

English 442 Exercise One Shakespeare in Code: Sonnet conversion

Part I: qualitative/narrative conversion

The Aim Convert a Shakespeare sonnet into a non-textual format. You're accustomed to doing "readings" of literature and producing a specific kind of output: a paper. In this exercise, the "input" will be the same (requiring the critical reading apparatus you should have gained as an English major), but the "output" will be different. Thus it will require two sets of skills.

The Text Sonnet #14 from Shakespeare:

Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck,
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good, or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality,
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell;
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
Or say with princes if it shall go well
By oft predict that I in heaven find.
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And constant stars in them I read such art
As truth and beauty shall together thrive
If from thy self, to store thou wouldst convert:
Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

Task Step 1: The "input" setup. All together:
In Class

- Figure out what the poem's about!
- Identify as many "dimensions" as you can (from Tufte).

Task Step 2: Come up with the "output" solution yourselves, in pairs.
Lab Session

- Come up with sample visual representations for each of those dimensions.
- Figure out which is the most important one, (ie the one that provides the framework for the poem) and make that your "primary dimension" (ie the one that will visually provide the structure for all the other ones).
- Decide what format you're going to use (sketch/drawing/painting, 2-d or 3-d collage, diorama, weaving/knitting/stitching, sound).
- Draw up some mock-ups of possible solutions (ie sketch out some plans on paper). You don't have to use *every* dimension.
- Decide what materials you're going to use (wool, objects, paper, computer, etc).
- Make a plan for physically creating the piece IN-CLASS over one to sessions.

Next Week Bring in all your materials and start assembling your piece.

English 442 Exercise Two Shakespeare in Code: Sonnet Conversion

Part 2: Part and Whole

The Aim This time we're going to get a little more specific and structured. Last time, your objects conveyed a kind of impressionistic version of the sonnet, focusing chiefly on imagery (logically, given that we're representing using visual objects). This time, you're going to go through the project line-by-line, and come up with an object made of precisely 14 parts, that shows how the poem is *structured*.

Once you've gotten all 14 pieces, the trick will be to put them back together in a way that doesn't just explicate each line, but also shows how the whole is put together, i.e. shows how the poem doesn't make sense as individual fragments unless you actually read the whole thing.

The Text Sonnet #14 from Shakespeare:

01 Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck,
02 And yet methinks I have astronomy,
03 But not to tell of good, or evil luck,
04 Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality,
05 Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell;
06 Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
07 Or say with princes if it shall go well
08 By oft predict that I in heaven find.
09 But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
10 And constant stars in them I read such art
11 As truth and beauty shall together thrive
12 If from thy self, to store thou wouldst convert:
13 Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
14 Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

Task Step 1: The "input" setup. All together:
Input

- Reread the poem and look at how it's built:
- You could concentrate on the patterns that make it a sonnet.
- Or, you could show how the lines relate to each other (but, nor, yet, etc).
- For added difficulty, you could try combining both of these structures.

Task Step 2: Come up with the "output" solution yourselves, in pairs.
Output

- Decide on how you're going to construct 14 parts, one for each line.
- Decide on how you're going to combine those 14 parts back together in a way that conveys how the poem is put together.
- You'll have the next three weeks to work on this exercise.

Next Week & Following Bring in all your materials and start creating and assembling your object.

English 442 Exercise Three Shakespeare in Code: Sonnet Conversion

Part 3: Encode/Decode

The Aim Encode your sonnet using a schema that you design. This exercise has three parts: encoding, composition, and decoding. Once your sonnet has been encoded, you'll create a physical object out of it, give the object to someone else, and ask them to interpret it using a decoder.

The Text Sonnet #14 from Shakespeare:

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13 Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
14 Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

Task Step 1: The "input" setup. All together:
In Class

- Reread the poem and look at how it's structured.
- Think of all the encoding systems we currently have around us. Visual: words, pictographs, icons, symbols, type. Aural: music, telephony. Tactile: Braille, coin design (edge milling and image relief).
- Make a list of possible encoding systems. There are two kinds: lossless, and lossy. Lossless encoding loses no information, for example if you have the "decoder" you should be able to completely reconstitute the poem word for word. Lossy encoding in the context of this assignment is more abstract: for example, you might want to encode just the nouns and adjectives, or just the rhyme scheme, or just the figurative language. When the reader "decodes" the poem, they will not see the original; they will see only what you've chosen to encode.

Task Step 2: Come up with the "output" solution yourselves, in pairs.
Lab Session

- Decide on the encoding system you're going to use.
 - What are you going to choose to encode? Grammatical features? Scansion? Poetic devices (metaphor, imagery, motif)? Sounds?
 - What kind of system are you going to use? Letters? Binary? Color? Space? Rebus (pictures that you sound out)?
- Develop your schema. This is where you lay out the "rules" for the system you will use and define what each part means. For example,
 - All nouns will be encoded as "red"; or
 - For each noun, go to the dictionary, count 9 nouns ahead, and replace the noun (this is called the "n+9" formula in Oulipo); or

- More figurative: for each poetic device, use emblems and tokens (remember English 324? Emblem=an object representing a “thing”, token=an object representing a “counter” or other abstract). For example, you could have emblems representing “weather,” and tokens representing “good” and “bad”, and combine them.
- Write down the rules for your encoding system. This will also become your decoder.
- Decide what you’re going to do with the sonnet once it’s encoded, i.e. what format the object should take. (Think: how can you use objects to convey simple bits of information, e.g. colored buttons, string, knots, cube faces.)
- You’ll have the next three weeks to build a schema, encode the sonnet and then build an object with that code. The object should come with a “decoder.”

Next Week & Following Bring in all your materials and start encoding and assembling your object and decoder.

English 442 Exercise Four
Shakespeare in Code: Sonnet Conversion
Part 4: Algorithms

The Aim You've done various kinds of conversions of the same sonnet. Now, it's time to try building it from scratch! In this exercise, your task is to create a "program" (a set of instructions) that will build a version of the sonnet when it's executed. In keeping with the "physical" objects we've been making up until now, let's add in an extra element: once you've created the program, write it down, and build a self-contained box that contains: 1) raw materials to build the sonnet, and 2) the instructions on note cards. Think of it like one of those self-contained craft kits, recipe boxes or Fluxus boxes. Once the box is complete, you should be able to give it to someone else, and they should be able to build a version of the sonnet from the items in the box.

The Text Sonnet #12 from Shakespeare:

01 When I do count the clock that tells the time,
02 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
03 When I behold the violet past prime,
04 And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;
05 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves
06 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
07 And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
08 Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
09 Then of thy beauty do I question make,
10 That thou among the wastes of time must go,
11 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
12 And die as fast as they see others grow;
13 And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
14 Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

Task Step 1: The "input" setup. All together:

- Reread the poem and look at how it's structured.
- Think about a basic program: it's a set of instructions that tell you how to make something happen; a kind of recipe that cooks with information instead of cake ☺. So, your task is to create a set of instructions or a "recipe" that will help a third party to "build" a sonnet from scratch.
- If you know anything about very basic programs, you'll know they have some interesting features. They're not just a list of instructions 1 > 2 > 3 etc. Instead, they are economical: if a task has to be repeated more than once, it's listed only once. Then, you use a "counter" to keep track of how many times the instruction has been executed. When the counter hits the right number, the program moves on to another task.
- Look at the parts of the poem that are patterned and/or repeat, and decide how you're going to write a set of instructions to build the sonnet.
- Hint: remember flow charts? They're great...
- Make a list of possible "ingredients" to build the sonnet.

Task Step 2: Come up with the "output" solution yourselves, in pairs.

Next Week & Following Bring in all your materials and start writing your instruction cards and building your recipe box.