

## Original Paper

# The Apothecary of Poetry: The Healing Power of Verse

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### Author's Note

*Nikola Nikša Eterović, born in Split Croatia, lives in Berlin (BRD) and Zadar (CRO). He graduated in Theatre Directing and Radiophony, Philosophy and Comparative Literature. His work is interdisciplinary and intercultural. Eterović's activities expand to the areas of directing, theatrical creations, prevention, resocialization, therapy, innovation in creative entrepreneurship, upbringing, and education.*

*He is the author of new methods of work that encourage creativity and the development of a complete personality, for example, H.T.– Organically Creative Method, AP—Apothecary of Poetry, NACQ: Necklace of Answers Created with Questions?, Der rote Rahmen/The Red Frame. His innovative methods were united in 2015, under one common name: Yellow Fish Method.*

### Abstract

*The Apothecary of Poetry is an interdisciplinary project by author Nikola Nikša Eterović that came to life in 2013. The first APOTHECARY OF POETRY that treats patients with verse.*

*In this text, the reader will get acquainted with some possibilities and aspects of the Apothecary of Poetry and its working process. How to use poetry, both already existing poetry and poetry created with the users of AP, is an important aspect of this text. The philosophy of verse, substance—selfhood and action, are reflected in the work of the Apothecary of Poetry in various ways. Poetry is medicinal, poetry is a medicine that you come to get at the Apothecary of Poetry. Poetry is the closest reflection of our existence.*

### Keywords

*poetry, apothecary, the healing power of verse, detail, the constant of unrest, in the whole a fissure*

What is a whole that we can encompass? Is it not just a small part of the thought entirety of the whole? Our microcosmos. This microcosmos is at the same time assigned to us and created by us. These

assigned elements include everything we did not choose that directed us from childhood. Parents—the part of the planet where we are born in a certain climate and social conditions, common givens, the belief systems of our parents, relatives, and tribes, language, the appearance of our skin that protects the mechanism of our being... From us, in that world and for that world, we create undiscovered and unexplored possibilities.

Our body. Our bodies differently the same.

Limitedly capable of unlimited creation.

Our bodies—our minds—our self. The personal in the collective.

All of this, and other things given to us, are boundaries that have cracked in their whole. We are born in a world that isn't ours, but which we change with our actions, in an attempt to make it our own.

White paper, empty space, a black box... are surfaces that mark the beginning, they are our "blank blackboard".

On it, and by living on it, which is already impactful, we write out our personal history, a part of the whole nation, which is a contribution to a part of the whole genus, which becomes a part of the whole planet, the planet a part of the planetary system—which is a part of the whole universe, which is a part of the whole... which to us is still, and forever (?), incomprehensible.

Still, it is possible to hear us all the way until the *end* of the universe—all the way to the never reached end—all the way to the *borders* that do not really even exist—this is what the philosophy of verse of the *Apothecary of Poetry* practices.

Step by step, flicker by flicker:

- listen to yourself, place your hand above your navel and listen to your breathing
- articulate your breathing for yourself, close to yourself, saying the vowels out loud, clearly, close to yourself: *a, e, i, o, u*
- arrange them, saying them out loud for yourself, close to yourself, the verse: *aeiou*, varying the duration of each vowel
- go to the mirror and at a distance of approximately one hundred centimeters calm the image of yourself in the look-alike in the mirror
- *aeiou*—direct it to your look-alike; if the image in the mirror fogs up it means you succeeded in reaching yourself in your look-alike with the *aeiou* verse
- stand against a wall in the space of your apartment and say *aeiou* verses to the wall on the other side; reach that wall—tell it this verse personally and directly
- go out onto the balcony and direct this secretive and substantial verse—*aeiou*—into your city
- *aeiou*—project it to all the corners of the country in which you live
- with your verse—*aeiou*—skip over all the labyrinths and borders (the entrance is also the exit of the labyrinth) and spread your verse all over Europe
- your *aeiou* all over the planet

- find the voice that carries you to the edge of the universe, to its non-existent *borders*—*aeiou*
- *aeiou* is enough to express what you are carrying within you in a given moment
- *aeiou* are vocals and all our worlds in them; *aeiou* is our interior house. Say them loudly and articulate them precisely, giving them their natural duration. All lined up in that way, say them in one exhale.
- *Aeiou* in one exhale evenly distributed
- *aeiou* in (dis)harmony with (dis)harmony
- *aeiou* in perfect imperfection
- *aeiou*—my self in the wholeness of the whole
- *aeiou*—my drop which falls in the waterfall
- *aeiou* sent from oneself into the distance, with the mentioned graduality, aimed as precisely as possible so that it arrives where it was directed
- *a e i o u*—then articulate each of the sounds for the duration of one exhale
- after this, direct the whole *aeiou* verse to the edge of the universe
- direct an *aeiou* from your heart, a deep, honest, hard, dark, difficult, painful, happy, but clearly existing *a e i o u*.

Vowels have volume, depth, width, even color, sound, smell—and they break up, each pronounced differently in the space of articulation, communication.

I say articulations, communications because in the process of being shaped, articulated they first play with us, they unlock our internal spaces.

When they cross the threshold of these spaces, they go out into the world of communication. To whom they are directed, having been born within us, is subject to our decision. It happens that even when we decisively want to direct them towards someone, they escape our control and do not reach the target. It is for us to train the direct orientation and arrival to the desired recipient.

The fact that we form verse, or a sentence with the sequence of vowels in the alphabet, i.e., *aeiou*, helps us arrange a possibility from chaos to which we dedicate time.

We have opted for a possibility to which we dedicate time, and it will reciprocate with everything that bothers it so that it can be fully realized.

We, therefore, experience obstacles that we need to jump over with precision and patience.

With *aeiou* we learn to cope in challenging times that occupy us. By sending an impulse into the distance, we at the same time send it upward.

This is a horizontal vertical. The dimensions of our voice and its orientation are never one-dimensional. The breakable architecture of selfhood is opened within us with voice—one must be careful with this selfhood.

It is our responsibility to find the correct, honest tone within ourselves. A voice placed in the articulation of vocals and sent out by us into the world, to the edges of the universe, offers an idea of wholeness.

When we do the described, we feel ourselves and we somatically feel the breaks and obstacles within us. Realizing one's personal obstacles is the first step towards removing them. It is not easy to remove them, one by one. The ones that are removed suddenly pull down many others and open new spaces. The first step is often the hardest. Starting. Beginning. Deciding.

Falling in love—for the first time—truly, with yourself.

The horizontal vertical, which for some people can start from a vertical horizontal, is an important challenge the *Apothecary of Poetry* is faced with and for which it seeks out modes of action, exercises, and training.

The horizontal vertical is created with people who perceive themselves as culprits and perceive themselves as the only ones responsible for their own successes and failures.

Starting from the vertical horizontal proved useful to me with religious people, who place their lives in the hands of others, including, in the highest instance, God's hands. They are inclined to feel despair over evil fate and are humble in prayer so that 'that someone' delivers them, has mercy on them.

A significant number of people with whom I started working from the vertical horizontal, came closer to their personal spirituality after they felt themselves, their orientation to the supernatural, abandoning in the process the usual supernatural forces familiar to them.

However, it cannot be ignored that fears appear in this transfer from the vertical to the horizontal, fears which can interrupt the process of taking responsibility.

The idea itself of taking responsibility remains as a tested possibility.

This realization is encouraging.

Few listen and even fewer hear when I am saying something. Few see and even fewer acknowledge what I am striving for. I cannot encourage myself in any way, cannot say what I think or what I want. I feel disoriented in the demands of everyday life. When I start one thing, another pulls me away. My life like this makes no sense. I am scared of what others will say. I cannot do without *xy*, and so on—these are reasons that should bring you to the *Apothecary of Poetry*. Hurry.

Here, without chemicals that are harmful to your organism, you will grapple with the reason that brought you, you will be aware of it and see the problem—yourself—in written verse.

From verse, you will set off in a direction useful to you.

That is why verse is also a signpost.

Cracks are accepted here and are treated quite personally in the establishment of a life balance.

That which is hidden in you in the moment is clear to verse!

Search for your verse. Write it out.

Shape your poem.

Write a new poem.

*Poeticize* your everyday life.

**AP** space in an architectural space and as the interior space of an architectural space.

The spiritual space—of an architectural space and in the space of the body of each one of us.

The real space in a human being sometimes gets sick, the space of a human being gets ill. Instead of being large and limitless, it becomes small and curled up, it oppresses and weighs on us. It hides the windows and doors, the entrances of exits and exits of entrances.

Then we must search for a cure.

AP offers a cure with verse. Verse is what you come to get in this apothecary. This is what it offers, and it is its purpose.

AP finds an effective verse of a poet and prescribes it against the cause of the hardship or ailment with which someone came to get a cure.

AP new verses are mixed, creating a poetic potion.

AP syrups are made for ailments and hardships.

AP is not in an endless race against time.

AP has all the time in the world.

AP the healing power of verse.

AP verse is created here as well. It is found in the interior images of a person and perceptions from the world around them. Completely slowly. Naturally. With the rhythm and curiosity of each individual.

AP is also a walking *apothecary*. It came to life in 2013 as one of my ways of working with patients bound to beds in Berlin. We played word games. We exercised the brain's gears with puns about the words spoken. We laughed, were in awe, shouted, whispered—poetry? We grew together in the process of creating something new. We emboldened these poem-forming acrobatics with the experiences of Dadaists, symbolists, and other acrobats of poetry.

AP awakened laughter in the beginning through word games.

AP words and laughter; words in laughter; laughter in words. A funny word. Can a word be funny? Fluent laughter. Can laughter be fluent?

AP a hospital bed and lying in it a person who is unknown to me—the first space(s) in which I activated the healing properties of poetry in my therapeutic process. I remember it was raining, thick rain like a curtain.

AP less than thirtyish square meters of green walls is enough; the quality of it, i.e., thickness of the green color—the type of material of the *walls*—is decided by the creator.

AP green space is formed by mixing blue and yellow colors. In the active additive RGB model of colors (*Red—Green—Blue*), green leads to white through the process of adding essential colors. That is my AP. In the space of spaces and in the spaces of thoughts.

AP the entrance, and if possible, the whole surface of the wall in which the entrance is, are made of glass through which you cannot see inside, but from the space inside you can see outside. The matter of who is inside and who is outside is considered from the point of view of the beholder. Individuality is respected here—the individual certainly moves in various directions—the philosophy of verse raises awareness of movement individually.

AP thin handles that glow in the dark are arranged on the walls. Handles—at the will of our

imagination. Light. Fireflies.

AP such a lighting solution of the space hides a surprise. The wall can always be opened and from it, you can pull out a drawer of medicine—verses that are stored in the wall, behind the luminous fireflies or stars, depending on how someone perceives those lights.

AP in one part of the space, there is an hourglass on which a person can lean and place a book, paper, and (or) other things needed for work.

AP the space needs to be clean, tidy, without anything superfluous. For this to be possible, in addition to sanitary facilities, it would be desirable to have a small pantry.

AP the room is a comfortable room temperature throughout the whole year. The temperature in the space is not affected by external weather changes.

AP is a workspace for working with individuals and with groups.

AP is a space in which poetry and verse creation await you.

AP is not a literary section for those who are interested and talented. But it can be this too.

AP is not oriented towards those who like to read and write poetry. But it can be this too.

AP is not focused on a poetic result. But it can be this too.

AP is not generationally determined. But it can be this too.

AP is not just for those who are literate. But it can be this too.

AP—*poeticizing* is done with the language of the soul. Language and speech.

AP—*poeticizing* the details.

AP—from the *poeticized* detail to the conscious fissure of the whole, and beyond.

AP techniques are used by me to awaken and nurture curiosity in artistic, pedagogical, and therapeutic work.

AP encourages the cognitive process and enables coping in a whole range of demanding life situations.

AP pays special attention to detail and *poeticizes* it.

AP the written details are arranged in diverse puzzles, picture shows, and signposts, thus encouraging and supporting the beneficial actions of each person.

AP is a world of innovation that is hidden in everyone.

AP with innovative solutions in various situations, we make personal progress and keep a balance of personality. This brings us peace and makes us happy.

AP verse—quiet within us—is awakened and effective.

AP verses are scattered around us—one needs to learn to gather them and arrange them into poems.

AP poems do not have a final form. They always elude the strictness and limitations of their authors. They stimulate movement and are movement itself.

AP the calling and workplace of a Poetry Apothecary.

AP the powder of verse, the voice of a poem, and its written record.

The constant of unrest in the cosmos—I found this in a line of poetry that was created during a workshop.

Unrest in the cosmos prompts unrest in us. Unrest is not something negative. Unrest is not something positive. Unrest doesn't need such grades.

Unrest is unrest. It keeps us awake. With unrest, we are awake even when we are dreaming.

Unrest manifests in us in ways familiar to us. We are in a certain state of excitement as we are carrying the weight of something we want to solve. There is as much unrest as there are fears. This means that it is hard to know their amount. Unrest is also in the crackling of the fire. In these cracklings, Ivana BrlićMažuranić recognized the Domaći (Note 1). Many describe their unrest in their diaries. Some examples of unrest have become read literature. I like the unrest written by Ivo Andrić. And the one by Fernando Pessoa.

Camus' "stranger" Mersault is not a stranger only to his unrest. The unrest of the flicker of something completely of its own. Unrest is not disorder. It is not an expression of dissatisfaction. Unrest is excitement. And in it, with it, wonder.

It is always a matter of the dictionary with which we note unrest. In poetry it is always a question of the choice and order of words: we can form our dictionary in different ways. An efficient exercise is to write down, in one minute, as many words as possible without thinking too much—the words that appear to us spontaneously, on their own. When we have written them down, then we read them out loud to hear their sound.

In each phase of working on a poem, we read it aloud. And not in a restrained and scared manner, but loudly and clearly. *Aeiou* in all its occurrence in the verse of the poem. The word needs to pass through our body, through our resonance chamber. Only then will we experience its scope and communication capabilities.

As we string words together on paper, we always check the sequence of words by reading them out loud.

And thus, treating what is written, we change and combine the words, the content, and the sequence—until we get to a poem that shows itself to us as ours.

This challenging process has many obstacles that need to be overcome. Many do not like to read out loud—"so as not to bother others", they say. It is possible to go to a space where reading out loud is possible. Some feel they are slower when they read out loud. This can be checked by measuring time. I have not done this with a sufficient number of participants to be able to negate the statement.

I think, however, that it is a feeling of the passing of time and not a matter of objective, measurable time. When we read out loud, we hear ourselves in what we are reading. Hearing oneself—that is what causes discomfort in a great number of people. One needs to get used to oneself, so that one can accept the content by reading out loud, removing "unwelcome thoughts". Only when we are able to do this can we begin to understand what we read. Understand the read writing with the resonant space of our body.

The read becomes—ours. The read becomes—I. A part of my being. Before verse, I stand as if before a mirror. Bare—by my true self. The read is brought to life the same way music is brought to life when

we play an instrument. Playing the instrument from inside the instrument itself. What we create ourselves with, in music, is our voice. Our voice communicates with us, in us, and shapes what we wish to understand and convey to others. Our voice is “our Domaći”, our crackling of the fire, our unrest.

I would most closely describe the difference between fears and unrest with the image of a lid covering boiling (liquid in the pot)—fears.

An uncovered pot in which the boiling liquid content turns into vapor—unrest. The vapor is made up of droplets of the soul that stick to the shaft of the ‘pot’ there where they are.

In the limit(less)space of our habitation—Earth and the universe. Behind the shaft are some other people, something else is boiling. The possibility of meeting exists.

A covered, boiling pot collapses, above all, on itself—fears.

The created vapor of unrest is in a dialogue of its possibilities. It is in search of its own rhythm. A meeting with poetry is a meeting with oneself. In itself, it is a meeting with others as well.

**AP** demands that poetry be read out loud.

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### Note

Note 1. Domaći are characters from the story “Stribor’s Forest”, from the book *Croatian Tales from Long Ago* by Ivana Brlić Mažuranić. Domaći are the sparks of a fire, small helpful and good-natured house spirits. They find their origins in Slavic mythology where Domovoy (Domovoj) are worshiped as house spirits.