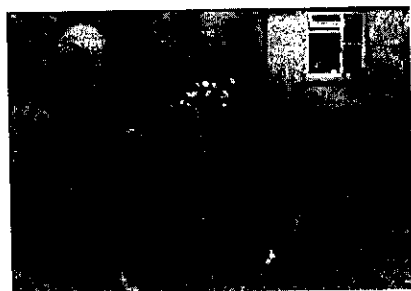


4

Images



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Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

— SEAMUS HEANEY

POETRY'S APPEAL TO THE SENSES

A poet, to borrow a phrase from Henry James, is one on whom nothing is lost. Poets take in the world and give us impressions of what they experience through images. An *image* is language that addresses the senses. The most common images in poetry are visual; they provide verbal pictures of the poets' encounters—real or imagined—with the world. But poets also create images that appeal to our other senses. Li Ho arouses several senses in "A Beautiful Girl Combs Her Hair" (p. 53):

Awake at dawn
she's dreaming
by cool-silk curtains
fragrance of spilling hair
half sandalwood, half aloes
windlass creaking at the well
singing jade

5

These vivid images deftly blend textures, fragrances, and sounds that tease out the sensuousness of the moment. Images give us the physical world to experience in our imaginations. Some poems, like the following one, are written to do just that; they make no comment about what they describe.

Explore
the poetic element
in this chapter on
LiterActive or at
[bedfordstmartins.com/
rewritinglit](http://bedfordstmartins.com/rewritinglit).

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS (1883–1963)

Poem

1934

As the cat
climbed over
the top of
the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot
carefully
then the hind
stepped down
into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

5

10

This poem defies paraphrase because it is all an image of agile movement. No statement is made about the movement; the title, "Poem"—really no title—signals Williams's refusal to comment on the movements. To impose a meaning on the poem, we'd probably have to knock over the flowerpot.

We experience the image in Williams's "Poem" more clearly because of how the sentence is organized into lines and groups of lines, or stanzas. Consider how differently the sentence is read if it is arranged as prose:

As the cat climbed over the top of the jamcloset, first the right forefoot carefully then the hind stepped down into the pit of the empty flowerpot.

The poem's line and stanza division transforms what is essentially an awkward prose sentence into a rhythmic verbal picture. Especially when the poem is read aloud, this line and stanza division allows us to feel the image we see. Even the lack of a period at the end suggests that the cat is only pausing.

Images frequently do more than offer only sensory impressions, however. They also convey emotions and moods, as in the following poem.

JEANNETTE BARNES (b. 1956)

Battle-Piece

1999

Confederate monument, Ocean Pond, Olustee, Florida, 1864

Picknickers sojourn here an hour,
get their fill, get gone.

Seldom, they quickstep as far downhill
as this bivouac; they miss sting, snap,

grit in clenched teeth, carbine, cartridge,
cap, *burrah boys*. Cannon-cracks
the peal, the clap of doom.

Into the billows, white, filthy,
choked by smoke, Clem, Eustace, Willy —
it would be useless to name names or call them all.

Anyway, that's done already. Every fall
sons of sons and reverent veterans' wives
lay wreaths, a prize of plastic daisies,

everlasting. Nobody calls this lazy.
It's August, and it's late, it's afternoon,
heat-mist glistens on slick granite, sun

fingers through sleek pines, their edges cropped
like the clipped elegant grass. It is a shock
to see a caisson blown

to flinders; a horse shrieks,
the mortar-shell zooms, spiral-
ripping tender belly. Oh, yes, here

are raked paths, cindered, sweet trees
and cool water. That whimper
you do not hear now was the doves,
spooning. Evening calls you all, eager

as spruce-gum-chewing, apple-filching boys
to pull one long last gulp of switchel
as if, now, somebody's sons had almost done

hayging. Keen to victual, nearly home, feature the sharp
surprise when, smooth as oiled stone
stroking the clean edge of a scythe, these boys achieved
each his marble pillow, astonished by the sky.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Contrast the images used to describe the present moment at the battle site with the images used to describe the actual battle.
2. Describe the speaker's tone. What do the images reveal about the speaker's emotions?
3. Analyze the diction and images of the final stanza. What makes it so powerful?

What mood is established in this next poem's view of Civil War troops moving across a river?



WALT WHITMAN (1819–1892)

Cavalry Crossing a Ford

1865

A line in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,
They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun — hark to the
musical clank,

Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering stop to drink,
Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person, a picture, the
negligent rest on the saddles,

Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering the ford — while,
Scarlet and blue and snowy white,
The guidon flags flutter gaily in the wind.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Do the colors and sounds establish the mood of this poem? What *is* the mood?
2. How would the poem's mood have been changed if Whitman had used “look” or “see” instead of “behold” (lines 3–4)?
3. Where is the speaker as he observes this troop movement?
4. Does “serpentine” in line 2 have an evil connotation in this poem? Explain your answer.

Whitman seems to capture momentarily all of the troop's actions, and through carefully chosen, suggestive details — really very few — he succeeds in making “each group, each person, a picture.” Specific details, even when few are provided, give us the impression that we see the entire picture; it is as if those are the details we would remember if we had viewed the scene ourselves. Notice, too, that the movement of the “line in long array” is emphasized by the continuous winding syntax of the poem's lengthy lines.

Movement is also central to the next poem, in which action and motion are created through carefully chosen verbs.

DAVID SOLWAY (b. 1941)

Windsurfing

1993

It rides upon the wrinkled hide
of water, like the upturned hull
of a small canoe or kayak
waiting to be righted — yet its law

is opposite to that of boats,
 it floats upon its breastbone and
 brings whatever spine there is to light.
 A thin shaft is slotted into place.
 Then a puffed right-angle of wind
 pushes it forward, out into the bay,
 where suddenly it glitters into speed,
 tilts, knives up, and for the moment's
 nothing but a slim projectile
 of cambered fiberglass,
 peeling the crests.

The man's
 clamped to the mast, taut as a guywire.
 Part of the sleek apparatus
 he controls, immaculate nerve
 of balance, plunge and curvet,
 he clinches all component movements
 into single motion.
 It bucks, stalls, shudders, yaws, and dips
 its hissing sides beneath the surface
 that sustains it, tensing
 into muscle that nude ellipse
 of lunging appetite and power.

And now the mechanism's wholly
 dolphin, springing toward its prey
 of spume and beaded sunlight,
 tossing spray, and hits the vertex
 of the wide, salt glare of distance,
 and reverses.

Back it comes through
 a screen of particles,
 scalloped out of water, shimmer
 and reflection, the wind snapping
 and lashing it homeward,
 shearing the curve of the wave,
 breaking the spell of the caught breath
 and articulate play of sinew, to enter
 the haven of the breakwater
 and settle in a rush of silence.

Now the crossing drifts
 in the husk of its wake
 and nothing's the same again
 as, gliding elegantly on a film of water,
 the man guides
 his brash, obedient legend
 into shore.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Draw a circle around the verbs that seem especially effective in conveying a strong sense of motion, and explain why they are effective.
2. How is the man made to seem to be one with his board and sail?
3. How does the rhythm of the poem change beginning with line 45?

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SELECTIONS

1. Consider the effects of the images in "Windsurfing" and Li Ho's "A Beautiful Girl Combs Her Hair" (p. 53). In an essay, explain how these images elicit the emotional responses they do.
2. Compare the descriptions in "Windsurfing" and Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish" (p. 31). How does each poet appeal to your senses to describe windsurfing and fishing?

"Windsurfing" is awash with images of speed, fluidity, and power. Even the calming aftermath of the breakwater is described as a "rush of silence," adding to the sense of motion that is detailed and expanded throughout the poem.

Poets choose details the way they choose the words to present those details: only telling ones will do. Consider the images Theodore Roethke uses in "Root Cellar."



Explore contexts
 for Theodore Roethke
 on LiterActive.

THEODORE ROETHKE (1908–1963)

Root Cellar

1948

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
 Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
 Shoots dangled and drooped,
 Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
 Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
 And what a congress of stinks!
 Roots ripe as old bait,
 Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
 Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
 Nothing would give up life:
 Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Explain why you think this is a positive or negative rendition of a root cellar.
2. What senses are engaged by the images in this poem? Is the poem simply a series of sensations, or do the detailed images make some kind of point about the root cellar?

3. What controls the choice of details in the poem? Why isn't there, for example, a rusty shovel leaning against a dirt wall or a worn gardener's glove atop one of the crates?
4. Look up *congress* in a dictionary for its denotative meanings. Explain why "congress of stinks" (line 6) is especially appropriate given the nature of the rest of the poem's imagery.
5. What single line in the poem suggests a theme?
6. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Try writing a poem of ten lines or so that consists of a series of evocative images that creates a strong impression about something you know well.

The tone of the images and mood of the speaker are consistent in Roethke's "Root Cellar." In Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," however, they shift as the theme is developed.

MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822–1888)

Dover Beach

1867

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits;— on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

5

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,

10

At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,

With tremulous cadence slow, and bring

The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago

15

Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought

Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow

Of human misery;° we

Find also in the sound a thought,

Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

20

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

15–18 *Sophocles . . . misery:* In *Antigone* (lines 656–77), Sophocles likens the disasters that beset the house of Oedipus to a "mounting tide."

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

25

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles° of the world.

pebble beaches

Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

30

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

35

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Discuss what you consider to be this poem's central point. How do the speaker's descriptions of the ocean work toward making that point?
2. Contrast the images in lines 4–8 and 9–13. How do they reveal the speaker's mood? To whom is he speaking?
3. What is the cause of the "sadness" in line 14? What is the speaker's response to the ebbing "Sea of Faith"? Is there anything to replace his sense of loss?
4. What details of the beach seem related to the ideas in the poem? How is the sea used differently in lines 1–14 and 21–28?
5. Describe the differences in tone between lines 1–8 and 35–37. What has caused the change?
6. **CRITICAL STRATEGIES.** Read the section on mythological strategies (pp. 677–80) in Chapter 26, "Critical Strategies for Reading," and discuss how you think a mythological critic might make use of the allusion to Sophocles in this poem.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SELECTIONS

1. Explain how the images in Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" (p. 121) develop further the ideas and sentiments suggested by Arnold's final line concerning "ignorant armies clash[ing] by night."
2. Contrast Arnold's images with those of Anthony Hecht in his parody "The Dover Bitch" (p. 538). How do Hecht's images create a very different mood from that of "Dover Beach"?

Consider the poetic appetite for images displayed in the celebration of chile peppers in the following passionate poem.

JIMMY SANTIAGO BACA (B. 1952)

Green Chile

1989

I prefer red chile over my eggs
and potatoes for breakfast.
Red chile *ristras*° decorate my door,
dry on my roof, and hang from eaves.
They lend open-air vegetable stands
historical grandeur, and gently swing
with an air of festive welcome.
I can hear them talking in the wind,
haggard, yellowing, crisp, rasping
tongues of old men, licking the breeze.

a braided string of peppers

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But grandmother loves green chile.
When I visit her,
she holds the green chile pepper
in her wrinkled hands.
Ah, voluptuous, masculine,
an air of authority and youth simmers
from its swan-neck stem, tapering to a flowery
collar, fermenting resinous spice.
A well-dressed gentleman at the door
my grandmother takes sensuously in her hand,
rubbing its firm glossed sides,
caressing the oily rubbery serpent,
with mouth-watering fulfillment,
fondling its curves with gentle fingers.
Its bearing magnificent and taut
as flanks of a tiger in mid-leap,
she thrusts her blade into
and cuts it open, with lust
on her hot mouth, sweating over the stove,
bandanna round her forehead,
mysterious passion on her face
and she serves me green chile con carne
between soft warm leaves of corn tortillas,
with beans and rice — her sacrifice
to her little prince.
I slurp from my plate
with last bit of tortilla, my mouth burns
and I hiss and drink a tall glass of cold water.

15

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All over New Mexico, sunburned men and women
drive rickety trucks stuffed with gunny-sacks
of green chile, from Belen, Veguita, Willard, Estancia,
San Antonio y Socorro, from fields
to roadside stands, you see them roasting green chile
in screen-sided homemade barrels, and for a dollar a bag,
we relive this old, beautiful ritual again and again.

40

45

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What's the difference between red and green chiles in this poem? Find the different images the speaker uses to distinguish between the two.
2. What kinds of images are used to describe the grandmother's preparation of green chile? What is the effect of those images?
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Try writing a description—in poetry or prose—that uses vivid images to evoke a powerful response (either positive or negative) to a particular food.

POEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

AMY LOWELL (1874–1925)

The Pond

1919

Cold, wet leaves
Floating on moss-colored water,
And the croaking of frogs—
Cracked bell-notes in the twilight.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** This poem is not a complete sentence. What is missing? Does it matter in terms of understanding what is described by the images?
2. What senses are stimulated by the images? Which sense seems to be the most dominant in the poem? Why?
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Is the title of the poem necessary to convey its meaning? Choose an appropriate alternate title and explain how it subtly suggests something different from "The Pond."

H. D. (HILDA DOOLITTLE/1886–1961)

Heat

1916

O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air—
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

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Cut the heat—
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path.

10

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Is this poem more about heat or fruit? Explain your answer.
2. What physical properties are associated with heat in this poem?
3. Explain the effect of the description of fruit in lines 4–9.
4. Why is the image of the cutting plow especially effective in lines 10–13?

LINDA PASTAN (B. 1932)

Pass/Fail

1975

Examination dreams are reported to persist even into old age . . .
—Time magazine

You will never graduate
from this dream
of blue books.
No matter how
you succeed awake,
asleep there is a test
waiting to be failed.
The dream beckons
with two dull pencils,
but you haven't even
taken the course;
when you reach for a book—
it closes its door
in your face; when
you conjugate a verb—
it is in the wrong
language.
Now the pillow becomes
a blank page. Turn it
to the cool side;
you will still smother
in all of the feathers
that have to be learned
by heart.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How well do the images in this poem capture for you the anxieties about taking exams?

2. Instead of a first-person point of view, Pastan uses the second person. Does her strategy make any difference to your reading of “Pass/Fail”?
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Write a poem in Pastan’s style that expresses your experience taking examinations.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Discuss the significance of being graded in this poem and in Pastan’s “Marks” (p. 152).

RUTH FAINLIGHT (B. 1931)

Crocuses

2006

Pale, bare, tender stems rising
from the muddy winter-faded grass,
shivering petals the almost luminous
blue and mauve of bruises on the naked
bodies of men, women, children
herded into a forest clearing
before the shouted order, crack of gunfire,
final screams and prayers and moans.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Comment on Fainlight’s choice of title. What effect does it have on your reading of the poem?
2. Trace your response to each image in the poem and describe the poem’s tone as it moves from line to line.
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Try writing an eight-line poem in the style of Fainlight’s based on images that gradually but radically shift in tone.

MARY ROBINSON (1758–1800)

London’s Summer Morning

1806

Who has not wak’d to list° the busy sounds
Of summer’s morning, in the sultry smoke
Of noisy London? On the pavement hot
The sooty chimney-boy, with dingy face
And tatter’d covering, shrilly bawls his trade,
Rousing the sleepy housemaid. At the door
The milk-pail rattles, and the tinkling bell
Proclaims the dustman’s office; while the street

listen to

5

Is lost in clouds impervious. Now begins
 The din of hackney-coaches, waggons, carts; 10
 While tinmen's shops, and noisy trunk-makers,
 Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,
 Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries
 Of vegetable venders, fill the air.
 Now ev'ry shop displays its varied trade, 15
 And the fresh-sprinkled pavement cools the feet
 Of early walkers. At the private door
 The ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop,
 Annoying the smart 'prentice, or neat girl,
 Tripping with band-box^o lightly. Now the sun
 Darts burning splendour on the glitt'ring pane, 20
hat box
 Save where the canvas awning throws a shade
 On the gay merchandize. Now, spruce and trim,
 In shops (where beauty smiles with industry),
 Sits the smart damsel; while the passenger 25
 Peeps thro' the window, watching ev'ry charm.
 Now pastry dainties catch the eye minute
 Of humming insects, while the limy snare
 Waits to enthrall them. Now the lamp-lighter
 Mounts the tall ladder, nimbly vent'rous, 30
 To trim the half-fill'd lamp; while at his feet
 The pot-boy^o yells discordant! All along
drink server
 The sultry pavement, the old-clothes-man cries
 In tones monotonous, and side-long views
 The area for his traffic: now the bag 35
 Is sliely open'd, and the half-worn suit
 (Sometimes the pilfer'd treasure of the base
 Domestic spoiler), for one half its worth,
 Sinks in the green abyss. The porter now
 Bears his huge load along the burning way; 40
 And the poor poet wakes from busy dreams,
 To paint the summer morning.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How effective is this picture of a London summer morning in 1806? Which images do you find particularly effective?
2. How does the end of the poem bring us full circle to its beginning? What effect does this structure have on your understanding of the poem?
3. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Try writing about the start of your own day—in the dormitory, at home, the start of a class—using a series of images that provide a vivid sense of what happens and how you experience it.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. How does Robinson's description of London differ from William Blake's "London," the next poem? What would you say is the essential difference in purpose between the two poems?

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757–1827)

London

1794

defined by law

 Explore contexts for William Blake on LiterActive. 5

I wander through each chartered^o street,
 Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
 And mark in every face I meet
 Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
 In every Infant's cry of fear,
 In every voice, in every ban,
 The mind-forged manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
 Every black'ning Church appalls;
 And the hapless Soldier's sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls. 10

But most through midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlot's curse
 Blasts the new-born Infant's tear,
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse. 15

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What feelings do the visual images in this poem suggest to you?
2. What is the predominant sound heard in the poem?
3. What is the meaning of line 8? What is the cause of the problems that the speaker sees and hears in London? Does the speaker suggest additional causes?
4. The image in lines 11 and 12 cannot be read literally. Comment on its effectiveness.
5. How does Blake's use of denotative and connotative language enrich this poem's meaning?
6. An earlier version of Blake's last stanza appeared this way:

But most the midnight harlot's curse
 From every dismal street I hear,
 Weaves around the marriage hearse
 And blasts the new-born infant's tear.

Examine carefully the differences between the two versions. How do Blake's revisions affect his picture of London life? Which version do you think is more effective? Why?

A SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSE

Tamara 1

Anna Tamara
Professor Burton
English 211
September 30, 2009

Imagery in William Blake's "London" and Mary Robinson's "London's Summer Morning"

Both William Blake and Mary Robinson use strong imagery to examine and bring to life the city of London, yet each writer paints a very different picture. The images in both poems "[address] the senses," as Meyer writes (106). But while Blake's images depict a city weighed down by oppression and poverty, Robinson's images are lighter, happier, and, arguably, idealized. Both poems use powerful imagery in very different ways to establish theme.

In Blake's poem, oppression and social discontent are defined by the speaker, who sees "weakness" and "woe" (line 4) in the faces he meets; he hears cries of men and children and "mind-forged manacles" (8). And, through imagery, the poem makes a political statement:

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls. (9-12)

These images indicate the speaker's dark view of the religious and governmental institutions that he believes cause the city's suffering. The "black'ning Church" and bloody "Palace walls" can be seen to represent misused power and corruption, while the "manacles" are the rules and physical and psychological burdens that lead to societal ills. In Blake's view of London, children are sold into servitude (as chimney sweeps) and soldiers pay in blood.

Robinson's poem, on the other hand, offers the reader a pleasant view of a sunny London morning through a different series of images. The reader hears "the tinkling bell" (7) and sees a bright moment in which "the sun / Darts burning splendour on the glittering pane" (20-21). Even the chimney-boy is shown in a rosy glow. Though he is described as having a "dingy face / and

Tamara 2

tatter'd covering," he wakes the "sleepy" house servant when he "shrilly bawls his trade" (4-6). In contrast to the chimney-sweep of Blake's "London," Robinson's boy is painted as a charming character who announces the morning amid a backdrop of happy workers. Also unlike Blake's London, Robinson's is a city of contentment in which a "ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop" (18) . . .

Tamara 4

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WILFRED OWEN (1893-1918)

Dulce et Decorum Est

1920

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through
sludge,

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling

 Explore contexts
for Wilfred Owen
on LiterActive.

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And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime. —
 Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning. 15

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin, 20
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
 Bitter as the cud

Obscene as cancer,
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest 25
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** The Latin quotation in lines 28 and 29 is from Horace: "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country." Owen served as a British soldier during World War I and was killed. Is this poem unpatriotic? What is its purpose?
2. Which images in the poem are most vivid? To which senses do they speak?
3. Describe the speaker's tone. What is his relationship to his audience?
4. How are the images of the soldiers in this poem different from the images that typically appear in recruiting posters?

MARVIN BELL (B. 1937)

The Uniform 1994

Of the sleeves, I remember their weight, like wet wool,
 on my arms, and the empty ends which hung past my hands.
 Of the body of the shirt, I remember the large buttons
 and larger buttonholes, which made a rack of wheels 5
 down my chest and could not be quickly unbuttoned.
 Of the collar, I remember its thickness without starch,
 by which it lay against my clavicle without moving.
 Of my trousers, the same — heavy, bulky, slow to give
 for a leg, a crowded feeling, a molasses to walk in.
 Of my boots, I remember the brittle soles, of a material 10
 that had not been made love to by any natural substance,
 and the laces: ropes to make prisoners of my feet.
 Of the helmet, I remember the webbed, inner liner,

a brittle plastic underwear on which wobbled
 the crushing steel pot then strapped at the chin. 15
 Of the mortar, I remember the mortar plate,
 heavy enough to kill by weight, which I carried by rope.
 Of the machine gun, I remember the way it fit
 behind my head and across my shoulder blades 20
 as I carried it, or, to be precise, as it rode me.
 Of tactics, I remember the likelihood of shooting
 the wrong man, the weight of the rifle bolt, the difficulty
 of loading while prone, the shock of noise.
 For earplugs, some used cigarette filters or toilet paper.
 I don't hear well now, for a man of my age, 25
 and the doctor says my ears were damaged and asks
 if I was in the Army, and of course I was but then
 a wounded eardrum wasn't much in the scheme.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What overall impression do the speaker's images convey about his uniform?
2. Write a description of the speaker's uniform using adjectives that are not in the poem.
3. Which lines seem especially revealing to you of the speaker's attitude toward his time in the army?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Compare the vision of war expressed in "Uniform" with that in Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" (p. 121).

PATRICIA SMITH (B. 1955)

What It's Like to Be a Black Girl 1991 *(for Those of You Who Aren't)*

First of all, it's being 9 years old and
 feeling like you're not finished, like your
 edges are wild, like there's something,
 everything, wrong. it's dropping food coloring 5
 in your eyes to make them blue and suffering
 their burn in silence. it's popping a bleached
 white mophead over the kinks of your hair and
 primping in front of the mirrors that deny your
 reflection. it's finding a space between your
 legs, a disturbance at your chest, and not knowing 10
 what to do with the whistles. it's jumping
 double dutch until your legs pop, it's sweat
 and vaseline and bullets, it's growing tall and
 wearing a lot of white, it's smelling blood in

your breakfast, it's learning to say fuck with
grace but learning to fuck without it, it's
flame and fists and life according to motown,
it's finally having a man reach out for you
then caving in
around his fingers. 15
20

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Describe the speaker's tone. What images in particular contribute to it? How do you account for the selected tone?
2. How does the speaker characterize her life? On which elements of it does she focus?
3. Discuss the poem's final image. What sort of emotions does it elicit in you?

RAINER MARIA RILKE (1875-1926)

The Panther

TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN MITCHELL 1927

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold
anything else. It seems to him there are
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides
is like a ritual dance around a center
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed. 5

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils
lifts, quietly —. An image enters in,
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,
plunges into the heart and is gone. 10

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Why do you think Rilke chooses a panther rather than, say, a lion as the subject of the poem's images?
2. What kind of "image enters in" the heart of the panther in the final stanza?
3. How are images of confinement achieved in the poem? Why doesn't Rilke describe the final image in lines 10-12?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Write an essay explaining how a sense of movement is achieved by the images and rhythms in this poem and in Emily Dickinson's "A Bird came down the Walk—" (p. 190).

JANE KENYON (1947-1995)

The Blue Bowl

1990

Like primitives we buried the cat
with his bowl. Bare-handed
we scraped sand and gravel
back into the hole.

They fell with a hiss 5

and thud on his side,
on his long red fur, the white feathers
between his toes, and his
long, not to say aquiline, nose.

We stood and brushed each other off. 10
There are sorrows keener than these.

Silent the rest of the day, we worked,
ate, stared, and slept. It stormed
all night; now it clears, and a robin
bubbles from a dripping bush
like the neighbor who means well
but always says the wrong thing. 15

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How do the descriptions of the cat—for example, "the white feathers / between his toes"—affect your reading of the poem?
2. Why do you think Kenyon titles the poem "The Blue Bowl" rather than, perhaps, "The Cat's Bowl"?
3. What is the effect of being reminded that "There are sorrows keener than these"?
4. Why is the robin's song "the wrong thing"?

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Write an essay comparing the death of this cat with the death of the dog in John Updike's "Dog's Death" (p. 22). Which poem draws a more powerful response from you? Explain why.

DONNA MASINI (b. 1954)

Slowly

2004

I watched a snake once, swallow a rabbit.
Fourth grade, the reptile zoo
the rabbit stiff, nose in, bits of litter stuck to its fur,

its head clenched in the wide
jaws of the snake, the snake
sucking it down its long throat. 5

All throat that snake—I couldn't tell
 where the throat ended, the body
 began. I remember the glass
 case, the way that snake 10
 took its time (all the girls, groaning, shrieking
 but weren't we amazed, fascinated,
 saying we couldn't look, but looking, weren't we
 held there, weren't we
 imagining—what were we imagining?). 15
 Mrs. Peterson urged us to *move on girls*,
 but we couldn't move. It was like
 watching a fern unfurl, a minute
 hand move across a clock. I didn't know why
 the snake didn't choke, the rabbit never 20
 moved, how the jaws kept opening
 wider, sucking it down, just so
 I am taking this in, slowly,
 taking it into my body:
 this grief. How slow 25
 the body is to realize.
 You are never coming back.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What, ultimately, is this poem about?
2. Comment on the effectiveness of the short, quick images in the first stanza in establishing the setting and plot.
3. Explain how time is depicted through the poem's images.

CONNECTION TO ANOTHER SELECTION

1. Compare the treatment of grief in "Slowly" and in Jane Kenyon's "The Blue Bowl" (p. 125).

SALLY CROFT (B. 1935)

Home-Baked Bread

1981

Nothing gives a household a greater sense of stability and common comfort than the aroma of cooling bread. Begin, if you like, with a loaf of whole wheat, which requires neither sifting nor kneading, and go on from there to more cunning triumphs.

— *The Joy of Cooking*

What is it she is not saying?
Cunning triumphs. It rings
 of insinuation. Step into my kitchen,

I have prepared a cunning triumph
 for you. Spices and herbs 5
 sealed in this porcelain jar,
 a treasure of my great-aunt
 who sat up past midnight
 in her Massachusetts bedroom 10
 when the moon was dark. Come,
 rest your feet. I'll make
 you tea with honey and slices
 of warm bread spread with peach butter.
 I picked the fruit this morning
 still fresh with dew. The fragrance 15
 is seductive? I hoped you would say that.
 See how the heat rises
 when the bread opens. Come,
 we'll eat together, the small flakes
 have scarcely any flavor. What cunning 20
 triumphs we can discover in my upstairs room
 where peach trees breathe their sweetness
 beside the open window and
 sun lies like honey on the floor.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Why does the speaker in this poem seize on the phrase "cunning triumphs" from the *Joy of Cooking* excerpt?
2. Distinguish between the voice we hear in lines 1–3 and the second voice in lines 3–24. Who is the "you" in the poem?
3. Why is the word "insinuation" an especially appropriate choice in line 3?
4. How do the images in lines 20–24 bring together all of the senses evoked in the preceding lines?
5. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Write a paragraph—or stanza—that describes the sensuous (and perhaps sensual) qualities of a food you enjoy.

JOHN KEATS (1795–1821)

To Autumn

1819

I

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
 To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

 Explore contexts
 for John Keats
 on LiterActive.

5

And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells. 10

II

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; 15
 Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook°
 Spares the next swath and all its twinèd flowers:
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook; 20
 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last ooziings hours by hours.

III

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day, 25
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river swallows,° borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies; 30
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;°
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How is autumn made to seem like a person in each stanza of this ode?
2. Which senses are most emphasized in each stanza?
3. How is the progression of time expressed in the ode?
4. How does the imagery convey tone? Which words have especially strong connotative values?
5. What is the speaker's view of death?

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SELECTIONS

1. Compare this poem's tone and perspective on death with those of Robert Frost's "After Apple-Picking" (p. 376).
2. Write an essay comparing the significance of this poem's images of "mellow fruitfulness" (line 1) with that of the images of ripeness in Theodore Roethke's "Root Cellar" (p. 111). Explain how the images in each poem lead to very different feelings about the same phenomenon.

C. K. WILLIAMS (b. 1936)

Shock

1999



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Furiously a crane
 in the scrap yard out of whose grasp
 a car it meant to pick up slipped,
 lifts and lets fall, lifts and lets fall
 the steel ton of its clenched pincers
 onto the shuddering carcass
 which spurts fragments of anguished glass
 until it's sufficiently crushed
 to be hauled up and flung onto
 the heap from which one imagines
 it'll move on to the shredding
 or melting down that awaits it.

Also somewhere a crow
 with less evident emotion
 punches its beak through the dead
 breast of a dove or albino
 sparrow until it arrives at
 a coil of gut it can extract, 15
 then undo with a dexterous twist
 an oily stretch just the right length
 to be devoured, the only
 suggestion of violation
 the carrion jerked to one side
 in involuntary dismay. 20

Splayed on the soiled pavement
 the dove or sparrow; dismembered
 in the tangled remnants of itself
 the wreck, the crane slamming once more
 for good measure into the all
 but dematerialized hulk, 25
 then luxuriously swaying
 away, as, gorged, glutted, the crow
 with savage care unfurls the full,
 luminous glitter of its wings,
 so we can preen, too, for so much
 so well accomplished, so well seen. 30 35

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** What do you think is the significance of the poem's title?
2. What connections can you make between the images in stanzas 1 and 2?
3. Explain how the third stanza develops a theme from the images provided in the first two stanzas.

EZRA POUND (1885-1972)

In a Station of the Metro°

1913

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Metro: Underground railroad in Paris.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** Why is the title essential for this poem?
2. What kind of mood does the image in the second line convey?
3. Why is "apparition" (line 1) a better word choice than, say, "appearance" or "sight"?
4. **CREATIVE RESPONSE.** Write a two-line vivid image for a poem titled "At a Desk in the Library."

CATHY SONG (b. 1955)

The White Porch

1983

I wrap the blue towel
after washing,
around the damp
weight of hair, bulky
as a sleeping cat,
and sit out on the porch.
Still dripping water,
it'll be dry by supper,
by the time the dust
settles off your shoes,
though it's only five
past noon. Think
of the luxury: how to use
the afternoon like the stretch
of lawn spread before me.
There's the laundry,
sun-warm clothes at twilight,
and the mountain of beans
in my lap. Each one,
I'll break and snap
thoughtfully in half.

5

10

15

20

But there is this slow arousal.
The small buttons
of my cotton blouse
are pulling away from my body.
I feel the strain of threads,
the swollen magnolias

25

heavy as a flock of birds
in the tree. Already,
the orange sponge cake
is rising in the oven.
I know you'll say it makes
your mouth dry
and I'll watch you
drench your slice of it
in canned peaches
and lick the plate clean.

30

35

So much hair, my mother
used to say, grabbing
the thick braided rope
in her hands while we washed
the breakfast dishes, discussing
dresses and pastries.
My mind often elsewhere
as we did the morning chores together.
Sometimes, a few strands
would catch in her gold ring.
I worked hard then,
anticipating the hour
when I would let the rope down
at night, strips of sheets,
knotted and tied,
while she slept in tight blankets.
My hair, freshly washed
like a measure of wealth,
like a bridal veil.
Crouching in the grass,
you would wait for the signal,
for the movement of curtains
before releasing yourself
from the shadow of moths.
Cloth, hair and hands,
smuggling you in.

40

45

50

55

60

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. **FIRST RESPONSE.** How is hair made erotic in this poem? Discuss the images that you deem especially effective.
2. Who is the "you" to whom the speaker refers in each stanza?
3. What role does the mother play in this poem about desire?
4. Why do you think the poem is titled "The White Porch"?

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SELECTIONS

1. Compare the images used to describe the speaker's "slow arousal" (line 22) in this poem with Sally Croft's images in "Home-Baked Bread" (p. 126). What similarities do you see? What makes each description so effective?

- Write an essay comparing the images of sensuality in this poem with those in Li Ho's "A Beautiful Girl Combs Her Hair" (p. 53). Which poem seems more erotic to you? Why?

Perspective

T. E. HULME (1883–1917)

On the Differences between Poetry and Prose


1924

In prose as in algebra concrete things are embodied in signs or counters which are moved about according to rules, without being visualized at all in the process. There are in prose certain type situations and arrangements of words, which move as automatically into certain other arrangements as do functions in algebra. One only changes the *X*'s and the *Y*'s back into physical things at the end of the process. Poetry, in one aspect at any rate, may be considered as an effort to avoid this characteristic of prose. It is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship "coursed the seas" to get a physical image, instead of the counter word "sailed." Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language. Verse is a pedestrian taking you over the ground, prose — a train which delivers you at a destination.

From "Romanticism and Classicism," in *Speculations*,
edited by Herbert Read

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

- What distinctions does Hulme make between poetry and prose? Which seems to be the most important difference?
- Write an essay that discusses Hulme's claim that poetry "is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily."

 Research the poets in this chapter at bedfordstmartins.com/rewritinglit.

5

Figures of Speech



Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting.

— ROBERT FROST

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Figures of speech are broadly defined as a way of saying one thing in terms of something else. An overeager funeral director might, for example, be described as a vulture. Although figures of speech are indirect, they are designed to clarify, not obscure, our understanding of what they describe. Poets frequently use them because, as Emily Dickinson said, the poet's work is to "tell all the Truth but tell it slant" to capture the reader's interest and imagination. But figures of speech are not limited to poetry. Hearing them, reading them, or using them is as natural as using language itself.

Suppose that in the middle of a class discussion concerning the economic causes of World War II your history instructor introduces a series of statistics by saying, "Let's get down to brass tacks." Would anyone be likely to expect a display of brass tacks for students to examine? Of course not. To interpret the statement literally would be to wholly misunderstand the instructor's point that the time has come for a close look at the economic circumstances leading to the war. A literal response transforms the statement into the sort of hilariously bizarre material often found in a sketch by Woody Allen.