



# Language Shapes Realities

**Trust me, I'm a Poet (or so...)**

# Context



# What We Saw Last Week

## We

- considered L/literature as performance
- looked at how a literary reading and linguistics can interact → Stylistics
- explored a line or poetry
  - in terms of levels of linguistic analysis
  - with respect to 3 Rs: **r**igorous, **r**eplicable, **r**etrievable
- introduced the basic concepts of Stylistics:
  - defamiliarisation
  - foregrounding and “markedness”
  - parallelism vs deviation (text-internal and external)

# The Plan for Today

- **A brief revisiting of notions of stylistics**
  - what we saw in Brontë's poem
  - what a stylistic analysis tells us
  - the roles of parallelism and deviation
- **branching off into “creative writing”**
- **decisions writers make**
- **why do we write**
- **Catharsis and artistic expression**
- **some practical experiences**
- **what we might need to consider as writers**

# Revisiting ‘markedness’

**How it works and why it’s done**

# Beyond description

No coward soul is mine

- **segmental phonology**: vowel assonance of *no* and *soul*
- **prosody**: break-up of iambic measure
- **morphology**: probable compound *coward soul*
- **Theme-Rheme**: ‘affected’ becomes subject
- **Word classes**:
  - avoidance of personal pronoun
  - emphasis mainly on possession
- **Syntax**: unity of possessor and possession

so what...?

emphasis on negative feature of the *soul*

focus on emotional ‘disturbance’

inseparability of concept *coward soul*

focus on *soul* as central proposition

economy of expression /  
central idea highlighted

possession reflects indirectly on  
possessor

# Answering the dreaded question

so what...?

***external foregrounding of  
nature of speaker's soul***

**'topic sentence'**

**rest of the poem**

- illustrates
- demonstrates
- justifies

emphasis on negative feature of the  
*soul*

focus on emotional 'disturbance'

inseparability of concept *coward*  
*soul*

focus on *soul* as central proposition

economy of expression /  
central idea highlighted

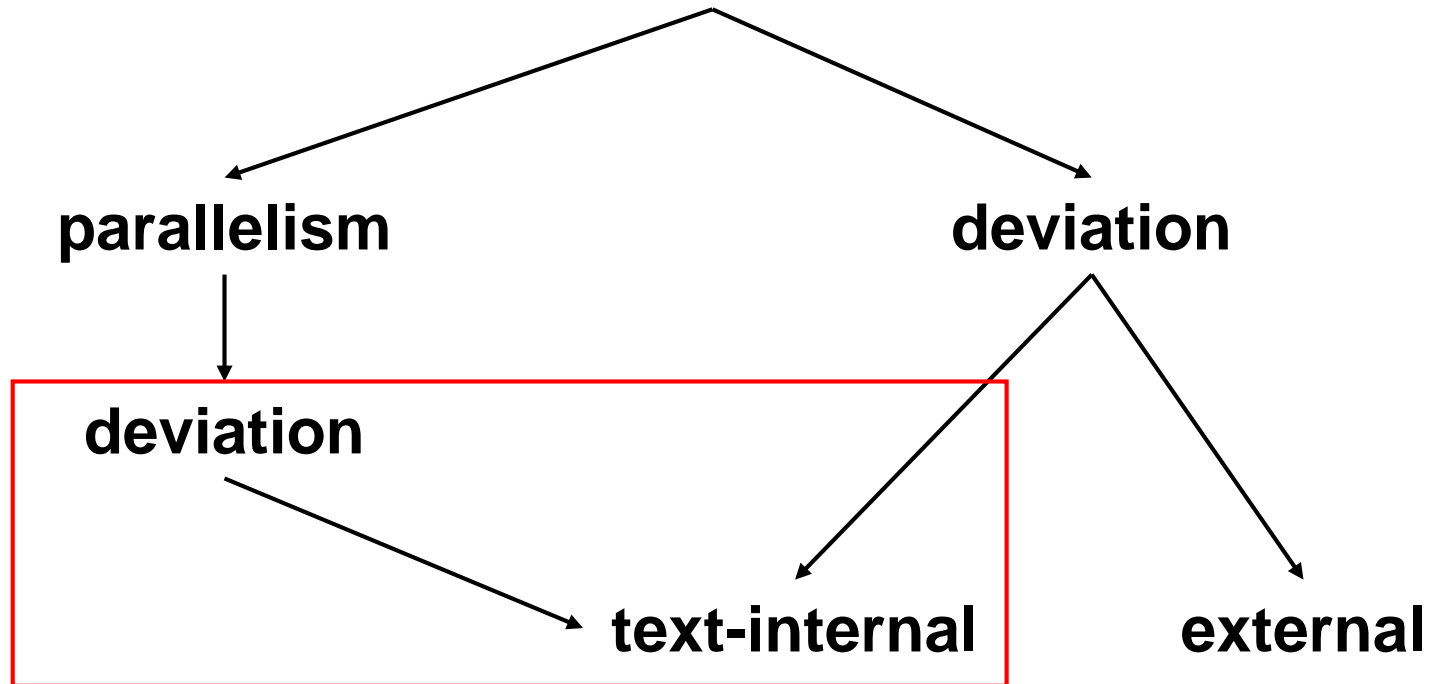
possession reflects indirectly on  
possessor

# An extension of the model

остранение : defamiliarisation

**“friction”**

foregrounding **“markedness”**





# Parallelism/deviation in folk song

## Prickly Bush or Hanging from the Gallows Tree



## King Henry (Child 32)



internal deviation incremental repetition

# Impact on writing

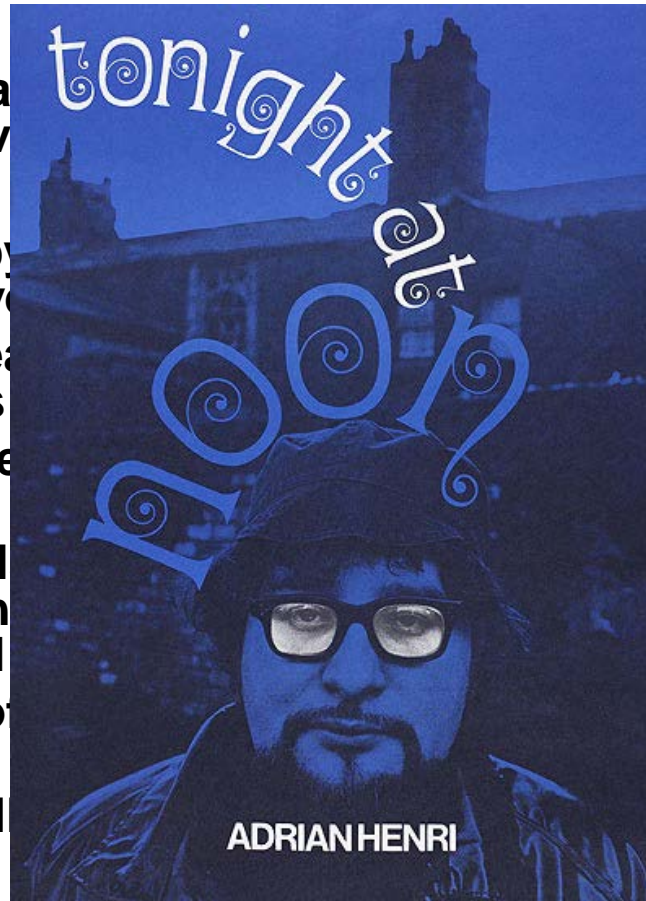
## Stylistics and 'Creative Writing'

# Foregrounding in composition a)

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Tonight at noon  
Supermarkets will a  
EXTRA on ev  
Tonight at noon  
Children from happy  
be sent to live  
Elephants will tell e  
human jokes  
America will declare  
Russia  
World War I general  
poppies in the  
November 11  
The first daffodils o  
appear  
When the leaves fal  
the trees



oon  
I hunt cats through city  
yards  
ll us to fight on the  
hes and on the landing  
s  
l of water will be built  
r Liverpool  
sighted flying in  
ation over Woolton  
will not only get his  
ack but his arm as well  
icans will demonstrate  
qual rights  
ne Black House  
nster has just created  
ankenstein

# Foregrounding in composition a)

Girls in bikinis are moonbathing  
Folksongs are being sung by  
real folk

Art galleries are closed to people  
over 21

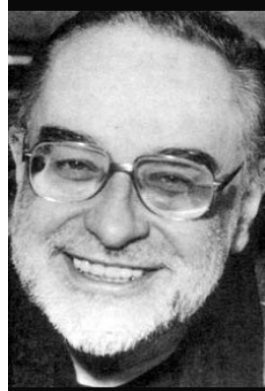
Poets get their poems in the  
Top 20

Politicians are elected to insane  
asylums

There's jobs for everyone and  
nobody wants them

In back alleys everywhere  
teenage lovers are kissing  
in broad daylight

In forgotten graveyards the dead  
will quietly bury the living  
and



You will tell me you  
love me  
Tonight at noon.

# A wedding poem

## What belongs together...



drum'n'bass  
head'n'case  
bright'n'early  
short'n'curly  
yoof'n'pimple  
plain'n'simple  
...

...  
rags'n'riches  
grouses'n'bitches  
R'n'B  
scones'n'tea  
footloose'n'fancy free  
and – obviously –  
you'n'me

parallelism 1: listing

parallelism 2: x'n'y

parallelism 3: rhyming  
couplets

deviation 1: puns

deviation 2a: breaking pattern

deviation 2b: 4 rhymes

# The power of a “creative” text

**DEATH TOLL EXPECTED TO RISE**

**42 killed in**

**147 die in Iraq bombings**

**Worse than during  
the troubles –**

**19 dead, 202 hurt**

**The Identity**

**3 car bombs in Dublin  
and Mogadishu kill 23**

**Roger McGough**

**67 civilian deaths  
in 2 days**

**SEVEN KILLED BY  
ULSTER BOOBY TRAP**

**Suicide bomb in crowded  
market, 56 dead**

**13 die in clashes, army  
accused of ‘massacre’**

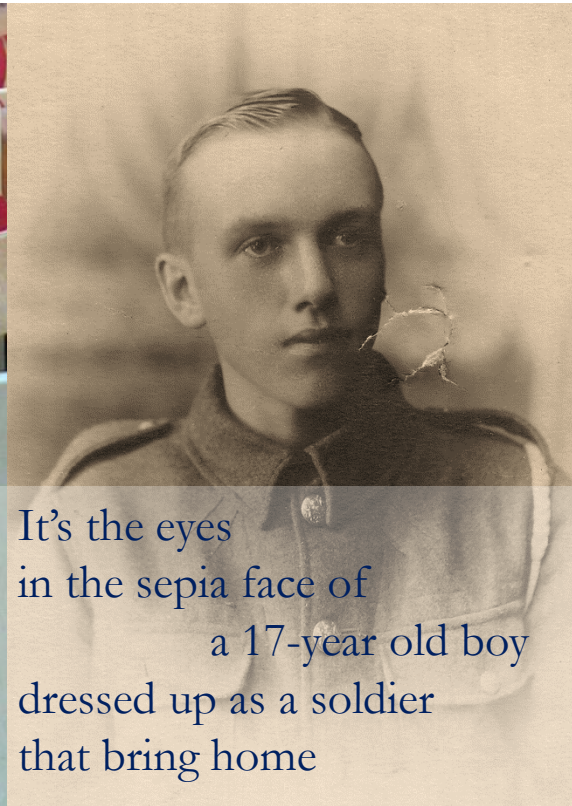
**Mass shooting  
38 victims**



# The Importance of Being Specific

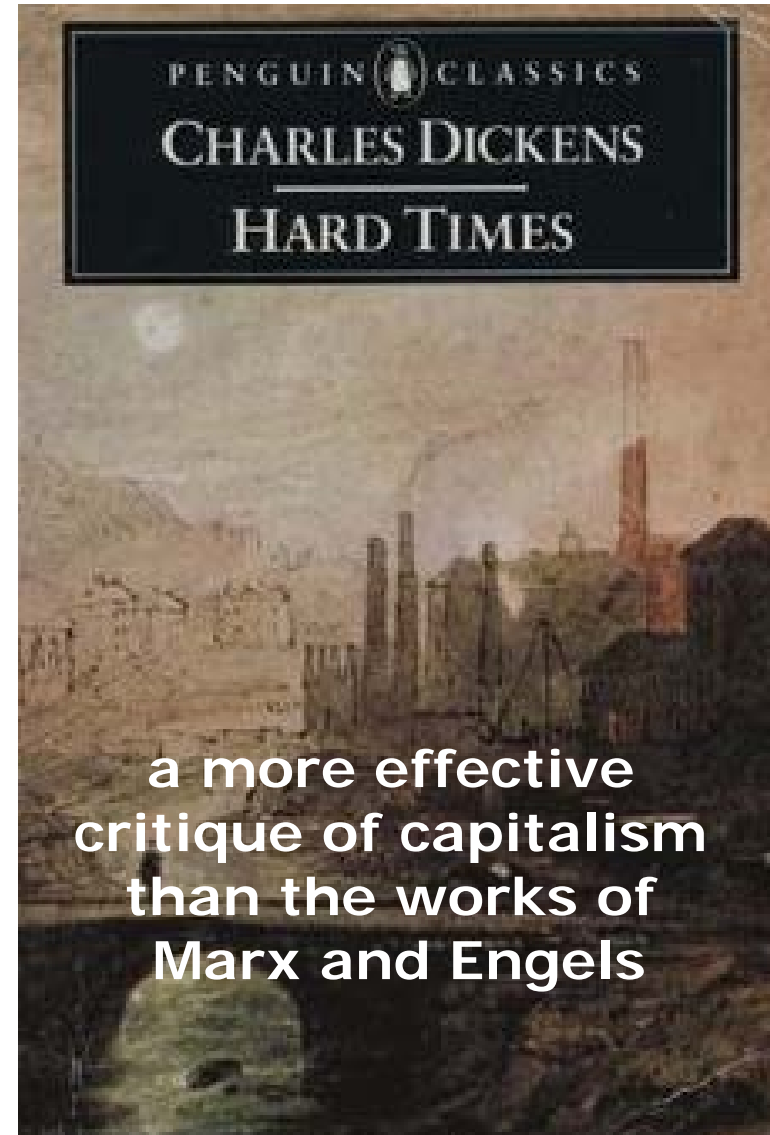
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It's the eyes  
in the sepia face of  
a 17-year old boy  
dressed up as a soldier  
that bring home

what it must have meant  
to do your bit  
to wait for the Big Push  
to go over the top.



# Authorial intention?

## Writers make decisions

- choice of content
  - choice of genre/form
  - choice of 'patterns'
  - choice of 'breaking patterns'
- topic (and title?)  
shape  
parallelisms  
deviations

**Knowledge of Stylistics  
a necessity?**



# Stylistics and creative writing

**‘I would like to suggest that the stylistics “toolkit” *can become an integral part of creative practice itself*. Its precepts inform the way you write, *as you write*.’**

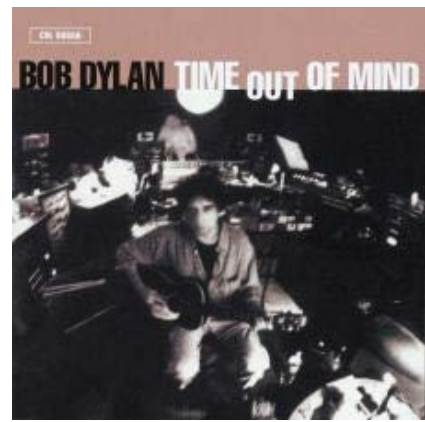
**Jeremy Scott (2013)  
*Creative Writing and Stylistics*, p 6**

Why write?

**Best text**

**vs.**

**best personal outcome**



# Diverging Goals

**‘Behind every beautiful thing  
there is some kind of pain’**

**Bob Dylan (1997) ‘Not dark yet’**



**‘There is no greater agony than  
bearing an untold story inside you’**

**Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings***



**Poetry: the best words in the best order.**

**(Samuel Taylor Coleridge)**

# Quality vs. Catharsis



vs.



**‘This was not [...] a “writing therapy” group – this was a writing workshop, and our goal was to create the very best stories we could write.’**

**David Surface (2013)  
“The Story We Tell Ourselves Afterwards”**

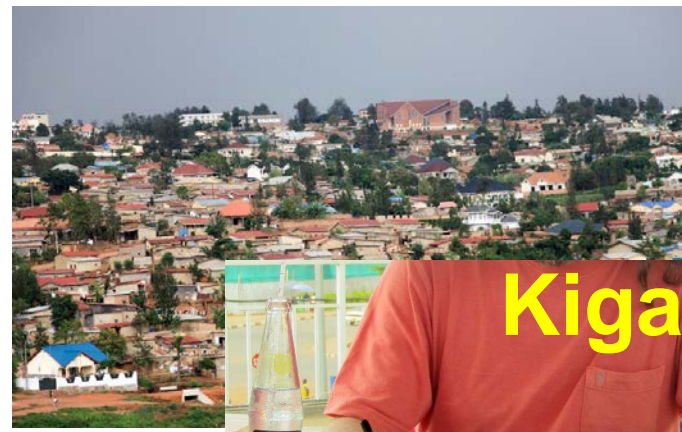
# Memory, writing and healing

**‘I hope that the opportunity to write about such traumas helped these young people to put some closure to their memories’**

Adisa Palmer ‘Sticks and Stones’ (1998, 8)



# Workshopping





# Bern: Write Identities

## Workshop Activity by Nushin Arbadzadah-Green



**What I remember**

**What I don't remember**

**'but I do  
remember  
Mum  
never lies  
to me'**

**list poem**

# Sarajevo: British Council Offices

## Workshop Activity

1. Think of a person that matters to you
2. Brainstorm her/his 'features'
3. Strike out all non-unique features
4. Write a short formal poem about the person

poem about a lover

**'focused' content,  
prescribed form**





# New York: T&W Collaborative

## Workshop Activity:

### Ten minutes on Earth

1. Brainstorm for 10 minute  
what is happening on Earth  
right now.
2. Write a sentence each on a slip of paper
3. Find a 'strong' sequence

‘somewhere ...  
my mother ...’



**list poem,  
parallelism and  
deviation**

# Kigali: Roof Top Café

## Workshop Activity:

### The Sensuous Detail

1. Focus on the main mental image of your memory
2. Try to find the ‘sense’ that best represents it (vision, smell, sound, etc.)
3. Make this the centrepiece of your narrative



**narrative,**  
**external deviation**

‘silver sheen on the  
sharpened edge of a machete’



# Some considerations a)

## Don't go for the 'big picture':

- **'Advice to young writers who want to get ahead without any annoying delays: don't write about Man, write about a man.'**

**E. B. White (quoted in Rick Bailey *et al*, 1998, 22)**

- **'It is vital that we write our memories because history books talk only in grand sweeps. They don't tell the real story of historical events because the real story can be told only in the lives of the people who lived through them'**

**Lois Daniel 1991, 69**

# Some considerations b)

## Don't leave it at 'catharsis':

- 'Anyone's story is as good as the telling'

Jill Ker Conway 1998, 152

## Also: don't get hung up on formal details

“a novice poet (...) spend[s] energy concentrating on the invention of rhyme instead of on the invention of a poem. That's like trying to remember how to spell every word in the first draft of an essay instead of focusing on the ideas you want to convey.”

Michael Bugeja, 1994, 205

# Some considerations c)

## Don't presume

- **‘some performances and performance forms are as much about forgetting things as they are about remembrance.’**
- **‘... many notions of “the healing power of stories” originate in some very particular North American and European traditions.’**
- **‘Overly easy reconciliation narratives have a tendency to make simplistic assumptions about which divisions are most important in people’s lives...’**

**James Thompson, 2015, 188-189**



# The freedom to focus...

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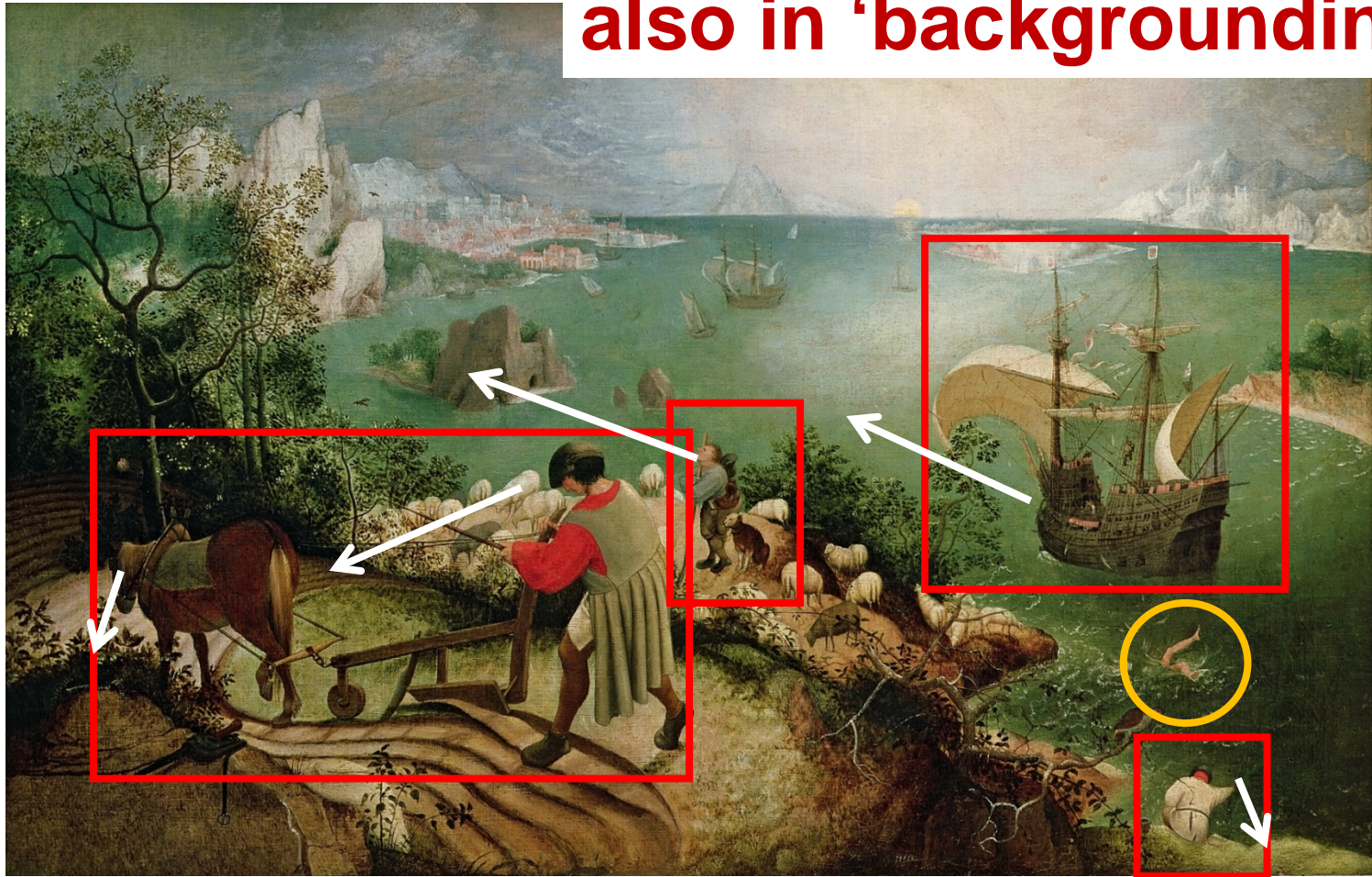
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The freedom to focus...

also in 'backgrounding'



# Some Considerations d)

## Don't make assumptions about 'beauty'

- '[w]riting a poem in such times may feel like fiddling while Rome burns'

Addonizio and Laux, 1997, 64

Was sind das für Zeiten  
wo ein Gedicht über Bäume  
fast ein Verbrechen ist  
weil es das Verschweigen  
über so viele Untaten miteinschließt.

What kind of times are these  
when a poem about trees  
is almost a crime  
because it entails the silence  
about so many evil deeds.

Bertold Brecht



# The Day Lady Died

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday  
three days after Bastille day, yes  
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine  
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton  
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner

...

...and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

Frank O'Hara



That's it for today...

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See you next week when  
we'll consider what it means

**We're in this  
together!**