

# Humanities & Arts Requirement

## Humanities and Arts Project Title Page

Poems 'n' Stuff, I Guess

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Humanities and Arts Course Sequence: Writing

WR1010	Elements of Writing	A19
EN 2219	Creative Writing	C18
EN 3219	Adv. Creative Writing	D18
RE 2722	Questions of Evil and Good	B16
MU 1611	Fundamentals of Music	B18

Presented to: Professor Joshua Harmon  
Department of Humanities & Arts  
Term B19  
HU 3900B06

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Humanities & Arts Requirement  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
Worcester, Massachusetts

## Abstract

This small collection of works explores some of my own thoughts and worries, inspired by the occasional walk taken over the term, combined with other memories, and blended with the occasional bite of humor. Observations on matters like perceptions, value, decisions, and worry are explored as well as some thoughts on direct observations made of the world, from an almost existential perspective.

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# Preface

**Description** My project is a set of poems and a few small personal essays that aimed to capture my thoughts and. . . well, ruminations, I suppose, as I walked about. The chapters the poems are grouped in are meant to capture a specific theme or general “category” of thoughts that I wanted to describe. For example, *Innatus* is a collection of poems focused on the natural ways someone (in this case me) might process the world, taking the reader through literal perception of the world, perception of value, and perception of what it means to be a social creature. In essence I suppose this is a collection of armchair philosophizing and assorted angst, but since it’s what I thought about and experienced while walking, I guess it seems appropriate. There are a few other observations and miscellaneous things that came to mind too, scattered in between.

**Usage of Walking** My writing typically doesn’t represent individual walks since the focus is not necessarily on the walk itself, but on the thoughts the walk inspired. Walks *are* used as a vehicle for discussion though, or sometimes a metaphor. In fact, many of these poems are amalgamations of different walks in which my thoughts were similar. For instance, I never *really* tried to pass ahead of a woman and then dodge a squirrel in the same evening, they were two separate events. However, the same thought — mindfulness and awareness of others’ anxiety and my own — was shared between the two, so I combined them into one to better deliver the message. To that end, while walking I tended to note down less about the overall walk, and more on the individual things or thoughts experienced while walking. The simple walk to school, for instance, wasn’t noted as a whole, while the extremely noisy truck on the way there was.

**Process & Methodology** My method was pretty simple: go for walk, and let my mind wander. Walking on its own is rarely an action-packed thing, so my technique was pretty easy to pull off! The interesting part was later on when I had to start composing poems based on my encounters. For that I started by grouping things into broad categories. Dirt on the street, or a homeless man on the corner, might go into the bucket on “failings of society”, whereas the aforementioned noisy truck, the rustling of leaves, or observations of people talking might go into the “perceptions” bucket (of sorts). Over time I came up with many different ideas for poems, some of which made it into writing. Of those, only a subset are reflected here,

because either some things were too personal or I felt they weren't of high enough quality.

Aside from poems, there were a few things that I thought of that I wanted to write down, but I couldn't figure out how to do it in an appropriate poem format. In my mind not *everything* can be a poem, so for those instances I wrote short essays, usually about the equivalent of two to three paragraphs.

I also tried to keep my work reasonably... formatted, in a way. My writing is fairly casual but I have an appreciation for well-formatted, tidy notes and documents, so I tried to keep that pattern throughout the class. I found that having tidy work and a sense of formality helped keep me focused, hence the inspiration for Latin titles, or the document style, or the poem line numbers, and so on. My hope is that my fondness for order shows up in my entire project.

**Goals** At first I didn't have any particular goals, I just wanted to write and get something down on paper. My work was actually shaped by the first poem I wrote ("*Aevum*"), which started off as a general inspired-by-observations poem but evolved into a this-is-how-I-sometimes-perceive-things poem. I liked the result and I enjoyed the contemplative mood of it, so I wrote another in the same style, and another, and another, and so on.

My overall goal was really just to capture the things I thought about over the term, very loosely inspired by my walks. I sought to use the walk and things encountered on it as metaphors for what I *really* wanted to talk about in a particular poem (e.g. "*Occasio*" isn't really about some massive intersection, it's intended to capture the directions a person could go in life and how *not* making a choice is a choice of its own). In the end I suppose that meant capturing general worry and anxiety, among other subjects.

**My Assessment** I'm not sure *what* to make of this, and frankly I'm worried if I wrote enough. After a time I became somewhat fatigued from writing so much in the same vein that I worry the quality might've slipped, so I omitted some pieces. There are definitely some pieces in here that I feel more proud of than I do about others (I'll leave it to the reader to decide which ones they are!), and some pieces that I think are a little on the rough side. Does this work capture the things I thought about? Yes. Did it do it *well*? Perhaps; I certainly hope so. Should I have done this in the first place?

I don't know. That's the part I'm least sure of. Like I said, I'm more proud of some parts than others; I was trying to walk a delicate line between being contemplative or ruminative, and being angsty or just *edgy*. Either this is going to come off well and at least a few pieces here will hit home, or

they won't and the reader is going to be left with a bad taste in their mouth and a (hopefully) faint regret for having read any of it.

# 1 Inside

WALKING AROUND IS A GOOD WAY to explore what people *do* when given enough time and space. Not because of the “Walking” part, but because of “*about*.” There are buildings and roads, lampposts and traffic lights, cars and pedestrians everywhere. Sure, there are a few extraordinary things here and there, mega-structures or complicated factories elsewhere in the world. Somehow, though, the extraordinary is less fascinating than the ordinary, especially when I’m on nfoot. Sometimes it’s not the river of ants flowing about an anthill that’s interesting, but interior of the colony itself. The parts we don’t think about. The parts within.

## 2 Innatus

### *Aevum*

Outside the air is still,  
not thick but heavy  
Branches bent, leaves hovering  
I see a squirrel  
5           a plastic bag  
            a fallen leaf  
            a rolling bottle  
To my eyes  
they are not moving.

10       A truck trundles by,  
          tires frozen to the ground  
          exhaust motionlessly climbing skyward  
          A distant man walks  
          in place towards me  
15       I wonder what he's thinking,  
          what he wants?  
          If I went outside,  
          I could find out.

20       Inside it's silent,  
          blissfully so.  
          The cold sting on my face,  
          warmth of my boots,  
          leather of my jacket  
          Comforting foci.

25       I blink.

          The next explosion reaches me.  
          The squirrel twitches cautiously  
          Leaves fall and crumple  
          The truck grinds inches forward  
30       *Oh god, I can smell diesel from here!*  
          The man takes another step, turning away

There's too much to keep track of,  
too much to sense.

35 I think I'll stay inside,  
today.



## *Letum*

5       The broken leaf beneath my foot  
          once *was* something  
          It still is, to me.  
          Tomorrow the street sweeper will come  
          and it will be no more.

10       Did someone once value it?  
          Gaze upon it in the tree,  
          thanking it for its natural,  
          physical beauty?  
          Maybe things have value because  
          we think their material is valuable.

15       Tinny music in my earbuds reminds me  
          this can't be all.  
          My music is only a number  
          stored in an intricate device  
          Just a bit of information.  
          Its value has no form.

20       Two people,  
          friends I assume,  
          walk before me.  
          Their friendship is neither material nor physical  
          Does it have value too?  
          Two squirrels play in the distance  
          Their friendship has value  
25       (to the squirrels, at least)  
          And if the neighborhood cat should find one,  
          what happens to that value?

30       Nature will recycle the leaf and feed something,  
          — maybe bits of used-to-be-leaf stuff  
          will appear in my chicken salad.  
          Then I too will be partly dead leaf.  
          Information like my music lasts forever  
          at least until it's deleted.

35       Only those squirrels will remember their friendship  
          Only those friends will remember their own.  
          But there is no recycling of relationships  
          They leave no detritus

to feed other relationships.  
They die and disappear forever.

40      We are made of the dead,  
walking through graveyards of trillions.

## Solum

Walking is a reminder  
of what *solitude* means  
There are people on the streets  
People you don't know  
5 don't need to know  
don't want to know

Except you *do*.

Not them.  
Others. Who?  
10 You don't know.  
The cruelest part  
of being an individual  
being *human*  
is needing to share it with others.

15 Their faces aren't familiar.  
Some scowl into the wind,  
Some might nod at you,  
acknowledging your existence.  
5 years from now, you think  
20 maybe I'll be friends with one of them.  
It's a possibility, technically.

But not here,  
not today.  
You don't *know* them,  
25 and there's too many of them anyways.

A stroll through a city reminds you  
The loneliest place on the planet  
is inside the biggest crowd.

### 3 What I Did

HOW LONG HAVE *we* been about, walking from place to place, finding we need a new place, then building it? It's been a few millennia by now, and look at what we've done. Everything from our commutes to our idle activities are unrecognizable to people 50 years ago — would someone in the 60's have predicted social media, for instance? Our cities too lack the shining robotic-everything, nuclear-centric retrofuturism predicted a century ago, but those predictions missed the “smart” technology era. We've come a *long* way.

*I* didn't make that happen, but maybe some of my ancestors helped. You probably didn't either, but the same applies to your ancestors as well, I suppose. No, *we* did that — the human race collectively took thousands of years to bring us the world we have today. It's comforting to think that inside each of us is *that* ability. But it's all too easy to say “that's not my fault” when faced with an inadequacy and just as easy to feel a swell of pride for something wondrous.

We've created schools and stadiums, fields of endless green grass and trees. We've created devices that can make thousands of calculations every second, or play beautiful music on a whim. We've developed new ways to keep people warm, fed, and happy. It doesn't take much to notice these things — just take a stroll from a town to a forest, and you'll see it. With so many accomplishments, we have much to be proud of.



There's a homeless man on the corner of the intersection between Lincoln and Route 9 — a different person every time. There's another near the exit from I-290. I don't carry any cash, and I don't make eye contact. There are bags and bottles and stuff from peoples' cars everywhere. There's smog in the air too, if I pay attention to it. I try not to notice these things, though. They're the things I don't think about — *I* didn't do that, after all. Somebody else did, and what they do has nothing to do with me.

Except, of course, that it does. If we all have the capacity within us to create such wonderful things, do we not also have the capacity to do such terrible wrongs? I can't simply say each person has the “good” of the human race in them but not the “bad”, if you will. Those homeless men were forced out on the street by someone like me — like *us*. The world collectively raised the litterers, too. We had a hand in them, too.

These things are what *we* did with our world, and we must take responsibility for them.

## 4 Personalem

### *Conatus*

A hill approaches me as I walk  
I'm wary of its slope  
*What's at the top?*  
*the middle?*  
*the beyond?*  
5 Am I approaching it, or it, me?

The slope is gentle, so far.  
The trees are rooted in the ground  
fixed guardians of the soil,  
10 former seeds that gave up on travelling.  
What do they think of travelers  
like myself?

The road grows steeper still  
My legs scream in pain,  
15 begging for an end,  
reminding me how much easier  
it would be to stop.  
What's the point of climbing, anyways?  
Will this ever get better?  
20 Is there even something  
beyond the horizon?  
How can I possibly know  
if I can't see the top?

I would make  
25 a good tree.  
Of that I have no doubt.

The ground begins evening out  
slowly, beneath my feet  
My legs feel it before I do  
30 At least, I think I do.  
This could only be a brief respite,

a pause in my upward battle.

35 I don't want  
to put down roots,  
I hope this isn't my time.

## *Ad Infinitum*

Have you ever heard of  
a roundabout?  
You can get stuck in one  
forever, if you like.

5        You're *supposed*  
          to learn about them  
          You're *supposed*  
          to know how to navigate.  
10       And if you're on foot,  
          disadvantaged. . .  
          Well, no-one told *me*  
          how to handle.

          So here I am,  
          round and round I go  
15       Sometimes walking,  
          Sometimes driving,  
          fast as I can go,  
          but never leaving,  
          never exploring outwards.  
20       Breaking out takes time,  
          dedication, *effort*  
          More than looping about.

          The more I loop around,  
          the more used to it I become  
25       I wonder what's beyond  
          the exit?

Have you ever heard of  
a roundabout?

## *Separatus*

5       How many roads can you walk  
          before they become one?  
          Before they fatigue the eyes?  
          How many styles can you see  
          until they become a genre?

10       This one has a divider down the center,  
          filled with trees and grass, and lined with houses.  
          That one has a park next to it, and bricks  
          down the center.  
          And this one here?  
          It's a one-way street with parking on one side,  
          because *someone* thought  
          it was a good idea.

15       Oh, to be a designer,  
          to decide what road you'll make.  
          How challenging it must be to stay  
          within the lines.

20       Too different, and your road will be rejected.  
          Outcast, eccentric,  
          ridiculed.  
          Too generic, and no-one will notice.  
          Common, mainstream,  
          *basic*.

25       Travellers want something *different*,  
          but something *familiar*.  
          They 'll say "Just make what's in your heart!"  
          But I don't know how to make  
          something they'll *like*.  
          Oh, how I long for some asphalt,  
30       to pave a road  
          that is myself.



## 5 Surface

IT SEEMS BOTH EASY AND DIFFICULT to take notice of what's around me, instead of noting the finer details of everything. I see a lush tree on my walks, turning red as the fall progresses, and I admire its beauty, and I accept it for what it is. But of course the tree is so much more complicated than that; it has a history (did someone plant it there? Where did its ancestors live? Has it had any rough winters? Etc.), it has internal structure and order, it has its own "purpose" if you believe in such a thing.

Are we "supposed" to go on a walk to reflect on nature and the environment in a surface-sort of way? I suppose it depends on why you go walking. If you're there to observe the world, you're definitely in the right place, and I won't begrudge anyone that. I've found myself in that position many times. What about walking just for a chance to observe their inner world, their inner thoughts? Just to be peaceably alone? Is a walk of that sort still "a walk," or is it really only mobile armchair philosophizing in disguise?

I think this is why it's both easy *and* hard for me to go on the observational kind of walk. Maybe I'm just a more inward focused person, and I secretly enjoy getting lost in inner worlds — my world, the tree's world, you name it.

Oh no, I'm doing it now aren't I?

## 6 **Anxietas**

### *Cautus*

5       The woman ahead of me  
          doesn't know I'm there.  
          I'm not far behind her,  
          keeping my distance in the  
          evening's light.  
          She must hear my footsteps.

10       But this isn't a horror movie  
          I'm just a passerby,  
          heading home.  
          So I walk ahead of her  
          keen to dispel suspicion.

15       A squirrel twitches in the distance  
          He's foraging for food  
          I'm not afraid,  
          But he is.  
          I move around him,  
          careful not to disturb.

20       I remain wary  
          Keen to avoid disruption  
          Keen to avoid annoyance  
          I don't want to be a burden.

          When I arrive home  
          I'll think the same  
          I wonder what squirrels  
          might live in my home?

## *Occasio*

The road ahead diverges  
Not into two, or three,  
but many.  
Down one path lies an apartment  
5 The second. . . a cat?  
Across the third are snowy hills  
Down the fourth I see a desert.

The one on my left feels happier,  
but only for a distance.  
10 The one on the right feels gloomy,  
but it lightens near the middle.  
Crowds of people line the road ahead,  
Behind me lies solitude.

But I'm not Robert Frost,  
15 I don't wonder which I should've taken,  
or muse on the one I'm on,  
I worry which I should *take*.

And so I stand at these crossroads,  
unable to decide.  
20 Paralyzed by inaction,  
trapped by my inertia.

I could stay here forever,  
but that's a road of its own.

## *Significatio*

Does snow have meaning?  
Does grass *mean* something,  
in a grand, “cosmic” sense?

5 I wonder what the meaning is  
of going for a stroll.  
To exercise? To enjoy the view?  
To reflect, to contemplate?  
Maybe it’s just to be alone.

10 Maybe that’s *why*  
but not what it means.  
I look on the grass,  
It’s there only to reproduce.  
If I pick a blade and ask  
15 “What’s its *meaning*?”  
will that create create one?

The question is unfair  
Does it need a “meaning”?  
Does the tree?  
Do you, or I?

20 Maybe the “meaning”  
of people who ask those questions  
is only to unceasingly search,  
so they can leave everyone else  
alone  
25 Dwelling in their own existentialism.

I think. . .  
I’d like it that way.

## *Terminus*

5        This journey nears its end  
          I haven't arrived  
          (I'm only just leaving)  
          and I won't for a while  
          But *this* part is done.

10       What did I see?  
          What did I learn?  
          I saw the end of this road  
          I decided to walk past it.  
          I saw snowy footsteps  
          But they took a different path.

15       I learned we make  
          our own roads,  
          if we want.  
          I learned the comfort  
          of following someone else's  
          But the joy  
          of twisting my own.

20       Whose road was I on?  
          Why did they end it?  
          Am I the first to walk it  
          or the last to go beyond it?  
          I don't want to be both.