

Unit #4: Ordinary Things, Extraordinary Ideas

Quiz, Tues., March 3rd
Poem Due Thurs., March 5th
25 lines typed

Pablo Neruda, "Ode to My Socks"
Pablo Neruda, "Ode to Broken Things"
Charles Bukowski, "Beer"
Lorna Crozier, "Carrots,"
Lucille Clifton, "Homage to My Hips"
William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"
Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"
Richard Wright, Five Haiku
Margaret Atwood, "Cell"
Jim Stevens, "Schizophrenia"

Poets are often interested in the ordinary objects of everyday life, especially when those objects can serve as portals to the profound. Pablo Neruda, for instance, wrote odes to common things (plates, socks, forks, apples, oranges, cats) drawing out their inner essence. For this assignment, you will be looking closely at an object and writing a poem about its physicality or its essence. Your poem can describe the physicality of the object with poetic precision, or you can use the object as a metaphor for an abstract idea.

Option #1 Ode

An ode is an elevated poem of praise addressed to an object or thing. Like Pablo Neruda, write a poem where you praise something that others would often ignore or pass by without noticing. Lucille Clifton and Charles Bukowski provide alternative models for the ode. Consider looking at their poems as well.

Option #2 Haiku

Haikus are short powerful, poems that use a 5-7-5 syllabic structure. Because of their compactness, haikus often use striking images that linger with the reader. Write a series of haikus (at least 10). Look at the poems by Richard Wright.

Option #3 Conceit

A conceit is an extended metaphor that sustains itself through the entire duration of a poem. . Jim Stevens uses a house as a metaphor for mental illness in "Schizophrenia." Describe your object, but also stress another hidden meaning or subtext. Let your object represent or stand-in for something else.

Option #4 Pretty- Ugly

Pick a strange, ugly, or even a disgusting subject and write a rich, lush, beautiful description of that subject. Examples: vacant lot, trash/litter, dirty pair of socks. Use

vivid language and strong imagery (i.e. beautiful, sensuous language) which will create a contrast between the content of the poem and the style. Use Margaret Atwood's poem "Cell" as a model.

Option #5 Objective Description

Like Williams, the objectivist writer, and Pound, the imagist, describe a thing (or several things) in painstaking detail so that the audience can actually picture what you are describing. Do not add value judgment or commentary on the object; let the description speak for itself. For this poem, you will be practicing one of the fundamental rules of writing: show, don't tell. You must create the object so that the reader can actually see it in his or her mind.

Ode to My Socks

Pablo Neruda

Mara Mori brought me
a pair of socks
which she knitted herself
with her shepherd's hands,
two socks as soft as rabbits.
I slipped my feet into them
as if they were two cases
knitted with threads of twilight and goatskin,
Violent socks,
my feet were two fish made of wool,
two long sharks
sea blue, shot through
by one golden thread,
two immense blackbirds,
two cannons,
my feet were honored in this way
by these heavenly socks.
They were so handsome for the first time
my feet seemed to me unacceptable
like two decrepit firemen,
firemen unworthy of that woven fire,
of those glowing socks.

Nevertheless, I resisted the sharp temptation
to save them somewhere as schoolboys
keep fireflies,
as learned men collect
sacred texts,
I resisted the mad impulse to put them
in a golden cage and each day give them
birdseed and pieces of pink melon.
Like explorers in the jungle
who hand over the very rare green deer
to the spit and eat it with remorse,
I stretched out my feet and pulled on
the magnificent socks and then my shoes.

The moral of my ode is this:
beauty is twice beauty
and what is good is doubly good
when it is a matter of two socks
made of wool in winter.

Ode To Broken Things

Pablo Neruda

Things get broken
at home
like they were pushed
by an invisible, deliberate smasher.
It's not my hands
or yours
It wasn't the girls
with their hard fingernails
or the motion of the planet.
It wasn't anything or anybody
It wasn't the wind
It wasn't the orange-colored noontime
Or night over the earth
It wasn't even the nose or the elbow
Or the hips getting bigger
or the ankle
or the air.
The plate broke, the lamp fell
All the flower pots tumbled over
one by one. That pot
which overflowed with scarlet
in the middle of October,
it got tired from all the violets
and another empty one
rolled round and round and round
all through winter
until it was only the powder
of a flowerpot,
a broken [memory](#), shining dust.

And that clock
whose sound
was
the voice of our lives,
the secret
thread of our weeks,
which released
one by one, so many hours
for honey and silence
for so many births and jobs,
that clock also
fell
and its delicate blue guts

vibrated
among the broken glass
its wide heart
unsprung.

Life goes on grinding up
glass, wearing out clothes
making fragments
breaking down
forms
and what lasts through time
is like an island on a ship in the sea,
perishable
surrounded by dangerous fragility
by merciless waters and threats.

Let's put all our treasures together
-- the clocks, plates, cups cracked by the cold --
into a sack and carry them
to the sea
and let our possessions sink
into one alarming breaker
that sounds like a river.
May whatever breaks
be reconstructed by the sea
with the long labor of its tides.
So many useless things
which nobody broke
but which got broken anyway

BEER

Charles Bukowski

I don't know how many bottles of beer
I have consumed while waiting for things
to get better
I don't know how much wine and whisky
and beer
mostly beer
I have consumed after
splits with women-
waiting for the phone to ring
waiting for the sound of footsteps,
and the phone to ring
waiting for the sounds of footsteps,
and the phone never rings
until much later
and the footsteps never arrive
until much later
when my stomach is coming up
out of my mouth
they arrive as fresh as spring flowers:
"what the hell have you done to yourself?
it will be 3 days before you can fuck me!"

the female is durable
she lives seven and one half years longer
than the male, and she drinks very little beer
because she knows its bad for the figure.

while we are going mad
they are out
dancing and laughing
with horny cowboys.

well, there's beer
sacks and sacks of empty beer bottles
and when you pick one up
the bottle fall through the wet bottom
of the paper sack
rolling
clanking
spilling gray wet ash
and stale beer,
or the sacks fall over at 4 a.m.

in the morning
making the only sound in your life.

beer
rivers and seas of beer
the radio singing love songs
as the phone remains silent
and the walls stand
straight up and down
and beer is all there is.

homage to my hips
Clifton

Lucille

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don't fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips.
they don't like to be held back.
these hips have never been enslaved,
they go where they want to go
they do what they want to do.
these hips are mighty hips.
these hips are magic hips.
i have known them
to put a spell on a man and
spin him like a top!

Carrots

Lorna Crozier

Carrots are fucking
the earth. A permanent
erection , they push deeper
into the damp and dark.
All summer long
they try so hard to please.
Was it food for you,
Was it good?

Perhaps because the earth won't answer
they keep on trying.
While you stroll through the garden
thinking *carrot cake,*
carrots and onions in beef stew,
carrot pudding with caramel sauce,
they are fucking their brains out
in the hottest part of the afternoon.

The Red Wheelbarrow
Carlos Williams

William

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

In a Station of the Metro

Ezra Pound

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals, on a wet, black bough

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1.

I am nobody:
A red sinking autumn sun
Took my name away.

2.

I give permission
For this slow spring rain to soak
The violet beds.

3.

With a twitching nose
A dog reads a telegram
On a wet tree trunk.

4.

Burning autumn leaves,
I yearn to make the bonfire
Bigger and bigger.

5.

A sleepless spring night:
Yearning for what I never had
And for what never was.

Cell

Margaret Atwood

Now look objectively. You have to
admit the cancer cell is beautiful.
If it were a flower, you'd say, *How pretty*,
with its mauve centre and pink petals

or if a cover for a pulpy thirties
sci-fi magazine, *How striking*,
as an alien, a success,
all purple eye and jelly tentacles
and spines, or are they gills,
creeping around on granular Martian
dirt red as the inside of the body,

while its tender walls
expand and burst, its spores
scatter elsewhere, take root, like money,
drifting like a fiction or
miasma in and out of people's
brains, digging themselves
industriously in. The lab technician

says, *It has forgotten
how to die*. But why remember. All it wants is more
amnesia. More life, and more abundantly. To take
more. To eat more. To replicate itself. To keep on
doing those things forever. Such desires
are not unknown. Look in the mirror.

Schizophrenia

Jim Stevens

It was the house that suffered most.

It had begun with slamming doors, angry feet scuffing the carpets,
dishes slammed onto the table,
greasy stains spreading on the cloth.

Certain doors were locked at night,
feet stood for hours outside them,
dishes were left unwashed, the cloth
disappeared under a hardened crust.

The house came to miss the shouting voices,
the threats, the half-apologies, noisy
reconciliations, the sobbing that followed.

Then lines were drawn, borders established,
some rooms declared their loyalties,
keeping to themselves, keeping out the other.
The house divided against itself.

Seeing cracking paint, broken windows,
the front door banging in the wind,
the roof tiles flying off, one by one,
the neighbors said it was a madhouse.

It was the house that suffered most.