

***Introduction to Poetry***

Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

they begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

***Untitled***

Stephen Crane

In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
Who squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said: "Is it good, friend?"  
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;  
"But I like it  
Because it is bitter,  
And because it is my heart."

***untitled***

Stephen Crane

I stood upon a high place,  
And saw, below, many devils  
Running, leaping,  
And carousing in sin.  
One looked up, grinning,  
And said: "Comrade! Brother!"

***The Guitarist Tunes Up***

Frances Cornford

With what attentive courtesy he bent  
Over his instrument;  
Not as a lordly conqueror who could  
Command both wire and wood,  
But as a man with a loved woman might,  
Inquiring with delight  
What slight essential things she had to say  
Before they started, he and she, to play.

***Song of the Powers***

David Mason

Mine, said the stone,  
mine is the hour.  
I crush the scissors,  
such is my power.  
stronger than wishes,  
my power, alone.

Mine, said the paper,  
mine are the words  
that smother the stone  
with imagined birds,  
reams of them, flown  
from the mind of the shaper.

Mine, said the scissors,  
mine all the knives  
gashing through paper's  
ethereal lives;  
nothing's so proper  
as tattering wishes.

As stone crushes scissors,  
as paper snuffs stone  
and scissors cut paper,  
all end alone.  
So heap up your paper  
and scissors your wishes  
and uproot the stone  
from the top of the hill.  
They all end alone.  
As you will, you will.

***you fit into me***

Margaret Atwood

you fit into me  
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook  
an open eye

***Turning Pro***

Ishmael Reed

There are just so many years  
you can play amateur baseball  
without turning pro  
All of the sudden you realize  
you're ten years older than  
everybody in the dugout  
and that the shortstop could  
be your son.

The front office complains  
about your slowness in making  
the line-up  
They send down memos about  
your faulty bunts and point out  
how the runners are always faking  
you out  
"His ability to steal bases  
has faded" they say  
They say they can't convince  
the accountant that there's such  
a thing as "Old Time's Sake"  
But just as the scribes were  
beginning to write you  
off  
as a has-been on his last leg  
You pulled out that fateful  
shut-out  
and the whistles went off  
and the fireworks scorched a  
747  
And your name lit up the scoreboard  
and the fans carried you on their  
shoulders right out of the stadium  
and into the majors.

***Much madness is divinest sense***

Emily Dickinson

Much madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye,  
Much sense, the starkest madness.  
'Tis the majority  
In this, as all, prevail:  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur, you're straightway dangerous  
And handled with a chain.

***The Book***

Miller Williams

I held it in my hands while he told the story.

He had found it in a fallen bunker,  
a book for notes with all the pages blank.  
He took it to keep for a sketchbook and diary.

He learned years later, when he showed the book  
to an old bookbinder, who paled, and stepped back  
a long step and told him what he held,  
what he had laid the days of his life in.  
It's bound, the binder said, in human skin.

I stood turning it over in my hands,  
turning it in my head. Human skin.

What child did this skin fit? What man, what woman?  
Dragged still full of its flesh from what dream?

Who took it off the meat? Some other one  
who stayed alive by knowing how to do this?

I stared at the changing book and a horror grew,  
I stared and a horror grew, which was, which is,  
how beautiful it was until I knew.

***A Poison Tree***

William Blake

I was angry with my friend:  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe:  
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,  
Night and morning with my tears;  
And I sunned it with smiles,  
And with soft, deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night  
Till it bore an apple bright;  
And my foe beheld it shine,  
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole  
When the night had veiled the pole;  
In the morning glad I see  
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

***what the mirror said***

Lucille Clifton

listen,  
 you a wonder.  
 you a city  
 of a woman.  
 you got a geography  
 of your own.  
 listen,  
 somebody need a map  
 to understand you.  
 somebody need directions  
 to move around you.  
 listen,  
 woman,  
 you not a noplac  
 anonymous  
 girl;  
 mister with his hands on you  
 he got his hands on  
 some  
 damn  
 body!

***note, passed to superman*** Lucille Clifton

sweet jesus, superman,  
 if i had seen you  
 dressed in your blue suit  
 i would have known you.  
 maybe that choirboy clark  
 can stand around  
 listening to stories  
 but not you, not with  
 metropolis to save  
 and every crook in town  
 filthy with kryptonite.  
 lord, man of steel,  
 i understand the cape,  
 the leggings, the whole  
 ball of wax.  
 you can trust me,  
 there is no planet stranger  
 than the one i'm from.

***the lesson of the falling leaves***

Lucille Clifton

the leaves believe  
 such letting go is love  
 such love is faith  
 such faith is grace  
 such grace is god  
 i agree with the leaves

***When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer***

Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns  
 before me,  
 When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add,  
 divide, and measure them,  
 When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured  
 with much applause in the lecture room,  
 How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
 Till rising and gliding out I wandered off by myself,  
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
 Looked up in perfect silence at the stars.

***Many red devils . . .***

Stephen Crane

Many red devils ran from my heart  
 And out upon the page.  
 They were so tiny  
 The pen could mash them.  
 And many struggled in the ink.  
 It was strange  
 To write in this red muck  
 Of things from my heart.

***The Dance***

William Carlos Williams

In Breughel's great picture, The Kermess,  
 the dancers go round, they go round and  
 around, the squeal and the blare and the  
 tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles  
 tipping their bellies (round as the thick-  
 sided glasses whose wash they impound)  
 their hips and their bellies off balance  
 to turn them. Kicking and rolling about  
 the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those  
 shanks must be sound to bear up under such  
 rollicking measures, prance as they dance  
 in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess.

***Terence, this is stupid stuff***

A. E. Housman

“Terence, this is stupid stuff:  
 You eat your victuals fast enough;  
 There can't be much amiss, 'tis clear,  
 To see the rate you drink your beer.  
 But oh, good Lord, the verse you make,  
 It gives a chap the belly-ache.  
 The cow, the old cow, she is dead;  
 It sleeps well, the horned head:  
 We poor lads, 'tis our turn now  
 To hear such tunes as killed the cow.  
 Pretty friendship, 'tis to rhyme  
 Your friends to death before their time  
 Moping melancholy mad:  
 Come, pipe a tune to dance to, lad.”

Why, if 'tis dancing you would be  
 There's brisker pipes than poetry.  
 Say, for what were hop-yards meant,  
 Or why was Burton built on Trent?  
 Oh, many a peer of England brews  
 Livelier liquor than the Muse,  
 And malt does more than Milton can  
 To justify God's ways to man.  
 Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink  
 For fellows whom it hurts to think:  
 Look into the pewter pot  
 To see the world as the world's not.  
 And faith, 'tis pleasant till 'tis past:  
 The mischief is that 'twill not last.  
 Oh I have been to Ludlow fair  
 And left my necktie God knows where,  
 And carried half-way home, or near,  
 Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer:  
 Then the world seemed none so bad,  
 And I myself a sterling lad;  
 And down in lovely muck I've lain,  
 Happy till I woke again.  
 Then I saw the morning sky:  
 Heigho, the tale was all a lie;  
 The world, it was the old world yet,  
 I was I, my things were wet,  
 And nothing now remained to do  
 But begin the game anew.

Therefore, since the world has still  
 Much good, but much less good than ill,  
 And while the sun and moon endure  
 Luck's a chance, but trouble's sure,  
 I'd face it as a wise man would,  
 And train for ill and not for good.  
 'Tis true, the stuff I bring for sale  
 Is not so brisk a brew as ale:  
 Out of a stem that scored the hand  
 I wrung it in a weary land.  
 But take it: if the smack is sour,

The better for the embittered hour;  
 It should do good to heart and head  
 When your soul is in my soul's stead;  
 And I will friend you, if I may,  
 In the dark and cloudy day.

There was a king reigned in the East:  
 There when kings will sit to feast,  
 They get their fill before they think  
 With poisoned meat and poisoned drink.  
 He gathered all that springs to birth  
 From the many-venomed earth;  
 First a little, thence to more,  
 He sampled all her killing store;  
 And easy, smiling, seasoned sound,  
 Sate the king when healths went round.  
 They put arsenic in his meat  
 And stared aghast to watch him eat;  
 They poured strychnine in his cup  
 And shook to see him drink it up:  
 They shook, they stared as white's their shirt:  
 Them it was their poison hurt.  
 --I tell the tale that I heard told.  
 Mithridates, he died old.

***A man said . . .***

Stephen Crane

A man said to the universe:  
 “Sir, I exist!”  
 “However,” replied the universe,  
 “The fact has not created in me  
 A sense of obligation.”

***When the prophet . . .***

Stephen Crane

When the prophet, a complacent fat man,  
 Arrived at the mountain-top  
 He cried: “Woe to my knowledge!  
 I intended to see good white lands  
 And bad black lands—  
 But the scene is gray.”

***Earth***

John Hall Wheelock

“A planet doesn't explode of itself,” said dryly  
 The Martian astronomer, gazing off into the air—  
 “That they were able to do it is proof that highly  
 Intelligent beings must have been living there.”

***The trees in the garden . . .***

Stephen Crane

The trees in the garden rained flowers.  
 Children ran there joyously.  
 They gathered the flowers  
 Each to himself.  
 Now there were some  
 Who gathered great heaps—  
 --Having opportunity and skill—  
 Until, behold, only chance blossoms  
 Remained for the feeble.  
 Then a little spindling tutor  
 Ran importantly to the father, crying:  
 "Pray, come hither!  
 See this unjust thing in your garden!"  
 But when the father had surveyed,  
 He admonished the tutor:  
 "Not so, small sage!  
 This thing is just.  
 For, look you,  
 Are not they who possess the flowers  
 Stronger, bolder, and shrewder  
 Than they who have none?  
 Why should the strong—  
 --the beautiful strong—  
 Why should they not have the flowers?"

***Sindhi Woman***

Jon Stallworthy

Barefoot through the bazaar,  
 and with the same undulant grace  
 as the cloth blown back from her face,  
 she glides with a stone jar  
 high on her head  
 and not a ripple in her tread.

Watching her cross erect  
 stones, garbage, excrement, and crumbs  
 of glass in the Karachi slums,  
 I, with my stoop, reflect  
 they stand most straight  
 who learn to walk beneath a weight.

***The Golf Links***

Sarah N. Cleghorn

The golf links lie so near the mill  
 That almost every day  
 The laboring children can look out  
 And see the men at play.

***I Remember the Room was Filled with Light***

Judith Hemschemeyer

They were still young, younger than I am now.  
 I remember the room was filled with light  
 And moving air. I was watching him  
 Pick brass slivers from his hands as he did each night  
 After work. Bits of brass gleamed on his brow.  
 She was making supper. I stood on the rim  
 Of a wound just healing; so when he looked up  
 And asked me when we were going to eat  
 I ran to her, though she could hear. She smiled  
 And said, 'Tell him . . .' Then 'Tell her . . .' on winged feet  
 I danced between them, forgiveness in my cup,  
 Wise messenger of the gods, their child.

***It was a dream*** Lucille Clifton

in which my greater self  
 rose up before me  
 accusing me of my life  
 with her extra finger  
 whirling in a gyre of rage  
 at what my days had come to.  
 what,  
 i pleaded with her, could i do,  
 oh what could I have done?  
 and she twisted her wild hair  
 and sparked her wild eyes  
 and screamed as long as  
 i could hear her  
 This. This. This.

***For a Lady I Know***

Countee Cullen

She even thinks that up in heaven  
 Her class lies late and snores,  
 While poor black cherubs rise at seven  
 To do celestial chores.

***Oh No***

Robert Creeley

If you wander far enough  
 you will come to it  
 and when you get there  
 they will give you a place to sit

for yourself only, in a nice chair,  
 and all your friends will be there  
 with smiles on their faces  
 and they will likewise all have places.

***at the cemetery,  
walnut grove plantation, south carolina, 1989***

Lucille Clifton

among the rocks  
at walnut grove  
your silence drumming  
in my bones,  
tell me your names.

nobody mentioned slaves  
and yet the curious tools  
shine with your fingerprints.  
nobody mentioned slaves  
but somebody did this work  
who had no guide, no stone,  
who moulders under rock.

tell me your names,  
tell me your bashful names  
and i will testify.

*the inventory lists ten slaves  
but only men were recognized.*

among the rocks  
at walnut grove  
some of these honored dead  
were dark  
some of these dark  
were slaves  
some of these slaves  
were women  
some of them did this  
honored work.  
tell me your names  
foremothers, brothers,  
tell me your dishonored names.  
here lies  
here lies  
here lies  
here lies  
hear

***The Hat Lady***

Linda Pastan

In a childhood of hats—  
my uncles in homburgs and derbies,  
Fred Astaire in high black silk,  
the yarmulke my grandfather wore  
like the palm of a hand  
cradling the back of his head—  
only my father went hatless,  
even in winter.

And in the spring,  
when a turban of leaves appeared  
on every tree, the Hat Lady came  
with a fan of pins in her mouth  
and pins in her sleeves,  
the Hat Lady came—  
that Saint Sebastian of pins,  
to measure my mother's head.

I remember a hat of dove-gray felt  
that settled like a bird  
on the nest of my mother's hair.  
I remember a pillbox that tilted  
over one eye—pure Myrna Loy,  
and a navy straw with cherries caught  
at the brim that seemed real enough  
for a child to want to pick.

Last year when the chemicals  
took my mother's hair, she wrapped  
a towel around her head. And the Hat Lady came,  
a bracelet of needles on each arm,  
and led her to a place  
where my father and grandfather waited,  
head to bare head, and Death  
winked at her and tipped his cap.

***Sign for my Father, Who Stressed the Bunt***

David Bottoms

On the rough cut diamond,  
the hand-cut field below the dog lot and barn,  
we rehearsed the strict technique  
of bunting. I watched from the infield,  
the mound, the backstop  
as your left hand climbed the bat, your legs  
and shoulders squared toward the pitcher.  
You could drop it like a seed  
down either base line. I admired your style,  
but not enough to take my eyes off the bank  
that served as our center-field fence.

Years passed, three leagues of organized ball,  
no few lives. I could homer  
into the garden beyond the bank,  
into the left-field lot of Carmichael Motors,  
and still you stressed the same technique,  
the crouch and spring, the lead arm absorbing  
just enough impact. That whole tiresome pitch  
about basics never changing,  
and I never learned what you were laying down.

Like a hand brushed across the bill of a cap,  
let this be the sign  
I'm getting a grip on the sacrifice.

***A Manifesto for the Faint-Hearted***

Carole Oles

Don't curse your hands,  
the tangle of lines  
there. Look how  
in the deepening snow  
your feet make blue fish  
no one can catch.

Don't take personally  
the defection of leaves.  
You can't be abandoned  
by what you never owned.  
Spring will give back more  
green than you can bear.

Don't rest by the hearth  
when all you're worth  
tells you *Run!*  
If the fires within  
strangle, not even suns  
will comfort your bones.

You're not so special.  
The jungle's full of animals  
whose guts invert  
when a stronger one parts  
the camouflage, peers through  
as they climb a tree.

Don't think you're different.  
The world's full of runts,  
stutterers like yourself  
who'd save all they have  
not to lose it.  
They lose it.

Leave trails, be separate,  
dress warm, travel light.  
Eat fear to grow muscle,  
even Olympic champs fall.  
Store advice  
in a cool, dry place.

***The Explosion***

Philip Larkin

On the day of the explosion  
Shadows pointed toward the pithead:  
In the sun the slagheap slept.

Down the lane came men in pitboots  
Coughing oath-edged talk and pipe-smoke,  
Shouldering off the freshened silence.

One chased after rabbits; lost them;  
Came back with a nest of lark's eggs;  
Showed them; lodged them in the grasses.

So they passed in beards and moleskins,  
Fathers, brothers, nicknames, laughter,  
Through the tall gates standing open.

At noon, there came a tremor; cows  
Stopped chewing for a second; sun,  
Scarfed as in a heat-daze, dimmed.

*The dead go on before us, they  
Are sitting in God's house in comfort,  
We shall see them face to face—*

Plain as lettering in the chapels  
It was said, and for a second  
Wives saw men of the explosion

Larger than life they managed—  
Gold as on a coin, or walking  
Somehow from the sun towards them,

One showing the eggs unbroken.

***The Lake Isle of Innisfree***

William Butler Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin there, of clay and wattles made:  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, a noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I heart it in the deep heart's core.

**Mid-Term Break**

Seamus Heaney

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
 Counting bells knelling classes to a close.  
 At two o'clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying—  
 He had always taken funerals in his stride—  
 And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
 When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
 By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were “sorry for my trouble,”  
 Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
 Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry, tearless sighs.  
 At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
 With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
 And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
 For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,  
 He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.  
 No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

**from *The Man with the Blue Guitar***

Wallace Stevens

The man bent over his guitar,  
 A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.

They said, “You have a blue guitar,  
 You do not play things as they are.”

The man replied, “Things as they are  
 Are changed upon the blue guitar.”

And they said then, “But play, you must,  
 A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar  
 Of things exactly as they are.”

**from *Howl***

Allen Ginsberg

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness  
 starving, hysterical naked,  
 dragging themselves through the Negro streets at dawn looking  
 for an angry fix.  
 angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection  
 to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,  
 who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking  
 in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across  
 the tops of cities contemplating jazz,  
 who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw  
 Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs  
 illuminated,  
 who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes  
 hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the  
 scholars of war,  
 who were expelled from academies for crazy & publishing  
 obscene odes on the windows of the skull,  
 who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their  
 money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through  
 the wall,  
 who ate fire in paint hotels or drank Turpentine in Paradise  
 Alley, death or purgatoried their torsos night after night  
 with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, and alcohol  
 who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar  
 to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,  
 yacketyakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and  
 memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of  
 hospitals and jails and wars,  
 who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off  
 the roof waving genitals and manuscripts  
 who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully,  
 gave up and were forced to open antique stores where  
 they thought they were growing old and cried . . .

***this is just to say***

William Carlos Williams

I have eaten  
 the plums  
 that were in  
 the icebox

and which  
 you were probably  
 saving  
 for breakfast

Forgive me  
 they were delicious  
 so sweet  
 and so cold

**Writing**

Jan Dean

and then i saw it  
 saw it all all the mess  
 and blood and everythink  
 and mam agenst the kichin dor  
 the flor all stiky  
 and the wall all wet  
 and red an dad besid the kichen draw  
 i saw it saw it all  
 an wrot it down an ever word of it is tru

*You must take care to write in sentences,  
 Check your spellings and your paragraphs.  
 Is this finished? It is rather short.  
 Perhaps next time you will have more to say.*

**How to Write a Poem about the Sky**

Leslie Marmon Silko

FOR THE STUDENTS OF THE BETHEL, MIDDLE SCHOOL, BETHEL,  
 ALASKA—FEB. 1975

You see the sky now  
 colder than the frozen river  
 so dense and white  
 little birds  
 walk across it.

You see the sky now  
 but the earth  
 is lost in it  
 and there are no horizons.  
 It is all  
 a single breath.

You see the sky  
 but the earth is called  
 by the same name  
                                   the moment  
                                   the wind shifts  
 sun splits it open  
 and bluish membranes  
 push through slits of skin.

You see the sky

**The English are So Nice!**

D. H. Lawrence

The English are so nice  
 So awfully nice  
 They are the nicest people in the world.

And what's more, they're very nice about being nice  
 About your being nice as well!  
 If you're not nice they soon make you feel it.

Americans and French and Germans and so on  
 They're all very well  
 but they're not *really* nice, you know.  
 They're not nice in *our* sense of the word, are they now?

That's why one doesn't have to take them seriously.  
 We must be nice to them, of course,  
 Of course, naturally.  
 But it doesn't really matter what you say to them,  
 They don't really understand  
 You can just say anything to them:  
 Be nice, you know, just nice  
 But you must never take them seriously, they wouldn't  
                                   understand,  
 Just be nice, you know! oh, fairly nice,  
 Not too nice, of course, they take advantage  
 But nice enough, just nice enough  
 To let them feel they're not quite as nice as they might be.

**Oh, Oh**

William Hathaway

My girl and I amble a country lane,  
 moo cows chomping daisies, our own  
 sweet saliva green with grass stems.  
 "Look, look," she says at the crossing,  
 "the choo-choo's light is on." And sure  
 enough, right smack dab in the middle  
 of maple dappled summer sunlight  
 is the lit headlight—so funny.  
 An arm waves to us from the black window.  
 We wave gaily to the arm. "When I hear  
 trains at night I dream of being president,"  
 I say dreamily. "And me first lady," she  
 says loyally. So when the last boxcars,  
 named after wonderful, faraway places,  
 and the caboose chuckle by we look  
 eagerly to the road ahead. And there,  
 poised and growling, are fifty Hell's Angels.

***Behind Grandma's House***

Gary Soto

At ten I wanted fame. I had a comb  
and two Coke bottles, a tube of Bryl-creem.  
I borrowed a dog, one with  
Mismatched eyes and a happy tongue,  
And wanted to prove I was tough  
In the alley, kicking over trash cans,  
A dull chime of tuna cans falling.  
I hurled light bulbs like grenades  
And men teachers held their heads  
Fingers of blood lengthening  
On the ground. I flicked rocks at cats,  
Their goofy faces spurred with foxtails.  
I kicked fences. I shooed pigeons.  
I broke a branch from a flowering peach  
And frightened ants with a stream of spit.  
I said, "*Chale*," "In your face," and "No way  
Daddy-O" to an imaginary priest  
Until grandma came into the alley,  
Her apron flapping in a breeze,  
Her hair mussed, and said, "Let me help you,"  
And punched me between the eyes.

***Eating Poetry***

Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.  
She does not understand.  
When I get down on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.

I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

***this is a photograph of me***

Margaret Atwood

It was taken some time ago.  
At first it seems to be  
a smeared  
print: blurred lines and grey flecks  
blended with the paper;

then, as you scan  
it, you see in the left-hand corner  
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree  
(basalm or spruce) emerging  
and, to the right, halfway up  
what ought to be a gentle  
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,  
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken  
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center  
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where  
precisely, or to say  
how large or small I am:  
the effect of water  
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,  
eventually  
you will be able to see me.)

***Nothing Gold Can Stay***

Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.

***Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird***

Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy mountains  
The only moving thing  
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,  
Like a tree  
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman  
Are one.  
A man and a woman and a blackbird  
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window  
With barbaric glass.  
The shadow of the blackbird  
Crossed it, to and fro.  
The mood  
Traced in the shadow  
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,  
Why do imagine golden birds?  
Do you not see how the blackbird  
Walks around the feet  
Of the woman about you?

VIII

I know noble accents  
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;  
But I know, too,  
That the blackbird is involved  
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.  
The blackbird must by flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.  
It was snowing  
And it was going to snow.  
The blackbird sat  
In the cedar limbs.

***The Emperor of Ice Cream*** Wallace Stevens

Call the roller of big cigars,  
The muscular one, and bid him whip  
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.  
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress  
As they are used to wear, and let the boys  
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers  
Let be be finale of seem.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,  
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet  
On which she embroidered fantails once  
And spread it so as to cover her face.  
If her horny feet protrude, they come  
To show how cold she is, and dumb.  
Let the lamp affix its beam.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

***The Sick Rose*** William Blake

O Rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy,  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

***Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop***

William Butler Yeats

I met the Bishop on the road  
And much said he and I.  
“Those breasts are flat and fallen now,  
Those veins must soon be dry;  
Live in a heavenly mansion,  
Not in some foul sty.”

“Fair and foul are near of kin,  
And fair needs foul,” I cried.  
“My friends are gone, but that’s a truth  
Nor grave nor bed denied,  
Learned in bodily lowliness  
And in the heart’s pride.

“A woman can be proud and stiff  
When on love intent;  
But Love has pitched his mansion in  
The place of excrement;  
For nothing can be sole or whole  
That has not been rent.”

***Inversnaid***

Gerard Manley Hopkins

This darksome burn, horseback brown,  
His rollrock highroad roaring down,  
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam  
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth  
Turns and twindles over the broth  
Of a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning,  
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew  
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through,  
Wiry heathpacks, flitches of fern,  
And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left.  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

***Not Waving but Drowning***

Stevie Smith

Nobody heard him, the dead man,  
But still he lay moaning:  
I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking  
And now he’s dead  
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,  
They said.

On, no no no, it was too cold always  
(Still the dead one lay moaning)  
I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.

*A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*

Craig Raine

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings  
and some are treasured for their markings—

they cause the eyes to melt  
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but  
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight  
and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish  
like engravings under tissue paper.  
Rain is when the earth is television.  
It has the property of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside—  
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film  
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist  
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,  
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it  
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up  
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer  
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.  
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt  
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,  
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves—  
in colour, with their eyelids shut.