

Fifth Week

I. Voice

II. Style

Subject matter/ diction/ point of view/ imagery/ syntax and grammar/
form: line breaks/ stanzas, structure/ any other pattern

III. Persona

IV. Experiments and Dreams, surrealist, postmodernist

V. Practice

1. Write a poem in the voice of someone in your family. It might be one of your parents talking about their lives or how they met; a brother or sister describing some family gathering.

Or

2. Write a poem in the voice of a famous person, living or dead. Try to give the reader an intimate glimpse of this person, one that couldn't be gotten from the media or history books.

Or

3. Write a poem that steals from other, well-known texts, altering them in some small way so that the originals are recognizable.

homage to my hips Lucile Clifton

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they do not fit into little
petty places, these hips are free hips
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

the women you are accustomed to Lucille Clifton

wearing that same black dress,
their lips and asses tight,
their bronzed hair set in perfect place;
these women gathered in my dream
to talk their usual talk,
their conversation spiked with the names
of avenues in France.

and when I asked them what the hell,
they shook their marble heads
and walked erect out of my sleep,
back into a town which knows
all there is to know
about the cold outside, while i relaxed
and thought of you,
your burning blood, your dancing tongue.

Wan Chu's Wife in Bed Richard Jones

Wan Chu, my adoring husband,
has returned from another trip
selling trinkets in the provinces.
He pulls off his lavender shirt
as I lie naked in our bed,
waiting for him. He tells me
I am the only woman he'll ever love.
He may wander from one side of China
to the other, but his heart
will always stay with me.
His face glows in the lamplight
with the sincerity of a boy
when I lower the satin sheet
to let him see my breasts.
Outside, it begins to rain
on the cherry trees
he planted with our son,
and when he enters me with a sigh,
the storm begins in earnest,
shaking our little house.
Afterwards, I stroke his back
until he falls asleep.
I'd love to stay awake all night
listening to the rain,
but I should sleep, too.
Tomorrow Wan chu will be
a hundred miles away
and I will be awake all night
in the arms of Wang Chen,
the tailor from Ming Pao,
the tiny village down river.

You've Changed, Dr. Jekyll Jan Richman

My, what big teeth you have. And I can't help but notice
your inseam sneak up to your chin and beard your uncircum-
stance. Your lace collar shudders, and. . . Now you remember:
smile, an ordinary word. Chat. Beat. Brag. While your left hand
conducts an under-the-table ejaculation, your right
flips the rusty tongue of a Dream Date Lunchbox, airing
its contents: laboratory mythologies. Yawn. Why do
historical men either gorge or starve? Come midnight,
you'll paint the town red, your lips wrapped around
a block-long siren, greased and bawling like a burned baby.
Now you're in the parlor deciphering forgeries.
Good eye. But what's that stain? You're due at the Nobels'
for dinner in an hour. Herr Doctor, Mr. Dad, you've handed
down a scratchy decree, this cushion on which I sit to jerk
off in the meager poem of your hiding place. Five hot minutes
on the phone with legacy equals a cup of serum. Hallelujah!
Accepting the award for Mlle. Hyde is cultured silence
braying like a Baptist: Oh yes, I can love all things,
just not at the same time.

after the election Michael Koch

our teeth rattle & our souls.
from the socket of the mask
mice swarm & swans.
the mother's eye is running
a small boy spins thru
the furnace of grass,
thru wheat spear & spire
goes running.
deep in the soil deep in the gut
death's bird-blue calyx is humming

The River Merchant's Wife Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse;
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.
I never laughed, being bashful.
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling.
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours
Forever and forever, and forever.
Why should I climb the look-out?

At sixteen you departed,
You went into far Ku-to-Yen, by the river of swirling eddies,
And you have been gone five months.
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.
You dragged your feet when you went out.
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,
Too deep to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the west garden—
They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down through the
narrows of the river Kiang,
Please let me know beforehand,
And I will come out to meet you
As far as Cho-Fu-sa.

Skinhead Patricia Smith

They call me skinhead, and I got my own beauty
It is knife-scrawled across my back in sore, jagged letters,
it's in the way my eyes snap away from the obvious.
I sit in my dim matchbox,
on the edge of a bed tousled with my ragged smell,
slide razors across my hair,
count how many ways
I can bring blood closer to the surface of my skin.
These are the duties of the righteous,
the ways of the anointed.

The face that moves in my mirror is huge and pockmarked,
scraped pink and brilliant, apple-checked,
I am filled with my own spit.
Two years ago, a machine that slices leather
sucked in my hand and held it,
whacking off three fingers at the root.
I didn't feel nothing till I looked down
and saw one of them on the floor
next to my boot heel,
and I ain't worked since then.

I sit here and watch niggers take over my TV set,
walking like kings up and down the sidewalks in my head,
walking like their fat black mamas named them freedom.
My shoulders tell me that aint' right
So I move out into the sun
where my beauty makes them lower their heads,
or into the night
with a lead pipe up my sleeve,
a razor tucked in my boot.
I was born to make things right.

It's easy now to move my big body into shadows,
to move from a place where there was nothing
into the stark circle of a streetlight,

the pipe raised up high over my head.
It's a kick to watch their eyes get big,
round and gleaming like cartoon jungle boys,
right in that second when they know
the pipe's gonna come down, and I got this thing
I like to say, listen to this, I like to say
"Hey, nigger, Abe Lincoln's been dead a long time."

I get hard listening to their skin burst.
I was born to make things right.

Then this newspaper guy comes around,
seems I was a little sloppy kicking some fag's ass
and he opened his hole and screamed about it.
This reporter finds me curled up in my bed,
those TV flashes licking my face clean.
Same ol' shit.
Ain't got no job, the coloreds and spics got 'em all.
Why ain't I working? Look at my hand, asshole.
No, I ain't part of no organized group,
I'm just a white boy who loves his race,
fighting for a pure country.
Sometimes it's just me. Sometimes three. Sometimes 30.
AIDS will take care of the faggots,
then it's gon' be white on black in the streets.
Then there'll be three million.
I tell him that.

So he writes it up
and I come off looking like some kind of freak,
like I'm Hitler himself. I ain't that lucky,
but I got my own beauty
It is in my steel-toed boots,
in the hard corners of my shaved head.

I look in the mirror and hold up my mangled hand,
only the baby finger left, sticking straight up,
I know it's the wrong goddamned finger,

but fuck you all anyway.

I'm riding the top rung of the perfect race,
my face scraped pink and brilliant.

I'm your baby, America, your boy,
drunk on my own spit, I am goddamned fuckin' beautifyl.

And I was born

and raised

right here.