

## JUST JUMP: READING LEAPS AS A SURVIVOR'S LANGUAGE

Michael A. de Armas • Class Handout • Warren Wilson • July 2020

“The question arises . . . how much digression, wildness, lack of control, tumult of style and content can a poem contain? Until rapture ruptures? The easy answer, and the only true one, of course, is that it will take as much as it takes. The final standard is whatever works.

— Tony Hoagland, “On Disproportion”

“why wait

to turn this distance  
to metaphor  
just jump.”

— Brian Teare, “The Stairs”

“We make our psyche out of what we need.”

— Tony Hoagland, WW lecture  
on the Composite Poem

“What if inside the body another shape is  
waiting to come out, white as a quilt, loose as a fever,  
and sways in the easy tides there?”

— Charles Wright, “California Dreaming”

“Each detail can be replaced by another. . . . Any one of them, chosen at random, will serve to bear witness to the transposed condition by which the whole of reality has been seized.”

— Boris Pasternak, quoted in Jakobson, *Language in Literature* (from Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*)

“the more things it standardizes into a state of lethargy, the more rebellious consciousness it arouses”

— Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

“Lyrical poems . . . may at first look like static, fixed-place poems with a confessional personal base, they hold the narrator up as an idea, even an abstract example, of consciousness, shifting in spatial locations.”

— Fanny Howe, *The Wedding Dress*

“such contact produces a more conscious and flexible response to perils without and within.”

— Claudia Ingram, “Fission and Fusion Both Liberate Energy: James Merrill, Jorie Graham, and the Metaphoric Imagination”

“For me, the greatest inventiveness  
leads to the greatest likeness.”

— Alberto Giacometti quoted  
in Charles Wright’s  
*Quarter Notes* (85)

“he who said  
the earth is blue  
like an orange  
which for an instant  
seems precisely  
correct because  
it will always  
be a solution  
just out of reach”

— Matthew Zapruder,  
*Father’s Day*, 108

## Definitions

Robert Bly defined a poetic **leap** as: “a leap from the conscious to the unconscious and back again, a leap from the known part of the mind to the unknown part and back to the known” (*Leaping Poetry, I*)

Maria Von Franz, a prominent Jungian, says, “**the inferior function** is the door through which all the figures of the unconscious come into consciousness.” (*Jung’s Typology, 55*)

The **superior function** is a “habitual pattern of performance which enjoys itself in its activity, a pattern that likes to be exercised” (*Jung’s Typology, 75*).

James Longenbach defines **disjunction** as “the leap from one semantic, discursive, or figurative place to another.” (Longenbach, “Forms of Disjunction”)

## Ocean

Juan Ramon Jiménez

- (1) I have a feeling that my boat
- (2) has struck, down there in the depths,
- (3) against a great thing.
  
- (4) And nothing
- (5) happens! Nothing . . . Silence . . . Waves
  
- (6) Nothing happens! Or has everything happened,
- (7) are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?

From *Leaping Poetry*

## Havana Birth

Susan Mitchell

(1) Off Havana, the ocean is green this morning  
(2) of my birth. The conchers clean their knives on leather  
(3) straps and watch the sky while three couples  
(4) who have been dancing on the deck of a ship  
(5) in the harbor, the old harbor of the fifties, kiss  
(6) each other's cheeks and call it a night.

(7) On a green sofa five dresses wait  
(8) to be fitted. The seamstress kneeling at Mother's feet  
(9) has no idea I am about to be born. Mother  
(10) pats her stomach which is flat  
(11) as the lace mats on the dressmaker's table. She thinks  
(12) I'm playing in my room. But as usual, she's wrong.

(13) I'm about to be born in a park in Havana. Oh,  
(14) this is important, everything in the dressmaker's house  
(15) is furred like a cat. And Havana leans right up  
(16) against the windows. In the park, the air  
(17) is chocolate, the sweet breath of a man  
(18) smoking an expensive cigar. The grass

(19) is drinkable, dazzling, white. In a moment  
(20) I'll get up from a bench lured  
(21) by a flock of pigeons, lazily sipping  
(22) the same syrupy music through a straw.  
(23) Mother is so ignorant, she thinks  
(24) I'm rolled like a ball of yarn under the bed. What

(25) does she know of how I got trapped in my life?  
(26) She thinks it's all behind her, the bloody  
(27) sheets, the mirror in the ceiling  
(28) where I opened such a sudden furious blue, her eyes  
(29) bruised shut like mine. The pigeon's eyes  
(30) are orange, unblinking, a doll's. Mother always said

(31) I wanted to touch everything because  
(32) I was a child. But I was younger than that.  
(33) I was so young I thought whatever I  
(34) wanted, the world wanted too. Workers  
(35) in the field wanted the glint of sun on their machetes.  
(36) Sugarcane came naturally sweet, you

(37) had only to lick the earth where it grew.

(38) The music I heard each night outside  
(39) my window lived in the mouth of a bird. I was so young  
(40) I thought it was easy as walking  
(41) into the ocean which always had room  
(42) for my body. So when I head out my hands

(43) I expected the pigeon to float between them  
(44) like a blossom, dusting my fingers with the manna  
(45) of its wings. But the world is wily, and doesn't want  
(46) to be held for long, which is why  
(47) as my hands reached out, workers lay down  
(48) their machetes and left the fields, which is why

(49) a prostitute in a little calle of Havana dreamed  
(50) the world was a peach and flicked  
(51) open a knife. And Mother, startled, shook  
(52) out a dress with big peonies splashed like dirt  
(53) across the front, as if she had fallen  
(54) chasing after me in the rain. But what could I do?

(55) I was about to be born, I was about to have  
(56) my hair combed into the new music  
(57) everyone was singing. The dressmaker sang it, her mouth  
(58) filled with pins. The butcher sang it and wiped  
(59) blood on his apron. Mother sang it and thought her body  
(60) was leaving her body. And when I tried

(61) I was so young the music beat right  
(62) through me, which is how the pigeon got away.  
(63) The song the world sings day after day  
(64) isn't made of feathers, and the song a bird pours  
(65) itself into is tough as a branch  
(66) growing with the singer and the singer's delight.

from *Rapture*

## Cities & Names

Italo Calvino

“Clarice, the glorious city, has a tormented history. Several times it decayed, then burgeoned again, always keeping the first Clarice as an unparalleled model of every splendor, compared to which the city’s present state can only cause more sighs at every fading of the stars.

In its centuries of decadence, emptied by plagues, its height reduced by collapsing beams and cornices and by shifts of the terrain, rusted and stopped up through neglect or the lack of maintenance men, the city slowly became populated again as the survivors emerged from the basements and lairs, in hordes, swarming like rats, driven by their fury to rummage and gnaw, and yet also to collect and patch, like nesting birds. They grabbed everything that could be taken from where it was and put it in another place to serve a different use: brocade curtains ended up as sheets; in marble funerary urns they planted basil; wrought iron gratings torn from the harem windows were used for roasting cat-meat on fires of inlaid wood. Put together with odd bits of the useless Clarice, a survivor’s Clarice was taking shape, all huts and hovels, festering sewers, rabbit cages. And yet, almost nothing was lost of Clarice’s former splendor; it was all there, merely arranged in a different order, no less appropriate to the inhabitants’ needs than it had been before.”

From *Invisible Cities*

**Conjugal**  
Russell Edson

- (1) A man is bending his wife.
- (2) He is bending her around something that she has bent
- (3) herself around.
- (4) She is around it, bent as he has bent her.
  
- (5) He is convincing her.
  
- (6) It is all so private between them.
  
- (7) He bends her around the bedpost.
- (8) No, he is bending her around the tripod of his camera.
- (9) It is as if he teaches her to swim
- (10) as if he teaches acrobatics
- (11) as if he could form her into something wet
- (12) that he delivers out of one life into another.
  
- (13) And it is such a private thing the thing they do.
  
- (14) He is forming her into the wallpaper
- (15) he is smoothing her down into the flowers there
- (16) and he is finding her nipples there
- (17) and he is kissing her pubis.
  
- (18) He is climbing into the wallpaper among the flowers
  
- (19) his buttocks move in and out of the wall.

from *Leaping Poetry*

**enough food and a mom**  
francine j. harris

- (1) The dad. body has just enough gravy on his plate  
(2) to sop up one piece of bread. So, enough for one  
(3) supper, says the mom. She comes back to him, says
- (4) don't argue with mom, you're a ghost. There's enough  
(5) water around to drown a cob in its husk. in a dad. He puts
- (6) up weather stripping all night. to keep out the mom. He says
- (7) I should have cooked for you more. She thinks she could  
(8) make her own insulin. to keep from going into dad.
- (9) She says I should have married a ghost. says: You have a  
(10) little raisin on your lip. a little. The mom says  
(11) stop all that quiet, it's foolish.  
(12) Come on now, dad. come to ghost.
- (13) says the ghost.
- (14) I won't even warn the mom. I won't even flinch if the ghost  
(15) tries to hold her mom. After all,
- (16) a good séance starts with enough food  
(17) and a mom. The ghost with a biscuit in meat. The mom
- (18) with the smell of cracked dad. sucked out of oxygen.  
(19) The mom is a smell of wrecked vines.
- (20) You, the dad. with no teeth. And no, (the mom)
- (21) is a garden full of ghost. No. says the dad: lost in ashes.
- (22) No city is complete. its own worst ghost. who can't  
(23) remember the ghost now, the ghost says:
- (24) All your selves know, now.
- (25) They ghost like a bushel of a snowflower.
- (26) Everyone is dead. now. says, the ghost.  
(27) The mom is a yard of blackening petals.

(28) At night, I have really long dads. Without the ghosts,  
I wake in a puddle of ghost.

(29) But you'll be mom one day. to know I am alive.

(30) We are all sappy dad, aren't we. Tell the ghost, it's ok.

(31) Let the bodies lie ghost for a while.

(32) I mom of you. I mom of you a lot.

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