

"Life is C, F, + G"

How has my writing (even my desire to write?) been affected by rhythm + sounds from early in my life?

- where did you grow-up?

Do you write about things you remember listening to in the past?

✓ What part do rhythms play in everyone's life?

What ^{direct} connections can I make between the papers I have written and the rhythm I used to hear?

what are ~~the~~ your favorite rhythms + sounds?

What childhood memories vividly stand out in your mind?

→ THERE MUST BE SOME STORY BEHIND HOW YOU CAME UP W/ THIS HYPOTHESIS. WHAT IS IT? bec I love music + sound + love it all of my writing

Are some people born w/ the ability to write (talent), or are they shaped from early life by these sounds? Can you remember these rhythms?

→ were you encouraged to develop these

rhythms & sounds from EARLY CHILDHOOD?

→ why else do you think they have affected your writing at all? (see above)

- Are there any schools of psychology (I know there are, but I don't know the names) ~~that~~ from which you can draw information?

- ~~Do you think that you actually have a desire to play some type of instrument. Maybe this is your true want coming through and you should pursue them along with your writing.~~ Do you think that you actually have a desire to play some type of instrument. Maybe this is your true want coming through and you should pursue them along with your writing.

Music ~~is~~ ^{represents} one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature. By creative I mean a form of play, an interaction that creates without destroying, that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech delights in interaction with throat & tongue without changing throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone, and lips; a snew, a fiber, and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log, and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating, the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration, in being "like," whatever they encounter, ~~is what~~ ~~was~~ ~~probably~~ ~~the~~ ~~first~~ ~~form~~ ~~of~~ ~~organized~~ ~~entertainment.~~ (2) ~~you - can't - that~~

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. ~~When~~ I learned ~~the~~ ~~full~~ ~~thrust~~ of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically, ~~when~~ each finger was a bridge from the crashing, lovely sounds inside the piano, directly to my ~~brain~~ brain. My ears listened for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices high & low, white & black, resonant & vibrant all at once and continually, between the forgotten silences of the before & after, just as I now want to the continuance, the liquidity, of word ~~after~~ ^{upon} word in a poem. The miracle of music is the shape it gives to air, otherwise as invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the spaces between solids. But sound - whether music, voice, or nature - performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around an object, an incident, a happenstance, and making it speak. (6)

~~And that is the primal birth of the music of the universe, even before the beginning when there was the word.~~ Not so much the cry of a loon, the call of elephant or wolf, the gurgle of a frog, or even the phenomenon of the cricket's wing - but the rustle or hurl or skriek ~~or~~ whisper of wind on its way anywhere, the rmp or rush or slap or shush of ~~the~~ ~~many~~ ~~water~~, the roar or crack ~~or~~ groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. (1) Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. (4) Our own bodies give us the pulse of our breath & blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. (3) ~~Even~~ ~~the~~ ~~landscape~~ ~~echoes~~ ~~with~~ ~~sequence,~~ ~~syncopation~~ ~~and~~ ~~cadence.~~ ~~We~~ ~~know~~ ~~the~~ ~~rhythm~~ ~~+~~ ~~repetition~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~seasons,~~ ~~and~~ ~~weather,~~ ~~and~~ ~~days,~~ ~~and~~ ~~years.~~ (2) ~~And~~ ~~all~~ ~~this~~ ~~music~~ ~~is~~ ~~speech,~~ ~~the~~ ~~sound~~ ~~of~~ ~~God~~ ~~or~~ ~~gods~~ ~~telling~~ ~~us~~ ~~the~~ ~~secrets,~~ ~~the~~ ~~maxims~~ ~~+~~ ~~tales~~ ~~of~~ ~~all~~ ~~things~~ ~~+~~ ~~all~~ ~~time,~~ ~~this~~ ~~means,~~ ~~to~~ ~~me,~~ ~~that~~ ~~there~~ ~~is~~ ~~poetry~~ ~~in~~ ~~music,~~ ~~and~~ ~~that~~ ~~is~~ ~~why~~ ~~there~~ ~~is~~ ~~music~~ ~~in~~ ~~poetry~~ ~~-~~ ~~not~~ ~~the~~ ~~other~~ ~~way~~ ~~around.~~
 → in ~~every~~ ~~specific~~ ~~place~~ ~~+~~ ~~time.~~

So sound is the speech of ^{particulate} things in the world, the spirit in all things & all beings, speaking to us from ~~all directions~~ space molded by air-taking shape: ~~the~~ air sculpted by alchemy as it comes in contact with something else, something concrete ^{a rock, a shell, an evergreen} and so, like metaphor, it ^{tells(?)} about its own fundamental relationships. ^{in itself} A poem, ~~is~~ a word, ^{made} by molding or shaping an ^{idea} by contact with a concrete image. ~~A poem is a word, a prayer, in the sense of suffering offered to God - the kind of prayer my grandfather uttered in his own ancient language, of witness, of offering, of humility, as pure acceptance - even gratitude for the conditions of life. his life in all its givens: Joy, and choice, chance, and pain.~~

Then, if it is true that sound is the "word" of air and object becoming audible ~~by~~ through connection, and that a poem is the unique "word" of idea & image, made audible through the double connection of their ~~connection~~ ^{connection} to each other & the connection of air & throat - then each is a natural, ^{musical} prayer, an embodiment of witness & acknowledgment of the ~~reality~~ ^{reality} of certain conditions of life on this planet.

Music & poetry ~~are~~ ^{are} as old as the hills, as ^{old as} hearts and bones & tears. Although ~~nature's~~ ^{nature's} music is as old, even, as matter & air, it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, just as human music & poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature ^{in any way} needs humans, or needs ~~us~~ ^{us}, ~~our~~ ^{our} human poetry cannot ^{be} separated from the poetry of the elements. ~~if we are (as we must be) looking at either (or both) from human eyes.~~ The poetry of sound/music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech & prayer and hence human poetry. When I say that prayer offers acceptance & acknowledgment of life's conditions, I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of will to change; I mean in the sense of recognition, focus, attention - acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being" as opposed to "meaning." (9) [we're breaking down here]

[explain att attention = love] relate to prayer & the career of the poem.
 go to part 3 p. 1 of draft 1.

Every space has a sound - a field, a ~~thicket~~ ^{cave}, a corridor: each room has its own sound bec. of how far air has to travel from its walls to ~~our~~ ^{our} ears. I want a poem ^{to} take me word by word, through hallways, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down highways ^{dirt roads} into wilderness, so I can hear the echo of ~~space~~ ^{space} of each ^{realm} ~~realm~~ of ~~space~~. ~~I want to feel, & follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion, it pulls me into an unstoppable onward rush, like a mt. hurrying me down its steep side.~~ [Now go to top p. 2]

~~This is what happens when I read a good poem~~: The breath and length of a line, its timbre and suspension, strike my inner ear with the thrill of a diving hawk who suddenly lifts upward midway through its plunge. The way a line ends at a precipice, a sharp ridge of extended air and space, it feels like an orchestra's quarter-beat rest than like the limb of a two-hundred-year-old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the silence that surrounds the poem, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging ~~with~~^{by} its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm crawling from a branch in search of its next foothold. And then to land again, having fallen backwards against the left-hand space, into a new rush of complex sound and sense that plunges onward across the page like another pier into the horizon. Again & again the poem carries me out to an edge and impells me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing, beginning, until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become ~~rooted~~ to this whole poem - a parachute to save me - and I am no longer at risk of falling into the void from (?) (over?) which we swing.

- into the void over which
- through the void from which

~~And~~, As Husman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. It becomes ^{us, and} ~~our~~ hearts and bones and tears, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word ^{range} ~~repeat~~ over centuries, sequence, repetition, sequence, repetition, like waves of seawater, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer, ^{I am very quiet, & listen, I begin to remember.} I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal pasts - and their lingering, literal presence here today - when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my throat, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.

① It was a random, not-quite-melodic sound, but it was based on a specific tradition which could be read by the initiated for meaning: a time, a place, a particular psalm or calling

① I didn't know that this not-quite-melodic, seemingly random sense of sounds, was actually based on a tradition ~~and words~~ whose meaning was audible and specific: a time, a place, a particular psalm or calling — each had its own ancient rhythm and tone. Instead,

② the hum of a mother rocking her hurt child,

③ I see this personal experience, ^{of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, were} ~~as~~ perhaps my earliest ^{incitement to write} ~~impulse to write~~ — ~~of which I have heard and heard to write~~. Since then, other things have stimulated me to ~~write~~ write

③ I see this personal experience, of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, sank into me as pure emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write. That there could be such deep meaning, without literal "sense," was a mystery too great to pass by. As Richard says knew, truth ~~does~~ conform to music, even now that the words I use do "make sense." So even though, since my early childhood, many other things have stimulated me to write — experience, a turn of phrase or ~~image~~ image or idea, a word that takes on strangeness out of context — nothing does so more than music.

④ But there are other more important kinds of music, on which the sounds of instruments are based. Every space has a sound — (go to part ⑤)

⑥ ~~That~~ that is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before the beginning when there was the word:

~~(While a true poem is a new word for a given condition of life.)~~
~~If sound and poem are each a word of the poem's words, ^{like nature's,} ~~are also~~ made of a connection between air and object — in this case air + throat — ~~these are~~ ancient languages like that of my grandfather's prayers, and each original word the poem's, nature's sound — is a prayer~~

⑦ ~~While~~ ^{while} ~~the~~ poem's words, like nature's, are also made of a connection bet- air + object — in this case air + throat — a poem in itself ^{also} is a "word," made by molding or shaping an idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem ^{is} a new word for a given condition of life.

↓ GO TO ⑧

"Speaking of sitting," Jake said, "you can sit there!"

2nd print out if 1 1/2 space, 12 font (this into 12 font)

or why there is music in poetry
on music in poetry
 26
 13

The Roots of Rhythm Remain

~~exploring the music of nature in poetry~~
~~story of them~~

→ This is the way we begin to remember
 This is the powerful pulsing of love in the veins
 After the falling and calling your name out
 These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain.

--Paul Simon

the nature of music in poetry
Music, Nature, & Poetry
The music of Nature + Poetry
The poetry in music

They were of the old world. They were, in fact, of another world entirely. Half the weekend they lived in half-darkness; on Sunday there was light. Always they lit candles, hummed unknown sounds, wore shawls or ribbons and black tiny hats. Smells of herbs brewed in the kitchen, dill and rosemary and thyme, smells of their own long-dead grandparents, harvested from fields of foreign tongues and long full skirts, near roads of dust and stone, in houses of seasoned wood and weathered cloth.

I spent a lot of time with my Orthodox, Jewish, immigrant grandparents when I was very small, and learned from them that people of radically different voices could nevertheless laugh and love me, and that I could love them; and I learned about the old Jewish culture of separate dishes and prayers that asked nothing of God. My grandfather Jacob's prayers had nothing to do with requests--for answers, assistance, favors or fortitude--although my grandmother Yetta, his wife, did worry some into hers. Jacob's prayers were about offering, suffering: Beneath and between the bonds of his symbolic harnesses and reins, my grandfather's body disappeared before his God, and all that remained were rhythm and sound.

While I understood that it was a different language, I didn't know that this not-quite-melodic, seemingly random series of sounds was actually based on a tradition whose meaning was audible and specific: A time, a place, a particular psalm or calling--each had its own ancient rhythm and tone. Instead, I only recognized the swaying and lilting moans of his dovening as the sound of nurtured wounds, the hum of a mother rocking her hurt child, the song of life on this earth. And listening, and loving, something of Biblical music, something pre-American, pre-verbal, pre-me--entered my being like a spirit, and as I learned to speak its primal memory went on ringing in the caverns of my soul.

This was, of course, my world. Our pasts have seeped into us and still pulse and flow through our veins; not just our childhoods, but the histories of our grandparents, our geographies, and our globe. In our very existence we are our world's universe.

I see this personal experience, of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, sank into me as purely emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write. That there

lost in 2nd draft?

to know poetry (?)

could be such deep meaning, without literal "sense," was a mystery too great to pass by. As Richard Hugo knew, truth does conform to music, even now that the words I use do "make sense."

①

like "Ar"
too - how
poems hit me -
they mean something
to me, even before
I discover or end
their meaning.

I want to read - + write -

②

stuffy about
poetry -
so it
isn't a
surprise
here

Even though, since my early childhood, many other things have stimulated me to write--experience, a turn of phrase or image or idea, a word that takes on strangeness out of context--nothing does so more than music.

The way a harmonica is like sand blown across desert, the way the violin in "Sea of Joy" makes me believe I could breathe and live underwater once again, the way the Neville Brothers' ^{several times} voices blending together ^{that move me} thin my blood to wine, the way tabla drumbeats travel like earthquakes through the tunnels of my bones....These sensations--nonverbal, archetypal--stir me to words.

But there are other, more important kinds of music, ^{that move me} on which the sounds of instruments are based. Every space has a sound--a field, a cave, a corridor: Each room has its own sound because of how far air has to travel from its walls to our ears. I want a poem, too, to take me, word by word, through hallways, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down highways and dirt roads into wilderness, so I can hear the echo and space of each realm. I want to feel, and follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion, it pulls me into an unstoppable onward rush, like an arpeggio, like a mountain hurrying me down its long steep side ^{side}.

Music represents one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature. By creative I mean a form of play, an interaction that creates without destroying, that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech ^{or singing} delights in interaction with the throat and tongue without changing throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone, and lips; a sinew, a fiber, and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log, and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating, the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration, in being "like," whatever they encounter.

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. I leaned toward the full thrust of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically. Each finger was a bridge from the crashing, lovely sounds inside the piano's body directly to my brain. My ears lusted for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices ^{diverse + familiar} high and low, white and black, resonant and vibrous all at once and continually, between the forgotten silences of the before and after, just as I now want too the continuance, the liquidity, of word upon word in a poem. The miracle of music is the shape it gives to air, otherwise as invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the spaces between solids. But sound--whether music, voice, or nature--performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around an object, an incident, a happenstance, and *making it speak*.

That is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before the beginning when there was the word: Not so much the cry of a loon, the call of elephant or wolf, the gargle of a frog, or even the phenomenon of the cricket's wing--but the rustle or howl or whisper or shriek of wind on its way anywhere, the ring or rush or slap or shush of moving water, the roar or crack or groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. We know the rhythm and repetition of seasons and generations, weather and days, and even the landscape echoes with sequence, syn-

stepwise

diverse + familiar

Small Fern's anger, bitterness, outrage - this is not glossing over. If comes from love to love + change. If you don't face reality in the first place rightkewly outraged

copation, and cadence. Our bodies give us the pulse of our breath and blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. And all this music is speech, the sound of God or gods telling us secrets, the maxims and tales of all things and all time, every specific place and time. This means, to me, that there is poetry in music, and that is why there is music in poetry--not the other way around.

So sound is the speech of inanimate things in the world, the spirit in all things and all beings, speaking to us from space molded by air taking shape: Air sculpted by alchemy as it comes in contact with something else, something concrete--a rock, a shell, an evergreen--and so, like any metaphor, it tells about its own fundamental relationships. While a poem's words, like nature's, are also made of a connection between air and object--in this case air and throat--a poem in itself also is a "word," made by molding or shaping an idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem, then, is a new word for a given condition of life. And each original word--nature's or the poem's--is a prayer like the ones my grandfather uttered in his own ancient language: A musical embodiment of witness. Such words are offerings, of acknowledgment, in humility, in pure acceptance of--even gratitude for--the reality of the conditions of life on this planet, in all its givens: Joy, choice, chance, pain.

Music and poetry are as old as the hills, as old as hearts and bones and tears. Although nature's music is as old, even, as matter and air, it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, just as human music and poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature in any way needs humans, or needs "meaning" as humans see such a thing, I believe that our human poetry cannot and should not be separated from the poetry of the elements. The poetry of sound/music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech and prayer and hence human poetry. When I say that the poem offers acceptance and acknowledgment of life's conditions, I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of will to change; I mean in the sense of recognition, focus, attention--acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being" as opposed to "meaning."

This kind of deep focus, in turn, is a form of selfless love. That is why, for my grandfather, he himself did not figure in his own prayers: His focus was the (musical) word of God, returning to its origins through him. As humans, we often forget how to love like this; listening to the poems of the natural world reminds us.

Sometimes, when I read a good poem, it happens like this: The breath and length of a line, its timbre and suspension, stroke my inner ear with the thrill of a diving hawk who suddenly lifts upward midway through its plunge. The way a line ends at a precipice, a sharp ridge of extended air and space, is less like an orchestra's quarter-beat rest than like the limb of a two-hundred-year-old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the silence that surrounds the poem, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging by its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm swaying from a branch in search of its next foothold. And then to land again.

(It has its own sound as just as did my grandfather's prayers)

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6

in

any

all (?)

speaks

the poem

natural

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4

carries me out to an edge and impells me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing beginning, until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become rooted to this whole poem--a parachute to save me--and I am no longer at risk of falling into the void over which we swing.

As Houseman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. It becomes us, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word range over centuries, sequence, repetition, sequence, repetition, like waves of sea water, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer. If I am very quiet, and listen, I begin to remember. I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal past--and their lingering, literal presence here today--when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my throat, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.

= plea, a directive?

More directive to reader, so what, instructions for living how to incorporate this into our lives

too intellectual?

on p. 3 about people who write bad po.?

(5-1)

old copy

The Roots of Rhythm Remain:

On Music In Poetry

on the Nature of Music in Poetry

the roots of

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the veins
After the dream of falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain...
--Paul Simon



They were of the old world, ~~They were, in fact,~~ of another world entirely. Half the weekend they lived in half-darkness; on Sunday there was light. Always they lit candles, hummed unknown sounds, wore shawls or ribbons and black tiny hats. Smells of herbs brewed in the kitchen, dill and rosemary and thyme, smells of their own long-dead grandparents, harvested from fields of foreign tongues and long full skirts, near roads of dust and stone, in houses of seasoned wood and weathered cloth.

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* But the 2 things that inspire me to write more than all ~~others~~ are music and nature, and the two are often hard for me to separate emotionally.

So while I did not ~~cont~~ his tradition of prayer, ~~this~~ ^{trad. of ^{prayerful} music} did take root in me.

Roots / page 2

of life on this earth. And listening, and loving, something of Biblical music, something ^{of a world} pre-"American," pre-verbal, pre-me--entered my being like a spirit, and as I learned to speak, and to know poetry, its primal memory went on ringing in the caverns of my soul.

This was, of course, my world. Our pasts have seeped into us and still pulse and flow through our veins; not just our childhoods, but the histories of our grandparents, our geographies, and our globe. In our very existence we *are* our world.

I see this personal experience, of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, sank into me as purely emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write. That there could be such deep meaning, without literal "sense," was a wonder too great to pass by. As Richard Hugo knew, truth does conform to music. even now that the words I use do "make sense."

In a good poem, "Air," for instance, by W. S. Merwin, ^{a good poem's} the rhythmical beauty of its words has musical meaning ^{forms} even before we begin to understand any intellectual meaning. Even if the initial impulse for a poem's creation is to explore or convey something specific--an experience, a message, an image, idea, or emotion--its actual creation must still emerge from this physical sense--conscious or not--of musical roots in its creator. When it does not, the words are dull, the message is didactic, the poem never breathes. Since my early childhood, I have been stimulated to write for many reasons, from needing to preserve--or create--a particular reality, to wanting to dance with a single word that takes on strangeness in new context. ^{see above} ~~But nothing inspires me to write more than music.~~

The way ^{sad, slow} a harmonica is like sand blown across ^{skin in the} desert, the way the violin in "Sea of Joy" makes me believe I could breathe and live underwater once again, the way several ^{polyphonic} singing voices blending together thin my blood to ^{summer} wine, the way tabla drumbeats travel like earthquakes through the tunnels of my bones.... These sensations--non-verbal, archetypal--stir me to words.

But there are other, more important kinds of music that move me, on which the sounds of ^{human} instruments are based. Every space has a sound--a field, a cave, a corridor: Each ^{place} room has its own sound because of how far air ^{show} has to travel from its ^{boundaries} walls to our ears. I want a poem, too, to take me, word by word, through hallways, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down highways and dirt roads ^{+ foot trails} into wilderness, so I can hear the echo and space of each realm. I want to feel, and follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion, ^{it} it pulls me into an

(see last line, this page)
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Music represents one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature. By creative I mean a form of play, an interaction that creates without destroying, that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech or singing delights in interaction with the throat and tongue without ^{altering} changing throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone and lips; a sinew, a fiber and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating, the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration ^{and} in being "like," whatever they encounter.

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. I leaned toward the full thrust of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically. Each finger was a bridge from the crashing, lovely sounds inside the piano's body, ^{through the space around us,} directly to my brain. My ears lusted for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices foreign and familiar, high and low, resonant and vibrous all at once and continually, between the ^{remembered} forgotten silences of the before and after, just as I now want too the continuance, the liquidity, of ^{image upon image,} word upon word in a poem. ^{one} The miracle of music is the shape it gives to air, otherwise as invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the spaces between solids. ^{But}

Sound--whether of music, voice, or nature--performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around ^{a form,} an object, ^{an incident,} a happenstance, and making it speak. ^{Is this not wh po. itself also does?}

^{This} That is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before "the beginning" when there was the word: Not ^{only} so much the ^{melody of the elephant, the} cry of a loon, ^{of a loon or wolf} the call of elephant or wolf, the ^{harmonies} gurgle of a frog, or ^{scales} even the phenomenon of the cricket's wing--but the rustle or howl or whisper or shriek of wind on its way anywhere, the ring or rush or slap or shush of moving water, the roar or crack or groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. We know the rhythm and repetition of generations and seasons, weather and days, and even the landscape echoes with sequence, syncopation, and cadence. Our bodies give us the pulse of our breath and blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. And all this music is speech, the sound of God or gods telling us secrets, the ^{memories} maxims and tales of all things and all time, in every specific ^{place + time.} place and time. This means, to me, that there is poetry in music, and that is why there is music in poetry--not the other way around.

through the space around us,

arpeggios
melisma

eloquent?

So sound is the ^{song} speech of inanimate things in the world, the spirit in all things and all beings, speaking to us from space molded by air taking shape: Air sculpted by alchemy as it comes in contact with something else, something concrete--a rock, a shell, an ^{low} evergreen--and so, like any metaphor, it tells about all fundamental relationships. While a poem's spoken words, like nature's, are also made of a connection between air and object--in this case air and throat--a poem in itself also is a "word," made by molding or shaping an ^{ethereal} idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem, then, is a new word for a given condition of life. And each original word--nature's or the poem's--is a prayer like the ones my grandfather uttered in his own ancient language: A musical embodiment of witness. ^{Tree} Such words ^a are offerings, ^{as an} of acknowledgment, in humility, in pure acceptance of ~~even gratitude for~~ the reality of the conditions of life on this planet, in all its givens: Joy, choice, chance, pain.

OK

Music and poetry are as old as the hills, as old as hearts and bones and tears. ^{then} Although nature's music is as old, even, as matter and air, ^{if} it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, ^{just as} human music and poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature in any way needs humans, or needs "meaning" as humans see such a thing (it has its own, just as did the sounds of my grandfather's prayers), I believe that our human poetry cannot and should not be separated from the poetry of the elements. ^{had been} The poetry of sound / music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech and prayer and hence human poetry. When I say that the ^{true} poem offers acceptance and acknowledgment of life's conditions, I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of will to change; ^{of anger or sorrow or even} I mean in the sense of recognition, focus, attention--^{momentary} acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being" as ^{not really} opposed to "meaning." ^{intellectual interp. of} (Perhaps ^{had been} Maeterlinck had something like ^{this in mind when he said that a poem should not "mean" but "be."})

interested in this. not nec.

This kind of deep focus, in turn, is a form of selfless love. That is why, for my grandfather, he himself did not figure in his own prayers: His focus was the (musical) word of God, returning to its natural origins through him.

As ^{now} humans, we often forget how to love like this; listening to the poems of the natural world reminds us. Listening only to our own individual autobiographies, as if they were separate from our neighbors', ^{the flavor of} our own backyards', or last century's, creates poems that will mean nothing to our neighbors, our homes, ^{lands} or our futures. Like words, we live in context, constantly ^{renewable} renewed by riveted attention to sameness and to change. Our poems should reflect such connection, and can do so by remembering from where poetry actually came.

future?

Sometimes, when I read a good poem, it happens like this: The breath and length of a line, its timbre and

suspension, stroke my inner ear with the thrill of a diving hawk who suddenly lifts upward ^{back} midway through its ^{own} plunge. The way a line ends at a precipice, a sharp ridge ^{of} extended ^{into} ~~air~~ and space, is less like an orchestra's quarter-beat rest than like the ^{long} limb of a two-hundred-year-old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the silence that surrounds the poem, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging by its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm swaying from a ^{stem} ~~branch~~ in search of its next foothold. And then to land again, having fallen backwards against the left-hand space, into a new rush of complex sound and sense that plunges onward across the page like another pier into the horizon. Again and again the poem carries me out to an edge and impels me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing beginning, until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become rooted ^{to} this whole poem--^{above} a parachute to save me--^{for the moment} and I am no longer at risk of falling into the void over which we ^{always} swing.

As Houseman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. It becomes us, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word range over centuries ^{sequence}, repetition, sequence, repetition ^{like waves} like waves of sea water, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer. If I am very quiet, and listen, I begin to remember. I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal pasts--and their lingering, literal presence here today--when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my ^{veins?} throat, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.

Houseman?

★ interconnecting, overlapping
~~a mobile stop~~

Jan 8
1998

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The Roots of Rhythm Remain:
On the Nature of Music in Poetry

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the veins
After the dream of falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain
--Paul Simon

They were of the old world, of another world entirely. Half the weekend they lived in half-darkness. On Sunday there was light. Always they lit candles, hummed unknown sounds, wore shawls or ribbons and a black tiny hat. Smells of herbs brewed in the kitchen, dill and rosemary and thyme, smells of their own long-dead grandparents, harvested from fields of foreign tongues and long full skirts, near roads of dust and stone, in houses of seasoned wood and weathered cloth.

I spent a lot of time with my Orthodox, Jewish, immigrant grandparents when I was very small, and learned from them that people of radically different voices and ways could nevertheless laugh and love me, and that I could love them; and I learned about the old Jewish culture of separate dishes and of prayers that asked nothing of God. My grandfather Jacob's prayers had nothing to do with requests--for answers^{or} assistance, favors or fortitude--although my grandmother Yetta did worry some into hers. Jacob's prayers were about offering, suffering: Beneath and beyond the bonds of his symbolic harnesses and reins, my grandfather's body disappeared before his God, and all that remained were rhythm and sound.

While I understood that it was a different language, meaning that it meant something, I didn't know that this chanting, rhythmic, not-quite melodic, seemingly random series of sounds was actually based on a tradition whose meaning lay specifically in its rhythms and sounds: A time, a place, a particular psalm or calling--each had its own ancient form and tone. Instead, I only recognized the swaying and lilting moans of his dovening as the sound of nurtured wounds, the hum of a mother rocking her hurt child, the song of life on this earth. And listening, and loving, something of Biblical music,

something of a world pre-"American," pre-verbal, even pre-human, and certainly pre-me-- entered my being like a spirit, and as I learned to speak, and to know poetry, its primal memory went on ringing in the caverns of my soul.

This was, of course, my world. Our pasts have seeped into us and still pulse and flow through our veins. ^{Not} just our childhoods, but the histories of our grandparents, our geographies, and our globe. In our very existence, we *are* our world.

My grandfather's prayers were both foreign and orally handed--or sung--down through the generations, and I see this personal experience of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that sank into me as purely emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write poetry. That there could be such deep meaning, without literal "sense," was a wonder too great to pass by. And while I did not continue my grandfather's tradition of prayer, his tradition of prayerful music did take root in me.

As ^{the poet} Richard Hugo knew, truth does conform to music. The rhythmic beauty of a good poem's words has musical meaning for us *before* we begin to understand any intellectual meaning in them, and this is because we are creatures of a rhythmic, melodic world. So even if the initial impulse for a poem's creation is to explore or convey something specific--an experience, a message, an image, idea, or emotion--^{I believe} its actual creation must still emerge from this physical sense--conscious or not--of musical roots in its creator. When it does not, the experience is private, the message is didactic, the poem never breathes.

Since my early childhood, I have been stimulated to write for many reasons, from needing to preserve--or create--a particular perception, to wanting to dance with a single word or image that takes on ecstatic strangeness in new context. But nothing inspires me more than music and nature, and the two are often hard for me to separate.

The way a sad, slow oboe is like sand blown across skin in the desert, the way several polyphonous voices blending together make me believe I could breathe and live under water again, the way tabla drumbeats travel like earthquakes through the tunnels of my bones . . . these sensations--non-verbal, archetypal--stir me to the instrument of words.

But there are other, more fundamental kinds of music that move me, on which the sounds of human instruments are based. Every object and every space has a sound--~~field~~, ~~cave~~, ~~conch shell~~: Each has its own sound caused by how far air travels between its boundaries and to our ears. I want a poem, too, to take me, word by word, through corridors, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down dirt roads and foot trails into wilderness, so I can hear the echo and space of each multi-inhabited realm. I want to feel, and follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion:

It pulls me into an unstoppable onward rush, like an arpeggio, like a mountain hurrying me down its long steep slope.

Music represents one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature, ~~By creative I mean~~ ^{kind} a form of inventive play, an interaction that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech or singing delights in interaction with the throat and tongue without destroying throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone--and lips; a sinew, a fiber--and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log--and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration and in being "like" whatever they encounter.

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. I leaned toward the full thrust of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically. Each finger was a bridge from the crashing lovely sounds inside the piano's body, made of trees and fibers and minerals, through the vibrant space around us, to mine, made of its own kind of flesh. My ears lusted for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices foreign and familiar, high and low, resonant and harmonic all at once and continually, between the remembered silences of the before and after, just as I now want too the continuance, the liquidity, of image upon image, voice upon voice, word upon word in a poem. Music gives shape to emotion, but more, its miracle is that it gives shape to the air, otherwise invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the rests between solids. Sound--whether of music, voice, or nature--performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around a form, an object, a happenstance, and *making it speak*. Is this not what poetry itself also does?

This is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before "the beginning" when there was *the word*: Not only the call of the loon or the wolf, the melody of the elephant, the harmonics of the frog, or the scales of the cricket's wing--but the rustle or howl or whisper or shriek of wind on its way anywhere, the ring or rush or slap or shush of moving water, the roar or crack or groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. We know the rhythm and repetition of generations and seasons, weather and days, and the landscape itself echoes with sequence, syncopation, and cadence. Our bodies give us the pulse of our breath and blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. And all this music is speech, the sound of God or gods telling us the ten thousand secrets, the maxims and

in the surrounding

+ as yet unborn life →

artist's vision

*Dependent for their very existence upon nature's
as old as matter + air,
whose own music is*

memories of all things and all time, in every specific thing and time. It says to me that there is poetry in music, and that is why there is music in poetry--not the other way around.

So sound is the song of ^{the} inanimate things in the world, the spirit in all things and all beings, speaking to us from space molded by air taking shape: Air sculpted by alchemy as

if comes in contact with something else, something concrete--a rock, a ^{leaf, or seed pod,} ~~shell,~~ a low evergreen, ^{and so,} like any metaphor, it tells about ^{feelings} all fundamental relationships. While a poem's spoken words, like nature's, are also made of a connection between air and object--in this case air and throat--^{even an unuttered} a poem is itself also a "word," made by molding or shaping an ethereal idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem, then, is a new word for a given condition of life. And each original word--nature's or the poem's--is a prayer like the ones my grandfather ^{channeled} uttered in his own ancient language: A musical embodiment of witness, ~~I see such a word~~ an offering, an acknowledgement, ~~in humility, in pure acceptance of the reality~~ of the conditions of life on this planet, in all its givens: Joy, choice, chance, pain.

Music and poetry are as old as the hills, as old as hearts and bones and tears, *dependent upon nature for their very existence.* Nature's music is as old, even, as matter and air. If it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, then human music and poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature in any way needs humans, or needs "meaning" as humans see such a thing (it has its own, just as did the sounds of my grandfather's prayers).

I believe that our human poetry cannot and should not be separated from the poetry of the elemental world around us. The poetry of sound / music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech and prayer and hence human poetry. ~~When I say that the true poem offers acceptance and acknowledgment of life's conditions,~~ ^{its word - is *} I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of anger or sorrow or even of will to change, ^{but} in the sense of recognition, focus, attention--momentary acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being," as against "meaning." (Perhaps MacLeish had something like this in mind when he said that a poem should not "mean" but "be.")

This kind of deep focus, in turn, is a form of selfless love. That is why, for my grandfather, he himself did not figure in his own prayers: His focus was the (musical) word of God, returning to its natural origins through him. Now we often forget how to love like this, in a form of worship: Listening to the poetry of the natural world reminds us. Listening only to our own individual autobiographies, as if they were separate from our neighbors', our own backyards', or last century's, creates poems that will mean nothing to our neighbors, our homelands, or our futures. Like words, we live in context, constantly renewable by riveted attention to sameness and to change. Our poems should reflect such connection, and can do so by remembering from where poetry actually came.

*And the
some damn
what last
existence*

*not in the
this kind of
acceptance is
not a passive act*

all?

Sometimes, when I read a good poem, it happens like this: The breath and length of a line, its timbre and suspension, stroke my inner ear with the thrill of a diving hawk who suddenly lifts upward, back through its own plunge. The way a line ends at a precipice, a sharp ridge extended into space, is less like an orchestra's quarter-beat rest than like the long limb of a two hundred year old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the hush that surrounds the poems, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging by its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm swaying from a stem in search of its next foothold. And then to land again, having fallen backwards against the left-hand space, into a new rush of complex sound and sense that plunges onward across the page like another pier into the horizon. Again and again the poem carries me out to an edge and impels me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing beginning, until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become rooted to this whole poem--and I am no longer--for the moment--at risk of falling into the void over which we always swing.

As Housman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. In turn, it becomes us, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word range over centuries, interconnecting, overlapping--sequence, repetition, change, sequence, repetition--like waves of sea water, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer. If I am very quiet, and listen, I begin to remember. I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal pasts--and their lingering, literal presence here today--when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my veins, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.

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The Roots of Rhythm Remain:
On Music In Poetry

This is the story of how we begin to remember
This is the powerful pulsing of love in the veins
After the falling and calling your name out
These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain.

--Paul Simon

They were of the old world. They were, in fact, of another world entirely. Half the weekend they lived in half-darkness; on Sunday there was light. Always they lit candles, hummed unknown sounds, wore shawls or ribbons and black tiny hats. Smells of herbs brewed in the kitchen, dill and rosemary and thyme, smells of their own long-dead grandparents, harvested from fields of foreign tongues and long full skirts, near roads of dust and stone, in houses of seasoned wood and weathered cloth.

I spent a lot of time with my Orthodox, Jewish, immigrant grandparents when I was very small, and learned from them that people of radically different voices could nevertheless laugh and love me, and that I could love them; and I learned about the old Jewish culture of separate dishes and prayers that asked nothing of God. My grandfather Jacob's prayers had nothing to do with requests--for answers, assistance, favors or fortitude--although my grandmother Yetta, his wife, did worry some into hers. Jacob's prayers were about offering, suffering. Beneath and beyond the bonds of his symbolic harnesses and reins, my grandfather's body disappeared before his God, and all that remained were rhythm and sound.

While I understood that it was a different language, I didn't know that this not-quite-melodic, seemingly random series of sounds was actually based on a tradition whose meaning was audible and specific: A time, a place, a particular psalm or calling--each had its own ancient rhythm and tone. Instead, I only recognized the swaying and lilting moans of his dovening as the sound of nurtured wounds, the hum of a mother rocking her hurt child, the song of life on this earth. And listening, and loving, something of Biblical music, something pre-American, pre-verbal.

pre-me--entered my being like a spirit, and as I learned to speak, and to know poetry, its primal memory went on ringing in the caverns of my soul.

This was, of course, my world. Our pasts have seeped into us and still pulse and flow through our veins; not just our childhoods, but the histories of our grandparents, our geographies, and our globe. In our very existence we *are* our world.

I see this personal experience, of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, sank into me as purely emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write. That there could be such deep meaning without literal "sense," was a wonder too great to pass by. As Richard Hugo knew, truth does conform to music, even now that the words I use do "make sense."

In a good poem--"Air," for instance, by W. S. Merwin--the rhythmical beauty of its words has musical meaning even before we begin to understand any intellectual meaning. Even if the initial impulse for a poem's creation is to explore or convey something specific--an experience, a message, an image, idea, or emotion--its actual creation must still emerge from this physical sense--conscious or not--of musical roots in its creator. When it does not, the words are dull, the message is didactic, the poem never breathes. Since my early childhood, I have been stimulated to write for many reasons, from needing to preserve--or create--a particular reality, to wanting to dance with a single word that takes on strangeness in new context. But nothing inspires me to write more than music.

The way a harmonica is like sand blown across desert, the way the violin in "Sea of Joy" makes me believe I could breathe and live underwater once again, the way several singing voices blending together thin my blood to wine, the way tabla drumbeats travel like earthquakes through the tunnels of my bones.... These sensations--non-verbal, archetypal--stir me to words..

But there are other, more important kinds of music that move me, on which the sounds of instruments are based. Every space has a sound--a field, a cave, a corridor. Each room has its own sound because of how far air has to travel from its walls to our ears. I want a poem, too, to take me, word by word, through hallways, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down highways and dirt roads into wilderness, so I can hear the echo and space of each realm. I want to feel, and follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion, it pulls me into an unstoppable onward rush, like an arpeggio, like a mountain hurrying me down its long steep slope.

Music represents one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature. By creative I mean a form of play, an interaction that creates without destroying, that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech or singing delights in interaction with the throat and tongue without changing throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone, and lips; a sinew, a fiber, and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log, and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating, the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration, in being "like," whatever they encounter.

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. I leaned toward the full thrust of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically. Each finger was a bridge from the crashing, lovely sounds inside the piano's body directly to my brain. My ears lusted for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices foreign and familiar, high and low, resonant and vibrous all at once and continually, between the forgotten silences of the before and after, just as I now want too the continuance, the liquidity, of word upon word in a poem. The miracle of music is the shape it gives to air, otherwise as invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the spaces between solids. But sound--whether of music, voice, or nature--performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around an object, an incident, a happenstance, and *making it speak*.

That is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before the beginning when there was the word: Not so much the cry of a loon, the call of elephant or wolf, the gargle of a frog, or even the phenomenon of the cricket's wing--but the rustle or howl or whisper or shriek of wind on its way anywhere, the ring or rush or slap or shush of moving water, the roar or crack or groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. We know the rhythm and repetition of generations and seasons, weather and days, and even the landscape echoes with sequence, syn-copation, and cadence. Our bodies give us the pulse of our breath and blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. And all this music is speech, the sound of God or gods telling us secrets, the maxims and tales of all things and all time, in every specific place and time. This means, to me, that there is poetry in music, and that is why there is music in poetry--not the other way around.

So sound is the speech of inanimate things in the world, the spirit in all things and all beings, speaking to us

from space molded by air taking shape: Air sculpted by alchemy as it comes in contact with something else, something concrete--a rock, a shell, an evergreen--and so, like any metaphor, it tells about all fundamental relationships. While a poem's spoken words, like nature's, are also made of a connection between air and object--in this case air and throat--a poem in itself also is a "word," made by molding or shaping an idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem, then, is a new word for a given condition of life. And each original word--nature's or the poem's--is a prayer like the ones my grandfather uttered in his own ancient language: A musical embodiment of witness. Such words are offerings, of acknowledgment, in humility, in pure acceptance of--even gratitude for--the reality of the conditions of life on this planet, in all its givens: Joy, choice, chance, pain.

Music and poetry are as old as the hills, as old as hearts and bones and tears. Although nature's music is as old, even, as matter and air, it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, just as human music and poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature in any way needs humans, or needs "meaning" as humans see such a thing (it has its own, just as did the sounds of my grandfather's prayers), I believe that our human poetry cannot and should not be separated from the poetry of the elements. The poetry of sound/music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech and prayer and hence human poetry. When I say that the poem offers acceptance and acknowledgment of life's conditions, I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of will to change; I mean in the sense of recognition, focus, attention--acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being" as *opposed to* "meaning."

This kind of deep focus, in turn, is a form of selfless love. That is why, for my grandfather, he himself did not figure in his own prayers: His focus was the (musical) word of God, returning to its natural origins through him. As humans, we often forget how to love like this; listening to the poems of the natural world reminds us. Listening only to our own individual autobiographies, as if they were separate from our neighbors', our own backyards', or last century's, creates poems that will mean nothing to our neighbors, our homes, or our futures. Like words, we live in context, constantly renewed by riveted attention to sameness and to change. Our poems should reflect such connection, and can do so by remembering from where poetry actually came.

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space

quarter-beat rest than like the limb of a two-hundred-year-old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the silence that surrounds the poem, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging by its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm swaying from a branch in search of its next foothold. And then to land again, having fallen backwards against the left-hand space, into a new rush of complex sound and sense that plunges onward across the page like another pier into the horizon. Again and again the poem carries me out to an edge and impells me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing beginning until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become rooted to this whole poem--a parachute to save me--and I am no longer at risk of falling into the void over which we swing.

As Houseman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. It becomes us, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word range over centuries, sequence, repetition, sequence, repetition, like waves of sea water, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer. If I am very quiet, and listen, I begin to remember. I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal pasts--and their lingering, literal presence here today--when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my throat, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.

*Impells
Houseman*

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They were of the old world. They were, in fact, of another world entirely. Half the weekend they lived in half-darkness; on Sunday there was light. Always they lit candles, hummed unknown sounds, wore shawls or ribbons and black tiny hats. Smells of herbs brewed in the kitchen, dill and rosemary and thyme, smells of their own long-dead grandparents, harvested from fields of foreign tongues and long full skirts, near roads of dust and stone, in houses of seasoned wood and weathered cloth.

I spent a lot of time with my Orthodox, Jewish, immigrant grandparents when I was very small, and learned from them that people of radically different voices could nevertheless laugh and love me, and that I could love them; and I learned about the old Jewish culture of separate dishes and prayers that asked nothing of God. My grandfather Jacob's prayers had nothing to do with requests--for answers, assistance, favors or fortitude--although my grandmother Yetta, his wife, did worry some into hers. Jacob's prayers were about offering, suffering: Beneath and beyond the bonds of his symbolic harnesses and reins, my grandfather's body disappeared before his God, and all that remained were rhythm and sound.

While I understood that it was a different language, I didn't know that this not-quite-melodic, seemingly random series of sounds was actually based on a tradition whose meaning was audible and specific: A time, a place, a particular psalm or calling--each had its own ancient rhythm and tone. Instead, I only recognized the swaying and lilting moans of his dovening as the sound of nurtured wounds, the hum of a mother rocking her hurt child, the song

of life on this earth. And listening, and loving, something of Biblical music, something pre-American, pre-verbal, pre-me--entered my being like a spirit, and as I learned to speak, and to know poetry, its primal memory went on ringing in the caverns of my soul.

This was, of course, my world. Our pasts have seeped into us and still pulse and flow through our veins; not just our childhoods, but the histories of our grandparents, our geographies, and our globe. In our very existence we *are* our world.

I see this personal experience, of musical, melancholy prayer, of words that, because they were foreign, sank into me as purely emotional sound, as my earliest incitement to write. That there could be such deep meaning without literal "sense," was a wonder too great to pass by. As Richard Hugo knew, truth does conform to music, even now that the words I use do "make sense."

In a good poem--"Air," for instance, by W. S. Merwin--the rhythmical beauty of its words has musical meaning, even before we begin to understand any intellectual meaning. Even if the initial impulse for a poem's creation is to explore or convey something specific--an experience, a message, an image, idea, or emotion--its actual creation must still emerge from this physical sense--conscious or not--of musical roots in its creator. When it does not, the words are dull, the message is didactic, the poem never breathes. Since my early childhood, I have been stimulated to write for many reasons, from needing to preserve--or create--a particular reality, to wanting to dance with a single ^{or thing} word that takes on strangeness in new context. But nothing inspires me to write more than music.

The way a harmonica is like sand blown across desert, the way the violin in "Sea of Joy" makes me believe I could breathe and live underwater once again, the way several singing voices blending together thin my blood to wine, the way tabla drumbeats travel like earthquakes through the tunnels of my bones.... These sensations--non-verbal, archetypal--stir me to words.

But there are other, more important kinds of music that move me, on which the sounds of instruments are based. Every space has a sound--a field, a cave, a corridor. Each room has its own sound because of how far air has to travel from its walls to our ears. I want a poem, too, to take me, word by word, through hallways, from room to room, and out of doors into back yards, down highways and dirt roads into wilderness, so I can hear the echo and space of each realm. I want to feel, and follow, the rush of air escaping from its inhalation, its inspiration, pushing past me toward the rest of the world. Reading a good poem is a propulsion, a compulsion, it pulls me into an

unstoppable onward rush, like an arpeggio, like a mountain hurrying me down its long steep slope.

Music represents one of the most basic creative relationships between humans and nature. By creative I mean a form of play, an interaction that creates without destroying, that delights in nature, naturally, without harming it, the way speech or singing delights in interaction with the throat and tongue without changing throat or tongue. What was human music made from? A blade of grass, a stick of bamboo or bone, and lips; a sinew, a fiber, and fingers; a skin stretched over a hollow log, and hands. Humans first "making" music were simply participating, the way children conduct their own imitations, in admiration, in being "like," whatever they encounter.

I was trained from an early age in music, particularly piano, beginning with classical, then blues and improvisation. I leaned toward the full thrust of Beethoven, who asked that almost all of my fingers press the keys at once, deeply, harmonically. Each finger was a bridge from the crashing, lovely sounds inside the piano's body directly to my brain. My ears lusted for the taste of all those notes, a medley of spices foreign and familiar, high and low, resonant and vibrous all at once and continually, between the forgotten silences of the before and after, just as I now want too the continuance, the liquidity, of word upon word in a poem. The miracle of music is the shape it gives to air, otherwise as invisible to our ears as it is to our eyes in the spaces between solids. ~~But~~ Sound--whether of music, voice, or nature--performs the seemingly impossible, by wrapping silenced air around an object, an incident, a happenstance, and *making it speak*.

That is the most fundamental kind of music of all, the birth of music, the primal music of the universe, from even before the beginning when there was the word: Not so much the ^{hoot} cry of a loon, the ^{howl} call of elephant or wolf, the gargle of a frog, or even the phenomenon of the cricket's wing--but the rustle or howl or whisper or shriek of wind on its way anywhere, the ring or rush or slap or shush of moving water, the roar or crack or groan or thunder of fire taking to the air, the elemental effort of earth shifting open or sifting closed, rising or settling, alive with microscopic fossils and life. Our world gives us percussion and wind, string and horn. We know the rhythm and repetition of generations and seasons, weather and days, and even the landscape echoes with sequence, syncopation, and cadence. Our bodies give us the pulse of our breath and blood, the rhythm of our walk, the hum of our minds deep in thought or at rest. And all this music is speech, the sound of God or gods telling us secrets, the maxims and tales of all things and all time, in every specific place and time. This means, to me, that there is poetry in music, and that is why there is music in poetry--not the other way around.

So sound is the speech of inanimate things in the world, the spirit in all things and all beings, speaking to us from space molded by air taking shape: Air sculpted by alchemy as it comes in contact with something else, something concrete--a rock, a shell, an evergreen--and so, like any metaphor, it tells about all fundamental relationships. While a poem's spoken words, like nature's, are also made of a connection between air and object--in this case air and throat--a poem in itself also is a "word," made by molding or shaping an idea by contact with a concrete image. A true poem, then, is a new word for a given condition of life. And each original word--nature's or the poem's--is a prayer like the ones my grandfather uttered in his own ancient language: A musical embodiment of witness. Such words are offerings, of acknowledgment, in humility, in pure acceptance of--even gratitude for--the reality of the conditions of life on this planet, in all its givens: Joy, choice, chance, pain.

Music and poetry are as old as the hills, as old as hearts and bones and tears. Although nature's music is as old, even, as matter and air, it depends on the human mind for its verbal definition, just as human music and poetry depend upon nature's for its nonverbal one. While I do not mean to suggest that nature in any way needs humans, or needs "meaning" as humans see such a thing (it has its own, just as did the sounds of my grandfather's prayers), I believe that our human poetry cannot and should not be separated from the poetry of the elements. The poetry of sound / music in nature automatically, intrinsically, influences speech and prayer and hence human poetry. When I say that the poem offers acceptance and acknowledgment of life's conditions, I don't mean in the sense of passivity or lack of will to change; I mean in the sense of recognition, focus, attention--acknowledgment of the "is" or the "being" as *opposed* to "meaning."

This kind of deep focus, in turn, is a form of selfless love. That is why, for my grandfather, he himself did not figure in his own prayers: His focus was the (musical) word of God, returning to its natural origins through him. As humans, we often forget how to love like this; listening to the poems of the natural world reminds us. Listening only to our own individual autobiographies, as if they were separate from our neighbors', our own backyards', or last century's, creates poems that will mean nothing to our neighbors, our homes, or our futures. Like words, we live in context, constantly renewed by riveted attention to sameness and to change. Our poems should reflect such connection, and can do so by remembering from where poetry actually came.

Sometimes, when I read a good poem, it happens like this: The breath and length of a line, its timbre and

suspension, stroke my inner ear with the thrill of a diving hawk who suddenly lifts upward midway through its plunge. The way a line ends at a precipice, a sharp ridge of extended air and space, is less like an orchestra's quarter-beat rest than like the limb of a two-hundred-year-old tree whose last leaf has just leapt. I love the silence that surrounds the poem, even the small dimensional silences between the words, the letters, on the page or on the tongue. I love to leave the noun, in all its specificity, clinging by its hind legs to the line, scanning the unknown ahead of it like an inchworm swaying from a branch in search of its next foothold. And then to land again, having fallen backwards against the left-hand space, into a new rush of complex sound and sense that plunges onward across the page like another pier into the horizon. Again and again the poem carries me out to an edge and impels me to spring back from that edge to a new, continuing beginning, until, at the end, I stop, attached, against all logic and laws of physics, as if I have become rooted to this whole poem--a parachute to save me--and I am no longer at risk of falling into the void over which we swing.

As Housman said, it is a physical sensation, this entering of the poem. It becomes us, and plays upon us, musically. The rhythms of the natural world and the natural word range over centuries, sequence, repetition, sequence, repetition, like waves of sea water, mountains, or air. Like waves of emotion and prayer. If I am very quiet, and listen, I begin to remember. I still feel that surge of life that links me to my personal and primal pasts--and their lingering, literal presence here today--when I hear the pulse of music enter me through my throat, when autumn blows out summer like a Sabbath candle, when I read poetry.