



Arc Poetry Annual 2010: A New Tool for Teaching Canadian Poetry

Free Copy of *Arc Poetry Annual 2010* for Canadian Teachers and Professors

Arc Poetry Magazine is delighted to launch *Arc's* first ever *Arc Poetry Annual*, and to invite you as a teacher or professor of Canadian Literature and/or Creative Writing to use *Arc Poetry Annual 2010* as a didactic tool in the classroom. To that end, *Arc* can provide teachers of Canadian poetry with a **complimentary sample copy** of the print magazine and deep discounts on class sets of the 2010 *Arc Poetry Annual*. Please contact us for details at arc@arcpoetry.ca.

An Introduction to *Arc Poetry Annual 2010*

For the premier edition of the *Arc Poetry Annual*, *Arc* has chosen to address the question of: How Poems Work. Think of it as a sort of New Year's Eve top one-hundred Much Music Countdown for poetry lovers, featuring such leading poets as Stephanie Bolster, Ross Leckie, Roo Borson, George Elliott Clarke and Tim Bowling writing about the poetry of such notables as Don Coles, Margaret Avison, Robert Kroetsch, bp Nichol, Jan Zwicky, Alden Nowlan and Michael Ondaatje. In order to attempt this investigation, *Arc* brought together highlights of its very popular "How Poems Work" webzine from 2003 to 2008. Each of the 21 poems appearing in the *Annual* (including a ballad, a "chubby" sonnet, an anti-sonnet, a blues "song," two concrete poems, a nursery rhyme, and a variety of free-ranging and more formal lyrics) is accompanied by an essay by a poet of note, explaining not only the mechanics of how they think the poem works, but also how the poem works for them. *Arc* invites students and lovers of English Literature to join in this discussion, using the *Arc Poetry Annual* as a springboard. Further to that end, *Arc's* How Poems Work editor Chris Jennings—also an academic and teacher—has compiled some suggestions for starting the conversation with the attached lesson plans.

For more information on the lesson plans, or on how to get copies of the magazine for your classroom, please contact:

Pauline Conley, Managing Editor, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, P.O. Box 81060, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 1B1, arc@arcpoetry.ca, www.ArcPoetry.ca.



Reading Poetry: Pattern and Variation

SABRINA OVESEN, *UNTITLED*, PHOTOGRAPHY, 2009
INSPIRED BY BRAHMS' CLARINET QUINTET IN B MINOR

Objectives

Students will gain an appreciation for how poetic form creates content by looking at three examples of poets working within and against a traditional poetic form. The exercise will also give them a chance to use the poetry's critical vocabulary, examining rhyme schemes and metre.

Please note: Key terms are in bold text. Keys for responses are in italics.

Advanced Objective

Reading Kroetsch's poem against the background of the sonnet pattern opens up discussions of accessibility and difficulty in poetry. For example: If "Sounding the Name: Sonnet 1" seems difficult, one reason for this might be that the poem resists the conventions with which readers of poetry are familiar. So, one way that you can attempt to "unpack" a difficult poem is by measuring it against the conventions it resists. (Please note that this assumes that students have had a very basic introduction to the sonnet.)



Lesson 1

Barbara Nickel's "Busking": The Sonnet (p. 36)

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INSPIRED BY "WORDSWORTH," *ARC POETRY ANNUAL 2010*, PAGE 51

- A. Note the features of this sonnet (best described as a **Shakespearian Sonnet**)
1. **Rhyme scheme** is abab, cdcd, efef, gg; 3 **quatrains** and a final **couplet**; **metre** is essentially **iambic pentameter**.
 - i. Many of the rhymes are **half-rhymes**.
 - ii. **Full rhymes** share the last vowel sound and the last consonant sound: cat, bat.
 - iii. Nickel uses rhymes that share only the last consonant: rice/face, above/sieve. You can still hear the connection between the words, but it is not as loud.
- B. Rhyme, not paragraphs or sentences, structure the movement through the poem and scene.
1. Sandy Shreve's essay breaks down the poem's quatrains and shows how the movement through the scene works as a poetic argument.
- C. Sonnets are characterized by a rhetorical "**turn**" or **volta**—we move to a new part of the **argument**. In a Shakespearian sonnet, the *volta* usually comes at the end of line 12.
1. What changes between the first 12 lines and the last 2?
 - i. *Possible prompts: the final couplet contrasts the pleasure of food and drink and even music—sensory pleasures—and the financial transactions behind them (buskers play for money) with the more abstract joy of connection to the tiny boy.*



Lesson 2

David McGimpsey's "KoKo": The Chubby Sonnet (p. 32)

SABRINA OVESEN, *UNTITLED*, PHOTOGRAPHY, 2009
INSPIRED BY "FARRE OFF," *ARC POETRY ANNUAL 2010*, PAGE 91

- A. Compare the formal features of "KoKo" to the form of "Busking"
1. Main similarity: first twelve lines break into three quatrains and the quatrains correspond to sections of the poem's **narrative**
 1. Also, the poem "turns" after line 12 (note the significance of the word **irony** in line 13 as a kind of turning)
 - ii. Differences – 16 lines, no set metre, no apparent rhyme scheme.
 2. So, why call this a sonnet?
 - i. "Each stanza has the value of a thought-unit" (Porco, p. 34), like the changes in immediate focus in "Busking."
 - ii. The poem develops its content the way a sonnet does. It sets a scene, describes a defining moment, and turns toward the significance of that moment in the context of the scene.
 - iii. Do the words that end lines connect even though they don't rhyme?
 - Boss-recession (linked as economic/work language)
 - Defectives-clowns (connects the idea of being "defective" to clowns, and so foreshadows the conclusion)
 - Oxford-style-my foot (specific kind of work shoe connects to the lamed foot that triggers the incident)
 - The connections are less obvious farther into the poem, but does this opening pattern encourage you to find similar connections between the words and ideas at the ends of lines?
 - iv. The poem is in the **first person perspective**. Does this connect to the lack of metre? Why?
 - *Possible prompts: "voice" of the character is more important here than the formal demands of the sonnet. Poets adapt forms to the specifics of their poems.*
 3. Porco argues that the little narrative of "KoKo" is carefully constructed. How much does this perception depend on the expectations created by calling this a sonnet? (That is, you expect a sonnet to have an argument or progression; a rhyme scheme; a metre; 14 lines.)



Lesson 3

Robert Kroetsch's "Sounding the Name: Sonnet #1": The Not Sonnet Sonnet (p. 99)

SABRINA OVESEN, *UNTITLED*, PHOTOGRAPHY, 2009
 INSPIRED BY "RECLUSE," *ARC POETRY ANNUAL 2010*, PAGE 69

- A. What is your reaction to reading this poem after "Busking" and "KoKo"? Is it "difficult"? Does it make sense? Why does Kroetsch call it a sonnet?
1. How would you describe the form of this poem?
 - i. What is the effect of composing the poem out of **sentence fragments**?
 - ii. Why are certain words in parentheses? Look at the words in context and describe the way they change the meaning of the words around them.
 - iii. Given our expectations of sonnets, does treating this poem like a sonnet help us understand its form (*à la* "KoKo")?
- B. In "Then the Poem Goes Terrible," Rhodes proposes that the poem's content affects its form in a way that differs from the other two sonnets: the poem *resists* the connection with its subject. What is the key metaphor in this argument?
1. *Gardening: Rhodes describes the comparison of the sonnet and the well-tended garden: cultivated, civilized, following rules. Kroetsch's "garden" is full of weeds, a word that seem out of place in this kind of contemporary poem.*
- C. Is it important that Kroetsch is a Canadian poet here? How does that fact make its way into the poem?
1. *Prompts: Canadian landscape; "north / (of) America"*
- D. Does knowing that the poem is resisting the sonnet (and the potential clichés of sonnets to spring, to flowers and gardens, etc.) help to make sense of the poem's form? Does that then help understand its content?



Summary Questions

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INSPIRED BY LATIMER'S "STATEMENT TO THE POLICE," *ARC
POETRY ANNUAL 2010*, PAGE 86

1. What value does a knowledge of formal conventions add when reading poetry?
2. What does it add to your understanding of a poem when you read not only the sentences, but also the conventions, the schemes (rhyme, metre) and forms?



Further Lessons from *Arc Poetry Annual 2010*

SABRINA OVESEN, *UNTITLED*, PHOTOGRAPHY, 2009
INSPIRED BY "NEW YEAR'S POEM," *ARC POETRY ANNUAL 2010*, PAGE 108

Each of the following poems has a regular stanza pattern: Richard Outram's "Barbed Wire"; Don Coles' "Recluse"; Charles Bruce's "Back Road Farm."

1. Describe the features of a "stanza pattern."
2. Suggest ways that the stanza pattern might influence your perception of the poem.
 - i. *Initial answers might include: for Outram, that the abab quatrains mirror barbed wire in the way the lines of the poem 'twine' together. For Bruce, that the two octaves reinforce the binary of sea and land at the core of the poem's arguments.*

The essays on Peter Trower's "Industrial Poem" and Anne Corkett's "Moses Wisdom" both argue a connection between these poems and traditional **genres**: the ballad (Trower) and the nursery rhyme (Corkett).

1. What features of these poems suggest that they should be read in the context of these particular genres?
2. How does reading these poems in the context of these genres affect your understanding of the poems? Do you understand the poem better?
3. Do you pay a different kind of attention to a poem when you know that the poet is thinking about the conventions of a genre?
4. Are these poems easier to understand because both ballad and nursery rhyme are popular forms?

The title of Frederick Ward's "Blind Man's Blues" refers to a musical genre, as does Jan Zwicky's "Brahms' Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op 115."

1. How do these poems express the musical genres in their printed forms?
2. What do these poems suggest about the way a poet can create the effects of music in words?
 - i. *Possible Prompts: Parallels in the rhythm and pacing to music; a piece of music can create a mood or explore an idea that the poem can share; a genre like Blues has a set of conventional narratives.*
3. Poets structure a poem in a way that reflects another form of art, or take a kind of order from some other source and express it in poetic form.
 - i. Are there other poems in the *Arc Poetry Annual* that do this? Which ones?
 - ii. What is the "borrowed" form and how is it expressed in the poem?
 - iii. And how does the borrowed form affect your understanding of the poem?