

#words 2028

## Hybrid Poetry by Robert Fleming

What is hybrid poetry: an integration of two or more art forms, where one form is text.

**Prose Poetry:** The most common hybrid poetry form is prose poetry which combines prose and poetry which is written in sentences in paragraphs without line breaks. The prose elements are that the sentences start with a capital letter and end with punctuation like a period. In contrast, typical poetry elements used are the repetition of the same word, words that start with the same letter (alliteration), consistent meter like the same number of words/syllables or the same sequence of word stresses in each sentence, word rhyming, or comparing one word to another (metaphor, simile).

One of the first prose poems was written by Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867), *Be Drunk* [Be Drunk by Charles Baudelaire - Poems | Academy of American Poets](#) .

Figure 1. Charles Baudelaire



*Be Drunk*: 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph

*You have to be always drunk. That's all there is to it—it's the only way. So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk.*

Exercise: re-read the prior paragraph defining prose poetry, and identify the prose and poetry elements. What form is *Be Drunk* prose, poetry, prose poetry, or neither: words written by a drunk man?

What are the benefits of prose poetry:

Reader: when a reader is bored with poetry and prose, prose poetry gives the reader diversity and something new.

Writer: opportunity to experiment with a new form while staying in their primary form. For example, a prose writer who has never written a poem before may try writing a prose poem which may be easier for them than trying to first write just a poem.

**Sung Poetry:** is a performance where poetry is sung and/or accompanied by playing a musical instrument. The first poets in Greece performed their poems with the accompaniment of a lyre (a stringed musical instrument in the lute-family [Lyre - Wikipedia](#)). The oldest (11th to 7th centuries BC) anthology of Chinese poetry, the Shijing, was a collection of songs [Classic of Poetry - Wikipedia](#) .

Figure 2. Lyre



Exercise: Get a metronome whose sound is similar to a drum (physical or digital: [METRONOME ONLINE - free online metronome](#) ). Read one of your poems while playing a metronome. In my above description of prose poetry, I explain *meter*. What did you learn about your poem's meter? If nothing, reread Baudelaire's *Be Drunk*, get an alcoholic drink, drink it, and try again.

What are the benefits of sung poetry?

Hearer: The instrument accompaniment to the voice reading may make the sound/musical elements of the poem more vivid (e.g. the meter is easier for the hearer to identify).

Writer/Musician: Can you make a living as a poet? Probably not. For many poets, poetry is a part-time role/hobby. My haiku poem explains:

the vow of poverty  
which is better which is worse  
the vow of poetry

Adding music to a text poem may extend the poem into a song. A successful song may be more lucrative for the composer and poet. A google search on *What music pays the most?* responded with Tidal, owned by a consortium of artists led by Jay-Z, has one of the highest payout rates in the industry, paying artists approximately \$0.0125 per stream.

**Visual Poetry:** combines text poetry and images. Up until +-2010 most visual poetry only used letters and words to form the visual image. In the introduction to Visual Poetry by Marvin Sackner he explained, in 2008, that *concrete poems as those in which only letters and/or words are utilized to form a visual image, whereas visual poems constitute those in which images are integrated into the text ...* [Visual Poetry in the Avant Writing Collection: John M. Bennett, John M. Bennett, Bob Grumman, Marvin A. Sackner: Amazon.com: Books.](#)

A master work of concrete poetry, written in the shape of angel's wings, is George Herbert's "Easter Wings." [Easter Wings by George Herbert | Poetry Foundation](#)

### **Easter Wings**

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
    Though foolishly he lost the same,  
        Decaying more and more,  
            Till he became  
                Most poore:  
                With thee  
    O let me rise  
    As larks, harmoniously,  
    And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
    And still with sicknesses and shame.  
    Thou didst so punish sinne,  
        That I became  
            Most thinne.  
            With thee  
    Let me combine,  
    And feel thy victorie:  
    For, if I imp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, a visual artist in the late 1970s was a graffiti artist who crossed out word(s) using the strikethrough symbol [Jean-Michel Basquiat - Wikipedia](#). While Basquiat was first a visual artist, I would also classify his work as visual poetry.

In Spring, 2022 I attended a Visual Poetry workshop, led by JoAnn Balingit, a prior Delaware (DE) poet laureate, at the Woodlawn Library in DE [JoAnn Balingit - The website of JoAnn Balingit](#). JoAnn explained that just like poetry has elements (e.g. meter, rhyme), that visual poetry has elements (doodle, border/barrier, strikethrough, layers, circle, concrete, and erasure). Basquiat was one of the first visual artist to include word strikethrough and erasure.

Exercise: Microsoft Word has the ability to strikethrough a word

Open MS Word / highlight a word / right click / select font

Written language includes yin/yangs – dualities ( light/dark / good/bad ). A visual poetry alternative to convey the opposite is to strikethrough a word opposite. If you want to use the dark, your visual poetry options:

light  
~~light~~

Find one of your written poems which has dualities

Copy the original text

Identify in the copied version, all the lines where there is an opposite word

Change the existing word to the opposite and strikethrough the word (e.g. if your line includes the word bad, change it to ~~good~~ )

Read the poem: is there any change to the meaning?

What are the benefits of visual poetry?

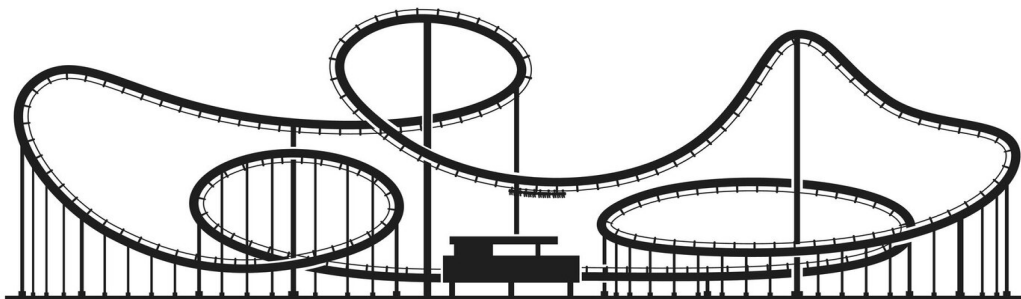
See-er: The visual element may make the work more vivid and easier for the viewer to have an emotional response. The visual poem probably will have fewer words and will viewers to interpret the work differently.

Writer: Create new publication/display opportunities for the writer including selling the work as art which may be the path for the poet to leave poverty.

**Author Experience: Robert Fleming’s journey to visual poetry.**

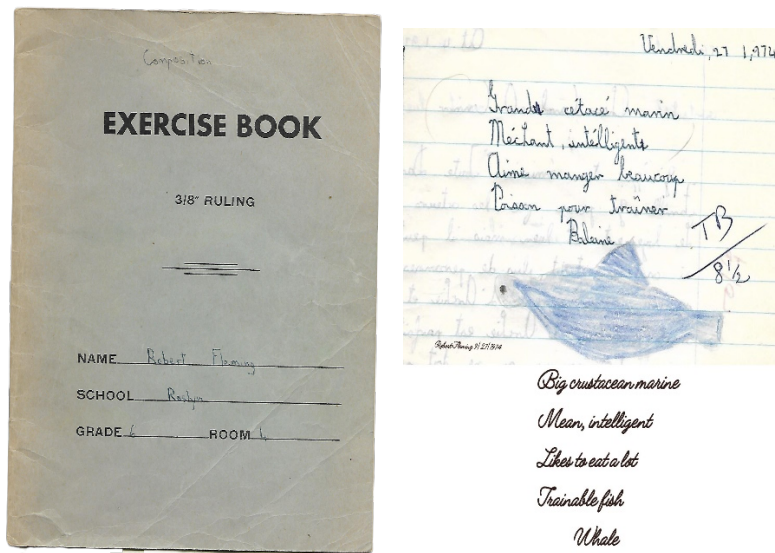
**What drew me to visual?** From 7-12 years old, I was everything rollercoasters: riding, watching, and drawing them. Instead of making my bed, with pencils and paper, I drew rollercoasters tracks.

Figure 3: Rollercoaster track



Growing up in Montreal, Quebec, my schooling was equally split between French and English. In grade 6, age 11, I wrote my first visual poem *Baleine* (Whale), which only translated into English four years ago.

Figure 4. Elementary school composition book and first visual poem

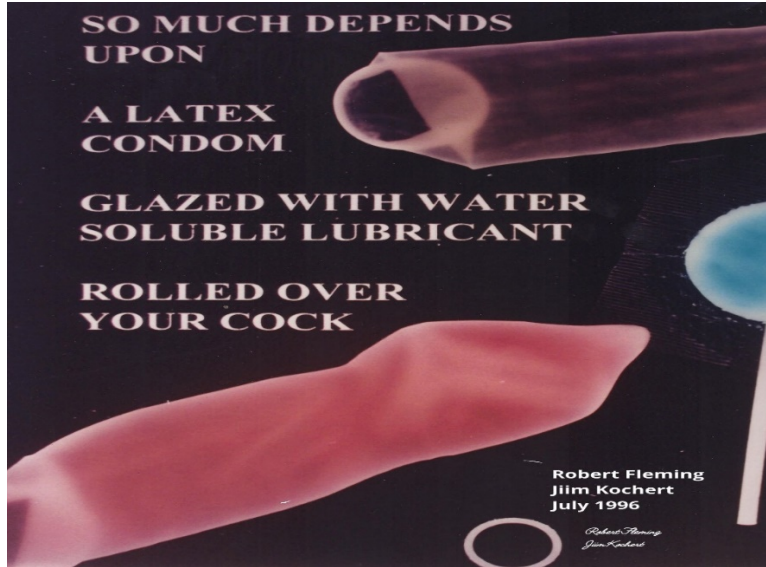


Another influence on my interest in art was, when I was 15-years-old my mother, Sybil, returned to school to get a bachelor in fine arts. While I was thrilled my mother was busy with her own school and would finally leave me alone, I did spy on her creating art.

**What drew me to poetry?** In grade 10, at 16, at St. Georges High School, I took a class in North American Literature with teacher James Plaw. Plaw assigned the students to write one, one page, poetry review every week which he checked-marked-off in his grade book. While I *hated poetry* and found every possible way to get into Plaw's grade book and checked-off that I did the weekly poetry review (without doing it), I came to love literature, even poetry.

**What drew me to visual poetry – combine art and poetry?** In 1996 I lived in the District of Columbia and joined the Triangle Artist Group (TAG). TAG had a joint exhibit where a visual artist and a writer were paired to collaborate. I joined with Jim Kochert, a photographer, who worked at the Smithsonian and had access to their photography lab. Jim and I created an erotic safe sex series during the AIDS crisis. I wrote four poems, in the style of William's Carlos Williams, The red wheelbarrow, 8 lines, with 4 2-line couplets [The Red Wheelbarrow by William Carlos Williams | Poetry Foundation](#). I printed the poems on clear plastic and brought lollypops and condoms to the photo lab. Jim and I arranged the text, lollypops, and condoms, on a flat surface that took a reverse photograph (photogram). Jim and my series was shown at the TAG show at the Artist Café in Adams Morgan, DC and then included in *Critical Discoveries*, curated by Ken Oda at the Artist Museum which was reviewed by the Washington Post 8/6/1998. After our visual poetry success, I asked Jim to create more series, but he returned to photography. I continued with visual poetry on my own.

Figure 5. So Much Depends



Another visual poetry attraction for me is that the poetry text is best when it is concise, which is consistent with my poetry style. For visual poetry text I aim for +-12 lines with a maximum of 6 words per line, with a maximum of 3 syllables per word.

**What is White Noir?** is my upcoming visual poetry book to be published by Devil's Party Press' imprint Old Scratch Press \* [ARRIVING 11.15.23 white noir by Robert Fleming – Devil's Party Press \(devilspartypress.com\)](#).

Why black and white? About +-75% of my art and visual poetry is in color and +-25% in black and white. I chose White Noir to be black and white to have contrast and show the reader something new. Typically, on the written page, the background color is white and the text is black. Since I am an alternative writer, I reversed the page color making the background black and the text color white.

Another reason why I made the book black and white, instead of color, is to reduce the cost to the reader. White Noir is priced at \$9.99, but would be at least \$15.99 if there was color inside.

White Noir includes what has been done before in visual poetry and brings new elements to visual poetry.

### **White Noir Includes Visual Poetry Done Before**

The poem epithelializations has the theme of human reincarnation (life of to death to life, and repeat) and uses letter and word art. I am grateful to Manny Blacksher, my winter 2023 Horror Writer's Association mentor, who helped me pick the title for this work.

Figure 6. epithelializations



### **White Noir Includes new elements in Visual Poetry**

Spatula creates the concrete element, the subject of the poem, using a graphic image and not letters or words. The black page background is created by making the spatula black, written on with white letters.

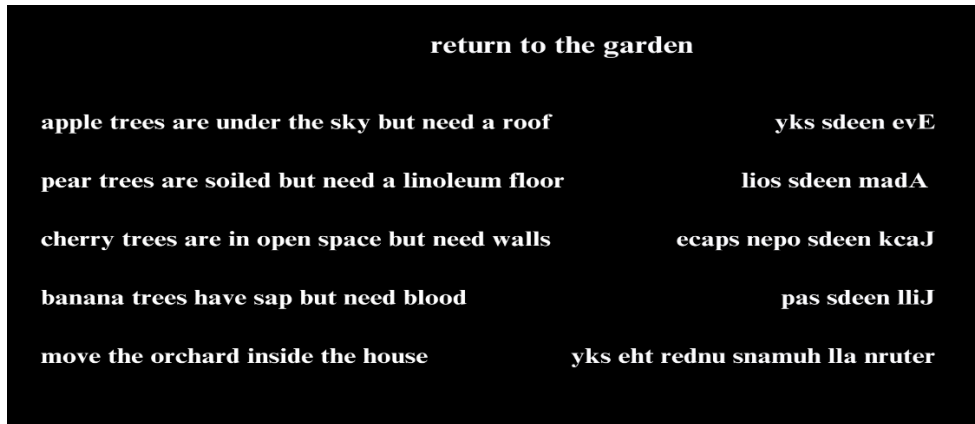
Spatula was inspired by Louise Glück's poem Witchgrass [by Louise Glück • Read A Little Poetry](#) that made me aware that an object like grass could have desire. This led me to imagine what the motivation of a spatula might be.

Figure 7. Spatula



Return to the Garden further extends the black page background by using columns for spacing, right aligning the right column, and orientating the text in the right column, right to left. The right column text orientation creates a mirror effect that are used in palindrome poems. My Garden was inspired by my many times reading about the Bible's *Garden of Eden* and Joni Mitchell's song *Woodstock* because Joni's lyrics suggest humans should get back to a garden [Woodstock \(song\) - Wikipedia](#) .

Figure 8. Return to the Garden



Exercise: To see more visual poetry new elements buy [White Noir](#).

Author: Robert Fleming is a visual poet from Lewes, Delaware. He is a founding and contributing editor of Old Scratch Press. His first chapbook: *Con-Way* was in [4 in 1](#), #4, by Four Feathers Press [Four Feathers Press: Search results for robert fleming](#) and his second book, [White Noir](#), will be published by Devil's Party Press in 11/2023 \* [ARRIVING 11.15.23 white noir by Robert Fleming – Devil's Party Press \(devilspartypress.com\)](#) . Follow Robert at <https://www.facebook.com/robert.fleming.5030>