

**Writing Exercise Ideas for Week One
of LARFP and PAC, Spring 2026 - Cascadian Poetry**

“Lust fatigues the soul” and “(Dreams drain the spirit if we
dream too long)” and “Out of these nothings
—All beginnings come” and
“This ambush, this silence” and “Water’s my will and my way.”

There are many memorable lines of poetry in *The North American Sequence* by Theodore Roethke. How do we enlist the frequency of this fountainhead of Cascadian poetry for our own purposes? There are several methods available to us that can be effective when writing spontaneously.

One is the “starting with a line by..” technique. Robert Duncan’s masterful poem *A Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar* gives you a sense of how he did it. Michael McClure’s grafting technique is another approach, related in the exercise *Mammal Grafting*. Pick a line from Roethke and write from that line. You can use it as an epigraph, or as first line. Put it in italics.

There is also the cover poem method. Pick a page of poetry from TNAS, or a section, or whole poem, and write your own version of that. For example, take the third section of “Meditation at Oyster River.” Roethke starts:

III

In this hour,
In this first heaven of knowing,
The flesh takes on the pure poise of the spirit...

You might write:

It’s 2:47 on the
88th day of the winter of no winter
spirit runs with the Skunk Cabbage of the ancestors...



The idea is to take the tone and specific references of the original poem and replace those references with ones out of your own personal mythology and your own dharma position. “Three days after my mother died...” or “The week they bombed a girl’s school in Iran” for example. One caution Ezra Pound, William Blake (& others) warned us of was to — as much as possible — avoid abstractions and generalizations. These practices reflect superficial states of consciousness, and the work we are urging you to do (& that which lasts) goes deeper. This does not mean to avoid abstractions, but that they are “earned.” Earned by placement near luminous details. Minute particulars. Specific sensory images, ideally from your own experience.

See: <https://paulenelson.com/workshops/cover-poem-rewrite-new-arrangement/>

One thing that could happen when writing a cover poem is that you find a vein and do not need the original poem as a template. You start getting a feeling that the poem is going somewhere and you “go on your nerve.” Keep the original poem handy, just in case you stall, but also employ the alluvial technique of Jack Kerouac.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46316/a-poem-beginning-with-a-line-by-pindar>

<https://paulenelson.com/2021/03/15/mammal-grafting/>

<https://paulenelson.com/workshops/cover-poem-rewrite-new-arrangement/>

<https://paulenelson.com/jack-kerouacs-alluvial-technique/>

