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# Poetry and Growth

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### I. Prayers, Poems, and Passages

And when he had said this, he was lifted up before
their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight.
And while they were gazing up to heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white
garments, and said
to them, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking
up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you
into heaven, shall come in the same way as you have seen
him going up to heaven."

— *Acts* 1: 9-11 quoted as the last selection in "Scriptural Texts for the Meditations on the Life of
Our Lord," from *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*
Two truths approach each other. One comes from inside, the other from outside, and where they
meet, we have a chance to catch sight of ourselves.
—Tomas Transtromer *Preludes (II)* translated by Robert Bly

That man is the center where two truths meet gets at a basic paradox about language which is true about both poetry and the English classroom. Both belong to the public, shared world. An English classroom is a place where students meet to share experience of some importance, to talk widely about people and situations in the world as they know it, gathering their shared experience into new wholes and enjoying the satisfaction and the power that this gives them. In sharing experience with others, students are using language to make that experience real to themselves. But in the process, each individual is building a world of his own.

Transtromer is also speaking in a way characteristic of our times. We are eager for the chance and anxious about the possibility of catching sight of ourselves. The duration and direction of that quest are what is new about us. Erik H. Erikson writes, "As technological advances put more and more time between early school life and the young person's final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescing becomes an even more marked and conscious period . . . almost a way of life between childhood and adulthood." [1] We have created modern adolescence as an extended struggle of passage toward that human purpose. Today millions throughout the world who have historically made do without an education are demanding one. Simultaneously, the schools have become the overwhelmed custodians of urban young whom society will deny a place, and for whom, therefore, adolescence may prove impossibly problematic. We are different from past generations. Our typical quest is the quest for who we are. Odysseus, Laertes' son, renowned for guile, knew. His son, Telemachus, in the long absence of his father, did not. He suffered a kind of adolescent identity crisis, but easily remedied by Athena, who sped from Olympus, took the form of Mentor, and strengthened and directed the wavering Telemachus with inspirational stories of his father. Father stories, today, take the shape of situation comedy or simple desertion at worst. At best, they must still be told in a world in which all facts are relationships of factors, and sons must distinguish their footsteps from their fathers'. Distant as we are from the Classical world, the seventeenth century's notion of personal and spiritual development seems even more alien to us. Whereas what Telemachus had to learn included both the technical and higher, abstract knowledge, the direction of the *Spiritual Exercises* is otherworldly.

The difference is important. Because of it, the attempt to find in sixteenth-and seventeenth-century poetry uses for our own age is apt to be superficial and to Produce what William K. Wimsatt called "crude" juxtapositions. [2]

But the worst pretense would be to create the illusion of teaching a kind of moralistic comparative literature. Planning lessons on poetry that deals with how to grow up can invite that illusion. I have often succumbed to it. I freely admit that academic pretension causes me to be didactic. Benevolence toward others has often been the teacher's excuse for talking to himself, often in front of a captive, but not always slavish, class of kids. Resolve to resist moralizing. Teenagers won't listen, anyway. They have to learn for themselves.

This reticence is in line both with Plato's suspicions of the powers of poetry—after all, why shouldn't reading or writing a poem be as likely to make you *worse* as better?—and with Auden's political cop-out to the effect that poetry makes nothing happen. [3] Any port in a storm. In port, on the balls of one's feet before a challenging classroom, it soon becomes clear enough that what is valuable about teaching poetry is the chance it gives students to make something of their experience and of themselves. As a palpable example, take Nikki Giovanni's "Conversation":.

> "yeah" she said "my man's gone too
> been dead longer than you is old"

"what do you do" i asked
"sit here on the porch and talk to the old folk
i rock and talk and go to church most times"
"but aren't you lonely sometimes" i asked
"now you gotta answer yo own question"
"i guess the children help a lot you got grandchildren
haven't you"
"oh the children they come and go always in a hurry
got something to do ain't no time for old folks
like me"
she squinted at the sun packing her jaw
with *bruton* snuff
"the old days done gone . . . and i say good-bye
peoples be going to the moon and all . . . ain't that
wonderful . . . to the moon"
and i said "i see stars all the time aretha franklin
and sly were at madison square garden recently."
"what you doing here" she asked
"i'm a poet" i said
"that ain't no reason to be uppity"
and the sun beat down on my head while
a dragonfly admonished my flippancy
but a blue and yellow butterfly sat on my knee
i looked her square in the eye
"i ain't gonna tell you" she said and turned her head
"ain't gonna tell me what" i asked
"what you asking me you gotta live to be seventy-nine
fore you could understand anyhow"
"now you being uppity" i said
"yeah but i earned it" she replied and shifting her wad
she clapped her hands and smiled
"you been here before"
and i said "yes ma'am but would you tell me just one thing
what did i learn"
and she spat out her juice
"honey if you don't know how can i"
i wanted to argue but the sun was too hot and the sky
too lazy and god heaved a sigh that swept under my blouse
and i felt me feeling a feeling
she crossed her legs at the ankle
and straightened her back
"tell you this" she said
"keep yo dress up and yo pants down and you'll be all right"
and i said impatiently "old lady you got it all wrong"
"honey, ain't never been wrong yet
you better get back to the city cause you one of them

technical niggers and you'll have problems here"

This is a poem in the tradition of Browning's *Dramatis Personae* (1864). It is a dramatic narrative, far deeper and more complex than any sex education class, aimed at diminishing the teenage pregnancy rate, is at all likely to be. More importantly, it offers something of the stuff of experience. We can experience the argument about values contained in this witty confrontation. Reading and discussing this poem lends to an analysis of life that goes beyond techniques of contraception and middle-class moralizing. There are no pat answers in a poem like this. Instead, there is an awakening of personal knowledge. Following the example of Kenneth Koch's work in teaching the reading and writing of poetry to New York City schoolchildren, students would do well to model a poem of their own on this poem. One idea might be to take a cliché, perhaps from a list of clichés, and turn it around. After exploring its meaning anew, the student should create a pair of antagonists, whether youth and age, boy and girl, cat and dog, or any other likely characters, for an argument poem to be clinched by the reborn cliché. The learning process here is akin to that displayed in Plato's *Dialogues* .

Scanning what twentieth-century poets have had to say about the autonomy of poetry from society, I feel I am a child of our age. I am not interested in poetry as propaganda; not even in poetry as good advice. I want more from the study of poetry than I did as a young man of the sixties and seventies who read Wilfred Owen to strengthen anti-war convictions, and black poets like Nikki Giovanni the better to understand the duties of a teacher of black students. This lesson plan reaches beyond the illusions of politics and society into what we of our age believe is truly real: the processes of the mind. It is that objective that matches up very well with the objective of a special kind of seventeenth-century poetry, based on the work of St. Ignatius Loyola and similar methods of poetic and imaginative spiritual development rooted in the meditative traditions of the Middle Ages. Louis I. Martz has identified the poetry in this tradition and termed it Meditative Poetry. [4]

### II. From God to Process
What most clearly distinguishes seventeenth-century Meditative Poetry from the children's poetry written under the auspices of Kenneth Koch is the change of vector from the search for God to growing up. A couple of diagrams may help to clarify things. Actual, Ideal, Real. Take these three terms and construe them as domains of consciousness, levels of reference. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was virtually no quarrel as to what was finally Real. What was finally Real was, of course, God. God, up there in Heaven. However one arranged things hierarchically back then, God was at the top: Eternal God; Unchangeable God; Absolute God;, Omniscient God; Omnipresent God; Omnipotent God; Pure and Immutable God. God gloriously was attributed these and all other qualities that the Real could be thought to manifest, however contradictory they may seem to us today. Dissenting opinions as to the Godhead were as likely to be out argued by auto-da-fé as by scholastic reasoning. So the diagram for consciousness in the world of Meditative Poetry must begin like this:.


   Real
   . . .
   . . .




The Ideal then falls into place. The Ideal, or things of this world as they should be, the earthly Heavenly City, is revealed by God, the Real. The Hound of Heaven hurries us to Contrition of Sins and toward the distant Ideal of Sainthood. In his directions for General Confession and Holy Communion, St. Ignatius writes, "Just as during

the Spiritual Exercises a person gains a more intimate knowledge of his sins and their malice than at a time when he is not occupied with his interior life, so now because of this greater understanding and sorrow for his sins, he will find greater profit and merit than he would have had before." [5] The otherworldly Ideal, then, lies overhead and beckoning, radiant between fallen man and God, the Real. We can fill in that blank now:.

        Real
        Ideal
        . . .

The Actual is, of course, we in our earthly existence. Lowly Actuality is the domain of our bodies, the people and places we love, our precious things, the works of nature, as well as the forces in the world which oppose and threaten us. Actuality is thus assured place and attention, too, such as Edmund Spenser gave it in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* . It is where we, compounded of dust and spirit, begin. And it, experience, is where Meditative Poems characteristically begin, with the observation of a shooting star, or the fact of awakening with the break of day and the touch of light, or a death, or the stubbing of a toe. This characteristic *locus* was then, and may be again for us, a touchstone for this kind of poetry, because our poetry also in principle begins with the stuff of experience, the concrete, the nitty-gritty of everyday. But that is by the way and getting ahead of things. To complete the simple diagram of the hierarchy of domains characteristic of sixteenth and seventeenth-century consciousness:

        Real
        Ideal
        Actual

In comparison, the problem of consciousness in our own age seems horizontal, God being dead. That is, however, much too simple. We are in trouble because ours is a complex time, more complex already by far than things were in 1933 when Alfred North Whitehead observed that the Real was

Process and warned us against "introspective bias." [6] Introspective bias has become, largely due to the success of Freud and the soft science of psychology, the religion and hipsterism of our time. As the proper purpose of meditative discipline was to help the practitioner "conquer himself" [7] and ascend to a higher order of being, the proper purpose of literacy today is to help the student express himself adequately, thereby to find himself and progress in growing up. When we are mad we are our own little microcosmic worlds, beside ourselves, out of our minds; when we are healthy, we "get ourselves together" or become a "whole person." We have gone beyond inverting the Divided Line; we have collapsed it within (which may well be where timeless Plato had it; so diagrams fail). But because the collapse of order in our time has such velocity and direction, it is possible to complete our pair of diagrams by beginning, like Wallace Stevens on the dump, with

a stone and from the bottom up. We all know what is real in our age. Not quite Stevens' "stanza my stone." [8] Words, words, words, words, words. But rather, the source of words, the domain of the substructure of language, the place of the motivations behind deeds.

"Why the deathwish of the arms race?"

"Why have sudden fateful incompatibilities wrecked the marriage of Gail and Norman?"

"Why can't I get serious enough about this paper?"

"Why do I talk too much?"

The answers to such questions lie in the domain of the Real in our age. "Tell me, where did this problem begin?"

"It's all in your mind."

You can't help the way you feel—you must learn to *accept* your feelings. The reasons why you behave the way you do, feel the way you do, live the way you do, lie buried deep in your psyche, and connect you now in this moment with both your distant past and with the whole mythic structure of being human. All that in your mind. That's why you like to cook pasta, have a beard, carry a knife, interrupt women, are kind to kids, and distrust but need authority: the Real reason lies in your mind, below the surface of things, in the subconscious, beneath your perceptions of your Actual everyday experiences.

As we strive toward our personal, esthetic, political, athletic, philosophical, ethical, even religious ideals (call in a Jesuit psychiatrist to exorcise the Devil out of that little girl:), we are sometimes thwarted and sometimes abetted by the forces of our mind: the Real. That's where the final answers are. Ask a psychiatrist, not a priest. Our diagram:


Ideal
Actual
Real



Admitting the expediency of diagrams, this is the place for yet one more *caveat* . Kenneth Koch, who seems to know more about teaching poetry to children than anyone else these days (although that may be because he is, like John Cage performing *Silence* , a man who is so interesting that he could probably successfully teach a narrative of this week's breakfasts if he were enthusiastic enough about it), warns us: "One shouldn't use a child's poetry to analyze his personal problems. Aside from the scientific f of so doing, it is sure to make children inhibited about what they write." [9] We do not intend to use poetry as a form of psychotherapy; not even as a form of "poetry therapy." What Koch does, and what this unit of teaching proposes, is in the tradition of Eriksonian developmental psychology and Maslovian humanism. Poetry has its role in the normal process of growing up. As another objective, this pedagogic objective would probably please Carl Rogers: our interest here is in *process* , not *content* . [10] A poem does not mean, but be.

### III. Personality and Style

> Linguistic study seeks to make conscious and general that which is known in a way unconscious and particular. Clearly some such self-awareness is valuable for adults. But how far need it be systematized?
> —Barnes, N.A.T.E. *Bulletin*
> Thus, it might be true . . . that the style of a poem and the style of men are one.
> —Wallace Stevens "Two or Three Ideas"

The personal powers which every adolescent must attain as he becomes an adult are charted and listed by psychologists as "the developmental tasks of life" (see Appendix) and analogously expressed by what Stevens calls "style." The media turn from the buzzword "revolution" to the buzzword "competence" today, while students and teachers find it difficult to determine what a person must learn if he is to be judged and to judge himself a reasonably happy and successful person. If we as English teachers brave this difficulty and force some decisions about what must or must not be learned, we will find ourselves in good company. We will be in the company of students, who are certainly going to do something, however fateful. We will also be in the company of T.S. Eliot in "Ash Wednesday": "Consequently, I rejoice, / having to construct something / upon which to rejoin." These decisions are the concerns of English in its widest sense. English opposes sullen, silent, empty depression with the possibility of self-expression, communication, and asking for what one needs. That last item has turned up as a kind of handy differentiator between those high-risk students who succeed in the schools and those who fail, according to a recent study of New Haven high-school students; those students who know how to ask for help, succeed; those students, inarticulate or withdrawn, who cannot communicate, fail. [11] The psychologists tell us that children had better get what they need. A developmental task is an essential task. A developmental task is a task which arises at a certain period in the life of the individual. Successful achievement of the task leads to happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society, and difficulty with later tasks. In the light of the historical role of poetry, it is imperative that poetry be explored as one way through which young people might get what they need.

Poetry does make things happen (apologies to Auden) in at least one sense: poetry makes things happen in terms of personal growth, if not necessarily in terms of those things necessary for social and economic well-being (the one very thoroughly American objective which bridges the hipsterism of revolution and the hustlings of competence). Poetry is not a "basic skill." It certainly doesn't pay. Ask any poet. As Martz has demonstrated, during an epoch when personal, social, and moral growth were more coherent than they are today, the place of poetry was also more clear. If obscured by our complex and muddled times, the place of poetry is still there. While it is always a mistake to "learn from history," and to try to apply the solutions of one age to the problems of another when the human condition has radically changed, there are certain constants in the scheme of things. One of these constants is the place of poetry in being young, both the Wordsworthian place of poetry in the youthful imagination, and the psychological place of poetry in the fantasy, play, quickness, and adventuresomeness of youth. A sure idea for writing a poem with schoolchildren is to focus on change, listing, for example, four or five lines on the order of, "When I was a ___, I had a ___; but now I am a

___, and I have a ___." One student recently wrote, "When I was a seed, I had a flower; but now I am a flower, and I have a tree." Another student wrote, "When I was a child, I had a mother; but now I am a mother, and I have a child." And another: "When I was a baby, I had tears; but now I am a man, and I have hands." Such poetry touches the strainings of self-knowledge, where poetry makes many things happen.

The place of poetry in the development of the personality is probably a place in a process, a changing place, along the lines charted in the "Immortality Ode." As a child grows he finds himself possessed of a new physical and psychological set of resources. He leaves behind the virtues of an old stage for the virtues of a new and larger one. A teenager looking at her baby picture is observing virtually a different being; indeed, some African adolescent initiation rites include investing the new adult with a *tiki* or necklace charm in the form of a limp and hanging human figure representing the dead past identity of the wearer. Our own discontinuities are less violent, but we feel them nonetheless. Perhaps the force behind metaphor is in part an expression of our personal sense of maintained identity across the great changes wrought by time. If so, all poetry may be a comfort and a celebration of this aspect of life.

The infant's legs grow larger and stronger, enabling him to walk away from the precious security of mother and into autonomy and selfhood; adolescent growth occasions an analogous sufficiency and departure. To grow up is to venture into story oneself and to become capable of making. A child's mentality develops, enabling him to reason more subtly and to understand the complexity of subjects such as arithmetic and reading. He also finds himself increasingly a responsible individual, facing new demands and expectations from the society around him. We all learn that the changes of growth can be as strange as or stranger than mirroring fantasy. Expectations become increasingly critical. Inner and outer forces contrive to set for the individual a series of developmental tasks which must be mastered if he is to become a successful human being. The only alternative to personal maturity is infantilism and arrested growth, away from which we all, except in the worst cases, strive toward "finding ourselves." Kenneth Koch sums up his experience with the utility of poetry in that task:

I began with the general notion of teaching my students the poems I liked best, but soon I saw that some of these were better to teach than others. Some poems came to me right away because of some element in them that I knew children would be excited by and connect with their own feelings. The fantasy situation in Blake, for example, of talking to an animal—or the more real-life situation in Williams' "This is Just to Say" of apologizing for something you're really glad you've done. Certain tones, too—Witman's tone of boastful secret-telling. And strange, unexpected things, like Donne's comparisons of tender feelings to compasses and astronomical shifts.

Some poems had forms that suggested children's verbal games and ways children like to talk, such as the lists in Herrick's "Argument" and in Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," or the series of questions in "The Tyger." Such forms would be a beginning for a poetry idea, since they were something the children could imitate easily when they wrote.

It was usually one of these appealing features that brought a poem into my mind as good to teach children. Of course, I wanted it to be a poem they could get a lot from. There are terrible poems about talking to animals and there are great ones. And the same for lists, strange comparisons, and the rest. I was looking for appealing themes and forms in the very best poems. "The Tyger," speaking to children's sense of strangeness and wonder, could heighten their awareness of nature and of their place in it. Herrick's "Argument" would help them to think about their poems in a new way, somewhat as they might think of places they had been or of specific things they had seen and done. Donne's poem could show hem connections between supposedly

disparate parts of their lives. Whitman could encourage them to trust their secret feelings about the world and how they were connected to it . . . ..

What seemed most important was that, of the children I taught, every one had the capacity to write poetry well enough to enjoy it himself and usually well enough to give pleasure to others, whether it was entire poems or surprising and beautiful images, lines, or combinations of words.

The educational advantages of a creative intellectual and emotional activity which children enjoy are clear. Writing poetry makes children feel happy, capable, and creative. It makes them feel more open to understanding and appreciating what others have written(literature). It even makes them want to know how to spell and say things correctly (grammar). Once Mrs. Magnani's students were excited about words, they were dying to know how to spell them. Learning becomes part of an activity they enjoy—when my fifth graders were writing their poems using Spanish words they were eager to know more words than I had written on the board; one girl left the room to borrow a dictionary. Of all these advantages, the main one is how writing poetry makes children feel: creative; original; responsive; yet in command. [12]

Koch's "poetry ideas" are each patterns or models for personal growth through poetry. They are particularly creative and workable devices in the pedagogic tradition of teaching poetry reading and poetry writing through one another. (Few schoolteachers feel that a poetry unit is complete without the kids having had a chance to try their hand at writing poetry of some kind.) Poetry reading gives rise to a "poetry idea"; then, writing a poem modeled along the lines of the poetry idea makes that reading the child's own, carried over into his behavior and accomplishment. Such a poem is a far-reaching realization and hard evidence that education has taken place.

Although the literature on the teaching of English includes such outlines as Edward J. Gordon's "Levels of Teaching," [13] Koch has not considered his method in terms of stages or sequences; however, the progress of the Pilgrim of Meditation was so considered.

The tradition that Everyman can be improved by writing poetry based on the poetry he reads is, as Martz has shown, traceable at least as far back as the poetry of the sixteenth century. Poetry ideas and meditative discipline are both modes of imitation. They are patterns for doing and being. They belong to the *models* approach to the teaching of literature and the literary use of language. The models approach to the teaching of writing, tested by Rollo Brown and I. A. Richards in two different ways, [14] is based upon the notion that students learn to write by reading, a supposition that is supported by the 1978 NCTE summation of research on the teaching of writing. [15] But within the progression from reading to writing, how much actual structure do poetry ideas and meditative discipline share?

Poetry ideas and meditative discipline are not simple one-to-one or level-to-level parallels but they are different expressions of the same epistemological fact: learning is an activity of the mind ranging across levels between the abstract and the concrete. Both poetry ideas and meditative discipline move *back and forth* from the abstract and general to the factual and concrete. This distinguishes both poetry ideas and meditative discipline from such theories of teaching as James Moffit's, which suppose a natural sequence of learning from the concrete to the abstract. [16] There is nothing natural about that sequence in the light of poetry ideas or meditative discipline; learning naturally works both ways, as when the student/poet lists five imaginative fulfillments of the abstract pattern of a poetry idea by discovering concrete things with which to fill in the blanks. The evidence of the success of Loyola and Koch further suggests that the procedural structure they share is normative.

### IV. Loyola and Koch: A Comparison and Contrast of Curriculums

In attempting to work out these various levels of questioning, or "testing," which are an important aspect of class discussion, I have been able to determine five levels: that which demands the ability (1) to remember a fact, (2) to prove a generalization that someone else had made, (3) to make one's own generalization, (4) to generalize from the book to its application in life, and, finally, (5) to carry over the generalization into one's own behavior.

—Edward J. Gordon "Levels of Teaching and Testing"

ANIMA CHRISTI

> Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
> Body of Christ, save me.
> Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
> Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
> Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
> O good Jesu, hear me;
> Within Thy wounds hide me;
> Suffer me not to be separated from Thee;
> From the malignant enemy defend me;
> In the hour of my death call me,
> And bid me come to Thee,
> That with Thy Saints I may praise Thee
> For ever and ever. Amen.

This prefatory prayer from *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* is full of good poetry ideas: an addressing of a person part by part, for one; the ecstatic progress from guilt to celebration, for another. But its prescribed and exemplary structure goes further than that. It is a systematic meditation on salvation through the love of Christ. Too elegant and elaborate to bear complete analysis here, the first six lines, culminating in the sensual sanctuary of Christ's wounds, reflect the general structure of several of the Spiritual Exercises, particularly the Fifth Contemplation. The Fifth Contemplation follows the seminal General Examination of Conscience, General

Confession and Holy Communion, five basic Exercises, and the First and Second Contemplations (the Third and Fourth Contemplations are repetitions of the first and second, respectively):

> After the preparatory prayer and the three preludes, it will be profitable, using the imagination, to apply the five senses to the first and second contemplations in the following manner:
>
> *The first point* is to see the persons in my imagination, contemplating and meditating in detail the circumstances surrounding them, and I will draw some spiritual profit from this scene.
>
> *The second point* is to hear what they are saying, or what they might say, and I will reflect within myself to draw some fruit from what I have heard.
>
> *The third point* is to smell and taste in my imagination the infinite fragrance and sweetness of the Divinity, and of the soul, and of its virtues, and of all else, according to the character of the person I am contemplating. And I will reflect within myself to draw spiritual profit therefrom.
>
> *The fourth point* is to use in imagination the sense of touch, for example, by embracing and kissing the place where the persons walk or sit, always endeavoring to draw some spiritual fruit from this.
>
> *The colloquy* . Conclude with a colloquy, and with the "Our Father," as in the first and second contemplations.

The overall structure of the Fifth Contemplation is an application of the progression from preparatory prayer and preludes through the "points" to colloquy which is taught by the seminal First Exercise. Consider the instructions for the Colloquy:

> Imagine Christ our Lord before you, hanging upon the cross. Speak with Him of how, being the Creator He them became man, and how, possessing eternal life, He submitted to temporal death to die for our sins.
>
> Then I shall meditate upon myself and ask "What have I dome for Christ?" As I see Him in this condition, hanging upon the cross, I shall meditate on the thoughts that come to my mind.
>
> The colloquy is made properly by speaking as one friend speaks to another, or as a servant speaks to his master, mow asking some favor, now accusing oneself for some wrong deed, or again, making known his affairs to Him and seeking His advice concerning them. Conclude with the "Our Father."

Martz would probably agree that the Colloquy is one antecedent of Blake's "The Tyger."

It was during the sixteenth century that this spiritual tradition became a practice of poetry. Martz sketches that development:

> The meditative poem is one that bears a close relation to the practice of religious meditation of that era. The relationship is shown by the poem's own internal action, as the soul or mind engages in act of interior dramatization. The speaker accuses himself; he talks to God within the self; he approaches the love of God through memory, understanding, and will; he sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches by imagination the scenes of Christ's life as they are represented on an inward, mental stage. Such imaginative, introspective meditation had its roots in the Middle Ages, when every aspect of the later practice may be found at work, but in scattered forms, chiefly designed for those who had entered into religious vows. The special achievement of meditation during the

The structure of what Koch teaches and the form of meditative exercise are both hierarchical, grounded in the sensual and factual and concrete. Both proceed through orderly stages and reach imaginatively toward the ideal—necessarily, as both are true to the nature of learning. Meditative poetry, like the poetry Koch teaches, is poetry written upon a "poetry idea" or ideas based upon prescribed models. In the tradition of meditative poetry, a poetry idea comes from reading. Koch reads poems with his students. He begins with the words on the page, decoding them word by word if necessary.

He begins by regarding words as facts, and then regards them as factors in relationships. That is what basic reading is. These two levels, the level of facts or things, and the level of primary, analytical generalizations about the relationships among those facts, are of course dimensions of every poem and every act of writing. However, they are focused upon in a particularly fortuitous way through certain poems. A four-week curriculum unit systematically treating poetry ideas should begin with poems which make felt the concreteness of words and things. Celebrating, fussing over, and savoring the factuality of words encourages the inspirable young to perk up over the power and importance of vocabulary; a sense of importance about the matter-of-fact also adumbrates later, more personal levels of reading and writing.

An accessible short poem that powerfully encourages perception on this primary level is "Between Walls" by William Carlos Williams. When Koch first used this poem in his work, he concentrated upon the unpoetic "un-beautifulness of the broken glass bottle and how Williams thinks it is beautiful anyway." [18] But after teaching this poem as a poetry idea, he learned that what was most important about it to the learner was the "foundness," the remarkable occasion, of the glass fragment as a thing of beauty which would have been lost in a dirty crevice but for the poem. The poem makes the shining glass fragment a fact the student experiences. It is the fact the poem is about. As a poetry idea, students can be sent forth on a scavenger hunt for lost facts that are likely stuff for their own short, vertical, one-sentence, magical discoveries. Writing will make personal the reality that words can have edges, light, and weight, and that poems can have power and personal importance. It is essential that copies of the students' poems be dittoed, drafted large on poster-sized newsprint, and fixed on the walls.

A second-day poem which focuses on this same level is Herbert's very dramatic "Mattens." This poem begins with the simple fact of morning light. Everyone wakes up to the light in the morning. This is a poem with which to begin the schoolday, when recollections of waking up are most fresh. Herbert addresses God as the Divine Light of Revelation; a modern student/ poet might address the light itself, listing the succession of perceptions, the things seen in order, involved in awakening.

The most fundamental kind of poetry idea on the level of fact is the list. Students might write that simplest of modern "skinny poems," a dream shopping list. Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" focuses on a further level, but is a good example of a more complex list poem. A more humorous poem, which students may enjoy especially for its "crazy" qualities, is his "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together." Listing such doodle-like flights of fancy makes an excellent class exercise, and results in a poem in which everyone has had a hand—and his moment. Thus a list poem can also list poets.

A supplemental list poem on the level of fact is Section 15 of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." As a poetry

idea, this is simply a list of all the things one can think of that are happening or that people are doing all over the world. As Koch teaches it, these things may have happened anytime, but must be written as though they are happening right now. Lists of such factual observations of life lead readily to primary generalizations about relationships, systems, structures, hierarchies, laws, principles, and forms in poems.

Such "internal" generalizations about the structure of literature re necessary at the primary stage of reading; beyond discrete words, words are related to each other; beyond discrete facts, the facts in a poem are related to each other as factors in the structure of the whole poem. The analysis of the structure of the world of a poem is a chance to use context to develop the meaning of specific words, and to begin to draw later levels of order and importance into the reading of the poem. It is also very important not to lose the concreteness and factuality of the first level when venturing into the more abstract analysis of the second. I recently borrowed from a nearby geometry class a large blackboard demonstration compass to teach the word "compass" in Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." After we took turns drawing all sorts of circles with it, I asked for volunteers. I had a handy boy grasp one leg of the compass and a flirty girl the other, and the class choreographed them in a *pas de deux* to the poem's imagery. While it is best to focus upon on the level of metaphor in this poem, getting to that level requires an effective job of *reading* on basic levels first. Once we have the words and what we describe in hand, meaning can be grasped on the primary level of things. Readers and writers then have something to work with. It is important to combine, but not to muddle, these two levels: words as facts, and their relationships as factors. Students should be encouraged to use their new vocabulary and their new knowledge of general relationships in their further reading and writing.

In writing along the lines of a poetry idea, the student is challenged by these two primary levels to come up with the words himself, the facts, often as factors in a formal relationship. Thus the listing of colors linked with incongruous things: the blue ear; the pink street; the white night; the green hair. For warmups. Then to such patterns as a list of imaginings along the lines of, "If I were a ___, I would ___."

Such practices are prewriting exercises preceding more challenging levels, but at their most successful they underlie powerful juvenalia:

>
> If I were a bird I'd wish that I could fly.
> If I was a cow I'd wish that I could moo 100 times.
> If I was a dog I'd wish that I could bow wow.
> If I was a table I would like it.
> If I was a ring Zulma would like me.
> If I was a doll Marilyn would like me.
> If I was a little girl I'd wish that I had a doll.
> If I was a little fish Zulma would not like me.
> If I was a cat I'd wish to play with a dog.
> —Mildred Camacho [19]

For the adolescent, what Koch from experience as a teacher calls "the terrible onset of self-consciousness" impedes such writing. [20] The adolescent poet must write with a felt sense of intention, which is the proper focus of the third day of this curriculum unit. (Of course, "day" is just a handy module here; the teacher must ring the changes from level to level, freely extending any "day" to meet the needs of his students.)

The intention of a seventeenth-century meditative poem is unarguable enough; the writer writes for spiritual development. The intention of a poetry idea is also frank: a fulfilled moment of life, success in an aspect of a developmental task, self-expression, a sense of mastery. The intention of each specific poem has, of course, its specific character, sometimes readily identifiable, but more often elusive, a third, central, deepest level. It is best to derive poetry ideas for this level from poems which have a more palpable sense of intention. If second-level generalizations about poems are *internal* generalizations, statements about the structural relationships within the poem (such as "love," "irony," "hierarchy") are *external* , reaching outward beyond the frame of the poem and into the world. There are two proven avenues into this level. The first, ideal for a poem such as "Who Goes with Fergus?" by William Butler Yeats, is by making generalizations about the message, moral, or lesson of the poem. Students readily see that Yeats is extending an invitation. They move easily from this realization to an intentional poetry idea:. write a poem that makes an invitation. The second avenue into this level is less direct, but quite effective. It is best begun with the questions, "Who does what to whom?" Students must venture generalizations about what the world they actually live in would be like, if it were like the world of the poem. This avenue works well with such highly intentional poems as "This is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams, and "Meditatio" by Ezra Pound. This is the level to which it is appropriate to converge again and again from other levels in the reading of a poem; when this level is most clearly understood, the poem has bean best read as a whole poem. A writer has finished a poem when he feels it says what he wants it to say.

Since it is not until the fourth day of this unit that it is possible to focus upon the relevance and frame of reference of poems, it is important to be able to return to third-day poems from the perspective of this level. Students are often able to understand something new about a poem on the level of intention, if they can see its structure as a pattern in terms of a structure with which they are familiar. The notion that we can only see what we already know often seems accurate in the reading of poetry. This elliptical, recapitulative kind of progress is the way the Spiritual Exercises progress. It is also the way poetry ideas should be developed.

It is the nature of poetry, and particularly of metaphor, to invite comparison and contrast, to resonate with the force of analogy and association. The meditative poem begins with the concrete and sensual, then explores Creation, Providence, Salvation, the medieval Great Chain of Being, the Christian Hierarchy of Correspondences, all the features of the landscape of the sixteenth-and seventeenth-century world view. The poetry idea is also a way of exploring logical, associative, and metaphoric connections. The compass as a metaphor is a vehicle for the consideration and celebration of perhaps otherwise recalcitrant feelings. The good teacher of poetry ideas invites relevance from anywhere and celebrates what is relevant in any reading. Any diction may become a poetic diction. Any subject may become a poetic subject. It is this fourth stage which is perhaps most broadly humanizing. Similes, metaphors, analogies, and comparisons and contrasts are the modes of connection that should be focused upon on this level. Besides reading Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" for the compass metaphor, "Lost" by Carl Sandburg should be read for its use of simile. "The Collar" by George Herbert is a meditative poem that makes powerful use of analogy. The empathy students feel for the *persona* of this poem makes for a fertile poetry idea, especially if the reading of the poem is supplemented by the Abraham story in the Bible. Students may write a power or hierarchy poem in which a ranting and raving student is "collared" into line by a teacher; or a poem in which a child in a tantrum is brought under control by a parent; or a poem about a child and a babysitter. The dramatic restoration of order

should be a goal of poems written along the lines of this idea. For a poetry idea based on comparisons and contrasts, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Stevens works well, as do his other "list" poems. The modes of thought cultivated by the student's reading and writing on this level will satisfy the developmental adolescent need for a sophistication more adequate to the tasks of growth.

This extension beyond simple matter-of-fact, however critically analyzed, and into a felt sense of importance, is essential. Most student writing means nothing to the students who write it; students write to satisfy teachers, defensively and uncommittedly. Better that they not write at all, than that literature should not be taken to heart. On the fifth day, poems read on the ultimate, fifth level should focus upon personal knowledge and personal feelings. Here readers and writers have the occasion to ask the challenging question, "So what?" The question should be asked not as a "put-down," but with some expectation of an answer. Modeling a poem on "I Never Saw" by Emily Dickinson is an excellent poetry idea for bringing students directly into touch with their senses of knowledge and imagination. Youth is easily inspired, as both the sense of growth and the sense of wonder provide tacit answers to the question, "So what?" But perhaps what most galvanizes adolescents is the sense of excitement. The writing of a poem, perhaps even a poem about poetry, modeled upon a poem of excitement such as Gerard Manley Hopkins' "God's Grandeur," is an excellent way to end the fifth day of this unit of reading and writing. It is a poem which ringingly progresses from level to level with velocity and direction. It increases steadily in excitement, and as the poem culminates the poet uses exclamatory words "Oh" and "ah:." As a poetry idea the task would be to start with a concrete image or statement of fact, then to place that fact in an important relationship, then to express the importance of that relationship, then to make a connection by metaphor or analogy to other facts which are known or felt s important, and finally, using exclamatory words if appropriate, proclaiming that importance to oneself. Poems about waves, about dreams of flying, about ecstatic fulfillment, or about growth and achievement, mode well upon this poetry idea. The essential value of the teaching of poetry ideas on this level is that it reconciles the teaching of the reading and writing of poetry with the tradition of meditative poetry.

### V. Salvation and Personal Growth
Meditation

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I. Preludes; Thanks to God; Signs; | I. Reading and Remembering Facts; | | |
| | Revelations; Acts of Faith | Vocabulary Development; Images | |
| II. Exercise of the Senses; | II. Reading for Relationships; The | | |
| | Examination of Conscience | Structure of the Poem | |
| III. Intention: Salvation | III. Intention: Enjoyment; Achievement; | | Sharing; Personal Growth |
| IV, Dramatization; Asking God | IV. Connections; Frame of Reference; | | |
| | | | Sharing; Relevance |
| V. Resolution; Thanks to God | V. Self-reflections; Personal Growth; | | Closure; Insight |

Both poetry ideas and the *Spiritual Exercises* describe a progress from primary to higher levels and a dynamic focus or converging on intention. The poetry ideas suggested begin with reading and end with personal and

linguistic growth: a poem. Meditation begins with prayers of appeal. It then develops dramatically and sensually toward a state of grace. Both meditation and poetry ideas move back and forth between levels while maintaining direction, knowing where they are going and how to get there. There are vivid contrasts of intention: otherworldly salvation on the one hand, and personal growth through reading, writing, and sharing poetry, on the other hand. But a wide range of poetry is subsumed under the *Spiritual Exercises* and the poetry of the meditative tradition. The starkest contrast is at the last level, a contrast between the religious and the secular, between otherworldliness and developmental tasks. But both consummations are consummations of personal growth, whether spiritual or psychological. They have growth in common, well expressed by Ben Jonson in his elegy to Shakespeare:

> Yet must I not give nature all; they art,
> My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part;
> For though the poet's matter nature be,
> His art doth give the fashion; and that he
> Who casts to write a living line, must swear,
> Such as thine are, and strike the second heat
> Upon the Muse's anvil, turn the same,
> And himself with it, that he thinks to frame.

# APPENDIX

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### A. Definition of Developmental Tasks
The tasks which the individual must learn—the developmental tasks of life—are those things which constitute healthy and satisfactory growth in our society. They are the things a person must learn if he is to be judged and to judge himself a reasonably happy and successful person. A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks.

### B. The Origin of Developmental Tasks
As the individual grows he finds himself possessed of new physical and psychological resources. The infant's legs grow larger and stronger, enabling him to walk. The child's nervous system grows more complex, enabling him to reason more subtly and to understand the complexities of subjects such as arithmetic. The

individual also finds himself facing new demands and expectations from the society around him. The infant is expected to learn to talk, the child to learn to subtract and divide.

These inner and outer forces contrive to set for the individual a series of developmental tasks which must be mastered if he is to be a successful human being.

Some tasks arise mainly from physical maturation, such as learning to walk, learning to behave acceptably to the opposite sex in adolescence, and (for women) adjusting to the menopause in middle life. Other tasks, arising primarily from the cultural pressure of society, are learning to learning to participate as a socially responsible citizen in society.

There is a third source of developmental tasks—namely, the personal values and aspirations of the individual, which are part of his personality or self. The personality, or self, emerges from the interaction of organic and environmental forces. As the self evolves, it becomes increasingly a force in its own right in the subsequent development of the individual. Already by the age of three or four the individual's self is effective in the defining and accomplishing of his developmental tasks.

Examples of the tasks arising primarily from the personal motives and values of the individual are: choosing and preparing for an occupation, and achieving a scale of values and a philosophy of life.

Thus developmental tasks may arise from physical maturation, from the pressure of cultural processes upon the individual, and from the desires, aspirations, and values of the emerging personality, and they arise in most cases from combinations of these factors acting together.

### C. The Teachable Moment
There are two reasons why the concept of developmental tasks is useful to educators. First, it helps in discovering and stating the purposes of education in the school. Education may be conceived as the effort of the society, through the school, to help the individual achieve certain of his developmental tasks.

The second use of the concept is in the timing of educational efforts. When the body is ripe, the society requires, and the self is ready to achieve a certain task, the *teachable moment* has come. Efforts at teaching which would have been largely wasted if they had come earlier, give gratifying results when they come at the teachable moment, when the task should be learned. For example, the best times to teach reading, the care of children, and adjustment to retirement from one's job can be discovered by studying human development, and finding out when conditions are most favorable for learning these tasks.

*Developmental Tasks of Early Childhood*

Learning to take solid foods.

Learning to walk.

Learning to talk.

Learning to control the elimination of body wastes.

Learning sexual modesty.

Forming simple concepts of the physical world.

Learning to distinguish right from wrong.

Learning appropriate social behavior with siblings and parents.

*Developmental Tasks of Middle Childhood*

Learning to care for one's person—to dress one's self, keep clean, etc. Developing physical skills as used in games.

Learning a sex role.

Learning to get along with age-mates.

Learning fundamental intellectual skills necessary for everyday life—the three R's.

Developing concepts necessary for everyday life.

Developing conscience and a scale of values.

Developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions—race, religion, school, government, nation, etc.

Learning to control emotions.

Learning wholesome attitudes toward one's self as a physical organism.

*Developmental Tasks for Adolescence*

Accepting one's physique, and accepting a masculine or feminine role.

Achieving new relations with age-mates of both sexes.

Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.

Achieving assurance of economic independence.

Selecting and preparing an occupation.

Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.

Preparing for marriage and family life.

Building conscious values (esthetic, religious, ethical) in harmony with an adequate scientific world-picture.

*Developmental Tasks of Early Adulthood*

Establishing one's self in an occupation

Courtship and marriage.

Establishing a home and family.

Developing knowledge and critical abilities necessary for civic competence. Assuming social responsibility as an adult in religious, political, civic,

and recreational affairs.

## Notes

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1. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* , p. 128.
2. "Day of the Leopards," *College English* , Vol. 3, No. 8, May 1972.
3. Quoted by Philip Applebaum in "Poems and Why in College English?" *College English* , Vol. 3, No. 8, May 1972.
4. *The Meditative Poem* , p. xvii.
5. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* , p. 53.
6. *Adventures of Ideas* .
7. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* , p. 47.
8. "The Man on the Dump," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens, p* . 201.
9. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , p. 27.
10. Carl R. Rogers, "What Can the Psychology of Learning Offer Education?" *The Psychology of Learning* , ed. Edwin R. Futhrie, Revised Edition. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1952).
11. Report of The Committee on Youth Development, New Haven Board of Education, June, 1978.
12. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , p. 53.
13. "Levels of Teaching and Testing," *The English Journal* , Sept. 1955.
14. Myers, Miles, "Five Approaches to the Teaching of Writing," *Learning* , April 1978.
15. "Using Research in Teaching Writing," *The English Journal* , Winter, 1978.
16. *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers* , p. 54.
          "The sequential pathway to this goal (literacy) is a growth scale going from the personal to the impersonal, from low to high abstraction, from undifferentiated to finely discriminated modes of discourse."
17. *The Meditative Poem* , p. xvii.
18. *Rose, Where Did You Get that Red* ?, p. 131.
19. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , p. 71.
20. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , p. 43.

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