

## Poetry Response #3

Complete one poem from Part 3.

**Denotation:** the dictionary meaning or meanings of the word

**Connotations:** what it suggests beyond what it expresses; its overtones of meaning

### There is no Frigate like a Book

Emily Dickinson

There is no Frigate like a Book

To take us Lands away

Nor any Coursers like a Page

Of prancing Poetry—

This Traverse may the poorest take

Without oppress of Toll—

How frugal is the Chariot

That bears the Human soul.

1. What is lost if *miles* is substituted for “Lands” (2) or *cheap* for “frugal” (7)?
2. How is “prancing” (4) peculiarly appropriate to poetry as well as to coursers? Could the poet without loss have compared a book to coursers and poetry to a frigate? What is a frigate?
3. How would the meaning of the poem change if *frigate* were changed to *cruise ship* or *coursers* change to *horses*?
4. What is the theme of this poem?
5. Is this account appropriate to all kinds of poetry or just to certain kinds?

### When my love swears that she is made of truth

William Shakespeare

When my love swears that she is made of truth,  
I do believe her, though I know she lies.

That she might think me some untutored youth,  
Unlearned in the world’s false subtleties.

Thus vainly thinking that she things me young,  
Although she knows my days are past the best,

Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;

On both sides thus is simple truth suppress.

But wherefore says she not she is unjust?<sup>1</sup>

And wherefore say not I that I am old?

Oh, love’s best habit is in seeming trust,

And age in love loves not to have years told:

Therefore I lie with her and she with me,

And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

<sup>1</sup>unfaithful

1. How old is the speaker? How old is his beloved? What is the nature of their relationship?
2. How is the contradiction in line 2 to be resolved? In lines 5-6? Who is lying to whom?
3. How do “simply” (7) and “simple” (8) differ in meaning? The words “vainly” (5), “habit” (11), “told” (12), and “lie” (13) all have double denotative meanings. What are they?
4. What is the tone of the poem—that is, the attitude of the speaker toward his situation? Should line 11 be taken as an expression of (a) wisdom, (b) conscious rationalization, or (c) self-deception? In answering these questions, consider both the situation and connotations of all the important words beginning with “swears” (1) and ending with “flattered” (14).

## Pathedy of Manners

### Ellen Kay

At twenty she was brilliant and adored,  
Phi Beta Kappa, sought for every dance;  
Captured symbolic logic and the glance  
Of men whose interest was their sole reward.

She learned the cultured jargon of those bred  
To antique crystal and authentic pearls,  
Scorned Wagner, praised the Degas dancing girls,  
And when she might have though, conversed instead.

She hung up her diploma, went abroad,  
Saw cantaloupes of domes and tapestry,  
Rejected an impoverished marquis,  
And learned to tell real Wedgwood from a fraud.

Back home her breeding led her to espouse  
A bring young man whose pearl cufflinks were real.  
They had an ideal marriage, and ideal  
But lonely children in an ideal house.

I saw her yesterday at forty-three,  
Her children gone, her husband one year dead,  
Toying with plots to kill time and re-wed  
Illusions of lost opportunity.

But afraid to wonder what she might have known  
With all that wealth and mind had offered her,  
She shuns conviction, choosing to infer  
Tenets of every mind except her own.

A hundred people call, though not one friend,  
To parry a hundred doubts with nimble talk.  
Her meanings lost in manners, she will walk  
Alone in brilliant circles to the end.

1. The title alludes to the type of drama called “comedy of manners” and coins a word combining the suffix *-edy* with the Greek root *path*—(as in pathetic, sympathy, pathology). How does the poem narrative story with both comic and pathetic implications? For what might the central character be blamed? What arouses our pity for her?
2. Explore the multiple denotations and the connotations attached to each denotation of “brilliant” (both in 1 and 28), “interest” and “reward” (4), “cultured” and “jargon” (5), “circles” (28).
3. What are the poet’s words more effective than these possible synonyms: “captured” (3) rather than *learned*; “conversed” (8) rather than *chatted*, *gossiped*, or *talked*; “catalogues” (10) rather than *volumes* or *multitudes*; “espouse” (13) rather than *marry*? Discuss the momentary ambiguity presented by the word “re-wed” (19).
4. At what point in the poem does the speaker shift from language that represents the way the woman might have talked about herself to language that reveals how the speaker judges her? Point out examples of both kinds of language.

## Poetry Response #4

### Complete one poem from part 4.

Imagery: the representation through language of sense experience.

#### **I felt a Funeral, in my Brain** **Emily Dickinson**

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading—treading—till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking through—

And when they were all seated,  
A Service, like a Drum—  
Kept beating—beating--till I thought  
My Mind was going numb—  
And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space—began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence some strange Race  
Wrecked, solitary, here—

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down—  
And hit a world, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing—then—

1. What senses are being evoked by the imagery? Can you account for the act that one important sense is absent from the poem?
2. In sequence, what aspects of a funeral and burial are represented in the poem? Is it possible to define the sequence of mental events that are being compared to them?
3. With respect to the funeral activities in stanzas 1-3, where is the speaker imaginatively located?
4. What finally happens to the speaker?

#### **Spring** **Gerald Manley Hopkins**

Nothing is so beautiful as spring—  
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and  
lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and  
thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring

The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;  
The glassy peartrees leaves and blooms, the  
brush  
The descending blue; that blue is all in a  
rush  
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their  
fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?  
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the  
beginning  
In Eden garden.—Have, get, before it cloy,

Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with  
sinning,  
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,  
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy  
the winning.

1. The first line makes an abstract statement. How is this statement brought to carry conviction?
2. The sky is described as being "all in rush/with richness" (7-8). In what other respects is the poem "rich"?
3. To what two things does the speaker compare the spring in lines 9-14? In what ways are the comparisons appropriate?
4. Lines 11-14 might be made clearer by paraphrasing them thus: "Christ, lord, child of the Virgin; save the innocent mind of girl and boy before sin taints it, since it is most like yours and worth saving." Why are Hopkins's lines more effective, both in imagery and in syntax?