



The way a scientist understands light as particle and wave, both at once, writers understand language as articulation *and* fusion. The reader moves through a passage in a particular mode, the mode of description for example, and then modulates, from description, say, to action. This succession of modes continues with each passage helping to develop the effect of the whole. The sequence from one component to the next follows three distinct configurations of logic: a second component can *repeat* the first, it can *oppose* the first, or it can *supplement* on the first (an idea from *The Art of Biblical Poetry* by Robert Alter). A writer's overarching question about the sense of the developing effect is: how does it go?

Writer and reader like improvisors modulate *together* from key to key, through variations in tempo, with keen attention, feeling our way along.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (in his book *Flow*) said that artists after 10,000 hours' practice may enter what he calls "a state of flow," what athletes call the zone, an elevated awareness of precise choices in the moment, as if time slowed down. With this awareness comes a serene confidence in artistic freedom and in the skill of choosing in relation to past and future choices.

Heightened awareness while *reading* comes more readily than it does while writing, because the complexities of good writing have been articulated and fused by an effective writer in ways that consummate their strongest possibilities. *Reading* well delivers the complexities of the flow involved in *writing* well. This is the focus of today's class.

## EXAMPLES

### The Bible, King James Version, Song of Solomon (Hebrew, circa 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E)

[1] I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.

[2] As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

[3] As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

[4] He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

[5] Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love.

[1] Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead.

[2] Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them.

[3] Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks.

[4] Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men.

[5] Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies.

[6] Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.

[7] Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.

[12] A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

[13] Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard,

[14] Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

[15] A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

[16] Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

[1] How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman.

[2] Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies.

**MY LOVE**      by e.e. cummings 1923

my love  
thy hair is one kingdom  
    the king whereof is darkness  
thy forehead is a flight of flowers

thy head is a quick forest  
    filled with sleeping birds  
thy breasts are swarms of white bees  
    upon the bough of thy body  
thy body to me is April  
in whose armpits is the approach of spring

thy thighs are white horses yoked to a chariot  
    of kings  
they are the striking of a good minstrel  
between them is always a pleasant song

my love  
thy head is a casket  
    of the cool jewel of thy mind  
the hair of thy head is one warrior  
    innocent of defeat  
thy hair upon thy shoulders is an army  
    with victory and with trumpets

thy legs are the trees of dreaming  
whose fruit is the very eatage of forgetfulness

thy lips are satraps in scarlet  
    in whose kiss is the combinings of kings  
thy wrists  
are holy  
    which are the keepers of the keys of thy blood  
thy feet upon thy ankles are flowers in vases  
    of silver

in thy beauty is the dilemma of flutes

    thy eyes are the betrayal  
of bells comprehended through incense

**moonchild** by Lucille Clifton 1993

whatever slid into my mother's room that  
late june night, tapping her great belly,  
summoned me out roundheaded and unsmiling.  
is this the moon, my father used to grin.  
cradling me? it was the moon  
but nobody knew it then.

the moon understands dark places.  
the moon has secrets of her own.  
she holds what light she can.

we girls were ten years old and giggling  
in our hand-me-downs. we wanted breasts,  
pretended that we had them, tissued  
our undershirts. jay johnson is teaching  
me to french kiss, ella bragged, who  
is teaching you? how do you say; my father?

the moon is queen of everything.  
she rules the oceans, rivers, rain.  
when I am asked whose tears these are  
I always blame the moon.

**THE BUNNY GIVES US A LESSON IN ETERNITY**

by Mary Ruefle 2006

We are a sad people, without hats.  
The history of our nation is tragically benign.  
We like to watch the rabbits screwing in the graveyard.  
We are fond of the little bunny with the bent ear  
who stands alone in the moonlight  
reading what little text there is on the graves.  
He looks quite desirable like that.  
He looks like the center of the universe.  
Look how his mouth moves mouthing the words  
while the others are busy making more of him.  
Soon the more will ask of him to write their love  
letters and he will oblige, using the language  
of our ancestors, those poor clouds in the ground,  
beloved by us who have been standing here for hours,  
a proud people after all.

## YOU DONT MISS YOUR WATER

by Cornelius Eady 1995

At home, my mother wakes up and spends some of her day talking back to my father's empty chair.

In Florida, my sister experiences the occasional dream in which my father returns; they chat.

He's been dead and gone for a little over a year. How it would please me to hear his unrecorded voice again, now alive only in the minds of those who remember him.

If I could, if as in the old spiritual, I could actually get a direct phone link to the other side, I could call him up, tell him about this small prize of a week I've had teaching poetry at a ski resort a few miles from Lake Tahoe, imagination jackpot, brief paradise of letters.

How could I make him believe that I have gotten all of this, this modern apartment, this pond in front of my window, all from the writing of a few good lines of verse, my father, who distrusted anything he couldn't get his hands on?

Most likely, he would listen, then ask me, as he always did, just for safety's sake, if my wife still had her good-paying job.

And I can't tell you why, but this afternoon, I wouldn't become hot and stuffy from his concern, think "old fool," and gripe back, *Of course I'm still teaching college. It's summer, you know?*

This afternoon, I miss his difficult waters. And when he'd ask, as he always would, *How're they treating you?* I'd love to answer back, *Fine, daddy. They're paying me to write about your life.*

## INCANTATION

by Czeslaw Milosz, translated by Czeslaw Milosz & Robert Pinsky 1968

Human reason is beautiful and invincible.  
No bars, no barbed wire, no pulping of books,  
No sentence of banishment can prevail against it.  
It establishes the universal ideas in language,  
And guides our hand so we write Truth and Justice  
With capital letters, lie and oppression with small.  
It puts what should be above things as they are,  
Is an enemy of despair and a friend of hope.  
It does not know Jew from Greek or slave from master,  
Giving us the estate of the world to manage.  
It saves austere and transparent phrases  
From the filthy discord of tortured words.  
It says that everything is new under the sun,  
Opens the congealed fist of the past.  
Beautiful and very young are Philo-Sophia  
And poetry, her ally in the service of the good.  
As late as yesterday Nature celebrated their birth,  
The news was brought to the mountains by a unicorn and an echo.  
Their friendship will be glorious, their time has no limit.  
Their enemies have delivered themselves to destruction.

*Berkeley, 1968*