

Subject to Change

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A reflection on my students

They are so beautiful, and so very young
they seem almost to glitter with perfection,
these creatures that I briefly move among.

I never get to stay with them for long,
but even so, I view them with affection:
they are so beautiful, and so very young.

Poised or clumsy, placid or high-strung,
they're expert in the art of introspection,
these creatures that I briefly move among—

And if their words don't quite trip off the tongue
consistently, with just the right inflection,
they remain beautiful. And very young.

Still, I have to tell myself it's wrong
to think of them as anything but fiction,
these creatures that I briefly move among—

Because, like me, they're traveling headlong
in that familiar, vertical direction
that coarsens *beautiful*, blackmails *young*—
the two delusions we all move among.

Try reading the poem out loud.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS POEM – ASK YOUR OWN TOO!

1. What do you think the poet wants to say? How does she 'tell it slant'?
2. This form is called a villanelle – see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Villanelle> for yet more examples. How does it make the poem feel?
3. What details make the argument vivid?
4. Is the dismissal of delusion a sort of enlightenment?