

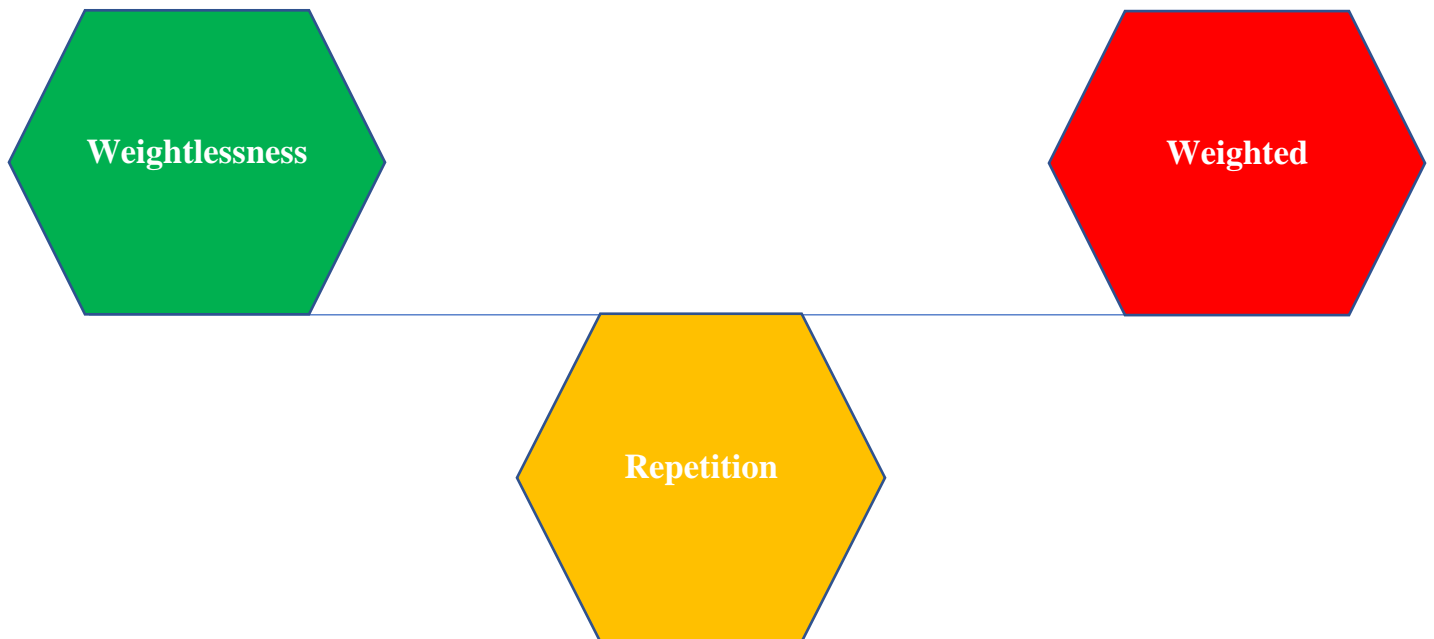
Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway, Vismai Rao's "Lightness," was published at *The Indianapolis Review*. Prepare the gravitons.

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### How It's Put Together

Obstacles physical ("I am gasping / for a stronger spine to spread even / the weight of my living.") and emotional ("we sail / our dead on shoulders") serve as pendulum—language, image, and myth, the poem's balance points.



### Weightlessness

1. The title.
2. Line two's end-word, *sail*.  
Our longest line, strung towards the righthand margin.
3. Objects: olive branch, paper crane.
4. Aided by simile, lunar measurement: "light as plum petals, light as moonbeam."

### Weighted

1. "The weight-bearing joints of my body."  
Listed: "hips, knees, ankles."
2. Exertion: "And how lugging a thing on shoulders gives weight."
3. Atlas, "shouldering a big ball of heaven." More on him later.
4. Concept: *eternity*.
5. Premonitory intensity: "must forewarn us a little of / heaven's heaviness."
6. A freshwater lagoon. Unless narrating from the Dead Sea, buoyancy is not an option.
7. Considerable metalworks: "bridges, steamships."

### Repetition

1. “The instructor” begins each stanza.  
The poem’s training aspect sets up line nine’s *how*,  
while *how*<sup>1</sup> is a posthumous matter, *how*<sup>2</sup>, task-intrinsic.
2. *Shoulders*, appearances one and two as transport.  
“how we sail / our dead on shoulders”  
“how lugging a thing on shoulders”  
Three is gerund.  
Four, location: “on the valley of your shoulders.”
3. *Heaven* as globe and afterlife.
4. *Weight*, its fourth time a homophone.
5. *Think*: present progressive verb – command – command.
6. “I need to,” aka the imperativized second stanza.
7. “Of my . . .”  
body  
living  
stomach  
veins  
And, the mystery of *my to your*—  
“light as moonbeam / on the valley of your shoulders.”  
Finishes with a geo-physique twist.
8. “I am” as opposed to “I’m.”  
The former gains a syllable, evokes effort.  
Similar to efforts of arriving at “the penultimate lap.”  
After all, the speaker’s tackling “hamstring curls / which  
will do my one bad knee good,” not ab sculpting to a Wii.

### Anatomical Balance

“This body” could *buckle*, yet just as easily create a trestle, the heat connotations of *forge* and *melt* somewhat hell-nudging when read with line seven’s *punishment*.

### Conversion

Line fourteen and fifteen’s “the pit of my stomach / to freshwater lagoon,” acid becoming aqua, followed by blood construction, “I need to melt the iron of my veins— / forge bridges, steamships.” Patience emphasized with enjambment, “as I wait / for this body . . .”

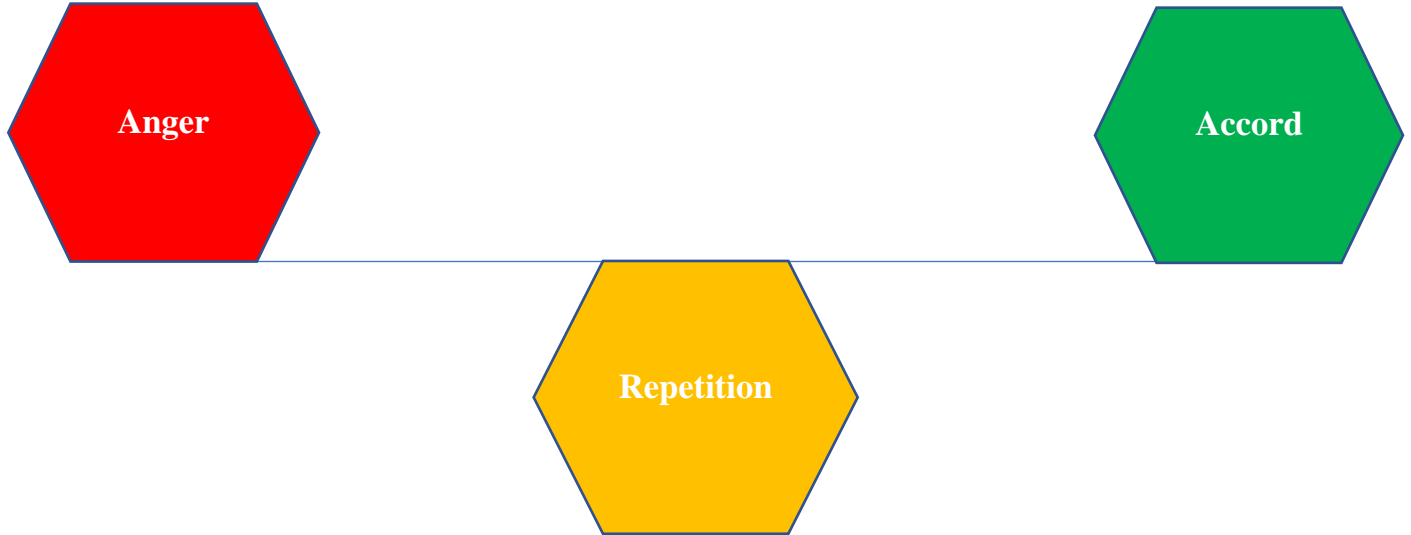
### Where I Break out the Antiquity Champagne

A) Vismai references the Titan leader, “Think of Atlas / for eternity shouldering a big ball of heaven.” B) Visual personification of the Atlas myth with the singly worded line thirteen, *out*— (on which one-and-almost-a-half stanzas rest), the poem’s glenohumeral joint<sup>i</sup> consisting of three letters and an em dash. The takeaway: lineation translates.

### Prompt

Write a poem set in a gymnasium, making detailed use of its lobby, locker area, and cardio room. These locations are where your first-person speaker works through a grievance.

You are balancing:



Try enjambment, white space, strikethrough, or another technique to visualize action(s) pertaining to a specific myth.

Happy Poeming,

Jon

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ortho.wustl.edu/content/Patient-Care/3127/Services/Shoulder-Elbow/Overview/Shoulder-Arthroscopy-Information/The-anatomy-of-the-shoulder.aspx>