LYRIC POEMS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASS: A COGNITIVIST APPROACH TO COURSE DESIGN

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PART I: COGNITIVE THEORY AND LYRIC POEMS

How can we help our students make literature a part of their lives and at the same time see that they get significant and extensive writing practice? Considering the manifold complexities of the writing process, students' unfamiliarity with this process, and the limited number of hours in a semester or quarter, do we have any business spending time on something like "the experience of poetry" in a freshman composition course? And if we do want to make that our business, how can we best pursue it?

That these are actually questions about cognitive development can be seen by examining some freshman writing. As a first-day diagnostic, for example, I recite William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just to Say," ask the class to write it down as it probably appears on the page, and then ask for seven minutes of writing that explains what the poem seems to be expressing. I also provide some false biographical information, indicating that the poet had a long-lasting concern with sin, redemption, and forgiveness. The following are representative responses.

(1) This short poem says a lot about life as we live it today. We work to save up wealth so that we can enjoy it in

our later life. And somehow, something always seems to spoil a perfect plan. Even if we hide our lives' treasures in the icebox.

(2) The poet is not only referring to the taking of plums from an icebox, but making comparison to other things in life which have the same result. He is referring to all sins, though they may be small, and all things of beauty which cause others to be hurt. He has enabled himself to make the poem very deep because of all the meanings it holds.

(3) The poet is saying that he has experienced things in life that he has enjoyed. Others may have been too afraid to do these things. They wanted to do them but felt they were too busy and would experience them later in life. He though, could not. He wanted to taste life to its fullest before it was too late.

These responses share four characteristics that indicate definite limits in the writers' conceptual abilities. First, they are simplistic, general, even nonsensical; the writers seem unaware that "life as we live it today" could be read many ways or that "He has enabled himself to make the poem very deep because of all the meanings it holds" is illogical as stated. Second, all three writers seem comfortable with the notion that poems contain "deep meanings" and are always about abstract topics. Third, all are short. Fourth, a positive characteristic: all are willing to attempt complex expressions. Writer 1 manages a nice metaphor, while 2 and 3 manage parallel structures fairly well. In fact, only one sentence is seriously flawed: "He has enabled himself. . . ." The writers might be considered competent at sentence construction; their weaknesses are in the area of content (ideas and development). These are cognitive problems.

The limitations may be more visible when compared to a fourth example from the same group.

(4) The poem "This is just to say" was written to show different sides of a persons conscience. The poet wants to show the reader that what a person says is not always from the heart. The first half of the poem is an apology, which the person who ate the plums is confessing to taking the plums. He tries to make the listener believe that he was feeling guilty by saying "and which you were probably saving for breakfast." He wants to let the listener know that his wrong doing was on his mind.

> In the second half of the poem the person who took the plums seems to be talking to himself. It would be very impolite to say that the plums were "delicious," "sweet" and "so cold" to the person who might have been saving the plums. These thoughts are from the heart. "They were delicious, so sweet, and so cold." All these words are said to produce a feeling of. . . .

This writer is responding to the actual details of the poem, is weaving these details into his response, and is advancing a complex thesis about the poem's purpose. He is making an ethical judgment that not everyone would think of: "It would be impolite to say that the plums were 'delicious' . . . to the person who might have been saving the plums." He sees the poem as having a two-part structure; perhaps he understands that the speaker and the poet may not be identical, since he tries to distinguish between "the poet" and "the person who took the plums." Instead of seeing the poem as containing a "deep meaning," he seems to be suggesting that it dramatizes a state of being: it is "written to show different sides. . . ." His response is twice as long as any of the first three. However, his sentences are no more competent than theirs.

Writer 4 is aware, as the first three are not, that generalizations should correlate with the data on which they are based, that the structure and voices of a text are important, and that development proceeds best with several different kinds of support (quotation, paraphrase, evaluation). We might say that 4 is a better writer than 1, 2, and 3, but we should go farther and recognize that Writer 4 has a greater command of the intellectual operations requisite to effective writing: he is able to perceive and manipulate different kinds of data in a way that is comprehensible to someone besides himself. I suggest that writers like 1, 2, and 3 can be helped to develop the writing and reading and thinking and general humanistic competences that 4 shows if a cognitivist approach informs the design of the course and that lyric poetry is an ideal subject matter for this approach.

By "cognitivist approach," as I am using the phrase, I mean four things. First, the teacher identifies the students' initial cognitive level. Second, the teacher determines what cognitive development can realistically take place during the term's ten or fifteen weeks. Third, the teacher determines what performance features will indicate that development. Fourth, the teacher designs course activities that call for intel-

lectual operations at and just beyond the initial cognitive level, forcing the students to reach beyond where they're comfortable.[1]

This may sound like a difficult program, but quite a bit of work has already been done on the average freshman's cognitive level and the associated capabilities, limitations, and likely directions of progress. Most freshmen, it is agreed, are late adolescents, unless they are the type we characterize as basic writers.[2] Paula Johnson has observed that for eighteen-year-olds in beginning literature courses, "abstract generalization is an important, newly-mastered cognitive maneuver" but is still not mobilized in a sophisticated way; hence it manifests itself in the search for a moral cliché or for the author's "real meaning." Students who are cognitively more developed are more able to adopt a "metalinguistic outlook," to think about the literary work itself as well as about what it says (Johnson, 138 and 141). Writer 4 has this outlook; the other three do not.

The difference between students searching for moral clichés and those more comfortable with the metalinguistic outlook is congruent with the difference William Perry identifies between the stages of "dualistic absolutism" (being able to see only two sides to any issue and believing that one side is always right) and "multiplicity" (accepting the right of everyone to an opinion, but still believing that among the various options one is correct), on the one hand, and on the other hand "acceptance of generalized relativism" (acknowledging that most judgments must be negotiated).[3] In an average class of mine, there might be one or two students who are securely located at the stage of "generalized relativism," who can accept several valid readings (including those suggested by authorities) while still upholding their own. Writer 4 seems to be at this stage. Writers 1 and 2 place at the stage of dualistic absolutism, for two reasons. First, they allow no qualification of their ideas: something *always* spoils our plans, the poet is referring to *all* sins and things of beauty. Second, they write as if they assume their readers can make sense of garbled or vague sentences; both are egocentric or "writer-based" in this respect, relying on their own code words and patterns of thought.[4] Writer 3 falls somewhere between. Her prose is writer-based, but her implicit approbation for the poet's willingness to be different might mean she is ready to accept multiplicity. Moreover, her diction does not suggest the absoluteness displayed by 1 and 2; she qualifies ("*may* have been")

and acknowledges an indefinite affective realm ("*felt* they were too busy").

Knowing that most of my writers are like 1 and 2, I can design exercises to help them learn to do what 4 does and to think as 4 thinks. Cognitive theory tells us that development "moves first from doing, to doing things consciously, and only then to formal conceptualization" (Lunsford 259-60). This developmental structure suggests that a writing course should provide opportunity for frequent and repeated movements among the three main types of intellectual operations: concrete (reading aloud, underlining, counting, rewording), associational (classifying data, relating data to personal experience), formal (summarizing, generalizing, extending).[5] For relatively immature writers and dualistic thinkers, it is important to ground the exercises in concrete operations. Hence lyric poems are especially suitable as subject matter for a course designed to enhance students' cognitive development. Because they are brief and because their features are more noticeable and more isolable than those of other types of texts (except perhaps advertisements), they lend themselves to reiterated concrete, associational, and formal operations, as described later in the sample sequences.

Lyric poems are also ideal subject matter for another reason: the average freshman's notions about poems and the experience of poems comprise a relatively limited and easily described core that the course can effectively challenge, and challenging this core maximizes student motivation and development. Freshmen expect a poem to contain a single "deep" or "hidden" meaning (often phrased as a moral cliché or a generalization like "life as we live it today"). This meaning can only be obtained by teacher-directed excavation, so they believe. They also expect a poem to yield a single impression rather than to develop and explore a situation. This impression differs from the "deep" meaning: either they get it instantaneously, on their own, or they never get it, and because it is an unthinking response it can be neither modulated by further experience with the poem nor analyzed by introspection. The intellectual and the affective responses can't be brought together. Most of them also have come to accept that different readers can see different things in a poem, although they are not yet able to evaluate several readings according to negotiated criteria. That is, they are at least beginning to accept multiplicity — while they agree that each person has a right to

his or her own opinion, they don't yet see that these opinions can be ranked.[6]

Exercises that draw out and then challenge the core notions can help create what William Perry calls "critical moments," moments when students are experiencing a tension between their "urge to conserve" and their "urge toward maturation" (51-53). If the exercises also offer a potentially more valid replacement notion or theory, motivation will be stronger, since students at the freshman level are beginning to be seriously interested in theory development. According to Jerome Bruner, this interest can be mobilized by involving students with the "generative propositions" underlying the discipline they're studying, for example, the conservation principles in physics (154-159). Bruner identifies no generative propositions for the study of lyric poetry, but the principle seems to hold here too. I have had success with these four propositions: (a) predispositions shape response, (b) there is no such thing as a "deep meaning" in a poem, (c) a poem's form influences how we read it, (d) poems embody the "common life" of humankind.[7] The point, however, is not to present the propositions explicitly or even to try to draw them out of the students. Rather, they are used to focus various sequences of exercises. Proposition d, for instance, is an obvious counter to the average freshman's perception of poems as abstract puzzles. This perception can be more effectively challenged if the challenge points toward a replacement notion the student can discover independently. Such discovery does happen, and it happens as a natural development — these generative propositions do represent a cognitively more mature perspective than that represented by the core of average freshman notions about poetry.

"Critical moments" and "generative propositions" might be regarded as two touchstones for a cognitivist approach to course design. A third touchstone, equally important, is "collaborative learning." As explained by Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The basic idea of collaborative learning is that we gain certain kinds of knowledge best through a process of communication with our peers. What we learn best in this way is knowledge involving judgment." We learn how to make judgments when we "practice making them in collaboration with other people who are at about the same state of development as we are" (103). The most important feature of collaborative learning is that the classroom is student-centered, not teacher-centered or even teacher-directed. In a writing class

whose subject matter is lyric poetry, collaborative exercises can be incorporated with all three kinds of intellectual operations (concrete, associational, formal); they provide a setting in which critical moments can be triggered, and they help ensure that generative propositions are discovered and assimilated rather than served up and forgotten. Most important, they make it possible for the less-cognitively-developed students, those at the stages of dualism and beginning multiplicity, to encounter and practice the intellectual operations and associated performance features that characterize students at the stages of advanced multiplicity and generalized relativism. As Perry reminds us, for students engaged in the process of development, "the most important support seemed to derive from a special realization of community" — realizing that in their attempt to come to grips with relativism, "they were in the same boat not only with each other but with their instructors as well" (213).

PART II: APPLICATIONS

The exercise sequences that follow represent two different types, one emphasizing associational operations and the other concrete operations. My experience indicates that a course should include both types. The second type, with its frequent instructions to list, circle, and so forth, accustoms students to focus on individual words in texts, something they need to do with their own writing and something that will also help them become better readers. However, the concrete operations can become tedious, leading to mechanical, unthinking performances; this lessens their effectiveness. The first type emphasizes associations between poems and students' own personal experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge. These operations help students make the experience of poetry their own experience and thus help to break down egocentrism, but as a steady diet, they too can become tedious.

In addition to the sequences themselves, I provide samples of writing done at the beginning and end of each sequence. These samples help show how students progress and also suggest revisions in the exercises.

SAMPLE SEQUENCE: PREDISPOSITIONS SHAPE RESPONSE (One Week)

The Steps

This sequence, a more elaborate version of the "This Is Just to Say" activity, is oriented toward the generative proposition that "predispositions shape response." The first three steps explore students' beliefs, values, and experiences as predisposing factors in evaluating poems; collaborative exercises compare various kinds of authority that inform evaluations: first-hand experience, second-hand experience, common knowledge. Step 4 sets the exploration in a prosaic setting. Step 5 functions as an evaluation, in combination with Step 1.

Step 1 Before dictating "This Is Just to Say," I state that the poem, simple as it will seem, was written by someone with a deep concern for morality and with a church-oriented, Calvinistic upbringing. After the students have recorded the poem and have written for seven minutes on what they think it means, I call for a few responses to be read aloud. Then I announce that the whole thing may have been a hoax: "This Is Just to Say" may not be a poem at all but an apology I jotted down after ravaging a housemate's shelf in the fridg we share. Another seven-minute writing session follows: Which statement do they believe, and why? Again a few responses are read aloud. For the remainder of the period and part of the next, the students divide into groups to discuss the two statements and draw up a list of evidence in support of each.

Step 2 Individually, students briefly write whether they are for or against capital punishment, and why. They then read Rod McKuen's "Thoughts on Capital Punishment" and write two more paragraphs, one identifying the poem's main points and the other evaluating its quality as a poem. (Whatever criteria they want to apply are okay.) I collect all three paragraphs for a future class, while handing out five responses generated by an earlier class. In groups, the students evaluate the relative impartiality of the duplicated evaluations, in light of the corresponding paragraphs on capital punishment. A second collaborative task is to evaluate the poem itself and report back to the whole class. With both tasks the goal is to practice evaluating and negotiating criteria rather than to arrive at answers.

Step 3 Having read William Stafford's "Traveling Through the Dark" at home, the students in their groups prepare a comparative evaluation of "Thoughts" and "Traveling"; they present their evaluation orally to the whole class.

Step 4 The class as a whole discusses what activity the following passage is describing and how their interpretations are determined by their personal associations with certain words or phrases.

> Rocky slowly got up, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him most was being held, especially since the charges against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong but he thought he could break it. He knew, however, that his timing would have to be perfect. Rocky was aware that it was because of his early roughness that he had been penalized so severely — much too severely from his point of view. The situation was becoming frustrating; the pressure had been grinding on him for too long. He was being ridden unmercifully. Rocky was getting angry now. He felt he was ready to make his move. He knew that his success or failure would depend on what he did in the next few seconds.[9]

Step 5 The last activity is similar to the beginning dictation and response exercise. I have various students read aloud several new poems, all having to do with death: cummings' "Buffalo Bill's," Bill Knott's "Poem" (on the death of a child), Dickinson's "I Heard a Fly Buzz." Then I read aloud Roethke's "Night Crow," instruct the class to write it as they think it appears on the page, and ask for a seven-minute written response to the question, "What is the poet describing?" These are read aloud and discussed.

EVALUATION OF THE SEQUENCE

By comparing the responses to Steps 1 and 5, I get an idea of how the whole class is progressing. The following responses to Step 5, from the first edition of this sequence, were not at all what I had hoped for. Nevertheless, they were instructive.

(5) I think that the poet Roethke, in his poem "Night Crow" is describing death, because, a crow is a big black bird and a wasted tree that stood a clumsy crow would mean that the bird is no longer alive. This symbolizes death. The line that says a shape of a mind rose up could mean that the bird spirit could have came across the poets mind, and for that moment the bird had flew further in to the poet thought. It's like the poet is recalling a death scene. And into a moonless black, deep in the brain far back could support the concept of death, when one experience death it become colorless, far beyond describing. It's lies in the back of your mind.

(6) He's describing a memory that was brought about when he "saw that clumsy crow flap from a wasted tree." He thought about it momentarily and then it escaped back into his memory — maybe to be brought out again sometime. It was a passing glimpse of something that he recalled from some time ago.

(7) To me, the poem evokes images of a black, fall night, and a crow suddenly flying out of a tree. I can see the picture in my mind very clearly that this poem describes for me. However, I don't think that picture is what Roethke is describing. Wait a minute! On second thought (and after reading the poem a few more times) I do think that is what Roethke is describing. There is lots of symbolism and metaphors in the poem, but that just adds to the picture. I can see Roethke outside on a cold, windy October night, and he sees a crow fly out of a tree. That sight provoked thought on his part, which is why there is more to the poem than just a description of the crow.

(8) It symbolizes the death of someone close to him. The last line, "Deep in the brain far back," says that the only thing that is left is a memory of that person. As the crow is flying farther and farther away it is describing his last days. He is getting closer and closer to death but farther away from life. He is flying from a "wasted tree" which may mean his life was not so good or not the way he had wanted. He flew over the "gulfs of dream," which means he never reached his dreams.

At first I thought the sequence had failed, because most of the responses were like numbers 5 and 8: plodding applications of a standard theme to the various lines of the poem. I had hoped that most responses would be like 7; after all, my ques-

tion specifically asked for a summary or a paraphrase rather than for an identification of the meaning. It also seemed that after a week of experiencing how predispositions shape response, more students would have realized that I had been trying to get them to think about this poem in terms of death, with the choice of poems read before "Night Crow," and that they would have tried to go beyond that obvious response; surely they would have suspected the same kind of trick I had pulled on them with "This Is Just to Say." But they hadn't. Class discussion bore out the impressions given by these responses: about two-thirds of the students wanted to move immediately to the poem's "deep meaning" without first trying to visualize the scene Roethke gives.

On the other hand, some students did come up with interesting readings, if not in writing then during the discussion. The reading that seemed to strike even the less imaginative students as plausible was that the poem may be describing what having a nightmare feels like: we are asked to see not just a crow in a tree but a nightmare crow in a nightmare landscape, and the crow recedes as nightmares do when we awaken. The discussion prompted me to reconsider the written responses. The average "Night Crow" response was almost twice as long as that of the first day and contained at least two or three quotations from or direct paraphrases of the poem, although not all quotations were indicated with quotation marks (e.g. 5). Writers 6 and 8 made noticeable progress in this respect, as I saw by looking again at their "Just to Say" responses (2 and 3). Even Writer 5 is in close contact with the poem's images and has plenty to say about it, although her problems with Standard Edited English obscure the contact.

My evaluation soon shifted from "only this after a week of work" to "all this in only a week." Furthermore, looking closely at these features of the responses in light of my cognitivist approach helped me rough out a follow-up sequence for use in a new edition of the course. The students achieved greater fluency and command of detail than I'd expected, but they made less progress toward the targeted generative proposition. Thus, I determined that a follow-up sequence should incorporate a more specific yet more sophisticated generative proposition. The class discussion also pushed me in this direction; the ability of most students to respond positively to their peers' creative suggestions about "Night Crow" reminded me to put more faith in the collaborative process. What I decided to try was this: "A poem may use a specific and

tangible event or scene as an analogue to a psychological state or psychological event" (a variation of the "common life" proposition). The new sequence focused on *event;* the exercises called for identifying the literal events presented by poems and comparing those events against student reactions to similar events.[10]

For example, one assignment called for students to go through a series of steps in which they read several poems, identified one to which they responded, named and described the specific feeling or memory with which they responded, and explored the connections between their own experience and what the poem seemed to be presenting. One student wrote the following about Ted Kooser's "Beer Bottle."

> (9) The poem evoked in me a memory of how profound little incidents can seem after a few beers. The idea of drinking is evident because the beer bottle "lands," which implies that it was just thrown; people usually throw bottles after they have finished them. The way the author writes about the cat being thrown off the roof to kill it brought out the image of a beer-drinker chugging the last gulps of a beer and smashing it against the rocks on the side of the road to "kill it." Nine times out of ten the bottle will break on impact; it would certainly be unusual if it didn't break. And if it "lands standing up unbroken" it is certainly rare. After a few beers I would think it "sort of a miracle" too!
>
> I can recall myself parked along the side of the road with two or three close friends enjoying a few beers, on a warm summer afternoon. After finishing a beer it is only natural to throw it into the ditch on the side of the road. We always gained some warped sense of satisfaction seeing the bottle smash into bits, hearing the delightful crash of an empty bottle. I can distinctly remember watching in amazement as a bottle bounced off a rock to land up-side-down with its neck embedded an inch in a thick patch of mud. We all thought this "sort of a miracle" since we sat and marveled at it for a good ten minutes.

The student responded to the experience in an associative way. His response reaches beyond simple association, however, since key features of his experience are described with the poem's terms: "I can distinctly remember watching. . . ." It seems to me that this use of another writer's words to articu-

late his own experience definitely signals decentering. Moreover, the paper begins by specifying the psychological content to the writer's and Kooser's experiences. Such a beginning indicates at least an implicit grasp of the sequence's generative proposition as well as an ability to view his own experience objectively; such ability is one of the signs of a later stage of cognitive development. The student also seems to have a more mature ethical perspective than he had when the experience took place: their sense of satisfaction was "warped."

SAMPLE SEQUENCE: FAMILIARITY ENHANCES RESPONSE (Two Weeks)

The Steps

In this sequence, students engage in a laboratory exercise: they infer the main features of the sonnet form and describe these features in their own language, being prohibited from using the traditional definitions. This prohibition generates anxiety at first, which is a signal that some students are experiencing critical moments — they are not allowed to rely on the authority of textbooks, as they have been accustomed to doing. As in a lab exercise in zoology or chemistry, their goal is not so much to identify the species or produce the reaction as to go through the procedure of looking closely at one phenomenon (the sonnet) and writing about their experience with that procedure. As in a lab, the write-up is the important product. To emphasize this point, I hand out excerpts from Samuel H. Scudder's "Take this Fish and Look at It," a description of his experience in the laboratory of Louis Agassiz, learning the value of observation.[11] Further emphasis is provided by calling each group of poems a set of data and by providing highly specific, sequential descriptions of the activities.

Each of Steps 2-4 in the sequence follows the Piagetian paradigm of concrete to associational to formal operations: students identify, classify, then generalize about the features of sonnets and near-sonnets. They also engage in what Wilkinson calls "speculating" by varying the definition they first generate so that it can fit non-traditional sonnets (Sternglass, "Assessing," 270). Step 5 represents an opportu-

nity for students to affirm that they have progressed in their awareness of the value of analysis. Steps 1 and 6 comprise a self-evaluation for the students and help me evaluate the sequence. In these steps, sentences in parentheses are directed to the teacher; everything else goes on handouts the students receive from day to day.

Data, Set A: "The End of the World" (Archibald MacLeish), "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (Keats), "When I Consider how my Light is Spent" (Milton).

Data, Set B: "When, in Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes" (Shakespeare), "Grief" (Elizabeth Barrett Browning), "Design" (Robert Frost).

Data, Set C: "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" (Whitman), "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" (Wordsworth), "Harlem Hopscotch" (Maya Angelou), "The White Stallion" (Guy Owen)

Step 1 (We begin with an in-class writing exercise on a new poem, Hopkins' "God's Grandeur.") Read the poem. Then write a paragraph describing what associations you make with particular words, lines, or images, identifying the poem's most important word or phrase, and defending that identification. If you are confused by the poem, explain why you can't get into it.

Step 2 Groups work collaboratively except where otherwise noted; the poems are those in Set A.

a. Read each poem aloud twice.
b. Each group member writes three sentences describing associations (as in Step 1) and two sentences identifying the most important word or phrase.
c. As a group, compose three sentences for each poem, identifying the poem's literal subject, its hidden theme (if there is one), and the point it makes about the subject or subjects.
d. Read each poem aloud again, pausing at the end of each line and then at each punctuation mark. Write a brief paragraph (five sentences) describing the rhyming patterns you notice.
e. For the first line of each poem, mark the stressed syllable of each word. Use a dictionary to help you with this. Then read each line twice, stressing the marked syllables one time, then stressing the words as you would when reading the line as a piece of prose. Write

a brief paragraph describing the unusual stress patterns you notice.

f. Do you notice any other similarities among the poems? How about the number of lines and the approximate lengths of lines? Describe the similarities in your own words.

g. (This activity is done with the entire class. Each group shares its results for activities c-f. The class identifies the most clearly written paragraph for each activity; everyone copies it for later use.)

Step 3 The poems are those in Set B.

a. Repeat a-f in Step 2, using as models the sentences from activity g.

b. Identify at least three ways the results of activity 3a differ from 2c-2f.

c. For each poem in the two data sets, circle transition signals (stanza breaks, sentence breaks, conjunctions). Identify the most significant transition signal in each poem. By referring to your results from activity 2c, explain why you view each transition as significant.

d. For each poem, write a one-sentence, multi-clause restatement. If the most significant transition signal is a conjunction, use it in your sentence.

e. Assume that the poems in Sets A and B are all members of one species called *sonnet.* Write a two-page description of that species by compiling the results from activities 3b-3d. For each species trait that you identify, quote several lines from a poem as an example. Write your description on the ditto-masters you've been given.

f. (The entire class discusses each group's description, copies of which have been distributed. Attention is focused on effectiveness of exemplification.)

Step 4 The poems are those in Set C.

a. Each group member identifies features of the poems in Set C that fit the group's species description and also features that don't fit.

b. Each individual, working alone, makes at least two changes in the group's species description, adding or removing traits or changing the description of traits, in order to accommodate some but not all of the poems in Set C. Each individual then writes a substantial paragraph explaining why the specific poems were ac-

commodated and the others left out. There is no right answer for this activity!

c. As a group, discuss what each member has produced for 4b. Revise each member's production, paying special attention to clarity of sentences and adequacy of examples, as discussed during activities 2g and 3f. Submit all revised versions as the group's collaborative effort.

Step 5 This is an individual activity to be done as homework. Read the following quotation from Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned." Notice that Wordsworth seems to be contrasting "the lore which Nature brings" with what we find out using our intellects. Does the line "We murder to dissect" apply to studying poems? Answer this question in a two-page paper, making use of your own recent experience in discovering something about sonnet form as well as any other experience you have had with poems.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things —
We murder to dissect.

Step 6 (The directions for this step are distributed when the writing is to be done.) This is an in-class writing exercise. Re-read "God's Grandeur" and write a substantial paragraph in which you describe the associations and identify important words, as you did for Step 1. Then write a paragraph comparing this paragraph with your earlier attempt.

EVALUATION OF THE SEQUENCE

The generative proposition here is that a poem's form is not arbitrary or accidental but is chosen, and a reader can get at the poem through this form. The following samples are from two of the students who were most dumbfounded by the poem the first day; the *a* responses are to Step 1, and the *b* are to Step 6.

> (9a) The poem "God's Grandeur" had very little meaning to me because of the presentation of two conflicting ideas. One of being smeared, bleared and crushed which has a bad connotation. The second idea is about "god's grandeur" "dearest freshness" "morning" springs and

bright wings. These words all have good connotation in other words there is, in my mind, a conflict of ideas.

(10a) The Poem "God's Grandeur," by Gerard Manley Hopkins held not significant word or phrase for me. In fact, the whole poem caused me no interest, its not understandable and insignificant. This is probably because I cannot make sense of how the lines are put together. It first talks of "God's Grandeur," then it says "crushed." I really don't like this poem, it is not put together well. I feel this poem was written only for the poet himself to express his inward thoughts.

(9b) In the first two lines of the poem "God's Grandeur" the author, Gerard Manley Hopkins, is telling how the world is filled with Gods greatness and that this greatness will eventually become exhausted. In line three the author says that the "greatness" of the world is equatable to the oozing of oil which possesses a "greatness" in value. In lines four and five Hopkins asks the question why doesn't the earth show the effects of man's constant abuse of nature. In lines six through eight Hopkins tells how the earth has been abused: it has been reaped of its mineral wealths, for trade; "bleared, smeared" with toils and it wears mans smudge and shares mans smell in other words it wears the man made care of industrial development and it shares the smells of pollution with man. In line nine Hopkins says and after all of the abuse nature is never spent. In lines ten through fourteen the author says that nature will always provide for man because, "with in nature there lives the dearest freshness deep down things" the unexhaustable wealth of the Holy ghost who will always provide for the people of god.

(10b) In the poem "God's Grandeur," by Gerard Manley Hopkins there are several things that stand out more clearly now than they did two weeks ago. I came to realize that the poem was trying to express the fact that the world is made up of the "grandeur of God." That this "grandeur" came to the world years ago and through those years the "grandeur" has been changed, formed, beaten and faded. "Grandeur" of God has aged as a rock does when exposed to the elements. However, "grandeur" has been changed by humans; through evil ways, "wears man's smudge and shares man's smell." However, Hopkins in the second stanza goes on to say that the world, no matter how changed "God's grandeur" is, lives

because of it. Hopkins states this very clearly, "and for all this nature is never spent." In the final two lines Hopkins also reveals all that I have said to be true: "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast. . . ."

In the first responses (9a and 10a) the writers don't suspect an *intended* self-contradiction or paradox. Both writers notice that the poem contains "two conflicting ideas," but they find no reason for the conflict nor any way the poem resolves it. Their confusion is typical of dualistic thinkers: they will have difficulty resolving apparent contradictions, because they think in terms of absolutes — if there are two contraries, one must be right and one wrong, but here neither seems preferable. Even students who are able to accept on priniciple that two conflicting points of view are both valid may have difficulty seeing any value in paradoxical images; thus neither writer sees any significance in the poem.

The second responses, despite their surface errors, are relatively fluent and coherent. Neither writer is baffled by the apparent contradiction; they are now able to see the entire poem and the sequence of its ideas, whereas the first responses concentrated on a few words. Writer 9 doesn't yet grasp the poem well enough to write about it in some way other than line-by-line, nor does he see the contradiction in his paraphrase: "this greatness will eventually become exhausted," but "nature is never spent." However, the paraphrase shows that the writer is making connections between the poem's world and our own (for example, "shares the smells of pollution with man"). Writer 10, too, has moved from bafflement to creative interpretation. Her comment on how her response changed is revealing:

> Through re-reading I realized this poem was sonnet, and I know sonnets usually relay the meaning of the poem in the last two lines. Therefore, I read the poem a third time, came up with a conclusion, and used the last two lines to prove or back it up. . . . Hopkins writes a well evident sonnet which fully expresses a dominant theme and prevailing voice in "God's Grandeur."

She is employing an identifiable problem-solving method: using part of the data to develop a hypothesis and then testing the hypothesis against another part of the data. Although her diction indicates a lingering egocentrism (for example, "a

well-evident sonnet" is her own personal shorthand for "a poem that is evidently a sonnet"), her improvement over the two weeks is encouraging.

Nor is Writer 10's comment unusual. Another student whose initial response was minimal (two sentences and two fragments) wrote that on his first encounter with "God's Grandeur" he felt "intimidated" and "tried to understand all of it at once." His second response showed as much improvement as 9 and 10. This time he had looked specifically for the mid-poem break, for a "change of thought" from one part of the poem to another, instead of trying to "get it all at once." That he remarks twice on the impossibility of totally and instantaneously grasping the poem suggests that he has learned more than just how to analyze a sonnet. He is stressing the value of incremental analysis, and that very stress shows that he knows he has acquired a new method. That is, he has learned, and he knows that he has learned. The same is true for Writer 10.

PART III: CONCLUSIONS

A writing course with lyric poetry as its subject matter, when designed according to cognitivist principles, provides an environment in which students can grow as writers and also mature in their ability to respond to literature. This means that we as teachers don't have to accept a dualistic interpretation of our role — teach either composition or literature but not both. Guided by an understanding of the patterns of intellectual development appropriate to a given population of students, the teacher can design prewriting, writing, and revising activities emphasizing the features characteristic of more mature reading, writing, and thinking. These features include increased length, multiple quotations, willingness to acknowledge uncertainties in a text and to go beyond categorical absolutes, ability to perceive and resolve apparent contradictions, and the ability to reflect on the reading process.

To be sure, less material will be "covered." Students will by no means get a survey of types, styles, periods, or techniques of poetry. On the other hand, they are less likely to be intimidated by a poem, should they happen to encounter one later in life. If the touchstones of "critical moments," "generative propositions," and "collaborative learning" are kept con-