

## Rewild

Age Group: High school, undergraduate

Materials: *Rewild*, writing materials, etc.

Time: 45-60 minutes

Medium: In-person or virtual

Lesson Overview: After reading *Rewild*, students will discuss the main themes of the collection and how they appear in all aspects of the work.

Before Lecture: Students should have read *Rewild*. The lesson below focuses on the following poems: Chronology, 1, You Broke My Heart, Flame Hive, The Thin Line, That Beauty, Logos

Lecture: In *Rewild*, Stricker's focus is on nature returning to human developed places, and her poems use many different tools to do so; animals and birds, atoms, and art all play a role in describing this phenomenon. However, the crucial theme is power as consumption, which takes many forms throughout *Rewild*.

- In *Chronology .1*, as with the other chronology poems, two things that happened in the same year are contrasted and then reflected on. "1948: Hiroshima/1948: the first shopping mall is built in the U.S." The poem (and the whole collection) immediately ties consumerism and pain to each other. The rest of the poem presents two other contrasts: reality TV and Dante, and the suffering of poverty with plastic surgery. Thus, the message is that the wealthy and powerful profit from suffering and they spring from the same root. The final line states that we are "in search of algorithmic salvation", hinting that both the pain and products are a way to protect and redeem ourselves, and that power by consumption is a type of religious fervor.
- In *You Broke My Heart*, Stricker reflects on the poet Rilke, expressing admiration of his work and life and disappointment at his flaws. One of the things she admires is how free he was from material concerns: "Rilke quarantined/himself from the sickness of money.../This contamination he left...to the phalanx of servants/employed by his aristocratic patrons, left the unsavory details/of money and credit cards for the rest of us to wallow in." He is framed as great and flawed for being so apart from money and by extension consumption. His patrons are wealthy, but this framing gives him the illusion of being unmoored from money entirely. His flaw is making an antisemitic remark about Franz Werfel, which can be read as either an unrelated thoughtlessness or springing out of monetary aversion. Rilke is framed as viewing money as a disease and unclean, emphasizing the destructive.
- In *The Thin Line*, the speaker is reading a newspaper and presents a striking but familiar image – a picture of war's atrocities and an ad for a silver cocktail shaker, separated by "...thin-as-breath lines..." These lines transform to become "...infinitely thin, poignant..." and the lead to the last verse says that they should be gone entirely: "Earthly paradise/would dissolve the lines/Heaven is not a gated community." Here it is not so much that the consumption of the rich leads to the suffering of the poor, but that wealth and suffering are too far apart, as if they were in a different world. This also puts *You Broke My Heart* into perspective, because here contamination can be good, to temper the

pain of one and excess of the other: “Sliver is covered/with mud/Mud is covered with silver.”

- In *Flame Hive*, the destruction of power is mentioned: “I try to imagine a world/that cannot be blown up, /cannot be Abstracted, entirely irradiated/by maniacs in power...” While there’s no mention of money, the destructive force of power is again underlined as a dangerous madness (possibly pleasurable) and something that pulls us away from the present.
- In *That Beauty*, first-hand accounts of the aftermath of Hiroshima are used in a striking way – quotes from observers, pilots and others show them seeing the bomb and the horror it created as beautiful and awe-inspiring: “...the pilot named the bomb/after his mother, in honor of his mother.” Their observations are abstracted and objectifying – one admires a naked woman dying from her radiation burns as if she were a painting and not a person. Plants are seen flourishing in the aftermath, which Stricker points out as misdirection: “...this is not about regeneration, it is about ashes.” The thin line is not about physical proximity but rather a lack of connection with others, enabling them to live of other’s suffering or watch them die – the spectacle is consumed and enjoyed with no true acknowledgment of what it cost.
- In *Logos*, the theme of consumption is exemplified by online shopping, with corporate logos supplanting the original meaning of *logos*, wisdom. Marketing has displaced a deeper way of thinking.

Consumption is the epitome of violence and destruction in this collection, and it does that through pushing out other ways of thinking and people, burning up everything else to stay alive.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Consumption is mainly framed as a human flaw but is also very much a part of nature. What forms does non-human consumption take in this collection?
2. Is war a type of consumption?
3. The lecture topic focuses on the themes and content of the work. Are any of these themes reflected in how the poems are written? In what way?

#### Writing Prompts:

1. Separation features in many of the poems above. Write a piece about two parts of life that are often separated (happiness and grief, work, and family). Try to also convey the separation in how you format the poem on the page.
2. Write a piece about a word whose meaning has completely changed and what that says about its current context.
3. Write a piece reflecting on a figure you have conflicted feelings about.

### Creative Assignment

Summary: This assignment can serve as a final assignment or a portfolio piece. This is meant to show the creative ability and understanding of the work.

Materials: *Rewild*, writing materials, other texts as approved.

Suggested Timeline: 3-4 weeks

Assignment: In *That Beauty* and in other places, Meredith Stricker uses quotes from primary sources in her poems to show certain ways of thinking, which she either impartially examines or refutes. Students should pick an historical event and write a series of poems (up to five) incorporating quotes from witnesses to that event. Students should also include a short explanation of their poems, including their use of the primary sources.

#### Requirements:

1. The poems should be no more than 10 pages
2. The whole assignment should be typed and carefully proofread
3. Explanation should be on a separate page in MLA format

### Critical Writing Assignment

Summary: This assignment is meant to help students develop their critical examination of poetry and delve deeply into the references of this collection.

Materials: *Rewild*, word processor, etc.

Suggested Timeline: 2-3 weeks

Assignment: *Rewild* contains a wide variety of writing styles – from prose poetry, white space, long stanzas, and so on. Students should write a comparative essay about two poems on a similar topic and a different format. Students should examine their similarities and differences and answer the question:

1. What does their respective formats add to the other aspects of the poem?
2. What is Stricker trying to convey with the different formats?

### Requirements:

1. Papers should be about 10 pages, in MLA format
2. Papers must have a separate citation page
3. They should be clearly structured and proofread