

# The Poetry Project

Online Edition

**Issue 3 – 19 April 2020**

Good afternoon everyone,

Apologies for the delay in sending out this third issue of the Online Poetry Project. Things became confusing when I began running the Zoom group as well as sending out these emails due to repeated content.

As some of you know, we have had two poetry groups on Zoom in the past two weeks. In the first, I went over the exercises from Issue 2, and in the previous, I did two new ideas that will be repeated here for anyone who did not attend on Zoom but may be interested in any case. There is also a new exercise on the poetry form ‘Rondeau’.

Feel free to do any of these (or previous exercises, or anything else for that matter!) and share them in the next Zoom group, before trying something new (which would be emailed out afterwards in Issue 4).

There was also a question on whether I would be running the class on Zoom during what would have been the school holidays, which were moved due to the lockdown. I am not sure, but it may happen. I will keep everyone updated via email in any case.

So, to review what happened earlier, and add more for those who already joined last Thursday:

## **1) A warm-up exercise from 1<sup>st</sup> Zoom class (9<sup>th</sup> April)**

Take this opening phrase: *Sam wasn't sure if it was a wonderful sign or a sign of disaster, but Sam knew...*

Write down that fictional opening, then keep going. Freewrite, meaning write without stopping or even thinking too much, just scribble away however things come out. You should write for at least five minutes but feel free to go as long as you like. No one has to see this but you, and you have permission for this to be nothing but gibberish!

*(Gotham Writer's Workshop – Writing Fiction, Alexander Steele)*

**2) A picture prompt from last week's Zoom (16<sup>th</sup> April)**

Try to write a poem on whatever springs to mind from this image below. Write whatever comes to you and edit later if necessary.



(<http://poetryforkidsjoy.blogspot.com/2013/01/bye-bye-balloons.html>)

### 3) Dead Stars poem by Ada Limón, from last week's Zoom (16<sup>th</sup> April)

I found the latter stanzas of this poem (starting from *What if we stood up with our synapses...* ) uncredited on Tumblr, and posted in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. I quickly discovered the full poem and the author through Google. According to an interview, this was originally a love poem inspired by the sound of wheelie bins and as it was published in 2018, clearly nothing to do with current events at all. But I do think it could be interpreted that way, especially the last half or so.

I think there is some wonderful imagery in this poem and overall the poem follows an astrological/astronomical theme in line with the title. For this one I had the idea to try either one (or more, or all!) of the following:

- A love poem
- A poem about current events, inspired by the last six words - "*after all of this is over*"
- A poem about stars/space/astronomy

For a structural style, try for something similar to *Dead Stars* in the sense that you'd write many short stanzas of one to three lines or so each.

And here's six words from the poem for inspiration, if you wish:

*Mute, suburban, stars, synapses, earth, sky*

## Dead Stars

Out here, there's a bowing even the trees are doing.

Winter's icy hand at the back of all of us.

Black bark, slick yellow leaves, a kind of stillness that feels  
so mute it's almost in another year.

I am a hearth of spiders these days: a nest of trying.

We point out the stars that make Orion as we take out  
the trash, the rolling containers a song of suburban thunder.

It's almost romantic as we adjust the waxy blue  
recycling bin until you say, Man, we should really learn  
some new constellations.

And it's true. We keep forgetting about Antlia, Centaurus,  
Draco, Lacerta, Hydra, Lyra, Lynx.

But mostly we're forgetting we're dead stars too, my mouth is full  
of dust and I wish to reclaim the rising—

to lean in the spotlight of streetlight with you, toward  
what's larger within us, toward how we were born.

Look, we are not unspectacular things.

We've come this far, survived this much. What

would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?

What if we stood up with our synapses and flesh and said, No.

No, to the rising tides.

Stood for the many mute mouths of the sea, of the land?

What would happen if we used our bodies to bargain

for the safety of others, for earth,

if we declared a clean night, if we stopped being terrified,

if we launched our demands into the sky, made ourselves so big

people could point to us with the arrows they make in their minds,

rolling their trash bins out, after all of this is over?

*From The Carrying (Milkweed Editions, 2018) by Ada Limón. Copyright © 2018 by Ada Limón.*

<https://poets.org/poem/dead-stars>

### 3) Rondeau

This one is a bit more complicated! The 'current' version of this form is described below, and may well require some more thought and editing. Have a go if you'd like, and read your resulting Rondeau in the next Thursday Zoom, likely on 23<sup>rd</sup> April...

The rondeau is a traditionally French form composed of a rhyming quintet, quatrain, and sestet. Named after the French word for "round," the rondeau is characterized by the repeating lines of the rentrement, or refrain, and the two rhyme sounds throughout.

The refrain consists of the first few words or the entire first line of the first stanza, and it recurs as the last line of both the second and third stanzas. Two rhymes guide the music of the rondeau, whose rhyme scheme is as follows (*R representing the refrain*): **aabba aabR aabbaR**.

An example of a solemn rondeau is the Canadian army physician John McCrae's 1915 wartime poem, "In Flanders Fields":

In Flanders fields the poppies grow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place, and in the sky,  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead; short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high!  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

The challenge of writing a rondeau is finding an opening line worth repeating and choosing two rhyme sounds that offer enough word choices. Modern rondeaus are often playful; for example, "Rondel" by Frank O'Hara begins with this mysterious directive: "Door of America, mention my fear to the cigars," which becomes the poem's refrain.

<https://poets.org/glossary/rondeau>

Some more rondeau examples: <http://www.shadowpoetry.com/resources/wip/rondeau.html>

#### 4) Bonus content

##### Scrabble3D:

I have recently discovered a free and open-source computer-based Scrabble game, called Scrabble3D available for Windows, Mac and Linux from <https://sourceforge.net/projects/scrabble/>

It's playable against the computer and also has network play online.

##### InspiroBot:

An amusingly surreal and abstract inspirational quote generator. Sometimes the results make great poetry prompts, sometimes they make absolutely no sense. Sometimes there's more than meets the eye.

<http://inspirobot.me/>

Example:



That's all folks!  
Hope you're enjoying The Poetry Project Online so far.  
Aaron