

PROJECT PAPERS

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SONNET WORKSHOP

An edited transcript of a talk given at the Poetry Project on February 27, 1979

I want to read you some sonnets, one by Shakespeare, one by Edwin Denby, and about three by me, and then talk to you a little about the sonnet. But before I read these, let me say that I was led to the sonnet by the fact that I was living in New York City and studying (as it were) poetry on my own. I didn't really have a course of study in mind but I liked the sonnets of Shakespeare that I had read. At that time (late 1960 or early 1961), I still didn't like all that much poetry, though I was confirmed in my mind that I was going to be a poet. The Donald Allen anthology was just out. I liked some of it considerably more than the poetry of the past. There was lots of great poetry of the past, but I just didn't like it very much. I knew that I would have to overcome that problem, but I wasn't worried about it. I figured I would sooner or later. I was drawn to Shakespeare's sonnets because they were quick, musical, witty, and short. And the last one was probably the most important consideration.

So, I decided to start my study of poetry. I had written some poems, of course, and I had taken a million hours of poetry in school, but I decided to start my own personal study with Shakespeare's sonnets. I had also read a lot of Ezra Pound, in fact had a go at becoming the next great *Cantos* writer of our time, but found out that I was somewhat lacking in theory and also in data to put into the cantos. With Shakespeare it seemed a little easier. I did pick up from Pound the idea that it was a good idea to put everything that was in your life into your works. But there wasn't much in my life like there was in his life, so it didn't seem like I could write cantos. So I began to read the sonnets of Shakespeare—and my idea of studying is to read them all the time. I read them over and over, I read them out loud, I read them to my friend Joe Brainard, which no doubt horrified him, but he acted like it was all right because he thought it was a good idea that I would do that if I wanted to do it. And I found a few that really struck me. Something about them struck me. And I knew it was not the basic ingredient in the sonnet that Shakespeare had made the sonnet from that was striking me, but something else. And that that something else had to do with diction. And that's mostly what I'm going to talk about tonight. This sonnet is one of my most favorite of Shakespeare's, number 94.

They that have to power hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow,
They rightly do inherent heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summers sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die,

But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

Now, I wasn't the least bit interested in lilies and flowers, believe me. I'm still not, to my chagrin. It's been brought home to me that all poets are interested in plants and flowers. Alas, I'm interested in them all right: they're always in the damn way when you're trying to close the window. Generally plants baffle me completely, though I notice they often look really beautiful, a cluster of them in a room. Especially if it's an artist's studio where the rest of the room is a highly polished floor and not much else. But flowers, no. Flowers seem to me to be truly narcissistic and they drive me completely insane. I mean they seem to only stand there and admire themselves enormously and expect you to do the same. I find that horrifying. And besides that, there are all these little bugs on them. If you bend over to smell one, admire its beauty a little, horrible little black things are crawling around on it. Furthermore, bumble bees, which I am in terrible fear of, are usually lurking nearby. Weeds I don't mind much, although I actually prefer pavements and sidewalks. Well, I like the countryside too, but there are a lot of bugs in it, I must say.

This is a sonnet by Edwin Denby, and it's the first one in *Mediterranean Cities*. Its name is "Trastevere," is a part of Rome (sort of the Greenwich Village of Rome). That leads prematurely to a point I was going to make later about titles. I've always considered titles to be sort of little poems which prepare you for the larger poem that you're going to read next.

Dear head to one side, in summer dusk, Olga
On her terrace waters potted azaleas
Thoughts of friends, their fine successes, their failures
Greek reliefs, Russian poets, all water with her;
The plants rejoice; across the street, the high wall
Reaches the decayed park of a long dead Pope
Urchins stole the sphinx near the fence up the hill
Where woods grow thick, sold it to a Yank I hope;
Now young priests smoke at the basin, by blurred sea-gods
Above them rises a hairy thicket of palms
That male in their joint green dusk yield Rome the odds
Returning with the night into primeval realms
As laughing Olga, feeding through the window cat-shadows
Then reading, then sinking into slumber, does

Now I would like to have someone else read it, would any one like to volunteer? Ron [Padgett], maybe you could do it. I just want to hear it by a different voice. [Padgett reads poem.]

I wrote my first sonnet in about 1958, but I didn't know it was a sonnet at the time. It was also about my third poem. This next one is from 1969. I had written a couple of hundred of these sonnets by then. This is called "Ann Arbor Elegy, for Franny Winston died September 27, 1969."

Last night's congenial velvet sky
Conspired that Merrill, Jayne, Deke, you & I
Get it together at Mr. Flood's Party, where we got high

On gin, shots of scotch, tequilla salt and beer
 Talk a little, laugh, a lot & turn a friendly eye
 On anything that's going down beneath Ann Arbor's sky
 Now the night's been let to slip its way
 Back toward a mild morning's gray
 A cool and gentle rain is falling, cleaning along my way
 To where Rice Krispies, English muffins & coffee, black
 Will make last night today. We count on that, each new day
 Being a new, day as we read what the Ann Arbor News has to say.

On that pause, trying to make a very mild poem. And still that would be an elegy and the elegiac touch is perhaps only in the tone, in the mildness, and in the kind of vowels that are used—and then in the fact that it ends in something that you could use in a newspaper. In fact, I didn't read in the newspaper that Franny Winston had died, but rather I had read that Rocky Marciano had died, in a plane crash in a field in Iowa. I didn't write it the morning of the day I'm talking about in here, but a few days later. In fact, Merrill, Jayne, Deke (whoever Deke may be), Franny, and I went to a bar called Mr. Flood's Party and did do all those things, and then about four in the morning they all had gone home and I walked across town to an all-night cafe to get breakfast, and a few days after that I went over and read in the paper that Rocky Marciano had died, and the day before that, I had heard on campus from Lewis Warsh, who was visiting, that Franny Winston had been killed in a car accident. So reading of his death made me write a poem about her death, which was on my mind. The sonnet seemed to me a proper vehicle for this, that is, to write an elegy, and at the same time, to write a poem in which I was making the events happen in the present, even though obviously I wasn't writing the sonnet while they were going on. And finally, there was the transference of having read something in the newspaper about someone's death who was not the person I was writing about. Again, the sonnet form seemed to allow me to do all those things, and that's what's happened. Now this is another one by me, written not so long after the other one. This is called "Wake Up."

Jim Dine's toothbrush eases two pills
 activity under the clear blue sky; girl
 for someone else in white walk by
 it means sober up, kick the brunette out of bed
 going out to earn your pay; it means out;
 bells, ring; squirrel, serve a nut; daylight
 fade; fly resting on your shoulder blades
 for hours; you've been sleeping, taking it easy
 neon doesn't like that; having come your way
 giving you a free buzz, not to take your breath away
 just tightening everything up a little; legs
 pump; head, wobble; tongue, loll; fingers, jump;
 drink; eat; flirt; sing; speak;
 night time ruffles the down along your cheek

That's about waking up because it's night and it's time to wake up and be alive and do everything, which is what you do at night.

All right, let's find something from in here at random. This is the book which made me "the man who changed the face of poetry for the next 20 years" or whatever it was Maureen Owen said. It's

called *The Sonnets*, I wrote it in 1963, it was first published by C Press in 1964. It's a sequence in a certain sense, but it's more like a serial poem. Originally, there were 88 of them. When I began writing them, I saw that something was going on, that it was going to be more than one of them, and so I meant for each one to stand by itself and yet be part of what I then thought of as a sequence, because I thought of Shakespeare's sonnets as a sonnet sequence. Now maybe I would think of it more as a *book*. There's great disagreement among scholars as to the proper arrangement of Shakespeare's sonnets. I have no disagreements with any of the scholars and I don't want to claim that there is a way that they should be arranged, but there *is* a way that they are arranged, that they're generally given to us. In that way, about the first 16 deal with a certain subject matter, and then they switch into what seems to be the real subject matter, and then they go on through to the end, and then the last two are two translations from Ovid, which seems to me to be exactly what you would put on the end of a collection of poems like that if you wanted that to be the end. The last one is, in fact—I believe it's the last one—though it might be the next to the last one, specifically about lust, both of them in fact being about lust, about Cupid and lust. They seem to me to be the perfect ending, and I wanted to make a sequence that was something like that. I paid some attention to the way my sonnets were starting out, that is, in terms of what they were about. After that I let them go as whatever they were and when I got down near the end I had there be a kind of procession of six or seven that marched on out in a certain kind of stately fashion which I worked against a little bit. And then the last one is about what the whole sequence is about, though it doesn't sum it up or add anything to it or take anything away from it or say anything about it. It simply says all that happened. In fact I wanted to avoid saying what the whole thing was about because the whole thing was about something quite boring, actually, which is growing up in a certain way, which is not a very interesting subject matter.

I'll read two of them. This is the first one:

His piercing pince-nez. Some dim frieze
 Hands point to a dim frieze, in the dark night.
 In the book of his music the corners have straightened:
 Which owe their presence to our sleeping hands.
 The ox-blood from the hands which play
 For fire for warmth for hands for growth
 Is there room in the room that you room in?
 Upon his structured tomb:
 Still they mean something. For the dance
 And the architecture.
 Weave among incidents
 May be portentous to him
 We are the sleeping fragments of his sky,
 Wind giving presence to fragments.

Now at this point in time, that sonnet seems very clear and straightforward with no mystery about it whatsoever. Perhaps at the time I wrote it I thought that it had a mysterious look and feel to it. I think it still has that, but I think even when I wrote it I felt that it was very clear. I really didn't know what the sonnets were saying until I finished them, or until maybe even the next day, or at least two or three hours later. Part of the premise of writing these was to *not* know on many occasions what I was going to come up with, since I was dealing with subject matter which was clear, but I didn't always want to know. I wanted to get material up from inside me that I would be loath to admit otherwise, things about myself and about others that I would not normally say.

All right, I would like to find a clearer one. This is number 19:

Harum-scarum haze on the Pollock streets
Where Snow White sleeps among the silent dwarfs
The fleet drifts in on an angry tidal wave
Or on the vast salt deserts of America
Drifts of Johann Strauss
A boy first sought in Tucson Arizona
The withering weathers of
Melodic signs of Arabic adventure
Of polytonic breezes gathering in the gathering winds
Mysterious Billy Smith a fantastic trigger
Of a plush palace shimmering velvet red
The cherrywood romances of rainy cobblestones
A dark trance
In the trembling afternoon

That one is about being in the movies when I was a kid, but it was of no interest to me that anyone know that. I took pains in fact not to tip my hand as to that being what it was about. I used to go to a theater called the Palace Theater. It had plush seats, and the experience was sort of like a dark trance in the trembling afternoon. But the rest of it has nothing to do with the movies or with my childhood or anything like that. This poem is about a feeling and it's about a feeling re-evoked—if that's a word (if it isn't, it will be now).

OK, this is number 31:

And then one morning to waken perfect-faced
To the big promise of emptiness
In a terrible Ozark storm
Pleasing John Greenleaf Whittier!
Speckled marble bangs against his soiled green feet
And each sleeping son is broke-backed and dumb
In fever and sleep processional
Voyages harass the graver
And grope underneath the most serious labor
Darius feared the boats. Meanwhile
John Greenleaf Whittier was writing. Meanwhile
Grandma thought wistfully of international sock fame
Down the John G. Whittier Railroad Road
In the morning sea mouth

I managed to get something out in the middle of that which meant a lot to me, and I feared to tamper with it any further. So I fooled with some feelings around it, fear being one of them, and next to fear, as Milton might say, humor, in order to keep fear from panicking. John Greenleaf Whittier had nothing to do with fear, but Darius had a lot to do with fear. I wanted to provide in *The Sonnets* a lot of material for footnotes so that scholars for one thousand years could check everything out. "The boats" was a particularly horrifying form of death, punishment by death, slow death. The Persians it thought up, or if it wasn't the Persians it was somebody that didn't like the Persians, but it was one or the other. You

can read about it in one of the Will Durant books. Darius knew that if he were caught by the enemy he might very well get put into the boats and so naturally he feared the boats, but other than that he didn't fear the boats because he was the king of his own people. And kings tend to think they'll stay that way.

OK, this is the last one, "A Final Sonnet":

How strange to be gone in a minute! A man
 Signs a shovel and so he digs Everything
 Turns into writing a name for a day
 Someone
 is having a birthday and some one is getting
 married and someone is telling a joke my dream
 a white tree I dream of the code of the west,
 But this rough magic I here abjure and
 When I have required some heavenly music which even
 now
 I do to work mine end upon *their* senses
 That this aery charm is for I'll break
 My staff bury it certain fathoms in the earth
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound
 I'll drown my book.
 It is 5:15 a.m. Dear Chris, hello.

Now, many of you may recognize some of those lines as being from one of Propero's speeches in *The Tempest*. I couldn't end the book until I found the right words to end it with and by accident I happened to start reading *The Tempest* about a week and a half after I knew I was finished with these, and when I came upon that speech, I put it into this last sonnet. I still had to make the sonnet in a certain way. I still had to get away with saying for the last line of the whole book not simply "it is 5:15 a.m.," but "Dear Chris, hello."

When I was reading Shakespeare's sonnets over and over, I found three or four that I liked very much and I typed them up. I had a desk, a long desk, which came from a Chinese restaurant. It had some shelves coming out about this far, and I scotch taped about four of Shakespeare's sonnets on the shelf, and I sat at my desk all the time, whether I was reading or writing or whatever, and I read them all the time until that music was in my head. And then, at the same time, I wrote some very specific imitations of Shakespeare sonnets, one which begins "Shall I compare thee to a baseball bat..." and actually carries that conceit, consistently all the way through the poem, which amazes me because it's not the kind of thing I do. In my imitation I tried to stick very close to rhyme and meter. I tried to use the same kind of rhyme scheme. I tried to use the exact meter, but I didn't know exactly what the exact meter was, I only knew what certain people said the exact meter was and I didn't have the confidence that I have now to know that they were wrong, that the meter varies and changes all the time. I wrote quite a number of those, but at some point I began to write other kinds of works as well. And some of those other kinds of works later got into *The Sonnets*, and got in there whole because I didn't change them at all. They weren't sonnets, and they were influenced by everything else I was doing too. This book of sonnets is arranged somewhat in the order that I wrote them, but there are some that I wrote before I even started writing the book.

When I started writing sonnets, the first thing that I noticed was that the diction in Shakespeare's sonnets which I heard with my American ears—heard from my voice saying those words—was very different than any Shakespearian plays I had ever seen, or movies (most notably movies) I had seen, Olivier, Marlon Brando, James Mason and John Guilgud. It was very different. As Kenneth Koch would say, I could not handle iambic pentameter naturally, and particularly rhymed iambic pentameter. I couldn't put my emotions into those rhythms, and after all, it was my emotions I was dealing with in the poems. But, in the sonnets of Shakespeare that I had picked out as my favorites, it seemed that I could read the emotions in those poems correctly. It didn't matter that I couldn't read them the beautiful way that, say, Richard Burton might read them. I decided to accept the assumption that the sonnet would be 14 lines long and not to worry about where the rhymes fell, nor would I worry about what measure the line had, that I would write them by ear, I would measure them by ear, I would have the lines end by what I then knew about line endings. I would use the line endings by what I primarily use them for, that is, as in the old days, as dramatic places, but again, I would use them in order to make the poem go faster or to make the poem go slower, and that is all that I would primarily worry about. If I wanted a line to be this long, I would have it be that long, as long as the poem retained its shapeliness. Not visual shapeliness, but shapeliness as being said out loud. So, I wrote some poems and I called them "personal poems" and many of the best ones turned out to be fourteen lines long, and not only that but they were worked pretty much as sonnets. I think nearly all of them worked in the eight/six sense of the sonnet; that is, the first part of the sonnet would be roughly eight lines long in which, I would be coming in to whatever I was taking about. And I would chiefly use notation. I would notate, rather than say "those that have the power to hurt and will do none" I might say "it is 5:15 a.m. and I'm waiting for the the milkman." But still, it was simply notations of what was going on, and I never did make a rude metaphor that I would use all the way through the poem or establish any elaborate conceits. Instead, I would turn back upon things that I had in the poem. I would come in and go out. In the first part, I would notate what was going on at that particular time. Everything that was outside my head, around me (particularly what I was doing), what the occasion was, if there were any, (in one of the poems it happens to be my birthday and I'm in a room alone). I would try to give each of those as much weight as they should have, no more, no less. Then in the second part of the sonnet, the six-line part, I would move to the inside of my head, and there would be a series of thoughts, the things that were on my mind. Then, most of the time, they would be the main things that were on my mind. Some of them would be phrased with humor, some of them would be phrased directly, some of them would be not so heavy, some of them would be very heavy. I might say "I wonder if my old loves ever give any thought to me?" or I might say "I wonder if I'm fooling myself about taking drugs?" or I might say "I wonder if people talk about me secretly?" or I might simply talk about common needs like "I wonder if there's any toilet paper." Each one of those kinds of statements is meant to stand for something, and yet I wrote these poems fast. I wrote them as fast as I could write them. I didn't have to build conceits, I didn't have to evolve the root metaphor in any way. I simply had to spill out what was inside me and I had to have a vessel to spill it out into. And I had found one, so that's what I did. Then I found that I was actually making the vessel. I was making whatever I was spilling out into. Last night I told someone that in this workshop I was going to say that content is only an extension of form. I think this is almost as valid to say almost as to say form is only an extension of content. For me it was and still is.

The next thing I discovered (after discovering whatever it was I told you I discovered) was that for me the sonnet—the Shakespearian sonnet and later on my own sonnet—seems to me to be made up of units, and those units were lines. This discovery, like any discovery, was perfectly true for the situ-

ation under which it was being discovered. It needed discovery. It doesn't matter whether light travels in waves or whether it travels in particles, I mean it doesn't matter to me. But it mattered to Einstein and he had to know, and of course what he found out is that it travels in both, which is a physical impossibility, but it does anyway.

I discovered that the basic unit of the sonnet was the line, the single line. That was interesting, because the basic unit for me when I'm writing is the phrase. I think in phrases, and the way that I write a poem is that I will often get a phrase or two or three and they won't necessarily be the ones that I will begin the poem with, but they will be what drive me to the paper and pencil, and from that I will build the work. I might start it with them or I might put them in the middle. So I had to work a coordination between the fact that my basic unit was the phrase and the fact that I was going to make a lot of sonnets out of lines, as if each line were a two-by-four. And I was going to make them like a ladder, a ladder with the sides taken away. Now there's a problem with the ends of the lines because if my ear told me that a line was long enough while I was still in the middle of one my phrases, I couldn't really put the rest of that phrase on the next line without destroying the sense of the line as a unit. Or could I? I wanted every line, you see, to be able to be read as a separate unit by itself. I didn't necessarily want it to have meaning by itself, but it had to be there, it had to exist the way that the squares exist in a Josef Albers work or the way the stripes do in a Jasper Johns flag work. I wanted the lines to have unity, and so the first line of the sonnet might say "I like to beat people up" and the second line might say "Absence of passion principles love." There's a period after that "love," and then it says "she murmurs" and then the third line says "What just popped into my eye was a fiend's umbrella." So it says "I like to beat people up, absence of passion, principles love, she murmurs, what just popped into my eye was a fiend's umbrella." Now, I'm not sure whether "she murmured" that people who like to beat people up suffer from "absence of passion principals love," or whether she's murmuring that what just popped into her eye was a fiend's umbrella, and frankly I don't care, because I wanted to have a "she murmuring" in there, you see. The rest of it was really inconsequential to me.

After "what just popped into my eye was a fiend's umbrella," the next line says "and if you should come and pinch me now" and the next line says "as I go out for coffee." Now, reading all those lines together: "I like to beat people up, absence of passion principals love, she murmurs, what just popped into my eye was a fiend's umbrella, and if you should come and pinch me now, as I go out for coffee." That works pretty well actually, I mean that makes some sense, I think, and it creates an environment and, now, how did I do that? I wish I could tell you, I don't remember.

Let's see if I *can* find one I can remember. Perhaps turning back to the first one, whose first line says "his piercing pince-nez, some dim frieze" is the first line. Those are notations: I was thinking of a picture of a particular person with a pince-nez and it was a profile shot, or a three-fifths profile shot, and the shape of the head and the hair made it seem as if a penetrating gaze was coming out of it. In the next part of that line, "some dim frieze" wasn't what the person was looking at with his piercing pince-nez, because his piercing pince-nez was on his face in the photograph which contained nothing but his face. However, "some dim frieze" was what *I* was looking at, which was a frieze on the side of one of the buildings in the quadrangle at Columbia University. But I did put those two phrases together, in any case. What the poems are going to be about, that's the first line of the whole sequence. I intended the poems to be a kind of dim frieze, but also, it was dim because it was night, you see, and it required a piercing look to make out what it actually was. (I was writing all these poems at night, but I didn't stop to think any of that.) All right, the first line is "his piercing pince-nez some dim frieze," the second line

says “hands point to a dim frieze in the dark night,” the third line says “in the book of his music the corners have straightened,” and the fourth line says “which owes their presence to our sleeping hands.” Now, it all seems to make sense, except in the line “which owe their presence to our sleeping hands.” What is the antecedent of “their?” I’m not sure, but because before that it says “in the book of his music the corners have straightened”: now that’s what I think that “their” refers to “the corners,” the straightened corners. If you’re reading a book over a period of days, you turn the corners down when you stop and you turn them back up when you go on. Well, if you never read that book anymore for 25 years, the corners will probably straighten out pretty well: I mean, you can barely even tell that they were ever turned down. That is, the book might be one that is no longer consulted. If it’s a book of music, it might be about a music that is out of fashion, and the reason it may be out of fashion is because of “sleeping hands.” I postulate all this now, but I didn’t think any of this when I was writing the poem. Anyone can do what they like with it. However, I got each one of those lines from four different poems that I had written, and which I thought were not bad poems, but they weren’t really successful enough and they were a little too much like someone else’s poems I was imitating at the time. But I did have a theme going on in these earlier poems, and looking at them it came to me that I could take a line from each poem, by selection of eye rather than mind.

I placed the earlier poems one on top of the other and made a mental rule that I would take one line from each one. There were six of them. I simply looked and found a line, but I didn’t always just grab the first one I looked at. If I looked and it didn’t resonate, I didn’t take it; but after having taken one, I would type it up, then turn the page, where I would take another one. It had to come up at me. In each case it did, and having gone through the six, I went through them again backwards and got six more. And by the time I had done that, I already knew what the final two would be, and that’s how I made the first sonnet. I made some others like that too, and then again there are many that I wrote straight through, all the way. So for me the unit of the sonnet is the line. It’s interesting to know what your own basic unit of writing is. Robert Creeley’s, for example, is probably the word. I’m very interested in the way Creeley does things, because I like to have there be the same distance between each word in every poem, in every line. I like that to be the constant musical element in my poems, and Bob does too, but for Bob the phrase is not his musical unit, and it is mine.

Each sonnet will break up into groups of eight and six lines and the eight will be a coming in and the six will be going out, but they will also break up into, let’s say, three quatrains and a final couplet. That’s a breaking I use a lot. In the first quatrain, you simply attempt to get something said, some things that you will use in the rest of the work. In the second one, you possibly attempt to set up the opposite of those things or to bring in some new things or to make a total digression. In the third one, I usually try to start turning it around and coming down the homestretch, and now I’m going to tell you something, I have to deliver something, and what I deliver is going to be in the face of everything else I’ve said before, and then there will be the final two lines and in the final two lines I like to make a statement which is quite different from telling you something. I like to simply make a statement. Sometimes I like to make a melodramatic statement. I like to make a statement which will cast a certain light on the whole poem and on everything that you’ve read before. I like it to be a kind of statement which will identify really clearly what kind of person has been talking to you in this poem (many times something I will have been trying to fool you about throughout the first three quatrains).

You can also write a sonnet in seven couplets. I’ve done some of those, those are fun to do. I’ve written some in which the sonnet consists entirely of fourteen kinds of sentences or statements. I haven’t

found any way yet in which you can write a sonnet consisting of fourteen lines that's just one simple statement, possibly there is some way that you can do that, but usually in order to make a poem you have to ring at least one change.

I do all these things is simply to have my poems be "true," like they say, because my poems are about what happens to me in my life as I see it or imagine it or fantasize it or do whatever. The "I" that I'm talking about, the "me," is just a person in this world. I don't write my poems about Ted Berrigan the poet, but about "me" Ted Berrigan. If I'm writing the poem, though, I may throw in something about the person that's writing, because it may occur to me suddenly that that guy I'm talking about is also scribbling something with a pencil or hitting the typewriter keys. You know, I might even to write a beautiful line like "I can hear today's key sounds fading softly" near the end of a poem, which means (secretly) that I've almost finished typing. But it might also mean, and it has to mean—in fact at the same time—that I am getting sleepy and about to go into sleep and can hear today's key sounds fading softly.