

# E-poetry

## Digital frontiers for an evolving art form

by Cynthia D. Shirkey

**A**pril is National Poetry Month and, in celebration, this article invites you to explore recent developments in the world of poetry. Even as a print art form, poetry is malleable. From Sappho to Shakespeare, and from Pope to Neruda, this genre pushes at the boundaries of language, sound, and vision. It evolves from one form into another. Poets and artists are currently using computer technology as a means to realize new ways of expressing themselves.

The amount of e-poetry, in its various forms, on the Web is astounding. A simple Google search on the word poetry returns over 9 million results. This bibliographic article attempts to highlight interesting, unusual, or even simply illustrative examples. It is not an attempt to exhaustively catalog e-poetry resources or to judge them in any way.

A short, informal glossary will help you in your explorations of this digital frontier.

- **Concrete poetry:** print and electronic poetic form in which the arrangement of words on the page or screen is as meaningful as the words themselves.
- **E-poetry:** generic term for all types of poetry written, published, and meant to be read in a primarily electronic environment.
- **Flash:** program by Macromedia enabling authors to create videos and multimedia.
- **Hypertext poetry:** form of poetry using a nonlinear linking system that allows the reader to spontaneously create the poem.

- **JavaScript:** coding language allowing designers to incorporate visual elements into Web pages.
- **New Media Poetry:** poetry written in an electronic environment that relies heavily upon graphics, videos, sound, and other elements.
- **QuickTime:** program by Apple that allows authors to make movies and other types of media pieces.
- **Sound poetry:** poetry form that places emphasis on how the poem sounds when read or performed out loud.
- **Visual poetry:** print and electronic gestalt-oriented art form in which visual elements, such as typography, calligraphy, painting, photography and drawing, are co-mingled with words to form poems.

### Meta sites: Starting points

- **Electronic Poetry Center.** Jointly authored by the Poetics Program and the Department of Media Study at SUNY Buffalo, the "EPC serves as a central gateway to resources in electronic poetry and poetics at the University at Buffalo and on the Web at large." It contains links to a large number of authors, magazines, presses, poetry organizations, and audio poetry files and maintains a curated collection of literary works. Poet and scholar Loss Pequeño Glazier is EPC's director and founder. *Access:* <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/>.
- **Voice of the Shuttle: Technology of Writing.** Over the years, Alan Liu's Voice of

### About the author

*Cynthia D. Shirkey is the instruction coordinator for the undergraduate library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, e-mail: [cshirkey@uiuc.edu](mailto:cshirkey@uiuc.edu).*

the Shuttle has been an excellent resource for humanities scholars. The Technology of Writing section provides access to a wide variety of resources, including a great many discussing the theory behind different types of e-poetry. *Access:* <http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2733>.

### **Collections of e-poetry**

• **Arras: New Media Poetry and Poetics.** Designed and edited by Brian Kim Stefans, Arras collects a wide variety of works by new media artists. Stefans kindly alerts readers about which plug-ins each work uses. *Access:* [http://www.arras.net/web\\_poetry.htm](http://www.arras.net/web_poetry.htm).

• **ASL Quest.** Web site authors Linda Wall and Mike Brunner have collected Flash and QuickTime poems performed in American Sign Language. Their links section also provides access to online sign language dictionaries. *Access:* <http://aslquest.deafbase.com/>.

• **UbuWeb: Visual • Concrete • Sound.** Published by Kenneth Goldsmith and written by Jerome Rothenberg, Andrew Stafford and Brian Kim Stefans, UbuWeb is "the definitive source for Visual, Concrete + Sound Poetry." UbuWeb contains an amazing amount of contemporary and historical poetry and poetry theory. The philosophy of the site is summed up on the resources page by this sentence: "Essentially a gift economy, poetry is the perfect space to practice utopian politics." *Access:* <http://www.ubu.com/>.

• **VISPO LANGU(IM)AGE.** This important site created by Jim Andrews focuses on new media poetry and other avant garde forms of the genre. *Access:* <http://vispo.com/misc/links.htm>.

### **Examples of individual poems**

• **COG.** According to author Loss Pequeño Glazier, "COG is a user-interactive experiment in the visual possibilities of a poem." It was created using Flash. *Access:* <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/e-poetry/cog/>.

• **Frame Work: A Hypertext Poem.** This piece by Robert Kendall was originally published in the Iowa Review Web. It uses frames and JavaScript to create a hypertext environment. *Access:* [http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Eiareview/tirweb/hypermedia/robert\\_kendall/](http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Eiareview/tirweb/hypermedia/robert_kendall/).

### **Magazines: Electronic serials that publish poetry and other art forms**

• **Agnieszka's Dowry (AgD).** If nothing else in this article has blown your mind, AgD, edited by katerina grace craig and Mark Lugowski, is sure to do so. It is a serial (it even has an ISBN), but it is arranged in a highly nontraditional manner. Be sure to check out AgD Intro/Index link at the bottom of the page for a linear explanation of how to read this publication. *Access:* <http://asgp.org/agnieszka.html>.

• **The Iowa Review Web.** Focusing on new media, Thomas Swiss is the Iowa Review Web's editor and Ingrid Ankerson is the associate editor/designer. The Iowa Review Web is sponsored by the University of Iowa's English Department and is "well-known for its commitment to new writing." *Access:* <http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Eiareview/mainpages/tirwebhome.htm>.

• **Mudlark: An Electronic Journal of Poetry and Poetics.** William Slaughter has been editing and publishing this serial since 1995. Each issue usually focuses on a single author or theme. *Access:* <http://www.unf.edu/mudlark/>.

### **Journals: Academic explorations of e-poetry and its theory**

• **Electronic Poetry Review.** This journal is dedicated to publishing poetry, as well as interviews with poets, essays, and book reviews. It is edited by Katherine Swiggart and D. A. Powell. *Access:* <http://www.poetry.org/>.

• **NMEDIAC: The Journal of New Media and Culture.** This ambitious project is under the direction of Jonathan Lillie. According to the front page, NMEDIAC will publish "peer-reviewed papers and audiovisual pieces which contextualize encoding/decoding environments and the discourses, ideologies, and human experiences/uses of new media apparatuses." *Access:* <http://www.ibiblio.org/nmediac/>.

• **Poems that Go.** According to editors Megan Sapnar and Ingrid Ankerson, this journal "explores the intersections between motion, sound, image, text, and code. The work

poems that **GO**

we feature explores how language is shaped in new media spaces, how interactivity can change the meaning of a sign, how an image can conflict with a sound, and how code exerts machine-order on a text." Access: <http://www.poemsthatgo.com/>.

### Articles: Helpful readings

- **Bibliography of Materials on New Media Poets.** This bibliography, which is broken into general categories, is part of a syllabus prepared by University of Iowa instructors Dee Morris and Thom Swiss for their fall 2002 class, *New Media Poetics: Histories, Aesthetics, Institutions*. Their class was taught in conjunction with a conference entitled *New Media Poetics: Aesthetics, Institutions, and Audiences*. Access: <http://twist.lib.uiowa.edu/newmediapo/bib.html>.

- **Hypertext Poetry vs. Print Poetry.** This short, helpful article by Andrew Strycharski, a lecturer at the University of Miami, compares and contrasts a traditional poem and a hypertext poem, both entitled "Insomnia." Access: [http://composition.miami.edu/~strycharski/link02/brodyWeb/page\\_five.html](http://composition.miami.edu/~strycharski/link02/brodyWeb/page_five.html).

### Forums: Informal electronic publishing communities

- **Poetry Poem.** This resource provides free Web sites for poets to publish their works and has a section called PoetryChat for discussion of various aspects of poetry. Access: <http://www.poetrypoem.com>.

- **The Web Poetry Corner.** Web Poetry Corner allows users to search by author's name, date of submission, and author's country. It also has a sub-forum for children, allows people to publish their poetry for free, and contains over 22,000 poems by more than 3,500 poets. Access: <http://www.dreamagic.com/poetry/poetry.html>.

### Workshops: Places to get formal feedback, criticism, and direction

- **Eratosphere.** Sponsored by AbleMuse: A Review of Metrical Poetry, Eratosphere allows writers to post their own metrical and nonmetrical poetry and get feedback from other poets. Access: <http://www.ablemuse.com/erato/Ultimate.cgi/>.

- **trACE: Online Writing Centre.** trACE is under the directorship of Sue Thomas and

Helen Whitehead, both faculty members of Nottingham Trent University's English and Media Studies Department. Membership is free, but workshops and courses designed around various genres, including hypertext and poetry, are fee-based. Access: <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/about/index.cfm>.

### Blogs: Free Web publishing services requiring no HTML skills

- **Eatonweb Portal.** This resource is a labor of love by author Brigitte Eaton. It is a directory of blogs that allows users to search on various topics and compiles user ratings on each blog. Searching on poetry produces a great number of results. Access: <http://portal.eatonweb.com/>

- **Mike Snider's Formal Blog.** This is just one example of what many blogs are like; a place for poets to publish poems, write articles, and share enthusiasm for the art form. Access: <http://radio.weblogs.com/0113501/>.

### For children

- **Surfing the Net with Kids.** Barbara J. Feldman's excellent bibliographic Web site, *Surfing the Net with Kids*, has a section entitled "Publish Your Poetry Online." She links to five very good Web sites dedicated to making poetry more accessible to children of various ages through the Web. Access: <http://www.surfnetkids.com/pubpoem.htm>.

### Fun stuff

- **Magnetic Poetry®.** Courtesy of Magnetic Poetry, Inc., the fridge genre has found



new life on the Web. Choose from New York, Artist, Romance, Dog Lover, College, Manager, Sequel, Kids Kit, Minnesota, Cat Lover, and Rock & Roll sets. Access: <http://www.magneticpoetry.com/magnet/index.html>.

- **tinywords.com.** Haiku is a serious genre of poetry, and this site contains beautifully artistic examples of the art form. D. F. Tweney's site is in the fun section simply because who could resist "fresh haiku, delivered daily?" Access: <http://tinywords.com/>. ■