

OISE, University of Toronto
Hosted by: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

Occasional / Collaborative Poetry Workshop

Workshop description:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop looks at **Occasional poems** via the poem “Seventy-Seven Beautiful and Adorable Things for Arthur Okamura’s 77th Birthday” by Joanne Kyger as well as elegiac occasional poems and **Rengas** via Renga for Obama to introduce collaborative writing.

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community.

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

Workshop outline:

(5 minutes)

Welcome participants & introductions

(5 minutes)

Share the purpose of this workshop: to engage with Occasional and Collaborative contemporary poetry. *“Think of a collaboration as an experiment conducted to find out what we can discover about poetry by working with others that we could not discover on our own”* (Padgett, 2000).

(5 minutes)

Discuss what an Occasional poem is!

- Poem for an event
- Sometimes seen as trivial but so much of poetry and writing is intentional (and marks events etc.)

(10 minutes)

Read through Kyger’s poem “Seventy-Seven Beautiful and Adorable Things for Arthur Okamura’s 77th Birthday”

- as a group, participants each reading a line

(10 minutes)

Participants make their own list of “things we noticed today” – our occasion is today

- a very beautiful thing
- disgusting un-adorable things (that are adorable things)
- a king/ queen of something
- a list of 3+ things that begins with “and the way you...”
- adorable thing

- a car/ mode of transportation
- something related to a holiday (ex: Christmas ornament, Valentine's card)
- arts and craft thing
- a famous persons body part
- refreshingly beautiful thing
- a perfect thing
- sometimes adorable thing
- a beautiful thing you've never seen
- a contemporary politician (maybe they're doing something ordinary)
- famous works of art and/ or artists
- pets
- lose something in the poem
- a gift someone gives you

(10 minutes)

Participants share out 2-3 lines each of their poem and collectively write an occasional poem

(5 minutes)

Discuss what a Renga is

- Reference to Lit Hub article & Ron Padgett
- haiku during Bashō's days was occasional verse par excellence, or what Mallarmé called vers de circonstance
- Daisetz Suzuki said in *Zen and Japanese Culture*, "a haiku does not express ideas but . . . puts forward images reflecting intuitions."

(10 minutes)

Explain the purpose behind and read through Renga for Obama

- as a group, participants each reading a line

(30 minutes)

Activity: Group Rengas - For the year's end / something ending and something beginning

- Each pair of writers will write the haiku + waiki, pass it to their right, and write the next haiku + waiki in relation to what came before. We'll do this until each pair has contributed to each renga.
- Once we're done, each group reads out their entire renga, paying attention to how we should order them into a longer Super Mega Bashō Renga!

Linking options (written on a board or in a handout):

- a parallel image from the previous stanza
- a contrasting image from the previous stanza
- a shift in focus onto another aspect of the same image from the previous stanza
- repeat prominent sounds from the previous stanza
- a pun or play on words from the previous stanza
- continuing or contrasting the mood from the previous stanza

Ideas for exit conversation

- participants are invited to discuss what they noticed as they read and wrote. We can consider general reflections on the poems and formats as well as how we feel reading and writing these poems as a collective.