Constraint Project Proposal

I know it’s hard to believe, but our time together this summer is nearly halfway over! Now that we’ve had a chance to experiment with a number of different constraints of varying types and complexities, it’s time for you to begin developing your own constraint...and to apply it in crafting poetry or prose meeting that constraint. On the syllabus I left the parameters for this exercise very wide-open (intentionally), and I’m willing to open them wider still. The purpose of this page is to help you decide what you’d like to tackle for your culminating constraint project.

So. What sort of constraint might you devise? It could be a...

- **lexical constraint**, mandating some sort of limitations on the letters used, or the ways in which those letters combine. It could instead be a...

- **stylistic constraint**, asking the author to adopt a certain voice, perspective, or other point-of-view. At greater remove still, it could be a...

- **semantic constraint**, imposing structure on the literary piece’s meaning. Or, it could be a...

- **situational constraint**, calling for the subjects of the literary piece to interact in a preset manner or context. Who knows?

Structurally, your constraint might be a very mathematical one, applying finite-state automata or some other mathematical machinery to do its dirty deeds...or it could have nothing at all to do with math, relying on qualitative parameters to regulate its work. It could be a machine for making short works, an aphoristic generator like the random similes or perverbs. It could instead be a means of crafting a lengthy piece, like the “pantransitional” constraint we will soon discuss, governing a piece in which appears every possible letter-to-letter transition.

No matter what constraint you intend to craft, I’d like to get a start by asking you to propose a general area you’d like to explore with your constraint. Though you don’t have to have all of the details worked out at this point, I’d like for you, by next Tuesday, to write 1-2 pages in which you lay out a general plan. Do you have, for instance, a general interest in lipograms and would like to develop your own twist on them? Or, are you intrigued by finite-state automata and would like to construct a new sort of automaton to do your bidding? Do you rather want to explore some sort of numerological constraint, even if you’re not sure of the exact nature of that constraint?

Your proposal should therefore give an indication of (1) the general nature of the constraint you’d like to develop, (2) the genre (aphorism? poem? what sort of poem? short fiction? long-form fiction?) of literature your constraint will generate, and (3) your reasons for exploring the constraint you propose. To this last point: it’s fair enough for you to propose a constraint for purely ludic reasons, because it’s fun! If, on the other hand, you have some deep philosophical reasons for developing the constraint you propose, please feel free to explain those reasons.

Your proposal is due to me via email no later than **8:00 am on Tuesday June 17th**. We will spend some time in class on that day workshopping your proposal ideas. Please bring a single hard copy of your proposal to class on Tuesday, as well, and let me know if you have any questions!