

“How to Eat A Poem”

Eve Merriam

Don't be polite.

Bite in.

Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice that

may run down your chin.

It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.

You do not need a knife or fork or spoon
or plate or napkin or tablecloth.

For there is no core

or stem

or rind

or pit

or seed

or skin

to throw away.

“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

“Lucy Wan”

Anonymous, 16th Century

Fair Lucy she sits at her father’s door,
A-weeping and making moan,
And by there came her brother dear:
‘What ails thee, Lucy Wan?’

‘I ail, and I ail, dear brother,’ she said,
‘I’ll tell you the reason why;
There is a child between my two sides,
Between you, dear Billy, and I.’

And he has drawn his good broad sword,
That hung down by his knee,
And he has cutted off Lucy Wan’s head.
And her fair body in three.

‘Oh, I have cutted off my greyhound’s head,
And I pray you pardon me.’
‘Oh, this is not the blood of our greyhound,
But the blood of our Lucy.’

‘Oh, what shall you do when your father comes to know?
My son, pray tell unto me.’
‘I shall dress myself in a new suit of blue
And sail to some far country.’

‘Oh, what will you do with your houses and your lands?
My son, pray tell unto me?’
‘Oh, I shall leave them all to my children so small,
By one, by two, by three.’

‘Oh, when shall you turn to your own wife again?
My son, pray tell unto me.’
‘When the sun and the moon rise over yonder hill,
And I hope that may never, never be.’

“The Unquiet Grave”

Anonymous, 15th Century

‘The wind doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true-love,
In cold grave she was lain.

‘I’ll do as much for my true-love
As any young man may;
I’ll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelvemonth and a day.’

The twelvemonth and a day being up,
The dead began to speak:
‘Oh who sits weeping on my grave,
And will not let me sleep?’

‘Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,
And will not let you sleep;
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,
And that is all I seek.’

‘You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;
But my breath smells earthy strong;
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,
Your time will not be long.

‘Tis down in yonder garden green,
Love, where we used to walk,
The finest flower that ere was seen
Is withered to a stalk.

‘The stalk is withered dry, my love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my love,
Till God calls you away.’

“I Am Stretched on Your Grave”

(Táim shínte ar do h’uaigh)

Anonymous, 17th Century

I am stretched on your grave and will lie there forever,
If your hands were in mine, I’d be sure they’d not sever,
My appletree, my brightness ‘tis time we were together,
For I smell of the earth and am worn by the weather.

When my family thinks that I’m safe in my bed,
From night until morning I am stretched at your head.
Calling out to the air with tears hot and wild,
My grief for the girl that I loved as a child.

Do you remember the night we were lost
In the shade of the blackthorn and the chill of the frost?
Thanks be to Jesus we did what was right
And your maidenhead still is your Pillar of Light.

The priests and the friars approach me in dread,
Because I still love you, my love, and your dead.
And still would be your shelter through rain and through storm
For with you in the cold ground I cannot sleep warm.

I am stretched on your grave and will lie there forever,
If your hands were in mine, I’d be sure they’d not sever,
My appletree, my brightness ‘tis time we were together,
For I smell of the earth and am worn by the weather. “

“Western Wind”

Anonymous, 16th Century

Western wind, when wilt thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my lover were in my arms
And I in my bed again!

An older version appears in Middle English

Westron wynde, when wilt thou blow,
The small raine down can raine.
Cryst, if my love were in my armes
And I in my bedde again!

“The Bat”

Theodore Roethke

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is amiss or out of place
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

***The Classic Tradition of Haiku:
An Anthology***
Fabion Bowers, editor¹

three translations of a poem by Matsuo Bashō,
(1644-1694)

On dead branches crows remain perched
at autumn's end.

—Hiroaki Sato

•

on a barren branch
a raven perched—
autumn dusk

—William J. Higginson

•

On a leafless bough
A crow is sitting: —autumn,
Darkening now—

—Harold Gould Henderson

¹ Bowers, Fabion, ed. *The Classic Tradition of Haiku:
An Anthology*. Mineola: Dover Thrift Editions, 1996.

² Wright, Richard. *Haiku: This Other World*.
New York: Anchor Books, 1998.

Haiku: This Other World
Richard Wright²

52

Gazing at her face
Reflected in the spring pond,
The girl grimaces.

200

A silent spring wood:
A crow opens its sharp beak
And creates a sky.

337

Blue-black beak open,
The crow hurls a caw straight at
A sinking red sun.

367

An old blindman
Playing a black violin
Amid fallen leaves.

408

A dead mouse floating
Atop a bucket of cream
In the dawn spring light.

474

A white butterfly
Sits with slowly moving wings
On a dead black snake.

561

An old lonely man
Had a long conversation
Late one winter night.

James Wright

“Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio”

In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home,
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

“Beginning”

The moon drops one or two feathers into the field.
The dark wheat listens.
Be still.
Now.
There they are, the moon's young, trying
Their wings.
Between trees, a slender woman lifts up the lovely shadow
Of her face, and now she steps into the air, now she is gone
Wholly, into the air.
I stand alone by an elder tree, I do not dare breathe
Or move.
I listen.
The wheat leans back toward its own darkness,
And I lean toward mine.

“Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, MN”

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

William Blake

“The Chimney Sweeper”¹

When my mother died I was very young.
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “ ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep! ‘weep!”
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl’d like a lamb’s back, was shav’d: so I said:
“Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head’s bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.”

And so he was quiet & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & Jack,
Were all of them lock’d up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open’d the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we arose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

“The Chimney Sweeper”²

A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil’d among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

¹ *Songs of Innocence*

Dover Publications, New York © 1971
[original self-publication 1789]

² *Songs of Experience*

Dover Publications, New York © 1984
[original self-publication 1794]

e. e. cummings
“in Just”

l(a

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

l(a

whistles far and wee

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and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

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when the world is puddle-wonderful

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the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-sotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and
the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

Francesco Petrarch (July 1304 - July 1374)

from *Rime Sparse*

original Italian

i

Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
in sul mio primo giovenile errore
quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'i' sono,

del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono
fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore,
ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,
spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono.

Ma ben veggio or sí come al popol tutto
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
di me mesdesmo meco mi vergogno;

et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto,
e 'l pentersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente
che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.

taken from:

<http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html>

English translation

i

You who hear the sound, in scattered rhymes,
of those sighs on which I fed my heart,
in my first vagrant youthfulness,
when I was partly other than I am,

I hope to find pity, and forgiveness,
for all the modes in which I talk and weep,
between vain hope and vain sadness,
in those who understand love through its trials.

Yet I see clearly now I have become
an old tale amongst all these people, so that
it often makes me ashamed of myself;

and shame is the fruit of my vanities,
and remorse, and the clearest knowledge
of how the world's delight is a brief dream.

trans: A.S. Kline

Emund Spencer (1552 — 1599)

from *Amoretti*

IX

Long while I sought to what I might compare
Those powerful eyes, which lighten my dark spright,
Yet find I nought on earth to which I dare
Resemble th' image of their goodly light.
Not to the sun, for they do shine by night;
Nor to the moon, for they are changed never;
Nor to the stars, for they have purer sight;
Nor to the fire, for they consume not ever;
Nor to the lightning, for they still persever;
Nor to the diamond, for they are more tender;
Nor unto crystal, far nought may them sever;
Nor unto glass, such baseness might offend her;
Then to the Maker self they likest be,
Whose light doth lighten all that here we see.

English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology. Richard S. Sylvester, ed. W.W. Norton & Co., New York, © 1974.

William Shakespeare (1564 — 1616)

from *The Sonnets*

126

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his fickle hour;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st.
If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure:
Her audit (though delayed) answered must be,
And her quietus is to render thee.

The Sonnets and Narrative Poems: The Complete Non-Dramatic Poetry. Sylvan Barnet, ed. Signet Classic, Penquin Books, New York, © 1989.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Nov. 12, 1648/51 — April 17, 1695)

149

Were the perils of the ocean fully weighed,
no man would voyage, or, could he but read
the hidden dangers, knowingly proceed
or dare to bait the bull to frenzied rage.

Were prudent rider overly dismayed,
should he contemplate the fury of his steed
or ponder where its headlong course might lead,
there'd be no reining hand to be obeyed.

But were there one so daring, one so bold
that, heedless of the danger, he might place,
upon Apollo's reins emboldened hand

To guide the fleeting chariot bathed in gold,
the diversity of life he would embrace
and never chose a state to last his span.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Margaret Sayers Peden, trans.
Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilimgüe, New York, © 1985.

Lady Mary Wroth (1587 — 1651/3)

from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*

I

When night's blacke Mantle could most darknes prove,
And sleepe deaths Image did my senses hier,
From knowledg of my self, then thoughts did move
Swifter then those, most switnes need require:

In sleepe, a Chariot drawne by wind'd desire,
I sawe: wher sate bright Venus Queene of Love,
And att her feete her sonne, still adding fire
To burning hearts which she did hold above,

But one hart flaming more then all the rest,
The goddesse held, and put itt to my brest,
Dear sonne now shutt (shoot), sayd she: thus must we winne;

Hee her obay'd, and martir'd my poore hart.
I, waking hop'd as dreames itt would depart,
Yett since: O mee, a lover have I binn.

The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth. Josephine A. Roberts, ed.
Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, © 1983.

John Berryman (October 25, 1914 – January 7, 1972)

from *Berryman's Sonnets*

115

All we were going strong last night this time,
the *mots* were flying & the frozen daiquiris
were downing, supine on the floor lay Lise
listening to Schubert grievous & sublime,
my head was frantic with a following rime:
it was a good evening, an evening to please,
I kissed her in the kitchen—ecstasies—
among so much good we tamped down the crime.

The weather's changing. This morning was cold,
as I made for the grove, without expectation,
some hundred Sonnets in my pocket, old,
to read her if she came. Presently the sun
yellowed the pines & my lady came not
in blue jeans & a sweater. I sat down & wrote.

Berryman's Sonnets. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York. © 1968.

Billy Collins (March 22, 1941 —)

Sonnet

All we need is fourteen lines, well, thirteen now,
and after this one just a dozen
to launch a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas,
then only ten more left like rows of beans.
How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan
and insist the iambic bongos must be played
and rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,
one for every station of the cross.
But hang on here while we make the turn
into the final six where all will be resolved,
where longing and heartache will find an end,
where Laura will tell Petrarch to put down his pen,
take off those crazy medieval tights,
blow out the lights, and come at last to bed.

Literature and the Writing Process, 8th Edition. Elizabeth McMahan,
et.al., eds. Pearson Prentice Hall., New Jersey, © 2007.

e. e. cummings

“i carry your heart with me(i carry it in”

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)

i fear

no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

Complete Poems: 1913-1962

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, © 1963.

Marilyn Hacker

“untitled”

You did say, need me less and I'll want you more.

I'm still shellshocked at needing anyone,
used to being used to it on my own.

It won't be me out on the tiles till four-
thirty, while you're in bed, willing the door
open with your need. You wanted her then,
more. Because you need to, I woke alone
in what's not yet our room, strewn, though, with your
guitar, shoes, notebook, socks, trousers enjambed
with mine. Half the world was sleeping it off
in every other bed under my roof.

I wish I had a roof over my bed
to pull down on my head when I feel damned
by wanting you so much it looks like need.

Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons

Arbor House, New York, © 1986.