

How to scan a poet

by [Malcolm Guite](#) in the [January 18, 2017](#) issue

My doctor tells me I will need a scan;
I tap a nervous rhythm with my feet,
“Just count to five,” she says, “and then sit down.

The gist of it is printed on this sheet,
So read it over when you are at home.
We’ll have a clearer picture when we meet.”

I read the letter in a waiting room,
Its language strangely rich for one like me
Image, Contrast, Resonance; a poem

Slips into view amidst the litany
Of Latin terms that make our medicine
A new poetic terminology.

The door is opened. I am ushered in
To lisp my list of symptoms, to rehearse
The undiscovered art of naming pain.

“It’s called *deep inspiration*,” says the nurse,
“Draw deep for me then simply hold your breath
And stay composed.” So I compose this verse.

She says, “We dye for contrast, to unearth
Each hidden image, which might bring
Some clue that takes us closer to the truth.

Be still and I will pass you through the ring,
Three passes, all in rhythm, and you’re free,
The resonance will show us everything.”

And now my Muse says much the same to me,
Scanning these lines, and calling me to sing.