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In response to the fear- and hate-mongering alive in our country today, I have joined Julie Landsman?a writer, teacher, and activist based in Minneapolis?to create the I Am From Project. Through our website (iamfromproject.com) and Facebook page, we?re collecting art from around the country prompted by that theme. You can listen to our interview on the National Writing Project radio here: . We want to gather the diversity of our voices, and we plan to archive the results online and to present them, in some form, in D.C. We?d love to have your voice among them! The Kentucky Arts Council has wrapped up my Where I'm From?project with a total of 731 poems from eighty-three counties. My thanks to everyone at the Council, especially Tamara Coffey, who put all those poems online. You can visit this website to find the map where you can click on any county and read offerings from poets of all ages. I am from clothespins, from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride. I am from the dirt under the back porch. (Black, glistening, it tasted like beets.) I am from the forsythia bush the Dutch elm whose long-gone limbs I remember as if they were my own. I'm from fudge and eyeglasses, from Imogene and Alafair. I'm from the know-it-alls and the pass-it-ons, from Perk up! and Pipe down! I'm from He restoreth my soul can say myself. I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch, fried corn and strong coffee. From the finger my grandfather lost to the auger, the eye my father shut to keep his sight. Under my bed was a dress box spilling old pictures, a sift of lost faces to drift beneath my dreams. I am from those moments-- snapped before I budded -- leaf-fall from the family tree. Listen to George Ella read the poem. Check out the book Where I'm From, Where I'm Nobody Yet (Orchard Books, 1989; Theater Communications Group, 1991) by my friend, Tennessee writer Jo Carson. All of the People Pieces, as Jo calls them, are based on things folks actually said, and number 22 begins, "I want to know when you get to be from a place." Jo's speaker, one of those people "that doesn't have roots like trees," tells us "I am from Interstate 40" and "I am from the work my father did." In the summer of 1993, I decided to see what would happen if I made my own where-I'm-from lists, which I did, in a black and white speckled composition book. I edited them into a poem — not my usual way of working — but even when that was done I kept on making the lists. The process was too rich and too much fun to give up after only one poem. Realizing this, I decided to try it as an exercise with other writers, and it immediately took off. The list form is simple and familiar, and the question of where you are from reaches deep. Since then, the poem as a writing prompt has traveled in amazing ways. People have used it at their family reunions, teachers have used it with kids all over the United States, in Ecuador and China; they have taken it to girls in juvenile detention, to men in prison for life, and to refugees in a camp in the Sudan. Its life beyond my notebook is a testimony to the power of poetry, of roots, and of teachers. My thanks to all of you who have taken it to heart and handed it on. It's a thrill to read the poems you send me, to have a window into that many young souls. I hope you won't stop there, though. Besides being a poem in its own right, "Where I'm From" can be a map for a lot of other writing journeys. Here are some things I've thought of: Where to Go with "Where I'm From" While you can revise (edit, extend, rearrange) your "Where I'm From" list into a poem, you can also see it as a corridor of doors opening onto further knowledge and other kinds of writing you're going to do or to revise or finish a piece. Let your goal be the writing itself. Learn to let it lead you. This will help you lead students, both in their own writing and in their response as readers. Look for these elements in your WIF poem and see where else they might take you: a place could open into a memory of going with them, helping, being in the way. Could be a remembered dialogue between your parents about work. Could be a poem made from a litany of tools they used. an important event could open into freewriting all the memories of that experience, then writing it as a scene, with description and dialogue. It's also possible to let the description become setting and directions and let the dialogue turn into a play. food could open into a scene at the table, a character sketch of the person who prepared the music is playing; could provide you the chance to interleave the words of the song and words you might have said (or a narrative of what you were thinking and feeling at the time the song was first important to you ("Where I'm Singing From"). something someone said to you wanted to say back but never did. a significant object could open into a sensory exploration of the object-what it felt, sounded, smelled, looked, and tasted like; then where it came from, what happened to it, a memory of your connection with it. Is there a secret or a longing connected with this object? A message? If you could go back to yourself when this object was important to you, what would you ask, tell, or give yourself? Remember, you are the expert on you. No one else sees the world as you do; no one else has your material to draw on. You don't have to know where to begin. Just start. Let it flow. Trust the work to find its own form. Where I'm From" Watch a visual poem based on "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon, created by Julia Daniel for Tamalpais High School's Academy of Integrated Humanities and New Media (AIM), fall 2010: A Young Artist's Own "Where I'm From" in Words and Image: In Winter of 2008, Sage Hennequin Kuhens was enrolled in University of South Carolina Upstate's "Write Here, Write Now: Sharing Slices of Life Through the Magic of Digital Storytelling," a series of writing and publishing workshops sponsored by the Spartanburg Community Writing Center. At eight years old, Sage was the youngest among her group of about 50 or so students, and was determined to be as independent as she could be. Her delightful instructor, Tasha Thomas, encouraged her independence. I'm from big blue herons to small river otters, I'm from big Metasequioas to tall stalks of bamboo, I'm from cousins that were unknown to the closest of friends, I'm from my mom and dad to my lab-beagle dog, albino rats, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches, I'm from roaring water falls to silent flowing streams, I'm from terrifying Zombie walks and Scarowinds to a gentle princess-loving godsister and godbrother I'm from my old dog Chani to red-shouldered hawks, I'm from my old like, I'm from bold looking deer to relaxing foxes, I'm from making a fire in the county to ridin' in a cotton combine, I'm from a fan of Alexa Vega and I together, I'm from my heritages to Mom's mystery heritages, I have an opinion that none can change...life is great! -Sage Hennequin Kuhens 1-29-08 The Hale Pono Boys and Girls Club of Hawaii posted ?Where I?m From? written by an eighth grade student as part of a study of The Killer Angels. The lesson plan is here. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. The Library of Congress receives hundreds of questions each year from people seeking help identifying the full text and authors of poems they read years—if not decades—ago. Most people are able to recall little more than a phrase or line from the sought poem and the general period of their life when they read it (e.g., elementary school), and then hope that our reference librarians can successfully apply their sleuthing skills to the task of tracking down the complete poem. I and my colleagues in the Library's new Researcher and Reference Services Division (formerly the Humanities and Social Sciences Division) field the vast majority of "help finding a poem" questions that come in through the Library's Ask a Librarian service, and we pride ourselves on having quite a good success rate in identifying poems and their sources for patrons. That said, it's not always possible to pinpoint the exact source of a poem, or to definitively identify a poem's author. Such is the case with the poem at the end Guillermo del Toro's 2017 movie—and recent winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture—The Shape of Water have written us in desperate search of the original source and author of this poem. And they are not the only ones in pursuit of an answer: searching the poem's text online forums, and social media services—from Reddit to Twitter—whose users are actively trying to figure out the poem's at the close of The Shape of Water, and is introduced by the movie's narrator, who says (minor spoiler alert!): "But when I think of her, of Elisa, the only thing that comes to mind is a poem, whispered by someone in love hundreds of years ago." The narrator then recites the following poem (which I have not lineated): Unable to perceive the shape of you, I find you all around me. Your presence fills my eyes with your love. It humbles my heart, for you are everywhere. Jalal al-Din Rumi. (Spiritual Couplets). Persia, 1441, copied by Salah al Din Mir Shah. Manuscript. Near East Section, African and Middle Eastern Division, Library of Congress. I and my colleague, Kathy Woodrell, who fielded one of the questions the Library received about the poem, searched numerous full-text databases, poetry indexes, and online resources—many of which are listed on my online guide to finding poems—for the poem, but couldn't find any exact matches. While many online sources attribute the lines to the 13th century Sufi mystic poet Rumi, none we found provide an exact citation that could be used to verify Rumi's authorship. Other online attributions we came across, such as the claim that the poem was written by Byzantine monk Symeon the New Theologian (942-1022 A.D.) and appears in an English translation of his Divine Eros, also did not pan out upon review of the cited works. Failing to find any reputable print or online sources that identify the poem's author, Kathy and I took a closer look at what, if anything, Guillermo del Toro has said about the poem. As it turns out, del Toro claims he came across the poem in a book of Islamic poetry. This claim appears in a review of the The Shape of Water published in the November 23, 2017, issue of Northern Kentucky University's student newspaper, The Northerner: Though he doesn't remember exactly where the verse came from, del Toro remembers reading it in a bookstore he'd frequent before going on set to film. Some additional details are given in a November 2017 Gold Derby interview with Richard Jenkins, who plays Giles in the movie. Jenkins recalls what del Toro told him about the poem's source: Narration is hard. It's really hard. I'll tell you what, I didn't have the final narration until about two weeks before I stopped shooting, and Guillermo came up to me and he said, "I found this poem in a bookstore today. It's written by a man hundreds of years ago," which I say in the narration. He said it was his love letter to God and we're gonna use it. So that's how that came to be. In a December 2017 conference call discussion about the source of the poem: Then we were already shooting the movie and it was the first week of the shoot, and I always arrive an hour or two before the crew to the set and I was a little earlier than that. Then my driver says, "What do we do?" When I have any free time, I say "Let's go into a bookshop, and I was browsing the shelves. I found this poem in a book about an illuminated poet talking about Allah, talking about God. I thought it was so magnificent. It moved me very much, and I bought the book. We got the credits in the movie—they're there at the end, and it became the most beautiful closing I could have imagined for the editing, and I knew that it was going to be perfect for the film. Aha! Kathy and I thought when we read this. If, as del Toro says, the poem or book is listed in the end credits of The Shape of Water, all we need to do is watch the movie, with pen and paper at the ready to jot down the poem's source as it scrolls by in the credits rolled, though, we had the same experience: at first eagerly awaiting the source's appearance, only for that eagerness to turn to despair when the credits ended without any mention of the poem or book. What happened? Either del Toro's words were not accurately reported, or his statement was inaccurate. Throughout our search, Kathy and I were keenly aware that the book in which del Toro supposedly read the poem would likely have been an English translation of Islamic poetry. Even if we couldn't find the English translation of the poem, we reasoned, perhaps a scholar of Islamic poetry would be able to recognize and direct us to the original version of the poem (in Arabic or Persian, perhaps). Since the poem's authorship was most frequently attributed to Rumi, I emailed Brad Gooch, author of the recent Rumi biography Rumi's Secret: The Life and Times of the Sufi Poet of Love, to see if he might have come across these lines during his research. According to Dr. Gooch: Rumi wrote over three thousand ghazals, and two thousand robaiyat, which are lyric poems akin to sonnets and quatrains. Many have not been translated. Many have been extraordinarily loosely translated. Often lines are attributed to Rumi, but they could have been written by a Sufi poet of the time under the influence of Rumi or of the general poetic thinking of the time, or someone later under the influence of either [or both]. Bottom line: I cannot give you a definite attribution for the lines, nor can I say they are definitely by Rumi (though they might be!). Fatemeh Keshavarz, Director of the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Maryland, College Park, and Chair and Director of the University's Roshan Institute for Persian Studies, agrees. Responding to my email inquiry, Dr. Keshavarz said that "the quote does not remind me of any particular verse of Rumi," though it does mirror key concepts and themes in Islamic lyric poetry and Rumi's own work: The concept that the beloved's shape is not to be perceived by the lover because the beloved is omnipresence has become a universal love theme in Islamic lyric poetry because the concept is expressed in the Qur'an. Since Rumi is the best know Muslim mystic, at this point, I am not surprised that it will be attributed to him. Also, I have no doubt that if we sifted through his lyric poetry corpus, we will find many lines evoking the shapelessness and the omnipresence of the beloved. Dr. Keshavarz points to two verses from the Qur'an as oft-quoted examples of these ideas: "Wherever you turn is the face of God" (defined as the beloved or the truth by the Sufis)." - Qur'an 2:115 "He is the beginning, the end, the outer and the inner." - Qur'an: 57:3) Given the information Kathy and I have amassed, what conclusions can we offer about the poem's origin? The most likely scenario is that the poem in The Shape of Water is an adaptation of a poem del Toro read in a book of Islamic poetry he found at a bookstore. Del Toro may have had the book in hand when adapting the poem, or may instead have relied on his memory of the poem's text. The poem he adapted was likely written by an Islamic lyric poet, perhaps in Arabic or Persian. While the poem could have been written by any of a number of Islamic poets operating in the lyric or mystic tradition given the poem's common theme, Rumi has quickly become the leading candidate. This may in part be due to Rumi functioning as what quotation expert Garson O'Toole calls a "Host," a well-known figure such as Mark Twain or Yogi Berra who frequently receives credit for a statement he never made, but which sounds like something he could have written or uttered. Another possibility is that del Toro is the sole, original author of the poem. In this scenario, he invented the story about discovering the poem in a book at a bookstore, perhaps as way to add a layer of mysteriousness, about the poem's source. This would explain his reticence to give a detailed source for the poem's source. This would explain his reticence to give a detailed source for the poem's source. and I bought the book"). Of course, the question about the poem's authorship could be answered by del Toro. Did he, in fact, purchase the book of Islamic poetry in which he says he found the poem? If so, he can provide the publication details for the book, and even the page on which the poem appears. I tried informally contacting del Toro through Twitter, but received no response. Perhaps some of the readers of this post are interested enough in the mystery of the poem's authorship to contact him through other means. If you uncover any further clues or leads about the poem's origins, feel free to share below! Update: Several commenters attribute the poem to the 11th and 12th century Sufi mystical poet Hakim Sanai (pseudonym of Abū al-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam). Sanai, who resided in Ghazna (modern day Ghazni), Afghanistan, is best known for The Enclosed Garden of Truth was first translated into English by J. Stephenson in 1910, and is available online through the HathiTrust Digital Library. In particular, a translation of a section by Priya Hemenway on page 38 of The Book of Everything: Journey of the Heart's Desire: Hakim Sanai's Walled Garden of Truth (2002) is a fairly close match, in both content and style, to the poem in The Shape of Water. While Hemenway's translation may indeed have been the poem that inspired Guillermo del Toro, since it embodies themes presents in much other Sufi mystical poetry, definitive attribution must come from del Toro himself. Update 2: Commenter Julie points out that a translation by Priya Hemenway on page 41 of The Book of Everything (first line: "Unable to discern the form of You, / I see your Your presence all around.") is actually much closer in wording to the text of the poem at the end of the movie. I agree, and believe the wording is near enough that it's quite likely Hemenway's translation is the one adapted for the movie by del Toro. Thanks, Julie! Update 3: In response to several readers who commented that a reference to Hakim Sanai appears in the end credits of the movie, I reviewed the end credits again and discovered, near their finish, the following reference: "Adapted works by Hakim Sanai." Attribution appearing in the end credits of The Shape of Water. Bingo! This attribution, which doesn't name the specific "adapted works" to which it refers, surely must be in reference to poem at the movie's end. So why did I, my colleagues, and many other people miss the reference to Hakim Sanai in the end credits? One possibility is that the end credits for the theatrical version of the movie were revised for the movie's release on DVD, on demand, and on streaming services. If any readers recall seeing the credit to Sanai while watching the movie in a theater, please let me know in the comments. Another possibility is that, because I was scouring the movie in a theater, please let me know in the comments. Another possibility is that, because I was scouring the credit to Sanai while watching the movie in a theater, please let me know in the comments. Another possibility is that, because I was scouring the credit to Sanai while watching the movie in a theater, please let me know in the comments. writings of Hakim Sanai, which I'm guessing is shared by many people who watched the movie, could have jumped out at us. So where does this new information leave us with respect to the poem's authorship? In sum, I believe we can now rather confidently state that the poem appearing at the end of The Shape of Water is an adaptation by Guillermo del Toro of a translation made by Priya Hemenway of an original poem by Hakim Sanai. Hemenway's translation appears on page 41 of her book The Book of Everything: Journey of the Heart's Desire: Hakim Sanai's Walled Garden of Truth. Thanks to the many commenters on this post for their help tracking down the poem's source. Again, if any other significant information about the poem's source comes to light, I'll update the post accordingly.

