

## THE POETICS OF THE MASH-UP

If you listen to dance music you know all about the mash-up: two or more songs thrown together by a DJ, sometimes taking the vocal track of one song and throwing it over the rhythm of another. In the cleverest of mash-ups, a DJ will take songs that somehow relate to each other lyrically and blend them together, sometimes in amusing ways, sometimes in fierce ways, sometimes in poignant ways (see DJ Earworm's work, or on Madonna's recent tour how she mashed her hit "Rain" with the Eurythmics' "Here Comes the Rain Again").

I've found in my own work, when I have two or three poem drafts that seem to be speaking to each other but none of which seem to be able to stand on their own as a fully formed poem yet, that "mashing them up" often creates surprising results. My favorite result is the tension of having two voices speaking back and forth to each other, which I sometimes indicate through italics or by giving the "mashed-in" poem its own spatial logic on the page.

So here's an exercise for you: Take two poems that you're not totally satisfied with and try mashing them together. That might mean alternating lines from one with the other, italicizing the one and having it break in throughout the course of the other so that it appears as if two voices are speaking, or simply taking your favorite lines from each and recombining them in ways that might startle you into an altogether new poem.

I have included a couple of examples of my own poems that use this technique. The first is a mashed-up poem titled "Skin Game," and the second is one titled "The Alchemists Dissolve and Coagulate."

The first example is a true mash-up, in which I took two poems and put them together to create the resulting, third piece (examples linked as PDFs). The two poems I mashed were "[Skin Game](#)" and "[Skin Shift](#)." The final product can be seen [here](#).

The second example, "[The Alchemists Dissolve and Coagulate](#)," is not so much a mash-up of two poems but a mash-up of two different types of language: the poem's story on one side and this juxtaposed list of a different kind of language that gives some sonic and semantic texture. The poem on the left-hand side came first and it always seemed to be asking for more. So I did some research and found these words really beautiful and wanted to somehow weave them in.

"Skin Game" and "The Alchemists Dissolve and Coagulate" are two distinct approaches to the prompt — the first mashing two drafts together and the second mashing a draft with found language. There are many other ways to approach this prompt as well.

Good luck with your pieces, and mash away!

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