

It is better not to read verse at all, than read it in the way which is considered lawful, requisite and patented in the sense of poetry and musicalness. Rhythm does not consist in stressing iambs and anapests. I cannot bear the marchlike beating out of rhythm. I want to sleep when I hear the reading of verse in a solemnly monotonous voice with chromatic tones crawling up. I cannot bear vocal leaps to the terza or quinta with a fall at the end of each line to a secunda. There is nothing more vulgar than a made, sweetish, quasi-poetical voice in lyric poems, which rises and falls like waves during a dead calm. What can be more terrible than the female readers at concerts, those tender, posing, soulful young ladies in light gowns who read from a pink velvet-bound book dear verses like: "Little star, little star, why are you so still?"

Constantin Stanislavsky: MY LIFE IN ART  
"Meridian"

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Constantin Stanislavsky', with a long, sweeping underline.

What is the proper approach to spoken poetry? I don't think it's an approach which is based entirely on diction or elocution or articulation or any of the other by-products of a speech class. Not that these things aren't important - they are, but in themselves they're simply not enough to sustain spoken poetry for very long. And we don't want an approach that just uses the text as a springboard for any sort of personal pyrotechnics.

I think what is needed is intelligence and a willingness on the part of the actor to confront the written text itself, to find out exactly what the poet had in mind and why he chose this particular way of saying it. Now, this takes considerable humility and a profound respect for the text. It means that the actor must stop worrying about the sort of impression he's making up there on the stage, and begin to concern himself with the shape and the form of the words he is saying. Only in this way will he begin to achieve some sort of approach to spoken poetry.

Edon Farber



POETRY ACTING

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

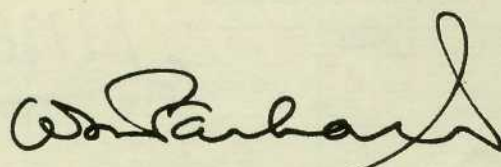
FIRST BEAT:

FOCUS - PRIMARY

SECONDARY

SECTIONS TO  
CHECK IN TEXT:

OTHER COMMENTS:

  
WILLIAM PACKARD









The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologists, to discover, why this is so, and why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal, we tend to express ourselves in verse.

T. S. Eliot: "A DIALOGUE ON DRAMATIC POETRY"  
SELECTED ESSAYS





Moreover, and above all, do not be in a hurry to reach the meaning. Approach it without forcing and, as it were, imperceptibly. Attain the tenderness and the violence only by the music and through it. Refrain for as long as possible from emphasizing words; so far there are no words, only syllables and rhythms. Remain in this purely musical state until the moment the meaning, having gradually supervened, can no longer mar the musical form. You will finally introduce it as the supreme nuance which will transfigure your piece without altering it. But first of all you must have learned your piece.

Paul Valéry: ON SPEAKING VERSE

THE **ART** OF POETRY / Vintage V194

Wm Fairbank







One must love theatre too much to love theatre enough. If the play is a success, the playwright alone gets the credit. If it is a flop, then, naturally, the stage director alone will be responsible. I would like to insist once again on the respect we must have for the works, for their authors and for the audience. This respect is shown by the strictest obedience to perfect memory.

Robert Manuel  
COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE.



## THE PROPER APPROACH TO A POETIC TEXT

1. Write out the text on a separate sheet of paper. Mark off all the various poetic devices - image, sound, voice. Draw transition lines across the page, creating separate beats. Circle any "reality" words (truth / beauty / justice) for substitutions.
2. As far as possible, try to withhold your own interpretation from the text. So far you are not ready to "interpret" it -- remember that relaxation and familiarity with the form of the text are the most important things. LET THE TEXT TELL YOU.
3. DO THE TEXT ALONE, ALOUD, MANY MANY, MANY TIMES.

This is the most important single step of all, and it cannot be done silently or intellectually. You must try to get the very rhythms of the text into your own bloodstream, all the sight and sound and sense values.

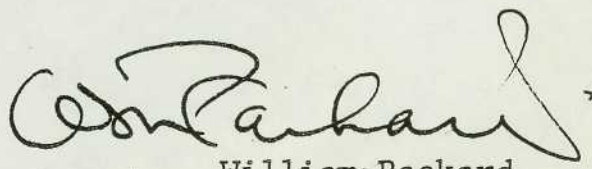
4. Get up and focus the text -- locate specific image areas outside yourself -- choose contact sources. If you are speaking the text to someone (primary focus), choose where that person is -- and if you refer to other image areas (secondary focus), choose where those areas will be.

Do this as you walk through the text, just as you would walk through the blocking of any ordinary play -- only remember that you are not yet acting.

5. AT LAST: begin to ask all the acting questions: what do I want, what are the obstacles to my getting what I want, what are my "given circumstances, my physical life, &c &c &c.

In the words of the French poet Valery: "as the final nuance, ask about the meaning of the text."

Remember that the challenge of a poetic text is to say what you see and see what you say.



William Packard