OISE, University of Toronto

Hosted by: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

**Poems** **of immediacy / Poems of the moment**

**Workshop description**:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop looks at **Poems** **of immediacy / Poems of the moment** through the online poetry publication Rattle, which uses current news-worthy events to generate poems, and Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems*, which are poems inspired by his midday quotidian musings in midtown Manhattan.

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community, and to think about the possibilities for poetry in our lives and classrooms. Today we specifically want to focus on how to use present moments as fodder for poems.

We are grateful to be a part of a community that values engagement with writing and reading.

**Workshop outline:**

*(5 minutes)*

**Welcome participants & introductions / check-ins**

*(5 minutes)*

**Share the purpose of this workshop**:

* To engage with poems being written at and in response to our present moment

*(5 minutes)*

D**iscuss what a poem of immediacy is**

* Poems of immediacy – can look distinct in responding to your immediate surroundings, this includes news of the day, if you’re hungry etc. The Rattle poems that are filtered through the news and current events… News that matters to us in Toronto or Globally

*(15-20 minutes)*

**Poems in response to current events via Rattle**

* Rattle says, with regards to their *Poetry Is Back in the News* 
	+ “On average, poems in Rattle are published six months after they were submitted. Then they appear online six months after that. Real poetry is timeless, of course, so usually it doesn’t matter—but this is the age of information. News cycles rarely last more than a week, let alone a year. One reason poetry lags behind other forms of contemporary media might be this delay—how can poetry be part of the conversation when it enters so late? Moreover, poets do often respond to current events in real-time, so why make them wait for our print schedule? Our solution is Poets Respond—a poem written within the last week about a public event that occurred within the last week will appear every Sunday.”

- Together participants read through 3-4 poems from Rattle: **https://www.rattle.com/respond/**

- Look closely at choices in the language the poets are making to inspire our own brainstorming and poem writing such as…. As a group, make a list of current events:

* Locally (DoFo)
* Nationally (pipeline; Indigenous rights/TRC)
* Globally (Huawei; US Government shutdown; Venezuela; climate change…)

- Rattle poems published in January cover the #tenyearchallenge, recent space missions to Mars and the moon, and the US Government shutdown. Some writing prompts drawn from these poems are:

 - return to your personal archive of events from 10 years ago: music you listened to, movies you watched, the place you were living, and include some of those details

 -mention some form of technology (phone, computer, videogames) that you used to use, or that you always wanted to use

 -include a prediction about the future

 - notice the rhyming words within/across lines: tone+drones, fast+blasts – make a list of 5 rhyming words and include a pair of them in a close proximity

 -make up a word

 -reference or invoke a planet or celestial body/event

 -include two three-line stanzas one after the other

 -give a command, or offer a very firm suggestion

 -make a statement that uses only two words (like “desire nothing”)

*(15 minutes to write, 5-10 minutes to share)*

*(15-20 minutes)*

**Poems in response to immediate surroundings/ poems of the moment**

- Frank O’Hara wrote lunch poems about his experiences/ thoughts/ observations etc. he had on his lunch break. Elevating quotidian moments, forcing/ allowing him to be fully present for specific moments.

- *Lunch Poems* can be found here: **http://www.citylights.com/resources/download.cfm?GCOI=87286100400810&thefile=LunchPoems50ExcerptCL.pdf.**

- These poems are written in a conversational tone and are spontaneous reactions to/ meditations on things as they happen. Many poems were written on his lunch hour, they contain references to pop. culture and literary figures, New York locations (where he lived and worked), and his friends. A common theme among the *Lunch Poems* is a desire for personal connection (to friends, lovers, or strangers)

- More about Frank O’Hara’s life and writing can be found here: **https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/frank-ohara#tab-poems**

- Together participants read through 3-4 of O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems*: “A Step Away from Them”, “On Rachmaninoffs Birthday”, "Personal Poem", and “The Day Lady Died”

- looking closely at moves O’Hara is making here, participants can feel free to include:

* Who do you desire connection with? Name them
* Use the phrase: “It’s my \_\_\_\_ so I \_\_\_\_\_”
* Trace your route
* What do you see, do, hear, smell, taste, feel etc.
* Identify an article of clothing people wear – what is it doing?
* Are there animals/ insects around? What are they doing?
* Look up – what’s there? Describe it
* Date, time of day, and imagine what someone you know is doing at the exact same time
* A piece of gossip (from pop culture or your own life)
* How are other people interacting with the environment?
* Mention a specific location and what happens there (a movie theatre, gym, etc.) Maybe you’ve been there for a specific event?
* Name a specific book or newspaper (or even an article if you choose the latter)
* What’s in your pocket?
* What did you eat and drink at lunch?
* What are you doing after, or even a few days away from the moment you’re in
* Use the phrase: “We don’t like\_\_\_\_\_\_ we like \_\_\_\_\_
* Mention a movie or performance recently experienced and compare it to another, offer a type of review in this comparison
* Name two “charms” or items you have with you that are important to you (are these lucky?)
* Include a stranger who asks you for something you don’t have
* Choose a famous person born on this day, and write a poem that includes elements of their craft in this poem for them. Famous Birthdays of January 28th:
	+ St. Thomas Aquinas (theologian/ saint)
	+ Alexander Mackenzie (politician)
	+ Colette (writer)
	+ Jackson Pollock (artist)
	+ Sarah McLachlan (singer/songwriter)
	+ Rakim (rapper)
	+ Joey Fatone of NSYNC and Nick Carter of BB (singers)

*(15 minutes to write, 5-10 minutes to share)*

*(5-10 minutes)*

**Ideas for exit conversation**

* participants invited to discuss:
	+ What they noticed as they read and wrote
	+ Benefits / uses of writing poems of immediacy or poems of the moment
	+ We can consider general reflections on the poems and formats as well as how we feel reading, writing, and sharing these poems