

Poem IV:  
*Voyage*

Exercise IV.2:

“Voyage” has been around for over 30 years, and it is indeed a well-traveled poem, having been republished in nearly a dozen textbooks, and made into a popular poster. Originally included in Tafolla’s 1983 collection, *Curandera*, the poem created an enduring metaphor that mingles personal aspirations for a life of unencumbered creativity with a social critique of conformist lifestyles and incorporates an implied historical-political commentary on the Spanish invasion of the Americas. On the surface, “Voyage” is one of Tafolla’s simplest poems—a celebration of imagination and personal freedom; in reality, it is one of her more complex and powerful poems.

Examine the poem’s extended metaphor—the repeated assertion that the poet was the “fourth ship” trailing behind Columbus’s famous trio. Obviously she is on a different voyage—she is “lost at sea,” sailing without a map an imagined sea empowered by “moonbreezes.” She is vowed to her voyage, not to any particular discovery, and yet her voyage is all about discovery. The sea she sails is poetry itself, and each poem is a new discovery.

Note that this poem, which celebrates unbounded creativity and imagination, is written in a regular form: three five-line stanzas, each beginning with the same line, each ending with a variation of the same idea. Do you find the “form” of the poem restrictive? Why not?

Note how the metaphor works. She is not simply “like” this imaged fourth ship. She says that she *was* that fourth ship. As with all true metaphors, this is an impossible statement that must involve the reader’s imagination in order for it to be understood. The poet doubles the power, so to speak, by using a “reverse personification”—not giving a voice to an inanimate object, but by becoming that object.

What are you committed to? Create a metaphor that stands for something to which you are truly committed. Whatever it is that you choose to compare yourself to, make a list of things associated with it. Repeat the metaphor, expand it by using the details from your list. Mean what you write.

— Exercise provided by Bryce Milligan, publisher of Wings Press;  
author of *Lost and Certain of It*