

LAPIDUS WORKSHOP II

CLIMATE CRISIS: Looking Your Demons in the Eye

with Linda France

24th October 2020

This handout accompanied the second workshop of two and sums up the close reading and feedback process that the session focussed on, while reflecting on some of the themes in the first primarily generative workshop.

*I keep six honest serving men.
They taught me all I knew.
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.*

Rudyard Kipling, *The Elephant's Child*

Zoom Appreciation & Editing Guidelines

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In breakout rooms, 3 people have 12 minutes each to read their piece of writing – with no preamble and hopefully share on screen or in chat – for close listening/reading and appreciation. Someone in the group takes charge of timekeeping.

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Read once, and then a second time.

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Responses from the group – writer stays silent (making notes to revisit comments later).

These suggestions for questions don't propose a formulaic way of reading or writing poetry, but are simply to encourage curiosity and penetrating observation. Sometimes the process happens naturally, especially with experience, but asking additional questions can help loosen and open the flow if you feel stuck – and to keep you on track.

– WHAT

Checking in with what you think the piece is about – no agreement or consensus is needed, the more diverse the opinions, the more fruitful for the writer. Avoid asking questions of the writer at this stage. Try turning your question to a

statement, getting a sense of the 'story' of the text, what's happening, who's speaking, the mood of the piece. Are there any gaps in your understanding?

– WHO

Who is the speaker of the poem? Are they talking to anyone in particular – how is that signified by the tone?

– HOW

How does the piece touch you? What do you connect with?

– WHERE

Where does the piece have the most impact – look at voice/viewpoint – I, you, he/she/it/they; sound effects – line endings, rhythm, rhyme; language – vocabulary, imagery; structure – layout, stanzas, white space, punctuation; narrative – beginnings and endings (WHEN might be a better place for the poem to begin and end? Is there a better order?)

– WHY

Why does the title work well – or not?

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A chance for the writer to speak back to the comments

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The questions can also work as editing guidelines, applied to your own draft...

...when you might also ask WHAT'S NOT THERE? What are you missing? What's just below the surface asking for attention? Another question could be: what might be better not there? Is there anything redundant, inadvertently repetitive, or telling too much you could remove? Listen for the eloquent silence.

Poetry is a place for the mysterious, the intuitive, the negative image – what comes slantwise, what can't be expressed any other way or paraphrased.

Leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself.

Do not impose yourself on the 'object'.

Become one with the 'object'.

Plunge deep enough into the 'object' to see something like a hidden glimmering there.

Basho

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Writing in response to an existing poem or text is one way to cultivate active/creative reading – asking questions of it and of yourself, staying curious and continuing a process of discovery.

The best poems stay open – offer hospitality and invite this sort of interaction. They are not closed or fixed – do not try to offer the final word.

The Question by Theo Dorgan

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/01/a-climate-change-poem-for-today-the-question-by-theo-dorgan>

What question would you like to put out there or could you imagine hanging in the air? Write a poem provoked by the question or concluding with it.

Seasonal Disturbances by Karen McCarthy Woolf

On the night of the hurricane
I slept right through it, then got up
while it was still dark and went to work,
wondering why the streets were empty
and there were no cars on the road.

...

[This poem is not available online and so I'm not including the full text here, but it is the title poem of Karen McCarthy Woolf's 2017 collection from Carcanet. You can order it from your local library or join the National Poetry Library (an excellent free resource) and read poetry books online or request to download.

<https://www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk/visit/join>]

Go for a walk and make a point of noticing the weather. How would you describe it? What words come to mind? Keep looking, listening, feeling, smelling beyond the point that you think you know everything there is to know.

What else is on your mind? Is it more important/insistent than the weather? Do the two connect in some way? How does the weather change? How do your thoughts change? At the end of your walk, what feels different?

The Solace of Artemis by Paula Meehan

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/13/the-solace-of-artemis>

Elms by Louise Glück

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49602/elms-56d22bda55f98>

Do some research on an endangered species that you feel a connection with. Write a poem about your process and your relationship with that creature, plant or organism. Include details of habitat, physicality, life cycle etc.

Pebble by Jane Lovell

<https://againstthegrainpoetrypress.wordpress.com/2020/01/28/the-winning-poems-atg-poem-competition-2019/>

Find a stone in your house or garden that you collected and brought home from somewhere – or someone gave you as a gift. If you don't have one, go for a walk and find one. What is its story? Real and/or imaginary? 'a small symbol of this precarious world', what is it saying to you?

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Read this extract from an interview with ecopsychologist Steffi Bednarek

<https://www.britishgestaltjournal.com/features/2020/10/21/steffi-bednarek-on-necessary-derangement-at-the-upcoming-bgj-seminar-day> and ask yourself the same question:

What are some of the practices and supports that help you 'step into the biggest and largest version of [yourself]' during this time of incredible upheaval?

I have much to learn and often my heart is rigid with grief and fear when I look at the fragmentation of the world. I think the kind of largeness I hope to live into is crafted between the heat of loss and the beauty of love for this world. I try my best to consciously live between the tension of these two potencies and they certainly stretch me beyond what I thought was possible. What I am hoping for is some kind of weather-beaten spaciousness that, at the best of times, can hold what life brings to my doorstep – the beauty and the loss. As far as I am concerned, this is a life-long meandering journey that does not progress in linear fashion.

What helps me personally is the support of Elders who are way further on this journey than I am. I need to stress that I am talking about Elders, not Olders! So, in the human realm, these are people who have allowed themselves to be ripened and matured by life and who are willing to live beyond the confines of self-interest and share what they have gathered

freely and generously. There are a couple of people in my life who support me in not getting caught up in the introspection of the wound, but to live a larger and more expressive life.

Not all Elders that teach me are alive and I certainly haven't met them all. Jung, Hillman, Rumi, Rilke and Thich Nhat Hanh are just some examples of Elders I invite to stretch and educate me. And in practical terms, visits to Thich Nhat Hahn's monastery in Plum Village fill me with a quiet sense of joy and gratitude for the simplicity of life.

And not all Elders are human. Sitting by a tree and allowing myself to shift into a more-than-human perspective helps enormously not to take my human troubles too seriously.

Viewing life in the continuation of my lineage behind me and the generations that lie in front of me is another way towards connectedness to something that is larger than my individuality. My life does not have to be extraordinary. For me, there is a simple and down-to-earth sacredness to the mere fact that I exist and that I pass on life into the future, through my actions or non-actions. I often lose sight of this and that is why I need the support of people who help me remember.

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Collect quotations that resonate, contemporary and historical. These too might prompt poems in any number of ways and encourage the sense of participating in a conversation, a community, a culture – acts of creative exchange. If someone or some place keeps cropping up, explore what it might be guiding you towards. Take time to follow through and ask more questions.

Some examples from my own notebook (still in rebellion post-PhD, I haven't kept track of sources, page numbers etc – although I do need to revert to that mode as it is useful to be able to locate context):

If we don't act until we feel the crisis that we rather curiously call 'environmental' – as if the destruction of our planet were merely a context – everyone will be committed to solving a problem that can no longer be solved.

Jonathan Safran Foer

We will probably not know in this lifetime if we are serving as death bed attendants to a dying world or as midwives to the next stage of human evolution.

Joanna Macy

...staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.

Donna Haraway

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof. What I want is so simple I almost can't say it: elementary kindness.

Barbara Kingsolver

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence.

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence.

The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Thomas Merton

THE POETICS OF PRESENCE & RESILIENCE

Writing as an Ecological Attitude

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| Taking space to write, cultivating a practice, honouring the process | ... | A sense of commitment, discipline & self-care |
| Grammar & syntax, inherent logic | ... | Clarity, communication skills |
| Economy & focus | ... | Simplicity |
| Truth-telling, managing register & tone | ... | Authenticity, a common humanity |
| Taking reader into account | ... | Connectedness, empathy, solidarity |
| Having something to say, breaking silences | ... | Courage, speaking out |
| Making choices about place/character/details/flora/fauna etc – based on close observation | ... | Gaining perspective, looking beyond yourself, orientation |
| Playing with language & sound – rhyme rhythm, voice, tense, lexicon etc | ... | Delight, pleasure, staying fresh, positive, awake |

Linda France

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www.newwritingnorth.com (has information about work from my Climate Residency)

<https://ginkgoprize.com>

<https://laurelprize.com>

<https://writersrebel.com>

<https://www.thewillowherbreview.com>

<https://www.terrain.org>

<https://emergencemagazine.org>

<https://dark-mountain.net>

<https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org>