RecitationWhiz®

A Structural Method
for Memorizing Poems
and Other Texts

by Robert Oliphant, PhD

Robert Oliphant's bestseller, *A Piano for Mrs. Cimino* (Reader's Digest USA, Canada, and Australia) was also (same title) a prize-winning film (Monte Carlo) that starred Bette Davis and is still being shown worldwide. A WWII air corps veteran, he studied English philology under Herbert Dean Meritt at Stanford, is an emeritus Professor of English at California State University, Northridge, and currently writes a column for Education News.org.

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(1) Poetry, Memorization, and Structural Learning

Historically and prehistorically there's absolutely nothing new about poetry as an expressive form of language. Certainly our hunter-gatherer ancestors kept track of important knowledge by expressing it in a form that could be carried around in the mind, as opposed to being laboriously carved into a rock or the wall of a cave. Even today schoolchildren use counting rhymes that are transmitted from one playground generation to the next, as described by the Opies in "The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren."

Nor is there anything new about the current popularity of "slam poetry" as a rhythm-based spoken form of expression. Under the classification of "talking blues," there have been many, many "slam" poetry hit records, including actual use of the term as a rhythmic marker in the printed version of "Trouble" from Merideth Wilson's *Music Man*, e.g., "TROUBle! SLAM. PAUSE. Yes, you've got TROUBble, my friends, SLAM- SLAM, with-a great big TEE that RHYMES with PEE that STANDS for POOL!"

What's fundamentally new about this book is its recognition of how important learning poetry and other texts has become in the lives of Americans, all of us. The most dramatic sign of that growing importance is our national "Poetry Out Loud" recitation competition for high school students, especially this year's 300,000 competitors, as opposed to only 40,000 four years ago. But this shift from passive reading to active preparation and performance also characterizes our immense "personal best" invovlement in 10Ks, marathons, amateur theatricals, memorizing and reciting family anecdotes, and even crossword puzzle solving — nearly

all of which emphasize doing one's best with what one has, not just winning at any cost.

Strategically considered, this book therefore focuses upon structural learning as a key feature in what might be called "personal best" America. Apart from those born with an "Irish ear" (not me), most of us begin to lose our rote-repetition skills after age 16 (both Vygotsky and Alfred North Whitehead have pointed this out), enough so that memorizing, say, a restaurant's menu is just as much a nightmare for many entry level job seekers as memorizing anatomical terms is for first year medical students.

But poems, thank heaven, are put together quite differently from restaurant menus and vocabulary lists. Their primary construction tool is our natural-rhythm marching pattern LEFT-right, LEFT-right, LEFT-right, LEFT-right — again, again, and yet again — as a bonding feature for both today's boot camp trainees (who can forget it?) and their predecessors in the legions of Rome. All this pointed out in *Keeping Together in Time*, by William H. McNeill, one of our most distinguish historians.

By way of pulling the marchers even more closely together through their common language, words and even melodies can be crafted to fit a 4-beat pattern like this in a sequence of 4-beat lines linked together by their rhyming final words. Consider the first two-line stanza of Joyce Kilmer's "Trees": "I think that I shall *nev*er SEE/ A poem lovely as a TREE." Poems, songs, even great speeches ("of the people, by the people, for the people") — they all all appeal to our physical being, to the savage in us, if you will. As the great French poet Paul Valery put it, "Poetry is MEMORABLE" (emphasis added). All of it can be remembered, and the best of it should be: generation by generation, and learner by learner.

For learners the memorability of poetry is greatly increased by its visual line-by-line shape, often broken up by spaces to separate individual rhyming groups (stanzas). Since this visual presentation reveals a poem's structure far more clearly than is spoken presentation, it invites learners, especially those over 16, to memorize desirable poems on the basis of their structural comprehension, very much like having a visual picture of "Trees" as a whole in our minds eye before trying to recall individual lines. Simply put, a savage ear and a civilized eye are all we need to learn a desirable target of 32 lines or less (usually about 200 words), be it a conventional rhymed poem, free verse, or even a passage of important prose.

As most of us know, though, learning a poem is far less challenging and frightening than reciting it to a friend or presenting it to a live audience, e.g., a wedding or funeral, not just a classroom. Certainly our LEFT-right learner's rhythm will come across as deadly "sing song" to our audience if we fail to breathe life and meaning into the words sentence by sentence and idea by idea, not just line by line. What's called for, just as in acting, is first of all the ability to visualize and "love" our audience, as Robert E. Lee advised generals to love their soldiers.

Second, and even more important, is a determination to bring all the resources of our body into play: voice, eyes, facial movement, physical movement, the hands, the hands, the hands. Some of this will be just plain acting, though the poet-critic Yvor Winters has claimed that "actors make bad poetry sound mediocre and good poetry sound mediocre." Some of it may invade the craft of the public speaker (both Churchill and Reagan were poetry memorizers). Overall, though, recitation skills are the servants

of our memories: If we know the words, the rest of the song will usually fall neatly into place for us.

What's here introduces you to the magic world of textual memorization in three sections. The first of these, as indicated by our table of contents, covers a full range of poetry memorization targets: short poems, Shakespearean and Petrachan sonnets, free verse, and song lyrics. It closes with a ranked list of 100 classic short poems, all of them in public domain and available via internet, e.g., www.poetryproject.com.

Our second section presents uses our ear-eye structural system as a tool for mastering five traditional prose targets: The 23rd Psalm, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, The Declaration of Independence (opening and conclusion), The Bill of Rights, and the Conclusion to Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Since these qualify as national patriotic documents, their recitation is still in demand at public ceremonies. Even more important the effort you spend will equip you to create and master other prose targets on your own — your own speeches, for example.

Our third section goes even further in the creativity department. Once memorized, a poem becomes a personal possession, but it also retains its own factual identify, just like a telephone number. This means your solitary consciousness can summon it up and use it as a basis for new, original MEMORABLE thoughts of your own, since they'll be linked to an unchanging source.

Fitting the words of a poem to a melody is one such spin-off activity; so is composing a new poem of your own using the rhyming words of one you've learned. It's best, of course, to start with pencil and paper. But in the long run you'll find that "in the head" productivity is a marvelously

powerful source of personal satisfaction and self confidence. Understandably so, since the urge goes back to prehistoric times and is probably in our genes.

But will this work for ME? . . . Education, sad to say, usually involves an outsider, often a self-appointed expert, telling us what to do with our life, especially the time element. So it's only fair to tell you how I got started in memorizing poems and what it's done for me personally. If this narrative rings true, I feel you'll feel far more comfortable than if I throw buckets of statistics and endorsements at you.

My own first step into memorization began when I read an article by the late Norman Cousins (a holistic medicine guru) about his involvement with UCLA researchers who hooked him up to an electroencephalograph and asked him to "concentrate." As Cousins told the story, he met this challenge by "matching up the words of the Gettysburg Address to th tune of Battle Hymn of the Republic." This turned out to be twenty-minute task which produced an impressively high alpha wave reading for what was taking place in his brain, as well as — even better — producing a fairly well polished recitation which he then recited to the awe-struck researchers.

My personal reaction to this story was one of stunned chagrin. First, I myself had never learned the Gettysburg Address; and second, I couldn't imagine myself sustaining that level of concentration on my own, since I was in my early seventies. So I decided to buy a poetry anthology, William Harmon's *The Top 500 Poems* (Columbia, 1992) and see how far I could go down the Cousins memory lane with poetry, not prose.

During the following years (I'm now 85) I must have memorized over 30,000 words from the Harmon anthology, some of the targets quite long, e.g. Milton's "Lycidas," which was our Siamese cat's favorite. And I even Imemorized the Gettysburg Address and other prose works. Even more surprising, especially in the concentration department, is that I was also, for the first time in my life, to stick with a diet-exercise program and lose 80 pounds (from 254 down to 174, according to Kaiser Permanente records).

I hope the above narrative rings true, along with the case I've made for structural memorization for all Americans, young and old. To tell the truth, I feel a bit tacky playing the "age card" here. But I suspect it may help some readers trust what's here more than otherwisde might be the case. And trust, expecially in times like these, is certainly what we all need as a basis for taking action — and getting desirable results.

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Section One: Memorizing Poems

LEARNER'S NOTE. . . . If the next three chapters (2, 3, and 4) ring true to you personally, you could close this book and start re-empowering your concentration and memory right away. Certainly poems you've previously learned and then forgotten are ideal targets — old friends waiting for a class reunion, we might say. If you want suggestions, Chapter Seven contains a ranked list of learning-friendly famous poems, i.e., under 33 lines and available online and in library anthologies.

   Chapters Five and Six deal with memorizing free verse and songs, both of which will appeal more to special interest readers. So for openers our 2-3-4-7 quartette is more than enough to get your personal best program moving. Remember it's your time that will drive this train and your enthusiasm that will keep it on the track.

   The rest of what is intended to be helpful and interesting, of course. But this first section may turn out to be the star of the show for you, especially if you have a friend or family member to test you here and there.

(2) Memorizing a Two-Stanza Poem

The memorization of poetry is once more on the march. Ambitious choir directors now insist their singers, all of them, learn the words by heart. Gerontologists push at-risk senior citizens to stand up and declaim Casey at the Bat. Even the National Endowment for the Arts, long a haven for professor-poets, is now sponsoring competitions where young people bravely stand up in public and recite Shakespearean sonnets.

   With more of us, including older Americans, headed for sweaty-palmed ordeals like these, we clearly need to replace traditional rote-repetition learning with an approach that brings our visual memory into play. . . . By way of illustration, let's look at a poem by A.E. Housman

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipped maiden
And many a light-foot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The light-foot boys are laid.
The rose-lipped girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

In actual performance there are of course no line-endings and line-beginnings, since recitation- performance takes place in time (about a hundred words a minute), not on a piece of paper. But its underlying pattern is still highly visual, especially the three stressed syllables for each line and the rhyming words that end each alternate line in an ab, ab, cd, cd pattern.

　　We can represent this visual pattern (even in our mind's eye) as an 8-line grid in which we retain the words that begin and end each line. The other words we'll represent by their initial letters, along with indicating extra syllables with hyphens.

With rue	*m*	*h*	*i*	*laden*
For golden	*fr*	*l*	*had,*	
For many	*a*	*r*	*l*	*maiden*
And many	*a*	*l*	*f*	*lad.*
By brooks	*t*	*br*	*f*	*leaping*
The light	*f*	*l*	*a*	*laid.*
The rose	*l*	*g*	*a*	*sleeping*
In fields	*wh*	*r-*	*fade.*	

COMMENT. . . . Given our crossword-style clues, most readers will be able to supply at least half of the twenty words that have been omitted in our learning-grid version, along with explaining the reasoning behind their guesses, e.g., the fact that BROOKS and BROAD both begin with a BR-sound. Given this natural ear for language, there's no need for us to get into technical terms and literary interpretation as memorization aids.

　　What's involved here is simply the operation of a communication system via which a writer composes a "concentration-friendly" poem of two verses in which the lines fall into a recognizable pattern and therefore make far more impact upon reader-learners than would be the case with a composition whose pattern is less recognizable and "memory friendly."

　　By way of illustration: The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution is only four words longer than our 54-word Housman poem. But it would probably take twice as long to memorize, especially for learners over forty. Simply put,

most of us have lost the marvelous rote-learning skills that served us so well when we were children. Hence the need for us to "see" our memory target as a whole and recognize how it works.

LEARNING GRIDS. . . . There's nothing exotic about constructing learning-grids. Simply transcribe the memory target line by line, omitting a few words in the middle of each line at first. After each successful reconstruction of the poem, blot out more words and try your hand at a higher level of challenge.   The direct involvement of your fingers, along with hearing the words in your mind's ear, will produce a multi-sensory memorization experience for you, in which connection it might be noted that many actors, including John Gielgud, follow the classical technique of writing out all the words in a part at least three times.

Don't expect too much of yourself at first. You may, for example, soak up this poem almost immediately, only to find it disappear from your conscious memory two hours later. This is as it should be, since forgetfulness is the primary defense of the human mind against invasion by outsiders. Consequently you'll have to "rehearse" it again and again (literally "re-harrow the same ground") until it becomes part of your consciously accessible memory. Overall I feel 40 words an hour is a good preliminary estimate for learning patterned verse, especially those that use conventional four-line stanzas.

     As far as self-testing goes, your ability to recall the rhyming words is an excellent starting point (*laden, had, maiden, lad; leaping, laid, sleeping, fade*). And these rhyming words will serve as very strong clues for recalling at least half of the actual lines (try it). Beyond that, you could ask a friend or family member to throw questions at you like "What word immediately precedes LADEN?" or what word immediately follows the phrase BY BROOKS?" If you grit your teeth and close your eyes in taking on challenges like these (just like lifting weights), that's a good sign you're starting to strengthen your most precious learning resource: **concentration**.
*

(3) Learning Shakepearean Sonnets by Heart

The term "Shakespearean sonnet" points in two directions. For most of us it means a 14-line poem written by Shakespeare himself. But it is also specifically defined in the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* as "a sonnet form used by Shakespeare and having the rhyme scheme abab, cdcd, efef, gg. Also called English sonnet, Elizabethan sonnet." To memorize one Shakespearean sonnet therefore opens the door to hundreds of others and even to your own personal-best writing using this form (roughly 110 words) that takes up only a minute to recite (a "moment's monument," Dante Gabriel Rossetti called the form).

    Regarding Shakespeare: It's worth noting here that his sonnets are right now easily available for downloading via *www.eserver.org/poetry/sonnets* and other sources. In addition, American dictionaries consistently list Shakespearean words and Shakespearean meanings for familiar words. So his sonnets are natural candidates for personal best learning, especially Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day" (recently featured in the film "Shakespeare in Love").

In the interests of stronger visualization we'll present our target first as a sequence of three 4-line stanzas followed by a closing couplet, as was customary in the memorization-friendly 19th century. After this, we'll indicate the stressed syllables of its iambic pentameter pattern (five stresses per line) along with some structural-design notes in brackets. Finally, as with our Housman poem, we'll present our target in a learning-grid self-testing format.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (sonnet 18)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Visual-Rhythmic Version: Sonnet 18

NOTE. . . . The phrase "iambic pentameter" described a line of poetry whose words fit a pattern of five stressed syllables (pentameter), each of which is preceded by an unstressed syllable. This pattern allows a few exceptions, but on the whole it's consistently followed and is a marvelous memory clue when counted out on the fingers.

   By way of illustrating this consistency, the following version places an accent mark above the vowel-letter of each stressed syllable, e.g., "Shall Í com-páre thee tó. . . ." For greater emphasis we could capitalize the stressed syllables, as in "Shall I comPARE thee TO. . . ." But once you become familiar with the accent-mark approach, the basic rhythm for each line will sing its way into your awareness and into your memory.

   As you may remember from school, you should NOT recite or read a poem aloud with this rhythm pattern (teachers used to call it "sing-song"). But you should certainly hear it like a softly beaten bass drum in your mind's ear that you can could ("and /ONE and TWO and THREE and FOUR and/ ONE [rest] [rest] [rest]." etc.)

   By way of additional memory clues, the following versions offers descriptive labels for the line units, paralleling the process used by Helen Vendler in *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets (Harvard 1997)*.

[a comparison with summer rejected]
Shall Í com-páre thee tó a súm-mer's dáy?
Thou árt more lóve-ly ánd more tém-per-áte.

[two time-of-year reasons]
Rough wínds do sháke the dár-ling búds of Máy,
And súm-mer's léase hath áll too shórt a dáte;

[three natural-change reasons]

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Some-tíme too hót the éye of héav-en shínes,
And óf-ten ís his góld com-pléx-ion dímmed;
And év-ery fáir from fáir some-tíme de-clínes,
By chánce or nát-ure's cháng-ing cóurse un-trímmed.

[three advantages of eternal summer]
But thý e-tér-nal súm-mer sháll not fáde,
Nor lóse pos-séss-ion óf that fáir thou ów-est;
Nor sháll Death brág thou wánd-erest ín his sháde,
When ín e-tér-nal línes to tíme thou gró-west.

[this poem offers eternal summer to its subject]
So lóng as mén can bréathe or éyes can sée,
So lóng lives thís, and thís gives lífe to thée.
*

Learning-Grid Version: Sonnet 18

Omitted words are represented with their initial letters; additional syllables are represented by dashes, e.g., "c-" for "compare." After reading this target twice, preferably out loud, you will be able to identify the omitted words with 70% accuracy. . . . Achieving complete memorization will take longer, usually about 3 hours of concentration effort (40 words an hour, including rehearsals) for a strong-pattern target like this. If you can also remember most of the line-ending rhyming words, that's a very good sign of a natural poetic "ear."

Shall I   c-   th   t   a   summer's day?
Thou art   m   l-   a   more temperate.
Rough winds   d   sh   th   d-   b   of May
And summer's   l   h   a   t   sh   a date.

Too hot   th   e   o   h-   sometime shines
And often   i   h   g   complexion dimmed;
And every   f   f   f   sometime declines,
By chance   o   n-   ch-   course untrimmed.

But thy   e--   s-   sh   not fade,
Nor lose   p--   o   th   f   thou owest;
Nor shall   d   br   th   w-   i   his shade,

When in   e--   l   t   t   thou growest.

So long   a   m   c   br   a   e   can see,
So long   l   th   a   th   g   l   to   thee.
*

COMMENT. . . . The reasoning behind the above "no frills" grid can be summed up in the phrase, Personal-Best Velcro-Style Learning. . . . If we view each poem-target as a learning-system, we can fairly describe its operation as a kind of dating-game search for a lasting or "sticky" match between two different actors: (a) the poem and (b) the learner's memory — very much like bringing two different pieces of Velcro up against one another.

   To pursue our analogy further: My piece of Velcro sticks right away to words like "brag" and "owest," along with noticing alliterative links like Brag/Breathe. I've discovered, though, that the memories of other learners "stick" to different words and linking features, even though we all in time reach the same goal, namely, the ability to produce an accurate recital of Sonnet 18 that satisfies our mind's ear and also rings true to friends and family members.

   As I see it, this common sense discovery indicates that personal-best memorization takes advantage of personal differences, very much like different detectives reconstructing the scene of the same crime. All that's called for, then, is a lot of helpful clues at the outset followed by fewer and fewer clues until near perfection is reached.

   By way of testing your own near-perfection, put your reconstruction skills to work on only our 14 line-closing rhyming words, namely, DAY, TEMPERATE, MAY, DATE. . . . SHINES, DIMMED, DECLINES, UNTRIMMED. . . . FADE, OWEST, SHADE, GROWEST. . . . SEE, THEE.

TO CONCLUDE: What's here is not just a memory-friend version of Sonnet 18. Rather it's a technique you can use to construct your own learning-grid version of ANY poetic target as a basis for making it stick Velcro-style in your own distinctively different mind step by step. Just as important, you'll find your concentration and memory power will improve, measurably so, with every target you take on and every hour you spend.

System, Concentration, Accuracy, Measurement, and Personal Best.

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These SCAMP-themes have certainly appeared in the last two chapters. If they make sense to you at this point, the rest of this book should make more and more sense to you as you go forward — just like bumping into old friends at a somewhat exotic amusement park (Memoryland?).
*

(4) Memorizing a Petrarchan Sonnet

Like Shakespearean sonnets, the Petrarchan sonnet is named after the poet who made it popular, namely, Francisco Petrarch. The definition appears in most dictionaries, e.g., the Random House Unabridged definition, "A sonnet form popularized by Petrarch, consisting of an octave with the rhyme scheme abbaabba and of a sestet with one of several rhyme schemes, as cdecde or cdcdcd. Also called Italian sonnet."

A learner friendly poetic form

 Petrarchan sonnets can fairly be called learner-friendly but writer-unfriendly. As opposed to Italian, the English language is not very rich in rhymes (Chaucer's contemporaries Langland and the Pearl Poet wrote alliterative, not rhymed verse). This means that a learner will have a very simple pattern to recognize with only four or five rhyme-groups in 14 lines, as opposed to a Shakespearean pattern of 7 rhyme-pairs in the same number of lines.

    For writers, though, composing sentences in which groups of four words must rhyme with each other represents a major memory-search challenge, as well as a way of developing one's craft. William Butler Yeats recommended it (paralleling Cyrano de Bergerac's ballade-duel in the film). Robert Frost mastered the Petrarchan form and once rather snobbishly observed that "writing free verse is like playing tennis without a net." Hence the desirability of non-rhyme forms like the *cinquain* and *haiku* as a first step for beginning poets, after which they can move on to more demanding traditional-form challenges

    Petrarch's dates (1304-74) indicate that the sonnet form developed in late medieval times. So scholars like Christopher Dawson have suggested it was borrowed via Provence from Arabic Spain, which at the time had reached a high level of court poetry with intricate rhyming forms (the Koran is written in rhymed prose, by the way)

As old as Arnaut Daniel, as new as Robert Frost and Theodore Roethke — it's somewhat humbling, I feel, to think of the Petrarchan sonnet as a long-lived tool that can still play a therapeutic role in our lives.

Rules of the poetic game and multi-sensory reconstruction

Language rules create language intelligibility. The rules of Pig Latin, for example, simply call for detaching a word's initial consonant or consonant cluster, moving it to the end and adding the vowel-sound –AY (if there's no consonant, a YAY is added. For strangers the result is gibberish, e.g., *ethay ulesray ovyay igpay atinlay*. But for those who know the rules, even five-year-olds, Pig Latin sentences make perfect sense, even when utterd at very high speeds.

In traditional information-theory terms we would say the rules create predictability (or redundancy) and this predictability-redundancy overcomes uncertainty (noise), thereby ensuring the message comes across clearly to the recipient and to the recipient's memory. In plain language we would simply say that a *difficult poetic form* will be *easier for a learner* to memorize than an easy-to-write form, e.g., unrhymed "blank" or "free" verse.

PETRARCHAN RULES. . . . The rules for writing a Petrarchan, as pointed our earlier, are stricter than those for a Shakespearean sonnet: two 4-word rhyming groups and two 3-word rhyming groups, as opposed to seven 2-word rhyming groups. Consequently, by way of working within these rules, the Petrarchan sonneteer stretches often stretches the language a little more. One way is to use "off" rhymes like *ways/grace*; another is to compose sentences that spill over from one line to the next, sometimes called *enjambment I*(as in *doorjamb*).

Thanks to stratagems like these, many Petrarch sonnets come across to the ear as more "natural" than some easier-to-compose Shakespearean sonnets. The form is a good example of the traditional editorial principle that "maximum-effort writing makes for minimum-effort reading — and learning."   One advantage of the octave's abbabaab rhyme scheme is that it "pulls" the reciter along without pausing. In contrast the abab cdcd stanzas invite pausing and blanking out at the end of each stanza.

Mind's ear learning

18

This version of a Elizabeth Barrett Browning's world famous love poem uses accent marks to indicate the stressed vowels called for by its iambic pentameter pattern, e.g., "Shall I comPARE thee TO a SUMmer's DAY. Read aloud with emphasis, the effect is "sing song," not a natural reading. But sing-song, just like marching and chanting in boot camp hammers the target into mind and body simultaneously. This version also follows the nineteenth century practice of dividing a Petrarchan sonnet into an octave and a sestet.
*

How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways. . . .

PRELIMINARY NOTE. . . . The Petrarchan sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning will be presented in three stages. First will come the original version, to which will be added accent marks over stressed syllables. It's important to remember that these indicate the basic five-beat rhythmic pattern of each line (pentameter), not the natural way in which you yourself would read these lines aloud. . . . Next will come an easy learning-grid version in which two or three words are removed from the middle of each of the 14 lines. This will be followed by a more challenging learning-grid in which more words have been removed, thereby creating a more demanding visual-reconstruction challenge for you. The poem is presented here with a two-stanza octave, followed by a six-line sestet. The five stressed syllables (including one-syllable words) are indicated by accent marks over the vowels.

ORIGINAL VERSION: "How Do I Love Thee?" (stressed syllables indicated with accent marks over their vowels)

How dó I lóve thee? Lét me cóunt the wáys.
I lóve thee tó the dépth and bróadth and héight
My sóul can réach, when féeling óut of síght
For énds of Béing ánd of ídeal Gráce.

I lóve thee tó the lével of évery dáy's
Most quíet néed; by sún and cándle-líght.
I lóve thee fréely ás men stríve for Ríght;
I lóve thee púrely, ás they túrn from Práise.

I lóve thee wíth the pássion pút to úse

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In my` old gríefs, and wíth my chíldhood's fáith.
I lóve thee wíth a lóve I séemed to lóse
With my` lost sáints, — I lóve thee wíth the bréath,
Smiles, téars of áll my lífe! — and, íf God chóose,
I sháll but lóve thee bétter áfter déath.
*

FIRST LEARNING GRID VERSION. . . . Omitted words are represented by their initial letters. If they contain more than one syllable, the extra syllables are represented by hyphens. Hyphenated words are represented as separate words, e.g., c- l for *candle-light*. After giving this a try, check your results against the full version. Then decide whether you want to check again or move on to the second learning-grid version.

How dó I lóve.... th?.... L.... m.... c.... the wáys.
I lóve thee tó the.... d.... a.... br.... and héight
My sóul can.... r....,.... wh.... f-.... óut of síght
For énds of.... B-.... á.... o.... ídeal Gráce.

I lóve thee.... t.... th.... l-.... of évery dáy's
Most quíet.... n....; b.... s.... and cándle-líght.
I lóve thee.... fr-.... á.... m....stríve for Ríght;
I lóve thee.... p-...., á.... th.... túrn from Práise.

I lóve thee.... w.... th.... p-.... pút to úse
In my` old.... gr...., a.... w.... my chíldhood's fáith.
I lóve thee.... w.... a.... l.... I séemed to lóse
With my` lost sáints, — l.... l.... th.... wíth the bréath,
Smiles, téars.... o.... á.... m.... lífe! — and, íf God chóose,
I sháll but.... l.... th.... b-.... áfter déath.

SECOND LEARNING GRID VERSION. . . . This version retains the basic frame of left-hand and right-hand, but it omits more words within the frame, somewhat like a Polaroid photo going gradually blank. After giving this a try, depending on how you do, you can either visit the original version or move on. If you decide to move on, you will also have to decide how to increase your mastery of the target. The simplest route is to use the 14 rhyming words as your primary clue. But beyond that, you should trust your natural abilities is locating other features, e.g., the recurrent phrase, "I love thee."

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How dó I.... l.... th?.... L.... m.... c.... th.... wáys.
I lóve thee t.... th.... d.... a.... br.... a.... héight
My sóul.... c.... r....,.... wh.... f-.... ó.... of síght
For énds... o.... B-.... á.... o.... í-.... Gráce.

I lóve.... th.... t.... th.... l-.... of é- -.... dáy's
Most quíet.... n....; b.... s.... a.... c-.... líght.
I lóve....th.... fr-.... á.... m....str.... for Ríght;
I lóve.... th.... p-...., á.... th.... t.... from Práise.

I lóve....th.... w.... th.... p-.... p.... to úse
In my`.... o.... gr...., a.... w.... m.... chíldhood's fáith.
I lóve.... th....w.... a.... l.... l.... séemed to lóse
With my` lost.... s...., — l.... l.... th.... w.... the bréath,
Smiles, ... t.... o.... á.... m.... l....! — and, íf God chóose,
I sháll.... b.... l.... th.... b-.... á-.... déath.

COMMENT. . . . It's important to remember here that a "frame" doesn't require time-consuming preparation. Practically considered, blotting out words with a small piece of cardboard or paper will achieve the same result. Also remember that the goal here is in-the-head mastery and possession, not just doing well on a learning-grid test. Your most important achievement will have two components: (a) remembering the 14 rhyme-ending words, and (b) being able to reconstruct the rest of the sonnet from those rhyme-ending words. After that, your in-the-head consciousness will do the rest. Don't worry if you go blank now and then. That's part of the process.
*

Mastering Modern Sonnets

The sonnet is still a flexible, active form. Some poets change the rhyming pattern of the sestet. Others keep the 14-line requirement but use a more idiosyncratic rhyme scheme. By way of illustrating that variety, along with bypassing the relatively unfamiliar vocabulary of Shakespeare and Donne, here are ten sonnets, each by a different author. Each is followed by its format initial (S for Shakespearean, P for Petrarchan, I for irregular) and its ranking position in the Granger's® index,1992. Each is available online and in major anthologies (they're all in *The Top 500 Poems*, ed. William Harmon, for example).

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The World Is Too Much with Us, William Wordsworth, P (r16). . . . Wordsworth was a prolific Petrarchian, many of them highly ranked in Granger's®.

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, John Keats, P (r17). . . . The comparison with Cortes is a famous slip, since it was actually Balboa, whose companions "looked at each other with a wild surmise/ silent on a peak in Darien."

Ozymandias, Percy Bysshe Shelley, I (r21). . . . The classic example of a "story within a story" — just like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Slightly offbeat semi-Petrarchan rhyming pattern.

God's Grandeur, Gerard Manly Hopkins, P (r36). . . . A Roman Catholic priest and a daring poetic innovator, his "The Windhover" (also Petrarchan) is top rank — and incredibly skillful.

Leda and the Swan, William Butler Yeats, P (r45). . . . A classic theme, a classic format, and a modern master whose "The Second Coming" was set to music by Judy Collins.

Lucifer in Starlight, George Merideth, P (r209). . . . Old Nick overflying "this rolling ball by clouds part screened" and encountering the stars, "which are the brain of Heaven."

Piazza Piece, John Crowe Ransom, P (r332). . . . A spooky "gentleman in a dustcoat" frightening "a lady young in beauty waiting." Repeats opening lines of octave and sestet.

Design, Robert Frost, P (r332). . . . A closing couplet: "What but design of nature to appall/ if design govern in a thing so small" (spiders, moths, flowers, etc.)

If We Must Die, Claude McKay, P (r434). . . . Not so well known as Langston Hughes, but a top-ranked Afro-American poet (remember, these top five-hundred poems outrank thousands and thousands of worthy competitors.

Chaucer, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, P,(r478). . . . Our greatest memory-friendly American poet. . . . Anyone who learns "Paul Revere's Ride" (it's very long) will never forget it.
*

TO CONCLUDE. . . As most of us know from experience, speaking to a group is always terrifying, especially in front of strangers, enough so that the internet (1/24/08) lists 528,000 hits for the phrase "fear of public speaking." As long as we're talking with friends and family, we usually communicate very well. But when we're talking to someone out of our professional and personal circle, very possibly on the other side of the planet, we can encounter serious problems making ourselves understood.

    Quite apart from building concentration power, memorizing poetry has always been celebrated as a "master speech teacher," especially when it comes to pronunciation. Even if you simply recite your targets to yourself during a morning walk, you're going to see and feel improvement very quickly. And so will others.

    For anyone fearful of his or her mnemonic capabilities (and who isn't these days?) the mastery of a few Petrarchan sonnets represents a very practical first step — and a highly civilized one.
*

(5) Learning Free-Verse Poems by Heart

Waltzes aside, we live in a four-beat world, and always have. Even the crows in my neighborhood favor four caws in sequence rather than two or three. William McNeil's *Keeping Together in Time* takes as its point of departure the extraordinary bonding power of chanting in unison during boot camp and basic training, going back to the Greeks (cf. Ajax in the *Iliad*) and even to the left-right footsteps of our putative simian forbears after they came down from the trees and began to walk upright and throw spears with their right hands (hence the need to place the left foot foremost).

    Almost all poetry in English — even free verse, as we'll see — has a four-beat core, especially if we recognize that, as in walking, a "rest" counts as a beat. Here are some examples (lines are separated by slashes.

FULL FOUR-BEAT LINES (tetrameter). . . . I THINK that I shall NEVer SEE/ a POem lOVEly AS a TREE (Joyce Kilmer "Trees"). . . . I WANdered

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LONEly AS a CLOUD/ that FLOATS on HIGH o'er VALES and HILLS (William Wordsworth, "The Daffodils").

FOUR-BEAT LINES WITH RESTS (trimeter). . . . With RUE my Heart is LAD-en [*rest*]/ for GOLDen FRIENDS I HAD [*rest*] (A.H. Housman, "With Rue My Heart Is Laden"). . . . Go. SOUL, the BODy's GUEST [*rest*]/ upON a THANKless Errand [*rest*]/ fear NOT to ASK the BEST [*rest*]/ the TRUTH shall BE thy WARrant [*rest*] (Sir Walter Ralegh, "The Lie").

LINES WITH SEVEN BEATS AND A REST ("fourteeners). . . . it LOOKED exTREMEly ROCKy FOR the MUDville NINE that DAY [*rest*]/ the SCORE was TWO to FOUR with BUT an INning LEFT to PLAY [*rest*] (Ernest Thayer, "Casey at the Bat."

FOUR-BEAT LINES ALTERNATING WITH THREE+REST LINES (the "ballad" pattern," or "divided fourteeners"). . . . It IS an ANcient MARiNER/ and he STOPpeth ONE of THREE [*rest*], Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Ancient Mariner"). . . ."You are OLD, father WILLiam," the YOUNG MAN said,/ "and your HAIR has beCOME very WHITE [*rest*] (Lewis Carroll, "Father William."

THREE BEAT+REST LINES ALTERNATING WITH A FOUR-BEAT LINE (the "poulter's measure," i.e., "baker's dozen"=13=3+3+4+3). . . . I NEVer SAW a PURple COW/ I NEVer HOPE to SEE one./ but THIS I WILL say Any HOW,/ I'd RATHer SEE than BE one (Gelett Burgess, "The Purple Cow")/

FOUR BEAT LINES ALTERNATING WITH ONE-BEAT LINES+THREE RESTS (iambic pentameter, including unrhymed iambic pentameter, i.e., "blank verse"). . . . to BE or NOT to BE, that IS the QUESTION (William Shakespeare, "Hamlet").
*

COMMENT. . . . Practically considered, our "four beat" principle means that we can individually "march" to the underlying rhythm of almost any poem, including solitary walks, parades, and group calisthenics. Even better, it means we can "translate" almost any piece of free verse into four-beat form as a prelude to memorizing it rhythmically and musically. By way of a test case, let's look at the original format of a very famous free-verse poem by Walt Whitman, "I Hear America Singing."

I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be, blithe and
strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing
on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, hatter singing as he
stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the plowboy's on his way in the morning, or at
noon intermission, or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the
girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day — at night the party of young fellows,
robust friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

COMMENT. . . . Read aloud, this non-traditional poem comes across beautifully, especially the natural pauses that are built into what is essentially one long, dramatically effective sentence. As far as memorizing goes, though, much like our savage forbears with their systolic-diastolic heartbeats, we are still a rhythmic species with a natural left-right, left-right orientation, usually in units of four strong beats each. Hence the desirability of representing "I Hear America Singing" as a sequence of four-line stanzas with four strong beats in each line.

A Mind's Ear Transcription of I Hear America Singing"

All this transcription does is to add extra line breaks, thereby five 4-line stanzas with four beats to each line, closed by a 2-line couplet. . . . Individual beats are indicated via accent marks, and key words are underlined. . . . Accent markings in multi-syllable words based on Webster's New World Dictionary. . . .Length: 154 words. (try clapping hands or snapping fingers to each stressed beat). If you're ambitious (just

like Norman Cousins), try singing these lines to the tune of "Greensleeves," assigning one syllable to two or more notes (melisma) where it feels right.

I héar América sínging, [rest]
the váried cárols I héar, [rest]
Thóse of mechánics, each óne singing hís
as it shóuld be, blíthe and stróng. [rest]

The cárpenter sínging hís [rest]
as he méasures his plánk or béam, [rest]
The máson sínging hís as hé
makes réady for wórk, or léaves off wórk,

The bóatman singing what belóngs to hím in his bóat,
the déckhand sínging on the stéamboat déck,
The shóemaker sínging as he síts on his bénch,
The hátter sínging ás he stánds,

The wóod-cutter's sóng, the plówboy's on his wáy
in the mórning, or at nóon intermíssion, or at súndown,
The delícious sínging of the móther, or of the yóung wife
at wórk, or óf the girl séwing or wáshing,

Each sínging what belóngs to hím [rest]
or hér and tó none élse, [rest]
The dáy what belóngs to the dáy— at níght
the párty of young féllows, róbust, fríendly,

Sínging with ópen móuths [rest]
their stróng melódious sóngs. [rest]

COMMENT. . . . Our four-beat requirement does not exclude lines with only three accented syllables, since the fourth beat is still there as an "empty" beat in marching or singing, e.g., "their STRONG melODeeuhs SONGS [rest]/" Rhythmically considered, it's amazing how neatly Whitman's phrases translate into a traditional verse pattern. The first stanza gives us two three-beat lines, followed by a four-beat line and a three-beat line — a total of 13 beats ("poulter's measure"), e.g., "Blest BE the TIE that BINDS"), limericks, and even Emily Dickinson ("I NEVver SAW a MOOR").

As might be imagined, one has to juggle a bit to come up with a rhythmic translation that works (a fast reading aloud is the best test). So different translators are bound to come up with different results as a first step toward bringing the mind's eye into play via a learning grid that retains the first and last words of each line, along with the initial letters for the remaining words, hyphens for extra syllables, and four dots as word-separators.

Thanks to these crossword-style clues, most readers can at this point achieve 70% accuracy or better — a giant step toward total memory mastery.

A mind's eye learning grid for "I Hear American Singing"

Following our previous approach, first and last words are retained in each line; initial letters areretained for other words; extra syllables are represented by hyphens, and key words are underlined.

I hear....A--....sínging,
the varied....   c-.... I héar,
Thóse o.... m-- ....e....ó....   singing hís
as it .... sh....   b,.... bl....and stróng

The carpenter.... .s-.... hís
as he measures.... h.... p.... or....   béam,
The mason.... s-....   h.... as hé
Makes ready   for.... w,.... o....   l.... off wórk,

The boatman.... s-.... wh.... b-....   t.... h in his bóat,
The deckhand.... s-.... o....   th.... steamboat déck,
The shoemaker.... s-.... a.... h.... s.... on   his bénch,
The hatter....   s-.... á.... he stánds,

The woodcutter's song,....   th.... pl-'s.... on his wáy
In the morning,.... o.... a....   n....   intermission, or at súndown,
Th delicious   s-.... o.... th.... m-,.... o.... of the young wife
at work, ... ó.... th.... g.... sewing or wáshing,

Each singing.... wh.... b-....   to hím
or her....a....   t.... none élse,

The day.... wh.... b-.... th....   day —   at níght
the party.... o.... y....   fellows, robust, fríendly,

Singing..... w.... open móuths
Their.... str....   melodious sóngs.
*

COMMENT. . . . Mnemonically considered, the level of concentration called for in making these mind's eye transcription decisions fixes the shape (and the sound) of our target in our mind much more forcefully than writing it out. Hence the surprisingly high (70%) mastery level achieved by the first stage of this mind's ear-and-eye method.

　　To be perfectly honest, though, reaching 100% mastery will take plenty of time and concentration. Since learning styles are bound to vary, our most productive route should take the form of honest do-it-yourself testing — enough so to shove our natural fear into the corner when we find ourselves staring nervously into a sea of unfamiliar faces.

TO CONCLUDE. . . . This chapter represents an ambitious effort to expand the resources of our concentration-memory-productive consciousness program. We began by centering upon the four-beat line as a key tool that encompassed trimeter, pentameter, fourteeners, and poulter's measure. Then we used these expanded resources to produce a translation of the free verse "I Hear America Singing."

　　As far as the reader's personal goals go, some of these matters may come across as side dishes, not the main course. On the other hand, attractive side dishes, even when untouched, contribute credibility to the meal as a whole, enough so, I hope, to make the reader feel comfortable about investing his or her personal-best concentration resources in learning some modern poetry by heart.

　　And Father Time, with or without whiskers, is the true scorekeeper in every personal-best game, is he not?
*

(6) Learning Songs by Heart

The quickest way for an American over fifty to upgrade his or her self confidence is to memorize the *Star Spangled Banner* — all of it. Here's why.

THE *STAR SPANGLED BANNER* IS OFFICIAL. . . . It's the national anthem and many youngsters, including Girl Scouts, had to learn all four verses by heart before WWII. As of 2005 we have had a handsomely sponsored National Anthem project (Walt Disney, American Legion, etc.) whose goal is to get more Americans, young and old, to learn the SSB. Even more important, the President of the USA has recently stated publicly (in connection with Spanish-language versions) that "Americans should learn all of the words to the Star Spangled Banner in English."

THE *STAR SPANGLED BANNER* IS VERY LONG. . . . Each of its four verses comprises two four-line stanzas: 16 stanzas totaling 318 words — roughly the equivalent of three Shakespearean sonnets. Consequently most Americans, especially during the last fifty years, have stopped after the first verse, even though each of the remaining three becomes progressively easier as the rhythm and rhyme scheme become more and more familiar.

MASTERY OF *THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER* IS IMPRESSIVE. . . . Personal best achievement doesn't have to take place in secret. Triathletes need to compare their finishing time with others in the same bracket, and so do 15- and 50-year old mnemonists. Given the reluctance of others, your achievement is bound to come across as both nationally important and unique, especially if you have something to say about the "story" it tells (e.g., those closing auxiliary verbs *does*, *may*, *doth*, and *shall*.

Risky though guarantees are, the learning-grid time you spend is almost certain to lift your self confidence to a new plateau and keep it there for a long, long time — visibly and prductively so.

The Language and Music Partnership

As a species we've clearly been involved with language and music for a very, very long time. Even now, some of us still retain the "Irish ear" that served us so well in effortlessly remembering tribal knowledge eons ago, just as some of our children are born with perfect pitch. As C.V. Darlington pointed out there are other skills, no longer relevant, that are clearly transmitted genetically, not acquired. The ability to wiggle one's ears is one, so is moving one's scalp, along with raising one eyebrow and furrowing the tongue.

Small wonder Wittgenstein and his Cambridge colleagues grew to believe that language and music originally comprised the same communication system.

Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan, Stephen Sondheim, Frank Loesser — these and others should actually be called "songsmiths," since they themselves composed both words and music, as opposed to working with a collaborator. Nor should we ignore the poetic skills of lyricists like Johnny Mercer and Lorenz Hart, who nearly always crafted a lyric with successive verses to fit a given melody. Francis Scott Key was such a lyricist, along with those whose new lyrics created new songs from existing melodies: "Love Me Tender" from *Aura Lee*, "What Child Is This?" from *Greensleeves*, etc.

Melody is of course the great mystery in music, more so than harmony; but poetry and song lyrics make sense to all of us as listeners, mnemonists, and even potential creators. Hence the sense of fulfillment that comes from "knowing all the words," even if our knack for singing them is far from perfect.

Memorizing the Star Spangled Banner

We'll begin with the full version, including accent marks that identify the four-beat pattern of each line. It should be noted that these strong beats are often preceded by two unstressed syllables, not just one, just like "LISTen my CHILDren and YOU shall HEAR/ of the MIDnight RIDE of PAUL ReVERE. Tradition has it, it incidentally, that the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt got her start by declaiming, not singing, the French national anthem La Marseillaise in one of her first theatrical auditions.
*

The Star-Spangled Banner, by Francis Scott Key (stressed syllables indicated by accent marks)

FIRST VERSE
O sáy, can you sée, by the dáwn's early líght,
What so próudly we háiled at the twílight's last gléaming?
Whose broad strípes and bright stárs, through the périlous fíght,
O'er the rámparts we wátched, were so gállantly stréaming?

And the rócket's red gláre, the bombs búrsting in áir,
Gave próof through the níght that our flág was still thére.
O sáy does that stár spangled bánner yet wáve
O'er the lánd of the frée, and the hóme of the bráve?

SECOND VERSE
On the shóre dimly séen through the místs of the déep,
Where the fóe's haughty hóst in dread sílence repóses,
What is thát which the bréeze, o'er the tówering stéep,
As it fítfully blóws, half concéals, half disclóses?

Now it cátches the gléam of the mórning's first béam,
In full glóry reflécted now shínes in the stréam:
'Tis the Stár-Spángled Bánner! O lóng may it wáve
O'er the lánd of the frée and the hóme of the bráve.

THIRD VERSE
And whére is that bánd who so váuntingly swóre
That the hávoc of wár and the báttle's confúsion
A hóme and a cóuntry should léave us no móre?
Their blóod has washed óut their foul fóotsteps' pollútion.

No réfuge could sáve the híreling and sláve
From the térror of flíght, or the glóom of the gráve:
And the Stár-Spangled Bánner, in tríumph doth wáve
O'er the lánd of the frée and the hóme of the bráve.

FOURTH VERSE
O thús be it éver when fréemen shall stánd
Betwéen their loved hómes and the wár's desolátion!
Blest with víct'ry and péace, may the Héav'n-rescued lánd

Praise the Pówer that hath máde and préserved us a nátion.

Then cónquer we múst when our cáuse it is júst,
And thís be our mótto: "In Gód is our Trúst."
And the Stár-Spangled Bánner in tríumph shall wáve
O'er the lánd of the frée and the hóme of the bráve!

COMMENT. . . . Even if this is our first encounter with our target, we now have a strong grasp of its basic four-beat rhythmic structure as a poem. We also have a good grasp of the rhyme pattern for each stanza.
*

Learning-grid version

Each partial transcription retains the initial letters of the word and indicates additional syllables, if any, with hyphens.   Don't be discouraged if you go blank on some of the partially transcribed words (70% correct is an excellent first-time score). Also, don't be afraid to guess and then check your guess against the original. It's your concentration effort that produces long term mastery, not just its immediate results.

FIRST VERSE
O say, c.... y.... s...., b.... th.... dawn's early light
What so proudly.... w.... h.... a.... th.... twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes....a.... br.... st...., thr.... th.... perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we.... w...., w.... s.... gallantly streaming?

And the rocket.'s.... r.... glare, th.... b.... b-.... in air,
Gave proof thr.... th.... n.... th.... o.... fl.... w.... still there.
O say does.... th.... st.... sp-.... banner yet. wave
O'er the l.... o.... th.... fr...., a.... th.... h.... o.... the brave?

SECOND VERSE
On the shore.... d-.... s.... thr.... th....m.... of the deep.
Where the foe's h-.... h.... i.... dread silence reposes,
What is that.... wh.... th.... br...., o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully.... bl...., h.... c-...., half discloses?

Now it catches th.... gleam o.... th.... m-....'s first beam,
In full glory re--.... n.... sh.... in the stream:

*'Tis the Star Sp-.... B-....! O.... l.... may it wave
O'er the land o.... th.... fr.... a.... th.... h.... o.... th.... brave.*

THIRD VERSE
*And where is th.... b.... wh.... s.... vauntingly swore
That the havoc o.... w.... a.... th.... battle's confusion
A home and a.... c-.... sh.... l.... us no more?
Their blood has w.... o.... th.... f.... footstep' pollution.*

*No refuge can.... s.... th....hireling and slave
From the terror.... o.... fl...., o.... th.... gloom of the grave:
And the Star .... Sp-.... B-.... i.... tr-.... doth. wave
O'er the land.... o.... th.... fr.... a.... th.... h.... o.... th.... brave.*

FOURTH VERSE
*O thus be i.... e-.... wh.... free-.... shall stand
Between their loved h.... a.... th.... war's desolation!
Blest with vict'ry a.... p...., m.... the Heaven rescued land
Praise the Power th.... h.... m.... a... preserved us a nation.*

*Then conquer we must wh.... o.... c.... i.... is just
And this be o.... m-....: "I.... G.... is our Trust."
And the Star Sp-.... B-.... i.... tr-.... shall. wave
O'er the land o.... th.... fr.... a.... th.... h.... o.... th.... brave!*
*

From Memory to Parody and Personal Best Creativity

Anyone who sings a song often begins to feel he or she owns the melody, enough so to craft a parody (i.e. traveling a "parallel road") of the lyric. Sometimes the results are what Dwight MacDonald called "intentionally unsuccessful forgeries" in which the source is quite clear, as in "Oh say can you see any bedbugs on me./ If you can take a few and then you'll have some too," or an effort based on *Moon River*, "My liver.... makes me feel so sad.... because it's going bad, you see." Other times the results can be quite respectable, as in *Love Me Tender* and *What Child Is This*?

   Given the strength of our melodic memory, parody is a very practical solitary-consciousness for you to experiment with. Simply pick a song you remember, even if you're shaky on some of the words, and work with whatever comes into your mind at first, after which your natural tenaciousness will probably take over and produce some highly satisfactory

results — either a complete whole or something to remember and work with later on using pencil and paper.

TO CONCLUDE. . . . As matters stand, you've covered a full range of poetry challenges: short, two-stanza poems, Shakespearean sonnets, Petrarchan sonnets, free verse, and songs. If you feel comfortable with our visual reconstruction approach, you could stop right now and construct your own memory-strengthening program, especially if you have a clear idea of what you want to memorize and why, and how much time you have to spend.

What's here is largely a program for saving time in the details department. As indicated in our next chapter, there's an optimum length for poetic memory targets. And there are also considerations of long-term popularity to take into account. Granted that it's your memorization time that involved and your journey of discovery, I think you'll agree it helps to have a guide for the trip who has visited the territory and stepped on some of the land mines. So here's hoping that what follows will be helpful.
*

(7) The 100-Poem Multiple Choice Testing Factory

Learning a new poem can be risky business. By way of illustration: Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (165 lines, 1155 words) is a great favorite of my friend and former colleague Arthur Lane, which was enough to push me into spending hours and hours and hours learning it by heart eleven years ago. After a month, though, I discovered that I had almost completely forgotten this famous poem. Later on I had the same dismal experience with T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (131 lines, 1048 words). Apart from group morale (military, school, team, etc.), I am convinced that learners should never be forced to learn and retain specific poems.

For this reason I now feel that the Poetry Out Loud program made a wise choice in expanding its number of personal-choice learning targets from 100 in 2005 to over 400 in 2009. Classic or modern, anyone who's going to stand up in front of strangers and risk going blank should be able to pick his or her own memory target, even if it's a recently created poem that hasn't been endorsed by traditionalist scholars. (In the interests of candor, I should admit here that as a traditionalist I was not an early supporter of the POL expansion policy and that events have proved I was wrong.)

FROM POETRY OUT LOUD TO POETRY ALL OVER. . . . The success of POL's learning-recitation program invites adaptation, not just slavish imitation. By way of illustration the following adaptation (let's call it "poetry in the head") retains the POL personal choice feature as presented in the appended list of 100 public domain poems. But the adaptation extends its potential range by replacing POL's high cost recitation feature with a low cost personal choice testing feature that invites use with a very wide range of potential participants — younger students, nonstudents, community groups, educational organizations, and even senior citizens.

Trees, Tigers, and Low Cost Poetry Testing
Let's start with an intentionally short personal choice target, namely, the first couplet of "Trees": *I think that I shall never see/ a poem lovely as a tree*.

In the POL program recitation serves as a first stage for a learner, which requires solo time, followed by an expert evaluation of the recitation's accuracy and dramatic effectiveness. Our low-cost alternative, on the other hand, limits itself to measures how accurate the learner's memory of the chosen poem is by focusing upon two key mnemonic features.

LINE IDENTITY. . . . With or without rhyming a poem is presented as a sequence of lines (hence Jeremy Bentham's observation that if the right hand margin is irregular, one is probably reading a poem. Hence each learner can reasonably be expected to know the specific words that appear at the end of each line, be it a 6-line poem like "Trees or a 14-line poem like Blake's "The Tiger," or a 165-line giant like "Tintern Abbey." This means that our memory of "Trees" includes a memory of the line-ending words, including those which appear more than once, and a memory of the relative position of the other "non-line ending words" in a line.

Based on the first couplet of "Trees," here are some potential learner-friendly test questions: (Q1) Please spell the first line-ending word of the couplet [*see*]. . . . (Q2) Please do the same for the second line-ending word [*tree*]. . . . (Q3) Please do the same for the word which immediately precedes the first line-ending word [*never*]. . . . (Q4) Please do the same for the word which immediately precedes the second line-ending word [a].

Since these questions identify relative positions, they will work just as well for the first two lines of any poem. Here are the answers for Frost's "Stopping by Woods: *know*, *though*, *I*, *village*. . . . Also, Blake's "The Tiger": *bright*, *night*, *burning*, *the*. By way of a personal best experiment, I invite the reader to try these four questions out on any familiar poem. They will also work with song lyrics that have a conventional line format, e.g.,

"Jingle Bells": *sleigh*, *way*, *open*, *the*. If desired, the relative positions can be extended to include "the word which comes BEFORE the word which immediately precedes the first line-ending word," etc.

THE MEMORY-FRIENDLINESS OF LINE-ENDING WORDS . . . As we'll see, tests based on line-ending words are amazingly cheap to produce and score. But are they fair as far as learners go? The answer, a positive one, can be summed up in one phrase, *structural memory*. This is to say that the architecture of each line is closed and defined by a single word, rhymed or not.

Practically considered architectural feature also means that when we're groping for a half-remembered word or words, a highly productive step is to start with neighboring line-ending words, e.g., *skies-grain-majesties-plain* of "America the Beautiful. Laterally considered the word *skies* reaches back across the page in our visual memory to cue the rest of the words in the rest of the line. Vertically considered, it stretches forward to cue the rhyming word *majesties* and other stanza-pattern line-ending words in lines that follow — along with many other words in each line.

Natural mnemonists, especially children, are able to memorize poetry very, very well via simple repetition, just like sponges mopping up a spill. But for most of us over 16 this two-dimensional perspective works far better, sticks in the mind longer, and — best of all — can help us to recapture lines we've forgotten. Call it structural self testing or line-ending self-testing, this method can be a memory strengthener, not just a fill-the-bubbles ordeal.

Question-format simplification and extension. . . . We can simplify our question presentation by using abbreviations like 1st for "first, LE for "line ending," 1p "precedes," 2p "preceding 1p), 3p, etc. In addition, we can extend our question range to include the category "line opener" (LO) and words which follow it (1f, 2f, 3f, etc.). Even more ambitiously we can extend our coverage to include the FINAL line ending and line opener as relative position markers, along with those positioned before them, e.g. FLE, FLE+1, FLE+2, FLO, FLO+1, etc. . . . Finally, we can simply our one-word answers by replacing each word with its "first vowel letter: A, E, I, O or U, "none of these" (to cover contingencies.

By way of illustration, let's assume a learner has memorized (1) "The Tiger," (2) "Stopping by Woods," (3) "Jabberwocky," and (4) Keats' "To Autumn," and Hopkins' "Pied Beauty." Let's further assume that our learner is already familiar with our abbreviation system and with our scoring

system that multiplies the number of lines in each poem by the percentage of correct answers. Here is a sample of the test instructions that such a learner might encounter.

Dear Test Taker. . . . Congratulations on memorizing four challenging poems (listed separately as P1, P2, P3, and P4, along with our system of line-word identifications. Please make sure that they are identified on your four-section answer sheet. For economy (remember, cash prizes are involved here), the same sequence of questions fits each poem and its answer sheet. Above all, take your time and trust your multisensory memory (vision, sound, rhythm.
*   INSTRUCTIONS. . . . Please enter your name and the requested information at the top of your answer sheet, along with the titles of the four poems you have learned. After this, please identify the word which corresponds to the following 15 position-descriptions in Poem #1. Then follow the same process with respect of P2, P3, and P4. Remember — again for economy and prizes — you will be indentifying the FIRST SPELLING VOWEL in each word target by choosing one of five alternatives: (a) A, (b) E, (c) I (d) O or U, (e) "none of these."*

Q1. 1st LE. . . . Q2. 2nd LE. . . . Q3. 3rd LE
Q4. 4th LE. . . . Q5. 4th LE, 1p. . . . Q6. 4th LE, 1p
Q7. 5th LE. . . . Q8. 5th LE, 1p. . . . Q9. 5th LE, 2p
Q10. 5th LE. . . . Q11. 1st LO. . . . Q12. 2nd LO
Q13. 3rd LO. . . . Q14. 1st FLE. . . . Q15. 2nd FLE
Q16. 3rd FLE. . . . Q17. 4th FLE. . . . Q18. 1st FLO
Q19. 2nd FLO. . . . Q20. 3rd FLO.

COMMENT. . . . Traditionalist or innovator, it's clear that POL's personal choice feature deserves to be extended to other potential groups of poetry learners

A Ranked List of 100 Memory-Friendly Poems. . . . Personal-best effort requires personal-choice energy. Since our learning-grid system will work with any poem, there's absolutely no reason why each learner shouldn't choose his or her own targets.   Since concentration and memory are our goals, not literary sophistication, poems written for children deserve serious consideration as targets, especially those by Robert Louis Stevenson, A.A. Milne, Edward Lear, James Whitcomb Riley, Lewis Carroll, etc. Nor should song lyrics be discounted. We're still waiting for a truly distinguished book

on American song lyrics to put beside the composer Alec Wilder's *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators*.

Practically considered, though, I feel the reader at this point deserves a preliminary list of poetry targets that would make sense to an objective outside observer in terms of four basic criteria.

Outside authority. . . . Nationally and even internationally our most up to date outside source regarding the current status of individual poems is The Columbia Granger's® Index to Poetry, Ninth Edition (1990), a standard reference work that is shelved in most community libraries. Most of the time it's used for locating anthologies in which specific poems appear, indexed by title and first lines. But it can also be used to determine and rank the frequency with which a specific poem appears in the roughly 400 anthologies which Granger's® covers (William Blake's "The Tiger" is currently at the top of the list).

William Harmon's *The Top 500 Poems* (Columbia, 1992) is explicitly based upon the Granger's® rankings, thereby doing a great deal to eliminate personal opinion from the memory-target selection process. Certainly this ranking technique tells us that the sonnets of William Shakespeare are still alive and living in the pages of currently published American poetry anthologies.

By way of a factual cross check, we can compare our list with the current number-of-hits Internet hits (1/25/08) for our Granger's®-based list, i.e., 291,000 for Blake's "The Tiger,: 78,500 for Keats' "To Autumn," 307,000 for Shakespeare's sonnet "That time of Year," 11,000 for Hopkins' "Pied Beauty," and 15,000 for Herrick's "To the Virgins." . . . Where most anthologies are assembled on the basis of personal whim, this collection represents the collective judgment of 400 different anthologists, just like a nominating convention in which only a relatively small number of candidates make it into the winner's circle.

Practical memorability. . . . Good poetry, Paul Valery tells us, should be "memorable" both in quality and learner access. My experience with learners has convinced me that any poem of more than 40 lines is proportionately far more difficult (and discouraging) than one of 20 lines. So I have limited our 100 mainstream memory targets to poems of less than 240 words (surprisingly enough, 80% of the top 100 poems on the Granger's® list meet this requirement).

Public domain status. . . . I have also excluded all poems under 240 words which are currently under copyright. My precedent here is Harold Bloom's "The Best Poems of the English Language" (2004), which takes up an encyclopedic 992 pages and includes copyright permission for only five poets: D.H. Lawrence, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, John Wheelwright, and Hart Crane.

  Apart from giving our anthology more of a mainstream flavor, this emphasis also gives aspiring learners FREE INTERNET ACCESS, e.g., poetryproject.com, which has most of these and makes them available for downloading. As far as duplication goes, incidentally, poems of 33 lines and under (all of these are) fit beautifully on a single page: 8.5 x 11 or even pocket-size half-sheets (4.5 x 5.5).

America's 100 most memorable public domain poems. . . . This ranked list (P1, P2, P3, etc.) is based on the most frequently anthologized short poems (under 240 words) in the Columbia Granger's® Index to Poetry, Ninth Edition, 1992. The Granger's rankings (G1, G2, G3) appear in parentheses. The entry for each poem closes with its number of lines and words, also in parentheses.

  As of 12-2-05 these rankings parallel their internet status, e.g., 37,000 "hits," for Blake's "The Tyger" (R1), as opposed to 3,500 for "When I Am Dead," by Christina Rossetti (R81). Public domain status is based upon data in recent anthologies, e.g., The Best Poems in English, by Harold Bloom (2004). [The letter L indicates that the compiler of this list still remembers the poem.]

P1 (G1): The Tiger, William Blake (28/120) L; P2 (G3): To Autumn, John Keats (33/234); P3 (G4) L; That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold, William Shakespeare (14/105); P4 (G5) L; Pied Beauty, Gerard Manley Hopkins (11/82) L; P5 (G10) To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time, Robert Herrick (16/112) L;

P6 (G12): The Passionate Shepherd to His Love, Christopher Marlowe (24/156); P7 (G13): Death, Be Not Proud, John Donne (14/130) L; P8 (G14): Upon Julia's Clothes, Robert Herrick (6/37); P9 (G15): To Lucasta, Going to the Wars (?), Richard Lovelace (12/
72); P10 (G16): The World Is Too Much with Us , William Wordsworth (14/126) L.

P11 (G17): On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, John Keats (14/112); P12 (G18) L: Jabberwocky, Lewis Carroll (28/161); P13 (G19) L: The Second Coming, William Butler Yeats (22/153); P14 (G21) L: Ozymandias, Percy Bysshe Shelley (14/115) L; P15 (G22): Sailing to Byzantium, William Butler Yeats (32/250) L;

P16 (G23): Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day? William Shakespeare (14/119) L; P17 (G24): Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds, William Shakespeare (14/107); P18 (G25) L: Fear No More the Heat of the Sun, William Shakespeare (24/152); P19 (G28): To Helen (?), Edgar Allan Poe (15/77); P20 (G29): Because I Could Not Stop for Death, Emily Dickinson (24/120) L.

P21 (G30): The Windhover, Gerard Manley Hopkins (14/138); P22 (G21) L: Anthem for Doomed Youth, Wilfrid Owen (14/112); P23 (G32): When Icicles Hang by the Wall, William Shakespeare (18/108); P24 (G33): Batter My Heart, Three-Person'd God, John Donne (14/122); P25 (G34) L: Love Bade Me Welcome (?), George Herbert (18/14);

P26 (36): God's Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins (14/113); P27 (G38) L: Western Wind, Anonymous (4/26); P28 (G39): They Flee from Me That Sometime Me Did Seek (?), Sir Thomas Wyatt (21/157); P29 (G40): The Good-Morrow, John Donne (21/182); P30 (G41): Delight in Disorder (?), Robert Herrick (14/77).

P31 (G42): I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, William Wordsworth (24/156); P32 (G44) L: Spring and Fall, Gerard Manley Hopkins (15/82); P33 (G45): Leda and the Swan, William Butler Yeats (14/106); P34 (G47): Go, Lovely Rose, Edmund Waller (15/87); P35 (G48): The Retreat, Henry Vaughn (32/168);

P36 (G50): London, William Blake (16/104); P37 (51): And Did Those Feet in Ancient Times, William Blake (16/96); P38 (G52): Composed upon Westminster Bridge (?), September 3, 1802, William Wordsworth (14/111); P39 (53): The Splendor Falls (?), Alfred, Lord Tennyson (18/67); P40 (54): The Darkling Thrush, Thomas Hardy (32/156) L.

P41 (G55): Loveliest of Trees, A.E. Housman (12/69); P42 (G59) L: Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes, Ben Jonson (16/96) L; P43 (G61): Why So Pale and Wan, Fond Lover? Sir John Suckling (15/75); P44 (G63): The

Solitary Reaper, William Wordsworth (32/162); P45 (G64): Break, Break, Break, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (16/96);

P46 (G65): Crossing the Bar, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (16/100); P47 (G69): Full Fathom Five Thy Father Lies, William Shakespeare (9/51); P48 (G70): When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought, William Shakespeare (14/108); P49 (G71) L: Piping down the Valleys Wild, William Blake (20/115); P50 (G72): So We'll Go No More a-Roving, George Gordon, Lord Byron (12/75).

P51 (73): I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died, Emily Dickinson (16/101); P52 (G74): Miniver Cheevy (?), Edward Arlington Robinson (32/184); P53 (G77): Since There's No Hope, Come Let Us Kiss and Part, Michael Drayton (14/111); P54 (G78): O Mistress Mine, William Shakespeare (12/75); P55 (79): At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners, John Donne (14/12) L.

P56 (G80): On My First Son, Ben Jonson (12/102); P57 (G81): Virtue, George Herbert (16/200); P58 (G82): Ask Me No More Where Jove Bestows, Thomas Carew (20/135); P59 (G85): Concord Hymn, Ralph Waldo Emerson (16/112); P60 (G86) L: The Lake Isle of Innisfree, William Butler Yeats (12/120) L.

P61 (G87): Non Sum Qualis, Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae, Ernest Dowson (18/198); P62 (G89): The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd, Sir Walter Ralegh (24/148); P63 (G90): Go and Catch a Falling Star, John Donne (27/138) P64 (G91): The Sun Rising, John Donne (30/180); P65 (G93): To Althea, from Prison, Richard Lovelace (24/126);

P66 (G94): The Sick Rose, William Blake (8/39); P67 (G96) L: The Eagle (?), Alfred, Lord Tennyson (6/39); P68 (G97): Home Thoughts from Abroad, Robert Browning (20/129); P69 (G98): A Narrow Fellow in the Grass, Emily Dickinson (24/120) L;   P70 (G101): Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter, John Crowe Ransom (16/108);

P71 (G104): With How Sad Steps, O Moon, Thou Climb'st the Skies! Sir Philip Sidney (14/119); P72 (G105): The Expense of Spirit in a Waste of Shame, William Shakespeare (14/110); P73 (G107) L: Hymn to Diana, Ben Jonson (18/90); P74 (G108): The Pulley, George Herbert (20/140); P75 (G109) The Lamb, William Blake (20/112);

P76 (G111): She Walks in Beauty, George Gordon, Lord Byron (18/117); P77 (G113): Tears, Idle Tears, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (20/160); P78 (114): When I am Dead (?), Christina Rossetti (16/96) L; P79 (G119): The Burning Babe, Robert Southwell (16/176); P80 (G120): When in Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes, William Shakespeare (14/111). L

P81 (G121): To Daffodils, Robert Herrick (20/46); P82 (G122): A Red, Red Rose, Robert Burns (16/92); P83 (G123): To a Waterfowl, William Cullen Bryant (24/200); P84 (G124) L: Annabel Lee, Edgar Allan Poe (26/169); P85 (G125) P88 (G125) Felix Randall, Gerard Manley Hopkins (14/154);

P86 (G126): No Worst, There Is None, Gerard Manley Hopkins (14/119); P87 (G127): To an Athlete Dying Young, A.E. Housman (28/196) L; P88 (G133): When Daisies Pied, William Shakespeare (18/99); P89 (G134): A Hymn to God the Father, John Donne (18/129); P90 (G137): On His Deceased Wife, John Milton (14/117).

P91 (G141): When I Have Fears, John Keats (14/119); P92 (G142) L: Meeting at Night, Robert Browning (12/74); P93 (G142): Remembrance, Emily Bronté (32/240); P94 (G144): There's a certain Slant of light (?), Emily Dickinson (16/96); P95 (G145): Up-Hill, Christina Rossetti (16/104);

P96 (G147): An Irish Airman Foresees His Death, William Butler Yeats (16/104) L; P97 (G148): Richard Cory, Edgar Arlington Robinson (16/114); P98 (G157) L: The Flea, John Donne (27/216); P99 (G158): Still to Be Neat, Ben Jonson (12/64); P100 (G159): The Triumph of Charis, Ben Jonson (30/156). . . . . **LEARNER'S NOTE**. . . . The omission of an L may well indicate that the Learner memorized the poem, didn't like it, and then forgot it, e.g., Herrick, Byron, etc. Since personal taste produces memory energy, other learners should not ignore theirs. Granted that memorization is heavy lifting, it should never be treated as self-punishment.

FAMOUS POEMS, FAMOUS AUTHORS, AND BIOGRAPHICAL CONNECTEDNESS. . . . Poems are written by people who have lives outside the printed page. This means they interact with other people and with their society: sometime officially, as with Milton; sometimes unhappily, as with Poe. Either way their biographers usually try to give their readers a picture of the society as a whole, even the world, in which their subject lived and worked.

Consequently the biographies themselves are very much like rather reliable historical novels since they (a) document their sources and try to tell the truth, and (b) create a narrative with a hero or heroine that holds it together, many of whom are demonstrably famous in different fields, e.g., Cromwell as part of Milton's life, Henry VIII as part of Wyatt's.

So if it plays out that your affection for one of Shakespeare's poems leads you to read one of the many biographies written about him, you'll also be exercising your "proper name vocabulary," along with acquiring additional knowledge — all this with higher speed and retentiveness than younger students employ in their "study for the test" efforts.

This is just an option, of course, very much so, given our concentration-memory-productive consciousness triad. But in the long run your growing self confidence will urge you to open such doors and explore what lies beyond.

Section Two: Memorizing Prose

LEARNER'S NOTE. . . . Poetry is our oldest literary form. It stretches way back into preliterate times when knowledge was passed on from generation to generation, and therefore required rhythm and rhyme to ensure the message was not distorted in transmission. Prose, on the other hand, is much more difficult to memorize, e.g., a restaurant server trying to memorize the complete menu of a fashionable restaurant. This section therefore applies our visual reconstruction and rhythmic-learning techniques to the memorization of prose.

This doesn't mean that you'll be able to learn, say, the Gettysburg Address in the same time you would need for a traditional-format poem with the same number of words, e.g., Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." But you'll certainly be able to master it in half the time a rote-learner would need.
 *

(8) Memorizing the Twenty-Third Psalm

Day to day living, even with a familiar routine, is usually a series of memory unfriendly events. If we're going for a drive, we must remember where the car keys are. If we want to phone someone, we must remember the phone number. If we want to go somewhere, we must remember the location or the address. If we're going to the market, we must remember what we need to buy. If we turn on the gas oven, we must remember to turn it off. If we're supposed to take a pill, we must remember when to take it.

The very simplicity of these factual challenges ensures the ferocious power of their numbers, much like a horde of small furry creatures constantly nipping at our heels — and our self esteem. Each phone number, represents a simple subject-predication statement, e.g., "The phone number for X IS 333.444.5555." But who of us over fifty can manage more than 20 of them without an arsenal of alphanumeric clues?

Non-poetic writing, fiction or nonfiction, gives us the same kind of difficulty. How many of us can recall word for word the front page of this morning's newspaper or pass a test that measures how well we can remember the details in a passage we've just read, to say nothing of a chapter in a nonfiction book we puzzled over three weeks ago? Yet this is what we must do, one way or another, when we give a speech or

telephone a stranger asking for his or her serious attention. It's also what we do when we memorize a religious text as an object of inspiration and comfort.

Biblical Psalms and Four-Beat Rhythm

Religious texts are primarily oral documents meant for communal use in houses of worship and for personal meditation. Consequently, they are composed and presented with the goal of making maximum impact upon the memory of the listener or readers. Though the Psalms, for instance, were composed in Hebrew, their subsequent translations were executed with the goal, as William Tyndale put it, of "being SUNG [emphasis added] by the plowman at his plow as well as the scholar in his study."

Tyndale might have added "by warriors going into battle," for the singing of psalms by Protestant soldiers was a major factor in the superior discipline of Cromwell's army, just as it had been in the German Peasant's Revolt and in the Hussite wars before 1400. If someone in time writes a book called "Music Goes to War," this pre-1400 singing of psalms will certainly invite comparison with Turkish military practice, along with the shaping impact of the Bektashi sect (very popular among the Janissaries) upon pre Lutheran Protestantism.

Tyndale's successors, the "company" who created the King James translation produced, and intended to produce a very effective oral document whose rhythms are just as memory friendly as those of modern free verse. It's true that the King James has been followed by more up-to-date translations with far less theeing and thouing. But the King James still reigns supreme when it comes to oral presentation, as in Nicol Williamson's recent one-man theatrical presentation of the *Gospel According to St. Mark*, which at 10,000 words made for a moving and dramaturgically effective two-hour theatrical experience ("The Greatest Story Ever Told — BRIEFLY," it might have been called.

A Two-Step Four-Beat Translation

Given the memory-friendly nature of the King James, we have good reason to expect that a four-beat translation of the Twenty-Third Psalm will work quite well. Here's a preliminary sketch.

45

STEP ONE: RHYTHMIC LINE-CONVERSION. . . . Rhythm is built into our natural speaking as much as into our poetry and song lyrics. So it makes sense, as indicated below, to represent the 23rd Psalm as a sequence of rhythmic lines suitable for singing and sing-song chanting. As you'll discover, it takes a bit of juggling, especially if you want a symmetrical four-stanza target with four lines in each stanza and four strongly stressed syllables or words in each line (represented here by accent marks over the vowel.

But as you'll also discover, this representation opens the door to multi-task learning via which finger-counting (1,2,3,4 — including rests where called for) and speaking work together. . . . What's here, then, IS the 23rd Psalm as far as the words, sentences, and punctuation goes. The only change is that of indicating stressed syllables and basing line divisions on our natural four-stress grouping.

STEP TWO: LEARNING-GRID REPRESENTATIONS. . . . There's nothing more discouraging in rote-repetition learning than grinding to a complete stop after going blank on one little word in the middle of our target. There's also nothing that builds preliminary confidence more than being given clues to bring our natural word-detective skills into play. As indicated below, it's a simple tactile-learning strategy to write out an abbreviated version of each line that retains a relatively small number of complete words and represents the others with their initial letters, along with hyphens to represent additional syllables.

Even better, since the number of retained words can be decreased, our strategy equips each learner to create his or her own ascending levels of difficulty — just like ascending El Capitan from its gentle slope, not its forbidding north face.

With clues like these it's not surprising that most learners achieve 70% accuracy target-recall at their first attempt. Nor is it surprising that their word-detective skills will usually recognize additional memory clues like the parallel-verb opening pattern: *maketh.... leadeth.... restoreth....leadeth*.

(1) THE 23rd PSALM: 4-beat rhythmic-line version. Stressed syllables indicated, and empty beats are indicated via a bracketed *rest.*

The Lórd is my shép-herd, I sháll not wánt.
He má-keth mé to lie dówn in green pás-tures.
He léad-eth mé be-síde the still wát-ers.
Hé re-stór-eth my sóul. [.... rést]

He léad-eth me ín the páths of ríght-eous-ness
Fór his náme's sake; yéa, though I wálk
Through the vál-ley óf the shád-ow of déath,
I will féar no é-vil, for Thóu art wíth me.

Thy ród and Thy stáff, they cóm-fort mé.
Thou pre-pár-est a tá-ble be-fóre me ín
The prés-ence óf mine én-e-mies. Thóu
A-nóint-est my héad with óil. [....rést]

My cúp run-eth ó-ver. Sure-ly góod-ness and mér-cy
Shall fól-low me áll the dáys of my lífe,
And Í shall dwéll in the hóuse of the Lórd
For év-....ér. [....rést....rést].
*

(2a) THE 23rd PSALM: Learning-grid version. Moderate level of difficulty.
Repeated constructions are underlined.

The Lórd is....m....sh-...., I....shall not wánt.
He máketh mé....t....l....d....i....green....pástures.
He léadeth mé....b-....th....still....wáters.
Hé restóreth....m....sóul[rést].

He léadeth me....í....th....p....of...ríghteousness
Fór his náme's....s....; y...., though I wálk
Through the váley....ó....th....shádow of déath,
I will féar....n ....é-...., f....Thóu art wíth me.

Thy ród and....Th....st...., th....cómfort mé.
Thou....prepárest....a....t-....b-....m....ín
The présence....ó....m....énemíes. Thóu
Anóintest my héad....w....ó..... [rést]

My cúp runneth....ó-..... S-....g-....and mér-cy
Shall fóllow me....á....th....d....o....my lífe,
And Í shall....dw....i....th....h....o....the Lórd
For éver. [rést....rést....rést].
*

(2b) THE 23rd PSALM: Learning-grid version. High level of difficulty

The....L....i....m....sh-...., I....sh....n....wánt.
He....m-.... m....t....l....d....i....gr....pástures.
He....l.....m....b-....th....st....wáters.
Hé....r- -....m....s [rést].

He I-....m....í....th....p....o....ríghteousness
Fó.... h....n....'s....s....; y...., th....I....wálk
Through.....v-....ó....th....sh-....o....déath,
I....w....f....n....é-...., f....Th....a....w....me.

Thy.... r....a....Th....st...., th....c-....mé.
Thou.... pr- - ....a....t-....b-....m....ín
The pr-....ó....m....é--..... Thóu
Anóintest....my....h....w....ó..... [rést]

My...c....r-....ó-..... S-....g-....a....mér-cy
Shall.... f-....m-....á....th....d....o....m....lífe,
And.... Í....sh....dw....i....th....h....o....the Lórd
For....é-.... [rést....rést....rést].
*

Meditative poetry, dinner table singing, and Mistress Quickly

Call it comfort or inspiration, memory-objects like the 23rd Psalm are traditionally classified as meditative poetry, a phrase which gets over two million hits on the internet as of 3/24/08. Since the meditative needs of humans beings vary with their states of minds, there are many anthologies available, especially in libraries, which offer comfort for the perplexed, depressed, discouraged, and disabled.

   Arthur Hugh Clough's "Say Not the Struggle Naught Availeth" was one of Winston Churchill's favorites, as was G.A. Henley's "Invictus."   But different poems and prose pieces are bound to comfort different people. So it's essemial for each learner to decide which meditative poem is a worth-the-time candidate for memorization as a meditative resource for his or her private consciousness.

   MELODIC TRANSLATION: Nor should the musical setting of texts like the 23rd Psalm be neglected. Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of English," for example, contains a scene in which Mistress Quickly, faced with a problem,

exclaims in effect, "This task will be as difficult as singing the Twenty-Third Psalm to the tune of "Greensleeves."

Given the Renaissance practice of "melodic translation," and given our four-beat setting, here's why I believe that Mistress Quickly overstates her position somewhat. First, the tune to "Greensleeves" is very familiar; second, it has a relatively large number of notes to match up syllables with. Third, it offers plenty of flexibility via "melisma" (letting one syllable extend over several notes) and "subdivision" (e.g., accomodating two syllables by turning a quarter note into two eighth notes).

TO CONCLUDE: My purpose here is not to urge the reader to go into the melodic translation business right away. Textual memorization itself offers more than enough challenge, especially for men and women over fifty. But consciousness, for all of us, can be a very hungry companion, very much like a restless child muttering, "There's nothing to do." So for those of us with musical notes spinning around in our heads (there are many such) and "nothing to do," the melodic-translation option will, and should, always be waiting.
*

(9) Learning Lincoln's Gettysburg Address by Heart

Traditionally considered, especially on Veteran's Day, a very respectable stand-up testing challenge has always been that of memorizing and delivering Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Long enough to be challenging (264 words) and rhythmic enough to stick in our mind's ear — the Gettysburg Address is still a worthwhile personal-best memory target, especially when set up as a line-by-line poem

The Gettysburg Address: a four-beat version

Each line is actually a "fourteener" (ballad measure) that comprises two four-beat units, i.e., ONE, TWO THREE, FOUR/ FIVE SIX SEVEN [rest]. Repeated key phrases and words are underlined. Each stressed syllable is indicated via an accent mark over its first vowel letter.

Fourscóre and séven yéars agó our fáthers bróught fórth
On this cóntinént a <u>new</u> <u>nátión</u>, concéived in líbertÿ
And <u>dedicáted</u> tó the propósítión thát

All mén áre creátéd équál.

Nów wé áre engáged in á great cívil wár,
Testing whéthér that <u>nátion</u> or ány <u>nátion</u> só concéived
Ánd só <u>dédicáted</u> can lóng éndúre.
We are mét ón a gréat báttlefíeld óf that wár.

We are hére to <u>dédicáte</u> a pórtion óf thát fíeld
As a fínal résting pláce for thóse who hére gáve their líves
That that <u>nátión</u> might líve. Ít is áltogéther fitting
And própér that wé shóuld dó thís.

Yét, ín a lárger sénse,
Wé cánnot <u>dédicáte</u>,
Wé cánnot <u>cónsecráte</u>.
Wé cánnót hállow thís gróund.

The bráve men, líving and <u>déad</u>, who strúggled hére have <u>cónsecráted it</u>
Fár abóve our póor pówer to ádd ór detráct.
The wórld will líttle nóte nor lóng remémber whát we sáy here.
Bút ít can névér forgét what théy did hére.

Ít ís for ús, the líving,
Ráthér tó be <u>dédicátéd</u>
To thé gréat cáuse which thóse who féll hére háve
Thus fár só nóblÿ advánced.

It is ráther for ús to be hére <u>dedicáted</u> to thé great tásk remáining befóre us,
Thát fróm these hónored <u>déad</u> we táke incréased <u>devótion</u>
To thát for whích they gáve the lást full méasure óf <u>devótion</u>,
That wé here híghly resólve that these <u>déad</u> shall nót have díed in váin,

Thát thís <u>nátion</u> únder Gód
Sháll háve a <u>néw</u> bírth of fréedóm,
And that góvernment óf the péople, bÿ the péople, fór the péople,
Sháll nót pérish fróm the éarth.

Learning Grid for the Gettysburg Address (low difficulty)

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Fourscóre and.... s-.... y.... a-.... o.... fathers bróught fórth
On this c--.... a.... n.... n-...., concéived in líbertÿ
And dédicáted t... th.... próposítión thát
All men.... á.... c--.... équál.

Nów wé áre.... e-.... i.... á great cívil wár,
Testing whéthér..... th.... n-.... o.... á-.... nátion só concéived
Ánd só d- - - .... can lóng éndúre.
We are mét.... o... a.... gr.... báttlefíeld óf that wár.

We are hére.... t.... d- - -.... a.... p-.... óf thát fíeld
As a fínal r-.... pl... f.... th.... who hére gáve their líves
That that n-.... m.... l...... Ít is áltogéther fitting
And própér th.... w.... shóuld dó thís.

Yét, ín a l-.... sénse,
Wé c-.... dédicáte,
Wé c-.... cónsecráte.
Wé c-.... h- thís gróund.

The brave men...., l-.... a.... d,.... wh.... str-.... here.... have cónsecráted it
Fár above our.... p.... p-.... t.... ádd ó detráct.
The world will.... l-.... n.... n.... l.... re- - - what. we say here.
Bút ít can.... n-.... f-.... wh.... they. did. hére.

Ít ís f... ú...., t.... lívíng,
Ráthér t.... b.... dédicátéd
To that great. c.... wh.... th.... wh.... fell. here. háve
Thus far.... s.... n-.... advánced.

It is rather for.... ú.... t.... b.... h.... d- - -.... t.... th.... great task remaining before us,
Thát from....th.... h-.... d.... w.... take increased devótion
To that for which.... wh.... th.... g.... th.... l.... f.... measure of devótion,
That we here highly.... r-.... th.... th.... d.... sh.... n.... have died in váin,

Thát th.... n-.... ú- Gód
Sháll háve a.... n.... bírth of fréedóm,
And that góvernment óf.... th... p-...., b.... th.... p-, for the péople,

Sháll nót p-.... fr....the éarth.

Learning Grid for the Gettysburg Address (Higher Difficulty

Fourscóre.... a.... s-.... y.... a-.... o.... f-.... br.... fórth
On th.... c- -.... a.... n.... n-...., c-....i.... líbertÿ
And d- - -....t... th.... pr- - - thát
All m.... á.... c- -.... équál.

Nów w.... á.... e-.... i.... á.... gr.... c-.... wár,
Testing wh-.... th.... n-.... o.... á-.... n-.... s.... concéived
Ánd s....d- - - .... c.... l.... éndúre.
We a.... mét.... o... a.... gr.... b-- o.... th.... wár.

We a....hére.... t.... d- - -.... a.... p-.... ó.... th.... fíeld
As a f-.... r-.... pl... f.... th.... wh.... h.... g.... th.... líves
That th.... n-.... m.... l...... Í.... i....á- - -.... fitting
And p-.... th.... w.... sh.... d.... thís.

Yét, í.... a....l-.... sénse,
Wé c-.... dédicáte,
Wé c-.... cónsecráte.
Wé c-.... h- .... thís gróund.

The bráve m...., l-.... a.... d,.... wh.... str-.... h.... h.... cónsecráted it
Fár a-.... o.... p.... p-.... t.... á.... ór detráct.
The wórld w.... l-.... n.... n.... l.... re- - - w.... w.... s.... here.
Bút ít c.... n-.... f-.... wh.... th.... did hére.

Ít ís f... ú...., the lívíng,
Ráthér t.... b.... dédicátéd
To t.... gr.... c.... wh.... th.... wh.... f.... h.... háve
Thus f.... s.... n-.... advánced.

It i.... r-.... f.... ú.... t.... b.... h.... d- - -.... t.... th.... gr.... t.... r- -.... be-.... us,
Thát fr.... th.... h-.... d.... w.... t.... in-.... devótion
To th.... f.... wh.... th.... g.... th.... l.... f.... m.... ó.... devótion,
That w.... h.... h-.... r-.... th.... th.... d.... sh.... n.... h.... d.... i.... váin,

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Thát th.... n-.... ú-.... Gód
Sháll h.... a.... n.... b.... o.... fréedóm,
And th.... g- -.... ó.... th... p-...., b.... th.... p-, f.... th.... péople,
Sháll n.... p-.... fr....th.... éarth.

TO CONCLUDE. . . . As we've seen our system is purely a personal-best
arrangement. You choose your targets, you choose your levels of time and
concentration, you choose which extra activities (e,g., melodic translation),
and you choose how far to go and how much fun to have. Some of that fun
might in time actually involve group-aerobics activity. But for practical
purposes your own mind will probably be company enough. Certainly it's
quite proper these days for us to talk or sing to ourselves as long as no one
catches us doing it.
*

(10) Learning the Declaration of Independence by Heart

A nation's past lives on in its patriotic texts. To abandon or change them,
as G.K. Chesterton put it, is to disenfranchise those who created them.
Kept alive, though, their original fervor and energy can drive us toward our
national future far more effectively and cohesively than misguided attempts
by those in power to rewrite them, and thus reinvent our national past.

   As a patriotic memorization target, though, the complete Declaration of
Independence, which includes a lengthy list of grievances against George
III, is much too long. So with echoes of 1776 thundering in our ears each
Fourth of July, along with Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever," we clearly
need a recitation-friendly version of the Declaration — one that will stand
tall on the speaker's platform, right there beside the Star Spangled Banner
(all four verses) and the Gettysburg Address.

This 242-word version of the Declaration presents its opening section
("When in the Course. . . .") and then its stirring conclusion, which begins,
"We, therefore, the Representatives. . . ." By way of providing a memory-
friendly format, what's here is set up poem-style in 10 four-line stanzas,
four stressed syllables to each line, with repeated key words underlined as
structural indicators. Later on we'll see how each personal-best learner
can transcribe each stanza in abbreviated "crossword-style" form for fast,
visually retentive memorization.

   A four-beat stanza format, key words underlined, original capitalization,
stressed syllables indicated with accent marks — there's nothing fancy

about these mnemonic aids. But they work. And they're well worth it in bringing this national treasure back into our lives, especially for personal-best learners who want to improve their memory power and public speaking confidence.

The Declaration of Independence in Stanza Format (first stage)

The original capitalization has been retained, key words have been underlined,

(1) Whén in the Cóurse of Húman Evénts
it becómes necessáry fór one <u>Péople</u>
tó dissólve the Pólitical Bónds
which háve connécted thém with anóther,

(2) and to assúme amóng the <u>Pówers</u> of the <u>Éarth</u>
the <u>séparate</u> and <u>équal</u> Státion to whích
the Láws of <u>Náture</u> and of <u>Náture's</u> Gód
entítle thém, a décent Respéct

(3) to the Opínions óf Mankínd requíres
that they shóuld <u>decláre</u> the cáuses whích
impél them tó the <u>Séparátion</u>.
We hóld these Trúths to bé self-évident:

(4) that áll <u>Men</u> áre <u>creáted</u> <u>équal</u>,
that théy are endówed by théir <u>Creátor</u>
with cértain unálienáble <u>Ríghts</u>,
thát amóng these are Lífe, Líbertÿ,

(5) and the Pursúit of Háppiness — Thát to secúre
these <u>Ríghts</u>, <u>Governménts</u> are ínstitúted
amóng <u>men</u>, deríving théir just <u>Pówers</u>
fróm the consént of the <u>Góvérned</u>,

(6) that whenéver ány Fórm of <u>Góvernment</u>
becómes destrúctive óf these Énds,
it is the <u>Ríght</u> of the <u>Péoplé</u>
to álter ór abólish ít. . . .

*****

(7) We thérefore the Répreséntatíves
of the <u>uníted</u> <u>Státes</u> of Américá,
in Géneral Cóngress Assémbled.
appéaling tó the Súpreme Júdge

(8) of the Wórld for the Réctitúde
of óur Inténtions, dó, in the Náme,
and bÿ Authóritÿ of the góod
<u>Péople</u> óf these <u>Cóloníes</u>,

(9) sólemnly Públish ánd <u>Decláre</u>
that thése <u>Uníted</u> <u>Cóloníes</u>
áre and óf <u>right</u> óught to bé
Frée and Índepéndent <u>Státes</u>.
*****
(10) — And fór the suppórt of this <u>Déclarátion</u> with
a fírm Relíance on the Protéction of divine Próvidence,
we mútually plédge to each óther our Líves,
our Fórtunes, ánd our sácred Hónor.

COMMENT. . . . The mind's ear, the body's action, and memory power — from the Alphabet Song up to the marching chants of military training, these have always been our basic learning partners. So our first mnemonic step is to read the Declaration aloud, emphasizing the stressed-marked syllables and counting time on our fingers (call it "sing-song" if you wish, but it always works as a first step).

After our read-aloud step, all that's needed is to bring our mind's eye into action by transcribing our target in a snapshot format, retaining the first and last word of each line, but using initial letters for the rest and representing extra syllables with hyphens. Here's how our first stanza looks via a learning-grid version. Most students achieve at least 70% mnemonic accuracy after writing down all ten stanzas in this abbreviated manner (much faster than ordinary script), and then coming back a few minutes later on for a first-stage retentiveness trial run.

Learning Grid Version of the Declaration of Independence (1st stage)

(1) Whén in.... th.... C.... o.... Human Evénts
it becomes.... n- - -.... f.... one Péople
to dissolve.... th.... Political Bónds
which have... c- -.... th.... with anóther,

(2) and to assúme a-.... th.... Pówers of the Éarth
the séparate.... a.... é-.... Státion to whích
the Láws of N- .... a.... o.... Náture's Gód
entítle th...., a.... décent Respéct

(3) to the Opínions ó.... M-.... requíres
that they sh.... d-.... th.... cáuses whích
impél th.... t.... th.... Séparátion.
We hóld these Tr.... t.... b.... self-évident:

(4) that áll M.... á.... cr- -équal,
that théy a.... en-.... b.... théir Creátor
with cértain u - - - - Ríghts,H
thát a-.... th.... a.... Lífe, Líbertÿ,

(5) and the P-.... o.... H- -.... — Thát to secúre
these R...., G- -.... are ínstitúted
amóng men, d- -.... th.... just Pówers
fróm the c-.... o.... th.... Góvérned,

(6) that whenéver á-.... F.... of Góvernment
becómes d- -.... ó.... these Énds,
it is the R.... o.... th.... Péoplé
to álter ó.... a- - ít. . . .
*****

(7) We th-.... th.... Répreséntatíves
of the u- - St.... o.... Américá,
in G- -..... C- Assémbled.
appéaling t.... th.... Súpreme Júdge

(8) of the W.... f.... th.... Réctitúde
of óur Inténtions, d...., i.... th.... Náme,

and bÿ A- - - o.... th.... góod
Péople ó.... th.... <u>Cóloníes</u>,

(9) sólemnly P-.... á.... <u>Declóre</u>
that th.... <u>U- -</u>.... <u>Cóloníes</u>
áre and ó.... <u>r</u>.... ó.... to bé
Frée a.... Í- - -.... <u>Státes</u>.
*****
(10) — And fór the s-.... o.... th.... <u>Déclarátion</u> with
a fírm Relíance o.... th.... Pr--.... o.... divine Próvidence,
we mútually pl.... t.... e.... óther our Líves,
our Fórtunes, á.... o.... sácred Hónor.

COMMENT. . . . You'll probably discover that first-stage self-testing with a learning grid is like a mini-course in speed reading. This is to say that certain abbreviations (o...., t...., th...., a...., etc.) turn up again and again and again, enough so that you recognize them very quickly as what linguists call "connecting" words or "function" words. Also, as you've probably also noticed, these high frequency connecting words often signal what's coming, e.g., a noun after "th...." (*the)*, a noun phrase after "a...." (a). It's previous knowledge like this that helps us to read a page (400 words a minute) and comprehend far more quickly can we can listen to a spoken sequence (roughly 110 words a minute).

Learning Grid Version of the Declaration of Independence (2nd Stage)

(1) Whén i.... th.... C.... o.... H-.... Evénts
it b-.... n- - -.... f.... o.... <u>Péople</u>
to d-.... th.... P- - -.... Bónds
which h... c- -.... th.... w.... anóther,

(2) and t.... a-....a-.... th.... <u>P-</u>.... o.... th....<u>Éarth</u>
the <u>s-.-</u>.... a.... é-.... S-.... t.... whích
the L.... o.... N- .... a.... o.... <u>N-</u>'s Gód
entítle th...., a.... d-.... Respéct

(3) to th.... O- -.... ó.... M-.... requíres
that th.... sh.... <u>d-</u>.... th.... c-.... whích
impél th.... t.... th.... <u>Séparátion</u>.

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We h.... th.... Tr.... t.... b.... self-évident:

(4) that á.... <u>M</u>.... á.... <u>cr</u>- -<u>équal</u>,
that th.... a.... en-.... b.... th.... <u>Creátor</u>
with c-.... u - - - - <u>Ríghts</u>,H
thát a-.... th.... a.... Lífe, Líbertÿ,

(5) and th.... P-.... o.... H- -.... — Th.... t.... secúre
these <u>R</u>...., <u>G</u>- -.... are ínstitúted
amóng <u>m</u>...., d- -.... th.... j.... <u>Pówers</u>
fróm th.... c-.... o.... th.... <u>Góvérned</u>,

(6) that wh- -.... á-.... F.... o.... <u>Góvernment</u>
becómes d- -.... ó.... th.... Énds,
it i.... th.... <u>R</u>.... o.... th.... <u>Péoplé</u>
to á-.... ó.... a- - ít. . . .
*****

(7) We th-.... th.... Répreséntatíves
of th.... <u>u</u>- - <u>St</u>.... o.... Américá,
in G- -..... C- Assémbled.
a- -.... t.... th.... Súpreme Júdge

(8) of th.... W.... f.... th.... Réctitúde
of óur Inténtions, d...., i.... th.... Náme,
and b.... A- - - o.... th.... góod
<u>Péople</u> ó.... th.... <u>Cóloníes</u>,

(9) sólemnly P-.... á.... <u>Decláre</u>
that th.... <u>U</u>- -.... <u>Cóloníes</u>
áre a.... ó.... <u>r</u>.... ó.... to bé
Frée a.... Í- - -.... <u>Státes</u>.
*****

(10) — And f.... th.... s-.... o.... th.... <u>D</u>- - - with
a f.... R- -.... o.... th.... Pr--.... o.... d-.... Próvidence,
we m- -.... pl.... t.... e.... ó-.... o.... Líves,
our F-...., á.... o.... s-.... Hónor.
*

COMMENT. . . . As with our version of the Gettysburg Address, the above 10-stanza rhythmic version gives you all that's needed to produce your own melodic translation. You could your hand at singing it to the tune of "Stars and Stripes Forever," where it fits amazingly well, enough so to convince me that Souza must have had the Declaration of Independence in his mind's ear when he composed Stars and Stripes — completely in his head, it's been said.

TO CONCLUDE. . . . For learners, the Declaration of Independence, even in shortened form, is well worth mastering, including its puzzles. What it meant, what it means today, what it might mean tomorrow — questions like these are bound to come into our thoughts after we've taken personal in-the-mind possession of a patriotic text.
    Just like a good friend or a moving prayer, a patriotic text can, and should, keep its own identity unchanged. Even better, uniquely so, it's also there for us in our own minds whenever we need serious company.
*

(11) Learning the Bill of Rights by Heart

It's no fun arguing with Libertarians. Academics may be more logical; but Libertarians hit back by quoting accurately and fully from our nation's Bill of Rights, pulling government into their corner even when they're opposed to it. As a matter of self defense, then, the rest of us, not just schoolchildren, should learn this particular patriotic text by heart.
    By way of saving time, mastering the Bill of Rights should begin by treating it as rhythmic poetry. This is, after all, the way in most of us recite the Pledge of Allegiance in unison: "I PLEDGE al-LEG-iance TO the FLAG//. . . . of the u-NIT-ed STATES of a-MER-i-CA//. . . . and TO the re-PUB-lic for WHICH it STANDS//. . . . one NA-tion U-nder GOD//. . . . IN-div-IS-i-BLE//. . . . with LIB-er-TY and JUST-ice for ALL.//"

Written out like this, it's clear the Pledge has a four-beat rhythm format (with an occasional empty fourth beat).   As a mnemonic timesaver, we'll present the Bill of Rights in four-line stanzas with four strong beats to each line, using accent marks over the first vowel of each stressed syllable, along with hyphens to represent extra syllables. For structural emphasis, we'll also underline words like right and people that get repeated again and again. In words that have more than one syllable, incidentally, our accent marks correspond to those in a dictionary's phonetic transcription.
    As an additional memorization aid, the following stanzaic version includes conventional subject headings in brackets, e.g., "freedom of

religion and speech." Since it's relatively long (474) words, we'll present it in SIX SEPARATE PARTS, each of which contains a text and two learning grid versions, the second more challenging than the first. This "divide and conquer" part-by-part approach will also work with other lengthy challenges, especially if each subunit makes sense on its own.

The Bill of Rights in 18 Four-Line Stanzas
[1st Amendment:Freedom of Religion and Speech]
I) Cóngress shall máke <u>no</u> <u>láw</u> respécting
an estáblishmént of relígion, ór
<u>prohíbiting</u> the <u>frée</u> exercíse thereóf;
ór abrídging the <u>fréedom</u> of spéech,

ór of the préss, or the <u>right</u> of the <u>péople</u>
péaceably tó assémble, ánd
tó petítion the góvernmént
fór a redréss of gríevancés

[Religion and Speech - Grid]
Ia) Congress....sh.... m.... n.... l.... respecting
an.... e---.... o.... r--, or
prohibiting.... th.... fr... e--.... thereof,
or.... a-.... th.... fr-.... o.... speech.

ór of the préss, o.... th.... <u>right</u> o.... th.... <u>péople</u>
péaceably t.... a-...., ánd
tó petítion th.... góvernmént
fór a r-.... o.... gríevancés
***

[2nd Amendement: Right to Bear Arms]
* A wéll reguláted <u>Milítia</u>, béing*
nécessáry to the <u>secúrity</u> óf
a <u>frée</u> <u>State</u>, the <u>ríght</u> of the <u>péople</u> to kéep
ánd bear Árms, shall <u>nót</u> be infrínged.

[Right to Bear Arms – Grid]]
II) A wéll r- - - .... <u>Milítia</u> béing
nécessáry t.... th.... <u>secúrity</u> óf
a <u>frée</u> <u>State</u>, the <u>r</u>.... o.... th.... <u>péople</u> to kéep
ánd bear Árms, sh.... <u>n</u>.... b.... infrínged.
***

[3rd Amendment: Quatering Soliders]

60

No Sóldier shall, in tíme of péace
be quártered in ány hóuse withóut
the consént of the Ówner, nor in tíme of wár,
but in a mánner to bé prescríbed by láw.

[Quartering Soldiers - Grid]
No Sóldier sh...., i t.... of péace
be quártered i.... á-.... hóuse withóut
the consent o.... th.... O-...., nor in time of war,
but in a mánner t.... b.... pr-.... by láw.
***

[4ᵗʰ Amendment: Unreasonable Search and Seizure]
The ríght of the péople to bé secúre
in their pérsons, hóuses, pápers, and éffects,
agáinst unréasonable séarches and séizures
shall nót be víolated, and no Wárrant shall íssue,

but upon próbable cause, suppórted by Óath
or áffirmátion, and partícularlÿ
describíng the pláces tó be séarched,
and the pérsons or thíngs to be séized.

[Unreasonable Search and Seizure Grid]]
The ríght o.... th.... p-.... to bé secúre
in their pérsons, h-...., p- ...., and éffects,
agáinst unréasonable s.... a.... séizures
shall nót be víolated, a.... n.... W- .... shall íssue,

but u-.... pr- - .... c...., s- -.... b.... Óath
or á- - -,.... a.... partícularlÿ
describíng th.... pl.... t.... b.... séarched,
and th.... p-.... o.... th.... t.... b.... séized.

[5ᵗʰ Amendment: Due Process]
No pérson sháll be héld to ánswer
for a cápital, or ótherwise ínfamous críme,
unless ón a preséntment ór indíctment
óf a grand júry, excépt in cáses

arísing in the lánd or nával fórces,
or ín the Milítia, whén in áctual
sérvice in tíme of Wár or public dánger;
nor sháll any pérson be súbject fór

the sáme offénse to be twíce put in jéopardy

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of life or límb; nor shall ány be compélled
in ány criminal cáse to be a wítness
agáinst himsélf, nor bé depríved

óf life, líberty, ór propertÿ
withóut due prócess of láw; nor shall prívate
próperty be táken for públic úse
withóut júst cómpensátion.

[Due Process: Grid]
No pérson sh.... b.... h.... to ánswer
for a c- -...., o.... ó- - .....ínfamous críme,
unless ón a pr- -.... ó.... indíctment
óf a grand j-...., e-.... in cáses

arísing i.... th.... l.... or nával fórces,
or ín th... M- -, wh.... in áctual
sérvice in t - .... o.... W.... or public dánger;
nor sháll a-.... p-.... b.... súbject fór

the sáme offénse t.... b.... tw.... put in jéopardy
of life or límb; n.... sh á-.... be compélled
in ány cr.... c.... t.... be a wítness
agáinst h-...., n.... b.... depríved

óf life, l- -...., ó.... propertÿ
withóut due pr-.... o.... l....; nor shall prívate
próperty b.... t-.... f.... públic úse
withóut j.... cómpensátion.
***

[6ᵗʰ Amendment: Speedy and Public Trial]
VI) In all criminal prósecútions, the accúsed
shall enjóy the ríght to a spéedy and públic
tríal, by án impártial júry
of the státe and district whereín the críme

shall have béen commítted, which district sháll
have been préviously áscertáined by láw;
and to bé infórmed of the náture and cáuse
of the áccusátion; to bé confrónted

with the wítnessés agáinst him; to háve
compúlsory prócess fór obtáining
wítnesses ín his fávor, and tó have
the Assístance of Cóunsel fór his defénse.

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PART FOUR b-version
[Speedy and Public Trial]
VI) In all <u>críminal</u> pr- - -,.... th.... <u>accúsed</u>
shall enjóy the <u>r</u>.... t.... a.... sp-.... and <u>públic</u>
tríal, by á....i- -.... <u>júry</u>
of the <u>státe</u> a.... <u>d</u>-.... wh-....the <u>críme</u>

shall have b.... c- -...., wh.... <u>dístrict</u> shall
have b.... pr- -.... áscertáined by <u>láw</u>;
and to bé in-.... o.... th.... náture and cáuse
of the <u>á</u>- - -....; t.... b.... confrónted

with the <u>w</u>- -.... a-.... him; to háve
compúlsory p-.... f.... obtáining
<u>wítnesses</u> í.... h.... f-...., and tó have
the Assístance o.... C-.... f.... his defénse

[Due Process: Grid]
VI) In a.... <u>cr</u>.... pr- - -,.... th.... <u>accúsed</u>
shall e-.... th.... <u>r</u>.... t.... a.... sp-.... and <u>públic</u>
tríal, b..... á....i- -.... <u>júry</u>
of th.... <u>st</u>.... a.... <u>d</u>-.... wh-....th.... <u>críme</u>

shall h.... b.... c- -...., wh.... <u>d</u>-.... shall
have b.... pr- -.... á- -.... b.... <u>láw</u>;
and t.... b.... in-.... o.... th.... n-.... a.... cáuse
of th.... <u>á</u>- - -....; t.... b.... confrónted

with th.... <u>w</u>- -.... a-.... h....; t.... háve
compúlsory p-.... f.... obtáining
<u>wítnesses</u> í.... h.... f-...., a.... t.... have
the A- -.... o... C-.... f.... his defénse
***

[7th Amendment: Facts Tried by Jury]
In Súits at <u>cómmon</u> <u>law</u>, whére the válue
in cóntrovérsy shall excéed
twenty dóllars, the <u>ríght</u> of tríal by <u>júry</u>
shall bé presérved, and <u>nó</u> fact tríed

by a <u>júry</u>, shall be ótherwise exámined
in ány Córt of the <u>Únited Státes</u>
thán accórding tó the rúles
óf the <u>cómmon</u> <u>láw</u>.

[Facts Tried by Jury – Grid}

In Súits at c-.... l...., wh.... the válue
in c- - -.... sh.... excéed
twenty dóllars, th.... r.... o.... tríal by júry
shall b.... pr-...., a.... nó fact tríed

by a júry, sh.... b.... ó- -.... exámined
in ány C.... o.... th.... Únited Státes
thán a- -.... t... th... rúles
óf th.... c.... láw.
***

[8ᵗʰ Amendment: Cruel and Unusual Punishments]
Excéssive báil shall not bé requíred
nór excéssive fínes impósed,
or crúel and unúsual
púnishménts bé inflícted.

[Cruel and Unusual Punishments - Grid]
VIII) Excéssive b.... sh.... n.... bé requíred
nór e- -.... f.... impósed,
or cr.... a.... unúsual
púnishménts b.... inflícted.
***

[9ᵗʰ Amendment: Rights Retained by the People]
The enúmerátion in the Cónstitútion
of cértain ríghts, shall not bé constrúed
to denÿ or dispárage óthers retáined
bÿ the péople.

[Rights Retained by the People - Grid]
The enúmerátion i.... th.... Cónstitútion
of cértain r...., sh.... n.... bé constrúed
to denÿ or d- -.... ó-.... retáined
bÿ th.... péople.
***

[10ᵗʰ Amendment Powers Reserved to States or People]
X) The pówers nót delegáted tó
the United Státes by the Cónstitútion,
nor prohíbited bÿ it tó the Státes
are resérved to the Státes, or tó the péople.

[Powers Reserved to States or People - Grid]

X) The p-.... n.... delegáted tó
the U- -.... St.... b.... the <u>Cónstitútion</u>,
nor <u>pr</u>- -.... b.... i.... tó the <u>Státes</u>
are resérved t.... th.... <u>St</u>...., or tó the <u>péople</u>.

Monuments and Modernity
The Gettysburg Address may live in our hearts, but the Bill of Rights lives in every lawyer's office, ready for use either a club or a shield in tomorrow's disputes. The Constitution can be amended, of course and the amendments themselves can be repealed, as happened to the 18th (prohibition of "intoxicating liquors"). But until that happens, the Bill of Rights stands as the law of the land with every word and phrase open to interpretation, debate, and final judgment in a maze of jurisdictions.

There's no doubt that memorizing the Bill of Rights represents a daunting challenge. But as set forth here, it can be approached Right by Right and part by part. One reason for emphasizing a three-stanza format is that it invites melodic translation into a musical target with two melodies, usually called the a-strain and the b-strain. "Greensleeves (aabb) is one of these, and so is "Alley Cat" (aab). Practically considered, each of our three-stanza groups fits this pattern perfectly, and it can be stretched out to aabb to fit our four-stanza group (the Fifth Amendment, "due process"), and cut back to aa to fit our closing two-stanza group.

TO CONCLUDE: As far as subconscious knowledge goes, many of the words and phrases in the Bill of Rights are already familiar to us, along with turning up again and again in the news and in conversation. Balanced against the Declaration of Independence, I feel this familiarity feature compensates for its length. As opposed to formal-pattern poetry, though, there's a good chance that some of the Bill of Rights, once learned, will fade from one's memory rather quickly.

Overall I feel that learning the Bill of Rights by heart is well worth the effort for older learners. It's a significant document that appears, along with the Gettysburg Address, along in most almanacs, e.g., Time Almanac 2007. As a heavy-lifting effort the achievement of mastering it is a marvelous tonic for one's self esteem. Best of all, a half hour's review will bring it back to one's conscious control for contemplation and citation in discussions.

If older Americans want to set a good example to their families, mastering the Bill of Rights will pay rich dividends for years and years.

*

(12) Learning Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" by Heart

The definitive version of Dr. Martin Luther King's speech delivered on August 28, 1963 appears in his autobiography. Since it's a long speech, the recitation version usually presents only its conclusion. As set forth here, these 390 words appear as a sequence of fourteen 4-line stanzas, with accent marks over each of the four stressed syllables in each line.

In addition, key words and phrases have been underlined, thereby emphasizing the speech's artistic organization and memorability. Its three basic units are "one day" (verses 1-5), "let freedom ring" (verses 6-11), and "free at last" (verses 12-14). . . . Following this stanzaic presentation, we'll then take a quick look at how an individual learner, young or old, via its memory-frame version, can memorize this classic piece with surprising quickness, including putting it to use as part of a continuing mental-physical fitness personal best program.

Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," poetic format version
The stressed syllables identified and key words and phrases underlined.
Key themes have been identified via enclosure within brackets.
Remember, a four-beat line can include rests, as in "Shall be made low" [rest) and "Brotherhood' [rest, rest].

[One day]
(1) I have a dréam todáy! I háve a dréam
That óne <u>day</u> <u>évery</u> válley shall bé
Exálted, <u>évery</u> híll and móuntain
Sháll <u>be máde</u> lów. . . .

(2) The róugh places wíll <u>be máde</u> pláin
And the cróoked pláces will <u>be máde</u> stráight
And the glóry of the Lórd shall bé revéaled
And all flésh shall sée it <u>togéther</u>. . . .

(3) Thís is our <u>hópe</u>. Thís is the <u>fáith</u>
That Í will go báck to the Sóuth with. . . .

With thís faith wé will be áble to héw
Out of the móuntain of despáir a stóne of hópe.

(4) With thís faith wé will be áble to transfórm
The jángling díscords óf our nátion
Ínto a béautiful sÿmphonÿ
Of brótherhóod. . . .

(5) With thís faith wé will be áble to wórk together,
To práy togéther, to strúggle togéther,
To go to jáil togéther, to stánd up for fréedom together,
Knówing that wé will be frée one dáy.

 [Let freedom ring]
(6) This will bé the dáy, this will bé the dáy
When áll of God's chíldren will be áble to síng
With new méaning "My cóuntry 'tís of thée,
Swéet land of líberty, óf thee Í sing.

(7) "Lánd where my fáthers died, lánd of the Pílgrim's pride
Fróm every móuntain side, lét freedom ríng!"
And if América is to bé a gréat nátion,
This múst becóme trúe. . . .

(8) And só let fréedom ríng from thé
Prodígious hílltops óf New Hámpshire.
Let freedom ring from thé
Mighty móuntains óf New Yórk.

(9) Let fréedom ríng from the héightening
Alleghénies of Pénnsylvánia.
Let fréedom ríng from the curváceous
Slópes of Cálifórnia.

(10) But nót only thát. Let fréedom ríng
Fróm Stone Móuntain of Géorgia.
Let fréedom ríng from Lóokout
Móuntain of Ténnessée.

(11) Let fréedom ríng from évery híll
And mólehill of Míssissíppi.
From évery móuntainsíde,
Let fréedom ring.

[Free at last]
(12) And whén this háppens, when wé allów
Fréedom to ríng, when we lét it ríng
From évery víllage and évery hámlet,
From évery státe and évery cíty,

(13) Wé will be áble to spéed up that dáy
When áll of God's chíldren, bláck men and whíte mén,
Jéws and Géntiles, Prótestants and Cátholics,
Will be áble to jóin hands and síng. . . .

(14) In the wórds of the óld Negro spíritual,
"Frée at lást, frée at lást.
Thánk God Almíghty
Wé are frée at lást."

COMMENTS. . . . The four-beat rhythm signaled by identifying the stressed syllables appeals to the mind's ear in our memory, as is also true of the underlined words and phrases, which stick in the mind's ear more and more each time they appear, often like tolling church bells.

For the mind's eye, though, our best course of action is to retain the first and last words of each line, using only initial letters for the others and representing extra syllables. Practically considered, this procedure works best when one writes each line out by hand, thereby bringing the tactile memory into play.

Here's how our stanza format looks visually in a learning grid version with many words represented only by initials, and with hyphens representing extra syllables. Most students achieve at least 70% accuracy after reading the original out loud and then attempting to guess the initialized words. . . . After this kind of confidence building as a start, any learner will achieve preliminary mastery in three or four hours. Recitation polish and confidence will of course take much longer — as it did for Dr. King himself.

At 390 words "I Have a Dream" represents a major learning challenge, enough so that all the stanzas are presented here in a learning-grid format. This will permit skipping back and forth as part of the preliminary memorization process. After this, of course, the learner can pursue a number of options, ranging from part by part master, as with our treatment of the Bill of Rights, to full scale repetition again and again as the larger structure and its rhythms sink in.

    As with the Bill of Rights, the effort required for mastering "I Have a Dream" is substantial: probably about fifteen hours for anyone over fifty. But anyone who brings it off will never again need to worry about losing his or her ability to concentrate.

Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" - Learning-grid version
(1) I have.... a.... dr.... t-!.... I.... h.... a dream.
That one.... d.... e-.... v-.... shall be
Exálted,.... e-.... h.... and mountain
Shall.... b.... m.... low. . . . .

(2) The róugh.... pl-.... w.... b....<u>máde</u> pláin
And the.... cr-.... pl-.... w.... b.... <u>máde</u> stráight
And the glóry.... o... th.... L.... sh.... bé revéaled
And all flésh.... sh.... s....it <u>together</u>. . . .

(3) Thís is.... o.... <u>h......</u> Th.... i.... the <u>fáith</u>
That Í.... w.... g.... b.... t.... the Sóuth with. . . .
<u>With thís.... f.... w.... w..... áble to</u> héw
Out of the m-.... o.... d-.... a.... a.... stóne of <u>hópe</u>.

(4) <u>With thís</u>.... f.... w.... w.... b.... áble to transfórm
The jángling.... d-.... o.... our nátion
Ínto a.... b-- sÿmphonÿ
Of brótherhóod. . . .

(5) <u>With thís</u>.... f.... w.... w.... b.... a-.... <u>to</u> wórk <u>together</u>,
To práy.... t--...., t.... str-.... <u>together</u>,
To go to.... j.... t--,.... t.... j.... t--, t.... st.... u.... for <u>fréedom</u> <u>together</u>,
Knówing that.... w.... w.... b.... fr.... one <u>dáy</u>.
***
(6) This will b.... th.... d...., th.... w.... b.... the <u>dáy</u>
<u>When áll</u>.... o.... G.... ch- w... b.... a-.... to síng

With new méaning.... "M.... c-.... '.... of thée,
Swéet.... l.... o.... l--,.... o.... thee Í <u>sing</u>.

(7) "Lánd where.... m.... f-.... d...., l.... o.... th.... Pílgrim's pride
Fróm.... e-.... m-.... s...., <u>l.... freedom ríng</u>!"
And if A--.... i.... t.... b.... a.... gréat nátion,
This.... m.... b-.... trúe. . . .

(8) And só.... <u>l</u>... fr-.... r.... from thé
Prodígious.... h-.... o.... N.... Hámpshire.
Let.... fr-.... r.... from thé
Mighty.... m-.... o.... N.... Yórk.

(9) <u>Let</u>.... fr-.... r.... fr.... th.... héightening
Alleghénies.... o.... Pénnsylvánia.
<u>Let</u>.... fr.... r.... fr.... th.... curváceous
Slópes.... o.... Cálifórnia.

(10) But nót.... o-.... th.... L.... fr.... <u>ríng</u>
<u>Fróm</u> Stone.... M-.... o.... Géorgia.
<u>Let</u>.... fr-.... r.... <u>from</u> Lóokout
Móuntain.... o.... Ténnessée.

(11) <u>Let</u>.... fr-.... r.... e-.... híll
And.... m-.... o.... Míssissíppi.
<u>From</u>.... e-.... <u>móuntainsíde,</u>
Let.... fr-.... ring.
***

(12) And whén.... th.... h-...., wh.... w.... allów
<u>Fréedom</u>.... t... r...., wh.... w.... l.... it <u>ríng</u>
<u>From</u>.... e-.... v-.... a.... e-.... hámlet,
<u>From</u>... e-.... e-.... st.... a.... e-.... cíty,

(13) <u>Wé will</u> b.... a-.... t.... spéed up that <u>dáy</u>
<u>When</u> a.... o.... G.... ch-...., bl.... m.... a.... whíte mén,
Jéws.... a.... G-...., Pr—a Cátholics,
<u>Will be</u>.... a-.... t.... j.... h.... <u>síng</u>. . .

(14) In the wórds.... o.... th.... o.... Negro spíritual,

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"Frée.... a.... l...., fr.... at lást.
Thánk.... G.... Almíghty
Wé a.... fr.... a.... lást."

I HAVE A DREAM" AND THE ORAL TRADITION: Our four patriotic documents offer you a representative range of American public discourse. At one extreme is the Bill of Rights, which is concerned with legal precision, not persuasive speaking, followed by the Declaration of Independence, which presents an official statement of policy in language which comes across as both logical and persuasive.

After this comes the Gettysburg Address, which has a logical structure supporting emotionally powerful statements, most of which have a repetitive structure, e.g., "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground." At the far end of the logic-persuasion scale we have "I Have a Dream," which as indicated by our underlining is filled with emotionally powerful repetitive language.

TO CONCLUDE: As far as memorization goes, it's well established that physical activity both tests and improves textual retention by raising the level of challenge. Stanislavsky, the great Russian director, used to make his actors recite their lines while moving a heavy grand piano across the stage. Conversely, walking, close order drill, resistance training, and other forms of repetitive physical exercise work much better with memorized chants and poems than with simple-minded counting.

Aerobically considered, the breathing effort needed for simultaneous poetry recitation and physical exercise measurably increases the level of exertion and fitness benefit. With four or eight exercise repetitions per 16-beat verse, for example, the 14 verses of "I Have a Dream" would take a health spa patron briskly through a multi-station "circuitry" exercise sequence

Quite apart from its patriotic value, health spa merit, and moral fervor, Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" is a significant artistic document, largely because of the way in which its repeated words and phrases invoke the natural rhetorical features that human beings have always responded to. Like the Star Spangled Banner (all four verses) and the Gettysburg Address, Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" represents a practical memorization target for older Americans, along with younger ones. Let's hope it continues to get the public attention it deserves.

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[1] Extracted from Memory Improvement and Vocabulary Empowerment Series (June 2008), MOVE IT! How to Strengthen Your Memory and Avoid Alzheimer's Disease.

Section Three: Memorization and Creativity

(13) Translating Memorized Texts

Our minds may take possession of a memorized text, but it still retains its original shape — just like a book we've bought and shelved. Practically considered, this original-shape feature means that we can pull these memorized texts up, even late at night, on our "memory screen and play with them creatively without changing their original form. By way of expanding our illustration, just imagine yourself mentally working with a split screen where your "memory object" is on the top, your workshop file is on the bottom, and your goal is to place your personal stamp upon your target by translating it into a different form in your workshop file.

There's no doubt that our memories of some poems have a visual shape, to the degree that in our minds we can see the individual words and their letters. But since we also are able to pronounce those words in our mind's ear, an excellent personal-best activity, especially when there's nothing else to do when we're stuck in traffic, is to transcribe the target using a phonetic alphabet. By way of illustration we'll use our Housman poem (from Ch. 2) as our target for three personal-best activities

Personal-best translation activities based on A.E. Housmans's "With rue my heart is laden"

[Housman's original]
With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipped maiden
And many a light-foot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The light-foot boys are laid.
The rose-lipped girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION. . . . Most American dictionaries and reading textbooks still use non-keyboard characters in transcribing how specific words sound via "standard American English pronunciation" (now used worldwide by almost three trillion human beings). The Scholastic Children's Dictionary and the Random House dictionaries in their downloaded format are the major exceptions (Merriam Webster uses keyboard characters only on its web site). With a couple of exceptions (IGH and THH), I'll use the Random House system here. Practically considered, as long as you have a dictionary against which to check your "orthographic dazzle," as Bernard Bloch once called it, you can use any system you feel comfortable. Only a few of the phonetic characters in traditional dictionaries are non-keyboard characters, by the way.

with roo migh hart iz lay"duhn
for gohl"duhn frendz igh had,
for me"nee uh rohz"lipt may"duhn
and me"nee uh light"fut lad.

bigh bruks too brahd for leep"ing
thuh light"fut ladz ahr layd.
thuh rohz"lipt guhrlz ahr sleep"ing
in feeldz hwer roh"zuhz fayd.

COMMENT. . . . Creatively considered, you may want to imagine yourself in your mind's ear reciting this poem to a large audience (as at a funeral) and therefore articulating your vowels and consonants with far more clarity, in which case you may want to match up your transcription against the transcription in an authoritative dictionary (Merriam Webster's, Random House, Webster's New World). I'll grant this is more of a learning-exercise activity than a creative activity. But it's certainly a practical tool late at night for driving away bad thoughts (what Churchill called his Black Dog).

Personal best paraphrasing. . . . The *Random House Unabridged Webster's Dictionary* (WordGenius version) uses keyboard-friendly phonetic symbols like these, along with an audio-pronunciation for each word. Hence you can check your original guesswork transcription for individual works and get better and better, including your in-the-head attempts.

Far more practical — and creative — will be your attempts to set forth in your own words what you believe a poem is saying sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase. As indicated by the following, a paraphrase can't be judged as correct or incorrect, good or bad; this means that it can always be changed in the interests of improvement, echoing Paul Valery's famous dictum, "A Poem is never finished, merely abandoned."

A PARAPHRASE OF "WITH RUE": The early death of my young friends — agile young men and lovely young women — saddens me. . . . The agile young men are now buried by brooks they cannot leap across. The lovely young women are buried in places where physical loveliness disappears. . . . TO EMPHASIZE THE POINT: There are many potential paraphrases of a specific poem, and this is only one of them. So don't be shy about creating your own paraphrases — and don't pay any attention to critics.

English to English specific-word translation. . . . Practically considered, a translation stands between the dictionary-authority of a phonetic transcription and the non-objectivity of a paraphrase (hence the Italian saying tradittore, traduttore "a translator is a traitor"). So there's no reason why you can't in the privacy of your own reverie substitute different words and phrases for some of the words in your memorized text (as with the capitalized words in the following version).

With SORROW my heart is laden
For AUREATE friends I had,
For many a rose-lipped GIRL
And many a light-foot BOY.

By brooks too WIDE for JUMPING ACROSS
The light-foot boys are STRETCHED OUT.
The rose-lipped girls are sleeping
In PASTURES where roses LOSE THEIR COLOR

COMMENT. . . . As you'll discover, this kind of non-objective challenge places you in an interesting creative bind. On the one hand you want to pick a substitute word or phrase that will be listed in your dictionary as a synonym for the word you want to replace. But on the other hand, you also want to be true to the meaning of the word in context, which is often quite different from its dictionary definitions, e.g., RUE, can mean both "sorrow" and "a yellow flower" (hence the implication of funerals and burials).

Going further, if you know a foreign language, no matter how rusty you are, you can also try your hand at word-for-word translation, e.g., (in Spanish) dolor for RUE, corazon for HEART, amigos for FRIENDS, etc. The broad canvas of a paraphrase or the precise focus upon a single word — a memorized text opens the door to what might be called a multi-ride personal-best amusement park, especially late at night.

Even better, it gives you the privilege of deciding exactly how far you want to go and when to stop. . . . all this within the dark recesses of your own resourceful, ingenious, and increasingly powerful mind — where nobody can correct you or say you nay.

Choosing memorized texts for translation activities

The physical feeling of heightened concentration (as in Rodin's "The Thinker"), the increase in self confidence that comes from learning and retaining a challenging memorization target, the sheer pleasure of possessing in one's mind some of what Matthew Arnold called "the best that's been thought and said" — most of us will agree that liking a target is far more important than its potential use to us later on. So there's no reason why, given the advantage of immediate access, you shouldn't choose poems from this book as experimental targets for phonetic transcription, paraphrase, English-to-English translation, or foreign language translation. It's your time you'll be spending, after all.

As a trial run, though, I would suggest taking a look at the first lines of our 20 Shakespearean sonnets. They're each presented forth in Chapter Nine and as such represent very practical "sample" challenges. Simply look at a first line like "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought"), see how it flies for you as a target for phonetic transcription, paraphrase, or word translation, and let your consciousness be your guide, as the saying goes.

(14) Set-Rhyme Composition and Writing Skills

Writing skills are not the same as spelling skills. A word's spelling can be judged as correct or incorrect by checking its dictionary entry. A paragraph or composition, on the other hand, is open to different interpretations by different readers. Not surprisingly, American folklore is filled with tales of

works like the "rabbit" epic Watership Down, which was rejected by thirty publishing houses before being accepted and becoming immensely successful. Given this basic uncertainty, along with the wounding impact of negative judgments, our best option is to take on writing tasks that we ourselves can evaluate on our own — accurately and objectively (almost like a computer would do)

Traditionally speakers of English learned to write by translating Latin targets into English and translating the result back into English after a few days had passed, cf. Ludus Literatus by Thomas Sheridan (father of the playwright). Since translation develops flexibility in both vocabulary choice and sentence-pattern manipulation, educators later on attempted to develop the same skills through bouts rimes, literally "rhyme endings," which we today in English call set-rhyme composition.

The challenge simply requires a test taker to write a new, original new poem using the same rhyming words in the same sequence as that of a previously written original, usually by a standard author. As we'll see, the results can be self-evaluated an unusually high level of objectivity, as opposed to depending upon the opinions of other people.   Here by way of an opening illustration is Housman's "With Rue My Heart Is Laden," followed by an "original" derivative poem with its set-rhyme words in capital letters.

With Rue My Heart Is Laden, by A.E. Housman (original)

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipped maiden
And many a light-foot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The light-foot boys are laid.
The rose-lipped girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade.

A Set-Rhyme Derivative of Housman's "With Rue" (retained rhymes are capitalized)

You loaf. I'm heavy LADEN
With care. You never HAD
Hard times. You're like a MAIDEN

Looking for a LAD.

I work while you go LEAPING
Toward sun and surf. I've LAID
Down roots, and I'll be SLEEPING
In comfort when you FADE.

Self evaluation

As indicated by Housman's original and its derivative version, set rhyme composition is very challenging, measurably so. Here are some of the elements involved.

SCOPE. Our original has 42 words, our derivative 43. Compared to a sonnet (average about 110 words), our derivative is of modest scope, requiring no more than an hour's phrasing, rephrasing, shuffling words and reshuffling them to make the sentences add up to a coherent whole.

RETENTION OF ORIGINAL RHYMES. As indicated by their capitalization, they're all here.

ORIGINALITY. Objectively our set-rhyme could measure this for himself or herself by counting the number of "new" words, excluding prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, and other so-called function words. Here are the 'new" words in the derivative: loaf, heavy, care. never, hard, times, looking, work, go, sun, surf, down, roots, comfort. Score: 14 points.

SPELLING AND GRAMMAR. . . . A desk top computer check of both original and derivative indicate no errors in spelling and grammar

COMMENT. The difficulty level for this particular set-rhyme derivative can be summed in two phrases: forty-two words and pencil and paper . . . A 43-word target, as we'll see, has fewer problems to solve than, say, a 100-word target. Just as important, the resources of pencil and paper place far fewer demands upon the memory than creating a set-rhyme derivative in one's head. By way of a more demanding challenge, let's look at a 121-word original and its set-rhyme derivative.

That Time of Year Thou Mayst in Me Behold, **by William Shakespeare (Sonnet 73)**

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, which seals up all in rest.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Set-Rhyme Derivative of Shakespeare's "That Time of Year"

(Sonnet 73); the original's rhymes are underlined.

*I heard the ocean cry aloud: "*Behold
the handsome sun-kissed seascape that I hang
for your approval! Praise it! Don't be cold*,*
or sulk about the roaring songs I sang

in darkness past. This is another day*;*
and all my storms are buried in the west*,*
their thunder and their lightning put away*.*
Take off your shoes and socks; lean back and rest*.*

The sand is warm, and you can build a fire
*if you prefer; there's lots of driftwood. * Lie
down! Let cares and covenants expire
of their free will as fleecy clouds slip by*."*

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He paused for breath. I felt the wind grow <u>strong</u>,
and knew I had postponed my flight too <u>long</u>.

SELF-EVALUATION. . . . The set-rhyme composer can evaluate a more demanding challenge like this using the previously introduced features, namely, scope, retention of original rhymes, originality, spelling, and grammar. A reasonable time estimate might be three hours. Hard work, but very fulfilling when everything falls into place.

COMMENT. . . . I've resisted the temptation to present other examples of set rhyme composition in action. Suffice it to say that William Butler Yeats often picked his rhymes first and then wrote a poem to fit them. In addition, the film Cyrano de Bergerac (starring Jose Ferrer) portrayed Cyrano picking his rhymes first, after which he goes on to compose a ballade and fight a duel simultaneously.   As a confidence builder set rhyme composition is literally unbelievable when it works. And it often does if one allows the energy of the original to play a subconscious role.

   Learn a great poem and then do some of your own tricks with it — what more than this can one ask of a personal best relationship.
*

(15) Concentration, Measurement Standards, and Optimism

C.W. Mills, a sociologist whose "Power Elite" book has become part of our language, once pointed out that as a writer he drew a key distinction between the terms "topic" and "theme." To him a topic (literally a "place," as in *topography*) was a part of a written work, e.g.,, a chapter or a clearly defined section. A THEME, on the other hand, was a less restrictied element that could appear and reappear all through a work, including a musical work. Lots of topics, relatively few themes — that's the way Mills saw the shape of what he was working on.

Concentration versus Intelligence

As indicated by our Norman Cousins story, most of us share a fairly clear idea of what concentration feels like physically, cf. Rodin's statue, the Thinker. We also would agree, I feel, that the act of concentration usually produces something tangible: a piece of writing, a measurable improvement in a physical skill (shooting baskets, etc.).

Intelligence, on the other hand, is something more intangible. It's used to describe an ability, not necessarily an activity. Nor does it correlate with concentration, since low-intelligence Americans can concentrate more than high-intelligence Americans, and often do. Hence the folk proverb, "Concentration can trump Intelligence seven days a week."

Concentration is a major theme in this book. Memorizing a poemt calls for concentration over a period of time, not necessarily the ability to interpret it in a class discussion. To put it another way, anyone who chooses to spend a productive amount of concentration time can achieve, especially in the long. Precociousness (often confused with intelligence) often produces impressive results in K-12 education and college. But the many career surprises we encounter in our 25th high school reunions are usually fueled by concentration, along with a little bit of luck.

Measurement Standards versus Expert Opinion

I believe the growing interest in poetry memorization links up with a growing commitment to scientific measurment standards in the American workplace and market place. This move first showed up about 20 years ago in the TQ (total quality) movement based on the work of W. Edwards Beming (the architect of Japanese technological success). But its most visible sign is the name-shift of our state agencies from "weights and measures" to "measurement standards" (e.g., California and Oregon), along with the new international field of Micrology, "the science of measurement."

By way of linking learning poetry to micrology, let's start with the four basic goals of a measurement system: an authorititative standard, calibration, relevance, and efficency. All distance measurements, for example, are ultimately based upon the accepted international authority of the standard meter, just as the "grades" (e.g., choice and prime) of a meat market are based upon an acceptable range of standard measurement, not a single reading.

Practically considered, the perceived relevance of the measurement system is also a factor (does the short tolerance range of the Lexus produce more sales?), and as in accountancy, so is the efficiency of the system (is the cost of a lower tolerance for error justified by the brisker sales of a higher priced product?

Authorititative standards, calibration, relevance, and efficency — The standard used by The Columbia University Top 500 Poems is the ranked

list produced by the Columbia Granger's® Index of Poems, 9th Edition (available in most public libraries). Since the ranking is determined by the number of appearances of a poem in published anothologies, the ranking also equips up to calibrate the popularity of poems (e.g., Blake's "Tiger," #1; Frost's "Stopping by Words," #6; and Lewis Carrol's "Jabberwocky." #18), along learning-difficulty factors (number of words, lines, date of composition, etc.). The relevance of time spent could be measured against performance on national writing sample tests, just as the relative efficiency or recitation testing could also be measured against the relevance of machine scored tests.

There's no doubt that the personal best movement accounts for the growing popularity of text learning-recitation programs, e.g., the recitation of memorized family anecdotes and even television commercials in senior centers. But I feel the measurable-standard parallel invites more attention to low-cost learning-recitation programs in many other locales, especially K-12 and senior centers.

Darwinian Optimism versus Personal Optimism

Like the United States, the so-called Western World has been a very optimistic place during the last 200 years. Prior to that time, especially in Shakespeare's time, people thought of themselves as living in orderly societies where just about everyone, rich or poor, had his or her assigned place at the table and stayed there — even the American revolutionists.

After 1800, fueled by progress in technology, the West began to think of itself as civilized human beings as moving forward year by year: this in marked contrast to "savages" as described by Darwin in a pro-evolution excerpt from his *Descent of Man* read via textbook (*Norton Anthology of English Literature*) read by millions millions of American college sophomores between 1960 and 2000.

But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians. . . They [the Fuegians at the southern tip of South America] possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; they had no government, and were merciless to anyone not of their own small tribe [from *Descent of Man*, 1871].

COMMENT. . . . After almost 140 years, when Americans of all ages are now worrying about their futures, it's well worth asking professional biologists whether "evolution" means "progress" today, as it clearly meant to Darwin, Huxley, and Herbert Spencer. The answers I've gotten have certainly downplayed the civilized progress theme in the last 20 years and replaced it, sometimes evasively, with the much less optimistic definition of "evolution as a force for change."

But personal best progress, it should be obvious, has a more personal impact than planet-wide changes. Our jobs, the happiness of our families, our overall satisfaction with the "station in life to which the Lord has been pleased to call us" — these are what human beings actually worry about, are they not? And they play themselves out on a stage far smaller than the grand movements of governments and international crises.

Indeed, I hope what comes through here to the reader is a recognition that uncertainty in a society opens far more doors to deceptively ordinary young people than does a stacked-deck-bureaucracy, especially those, young and old, who are willing to concentrate first upon their own personal growth, measurably so, as opposed to taking on "born to lose" challenges.

To me, our most basic born-to-lose challenge is that of attempting to lose weight, a scenario which in my personal experience fails nine times out of ten and in the process kills most our self confidence. In contrast, a memorization challenge is first of all secret, second, relatively practical, third, immensely satisfying, and fourth, surprisingly impressive to others when declaimed. If you think of your effort as "completing a mini-marathon," you won't be far off, I feel.

Memorizing poems, memorizing prose, and personal creativity. . . . Of these, memorizing poems is clearly the most practical and the most productive jumping off place. But I'm positive the other two will open their doors once you get a few mnemonic successes under your belt. Best wishes in picking your own poems and making your own discoveries. . . . especially regarding your own personal powers and capabilities!
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