

WATKINS MILL HIGH SCHOOL

Montgomery County Public Schools
10301 Apple Ridge Road

Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879

Rising IB Juniors (and Parents of Rising Juniors),

Welcome to the IB Language A: Literature Course. I am very excited to be working with you in the coming school year. Your junior year will undoubtedly prove to be both challenging and rewarding.

Brief Overview

The IB Language A: Literature Course is a two year course consisting of four parts. You will study Parts 1 and 4 in your junior year.

Part 1—Works in Translation

Part 2 –Detailed Study

Part 3 – Literary Genres

Part 4 –Options (School's Free Choice)

Texts

It is important that you have your own copy of each of the required texts. These texts are listed below.

Part 1—Works in Translation (Chosen from IB Prescribed Literature in Translation List)

Broken April—Ismail Kadare, Translated by J. Hodgson

Chronicle of a Death Foretold—Gabriel García Marquez, Translated by Gregory Rabassa

Four Major Plays by Ibsen—Henrik Ibsen, Translated by Jens Arup (Contains "A Doll's House," "Ghosts," "Hedda Gabler," and "The Master Builder")

Part 4—Options (Works are chosen by the teacher)

The Kite Runner—Khaled Hosseini

The Awakening—Kate Chopin

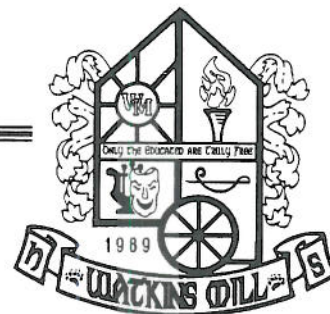
Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath (Poems will be provided)

Summer Preparation

Your summer reading is a compilation of essays, poems and commentaries that will serve as the basis of our discussion and writing for the first couple weeks of school. It is imperative that you complete all reading, annotation and writing required of you before returning to school in the fall. Specific directions can be found in your summer reading packet which you received early June in your 10th grade English class. Should you need, extra copies can be obtained in the WMHS main office, the guidance office or online through the summer information link on the WMHS website. I can be reached over the summer at veena_L_roberson@mcpsmd.org. Have a great summer.

Looking forward to meeting you.

Ms. Veena Roberson



**IB English 11 Summer Reading
Fall 2011
Roberson**

1—After reading the following article, write a one page typed reflection in which you identify Perrine’s argument and explain his justification for his assertions. Include in your reflection your thoughts on the article. Do you agree or disagree with Perrine? Is there a “correct” interpretation (and thereby an incorrect interpretation) or poetry? How do we (can we even) measure the validity of our interpretations of literature?

"The Nature of Proof in the Interpretation of Poetry"

Laurence Perrine

That a poem may have varying interpretations is a critical commonplace. That all interpretations of a poem are equally valid is a critical heresy, but one which perennially makes its reappearance in the classroom. “Why can't a poem mean anything that a reader sees in it?” asks the student. “Why isn't one person's interpretation of a poem as good as anyone else's?” According to his theory the poem is like an ink blot in a Rorschach personality test. There are no correct or incorrect readings: there are only readings which differ more or less widely from a statistical norm.

This theory is one that poets themselves have sometimes seemed to lend support to. T.S. Eliot, in response to conjectures about the meanings of his poems, has replied, “If it suits you that way, then that is all right with me.” Yeats once wrote to a friend: “I shall not trouble to make the meaning clear--a clear vivid story of a strange sort is enough. The meaning may be different with everyone.” But one is not really quarreling with Eliot or Yeats in challenging this point of view. Eliot, as a critic dealing with the poetry of others, has been constantly concerned with determining precise meanings. No poet, however, likes to be caught in the predicament of having to explain his own poems. He cannot say, “What I really meant was . . .” without admitting failure, or without saying something different (and usually much less) than what his poem said. And in doing so, he gives this diminished reading the stamp of his own authority. “A writer,” E. A. Robinson once told an interviewer, “should not be his own interpreter.” It is significant that Yeats was quite willing to write, for an anthology, a comment on one of his poems so long as the comment did not appear over his own name. “If an author interprets a poem of his own,” he explained to the editor, “he limits its suggestibility.” The poet is eager to be understood. But where as the comments of a critic may raise the curtain on a reader's understanding of a poem, the poet's own comments drop the curtain. We must therefore not mistake the defensive gestures of a poet like Yeats or Eliot for a declaration of his critical theory.

In this paper, accordingly, I wish not to advance any new propositions, but only to re-assert the accepted principal that for any given poem there are correct and incorrect readings, and to illustrate the process which the correctness of a reading may be proved or disproved. For logical proof, though not experimental proof, is at least as possible in the interpretation of poetry as it is, say in a court of law.

The criteria used for judging any interpretation of a poem are two: (1) A correct interpretation, if the poem is a successful one, must be able to account satisfactorily for any detail of the poem. If it is contradicted by any detail it is wrong. Of several interpretations, the best is that which must fully explain the details of the poem without itself being contradicted by any detail. (2) If more than one interpretation satisfactorily accounts for all the details of the poem, the best is that which

is most economical, i.e. which relies on the fewest assumptions not grounded in the poem itself. Thomas Huxley illustrates this principle of judgment in a different area in one of his essays. If, he says, on coming downstairs in the morning we find our silverware missing, the window open, the mark of a dirty hand on the window frame, and the impress of a hobnailed boot on the gravel outside, we logically conclude that the silverware has been stolen by a human thief. It is possible, of course, that the silverware was taken by a monkey and that a man with dirty hands and hobnailed boots looked in the window afterwards; but this explanation is far less probable, for, though it too accounts for all the facts, it rests on too many additional assumptions. It is, as we would say, too "far-fetched."

These two criteria, I ask you to notice, are not different from those we bring to the judgment of a new scientific hypothesis. Of such we ask (1) that it satisfactorily account for as many as possible of the known facts without being contradicted by any fact, (2) that it be the simplest or most economical of alternative ways of accounting for these facts.

Problems in Interpretation

Let me illustrate by presenting two problems in interpretation. The first is an untitled poem by Emily Dickinson:

Where ships of purple gently toss
On seas of daffodil,
Fantastic sailors mingle,
And then-the wharf is still.

The second consists of a pair of poems, one by Walt Whitman, the other by Herman Melville. The poem by Whitman appeared in his volume of Civil War poems, *Drum-Taps*. Melville, who was Whitman's almost exact contemporary, also published a book of war poems (*Battle-Pieces*), though the following poem did not appear in it. I ask you with the Dickinson poem merely to decide what it is about; with the Whitman and Melville poems, to determine the principal difference between them.

AN ARMY CORPS ON THE MARCH

With its cloud of skirmishers in advance,
With now the sound of a single shot snapping like a whip, and now
an irregular volley.
The swarming ranks press on and on, the dense brigades press on,
Glittering dimly, toiling under the sun-the dust-cover'd men,
In columns rise and fall to the undulations of the ground,
With artillery interspers'd-the wheels rumble, the horses sweat,
As the army corps advances.
--Walt Whitman

THE NIGHT-MARCH

With banners furled, and clarions mute,
An army passes in the night;
And beaming spears and helms salute
The dark with bright.

In silence deep the legions stream,
With open ranks, in order true;
Over boundless plains they stream and gleam
No chief in view!

Afar, in twinkling distance lost,
(So legends tell) he
lonely wends
And back through all that shining host
His mandate sends.
--Herman Melville

Several years ago I presented the Emily Dickinson poem to a number of students and colleagues and discovered that not one of them interpreted the poem as I did. Almost universally they read the poem as being descriptive of a scene in a garden or meadow. A consensus of their interpretations runs as follows:

Tall purple flowers (iris?) stand above the daffodils and are tossed in the breeze. Bees and butterflies ("fantastic sailors") mingle with the flowers. The wind stops, and then the garden is still,

Beside this let me place the interpretation which I hope to prove the correct one:

The poem is a description of a sunset. The "ships of purple" are clouds. The "seas of daffodil" are skies colored golden by the setting sun. The "fantastic sailors" are the old-fashioned seamen dressed in gorgeous garments of many colors brought from exotic lands. The sun sinks and the wharf (the earth where the sun set-the scene of this colorful activity) is still.

How do we demonstrate the "sunset" reading to be correct and the "garden" reading to be incorrect? By some such argument as this:

"Ships of purple" is a more apt metaphor for clouds than for flowers, both as to size and to motion (we often speak of clouds as "sailing"). "Daffodill" would normally be in the plural if it referred to flowers rather than to color: why would not the poet say "On a sea of daffodils"? "Mingle" fits better the intertwining colors of the sunset than it does the behavior of bees, which mingle with flowers perhaps but not, except in the hive, with each other (and the flowers here are "seas"). The "garden" reading provides no literal meaning for the "wharf." The "garden" reading, to explain why the wharf becomes "still", demands the additional assumption that the wind stops (why should it? and would the bees and butterflies stop their activity if it did?); the disappearance of the sun, in contrast, is inevitable and implicit in the sunset image. Finally, the luxuriance of imagination manifested in the poem is the more natural consequence of looking at clouds and sunset sky than at flowers. We look at clouds and see all sorts of things-ships, castles, animals, landscape-but it takes some straining to conjure up a scene such as this one from a garden. The "garden" reading is therefore incorrect because it fails to account for some details in the poem (the wharf), because it is contradicted by some details (the singular use of "daffodil"), because it explains some details less satisfactorily than the "sunset" reading ("ships of purple," "mingle"), and finally because it rests on assumptions not grounded in the poem itself (the wind stops). The "sunset" reading explains all these details satisfactorily.

Ordinarily we have only the internal evidence of the poem itself on which to rest an interpretation. In this instance, as I discovered some time after the incident related, there is

external proof also of the "sunset" reading. The poem was first published in 1891 under the title "Sunset." Though this title was editorially supplied by T. W. Higginson after Emily's death, its correctness is established by two other poems in which the poet uses substantially the same imagery (yellow and purple, sea and ships). One poem itself contains the word "sunset"; the other was entitled "Sunset" by the poet in a letter to a friend.

The Whitman-Melville problem I presented more recently as a theme assignment to an Honors section in freshman English. Again I received not a single correct solution. I should confess at the outset, however, that I am guilty of having planted a false clue. The false clue lies in the information that Melville wrote a book of poems about the Civil War-perfectly true, of course, but totally irrelevant. This poem is not about the Civil War, as is manifest from "spears and helms"-items not stocked by Civil War quartermasters. More important, this poem is not about war at all. The main difference between this poem and Whitman's is that Whitman's is literal, Melville's metaphorical. Whitman's is about an army corps on the march, Melville's is about the stars.

My freshmen immediately identified subject matter when I wrote the Melville poem on the board and circled words: "beaming," "bright," "gleam," "twinkling," "shining." The five words together form a constellation whose reference, once the pattern is recognized, is almost immediately clear. That "twinkling" modifies "distance" and that "shining" modifies "host" provides additional confirmation. The phrase "host of heaven" is used extensively for stars in the Bible.

From this starting point the proof proceeds with logical rigor: (1) The close repetition of "beaming," "bright," "gleam," "twinkling," and "shining" immediately suggests stars. (2) The setting is night. (3) The poem emphasizes the silence of the procession, which moves "in silence deep" and "with clarions mute." (No actual army, of course, no matter how secret its movements, is ever quite so stealthy. In Whitman's poem "the wheels rumble," as indeed wheels do.) (4) The poem also emphasizes the idea of infinite space: the army marches "over boundless plains"; its leader is "Afar, in twinkling distance lost." (5) The army marches "With open ranks, in order true"-a formation more star-like than military. No actual legions ever "stream" in perfect order; but the stars keep an eternally fixed but open relation to each other. (6) Finally, no commander of this army is in view -a situation especially unusual in an army proceeding in perfect order. Indeed, the "army" interpretation cannot explain this detail without assumptions grounded outside the poem.

The real difficulty of interpreting the Melville poem comes, of course, at this point, for the Melville poem is not simply descriptive, as Whitman's is, but philosophical. As I read it, the poem poses the question of the existence of God. No God is observable in the heavens (which are silent), yet the stars follow an "order true," and legends (e.g. the Bible) tell us that God orders them. These stories, however, are indeed "legends," i.e., they are of doubtful authenticity; and even if they be true, the God they speak of is "Afar, in twinkling distance lost," not in daily confrontation of man or nature. One hundred years earlier a poet writing on this theme would have declared without hesitation that "The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament showeth his handiwork"; Melville ends his poem with a question or a doubt. In the nineteenth century the argument from design had been shattered.

If a poem, then, does have a determinable meaning-if, in the interpretation of poetry, we can't say that "anything goes"-why does the opposite theory so often arise? It is because of some false analogy drawn with music or abstract art? Perhaps. But, first of all it arises because within limits there is truth in it. A poem-in fact, any pattern of words-defines an area of meaning, no more. Any interpretation is acceptable which lies within that area. The word "horse" may justifiably call

up in a reader's mind the image of a black, a roan, or a white horse; a stallion, a mare, or a gelding; even a wooden sawhorse, a human "work horse," or a female "clothes horse." But as soon as the word is combined with another, say "roan," the area of meaning is drastically reduced. It can still be stallion, mare, or gelding; but it cannot be a white or black horse, a sawhorse, "work horse," or "clothes horse." Further expansions of the context limit the meanings still further. But even without context the word cannot mean cow.

In poetry, context may function to expand meaning as well as to limit it. Words in poetry thus have richer meanings than in prose—they may exhibit purposeful ambiguities—but the meanings are still confined to a certain area. With a poem like Whitman's that area is fairly narrowly circumscribed. The reader may legitimately see a Northern or Southern army (if he knows nothing of Whitman's life); in fact, if the poem is removed from its context in *DrumTaps* he may legitimately see a Revolutionary War army, but in no case may he interpret the poem as being about stars.

The Problem of Symbols

The areas of greater meaning are created by symbolical poems. "A symbol," writes John Ciardi, "is like a rock dropped into a pool; it sends out ripples in all directions, and the ripples are in motion. Who can say where the last ripple disappears?" True, But even a symbol does not have unlimited meaning. The pool in which the rock is dropped has borders. A symbol in literature is made up of words which, by the way they are used, have acquired a sometimes tremendously increased area of meaning. To switch from Ciardi's figure, we may envision such a symbol as a powerful beam of light flashed out into the darkness by a searchlight from a point on earth. The cone of light is the area of meaning. Its point is precise and easily located. But its base fades out into the atmosphere. Its meanings are therefore almost infinite. But they are not unlimited. They must be found, at whatever distance from the apex, within the circumference of the cone.

By the very nature of the case the process of proof or demonstration with symbolic literature is more difficult than with nonsymbolic, just as complex logical problems are more difficult than the simple ones by which logicians demonstrate their principles. Scholars will continue to debate the meanings of the "white whale" in *Moby-Dick* for years to come. Their argument, however, has meaning. Some interpretations do make more sense than others. More than one meaning may be valid, but not just any meaning can be. The white whale is not an ink blot, not even a white ink blot.

Let me illustrate with a poem by William Blake:

THE SICK ROSE

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

The essential difference between a metaphor and a literary symbol is that a metaphor means something else than what it is, a literary symbol, means something more than what it is. In the word of Robert Penn Warren, a symbol "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible"; in the words of E. E. Stoll, a symbol "means what it says and another thing besides." if we use I. A. Richards' terms vehicle and tenor for the two things equated by a metaphor, we must say that with a symbol the vehicle is part of the tenor. The vehicle in this case is not like one of those long trucks we see on the highways carrying automobiles from manufacturer to dealer; it is more like a new automobile filled with presents at Christmas time in which the automobile is part of the gift. Melville's "Night-March" is not really about an army at all; Blake's poem is about a rose and a cankerworm.

But Blake's poem is so richly organized that the rose and the worm refuse to remain a rose and a worm. The phrase "dark secret love" is too strong to be confined to the feeding of the worm on the rose; "thy bed of crimson joy" suggests much more than the rose bed which it literally denotes. The powerful connotation of these phrases, added to those of "sick," "invisible," "night," and "howling storm," and combined with the capitalization of "Rose" and the personification of the flower, force the reader to seek for additional meanings. Almost immediately the Rose suggest a maiden and the worm her secret lover; but these meanings in turn suggest still broader meanings as the cone of light broadens. The poem has been read by different readers as referring to the destruction of joyous physical love by jealousy, deceit, concealment, or the possessive instinct; of innocence by experience; of humanity by Satan; of imagination and joy by analytic reason; of life by death. Some of these meanings are suggested entirely by the poem itself, some by a knowledge also of Blake's other writings.

It is not my purpose here to make a detailed examination of these interpretations in the light of my two criteria. My belief is that a case can be made for all of them; that the symbols allow them all; that we are not forced to choose between the two interpretations of the Dickinson poem or the one by Melville. But if the rose can mean love, innocence, humanity, imagination, and life; and if the worm can mean the flesh, jealousy, deceit, concealment, possessiveness, experience, Satan, rationalism, death (and more), can the two symbols therefore mean just anything? The answer is No. The rose must always represent something beautiful or desirable or good. The worm must always be some kind of corrupting agent of youth. Both symbols define an area of meaning and a viable interpretation must fall within that area. Blake's poem is not about the elimination of social injustice by an enlightened society; it is not about the eradication of sin by God; it is not about the triumph of freedom over tyranny. Any correct interpretation must satisfactorily explain the details of the poem without being contradicted by any detail; the best interpretations will rely on the fewest assumptions not grounded in the poem itself.

A rose is a rose is a rose, and is more than a rose. But a rose is not an ink blot. Nor is a poem.

from The English Journal (September 1962; pp.393-98)

#2—Read and annotate each poem. Focus your annotation on author’s purpose and how he/she accomplishes that purpose. After analyzing the poem, read and annotate the commentary that follows. Identify, through your annotation, the main assertion of the explicator and the textual evidence cited to support his/her claims. For each poem-commentary pair, write an extended paragraph (typed, double spaced) in which you identify the explicator’s thoughts and evaluate his/her analysis. Do you agree or disagree? Does the poem lend itself to the interpretation provided or is it “way out there?” Explain/Expand.

THE FLEA.

by John Donne

MARK but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two ;
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.
'Tis true; then learn how false fears be ;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

John Donne, whose career overlapped Shakespeare's, was the leading figure of the loosely affiliated Metaphysical school of British poetry. The literary idiosyncrasies of the Metaphysicals, always controversial, would be denounced by eighteenth-century critics like Samuel Johnson. Few Romantics were admirers of this witty, cerebral style; an exception was Emily Dickinson. Interest in Metaphysical poetry revived in the twentieth century, when it was championed for its intellectuality by modernists like T. S. Eliot.

"The Flea" is one of the oddest love poems ever written. It's a good illustration of the Metaphysicals' effrontery, incongruities, and ostentatious use of conceits (elaborate metaphors). Like so many poems of the period, it's a cunning strategy of seduction. Here, however, the poet satirizes his own sexual desperation. The date of composition is unknown, but it presumably precedes Donne's secret marriage to Anne More in 1601. (Their union was opposed by her high-ranking parents, who objected to Donne's Catholicism.) The poem purports to show Anne resisting his advances until they can be legally married. As his wife, she would inspire Donne's great poem "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," but she was not the woman addressed in his early, bawdy "To His Mistress Going to Bed."

The three long stanzas of "The Flea" are like scenes from a play. The abrupt opening (a feature of Metaphysical poetry) has a dramatic immediacy partly inspired by London theater, then booming. Donne also shows a feel for the printed page here that was rare when poets circulated their work in manuscript. He uses the blank space between stanzas as eloquently as words themselves. The poem begins in the vernacular, as if the reader has dropped into the middle of a conversation. Donne may have learned this from Shakespeare, who often starts scenes and even plays in an offhand manner. However, the overall structure of "The Flea" is formal. Its appeal to the beloved is based not on romantic emotion but on logic, almost as if it were a court brief. (Donne studied law before entering government service.)

"Marke but this flea": observe this. Our attention, as well as the

lady's, is seized, as we are drawn into an intimate, sheltered space. Fleas were a mundane annoyance, infesting bedding and upholstery even in wealthy homes. The Mannerist grotesquerie of the flea metaphor flouts the faded Petrarchan tradition of love poetry. Donne exploits the mock-epic contrast between the insect's size and the burden of meaning it's asked to carry. Allusions and homilies—the lavish attention normally paid to devotional symbols like the crucifix—are heaped on it as if it were a patient pack mule. The hapless flea will actually end up as a holy martyr to love. Its transformation begins with its theft of human blood—first the poet's and then the lady's, which are "mingled" like potion in a beaker (3–4).

As it magically "swells with one blood made of two," the flea becomes their weird child (8). The couple have somehow vaulted to procreation without sexual intercourse, for which a virgin always pays a blood price. The poet tries to minimize the latter: "How little" is the "losse of maidenhead"—the hymen as inconvenient barrier (2, 6). Since it's neither "sinne, nor shame" to lose a drop of blood to a flea, why fixate on a useless shred of tissue? The flea, in its bustling animal drive, "enjoyes," or takes its pleasure, "before it wooe" (7). Fleas, in other words, are rapists. "This, alas, is more than wee would doe": the first stanza ends with Donne's rueful assurance that, even in high heat, he will woo and never rape. As a gentleman, he knows his pleasure depends on a woman's consent.

In the pause (a heartbeat) between stanzas, there's activity we don't see. "Oh stay," cries the poet: spare that flea (10)! The lady has clearly moved to kill it; hence the rest of the stanza consists of Donne's oratorical plea for clemency. It's an amusing reversal of conventional melodrama, where a weeping woman (like Pocahontas, who visited England in 1616) intercedes to beg mercy from a grim executioner. To distract her from her lethal project, the poet blows up a blizzard of whimsical metaphors. The flea becomes the Holy Trinity ("three lives in one"; compare the poem's three stanzas). The flea is their "marriage bed" and "marriage temple," a chapel made of "living walls of Jet"—the insect's black shell (13, 15). In the flea's mixed blood, they "more than maryed are," having in effect already become lovers (11). Gratitude is owed the flea, which has protectively "cloystered" or closeted

tu... (like monks and nuns living without sex) against a hostile world where "parents grudge"—that is, ungenerously forbid true lovers' happiness (14–15).

But she too "grudge[s]" in torturing her suitor by making him wait and wait (14). He needles her with hackneyed Petrarchanisms: "Though use make you apt to kill mee" (16). Flabit and overfamiliarity, he claims, make her treat him with excruciating indifference, so that she has become a *passé* type—the frosty Petrarchan mistress, killing her lover with scorn. Surely she's more sensible and au courant than that! Don't add suicide ("selfe murder") to homicide, he pleads (17). It would be "sacrilege" too, since the flea's death would mean desecration and razing of their "marriage temple"—as if a flea's extermination were a historic atrocity comparable to the Romans' destruction of Herod's temple (18).

The lady's response to the poet's torrent of images is short and sweet: during the pregnant pause between the second and third stanzas, the flea meets a swift end at her hands. She is serenely impervious to the poet's dazzling flights of rhetoric. He is *stung*, but hardly stopped. "Cruell and sudden" he calls her in *feigned despair*, casting her again as yesteryear's imperious Petrarchan lady (19). She has "purpled" her fingernail (still a fail-safe way to kill fleas) in "blood of innocence" and thus turned tyrant, like Herod slaughtering the Innocents or Pontius Pilate washing his hands of the blood of a just man (20).

The beloved's silence has its own power. Fond but weary of her chatterbox suitor, she may just be trying to take a nap! Determined to rouse a reaction, the poet peppers her with questions. She has acted arbitrarily, he charges, like a ruthless hanging judge: what was the flea "guilty" of except "that drop" it sucked from her (21–22)? This seems to make her laugh ("thou triumph'st") and blithely reply that she finds neither herself nor him any "the weaker" from loss of blood (23–24). The poet pounces on this as if it were the first false move by an opponent in a wrestling match. "Tis true," he exults, taking the weight of her lunge and turning it against her: her own statement is proof of "how false" her "feares" of sex are (25). The loss of "honor" in chastity's end is infinitesimal—no graver in the cosmic scheme than the death of a flea (26–27).

Whether Donne's ingenious indictment of the perennial double standard was then or ever effective, we don't know. The poem's juxtaposition of desire and disgust would be a risky maneuver in any courtship. But "The Flea" makes us feel the evolution in personal relationships at the English Renaissance, when marriage acquired the romantic idealism that adultery had had in medieval literature. Though Donne's fiancée says little, the poem's precocity is a tribute to her intelligence. He will jump through hoops to win her admiration. The poem's self-conscious artificiality captures the fragility of the complex rituals with which society has always tried to contain and control sexual energy.

In its arch absurdity, "The Flea" resembles Surrealist art. It has the grandiloquence and sexual explicitness of Salvador Dalí's dream paintings, where crawling ants signify itching lust. Dalí's fascinated subordination to his challenging wife, Gala, resembles the romantic pattern in "The Flea." Donne portrays himself, like Dalí, as a showy phallic swordsman baffled and bemused by a forceful, alluring woman, who brushes him away like a pesky fly.

The Red Wheelbarrow

by William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

Simplicity is the hallmark of William Carlos Williams's most original work, which never loses its mysterious freshness. Like Wordsworth, Williams sought a common language to close the gap between poetry and everyday experience. "The Red Wheelbarrow" invites us to cast off habit and look at life again with childlike wonder. The poem is an extension of Imagism, a modernist Anglo-American movement influenced by unrhymed Asian poetry (such as haiku and tanka) that strictly limits the number of lines and syllables. In Imagist poetry, sharp physical details are presented but not explained: the images must speak for themselves.

The red wheelbarrow carries a heavy load of meaning ("so much depends / upon"), but what that might be is left unsaid (1-2). Or perhaps it is inexpressible: language, as an emanation of the human brain, can never fully reach the stubbornly concrete world. To understand his own riveted reaction, Williams analyzes the scene into its visual elements and lays them out in small, spare units, unpunctuated to induce our contemplativeness. As an ordinary, functional, workaday object, the wheelbarrow wouldn't rate a second glance from most passersby. But the poem sees it as potentially as beautiful and significant as any high symbol of art or culture. Another artist of Williams's generation, the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp (whom Williams knew), performed a similar alchemy on coal shovels and urinals. But by putting his "readymades" on exhibit in art shows, Duchamp altered their context. Williams honors the wheelbarrow's natural environment and makes us feel its harmony.

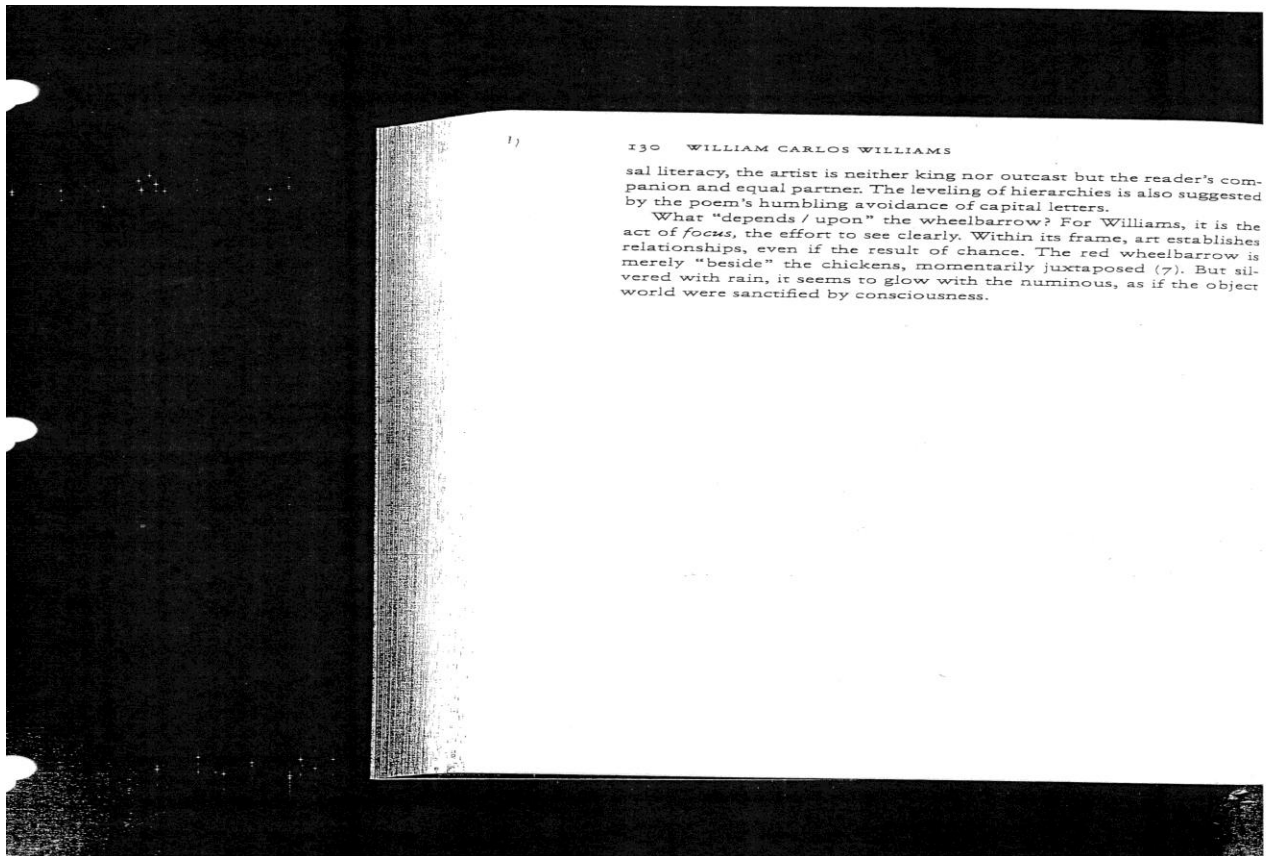
Though no people are visible, the wheelbarrow is their mark or signature, evidence of human industry and ingenuity. This robust tripod with its warm, festive color presides over the barnyard in a tranquil scene resembling a Dutch genre painting. It represents a stable agrarian society that was already slipping away when the poem was written. Time seems frozen in a moment of heightened perception. "Glazed with rain / water," the wheelbarrow gleams as if sprinkled with diamonds or iced like a cake in a fairy tale (5-6).

The rain may have stopped, but we still feel its soft fall in Williams's spilling lines. The poem is a single sentence consisting of a series of prepositional phrases that dangle from the verb "depends" in the first line. The root meaning of "depend" is to hang down: hence the poem seems to rappel down the page on a smooth chain of words. Movement slows, then speeds up again at the surprise split of "wheelbarrow" in two: when "barrow" drops to the next line (cleverly sliding off "wheel"), we must pause and take breath (3-4). Conglomerations of language are being teased apart for inspection by the appraising eye.

At the very end, "white / chickens" bring a hint of bustling energy to the otherwise inanimate tableau (7-8). They suggest purity, guilelessness, and inquisitive openness. Though chickens lack the romance of Aphrodite's doves or the proud spirit of Yeats's falcon, Williams is unembarrassed to make them his *dramatis personae*. Chickens are half-comical beings who long ago renounced flight to become man's unassuming servants, domesticated citizens of the peaceable kingdom. Chickens may faint in a fight, but they are active, gregarious, and productive.

As an object, Williams's sparkling wheelbarrow is both surface and structure. Hence, like Wallace Stevens's Tennessee jar, it can be seen as an analogue to the poem itself. Indeed, each of Williams's neat, tiny stanzas has a recessive wheelbarrow shape: the first line is the wheelbarrow's long handles, while the daringly terse, one-word second line mimics the sloping cart. The poem's title, like a novelty cookie cutter, seems to be busily stamping out pointy stanzas from the sludgy batter of language.

If the wheelbarrow is the artwork, then the milling chickens are perhaps partly a cartoon version of art's restless, hungry audience with its pecking questions and complaints and short attention span. At the finale of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," the suspicious, uncomprehending audience does a hostile circle dance. In Williams's poem, however, the audience loiters in neighborly coexistence with the steady, charitable artist. Solid and sturdy, the wheelbarrow represents Williams's practical view of poetry: the artwork collects and transports material reality, but we do the sorting. In a democratic age of univer-



This Is Just To Say

by William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

With its offhand title, "This Is Just to Say" pretends to be no more than a memo, jotted in haste on a scrap of paper. But it is a highly original love poem whose casualness is a deft tribute and token of intimacy and respect. The note has been left in a kitchen, female space usually ignored by major literature. The poet knows that he is an intruder, a vandal disrupting the orderly center of life. His palpable sense of trespass turns the kitchen into Eden and the pilfered plums into forbidden fruit.

In genre, the poem is a mock confession and appeal for absolution. By confiscating the plums, the poet has preempted tomorrow morning's meal and sabotaged his wife's good housekeeping. "Forgive me," the poet pleads, as if his wife were not only Eve with her seductive apple but the garden's angry deity to be propitiated (9). She commands this realm even in her absence. At one level, the succulent, fleshy fruit is a makeshift proxy for the opulent female form. The poet feels naughty and childlike yet also smugly triumphant, like a hero spiriting away a fabulous treasure (compare Jason and the Golden Fleece). But his trophy is merely a simple pleasure and summer staple, a sun-ripened, royal purple gift of nature.

The note was evidently written overnight, while the rest of the family was asleep. Perhaps Williams, a physician by profession, returned from a house call or was working late at his desk and went foraging for a snack. The chilled plums, with their burst of multiple sensations, bring true refreshment, bracing and restorative after mental tension and fatigue. Hence the poem offers homage to the provisioner of this happy oasis. Women have been honored in poetry as lovers and (from the Renaissance on) as faithful wives, but rarely have they appeared as homemakers, queens of their own domain. Williams asks for no wider world than this. The disdainful frigidity of the Petrarchan lady takes amusing new form: the omnipotent mistress now rules the icebox, which has supplanted the blazing hearth as the vital center of the modern kitchen. The poem's narrow shape actually resembles an icebox, a two-tiered fortress (block ice above,

perishables below) that was transformed during Williams's lifetime into the streamlined electric refrigerator. Opening like a vault, the icebox is analogous to a book or poem, which stores up reshaped experience for future pleasure.

Despite its deceptive plainness, "This Is Just to Say" triggers deep associations in the reader by playing on mythic patterns of sin and desire; female secrecy and fertility; and male aggression and violation. The fragmentary, nondescript title—just a sentence sliver—is self-referential in the modernist way, yet the poem's brimming emotion is too rich for irony. Paced by short, halting lines, the rhythms are bewitchingly slow, evoking the reassuring stability of domestic routine. The poem's condensed time scheme is surprisingly complex. The first stanza takes us backward into the dark recesses of the icebox, where the plums nest like eggs. The second stanza leaps forward to the wife's projected enjoyment of the now-aborted breakfast. The third stanza returns to the past—to the poet's gluttonous indulgence, vividly re-created through universal, primary properties ("so sweet / and so cold") that make us shiver with delight (11–12).

Hovering over the poem is an invisible figure similar to the one in John Donne's "The Flea"—a strong, silent female companion whose favor is begged and whose judgment is comically feared. Williams exaggerates his apprehension and psychological distance to set the stage for reconciliation. His poem is an offering and bribe to convert his wife's disapproval to forgiveness—turning her, in other words, from "cold" to "sweet." Hence the "delicious" fruitiness of the final images has the tactile lushness of a kiss.

#3—Time to Practice: carefully read and analyze the following poem. Provide a detailed annotation of the poem. Focus your annotation on the meaning of the poem and how the poet is accomplishing the meaning. Consider what stands out to you. Remember annotation is highlighting AND notetaking. This poem would lend itself nicely to your first writing assignment, don't you think?

My Last Duchess
Robert Browning

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart -- how shall I say? -- too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace -- all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, -- good! but thanked
Somewhat -- I know not how -- as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech -- (which I have not) -- to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' -- and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
-- E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!