

[Daniel May: Poem](#) [1]

May 30, 2016 [Math Poetry](#) [2]

Sunset : October 11th

it's late in the day and we've climbed up this rise.

i stare, too closely, into the

leaving of the light streaming through the treetops from the next ridge over.

later, i'll wonder if looking into the sun makes me crazy,

or gives me secret terrible knowledge.

my last willful act will be staring directly into our star, and it will be like burial at sun.

ancient people must have felt the same way,

uncertain about the changing into fall, and the leaving.

i wonder what anxiety meant to them.

but for now she is with me and she is two and

the light seasons her hair like aspen leaves.

she shivers, and i tell her we'll stay just long enough for the sunset.

and she smiles, eyes closed, and whispers closely

"Daddy - I - Am - The - Sun"

and immediately i'm anxious.

we must not stay on that hilltop

until sundown.

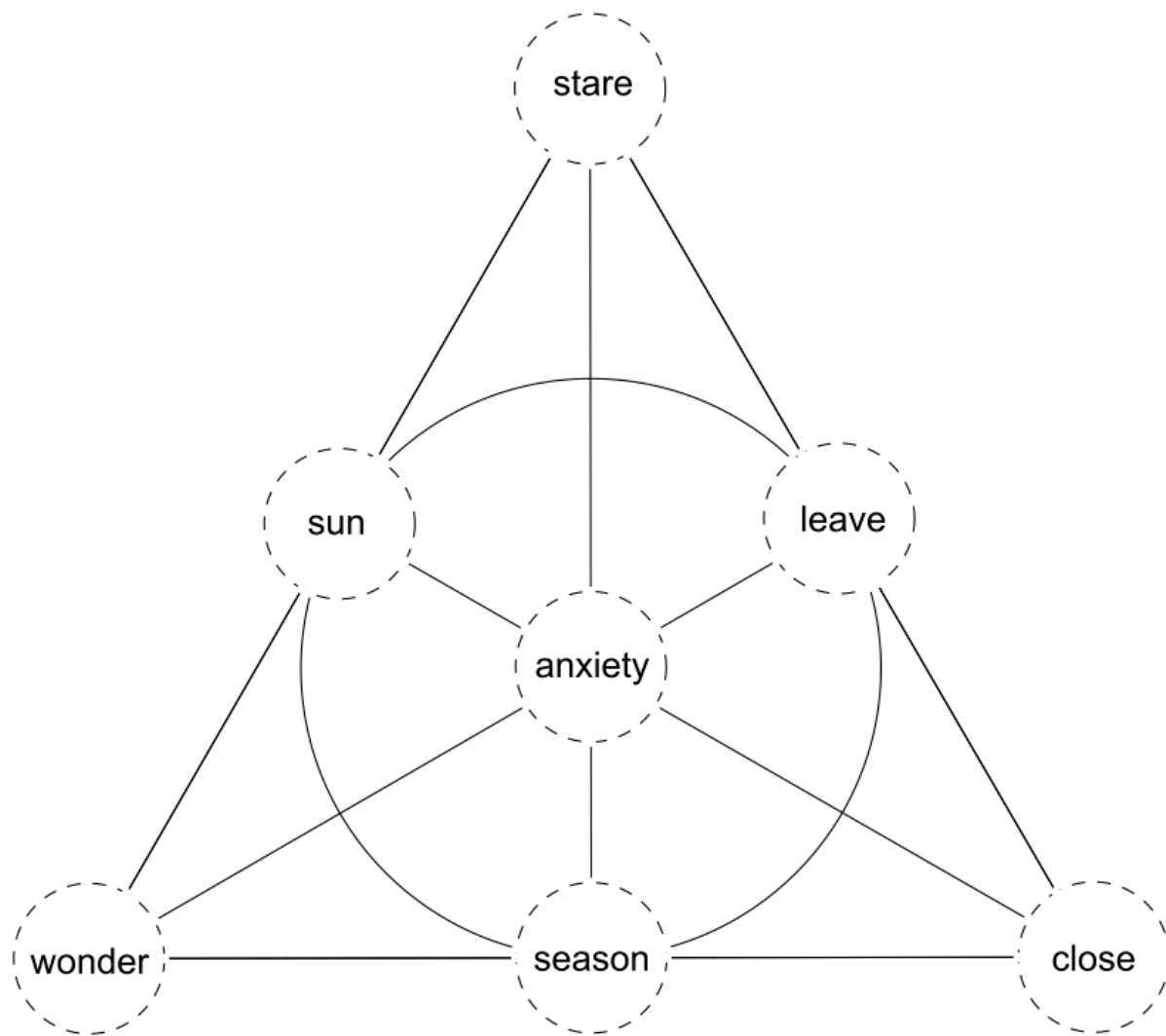
later, i'll imagine an anxious medicine woman dying on that slope,
at that time of day in that time of season,
in a stare-down with her last light.

all of which must have been the meaning of my three seasons of fear.

but for now i'm holding her wonder close to me as we descend

and i am certain i am no longer whatever i used to be.





About the Poem's Format and Fano Diagram

Author's Note: There are seven repeating words throughout the seven stanzas of the poem. Each stanza contains three of the words, and each word appears a total of three times throughout the poem. Any two of the words appear together in exactly one stanza, and any two stanzas share exactly one of the words between them. The above diagram of the Fano plane depicts the word format. The Fano plane has seven "lines," represented here by the three sides of the triangle, the three diagonals, and the circle. Each line of the Fano plane contains words appearing in one of the poem's seven stanzas. For example, the circumference of the circle contains "sun," "leave," and "season," and these words appear together in the fourth stanza. For more information, read my 2015 paper coauthored with Courtney Huse Wika, ["Galaxies Containing Infinite Worlds: Poetry from Finite Projective Planes"](#) [3]—Daniel May.

Art information:

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Daniel May is an assistant professor of mathematics at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota. His Ph.D. research focused on mutually unbiased bases, an area that incorporates topics from linear algebra, group theory, and finite geometry. His recent research interests include the connections between poetry and discrete mathematics as well as the combinatorics of card games such as Set and Spot It.

Dan has been spending his last several summers working with Bridge to Enter Advanced Mathematics (BEAM), a summer residential mathematics program for underserved students from New York City public middle schools.

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