



Demonstrategy

By H. L. Hix

A Study Guide

Synopsis

Against the busy background of the “information age” and the “anthropocene,” where’s poetry? It might seem invisible, irrelevant, but *Demonstrategy* proves it as salient as ever, and more urgent. In paired essays about poetry in the world and the world in poetry, *Demonstrategy* finds poetry’s pulse steady and strong.

Author Bio

H. L. Hix has published an anthology, *Wild and Whirling Words: A Poetic Conversation* (2004), and 12 books of poetry and literary criticism with Etruscan Press, including *As Easy As Lying: Essays on Poetry* (2002); *Shadows of Houses* (2005); *Chromatic* (2006); *God Bless: A Political/Poetic Discourse* (2007); *Legible Heavens* (2008); *Incident Light* (2009); *First Fire, Then Birds* (2010); *Lines of Inquiry* (2011); *As Much As, If Not More Than* (2014); *I’m Here to Learn to Dream in Your Language* (2015); *American Anger: An Evidentiary* (2016); and *Rain Inscription* (2017). In addition to having been a finalist for the National Book Award for *Chromatic*, his awards include the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Peregrine Smith Award, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kansas Arts Commission, and the Missouri Arts Council. He earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin, taught at Kansas City Art Institute, and was an administrator at The Cleveland Institute of Art, before accepting his current position as professor in the Philosophy Department and the Creative Writing Program at a university in “one of those square states.” He has been a visiting professor at Colorado College and at Shanghai University, and a Fulbright Distinguished Professor at Yonsei University.

Study Questions

Knowledge/Comprehension

1. Summarize the overall themes of the book.
2. How does the author define the terms “poetry,” “ethopoesis,” and “vortic word”? (pages 9 and 154)

Knowledge/Comprehension (cont’d)

3. The author uses global warming, war, and love as examples of mysteries that cannot be “solved” as problems. Compile a list of other “mysteries” that defy solutions through technology.
4. Explain an “idealized cognitive model (ICM).” (page 28)
5. Summarize the difference between “close third” and “critical third” according to Hix. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? (page 49)
6. Summarize the differences and similarities between philosophy and poetry as Hix defines the terms. (page 60)
7. Compare and contrast “exceptionalism” with “implicationism.” (page 124)
8. Hix uses Ishmael’s role in *Moby Dick* as an example of a voice of dissent. Describe two other examples of dissenters in literature. (pages 165-166)

Application

1. Hix uses “let” as an example of a word that can designate past or perpetual present tense, depending on context. List two other verbs like this and use them in a sentence to demonstrate the ambiguity. (page 41)
2. In *Demonstrategy*, Hix quotes Salman Rushdie: “The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquires numinous qualities.” Compose a poem made of “shards of memory.” (page 107)
3. Create a poem using phrases from another book, as Hix does in the poem beginning on page 136.
4. Write a poem using identical rhyme. Then rewrite the poem using perfect rhyme. (page 150)

Analysis

1. “Poetry is not dying for want of an audience; humanity is dying for want of poetry.” In what ways is humanity “dying for want of poetry?” (page 9)
2. “Our reach now exceeds our grasp, and...this exceeding is not the unqualified, heavenly good.” In a two page essay, discuss why you agree or disagree with this statement. (page 13)
3. Compare and contrast ethopoesis and ethotechné. How does the author define these in terms of our present culture and responsibilities? (page 14-16)
4. Select a poem that contests the standards of poetry. Analyze what standards it contests and what the poem is trying to achieve.
5. Select and analyze a poem that answers the question: “How can poetry serve the interest of social justice at least as robustly as it answers the impulse toward self-expression?” (page 47)
6. Hix asserts that epic poetry has traditionally been used to “exercise a degree of cultural control” over the community. In an essay, discuss examples in popular literature, music, social media, etc. that influence the culture of contemporary American society. (page 161)

Synthesis

1. Select a poem you feel could be updated and rewrite it.
2. Write a poem on any topic. Then rewrite the poem, but make it “other” rather than “better.” How did your approach differ?
3. Hix notes that chant is a “technology for inducing a change in consciousness...to work one’s way into a special frame of mind separate from one’s usual state.” Discuss the current rise in popularity of meditation and yoga in terms of Hix’s observation. (page 82)
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of portraying a poem as a list, as in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and Rankine’s list of pharmaceutical companies in *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*? Compose a poem in this form. (page 31)
5. Hix observes in Alice Notley’s *The Descent of Alette*: “Without a change of internal state, the external events have no meaning...Without a change in external events, internal change has no value.” Compile a list of books, poems, films, television programs, etc. in which a character’s transformation coincides with change on a larger social scale. How are the items on your list similar? How are they different? (page 89)

Evaluation

1. In what ways does technology mask the “continuing greater importance of poetry in our lives”? Do you believe that modern technology can solve the global concerns we need to address? Write an essay to explain your position. (page 21)
2. Hix quotes Jan Zwicky’s discussion of words: “though they have drifted, are nonetheless anchored, their meanings holding out for centuries.” Choose a word in a poem and research its etymology in the Oxford English Dictionary. How has the word’s denotation and connotation changed over time? How does context influence meaning? (page 32)
3. Explain how critical third person elevates “the quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives.” (page 53)
4. Hix claims that “saying is itself a doing, one that my influence future doings.” In what ways do you believe poetry may “support coercive activism” and could cause a person to change their assumptions? (pages 69 and 75)
5. Hix advises us to reconsider the question, “Is it good?” to evaluate a poem and ask instead, “What is at stake?” Select a favorite poem and write a one-page essay in which you evaluate what is at stake for the poet and the reader. (pages 76-77)
6. “A patriot judges that the nation is more important than human rights and social justice on a global scale, when in fact, van Hooft contends, that order of importance ought to be reversed.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain the role of dissent in the gap between the real and the ideal. (page 98)

Standards for the English Language Arts (compiled by NCTE and IRA)

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Standards for the English Language Arts (compiled by NCTE and IRA) (cont'd)

4. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
5. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
6. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
7. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

DEMONSTRATEGY

Poetry, For and Against



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