

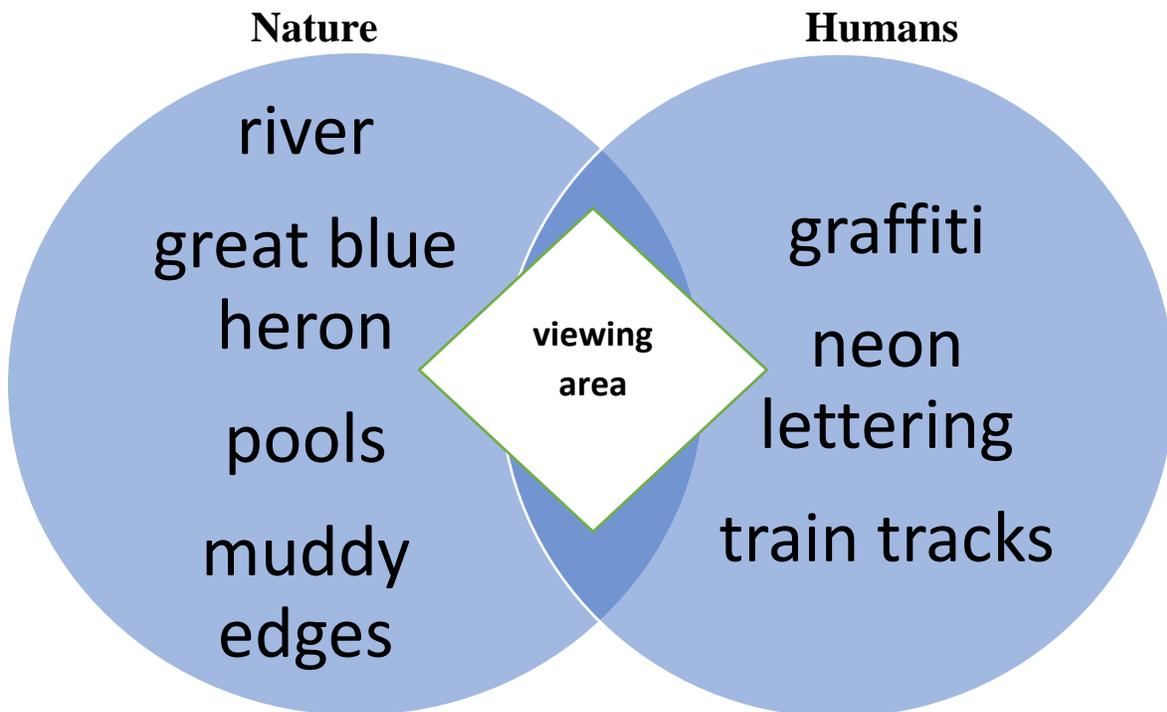
Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway examines Monica Rico's "Where the Girls Are" which will appear in her forthcoming debut collection, *Pinion* (Four Way Books). Congratulations, Monica!

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How It's Put Together

The poem has convinced me we need more sonnets that begin with scrying, its opening lines an eco-pendulum.



Surveilled aerially is a memory of terrain, simile joining clothes and transportation—"the muddy edges / I used to walk, years ago in my father's leather jacket // stiff like the train tracks beside the river." Laundered "sleeves [disguise] themselves as waves," resulting in enough attire to starch a watershed ("fifteen / thousand work shirts un-ironed"). Quantity deepens the image's impact, quality hinging on *un-ironed*. The shirts' configuration into twigwork "for the layering / of a bird's nest in waiting" recalls the leather jacket's rail-ready durability.

Aquifer and illumination hold the "I's" interest through Rico's split octave, the volta a non-gill ("There are no fish at this shore."). One inhalation we're treading graffiti, the next we're at an industrial impasse. Afterwards, tercets disclose the banker / sex-worker dualities of "My best friend's mother" "and her // friends," which is new knowledge for the speaker. The takeaway: revelation is more effective when you're strategic about its placement. Two lines past halfway, the sonnet surprises us. Naturally, we revisit the volta-as-jostle-agent—the stanza break between lines eight and nine a corridor from landscape to discernment.

The transaction query, "she asked him once if he / and his friends would like to party with her and

her // friends,” makes use of a verb that’s equally at home with nounitude. It also harkens to classification (search party, hunting party, a dinner reservation’s party of six). In this light, “party of” refutes the fauna of lines one through eight since it’s neither a siege of herons nor a shoal of herrings, similar terminologies discussed in Colleen Patrick-Goudreau’s podcast “A Gaggle of Geese, a Pride of Lions, a School of Fish, and More Collective Animal Nouns.”ⁱⁱ Turmoil of porpoises? Nye of pheasants? Consider this roadmap for all things collective during a future draft.

Line twelve tells “Where the Girls Are” (“at Second National Bank”), the end tercet longer than the preceding stanzas. Did anyone else notice “the fourteenth floor” resides in line thirteen? Score one for architectural deftness meting the superstitions of buildings. This is another height detail—a heron “Above the river” begins the piece—in a poem juxtaposing narrator-then and bird-now. The final line’s window brings us to a viewing area, the friends’ proximity, “a handshake or someone’s favorite color,” giving interpretive openness.

Prompt

Write a sonnet about an industrial habitat, a transactional reveal occurring in line nine. Include an image whose quantity is supported by its adjective quality; a height detail; and one collective noun phrase. Jostle with your volta.

Happy Poeming,

Jon

ⁱ https://www.havehashad.com/web_features/where-the-girls-are

ⁱⁱ <https://colleenpatrickgoudreau.com/a-gaggle-of-geese-a-pride-of-lions-a-school-of-fish-and-more-collective-animal-nouns-2/>