

## **Journal #2**

### **Background in Poetry**

I actually took a creative writing course where I studied poetry and wrote a lot of my own. I seemed to gravitate toward Sherman Alexie, I learned a lot about modern native American culture by reading his poetry and I found it quite affectional. I also naturally love Edgar Allen Poe's poetry, Annabelle Lee particularly interests me. It is such a different approach than the Raven, much more childlike and ethereal, and deals with the topic of Love, which I don't identify in very much of his body of work. I've said it in class, but I don't think song exactly fits the poetry form. As they say, it's not a song until someone sings it. And I simply don't believe that it can be analyzed in the same way as a poem without hearing the music that accompanies it. That is not to say that I don't appreciate song. Quite the opposite, actually! I love song and I wish to see it as its own form, not as a subset of poetry. Just as song contains something that poetry doesn't, the same goes for poetry having something essential that song doesn't. The lines, the meter, the visual form, the way we see a poem on the page, it's something a song can't give, and it opens up the ambiguity of the poem significantly. I also feel that when a poem isn't vocal, the words really have a loose nature and allow for more flexible interpretation. A word said with certain inflection takes on a new meaning. When we don't have that inflection from someone else, it makes the experience much more personal. For that reason, I find poetry to be the most fun and engaging to interpret because there are so many possibilities! In this class, I hope to learn a lot more about meter and the visual aspects and forms of poetry.

## **Billy Collins' Introduction to Poetry**

I am about to deconstruct a poem that begs not to be deconstructed. I guess I should say that I am going to identify how the poem is already deconstructed, isn't that how critics go about it? In the first stanza, I am curious who is being addressed. *Them*. It sounds like it is from a position of authority as well. He tells them this, they do something else. Possibly a high school or college teacher, but it can be extended to all forms of teaching, we shouldn't be too concerned with those details. What we should be concerned about is the notion that there is a correct way to read poetry, and that there is an assumption that he has authority over something that can't be controlled, poetry. I get where he is coming from. The last line resonates. *To find out what it really means*. There's an overtone of sarcasm that I identify in that line. As if to say, poems don't have meaning? He's taken the time to illustrate that their method is wrong, and part of their method is finding the meaning, so he is in turn criticizing the search for a meaning in text. He (and when I say he, I mean the voice of the poem, not necessarily Collins) would have us skim along the surface, when we really want to dig in deep. There is also an assumption that poems are beautiful in the same way the surface of a lake is beautiful, or a beehive, etc., and I would argue that the beauty of a poem cannot be gleaned from such a surface level reading. Mainly because that beauty comes from self-reflection as well. If we simply glance (or gaze) at a poem, are we really taking the time to reflect and apply our unique insight? Poetry is an interactive medium. I would argue that most medium are. But particularly poetry, due to the ambiguity and play in language. I will say this, he does seem to treat poetry as a living organism, rather than something dead to be dissected. When he says to drop a mouse in, I assume that to mean our attention and affection for the poem. Let your reading take its course, and glide through the poem,

rather than over it. That, to me, signifies an active participation, more than some of the other analogies. But then he views their reaction in beating the text with a hose as a negative act. What is the difference between the mouse running through it and beating it with a hose? One sounds a lot more violent, but what is the direct translation? When we beat a text, are we only hitting at the surface and not the essential being? I'm not sure exactly what is being said, but I guess what we can take from that, is that we shouldn't be attacking poetry (much like I am doing right now) but rather, letting it flow into our understanding and come out unique to us. One word that is interesting to me, is confession. We try to beat a confession out of the poem. This is a powerful image, because I am sure we all have an opinion about military torture techniques. Some people see it as an effective means of gaining information, but the leading experts have said time and time again that we don't receive accurate information from torture confession. If you torture the poem, it will tell you anything you want it to say. And it simply is just not a pleasant experience. The poem will come out bruised and tired. So rather, than beat the thing, let's just give it some room to breathe. That doesn't mean not to delve deep. Just go about it organically. If you can convince yourself and room full of people, then there is a good chance there is some validity to your reading. I personally believe there's a validity to all reading, but more pleasant reading involves being kind to the text. Making it fun. Making it organic.

## Robert Frost's Road Not Taken

From Parker's reading, it seems New Critics were more adept or inclined toward interpreting poetry rather than other forms of literature, which most likely correlates to the intrinsic structures of iambic meter and rhythm therein. In their spirit, I've chosen to interpret Frost's poem above the others. *The Road Not Taken* offers less traditional variation of iambic tetrameter, and I'm sure New Critics are quite interested in using those patterns for interpretation, but I'm going to take *the road less traveled by* and ignore the more structured side of poem, in favor of the more ambiguous side.

*The Road Not Taken* is interested in choice, and the ambiguity of choice and its consequences. One of the first examples of ambiguity in the text might be the use of the word *yellow* in the first line, which sets the events presumably in Autumn, and Autumn signifies the end of a life cycle in the natural world (which we also happen to inhabit), so in turn, it could signify that the choice takes place closer to end of the speaker's life. That chain of ideas by itself might not seem ambiguous, but couple the time of year with the time of day, morning, which might signify that the choice could also take place in your early youth. So just with two words that describe the setting, we have this tension, or you might say *unity*, that seems to say that these difficult choices we make can be made at any time, and in particular, that the nature of this poem isn't necessarily in regard to a specific instance, but more the idea of choice in general, and the many choices we will have to make.

The end of the *road* is where I find the most ambiguity and the most interesting ambiguity. The *sigh* is one of the more clear explicates, and noticeably less so, is the *difference* in the end. The *sigh* is noteworthy to me because there are one of two ways it

can go, much like the *road* itself, but the *difference* is the last idea we're left with, and maybe it shouldn't interest me as much as it does, but there's something about its vagueness that speaks to the rest of the text and everything I've explicated. The poem is concerned with finding the difference in choice and trying to interpret which is more enticing, or more frugal, or more you-name-it; And it might even comment on the very nature of interpreting the text, for each path to interpretation seems more enticing than the last, but when it comes down to it, they're *worn really about the same*