

*COLLEGE GUILD*  
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

POETRY CLUB-2, UNIT 4  
SPANISH SPEAKING POETS

**Octavio Paz** (1914-1998) born in Mexico City, is considered one of Latin America's most important poets. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990, a prestigious award. He also wrote prose, taught in the United States and served as the Mexican ambassador to India. *(All of his poems in this unit are translated from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger.)*

POEM

At times poetry is the vertigo of bodies and the vertigo of joy and the vertigo of death;

The walk with the eyes closed along the edge of the cliff, and the verbena  
in submarine gardens;

the laughter that sets fire to rules and the holy commandments;

the despair that boards a paper boat and crosses,

for forty nights and forty days, the night-sorrow sea and the day-  
sorrow desert;

the idolatry of the self and the desecration of the self and the dissipation  
of the self;

the beheading of epithets, the burial of mirrors;

the recollection of pronouns freshly cut in the garden of Epicurus\*, and

the garden of Netzahualcoyotl:\*\*

the flute solo on the terrace of memory and the dance of flames in the  
cave of thought;

the migrations of millions of verbs, wings and claws, seeds and hands;

the nouns, bony and full of roots, planted on the waves of language;

the love unseen and the love unheard and the love unsaid; the love in  
love.

*Syllables seeds.*

*\*a Greek philosopher (341 – 270 BC)  
formed in the*

*20<sup>th</sup> century by draining a lake; a poor area with a high crime rate.*

*\*\*part of Mexico City*

- 1. This poem uses many images to describe a poem. Pick two of these images and write about them in prose. Do you like the poetic or the prose version best? Why?**
- 2. How can syllables be seeds?**
- 3. Write a poem to describe poetry using images relevant to you.**

[Use your CG dictionary for words unfamiliar to you. If you don't have a dictionary, try to figure out the meaning from the context. Every word in a poem is carefully chosen --poets spend many hours revising. If you are able to, read the poems out loud several times. You will have a different feeling/understanding of poems when you hear them.]

WIND, WATER, STONE

Water hollows stone,  
wind scatters water,  
stone stops the wind.  
Water, wind, stone.

Wind carves stone,  
stone's a cup of water,  
water escapes and is wind.  
Stone, wind, water.

Wind sings in its whirling,  
water murmurs going by,  
unmoving stone keeps still  
Wind, water, stone.

Each is another and no other:  
crossing and vanishing  
through their empty names:  
water, stone, wind.

- 4. Notice and list the verbs Paz uses in this poem. What is the effect of using so many verbs (action words) and short sentences?**
- 5. How can their names be "empty" and why do you think he writes, "each is another and no other"? How would you explain this in prose?**
- 6. Write a poem about three objects that are related in some way.**

BROTHERHOOD

I am a man: little do I last  
and the night is enormous.  
But I look up:  
the stars write.  
Unknowing I understand:  
I too am written,  
and at this very moment  
someone spells me out.

**7. Express the meaning these eight lines have for you in one sentence. Which version conveys brotherhood best?**

**8. Notice how Paz carries the metaphor of writing throughout the poem. How can “stars write?” What do you think “I too am written” and “someone spells me out” mean?**

BETWEEN GOING AND STAYING

Between going and staying the day wavers,  
in love with its own transparency.

The circular afternoon is now a bay  
where the world in stillness rocks.

All is visible and all elusive,  
all is near and can't be touched.

Paper, book, pencil, glass  
rest in the shade of their names.

Time throbbing in my temples repeats  
the same unchanging syllable of blood.

The light turns the indifferent wall  
into a ghostly theater of reflections.

I find myself in the middle of an eye,  
watching myself in its black stare.

The moment scatters. Motionless,  
I stay and go: I am a pause.

Again Paz uses images and metaphors to describe the day in the first stanza and the afternoon in the second stanza. How can the day waver and be in love with its own transparency and how can the afternoon be like a bay where the world in stillness rocks. Looking at how this is done can help you develop metaphors in your own poems, unusual and effective ones. Reading aloud, slowly several times helps to open up the images so you see how much they contain and allows readers to use their imaginations of fill in and feel the picture.

**9. How can all be both “visible and “all elusive”?**

**10. Write a poem about how you experience “time”.**

**11. Paz has said, “Poetry constitutes the secret religion of the modern age.” Explain why or why not you agree with him?**

**Antonio Machado** (1866-1939) is one of Spain’s most beloved poets. He has been called subtle, amusing and aphoristic -- writing a concisely and tersely about truth. Frequently he writes like a philosopher. In his later years he devoted poetry to social commentary. *The following poems are translated from the Spanish by Willis Barnstone.*)

GUADARRAMA, IS IT YOU, OLD FRIEND?\*

Guadarrama, is it you, old friend  
the sierra gray and white,  
the mountains of my Madrid afternoons  
when I saw you painted against the blue.

Up through your deep ravines  
and through your bitter peaks,  
a thousand Guadarramas and a thousand suns  
canter with me into your body.

*(\*mountain range extending from Avila, passing close to Madrid, and ending in province of Segovia. It is 50 miles long with the highest peak at 7,966 feet)*

**12. What is Machado’s relationship with Guadarrama?**

**13. Write a poem about some aspect in nature that moves you.**

YOU WILL KNOW YOURSELF

You will know yourself  
by remembering the clouded canvases of old dreams  
on a grim day when you walk  
with your eyes open.

What counts in memory  
is the clean gift of evoking dreams.

**14. Do you agree with Machado that “What counts in memory is the clean gift of evoking dreams?” Explain how memory and dreams are connected.**

**15. Using imagery, write a poem about how you can or will know yourself. For example, Machado used the image of a clouded canvas.**

WILL THE SPELLBOUND\* WORLD DIE WITH YOU

Will the spellbound world die with you  
where memory hands on  
to clean breaths in life,  
the white shadow of a first love,

a voice that stuck your heart, the hand  
you wanted to grab in dreams,  
and every love  
that fell in the soul down to the bottom sky?

Will your world die with you,  
the old life you remade in your way?  
Have the anvils and crucibles of your soul  
been working for dust and wind?

*\*(entranced or fascinated)*

**16. In what ways is the world “spellbound”?**

**17. Machado uses concrete images in an unusual way to create a mood. What mood does this poem evoke for you and what lines give you this impression?**

**18. Answer the question in the last two lines in the poem: “Have the anvils and crucibles of your soul/been working for dust and wind?” by writing a poem of your own.**

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*Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes*