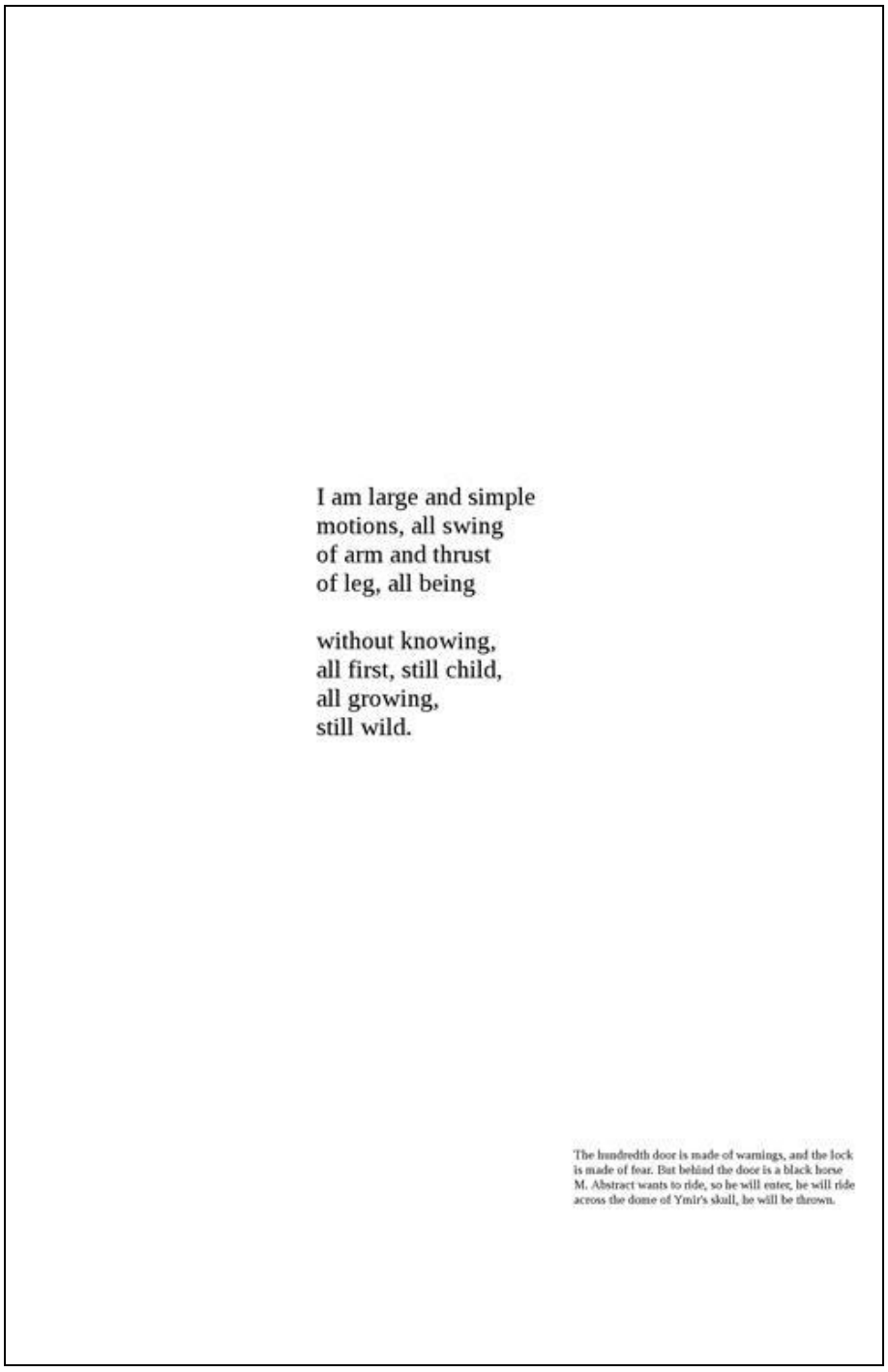
Be honest, lord, how many days?
Forty.
The truth now, how many?
One.

Poem 2.1: Prologue

Poem 2.2: The First Day

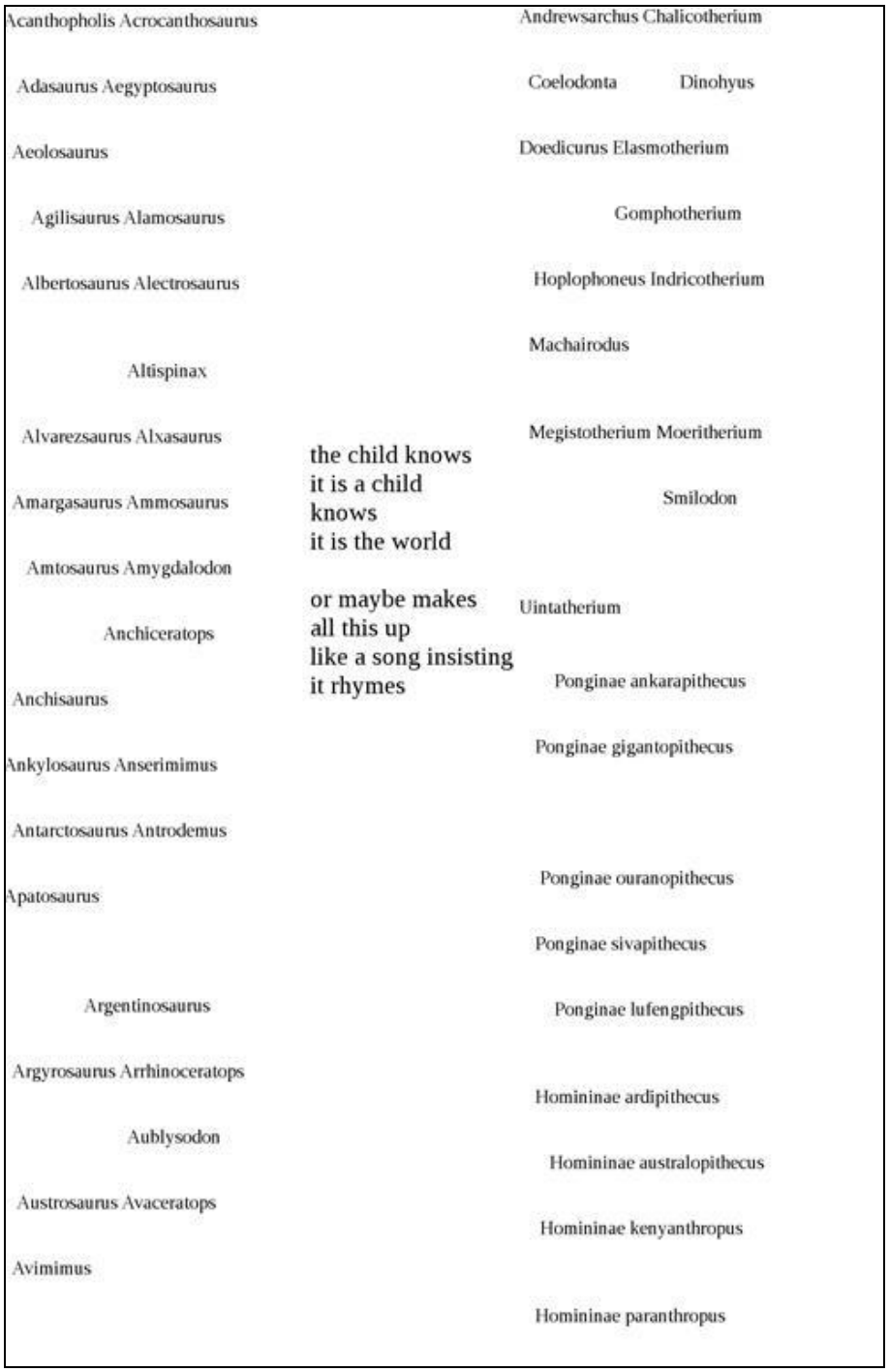


Poem 2.3: The First Night

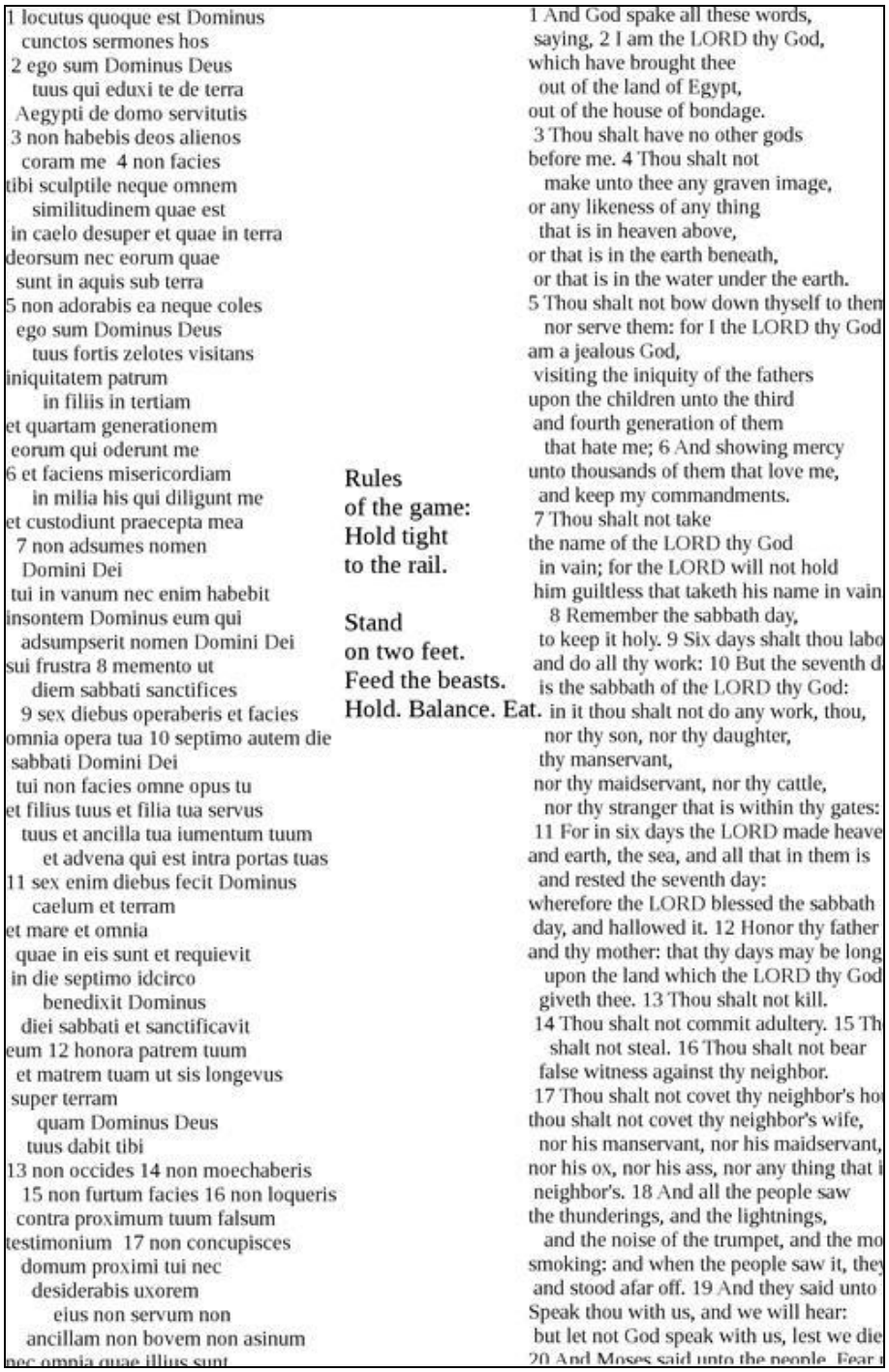


Poem 2.4: Infancy

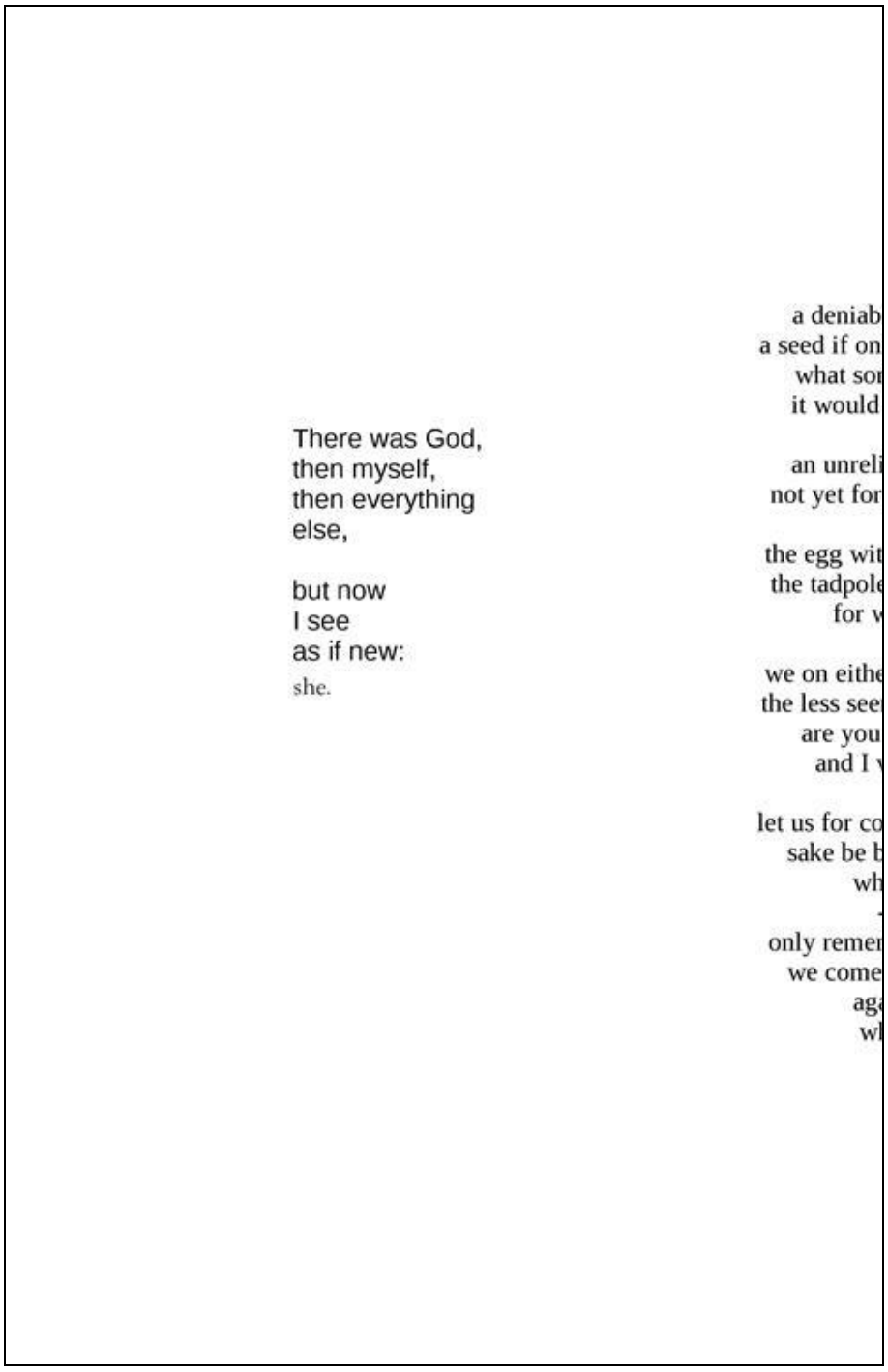
Poem 2.5: “what is breath in the air, or rain in the sea?”



Poem 2.6: Damned Taxonomy

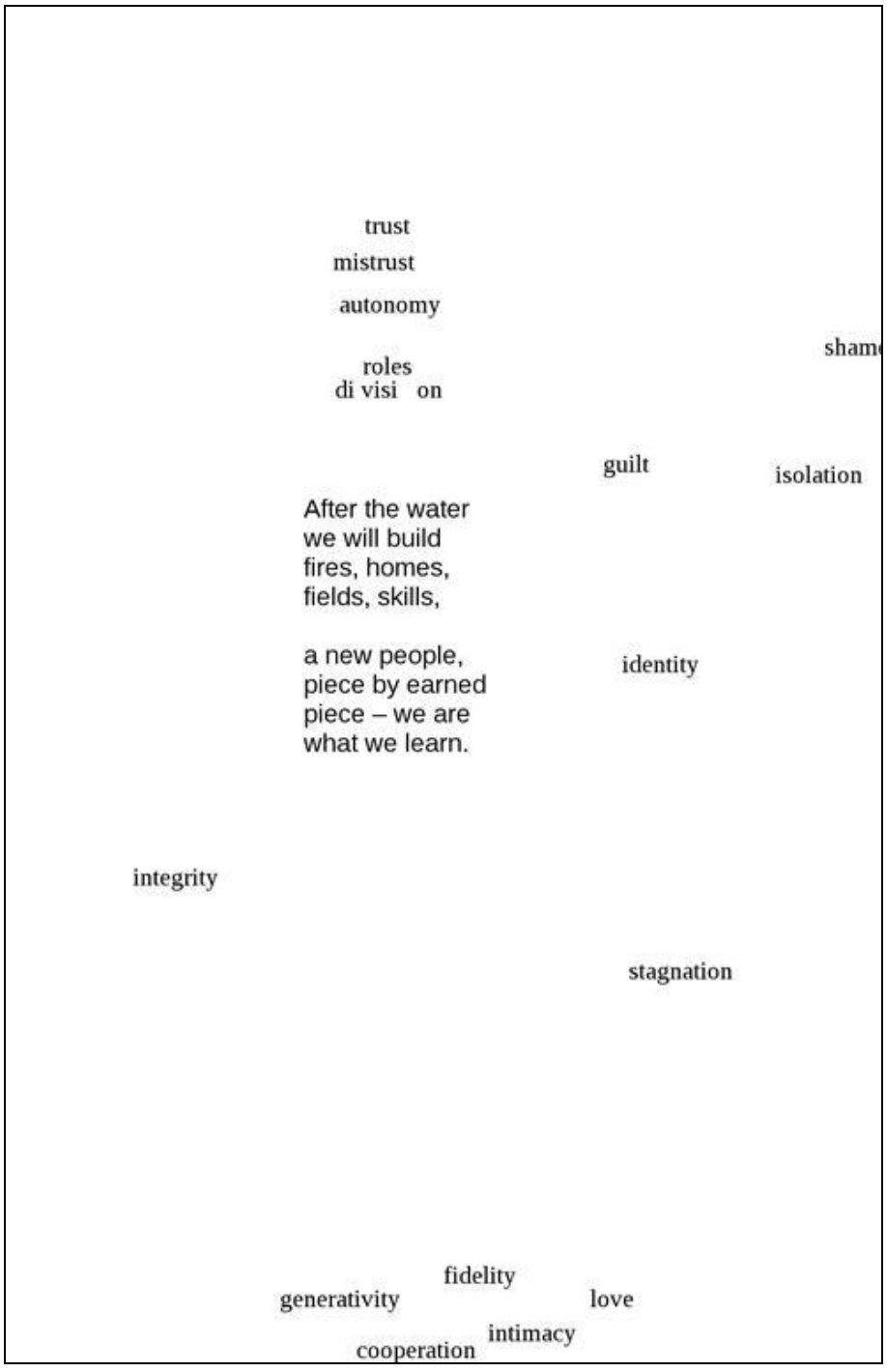


Poem 2.7: Laws and Walls

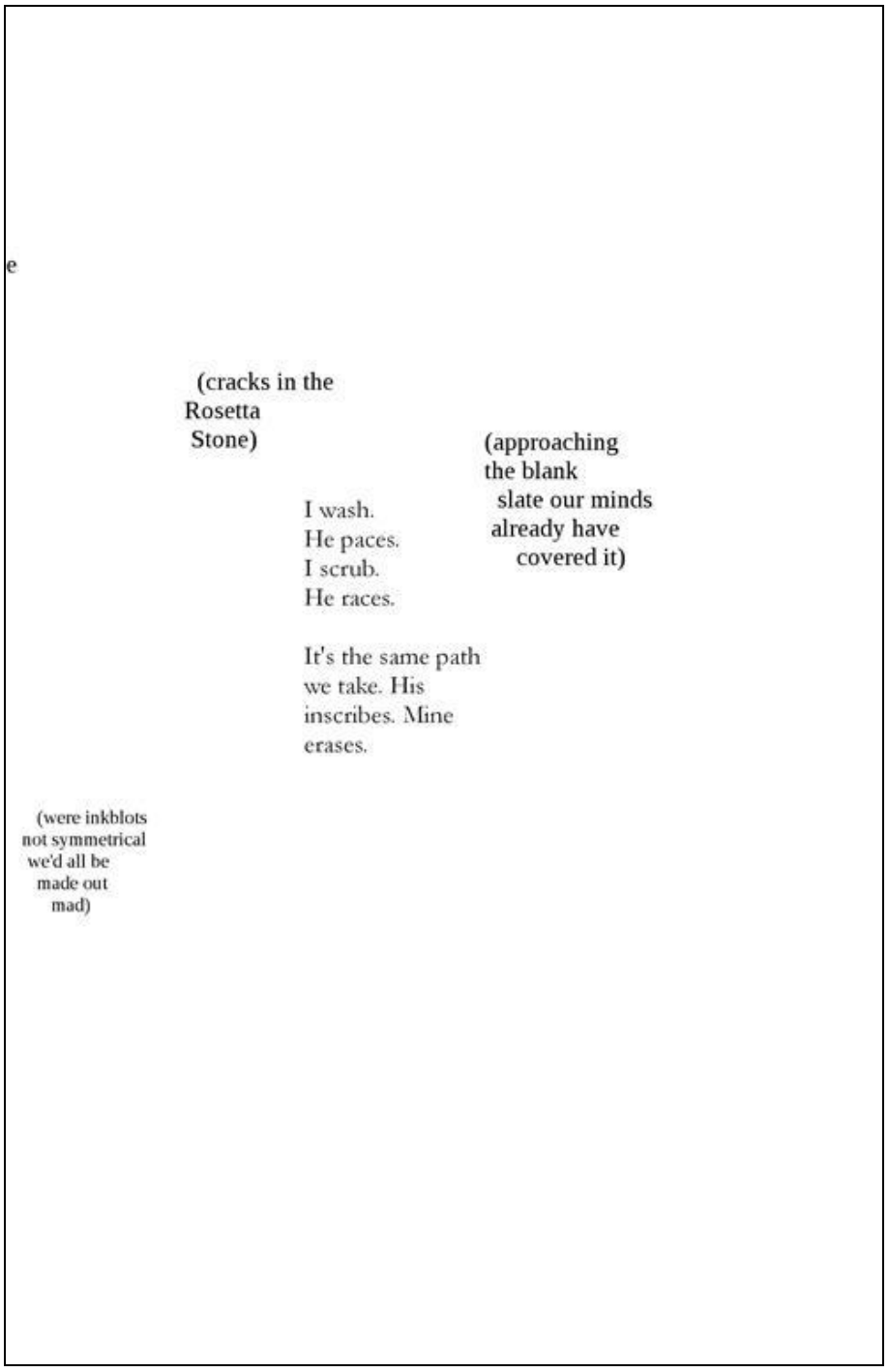


Poem 2.8: Noah emerges

Poem 2.9: the wife emerges

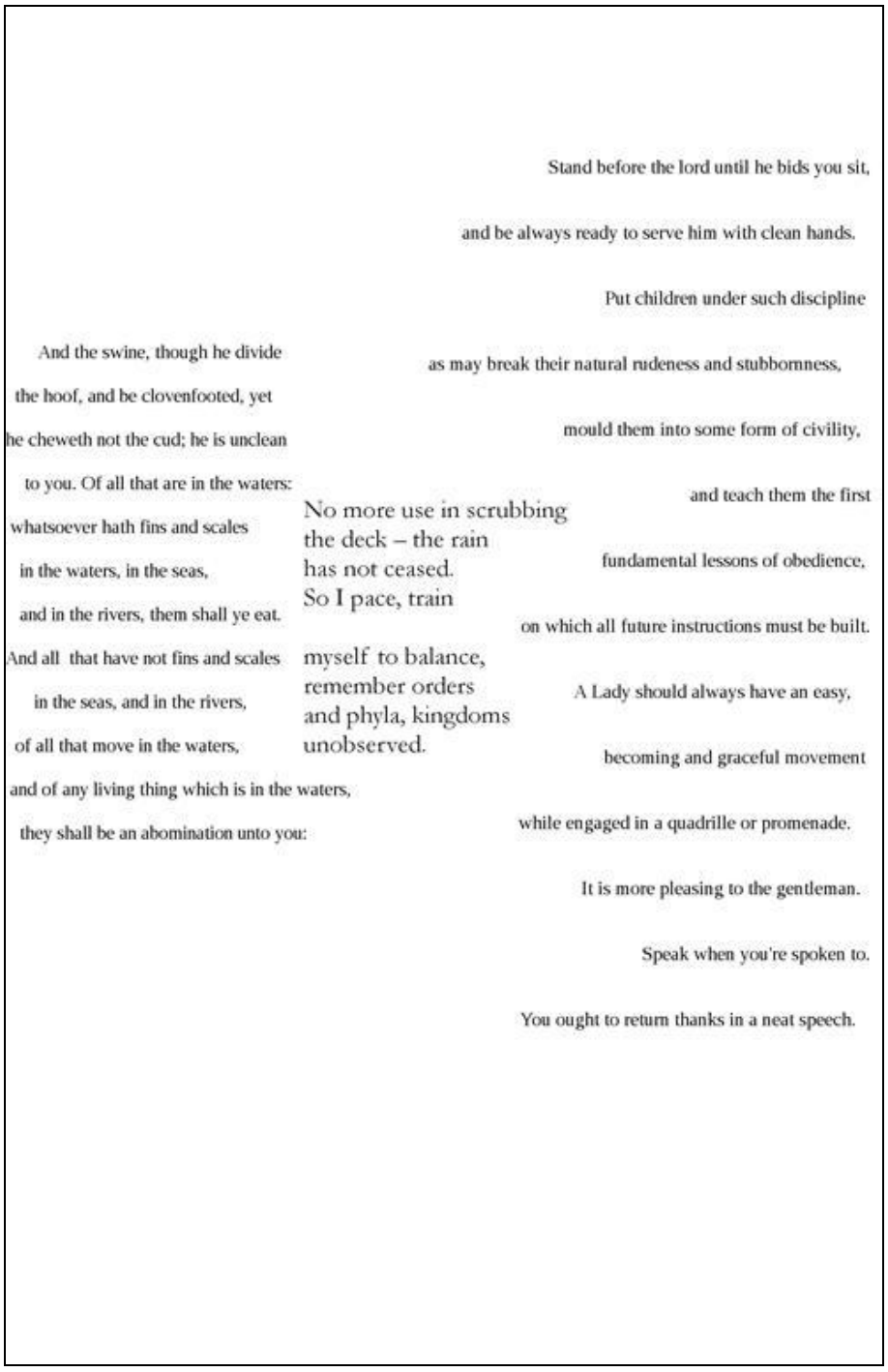


Poem 2.10: Erikson

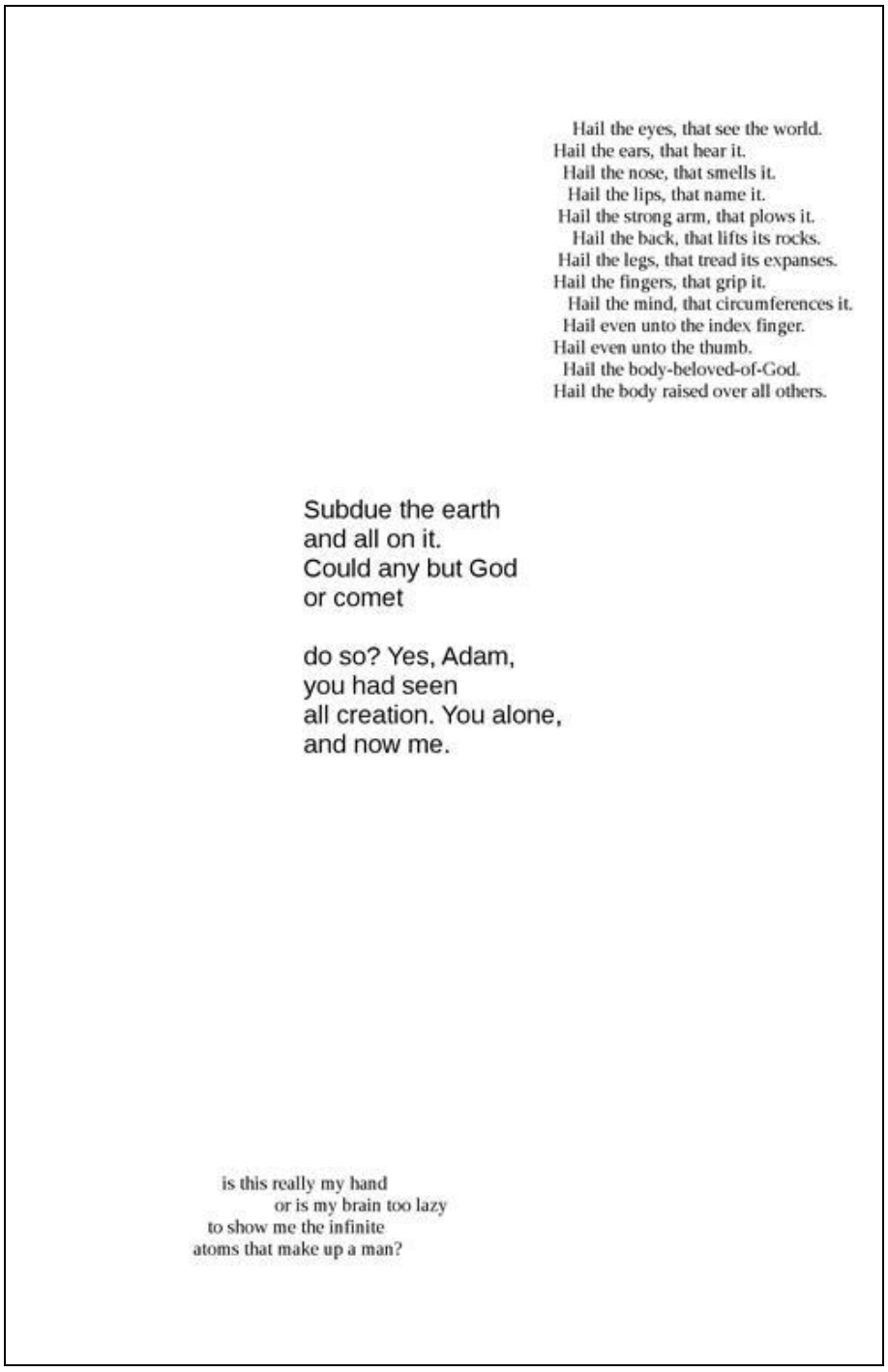


Poem 2.11: role-calling

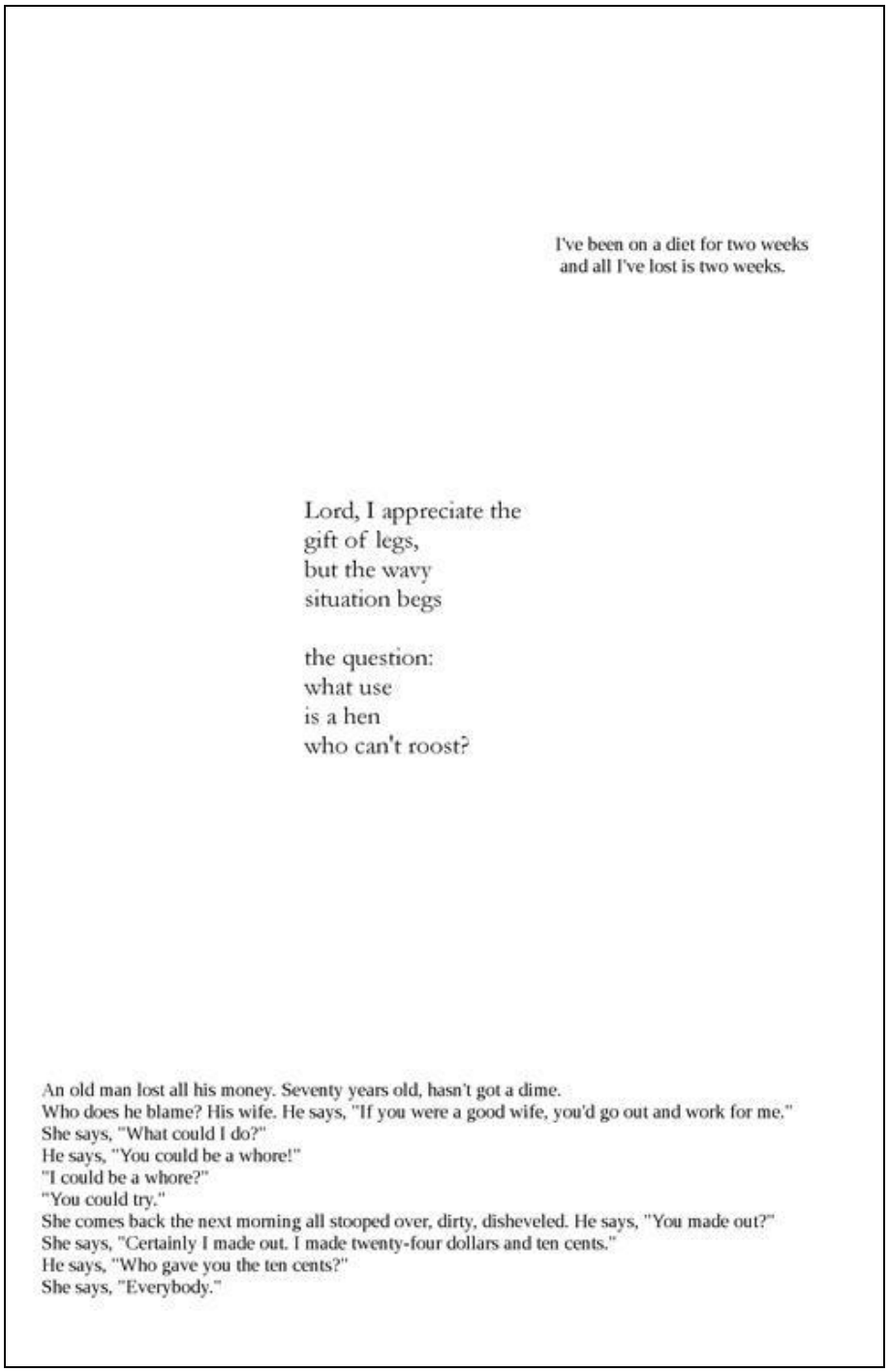
Poem 2.12: bestiary



Poem 2.13: marching orders



Poem 2.14: *What Narcissism Means to Me*



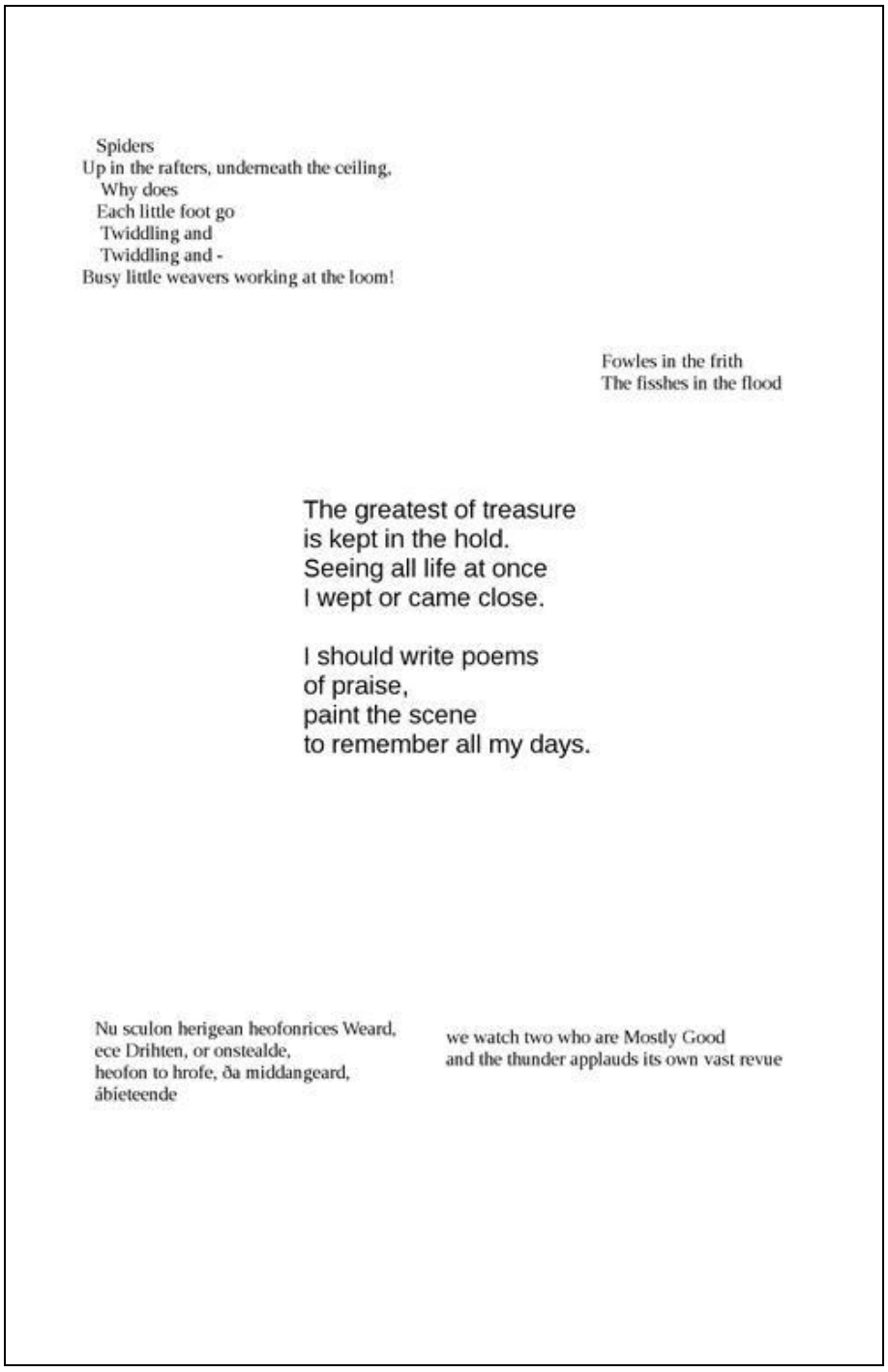
I've been on a diet for two weeks
and all I've lost is two weeks.

Lord, I appreciate the
gift of legs,
but the wavy
situation begs

the question:
what use
is a hen
who can't roost?

An old man lost all his money. Seventy years old, hasn't got a dime.
Who does he blame? His wife. He says, "If you were a good wife, you'd go out and work for me."
She says, "What could I do?"
He says, "You could be a whore!"
"I could be a whore?"
"You could try."
She comes back the next morning all stooped over, dirty, disheveled. He says, "You made out?"
She says, "Certainly I made out. I made twenty-four dollars and ten cents."
He says, "Who gave you the ten cents?"
She says, "Everybody."

Poem 2.15: First Ladies

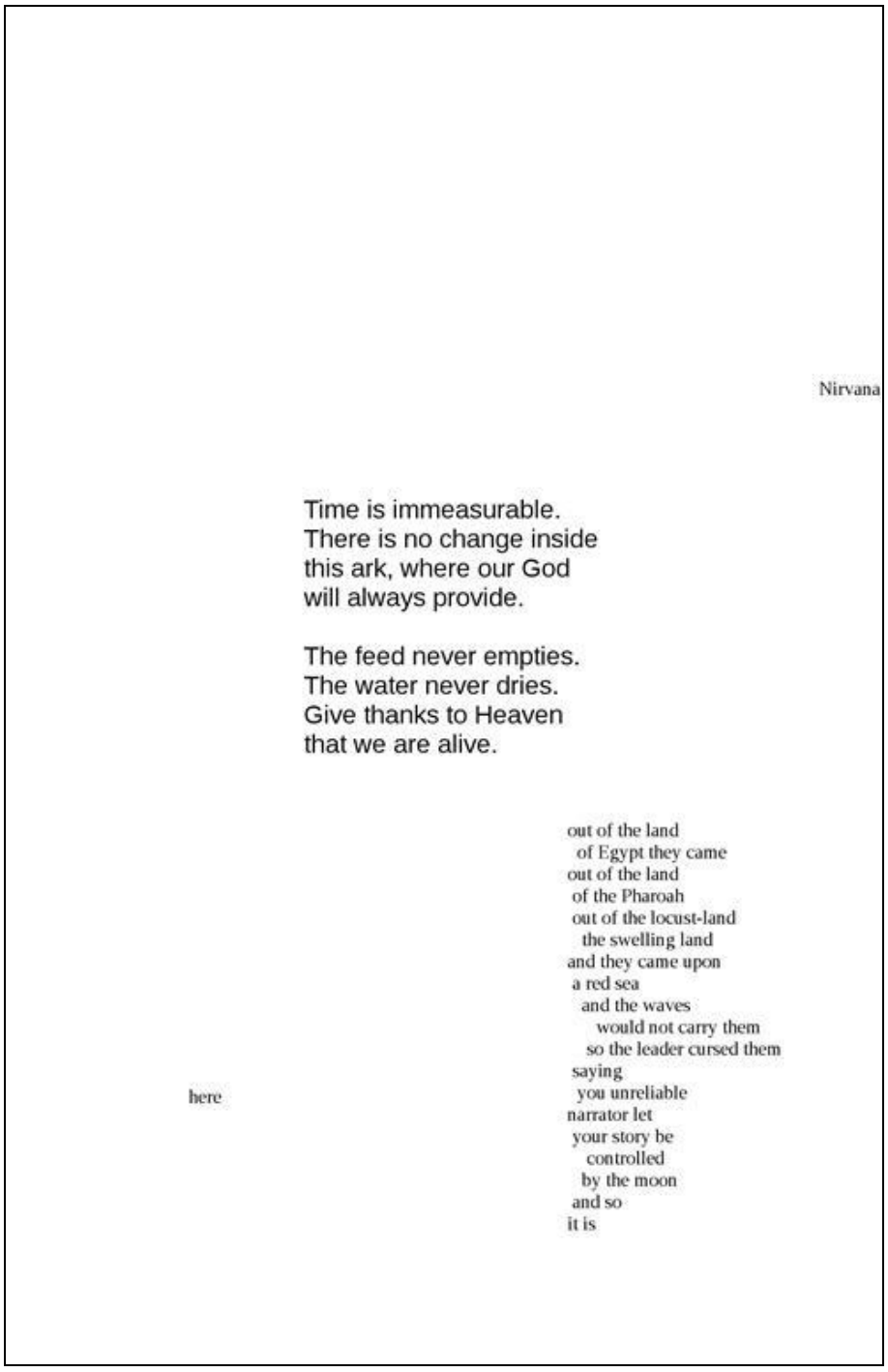


Poem 2.16: ye olde

Poem 2.17: Predating Mumford & Sons

Poem 2.18: The Boke of Maneres

2.19: & the Valley & the Shadow & Our Former Selves



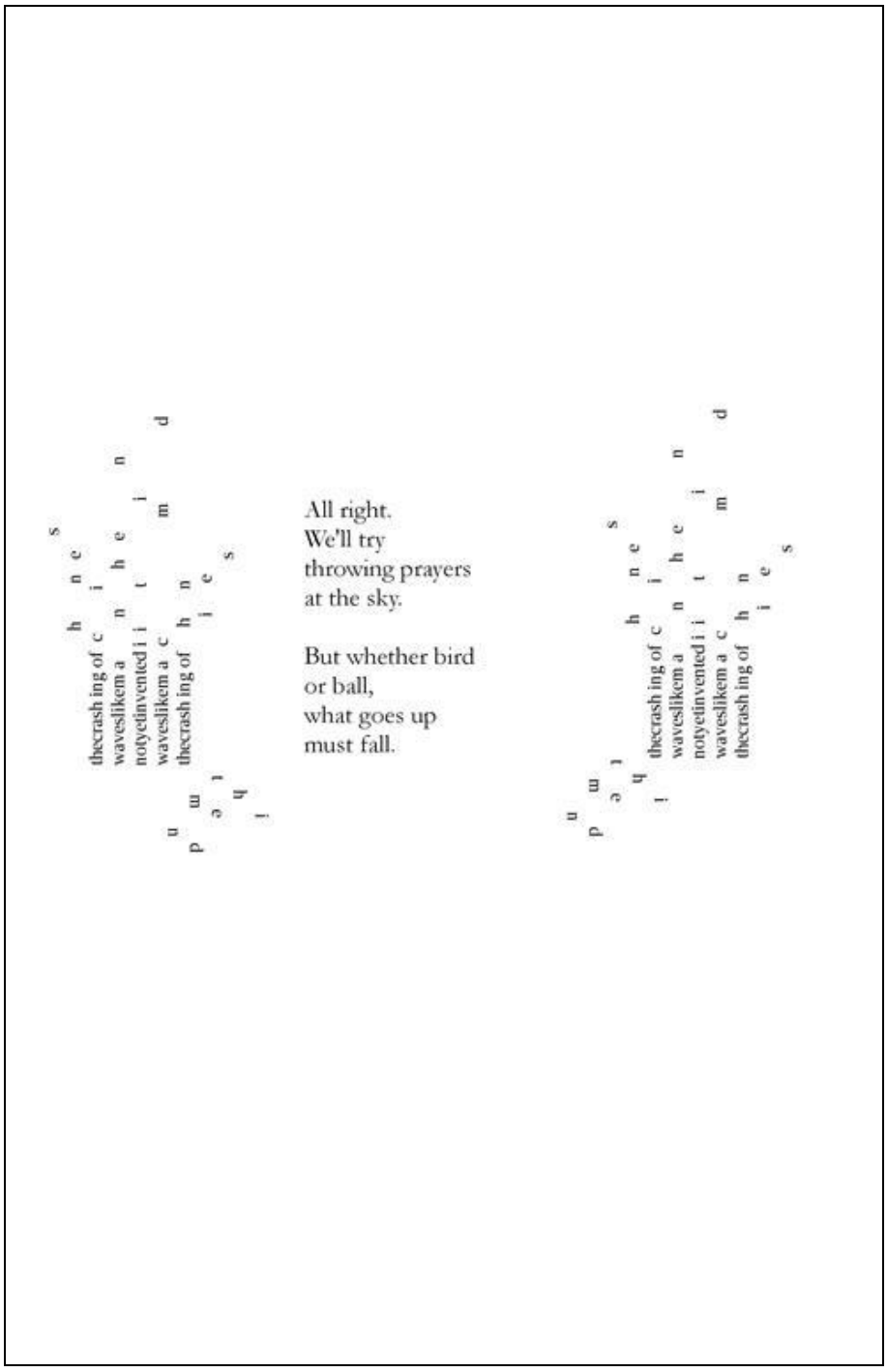
Poem 2.20: unreliable narrators

Poem 2.21: Cue U2

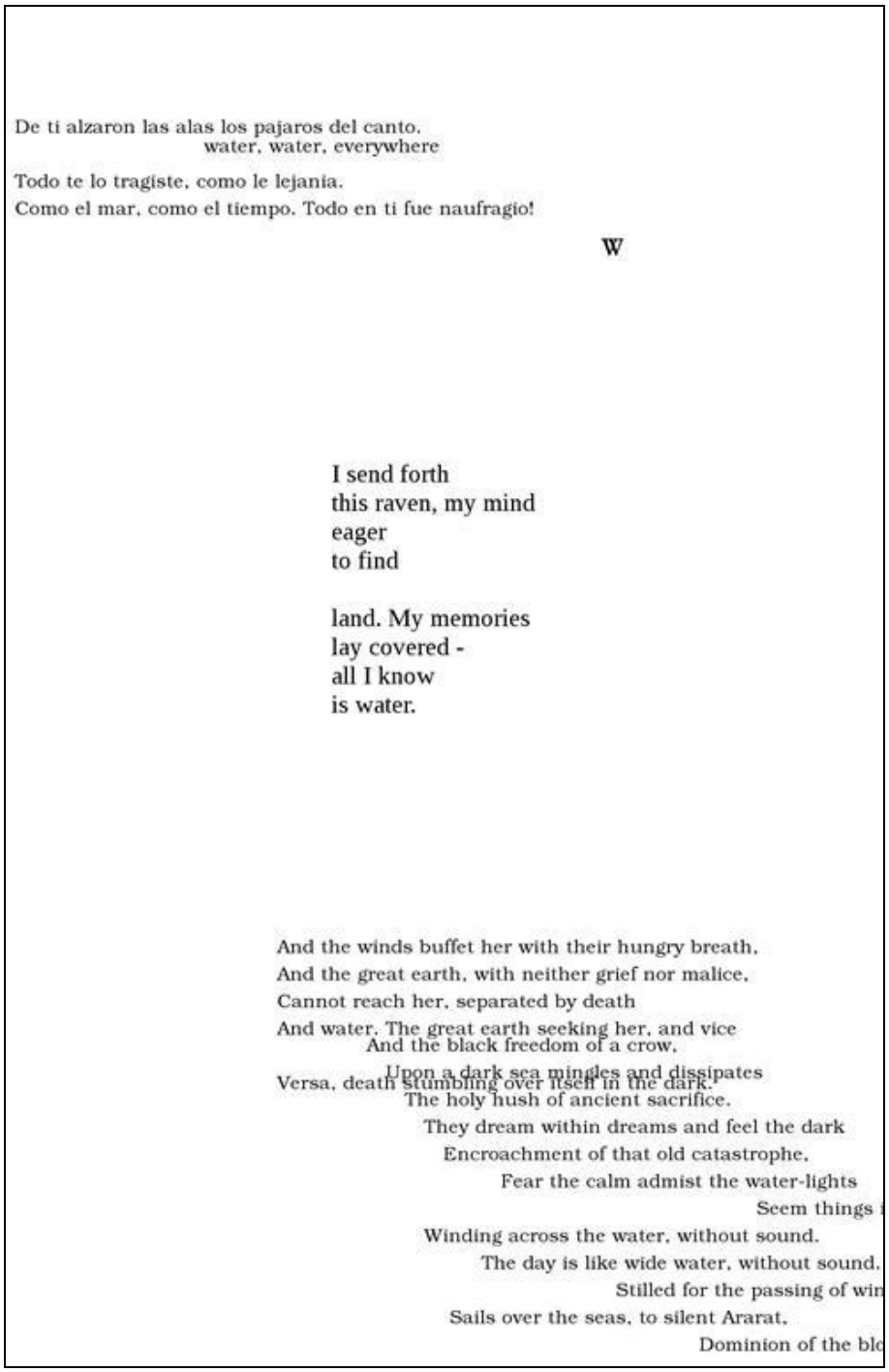
Poem 2.22: A test?

Poem 2.23: The Alpha and the Meta

Poem 2.24: scattershot prophecy



Poem 2.25: crashing symbols



De ti alzaron las alas los pajaros del canto.
water, water, everywhere
Todo te lo tragiste, como le lejania.
Como el mar, como el tiempo. Todo en ti fue naufragio!

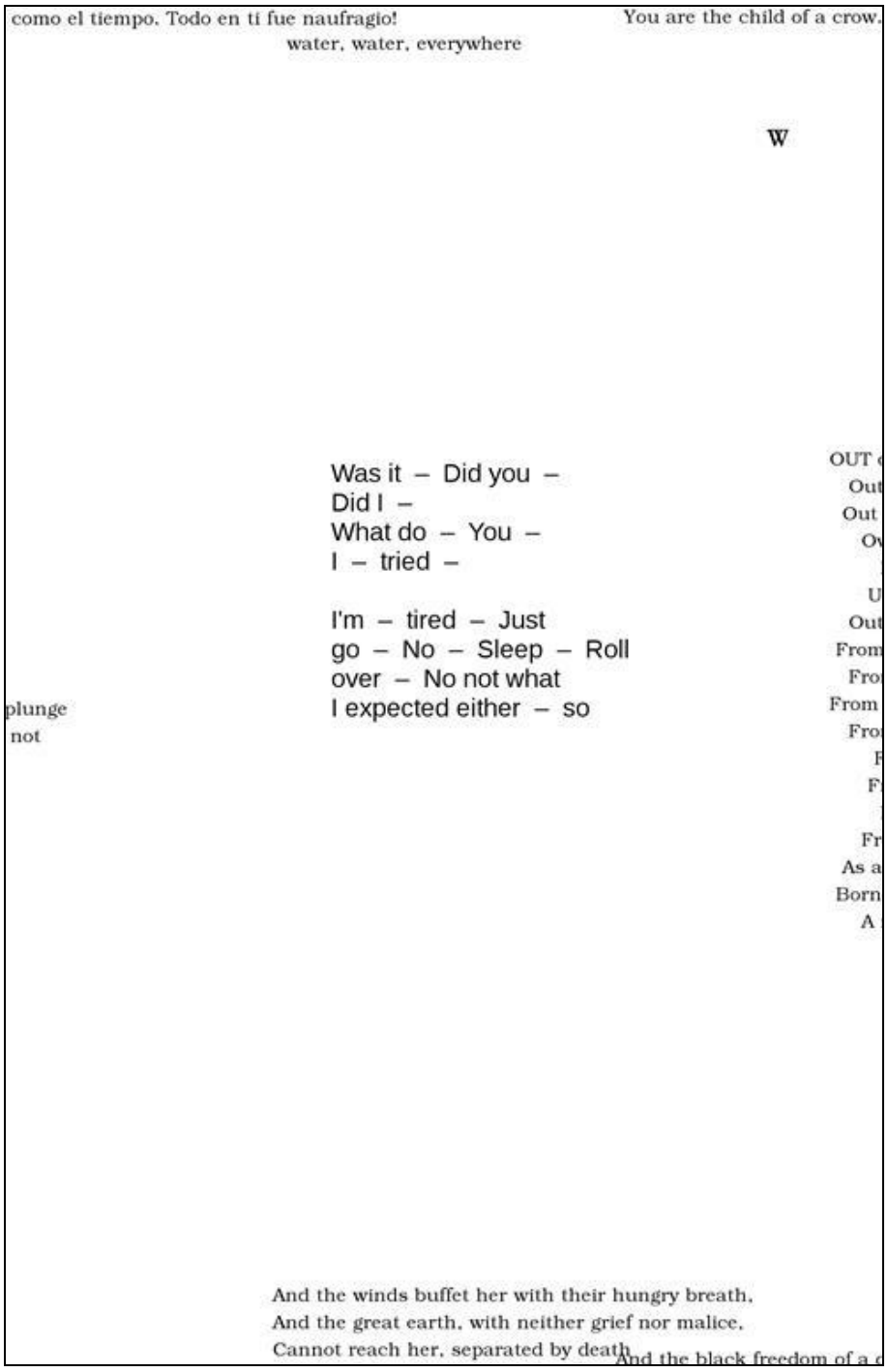
W

I send forth
this raven, my mind
eager
to find

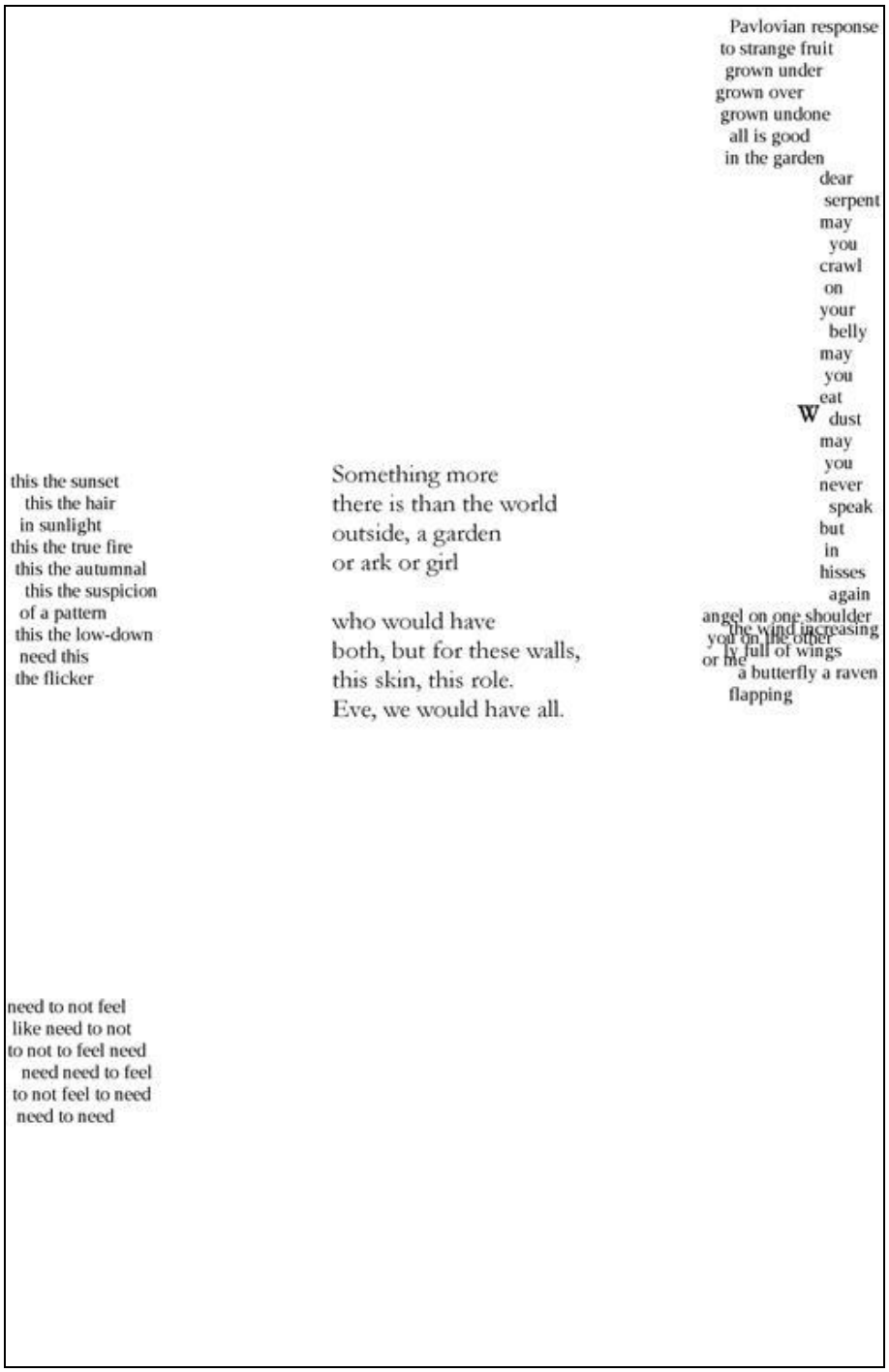
land. My memories
lay covered -
all I know
is water.

And the winds buffet her with their hungry breath,
And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice,
Cannot reach her, separated by death
And water. The great earth seeking her, and vice
And the black freedom of a crow,
Upon a dark sea mingles and dissipates
Versa, death stumbling over itself in the dark.
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice.
They dream within dreams and feel the dark
Encroachment of that old catastrophe,
Fear the calm admist the water-lights
Seem things
Winding across the water, without sound.
The day is like wide water, without sound,
Stilled for the passing of wi
Sails over the seas, to silent Ararat,
Dominion of the bl

Poem 2.26: citizen crow

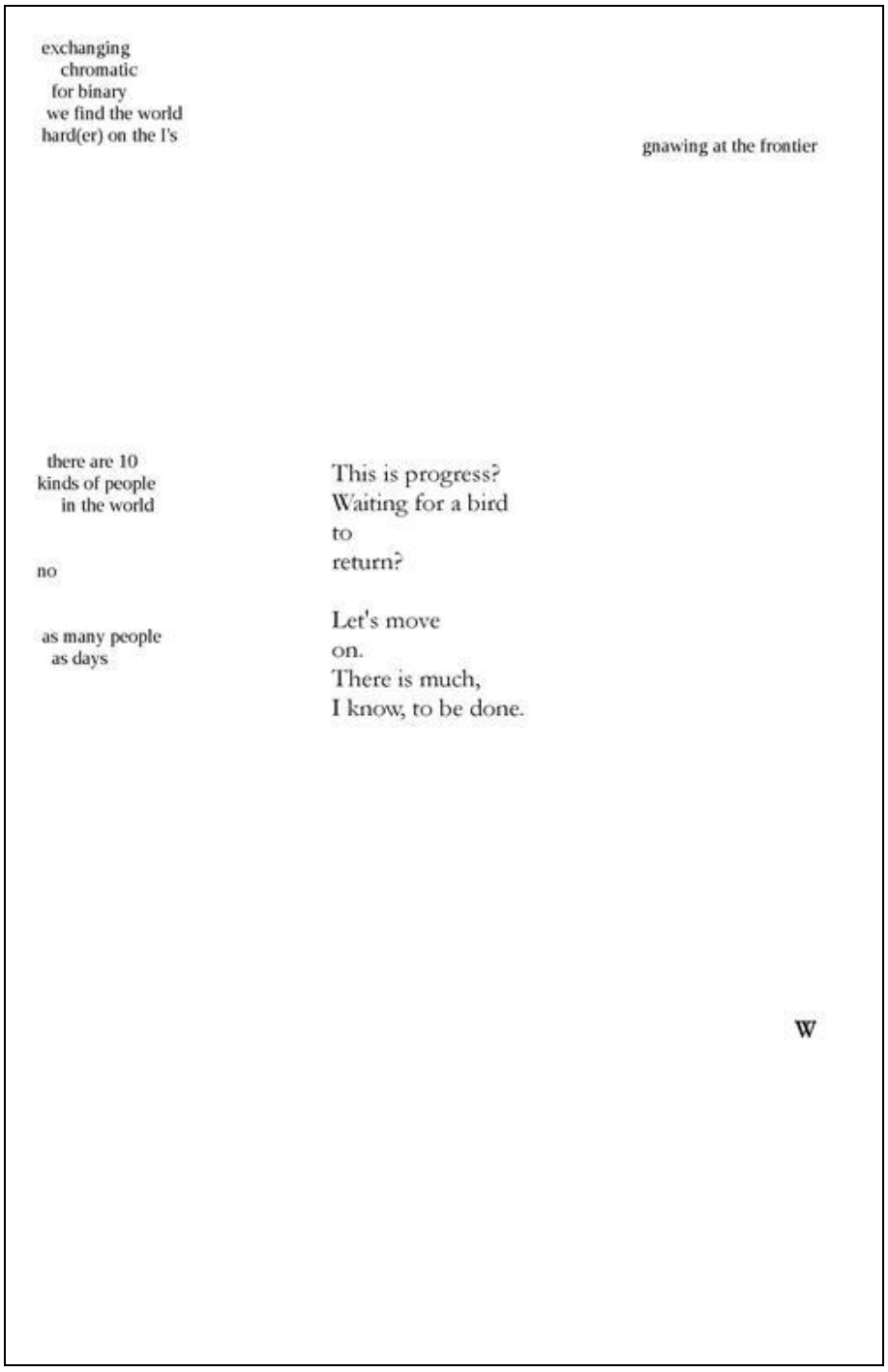


Poem 2.27: redshifting web

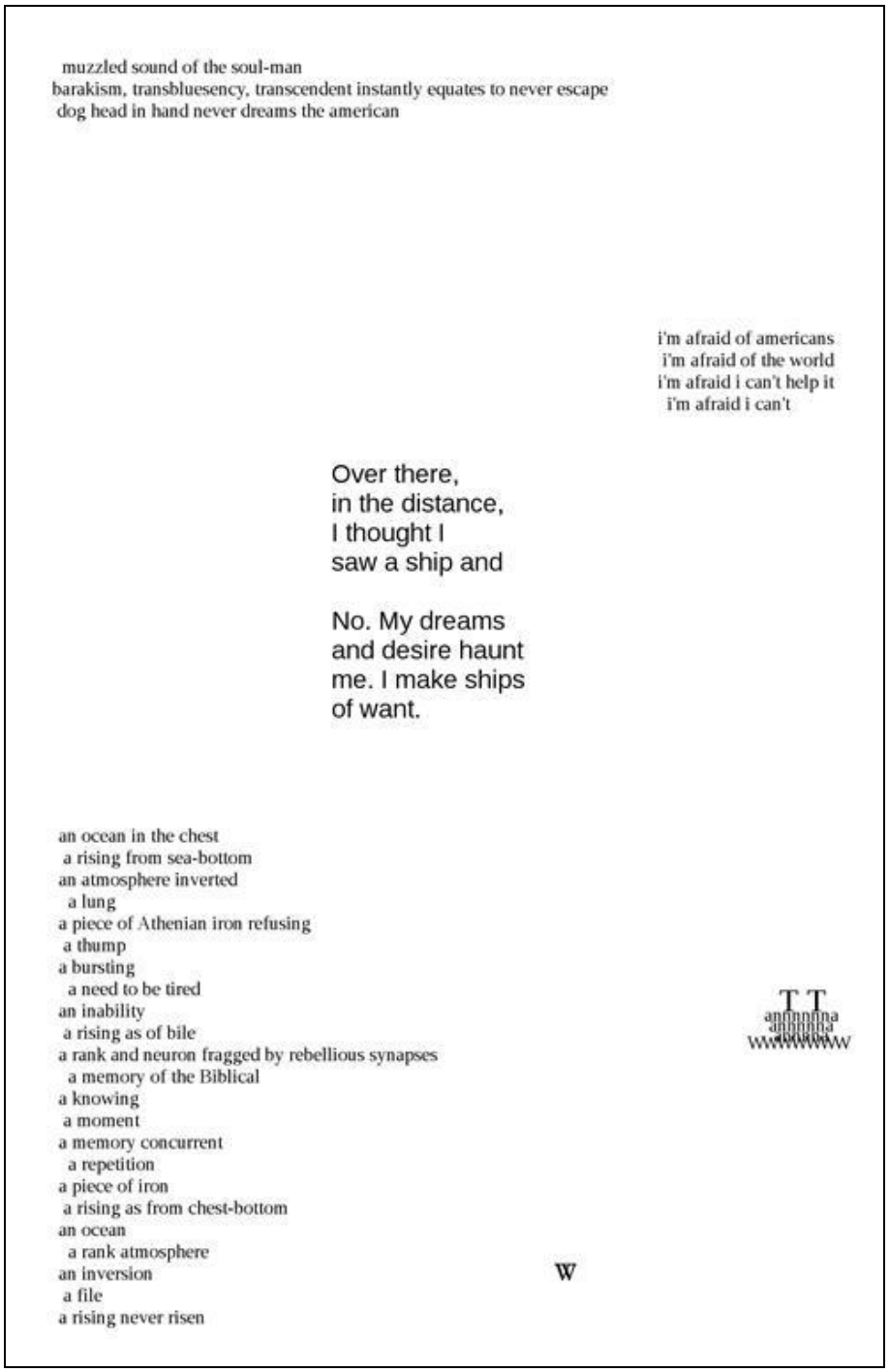


Poem 2.28: Red Delicious

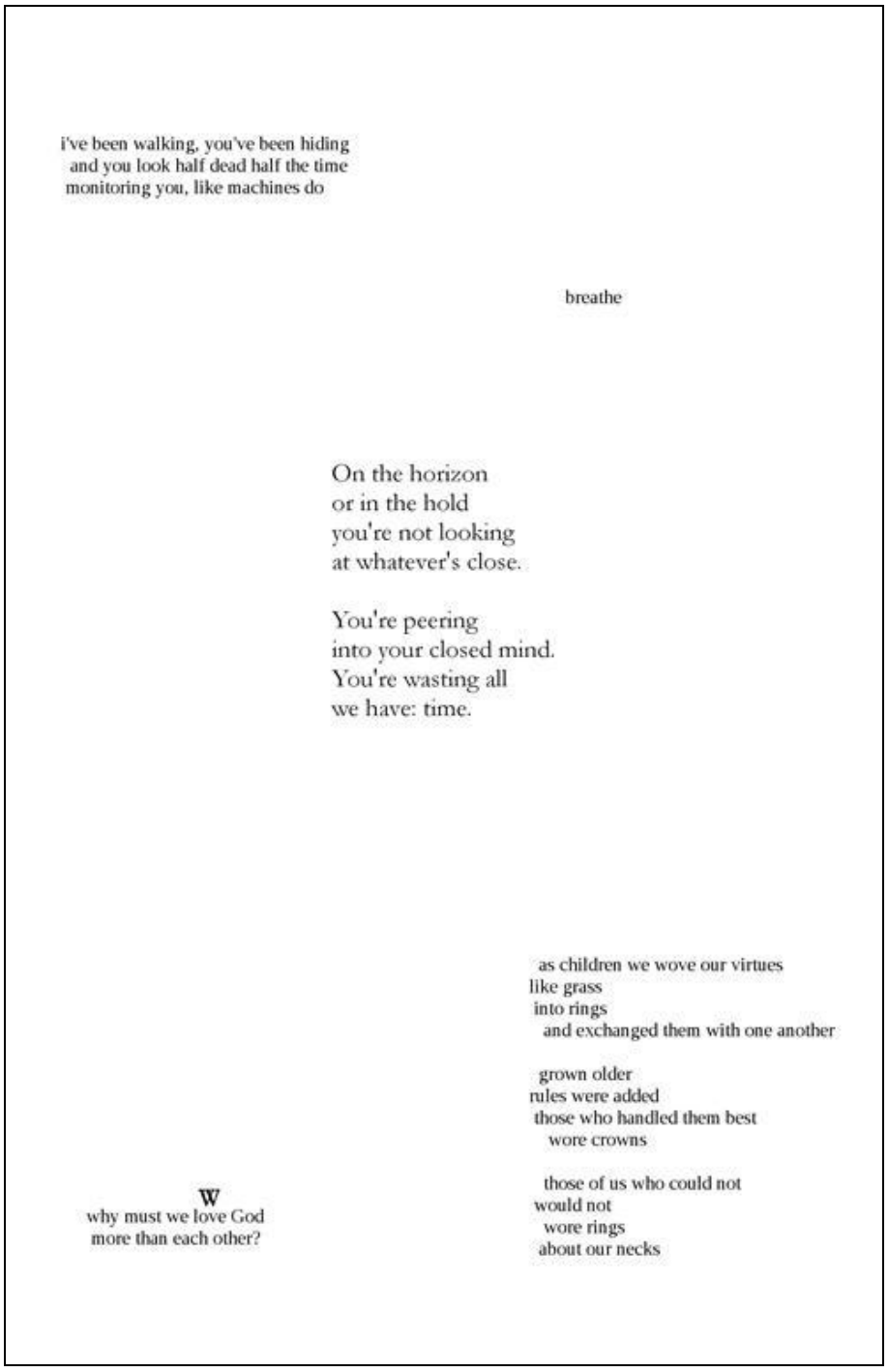
Poem 2.29: The man with the bag


exchanging
chromatic
for binary
we find the world
hard(er) on the I's
gnawing at the frontier
there are 10
kinds of people
in the world
no
as many people
as days
This is progress?
Waiting for a bird
to
return?
Let's move
on.
There is much,
I know, to be done.
W

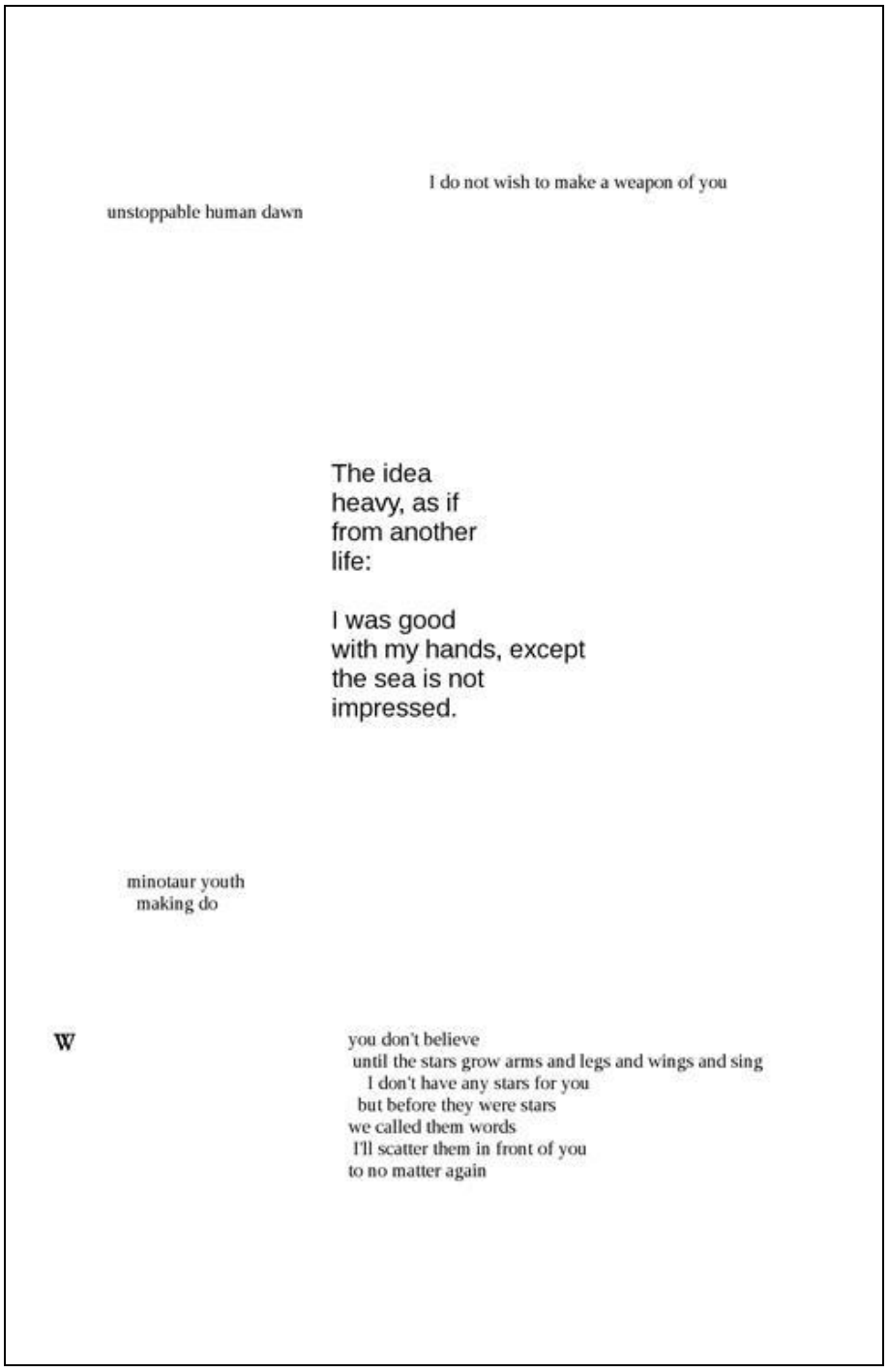
Poem 2.30: 101



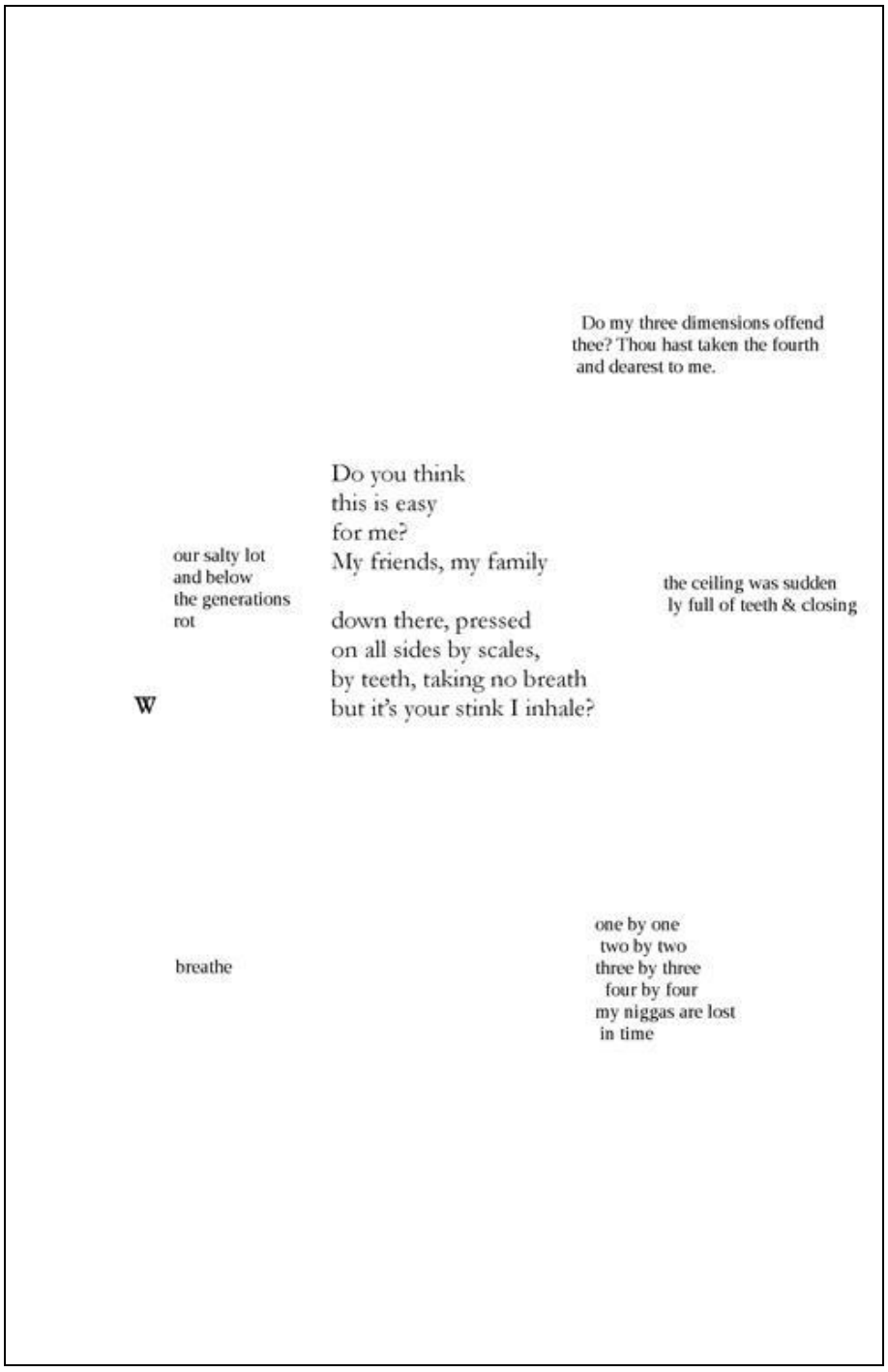
Poem 2.31: Las/Loss Americas



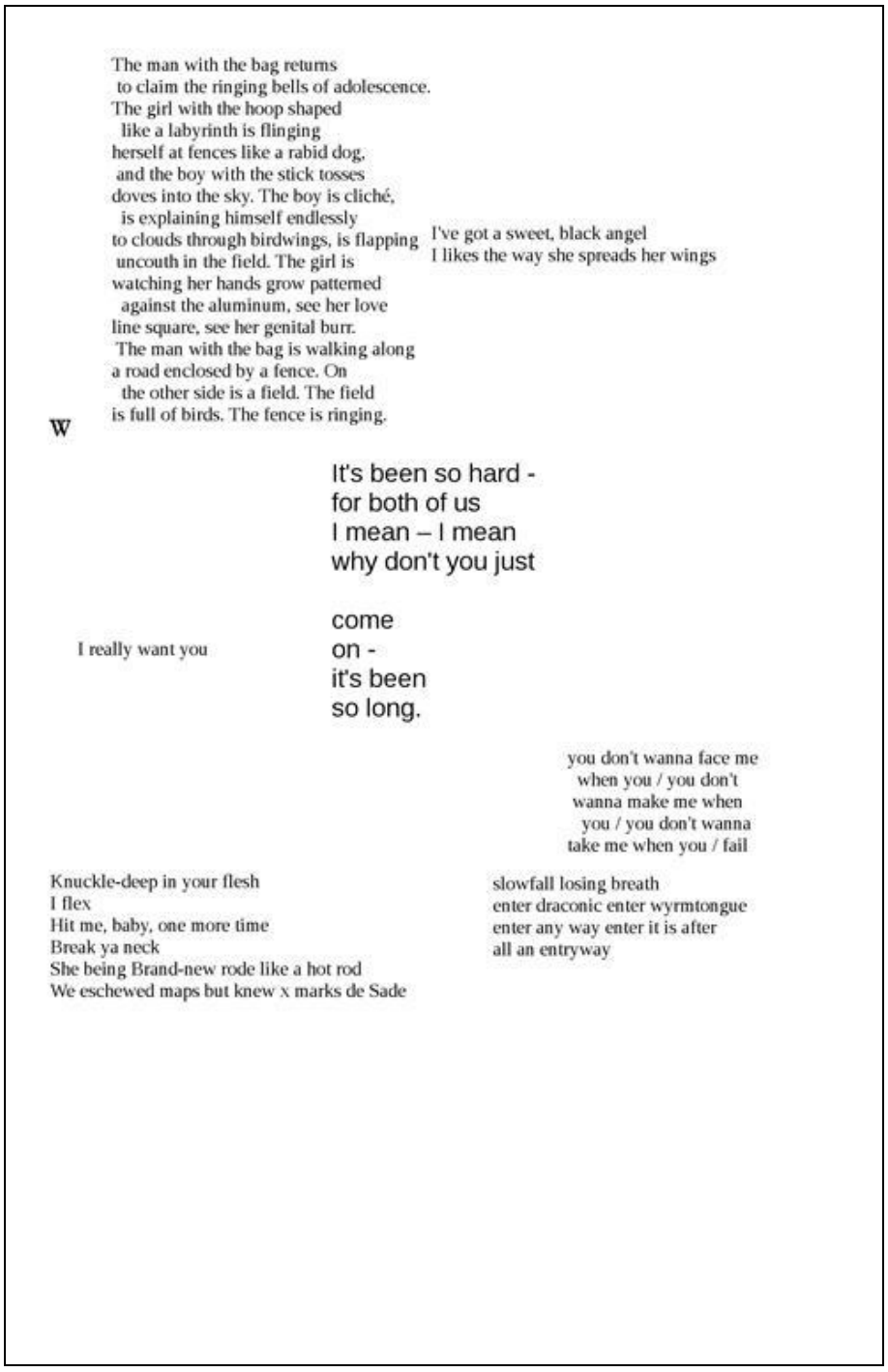
Poem 2.32: *I Megaphone*



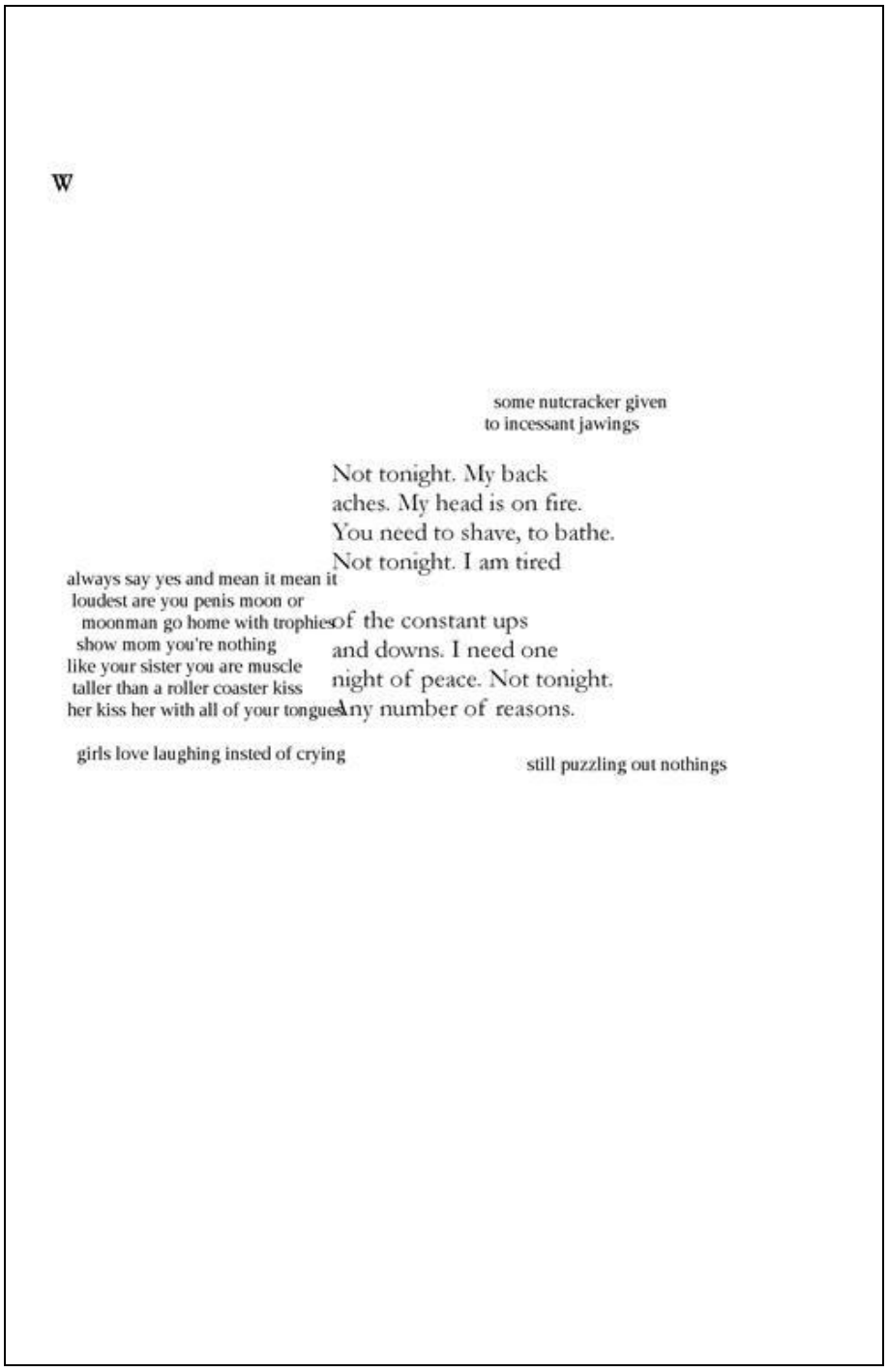
Poem 2.33: for Crystal



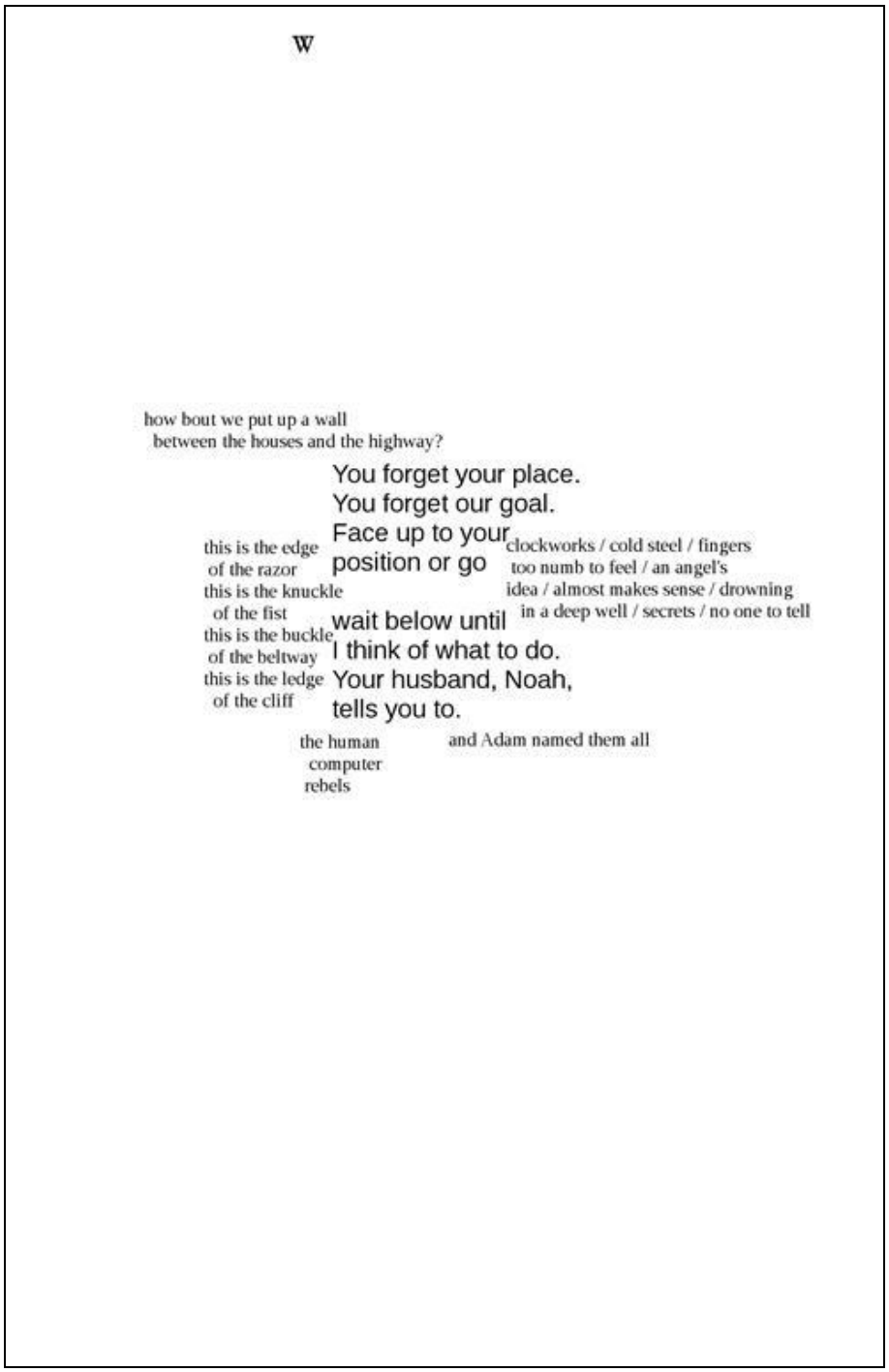
Poem 2.34: Bait and Switch



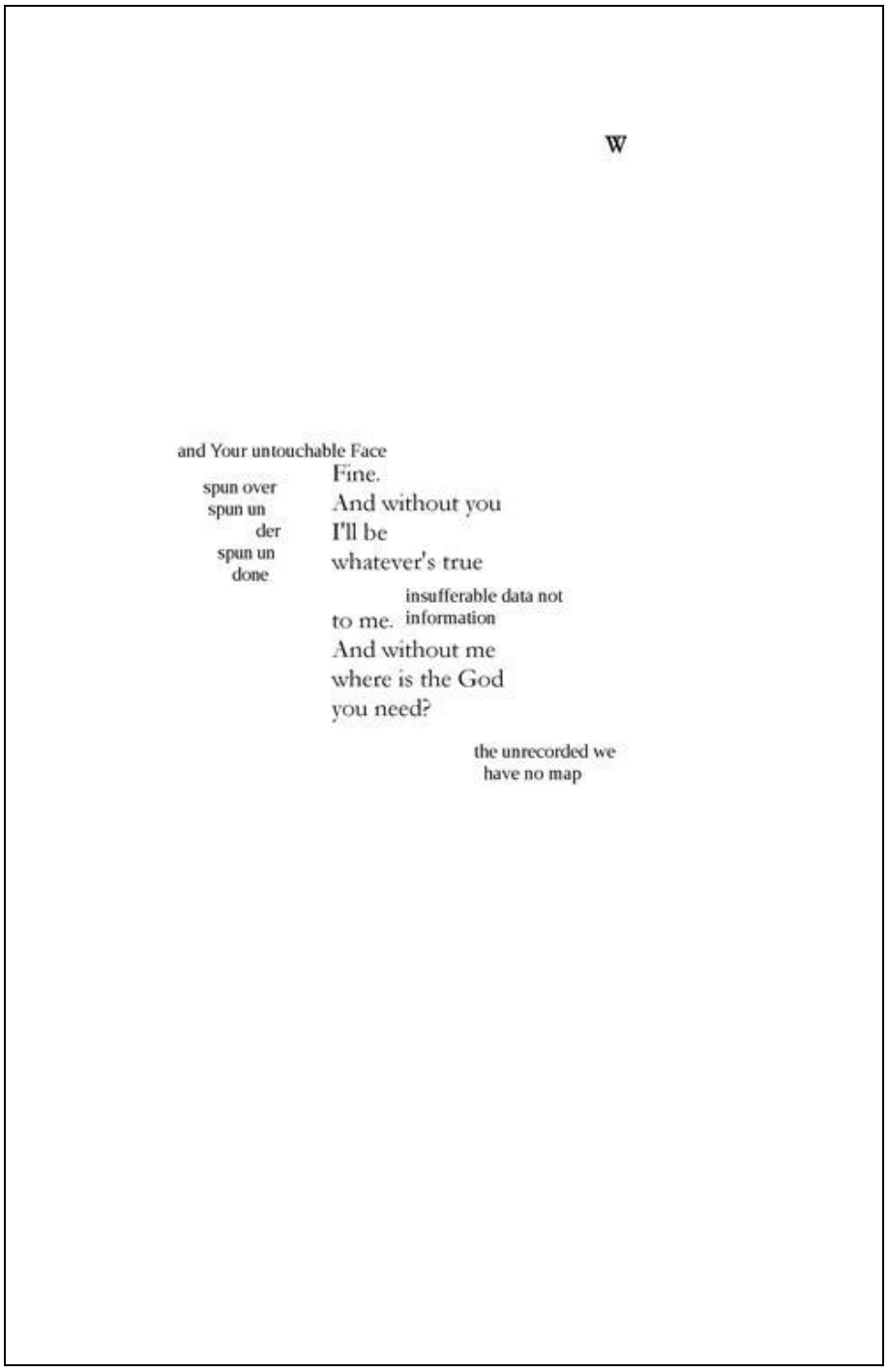
Poem 2.35: We've heard this song before



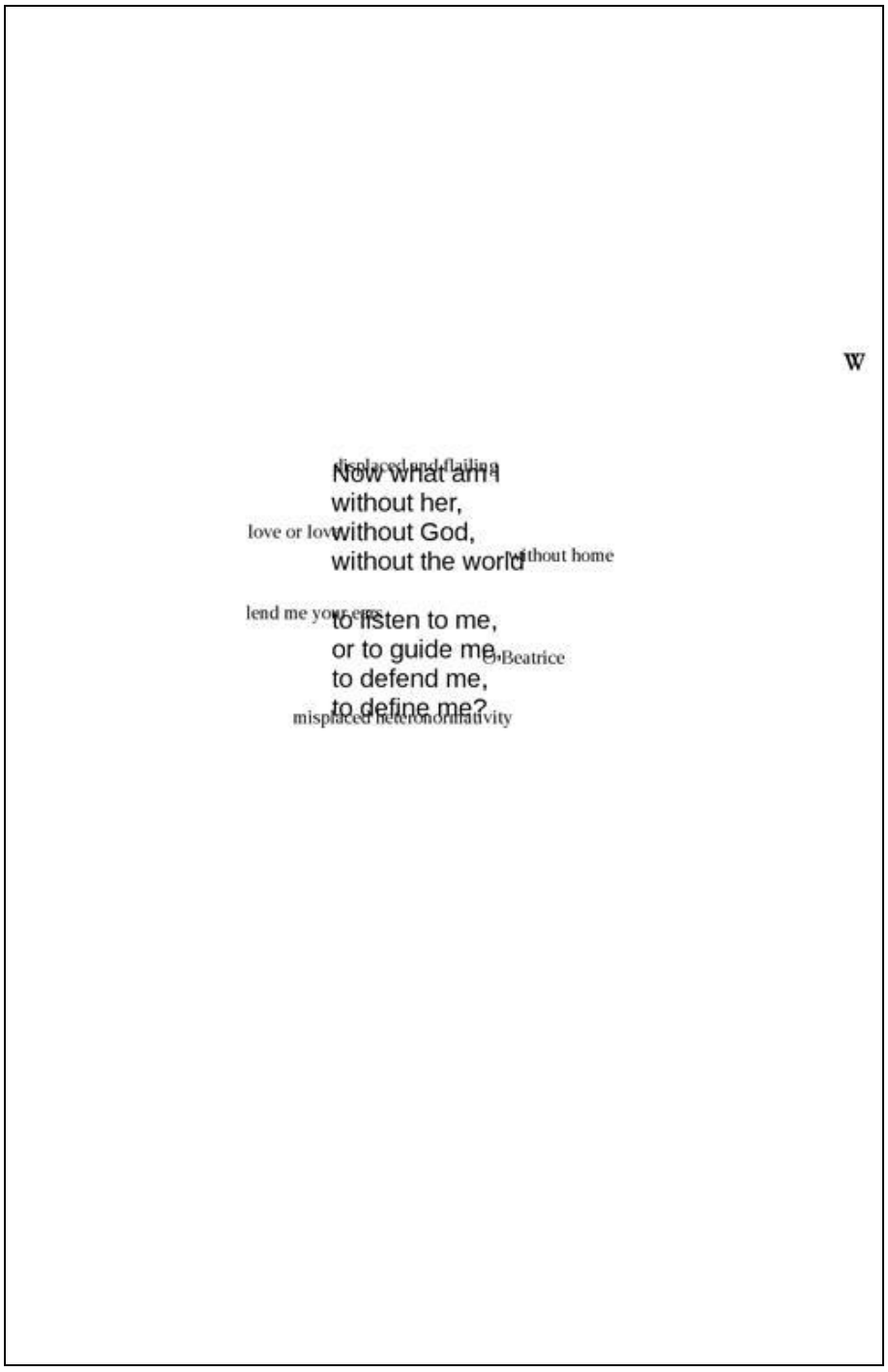
Poem 2.36: for Elizabeth



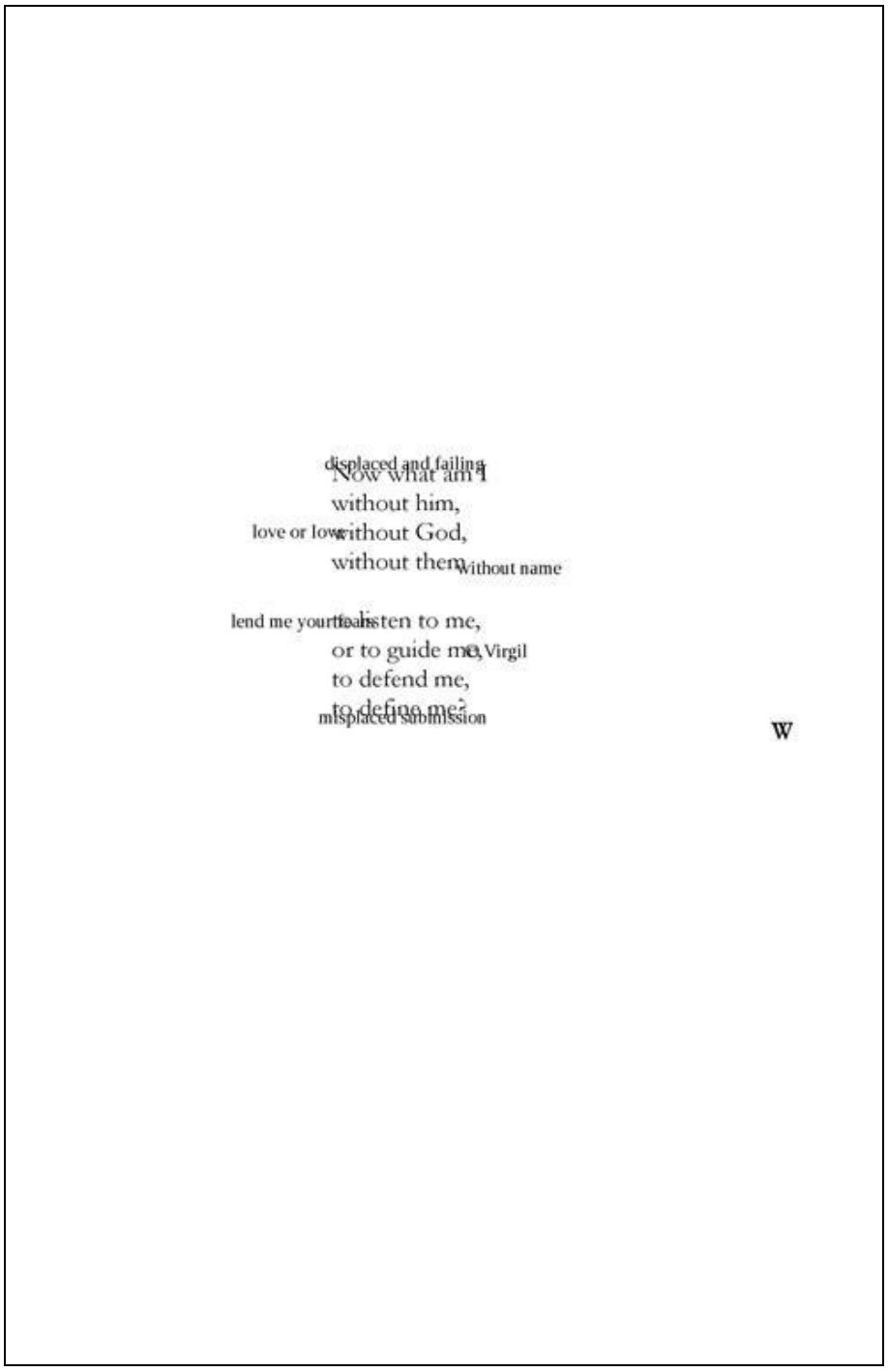
Poem 2.37: Even when they're dry as my lips for years



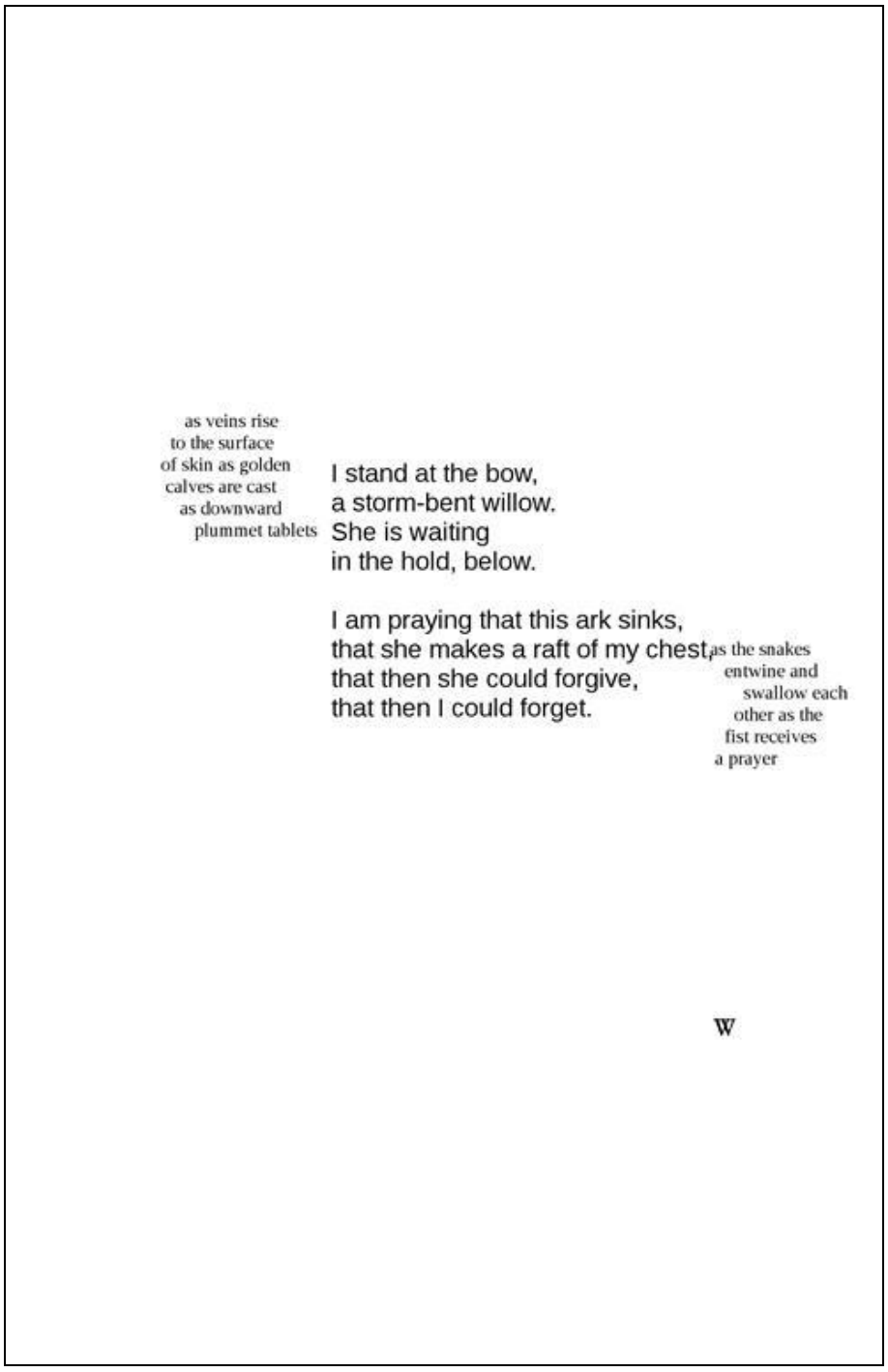
Poem 2.38: The walls of your bower


W
displaced and flailing
Now what am I
without her,
love or lov
without God,
without the world
without home
lend me your ears
to listen to me,
or to guide me,
O Beatrice
to defend me,
to define me?
misplaced heteronormativity

Poem 2.39: 1:1 #1

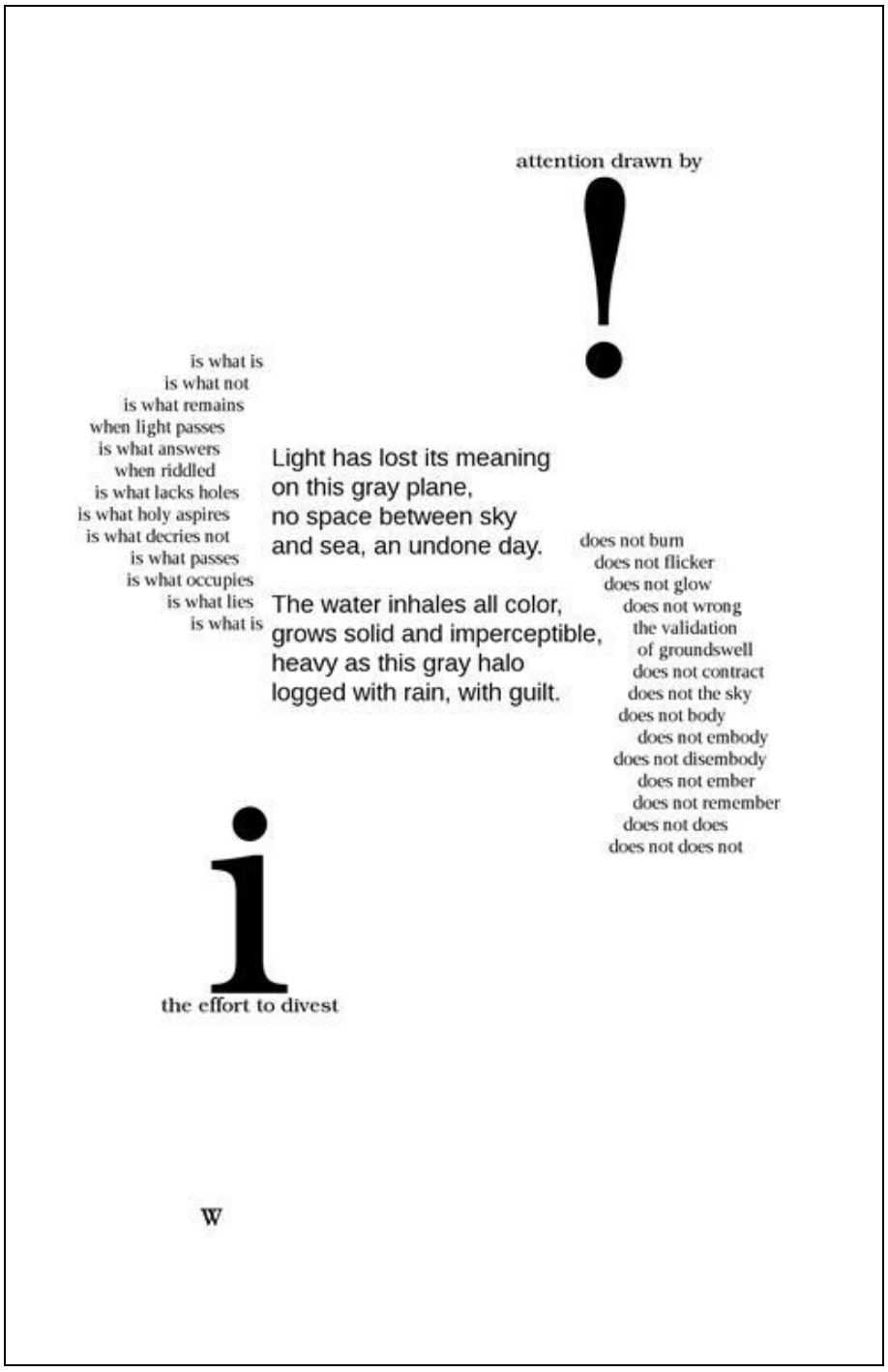

displaced and failing
Now what am I
without him,
love or low
without God,
without them
Without name
lend me your ears
listen to me,
or to guide me
Virgil
to defend me,
to define me?
misplaced submission
W

Poem 2.40: 1:1 #2

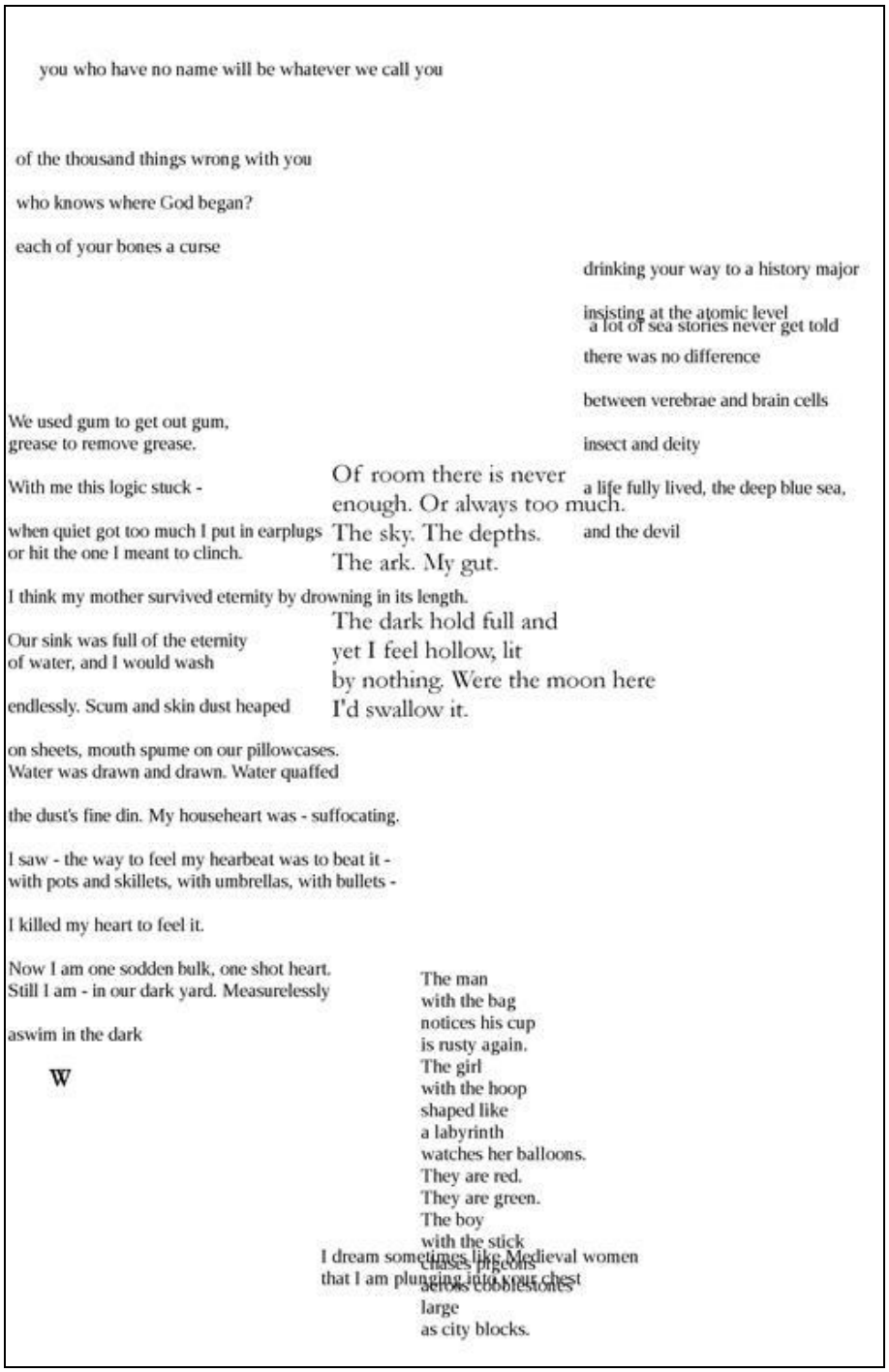


Poem 2.41: Flesh against wood

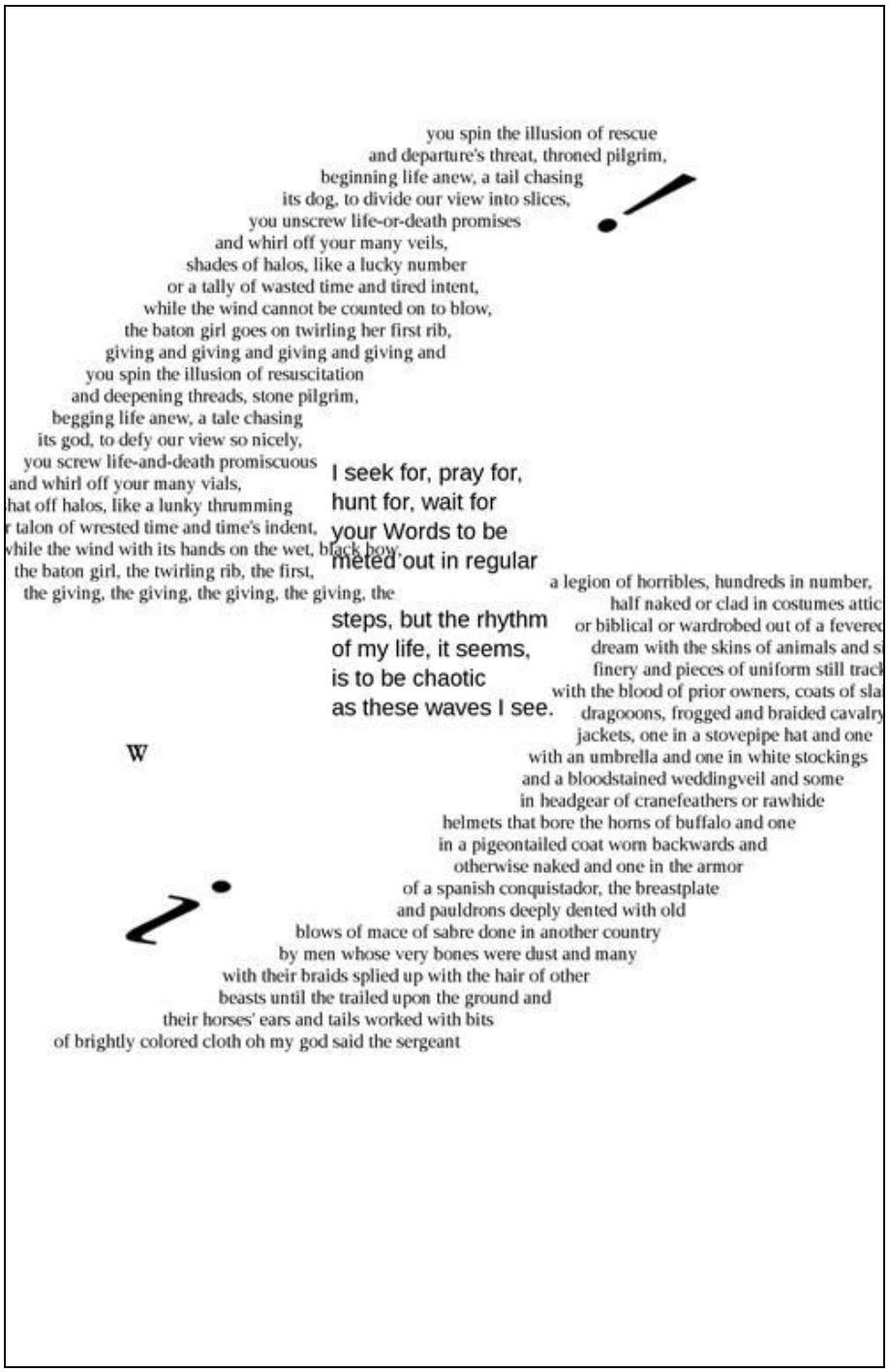
Poem 2.42 Xenophanes



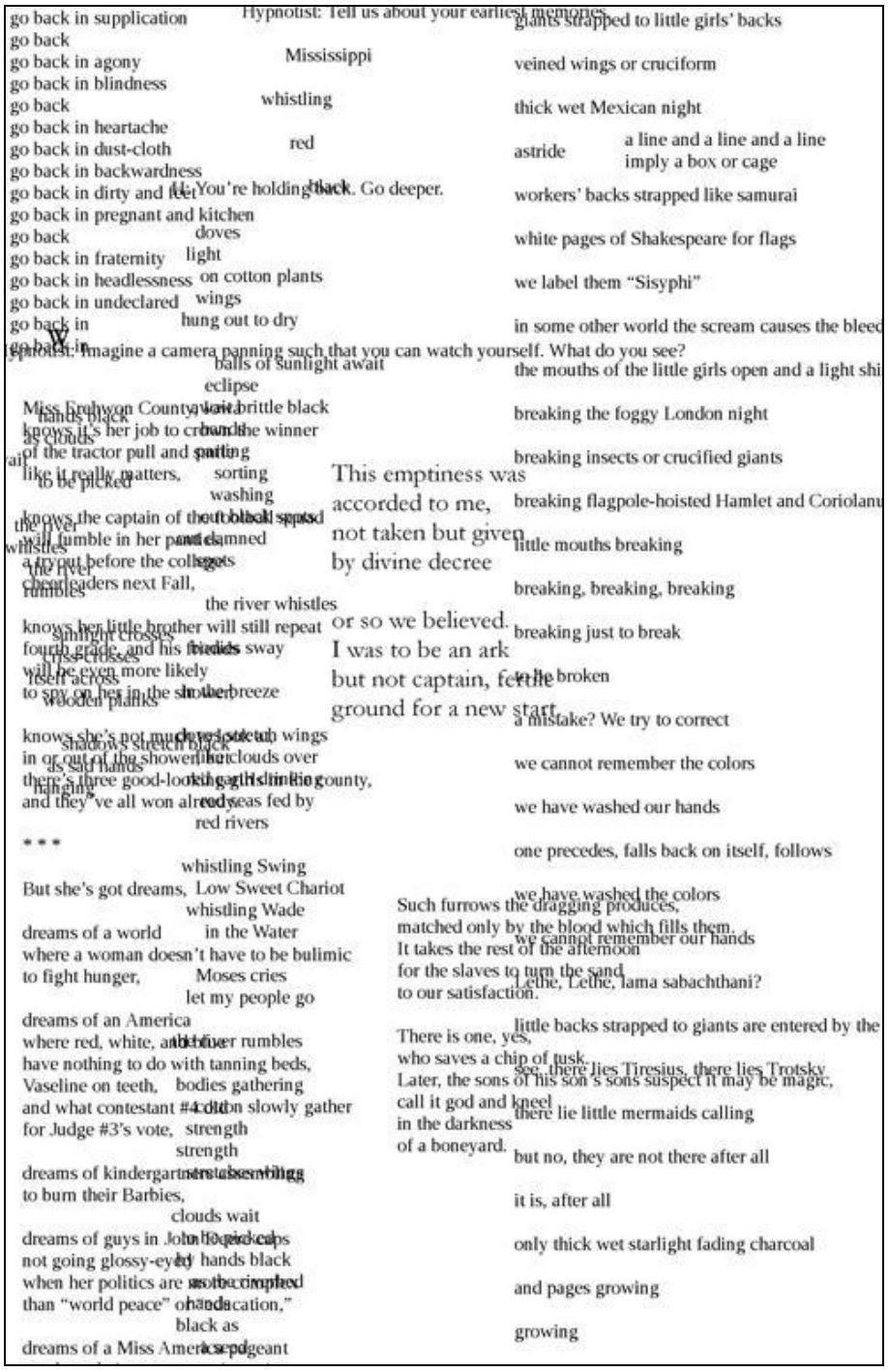
Poem 2.43: I of the Storm



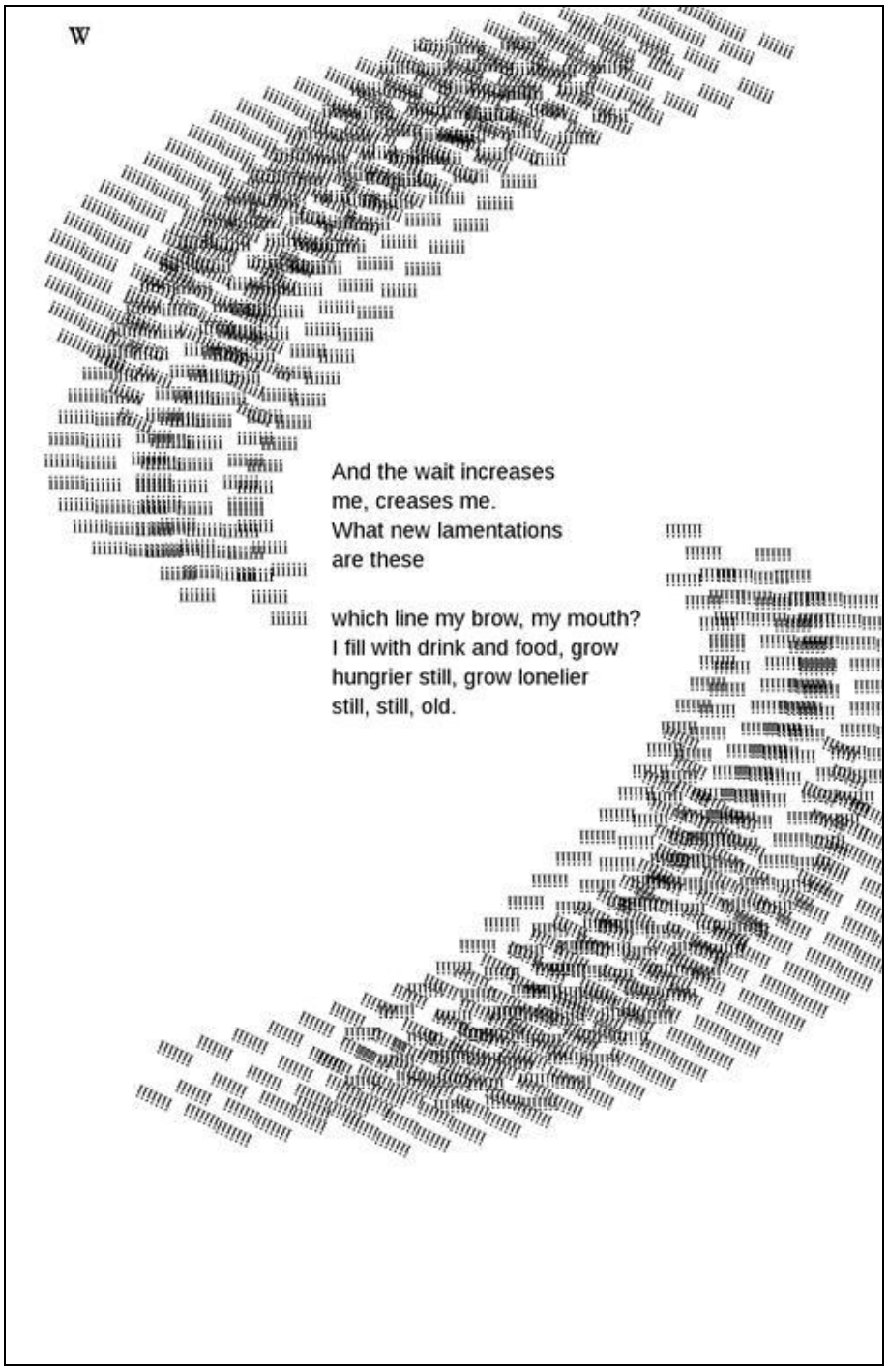
Poem 2.44: for Darcie



Poem 2.45: Meridian



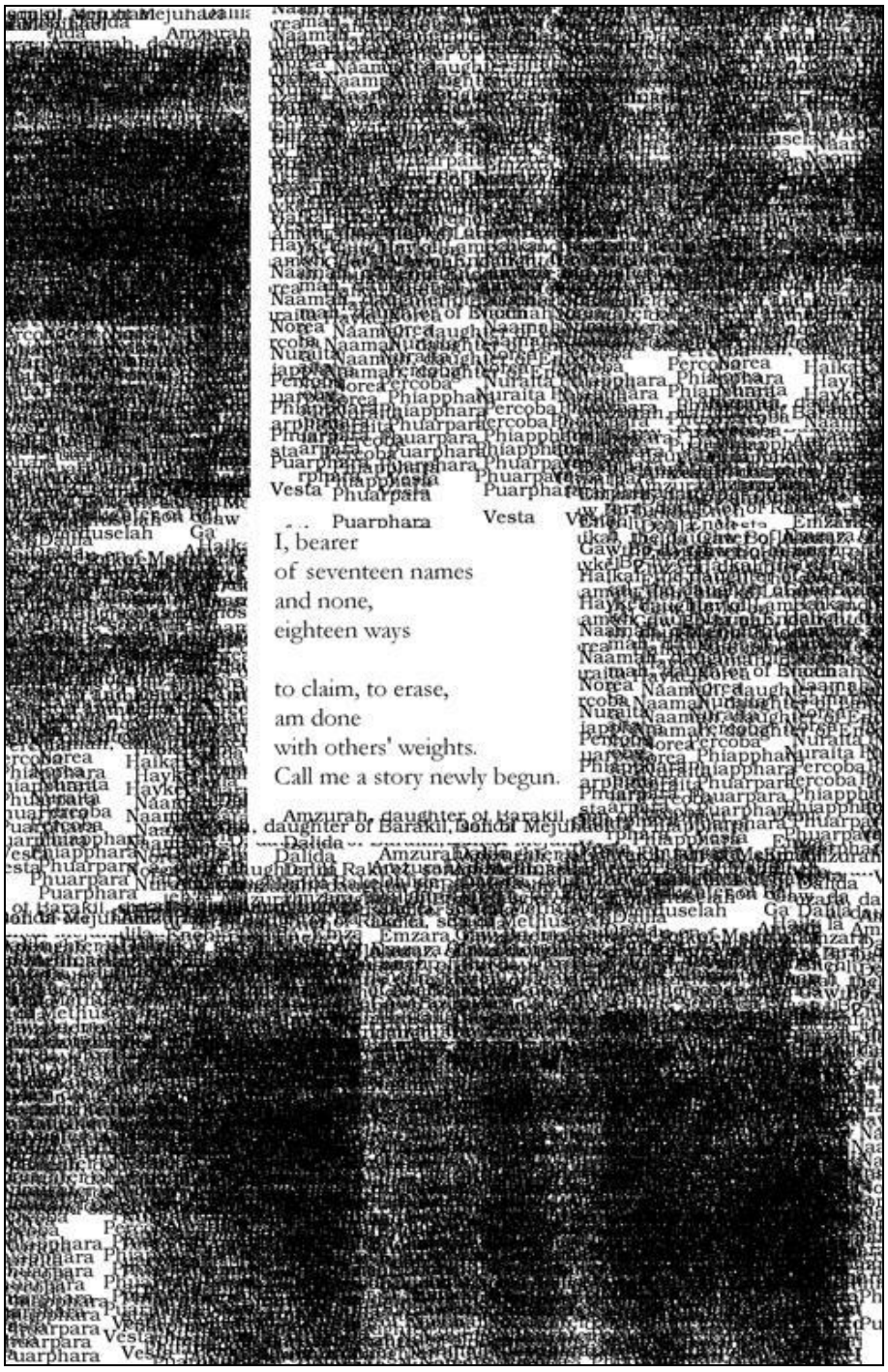
Poem 2.46: The Sound and the Silence



Poem 2.47: iiiiii

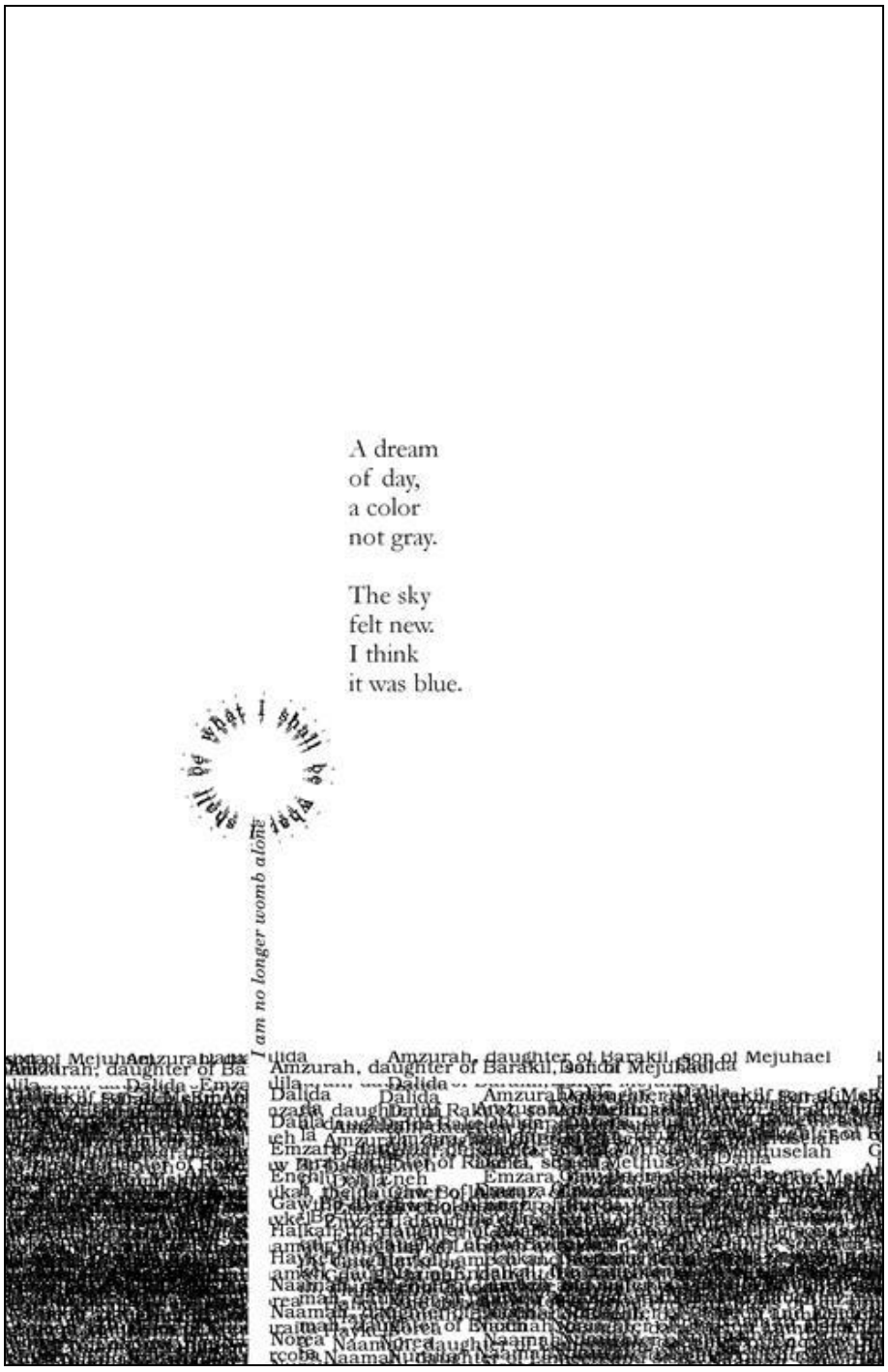
Poem 2.48: man, bag, girl, hoop, boy, stick

Poem 2.49: Exquisite Corpse

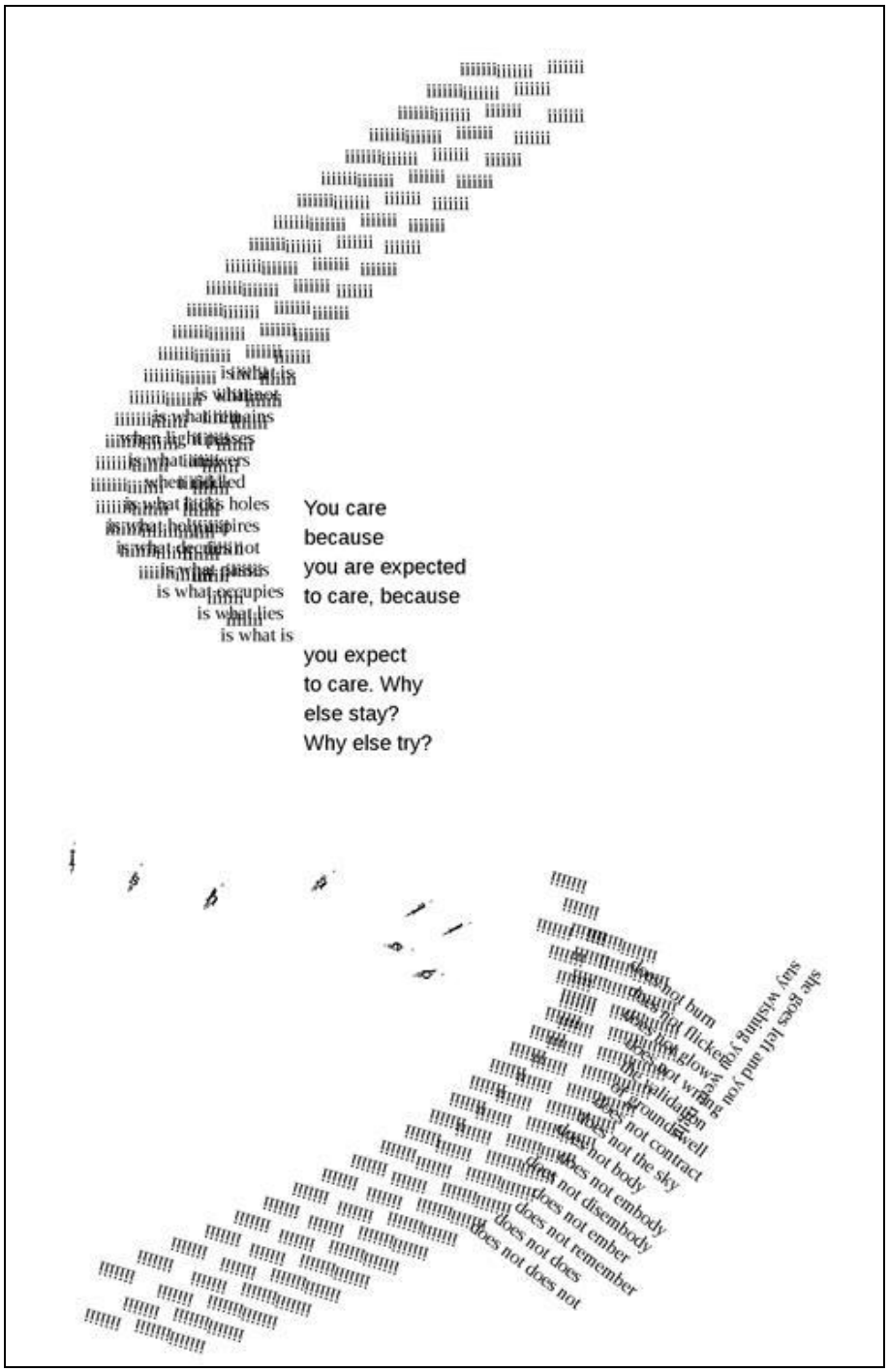


Poem 2.50: I got gone, gone, gone

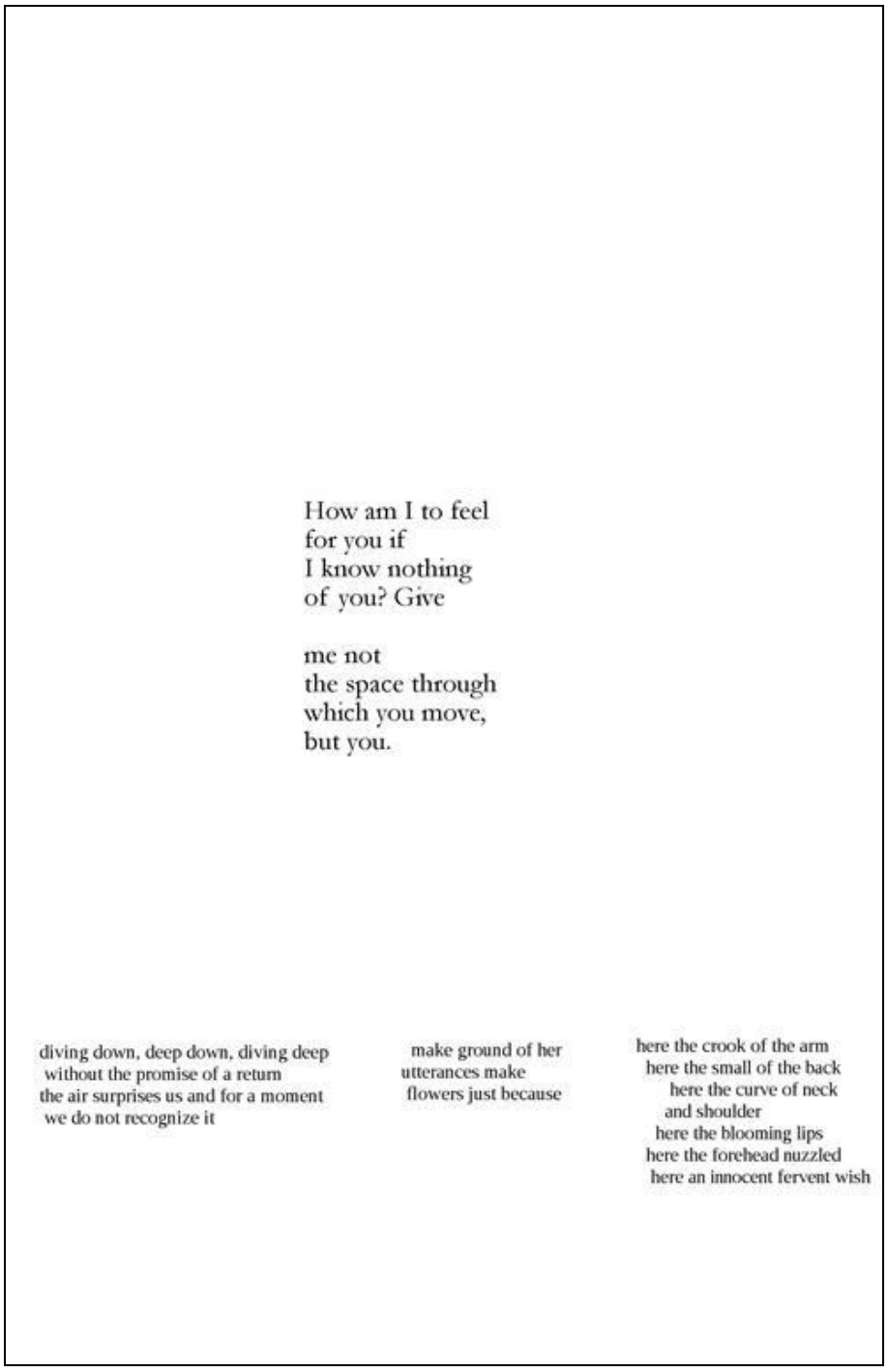
Poem 2.51: for H.D.



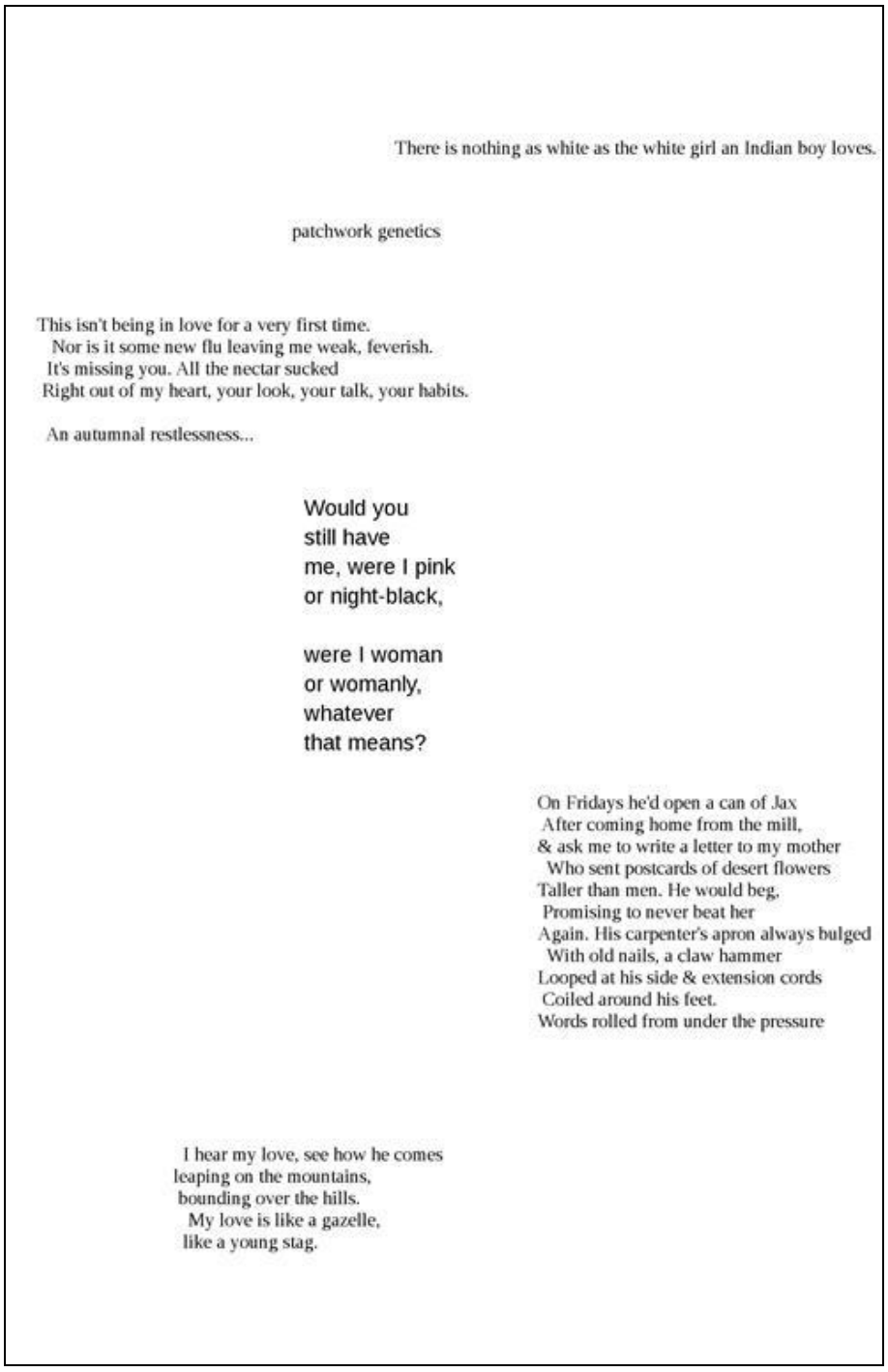
Poem 2.52: Growth



Poem 2.53: Windsday



Poem 2.54: a new foundation



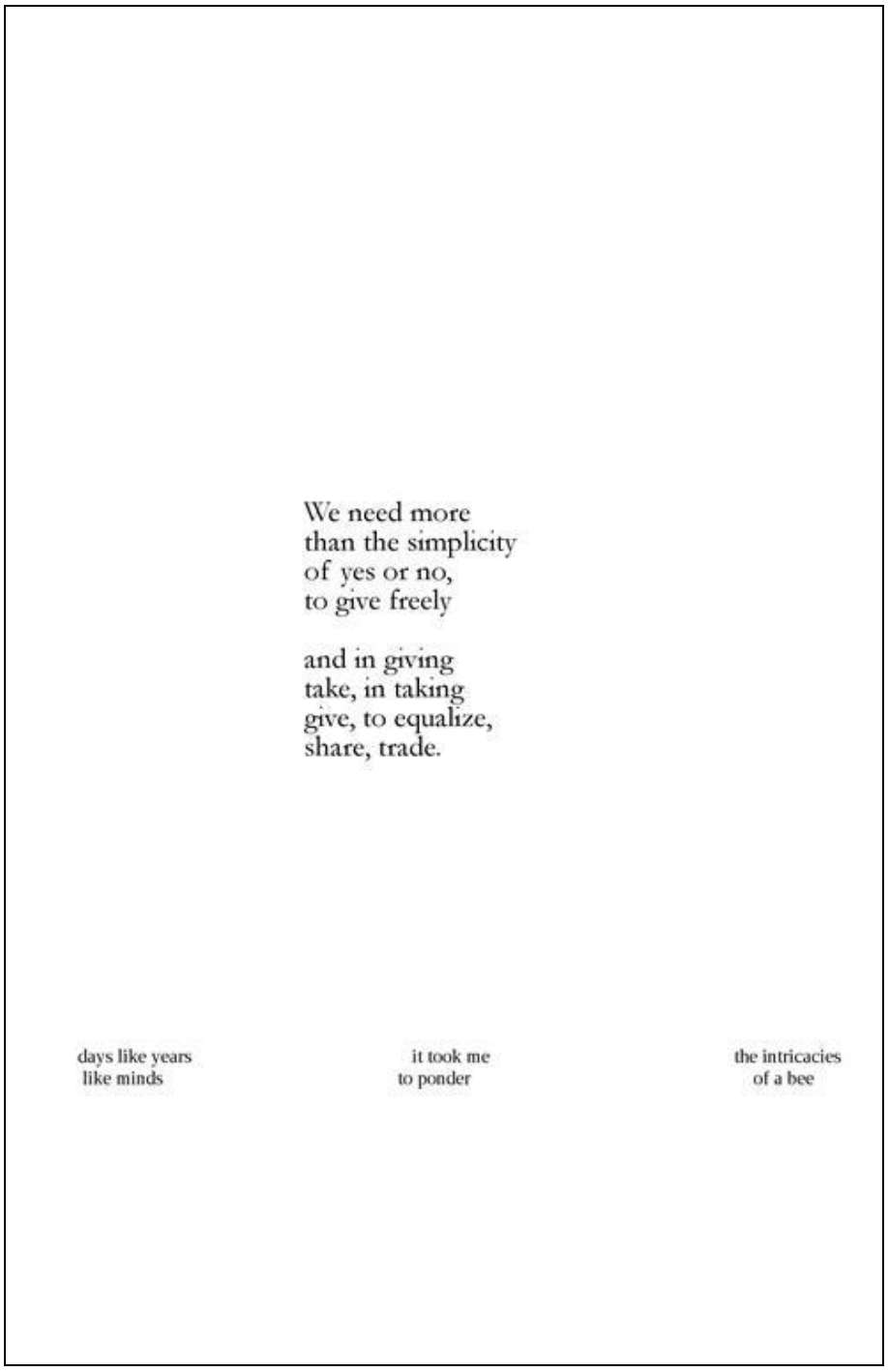
Poem 2.55: spectrum

Poem 2.56: Catharsis through the Blues #1

Poem 2.57: Catharsis through the Blues #2

Poem 2.58: for Jason Salavon

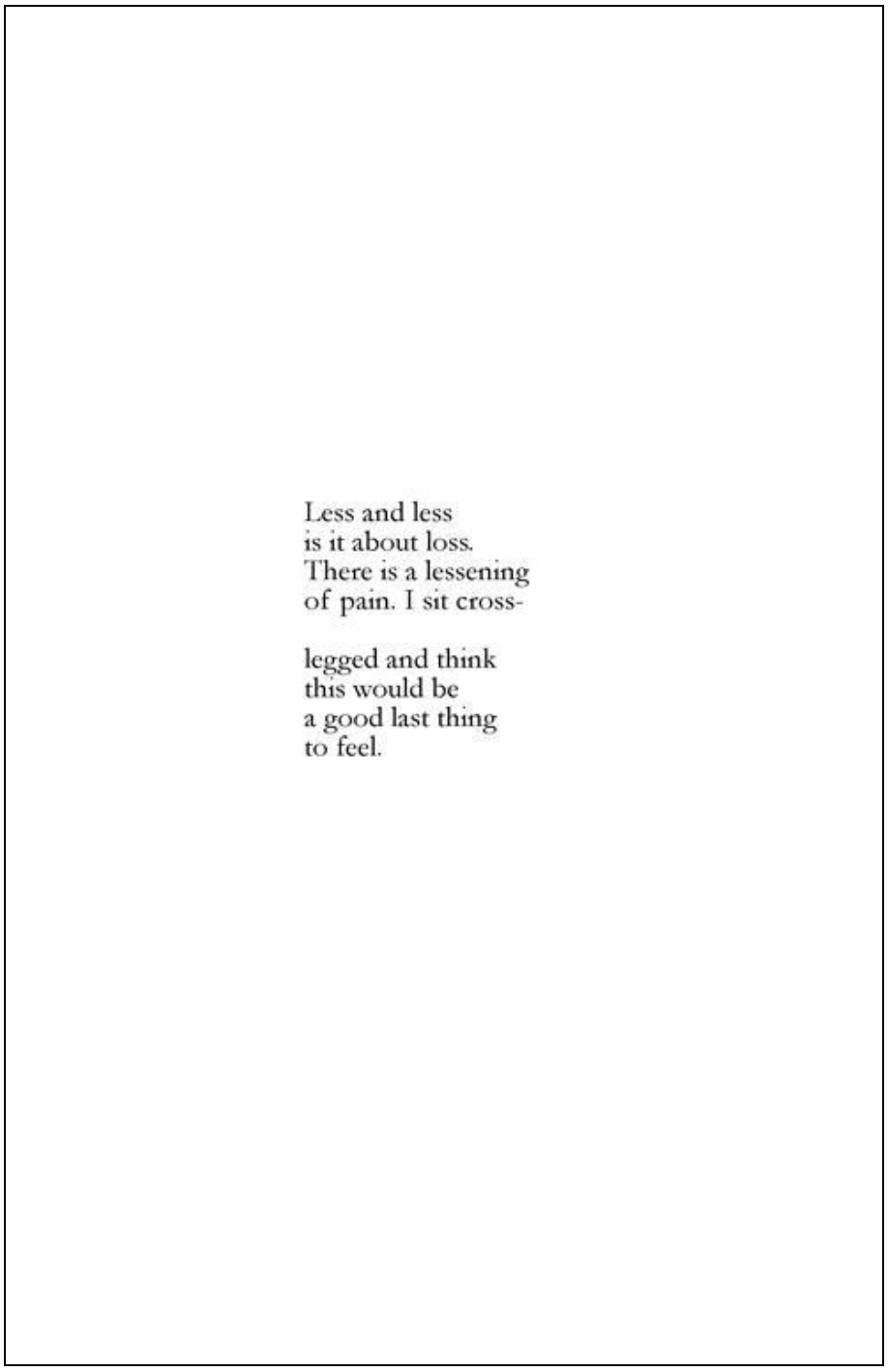
Poem 2.59: decisions, decisions



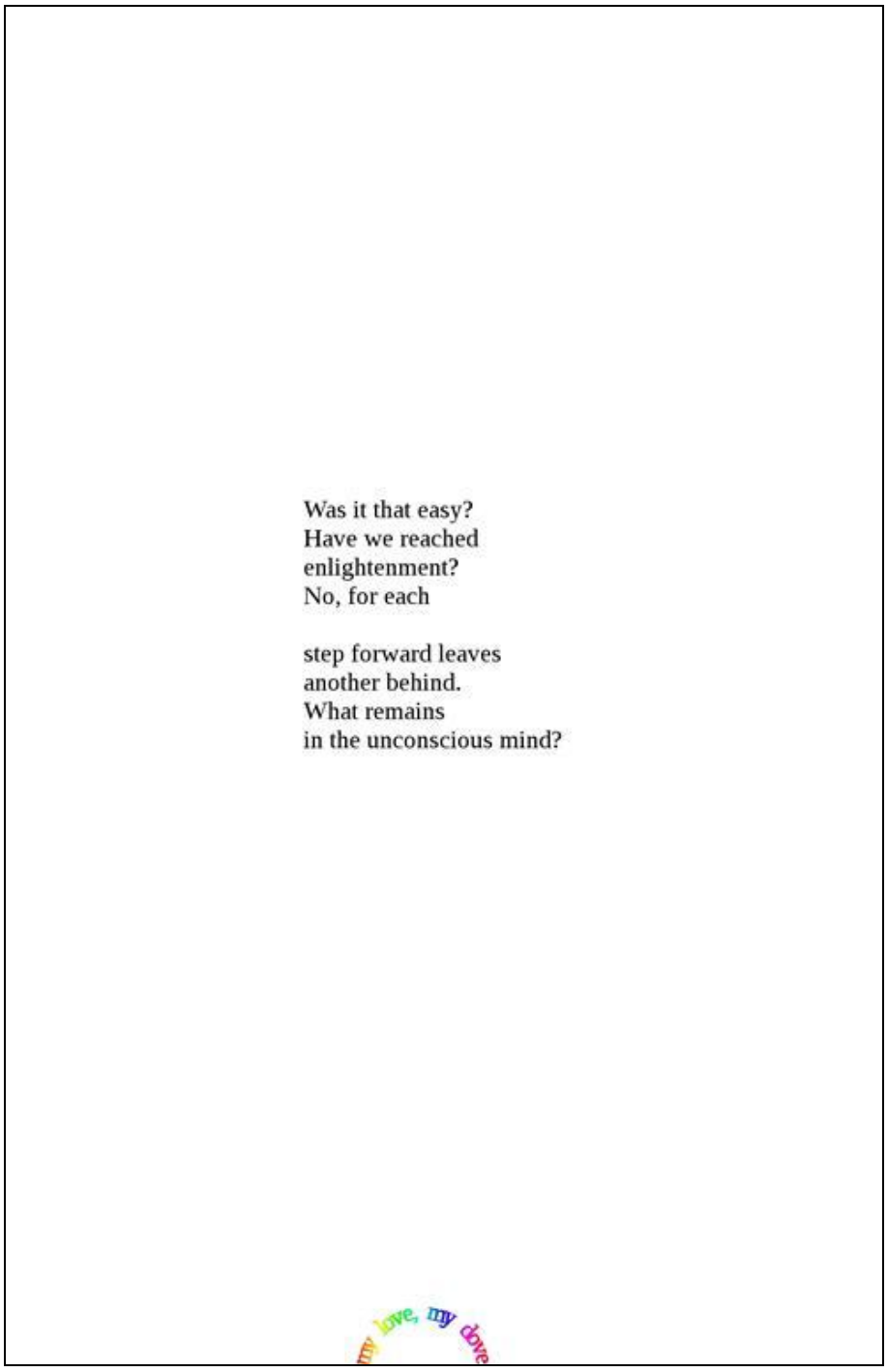
Poem 2.60: Paging Karl Marx?


I see now, in filling
certain space
some other opens,
and yet I've raced
ahead of... what?
Not the storm, nor gulf,
but what these were part of:
myself.
the intricacies
of a bee

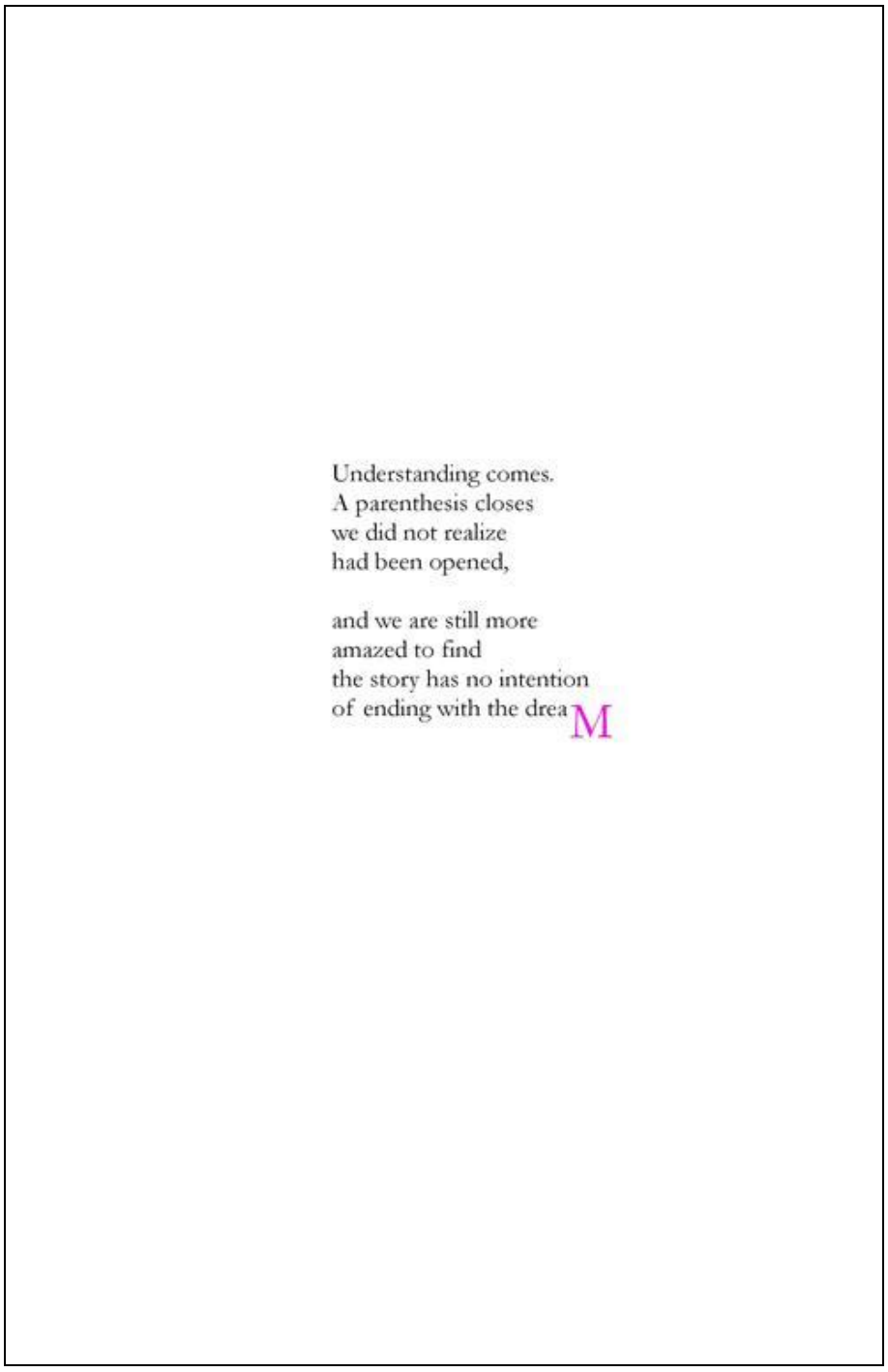
Poem 2.61: key



Poem 2.62: redux



Poem 2.63: rainbow



Poem 2.64: ROYGBIV

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I hope it is evident by now that the initial binary I set up is a false one. Plenty of long poems, ostensibly hailing from the oral tradition, are written and therefore to some degree or another visual. Plenty of visual poems express or imply narratives that require time. The value in studying these poems is paradoxical, then. They at once highlight the differences between different realms of poetry, make clear the extent to which something can be a visual poem, can be a long poem, and erase those differences. Despite their unfamiliarity to the mainstream reader, they ultimately require no more training to decipher than do poems of the modernist movement, or the postmodernist, or the Victorian, or Medieval – they simply require a different kind of training. I would go so far as to say that the training, one that combines the visual, the iconographic, with the narrative, speaks particularly to our age of multimedia in which even throw-away advertisements combine the image and the word so completely. Much can be made of the loss of the metanarrative, the postmodern concept that we no longer operate under one storyline (if we ever truly did), and here are works that take that notion head-on while still holding out that hope, through their implicit stories, that sense can still be made of it all. As in *diluvium*, the story becomes stories, becomes writ*ing* rather than writt*en*. Seeing and looking, reading and creating, all become intertwined.

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VITA

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