

Getting into the Weird for Poetry Project #2

Project #2 is about upsetting your usual, logical ways of thinking, and writing stranger, more insightful lines of poetry.

One option for the project is to write in the voice of a persona—a person or thing entirely different from you. Another is to try your hand at surrealist methods.

Have you ever noticed that children love learning to talk? Words for them are funny and utterly new; they love rhyme, they love playing with language. Illogical statements can crack them up. Most of us, though, sadly grow out of loving words and our imaginations become inert. You might say that poets are adults who never got over the thrill of playing with language and meaning.

The surrealist artists and writers of the last century wanted to restore to our stone-cold conscious realities the pure pleasure as well as unexpected genius of our dream minds—our unconscious minds. Their art makes a kind of “nonsensical sense”—illogical but at the very same time, when really good, startlingly true.

Here's a line: **He took flight into the starry sky.** Not a bad line, right? Kinda beautiful. But can we make it weirder?

1. **He took flight into the starry earth.**

Earth is opposite of sky; can you fly in it? Why not? When I read a line like this, I start to think of both “earth” and “flight” differently. Try doing this kind of thing—say the REVERSE of what would be rational or normal.

Our minds tend very strongly toward familiar patterns and grooves, and one of the traditional jobs of poetry and art is to shake us out of them. It can be surprising how TRUE a reversal can be, or at least more intriguing. It's interesting to ponder flying in the earth!

2. **He took flight into the staring sky.**

Here I just randomly substituted the word “staring” for “starry,” which sounds similar (is a slant rhyme). “Staring” plays on the sound of “starry” for a more unexpected adjective. Does the sky stare? I've never looked at it that way, but why not? Yeah. It stares down at us constantly! Damn! We can't get away!

Let the sound of words suggest freakier and maybe more beautiful possibilities in your lines.

3. **He cooks light in the daring why.**

Again, playing with sound. Re-write a line with a *random rhyme* replacing each primary word.

He shook white from the darling lie.

He hooked right into the married good-bye.

He poked the night with a hairy "Hi!"

By the way, the early surrealists loved how funny the mind is!

4. **He gave his flight back to Steve, the Sun God.**

"Gave back" is the opposite of "take." Again, strange and interesting. Then why not also do something goofier with "sky"? Mention the Sun. And hell, why not name the sun. Steve is utterly, purely, gloriously random.

5. **He returned his flight to the starry dust.**

Again, "returned" is the opposite of "took." And this time "dust" seems like a dark but beautiful and traditionally poetic way of saying "earth."

I really like the surprise of "starry dust" because it conflates opposites (sky and ground). It forces us out of our usual binary, either-or ways of thinking (him-her, earth-sky, black-white, happy-sad, etc.). After all, reality is probably not so black and white much of the time. Are you ever really 100% happy or 100% sad? Aren't some of our most profound feelings in fact the ones that include both joy and grief, love and hate, beauty and unloveliness at the same instant?

6. **He returned his flight to the starry dust for customer credit.**

The surrealist artists and writers of the last century loved to make fun of middle-class consumer culture, so I also threw in the mention of customer credit for giggles!

Surrealist poetry is not calculated; it's all about tapping into the genius of fast, random, archetypal associations. Because it can be somewhat difficult to let ourselves go, however, little tricks such as those above can help to kind of loosen up our minds and let them play.