

“The contours, the color, and texture”

I believe that Edmund Blair Bolles, editor of *Galileo's Commandment*, did a fantastic job organizing pieces for the specific purpose of his book. Bolles states in the introduction that he enjoys science writing because it “puts me in direct contact with an active, probing mind” (Bolles XV). Bolles does a wonderful job explaining to us how he sees this in action through the pieces he selected for this book. While I enjoyed the inside looks into these critical thinkers' minds, I was mainly enthralled by the poetic language of people who are assumed to be left-brain thinkers.

Maybe I am so fascinated by the way some of these researchers write because I am an “English person.” I have heard this all my life. You are either a math and science person or a history and English person. While this can be true, various pieces in this book have taught me that people can, in fact, think analytically and creatively to create a piece of scientific literature. I also believe this attention to detail in some of the writer's language helped me to better grasp their ideas. It also had the same effect on some of my classmate's reading, as language and detailed imagery came up in multiple discussion posts.

I am currently enrolled in Advanced Poetry here at MSU. We often discuss how readers need to be able to relate to writing through sensory detail. While poems are meant to be poems and science writing is meant to be science writing, I believe the sensory and descriptive imagery that some of the pieces in this book possess is key to making the reading more relatable and enjoyable.

My first piece pick for my proposed chapter is Galileo Galilei's “First Look Through a Telescope.” When I originally read this piece I remember thinking how Galilei not only has a

way with discovery, but he has a way with words. Things like the moon and the stars were only visible at the time, and not fully understood. Galilei describes his findings in an exciting and descriptive way to make his readers understand his sights clearly. And although the entire piece could not be classified as poetry, (like the other pieces I will describe) it has poetry throughout it, which helps bring emotion into the piece. Here are a few quotes for examples of this.

“On the fourth or fifth day after newmoon, when the Moon presents itself to us with bright horns, the boundary which divides the part in shadow from the enlightened part does not extend continuously in an eclipse... even a great quantity of small blackish spots, altogether separated from the dark part, sprinkle everywhere almost the whole space which is at the time flooded with the Sun’s light...” (Galilei 98-99).

This is taken from Galilei’s piece, yet I can picture finding it in poetry. I particularly find poetic language in Galilei’s verb usage; verbs and adverbs like “extend continuously,” “sprinkle,” and “flooded” help paint a clear image in the reader’s mind so they can not only understand his descriptions but see them. I think Galilei might have been a genius in more ways than one thanks to his descriptive details in his writing.

There are also pieces in the book in which Bolles describes that the authors are in touch with the literary side of their writing and not just the science part. For example, Isaac Asimov was not only a “Scientist” but a great fiction writer. My next pick for my chapter proposal is Loren C. Eiseley’s “Little Men and Flying Saucers.” Bolles mentions in his description of the piece that Eiseley was able to create literary form and that he had “an unusual gift in the history of science prose” (Bolles 333). He is not only successful at creating literary forms, but he is also incredibly smart when it comes to using descriptive, poetic language. I mentioned in my

discussion post for week 6 that Margaret Atwood is an amazing writer because she writes her books like a poet, and I feel like Eiseley does the same. Every sentence in his piece is well thought out and descriptive as can be. Take the first two sentences for example, “Today as never before, the sky is menacing. Things seen indifferently last century by the wandering lamplighter now trouble a generation that has grown up to the wail of air-raid sirens and the ominous expectation that the roof may fall at any moment” (Eiseley 333). He sets the scene and gives us a look into what society was like at the time he wrote the piece while using language that adds emotion.

In poetry, we often discuss how our words need to be necessary in order to include them in our writing. I think Eiseley does a great job of using not only the right words but the necessary words to get his point across. He uses language in a way that makes the reader feel something; the words work to make the content better. Poetry winds narrative and emotion and detail into one, and I think Eiseley is gifted at this.

Another pick for my chapter is Louise B. Young’s “How Ice Changed the World.” I think that Young has a similar writing style to Eisely in the way that they both remind me of Margaret Atwood. They all use their words in a poetic way to create great detail. I think Young’s piece may be the best fit for my chapter because she applies poetic writing style throughout her whole piece. I honestly do not think that there is a sentence in “How Ice Changed the World” that wouldn’t work in a poem. An example of how great she is at descriptive detail is this: “The wake of the moon is diffused and softened. The water’s restless movement is quieted; its body rises and falls almost imperceptibly as though it had fallen asleep” (Young 447-448). There are a lot of poetic elements in this quote. For starters, the way she structures the first part of the sentence

“The water’s restless movement is quieted,” she very well could have said, “In winter, the waves aren’t as bad.” But she chose to make the subject the movement and chose to make that movement quieted. This instantly creates clear imagery in the reader’s head. Not only that, the sentence is more interesting, keeping the reader interested.

In the second part of that same sentence, she uses a simile to say that the slightly frozen water rises and falls like it fell asleep. This is instant imagery. Although I’ve never sat and watched a freezing lake, I have seen someone fall asleep, making it very easy for me to relate to the description. She continues her fantastic imagery through the entire piece, which made it impossible for me to lose interest in her topic.

My last pick for my poetic chapter is Rachel Carson’s “The Long Snowfall.” First off, her title is poetry. Often in poetry, it is advised that poets not give too much information about their poems in their titles. When I first read the title, I was thinking the piece was going to be about actual snow, and I assume others reading the piece thought the same. I was pleasantly surprised to find out that “snow” was, in fact, a metaphor for the falling of sediments to the ocean floor. The greatness of her piece does not stop there. Once again, right at the beginning of her piece, she makes sure that we can see what she sees in her head when she thinks of this “snowfall.” She writes, “I see always the steady, unremitting, downward drift of materials from above, flake upon flake, layer upon layer—a drift that has continued for hundreds of millions of years, that will go on as long as there are seas and continents” (Carson 439). She sets us up to fully see and understand her topic so that as readers, we are invested from the beginning. This is another aspect of poetry (and writing in general) is that many people like to build up to their main point instead of just getting on with it. Carson has no problem diving right into her subject matter.

She also uses another technique often used in poetry: repetition. Her “flake upon flake, layer upon layer” image is descriptive, emotive, and not cliché because she stops repeating after two. A lot of writers like to make their lists in threes because they believe it is the perfect number. A lot of readers disagree because this often feels overdone. I enjoy the fact that she left her list at two because it makes the sentence even more powerful.

My chapter will have pieces that use poetic language and technique to capture their reader. This not only makes the reader have more interest in the topic but makes them care more about what they are reading. These pieces show that renowned scientists can have a way with words too; it’s not just poets and writers who know how to effectively use literary techniques.