

About the Epigraph

This bit of poetry? The odd, illustrated lines written here before the chapter actually begins? It's what's called an *epigraph*. Long before DJ's were reusing bits of other songs -- sampling, say, a passage from a David Bowie song into a newer one by Vanilla Ice -- poets were borrowing snippets from their predecessors. The epigraph can have many functions. It can make a nod to a respected literary forebear. It might introduce a theme. The contrast between the diction of the epigraph and the author's language might create an interesting juxtaposition.

Although epigraphs may be used at the outset of any piece of literature, this particular epigraph derives from a poem entitled "Marc Mckee," written by the contemporary poet Jason Bredle. And in this case, the poem "Marc Mckee" is about another poet, whose name is Marc Mckee.

The poem entitled "Marc Mckee" appears in Jason Bredle's book, *Waiting in Line for the Beast*. That book opens with an epigraph, too, a quote from a writer named Jack Handey: *Once I was passing a roadside fruit stand, and I stopped to ask for directions. There was an old grizzled farmer there, with a face that looked like he had seen many things in his life. He paused for a moment, then took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow. I don't know what he said, because I just peeled out. I don't have time for guys to pull out handkerchiefs. --BC*