

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
anonymou
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.