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Linguistic Self-Awareness and Poetry Preference

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between linguistic self-awareness and poetry preference in college students who don't regularly read poetry. It addresses whether or not there are consistent phonological and semantic features that influence preference, and it observes whether or not students recognize linguistic factors as part of their preference. It also touches on syntactic play and the degree to which amateur readers understand that professional poets deliberately subvert linguistic tendencies.

Keywords

poetry, semantics, phonology, alliteration

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Linguistic Self-Awareness and Poetry Preference

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Introduction

Language is the foundation of culture, and poetry is a form of discourse unlike any other. It is creative and subverts many of the rules of standard spoken or written English. But what is happening beneath the surface of a poem? I hypothesize that appraisal of literary value is closely related to the frequency with which certain linguistic features appear. This study will focus primarily on phonemic play (alliteration, rhyme, assonance, etc.) and semantic stretching or variability with brief attention to syntactic subversion as necessary.

Literature Review

The number of studies that approach poetry from its roots up is limited. That noted, there are indeed some projects that set a precedent and provide a helpful model for this particular exercise. For example, studies by Dalvean (2013) and Kao & Jurafsky (2015) analyzed poetry corpora for repeated features. Kao & Jurafsky's study found that Imagism, a poetic movement towards concrete language (pine incense, etc.) and fewer emotionally-charged abstract words (love, etc.), has widened the gap between modern and amateur poetry as the latter, according to the study, tends to be modeled after older poetic works. This study is useful for a few reasons, namely because it indicates there are linguistic patterns in poetry, particularly semantic ones. More notable, however, is the fact that amateur poets model their work on that of older poets and tend to use more abstract and emotional language. The participants in my study will have had limited exposure to modern poetry, which means they will bring a similarly untrained "eye" to the work placed before them.

Dalvean's study extended Kao & Jurafsky's project by analyzing a corpus of what are considered to be the best American poems. Throughout the pieces, he identified ninety-eight linguistic and psycholinguistic variables and found that they correlated to the perceived quality or professionalism of the conventions in the genre as it is now. Dalvean compiled his project in an algorithm-based program available online. Although the direct application of the program in this project is limited, it may effectively gauge the tastes of the participants in this study. With this macro view established, it is necessary to consider projects on individual poems.

Other studies have noted the underlying importance of linguistics on the interpretation and appreciation of poetry, and while they occasionally lean towards traditional literary analysis, they maintain a distinctly linguistic bent. Studniarz (2015) highlighted this fact through a phonemic and semantic analysis of Poe's "Annabel Lee." The study determined that phonemic similarity was used throughout the work to shape semantic meaning. To put it another way, the shape and sound of the poem were influential in how readers interpreted it. This demonstrates the correlation between underlying linguistic forces and aesthetic appeal. Ufot (2013) further strengthened the argument that literary interpretation is built on a linguistic framework through a study on Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Churchyard." The phonological features throughout the work are used to subvert the surface-level tone of the work and change the reading. As a simple explanation, consider the difference between the headlines: "Big Black Bear Bites Brian" and "Bear Maims Hiker." Although the surface-level message is the same in both examples, the tone of the first phrase is radically different than the second because of the way it utilizes phonemic play. Sound and semantics are inextricably linked, but the two will be addressed separately in this article.

As mentioned, one of the primary concerns of this study is phonemic. There has been extensive research on phonological deviance, and this is a strong basis for the work of this particular study. Poetry is a language of metaphor, but phonological factors, such as alliteration and rhyme, play a significant role in shaping novel metaphor. Benczes (2013) addresses the overlap with semantics, concluding that phonological analogy allows foregrounded meaning and the implementation of shared schemas. This characteristic indicates a natural appeal in rhyming compounds that may be reflected in this study. Similarly, Önkas (2011) found that the link between phonemics and semantics is crucial in overall comprehension of a poetic work. Lea et al. (2008) studied the role of alliteration in poetry comprehension and found that readers were more likely to recall poems and remember relevant information from earlier in the works if they made extensive use of alliteration. Again, this study demonstrates that readers have a natural draw to these phonemic features. It seems that phonemic play in poetry is a bit more clear-cut than semantic flouting.

Research on semantic variability has been extensive, though it is often completed tangentially to its relationship to poetry. In a study by Hoffman, Ralph, & Rogers (2012), they determined that polysemous words (words with a wide semantic range) were recognized faster than unambiguous words. Abstract words have a wider semantic range than concrete words, and, as noted by Dalvean (2013) and Kao & Jurafsky (2015), amateur poetry tends to use abstract language. This predilection may explain why the participants in this study prefer the poems they do. A psycholinguistic study by Musz & Thompson-Schill (2015) found that words with a higher semantic range activated more regions in the brain than those with a limited range. This, again, could indicate a cognitive preference for abstract language in poetry, as it is more easily processed. Although phonemics and semantics are the two primary foci of this project, a brief note on syntax is in order.

Finally, with regard to syntactical manipulation, both Nofal (2011) and Kiparsky (1973) have written on the ways in which poets subvert characteristics of traditional syntax for

dramatic effect. Nofal notes this use of hyperbaton (inversion of word order for dramatic effect) as well as an “employment of loose syntax” modeled more after spoken language than what would be considered typical for written English. Likewise, other atypical forms, such as passive constructions, discontinuity, and archaic language, permeate poetic texts. Kiparsky (1973) largely echoes Nofal’s work and suggests a limited range of permissibility in use. Using transformational grammar, the deepest syntactical structures can be reduced to their constituent structures. Nofal suggests that syntactic parallelism runs throughout poetic language with varying degrees of strict usage. Though the extent to which inversion is allowed changes throughout time, it has remained consistent as a feature, particularly as a means of foregrounding. To consider a simple example, compare the following two phrases: “I have loved you” and “You, have I loved.” The emphasis is altered greatly. Von Auw Berry (2002), however, notes that there are multiple different methods for grammatical analysis in poetry. Having addressed that, for this study’s purposes, syntactic deviance is largely irrelevant except as it relates to foregrounding.

Building on the work of others, this study proposes a joint examination of readers’ linguistic awareness, which will implicitly touch upon the degree to which modern poets intentionally subvert the use of these features as well as whether or not amateur readers display preference as predicted by the literature review.

Methodology

This study will seek to answer the following questions related to the reading and writing of poetry:

1. To what extent do college students with limited exposure to poetry prefer works because of linguistic features, such as rhyme or broad semantic range?
2. If they do show preference based on linguistic features, are amateur readers aware of their own linguistic preferences?
3. Do amateur readers recognize that modern poetry subverts natural linguistic preferences?

For the purpose of answering these questions, a few methods of input were chosen, namely data collection, surveys, and interviews.

The first method utilized a collection of ten poems (see Appendix 1), ranging from Longfellow’s “Loss and Gain,” to Kimiko Hahn’s “The Dream of a Black Lacquer Box.” These works were chosen because they are representative of a variety of genre and forms. The poems were then placed in Dalvean’s poetry assessment tool and assigned a score with supposed professionalism noted by a high score and simplicity being indicated by a low or negative score. As a caveat, note that the scoring system is through an imagist lens, so a poem like Longfellow’s “Loss and Gain,” which leans heavily on semantically-broad language, scores much lower than Spender’s “The Truly Great,” (see Appendix 1) which is reliant on semantically-tight elemental language. Based on the work of Musz & Thompson-

Schill (2015), it may be possible to predict that participants in the survey would have a higher preference for Longfellow's work. Although Dalvean's tool is helpful as a guideline, it is limited in that shorter poems receive a less "accurate" score. This issue is not unforeseen, however, and is therefore not problematic; the scores are only a rough guideline for this study's purposes. Therefore, it remains appropriate to use the tool.

For the second method, the aforementioned poems were placed in a simple, ten-question survey, and participants were asked to rank the poems from one to ten, with one being their favorite and ten being their least favorite. The survey was sent to college students, and the results were compared to Dalvean's scores of each of the poems. One of the issues inherent in a survey is the indirect targeting of a particular demographic, which is why the focus of this study was limited to college students. The relationship with poetry has shifted in the age of the internet, creating many self-proclaimed poets and poetry readers. The artistic pretense that often surrounds poetry also could be problematic, so participants were asked to rank their favorites, not which poem they thought was best. This distinction, though seemingly arbitrary, serves to shift the conversation to one of preference rather than intrinsic artistic value.

The third method of data collection built on the other two. Six college-aged individuals who had taken the survey were interviewed briefly and asked why they ranked the poems as they did. The participants were all between the age of 18 and 22, from a variety of majors. The goal of these questions (see Appendix 3) was to observe the frequency with which individuals cited explicitly linguistic reasons (i.e. "I liked the rhyme" or "I liked this word choice") as opposed to broader, nonlinguistic reasons (i.e. "This spoke to me" or "This reminded me of something"). Participants were also asked if they described themselves as people who actively sought out poetry. Again, the framing on such a question may seem a bit odd, but framing it more directly would be to load the question: Many people would say they like poetry; few would say they look for it. Finally, individuals were also asked what their primary source of poetic exposure was, which was telling in terms of revealing the interviewees' understanding of the genre. Each interview was less than ten minutes and participant-driven as much as possible to prevent the data from being skewed by the inadvertent introduction of explicitly linguistic questions.

Through the triangulated approach to the research, utilizing Dalvean's scores, simple surveys, and interviews, it seemed probable that the data would clearly highlight patterns if any existed. After some evaluation, it became apparent that such was the case, and the results are described below.

Data

For the most part, the data collected was reflective of the hypothesis presented and the research previously completed. The Dalvean scores were more varied than expected, but the results of the survey were as consistent as initially predicted. The interviews with those who had participated in the survey were quite revealing, and they fleshed out the data as anticipated.

Section 1: Dalvean Scores

According to the chart, it might be expected that Henry Longfellow's "Loss and Gain" would be the preferred poem, followed by Roethke's "The Waking." Conversely, it seems probable that Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty, but was Scarce" would be the lowest-ranked poem in the next portion of the survey. The remaining poems should rank comparably with less distinctive placement.

Poem	Score
Loss and Gain - Henry Longfellow	-2.7
Fall, Leaves, Fall - Emily Brontë	-1.3
The Tyger - William Blake	0.5
I Wait - Ezra Pound	0.2
The Truly Great - Stephen Spender	1.0
Those Winter Sundays - Robert Hayden	-0.8
Wind on the Hill - A.A. Milne	0.4
The Dream of a Lacquer Box - Kimiko Hahn	0.9
The Waking - Theodore Roethke	-2.5
I Died for Beauty, but was Scarce - Emily Dickinson	1.5

Table 1**Section 2: Survey Results**

Twenty-five students responded to the survey, and as evidenced by the chart, the majority of participants chose Longfellow's "Loss and Gain." The other poems were ranked far closer together, with the exception of Kimiko Hahn's, which fell much lower on the spectrum.

Table 2

Section 3: Interviews

The interviews were as telling as the survey, if not more so, and brief synopses are provided below. Note that names have been altered for privacy.

Adam is a college freshman who appreciates the idea of poetry but does not actively seek it out. His last major exposure to the medium was in high school when he took a poetry class, which he enjoyed. While he enjoyed the content of every poem in the survey, he cited Longfellow's "Loss and Gain" as his favorite piece. When asked why he favored this particular entry, he stated that "The rhyme scheme was just very even. It was comfortable to read." He disliked "Those Winter Sundays" because it was "hard to follow," but he was quick to add that the problem may have been his "inability to read or something." These statements were interesting in that they indicated a linguistic awareness and an implicit understanding that poets deliberately flout linguistic expectations.

Stan thought it was hard to rank the poems because the rhyme scheme was very different. He enjoyed Milne's "Wind" piece because it was easier to read, but he added the caveat that it could be because he did not have "a great poetic background" and generally reads poems only in class or through social media. His favorite poem was Dickinson's "I Died for Beauty, but was Scarce" because it spoke to "the futility of life and how we're all going to end up in the grave." In his words, he "hated" "Wake to Sleep" because, while he understands that slant rhymes are permissible, he did not like how it flowed. Finally, he argued that a good poem was one that had a clear point and maintained its rhyme scheme if it had one.

Another student, Josh, described himself as someone who rarely reads poetry. When asked where he usually encounters it, he stated that social media was the primary source. Like others, his favorite poem was Longfellow's "Loss and Gain." He differed, however, in his

reason for why it was his favorite poem: "It describes something that you could chase down. It wasn't a fictional story." According to Josh, a good poem is "one that makes you think about your morals, and one that makes you think about your life."

Keith, a college sophomore, said he enjoyed poetry but did not read it very often. His favorite poem from the collected works was A.A. Milne's "Wind on a Hill" because it was "a good description of where life is going." He felt unable to pick a single least-favorite poem, but notably, he, like Josh, did not mention any linguistic characteristics as the basis for why he chose Milne's piece. Keith said that on the occasions he does interact with poetry, it comes in the form of music.

Sarah is a college freshman and encounters poetry most frequently through music and social media. She also favored Longfellow's piece because it was more "philosophical" than the other poems, and it "felt airier than the other ones." Her least favorite was Kimiko Hahn's, which she felt was fragmented to the point of being nonsensical. Sarah identified the features of a good poem as being metrical and having an intentional word choice because it means the piece is "deeper in scope." These comments were interesting, as the participant seemed to skirt around an explicit linguistic knowledge. In light of her statement about music being a source of poetry, though, it makes sense.

Other students were more descriptive of their relationship with poetry, such as Janet. She said she likes the idea of poetry but does not really make a point of seeking it out. Perhaps unsurprisingly, her favorite poem was also Longfellow's because it "carried meaning and had a good rhyme scheme." She suggested that Milne's piece sounded like "it was written by a 12-year-old," and Ezra Pound's "I Wait" was too abstract. She closed by stating that, "The intent of poetry is to express something deep in a way that is enjoyable to listen to, and also captures a perspective on it that isn't totally boring." This statement was noteworthy because she captured the phonological aspect of poetry and alluded to the semantic side already discussed.

Although each of the interviews was distinct and reflected unique personalities, the amount of consistency in thought was quite surprising. Most of the interviewees picked Longfellow's piece, and only two did not mention any linguistic factors in their preference. Of those who did mention rhyme scheme, some made comments about potentially not knowing how to read poetry, as if it were a trained skill.

Discussion

The various methods of data collection were all effective to some degree, but the survey and particularly the interviews were revealing of the types of linguistic patterns favored by the students.

Preliminarily, it is possible to make a few general statements:

1. College students with limited poetic exposure preferred rhyming and semantically open works.

2. Amateur readers have a limited self-awareness about their own linguistic preferences; and, similarly,
3. Readers are somewhat aware of the way in which poets subvert linguistic trends.

Based on the results of the surveys, it would appear that preference is jointly predicated upon phonemic consistency of rhyme scheme and semantic open-endedness. The poems that featured extensive use of both ranked highest, whereas those that favored one over the other—or utilized neither—were ranked lower.

The interviews also affirmed the preference for Longfellow's piece, and as seen in the interviews, most participants were not linguistically aware of why they chose the work. They cited reasons that were as abstract as the words comprising the poem itself. This tendency aligns with what was predicted in accordance with Musz & Thompson-Schill's (2015) study on semantic association and the psycholinguistic preference for words with a broad semantic range. In alignment with Kao & Jurafsky's study (2015), the poem is heavily reliant on abstract language, with the most "concrete" word being "tide." As seen in the interviews, many participants identified with the poem, which is certainly tied to the aforementioned semantic broadness. Readers are able to place themselves in the author's role because a concept like "victory" or "loss" is abstract and defined almost exclusively by an individual's personal experience with the concepts.

Sound preference also came into play, as Longfellow's work opts for extensive phonemic repetition through the use of assonance and rhyme, as seen through phrases like:

"What I have lost with what I have gained

What I have missed with what attained"

The /s/ phoneme is repeated, as is the /æ/ phoneme, and this sampling is only a small representation of multiple subsequent uses of phonemic play. Recalling Benczes (2013), Studniarz (2015), and Önkas (2011), the phonemic repetition through the use of assonance acts on a natural preference readers have for such forms and even shapes the semantic interpretation of the works. In light of Hoffman, Ralph, & Rogers (2012), this preference also makes sense as readers will feel that a poem they have never read is familiar if it relies on semantically open language. Although other works, such as "The Tyger," relied more on phonemic repetition, they scored lower because they were more semantically limited. Some participants even asked if there was more to the poem because they did not understand why something as specific as a tiger would be the subject of a poem.

The influence of phonology and semantics was anticipated, but the importance of syntactical subversion was surprising. As noted, Nofal (2011) and Kiparsky (1973) argue that poetry's irregular syntax influences how readers appreciate it, and this fact is evident in the irregularity of lines like,

"Little room do I find for pride,"

or

“How like an arrow the good intent
Has fallen short or been turned aside.”

In both cases, Longfellow uses inverted syntax to accommodate the rhyme scheme, which requires the reader to read the piece differently than something with standard syntax. Compare the structure of the above to:

“I find little room for pride,”

or

“The good intent has fallen short or
Been turned aside like an arrow.”

The inversion of the syntax grants the work a “poetic” feel, at least in the eyes of amateur readers. With each of the aforementioned factors in mind, one might expect the lowest-ranked poem to lack semantic variability, phonemic play, and irregular syntax, and this prediction was indeed the case.

Kimiko Hahn’s poem, “The Dream of a Lacquer Box,” was the lowest-ranked poem of the ten. Participants frequently described it as “fragmented” or said they needed more context to understand it. This is noteworthy because it contained the most semantically limited language. For example, there are explicit references to “Hello Kitty” and a “black lacquer box.” Readers described themselves as feeling like the poem was part of a larger work. Similarly, the poem featured no explicit rhyme scheme or meter. In other words, it featured neither of the key features that were determinative in preference. Consider the following sample lines:

“wish I knew the contents and I wish the contents

Japanese —

like hairpins made of tortoiseshell or bone
though my braid was lopped off long ago,

like an overpowering pine incense
or a talisman from a Kyoto shrine,

like a Hello Kitty diary-lock-and-key,
Hello Kitty stickers or candies, . . .”

Aside from the repetition of /o/ in lines 3 and 4, no other surface-level linguistic pattern appears. There is a limited use of alliteration and assonance, such as the /k/ in “like” and

“Kitty,” and while this contributes to the appeal, it is not immediately obvious in the way that Longfellow’s phonemic play is. The language is also very semantically tight with little room for the individual to read his or her self into the piece. Syntactically, the poem is also relatively straightforward and does not read as “poetically” as many amateur readers would want. The lack of obvious pattern is why Sarah felt the poem was fragmented and “nonsensical.” Patterns feel familiar to readers, which is why readers are more likely to identify with works that utilize them.

The results of the study confirmed initial expectations. Readers demonstrated a definite preference for works with a heavy reliance on rhyme and semantically open language. They were, however, more self-aware than predicted, with four out of six interviewees identifying linguistic characteristics as the basis for their preference. Only one participant noted semantic features, whereas the others mentioned the phonology of the rhyme scheme. Finally, participants also showed a limited awareness of how poets subvert linguistic expectations, as two participants justified their preferences by suggesting that they were not avid readers or simply did not know how to read and appreciate poetry.

Future Study

All work relating to poetry is inherently difficult to pin down; the number of variables is extensive, and the researcher’s personal relationship with it could risk influencing the structure of a project. This study was designed to reduce these variables, but in doing so, the scope of the project is limited at best and should be considered only as guidance for future research. There are, however, some ways for those with similar interests to avoid potential pitfalls.

In retrospect, this study would have benefited from more foresight of the poetry use in the survey. Intentionally selecting works with varying degrees of semantic range and phonemic play would be helpful. This study used specific poems to some extent but not to the degree necessary to make any sort of quantifiable statement about preference. However, poetry and its interpretation are fluid, so perhaps it would make little difference.

In the future, studies should target a broader demographic or focus comparatively on individuals who would consider themselves avid readers of poetry. In this case, they should select more obscure poems so that the participants are still reading “blind.” Otherwise, it would be possible for the data to be skewed when a participant encounters a favorite poem.

Additionally, this project dealt only with English-language poetry, which has different linguistic tropes and features associated with it than poetry in other languages. A contrastive study between two languages would be interesting, and it would provide a helpful explanation of psycholinguistic universals.

Despite the limitations on this study, it provides an effective starting point for future research on the linguistic underpinnings of poetry and its appreciation. Art is an

abstraction, but that abstraction can be analyzed through linguistics and psycholinguistics. Perhaps there is something poetic about the synthesis of beauty and science.

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Appendix 1: Poems

“Fall, Leaves, Fall” by Emily Bronte

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

“Loss and Gain” by Henry Longfellow

When I compare
What I have lost with what I have gained,
What I have missed with what attained,
Little room do I find for pride.

I am aware
How many days have been idly spent;
How like an arrow the good intent
Has fallen short or been turned aside.

But who shall dare
To measure loss and gain in this wise?
Defeat may be victory in disguise;
The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.

“The Tyger” by William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?

And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

“Wind on the Hill” by A.A. Milne

No one can tell me,
Nobody knows,
Where the wind comes from,
Where the wind goes.

It's flying from somewhere
As fast as it can,
I couldn't keep up with it,
Not if I ran.

But if I stopped holding
The string of my kite,
It would blow with the wind
For a day and a night.

And then when I found it,
Wherever it blew,
I should know that the wind
Had been going there too.

So then I could tell them
Where the wind goes...
But where the wind comes from
Nobody knows.

“I Wait” by Ezra Pound

As some pale-lidded ghost that calls
I wait secure until that other goes
Leaving thee free for thy high self of old
Upon which soul then free, will mine beget
Such mighty fantasies as we before
Bade stand effulgent and rejoice the world.

I wait secure and waiting know I not
A bite of anger at thy littleness, nor even envy
Of that the other one that bindeth thee
Within the close-hewn shroud of womanhood.

Being at peace with God and all his stars
Why should I quail the strings of nettle Time
Or fret the hour
Are there canals less green
Or do the mottled colors of reflexion
Less dew their waters with mild harmony?
Is there less merriment and life withall
Amid this hoard of half-tamed brats
That rollick o'er the well-curb
while one crowned
In mock of finery doth lead the rout
Half-scared at all the
new-found pomp
Atop of him?
A Czar in very soul.
And if they mock the world in this their spot
Is not their jest as near to wisdom as are we?

“The Dream of a Lacquer Box” by Kimiko Hahn

I wish I knew the contents and I wish the contents
Japanese —

like hairpins made of tortoiseshell or bone
though my braid was lopped off long ago,

like an overpowering pine incense
or a talisman from a Kyoto shrine,

like a Hello Kitty diary-lock-and-key,
Hello Kitty stickers or candies,

a netsuke in the shape of an octopus,
ticket stubs from the Bunraku —

or am I wishing for Mother? searching for Sister?
just hoping to give something Japanese to my daughters?

then again, people can read anything into dreams

and I do as well. I wish I possessed
my mother's black lacquer box

though in my dream it was red,
though I wish my heart were content.

“The Truly Great” by Stephen Spender

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious, is never to forget
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light
Nor its grave evening demand for love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

“Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

“The Waking” by Theodore Roethke

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

“I Died for Beauty, But was Scarce” by Emily Dickinson

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
“For beauty,” I replied.
“And I for truth,—the two are one;
We brethren are,” he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

Appendix 2: Dalvean Tool

The tool is available at <http://www.poetryassessor.com>. A sample is contained below.

Poem Title : The Waking

Poem Text :

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
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To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

Name of Poet (Optional) : William Roethke

Poem's Score: -2.5

Appendix 3: Sample Interview Questions

Would you describe yourself as an active poetry reader?

Do you like poetry?

What is your primary exposure to poetry?

Which of the poems was your favorite? Why?

Which poem was your least-favorite? Why?

What makes a good poem?

What makes a bad poem?