



Day Song as Vision Quest

The Day Song, a poem written in a 24 hour period (or the 16 or so hours you're awake during a 24 hour period) was originally envisioned as an attempt to broaden the compositional range of the postcard poet, from the 12-14 lines that can fit onto a postcard to the 10-119 pages that can be written in a day. (119 if you're Bernadette Mayer writing *Midwinter Day*.) The exercise was offered to participants in the Life as Rehearsal for the Poem workshop and then to participants in the 2022 *Poetry Postcard Fest*. See:

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Inside-the-Day-Song-The-Temporal-Epic-.pdf>

The second Day Song writing exercise happened on February 18, 2023 and the handout for that event is here:

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Anno-Uno-Die-aut-septem.pdf>

We plan the next such exercise September 8, 2023, but it can be conducted at any time convenient for the poet attempting such a project. (It is preferred to have solitude for the whole day, so one can harvest dreams and not have the fear of being interrupted. This may require sending a spouse away for 40 hours or so, or going on a writing retreat, though it has been my experience that proximity to one's books comes in handy and also being in a place where the muse knows where to find you.) In my own experiences, deaths of friends helped propel the content of each Day Song I have so far attempted. Having a historical year as organizing principle was very helpful in the Anno Uno Die Aut Septem version. Having 31 original postcard poems handy to graft from is also helpful when inspiration runs dry, as it can when you are trying to write a



Day Song. It also helps to prepare months in advance for such an occasion, as Bernadette Mayer did for her poem, and you might want to consider relating current events happening on the day of writing as Pierre Joris did in his Canto Diurno #1.

Michael McClure said: “to write spontaneously does not mean to write carelessly or without thought and deep experience. In fact, there must be a vision and a poetics that are alive and conscious... I do not know of a more adventurous gesture than to write spontaneously...” The Day Song exposes poets operating with a dead poetics and without deep experience. One’s writing practice is exposed. This is not an exercise for an occasional poet, or for one who would spend the next six months editing what they wrote on the Day Song occasion.

Umek, Dr. E. Richard Atleo is a hereditary Chief of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribe on western Vancouver Island, BC. I interviewed him in March of 2005. I reconnected with him in March of 2023 and asked him directly if the project of writing a poem in one day was similar to his tradition’s Oosumich, or vision quest and he answered yes without hesitation.

To better understand the Day Song, and the qualities critical for its success, here is an excerpt from the interview with Dr. Richard Atleo:

Paul E. Nelson: Your great grandfather, Keesta, as I understand, was the last of the old-time whalers. Quite a process involved in capturing a whale at that time. Can you tell us about that time, that was, what? About 125 years ago, is that accurate?

E. Richard Atleo: Yes. Somewhere in that neighborhood. We don’t really know for certain except that it was the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, and he being born circa 1860, and nobody really knows exactly when he was born either. But elders remember



him as being rather old at the turn of the century. Not *really* old but he was quite a mature man.

And settlement did not really seriously take place in our part of the world until the turn of the century when missionaries, people began to bring livestock and so on out to the coast and build their homes there. And even then it was several decades before the full impact of civilization began to *erode* our way of life.

Keesta then, having lived his adult life growing up and heading a house into which I was born, lived as the way of his ancestors did, and taught *me* those same ways so that in the beginning, as a three-year-old or four-year-old child, I would have the beginning of training for Oosumich and as a small child, and before breakfast, made to run down to the beach and dive in the ocean and come back. And that was it. That was a very important initial training process.

Keesta, himself, as a whaler would practice what we've called Oosumich, which I have called "knowledge acquisition methodology" that is a method to acquire knowledge, a method to access knowledge from the spiritual realm. And so for that purpose he would isolate himself for long periods of time, and fast and pray and deny himself the physical pleasures of the world in order to focus on the spiritual concerns that he had. Assuming that the spiritual dimension had power, had knowledge, had treasures that he could access through a correct methodology.

Now in science, the fundamental requirement in successful, scientific experimentation, the classical form, was neutrality. Scientists attempted to be neutral in their observations, so as not to *bias* the information.



Paul E. Nelson: You're talk about being objective...

E. Richard Atleo: Being objective, exactly. Now, of course, this has been challenged by a feminist theory, and rightly so. However, there's a lot of credence to the classical form of research that created this technology and continues to create marvelous technology. So it has served classical science and scientific methodology. It's very legitimate. I sometimes find difficulty [laughs] because I'm thinking in the child and then that gets in the way.

Oosumich is also a methodology and when it's practiced, the critical stance in Oosumich, according to our origin stories, is what I call the insignificant leaf approach. According to one of our stories, where the swelled-headed approach of Son of Raven was unsuccessful in accessing the resource. But when he became an insignificant leaf, he was swallowed by the daughter of the great chief who owned the resources and there was an immaculate conception, and she became pregnant. And so Son of Raven became then an inheritor of the resources owned by the chief, and that's how we got the light.

So humility then, is the proper stance in Oosumich, just as objectivity is the proper stand in science. Now, if we *merge* the two together, and make a more *complete*, knowledge acquisition *system*, scientists will have to buy into the humility aspect because without humility there's no seeing in the spiritual realm. You cannot access. Our stories are very plain that if you attempt, to access information or any kind of resource from the spiritual domain other than through humility, you will not succeed. You will *not* get the information you want.



Paul E. Nelson: That's one way to narrow the field [laughs]. But your great-grandfather, when you talk about Oosumich, this is likened to a vision quest.

E. Richard Atleo: Yes, yes. The word Oosumich has in it the root oo, which means "be careful." And so it's based on the view of reality that perceives it as along a spectrum, which might be divided in two. On the one side, we might call it the dark, evil, destructive aspect of reality, and the other side, the beautiful, the creative, the glorious, the harmonious, the balance. All of those things that can describe Qua-ootz, owner of reality. And for some reason, creation, the design of creation is such that we don't understand why the reality is this way. But we accept it and embrace it. And so we create ceremonies, and we create *teachings*, to *manage* this reality as we perceive it, through Oosumich. Cannot perceive this reality with our physical eyes but more with our spiritual eyes through Oosumich. Physical eyes, of course, will corroborate what we see through the spiritual realm but the spiritual realm will give you a greater kind of certainty about the nature of reality than the physical realm. I know that empiricists, will abhor this kind of statement.

The act of writing spontaneously, of allowing the language to have its say through the person who writes, can be a journey of self discovery, as la práctica del exterior allows one to access realms greater than the individual ego. "If it sounds good, it is" so said Duke Ellington and baseball scores, news articles and the subjects day song rabbit holes can lead you to are all fair game in this method, but one must be humble, open to the concept of poem as "knowledge acquisition methodology" and to the notion that one must be the owner of one's own reality. In this early stage of Artificial Intelligence, climate breakage, declining empire and attention spans, your liberation awaits.



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