



Notes for an Imbolc Daysong (February 1, 2025)

There are a few concepts which spring to mind as I begin another attempt at creating a writing exercise, or at least some kind of notes, designed to assist a poet attempting a “daysong” or a day-long writing ritual that, ideally, becomes a successful long poem. Of course any attempt at doing such an exercise can only benefit the person writing, as we learn from failure and Charles Olson encouraged us to “fail large.”

In my own practice this exercise has settled into a twice-a-year rhythm of a daysong around Imbolc, and one around Labor Day. I think advance planning is part of the incubation of any successful daysong and the beginning of spring (for pagans) and the end of summer for Northern Hemispherians are two auspicious occasions one could plan around. Add the recrudescence in the U.S. of *he who shall not be named* at a time of whole systems transition, or as some call it the “polycrisis” and you have a lot with which to work.

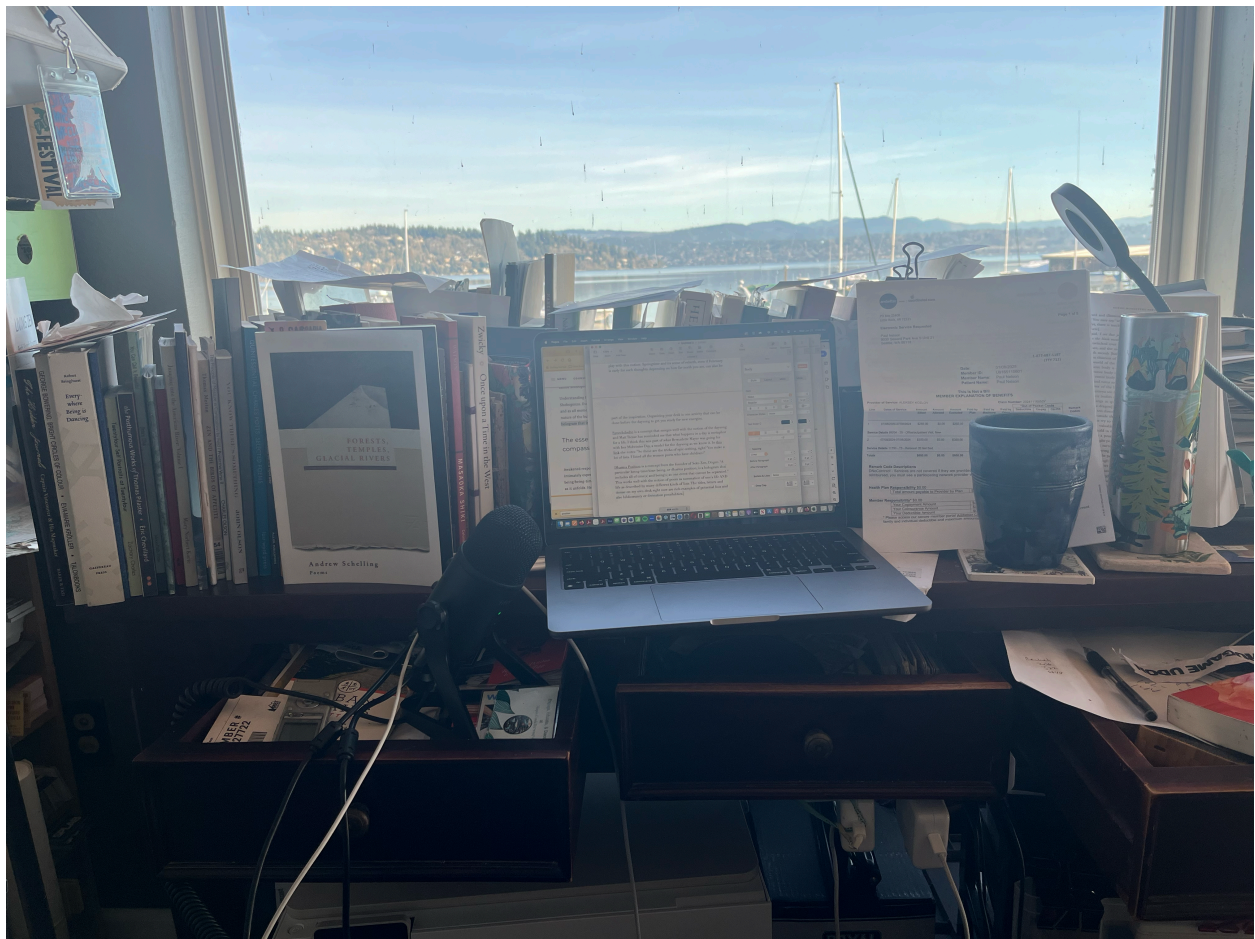
The first thing to recognize is the power of the beginning of pagan spring, or the exact middle of winter, depending on what resonates with you. To have a ceremonial fire the night before the daysong, to include an altar, the burning of myrrh, frankincense, and/or musk and the lighting of white, red, &/or orange candles are all things that will connect you to forces larger than yourself and help you discover and implement an intention for the occasion. Intentionality helps all occasions, I’m convinced.

Also important is a notion Barry McKinnon appears to have taken from William Carlos Williams, but I’ve never been able to find documentation, and that is every poem you write should be a summation of your life up to that point. The daysong gives you many opportunities to play with this notion. Springtime and its sense of rebirth, even if February is early for

such thoughts depending on how far north you are, can also be part of the inspiration. Organizing your desk is one activity that can be done before the daysong to get you ready for new energies.

Synechdoche is a concept that merges well with the notion of the daysong and Matt Trease has reminded me that what happens in a day is metaphor for a life. I think this was part of what Bernadette Mayer was going for with her *Midwinter Day*, a model for the daysong as we know it. In [this link](#) she notes: “So these are the tricks of epic-writing, right? You make a lot of lists. I listed all the women poets who have children!”

Dharma Position is a concept from the founder of Soto Zen, Dōgen. “A particular being-time/time-being, or dharma position, is a hologram that includes all of time(s) and being(s) as one event that cannot be separated.” This works well with the notion of poem as summation of one’s life AND life at a particular moment, now, as described by many different kinds of lists. The titles, letters and items on my own desk right now are rich



examples of potential lists and also bibliomancy or divination possibilities. Dōgen has notions perfectly suited to the daysong: “Uji discusses the various aspects of a dharma position: its independence, codependent arising, eternal presencing, universality, and flexibility as one mandala manifesting as this moment’s intimate response.”

These last four weeks, workshop participants have been given an opportunity to create a Personal Universe

Deck and also studied one example of an extended poem written in part with such a tool. Re-reading Michael McClure’s “Dolphin Skull” to see how McClure wrote an extended poem over a series of days may give you a sense of how to manage your one day of writing a daysong. It also should give you ideas about how to implement a Personal Universe Deck. At very least his work may put you in a different state of consciousness, one that spurs your own imagination and dedication to the moment in all of its mythic correspondences. Life has the potential to be very rich, even in this time of spectacle. You don’t have to take the bait. The daysong is your ticket out of the spectacle. If you do it right, it will give you an elevated consciousness for a couple of months, or as Michael said: “you’ll get a little high.”



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