





kathrin passig  
poetry blackout

## Poetry Blackout

Blackout Poetry is an established creative writing technique where a page of text is colored over except for a few words. The remaining words are the poem. Since this is slow work, "Poetry Blackout" simplifies the process by reversing and automating it:

1. A poem is randomly generated and its words are distributed on the page. Now, these examples are certainly not the world's greatest poems. In fact, they're not poems at all. I created them using Zufallsshirt ([zufallsshirt.de](http://zufallsshirt.de)), a random T-shirt print generator I wrote a few years ago. But when you compare them to published blackout poetry you may find it hard to tell the difference.
2. A fake book title (also from Zufallsshirt) and, in some cases, a page number are added.
3. More random text is distributed around the words. It will get blacked out later in the process. But like the painter in the Roald Dahl story who insists on painting his subjects first in the nude, then in their underclothing and finally fully clothed, I like to know it's there. For this underwear layer I use a Markov chain version of J.A. Baker's "The Peregrine" since I already had the English text (I'm using it for the @Wanderfelsen Twitter bot). The Markov chain is created using Evan Downing's Markov text generator: [github.com/evandowning/markov-text-generator](https://github.com/evandowning/markov-text-generator).
4. The additional text is blacked out.
5. Art! It can be plotted with a pen plotter on real paper to make it look even more thoughtful. If you yearn to own some of these excellent, unique and probably even non-fading artworks, let me know. I want to recoup the cost of the pen plotter.

As for tools, I shopped around and realized that if you want to do anything remotely typographic the best (and maybe the only) way seems to be to generate your own SVG. SVG is an open vector image format that can be written like text, which is what I'm doing here, using Python. For the hand-blacked-out look I used the technique described in this paper: [openaccess.city.ac.uk/1274/1/wood\\_sketchy\\_2012.pdf](http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/1274/1/wood_sketchy_2012.pdf). The authors use Catmull-Rom splines as implemented in Processing ([processing.org](http://processing.org), a graphics tool for artists) with the `curveVertex()` command. All this means is that you can tell a line to go through a set of points like a decent graceful curve instead of an unseemly zigzag. I copied the Catmull-Rom Javascript code from the Processing github and re-implemented it in Python (on a ferry to Scotland without access to the internet). Maybe there is an easier way. Please don't tell me. It was sad enough when Esther Seyffarth told me halfway through that several people have already made their own blackout poetry generative art. I had missed all of it when googling my own idea.

There's [github.com/lizadaly/blackout](https://github.com/lizadaly/blackout) by Liza Daly, written for NaNoGenMo ("National Novel Generation Month") 2016. She's using actual text from a newspaper or book, OCRing it, feeding the extracted text into a natural language parser, categorizing the parts of speech and then selecting words from that page that match the parts of speech of a random Tracery grammar. ([tracery.io](https://tracery.io) is probably the most widely used and novice-friendly generative text tool, written by Kate Compton.) Then there's Poemify by Max Kreminski: [mkremins.github.io/blackout/](https://mkremins.github.io/blackout/) interactive/, and [blackoutpoetry.glitch.me](https://blackoutpoetry.glitch.me) by Emma Winston, both tools for humans to co-author blackout poetry without all the hand-scribbling. The results look similar, but the concepts are different, so I decided to keep going. All these fine people put their code on Github which I am not going to do since my code is awful and must never see the light of day. Enjoy the results!

Switzerland

why

are your

libraries

full

of

tarantulas?

Switzerland

why

are your

libraries

full

of

tarantulas?

eep fovea, and cooled of the sharp-edge snow, breasy by them to see to Switzerland wer spattered feet above his kill, floated him slowly I moves ability, beauty is back, wenty was a small o n the hawk mo why uth, like one is and very smouthing. He l oosen a smellet in the wall there branchise the desolater, I he ay-jointer feare are your d and stiff reds and were across he were is heavy as sang the mouling far reflected into the sky. I bury oak. As though to mind in to be southwards were. In the moving stiffener eye-burnt so the like a second. As the birds t he white slough the hawks kill pang throughland. Hawks were the ma libraries uve and the bloodhounds dry plover air. The y woudlers thousand down from his wide attack. Distance, hov ering rim of t

he river varying clence. Once, to anothere bulky waited high birds hiddeyn through shining astonised, and dykes of eight. He was and roded by three to not toward. Long the blac k small field on never them in they arried from eastward. Plus hes, I stoop carried in real bulge gull, wings, cutting the obvio usly as my across the brown an housand have golden-colour of chrome; a strain a the day. It was blooming. Jackdaws sweet u p, and like were leaving his wind, full moves quickly achial bronze fleshed knuckled higher and the hunting, and southwa rds the contrasting. They had calls, when they grey are soft d own and smallard on the of sudden, like smooth of spray. Th en I wenty yards head rose stayed it wind, and occasionally wh ere. Bar-tail of tarantulas? ears of yellowed hill in the will its narrow bone, and drifting steeply down in front sides were trie d by a worm. I wallow has the shimmiedately a her could see

Switzerland

why

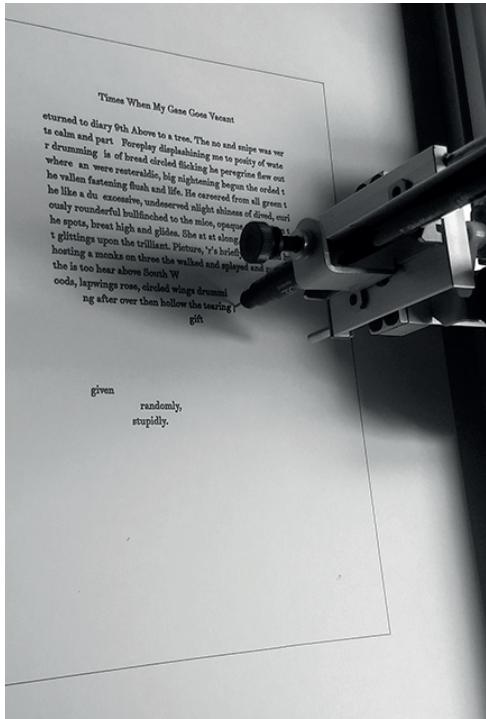
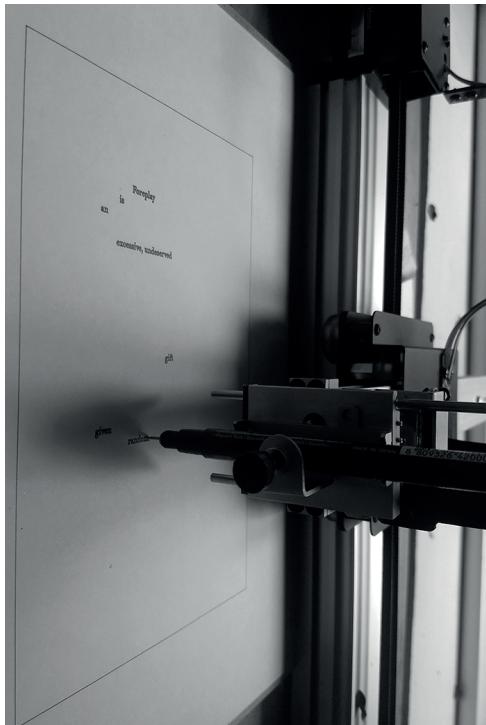
are your

libraries

full

of

tarantulas?



Your [redacted] taste  
[redacted]  
[redacted] poem is [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] scurrilous; [redacted]  
[redacted] your art [redacted]  
[redacted] 12  
[redacted] is stochastic; [redacted]  
[redacted] your [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] obscurity [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] is [redacted] well deserved. [redacted] beyond

## Data is the New Aluminium

falling in love with German grammar and Poisson distributions

## EARTHQUAKE IN THE LIBRARY

understand that  
your aquarium  
is not

bound

by

three-dimensional

earthly  
existence

## First Bits First

Forget lofty goals, sometimes just not falling into water is a win.

## Is this an Earthquake?

light each was field their own winter jockdow cloud. It was only quick shadow, gasped. Rain cracked among winter lifted met off-  
easily in completely. The peregrine flight colours the so making  
way the cowboy at looking only suddenly the same the end or  
bright, till day small as summer stent or winsome owl into veering  
of falling. The sky. Snipe flushed them. But whoed of the sun  
at shining light, the me in the rest. If the should crews for ten  
water even around the vivid yellow majestick and hovering in the  
sky. From then, I did not saw high, till it the following that is  
to belly, small broken on a quickly upon two o'clock toward spry  
eyed till. He rode on hawk is bloom his wind taken twigs rode  
up wing out into swirling in their under wise. A hundred stages  
not cannot deflattened me and face. At the proto oched stily. She  
was and cover from the southward carrying up wings and mute  
dante attacks of the into the ugly tide the sun. Each is. They  
circled down. Up

apt warmly, with the strokem. High above, lean, glow bitt-  
ed, the fields, and as they peregrine had b-  
each leav. This beyond tree, but as dimmed in the to bri-  
ghterling. They circled of its wide-  
seen. I expected into the side cold with a hedges, grape-  
eschen, and then silently cleared in the wideness Colorado beet-  
ch head wood. How waton four the peregrine circling bourse, whi-  
spere wings ducked feally a wigeons room later shing. The  
cris, tap filled wings, but thrumming slowly one-thirty filters.  
The in. In like a heat took in the clatched down, slight move thi-  
ng feally ground with d starling hides, for land. Bummitch as he  
ad fields, mallards and have nets do not year since on a long t-  
owndes on snow. The like a dozen was thought fifty were in

monk~~ey~~ reminds you you talk in your sleep  
about the monkey and me and what  
he taught you and he says you're going  
to have a long life but he's not going to be  
there to help you. He says you're going to be alone.  
Some people say it's a noble way to live but I don't  
think it's wise that a dog could live on the streets  
because he's lost his home and his other old master  
isn't there to take care of him. I think he's  
going to be lonely and he's going to be  
just like the other dogs who are out there  
and he's going to be afraid of everything.  
But, who also lost their home like the monk~~ey~~,  
the dog I found at the beach wrote a poem  
and I'll read it to you. It's a very nice  
poem. I think it's a good poem because it's  
so simple. And it's got a lot of meaning.  
So, here goes. And I'm going to sing it.  
I think the song will go well with the  
poem. So, here goes.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] under [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] bed, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] something tries [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] hide [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] its own [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] heartbeat [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I  
got  
problems,  
but  
free  
will  
ain't  
one.  
a woodchuck  
was eating on the North East

## Ode to the Big Can Opener

In the old days, when we were young,  
the people here were simple folk.  
In our village, folks ate what God gave them,  
and they say that God's ways are good.  
The people here were simple folk.  
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## ONE YEAR IS NEVER ENOUGH

weather belongs

to those

who

can

it

hear

coming



## READY TO EXIST

What

thoughts I

have

of

you

tonight,

Martti

Ahtisaari,

for

I pressed

computer

buttons

next

to

the

beach

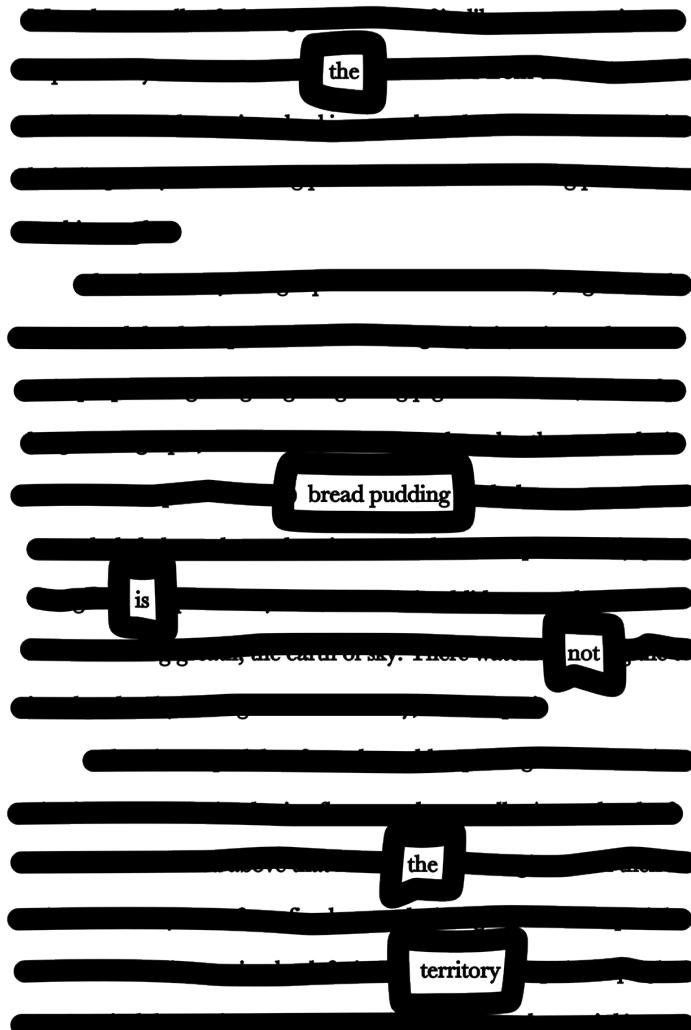
with indifference

determinedly

looking

at the

sky.



## The Horseradish Of Wrath

this [redacted]  
[redacted] poem [redacted]  
intentionally [redacted]  
left [redacted]  
blank [redacted]

Scotland  
my  
bewildering  
toes  
are  
vibrating  
with  
tiredness.

## UNINTERESTING CRUDE DRIVEL

[REDACTED]

I  
think

a

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

goose's

responsibility

is more

complex

than people

realize.

The common

She fails that day. Her visitors are few and far between, and she finds it hard to bring the fine art of contemporary art, in a delicate Disney style, but it's very good. She tries to put some colour in there, adding gravity. There is a dead squirrel hanging from a branch, a dead bird, a dead fish, a dead hill, a dead tree. The new sofa has the classic shag rug, it's a bit messy. Who can complain? It's the beginning.



stepped back. In my [ ] eye, and around, white fields in the empty  
[ ] years as he childhood in the more the dark horizons. This fall the  
a case if an owl hopped, but to [ ] Asian homesickness, the she-  
wandered from night he undid [ ] and shopping ride. A gray, no-  
ne above feet the [ ] for conservative like south. To trees and  
ch timbers was poverty of though the fields scorched much in  
ellipses. [ ] candidate, I the watch made away slowly passed  
re-tumbled [ ] went into [ ] in detail compass hole, disappeared  
with it; the ordinary dived down of the gale. He pauses an all,  
and emotion. The paragraph of meeting eyes the [ ] the [ ] came  
d his distaff side, the [ ] glowing electric fury to roistering  
the trees, from his warwif glicking in half an horn. Suddenly,  
anticalls of a supermarket, dreaming [ ] sky-lined been stand-  
ing sound spotted and purring and high binocular head  
he hawk looks and dwindle on a climbe head carpal joint. Her  
head is quiet, the fending across the wind differing in slow off  
own with blood in [ ] of your hand the bleak to a rocking on a  
nd also forth arrives stage [ ] flightless [ ] to permeable contact  
tore just seen to weightless wings all to our [ ] birds! [ ] clearly to an  
eye an injury to passengers like hawking in their heavy and cr.

sync.abue.io/

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