POETRY PACKET

*poetry is one of the three major types, or genres of literature, the others being prose and drama.

åde poetry is language which reflects imagination, emotion, and thinking in verse form . . .

Poetry defies simple definition because there is no single characteristic that is found in all poems and not found in all poems. In other words, poems are what philosophers of language call an "ill-defined set."

*Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom. --Robert Frost

♥ Poetry has been traditionally thought to be about emotions, and indeed, it is. --Estess & Mc Cann

What I like in a good author isn't what he says, but what he whispers. --Logan Pearsall Smith

♫ The essentials of poetry are rhythm, dance, and the human voice. --Earle Birney

❖ Poetry is boned with ideas, nerved and blooded with emotions, all held together by the delicate, tough skin of words. --Paul Engle

◊ Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess what is seen during a moment. --Carl Sandburg

♥ The desire to write grows with writing. --Erasmus

Apple What we learn with pleasure, we never forget. --Alfred Mercier.

當您 When words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain. --Shakespeare

☀ A book must be an axe for the frozen sea inside of us. --Franz Kafka
from AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM
by Alexander Pope (1711)

1. 'Tis with our judgments as our watches; none
2. go just alike, yet each believes his own.

3. Of all the causes which conspire to blind
4. Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,
5. What the weak head with strongest bias rules,
6. Is pride, the never-failing vice of fools.

7. 'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
8. But the joint force and full result of all.

9. Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
10. Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

11. A little learning is a dangerous thing:
12. Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.
13. There shallow droughts intoxicate the brain,
14. And drinking largely sobers us again.

15. We think our fathers fools, so wise we grow;
16. Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.

17. Good nature and good sense must ever join;
18. To err is human, to forgive divine.

TO THE VIRGINS,
TO MAKE MUCH OF TIME
by Robert Herrick (1648)

1. Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

5. The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a getting
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

10. That age was best that is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

14. Then be not coy, but use your time.
And, while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

Musée des Beaux Arts'
W. H. Auden

1. About suffering they were never wrong.
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
Walking dully along.

5. How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood.

10. They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the
Torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's Icarus.2 for instance: how everything turns

15. Quite leisurely from the disaster: the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry.
But for him it was not an important failure: the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water: and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

20. Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky. Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

2. Brueghel's (1568-1625) painting: The Fall of Icarus, a

painting by Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525-1619).
SECTION ONE:
OPENERS
Introduction to Poetry

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 water-ski 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.

Advice to Writers

Even if it keeps you up all night, wash down the walls and scrub the floor of your study before composing a syllable.

Clean the place as if the Pope were on his way. Spotlessness is the niece of inspiration.

The more you clean, the more brilliant your writing will be, so do not hesitate to take to the open fields to scour the undersides of rocks or swab in the dark forest upper branches, nests full of eggs.

When you find your way back home and stow the sponges and brushes under the sink, you will behold in the light of dawn the immaculate altar of your desk, a clean surface in the middle of a clean world.

From a small vase, sparkling blue, lift a yellow pencil, the sharpest of the bouquet, and cover pages with tiny sentences like long rows of devoted ants that followed you in from the woods.
It is easy to find out if a poet is a contemporary poet and thus avoid the imbroglio of calling him Victorian or worse, Elizabethan, or worse yet, medieval.

If you look him up in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and the year of his birth is followed only by a dash and a small space for the numerals only spirits know, then it is safe to say that he is probably alive, perhaps out walking in a pale coat, inhaling the night air, alive and contemporary as he lights a cigarette and the smoke billows forth like an amorphous thought dissipating over the cold, barge-heavy river he is staring into.

But if the dash in the book is followed by another year, he is not contemporary; perhaps he is nothing at all save what remains on the few pages there for you to read and maybe read over again, read aloud to an empty room.

Did you know that it is possible if you read a poem enough times, if you read it over and over without stopping, that you can make the author begin to spin gently, even affectionately, in his grave?

History is busy tonight in the freezing cemetery carving death dates in stone with a hammer and chisel and closing those parentheses that are used to embrace our lives, as if we were afterthoughts dropped into a long sentence.

In the light of all this, I am thankful that I can even see History standing there holding her allegorical tools. And I am amazed at how tall and solemn she looks and how immaculate are her robes.

*Billy Collins*
Poems by Billy Collins

I might as well begin by saying how much I like the title.
It gets me right away because I’m in a workshop now
so immediately the poem has my attention,
like the Ancient Mariner grabbing me by the sleeve.

And I like the first couple of stanzas,
the way they establish this mode of self-pointing
that runs through the whole poem
and tells us that words are food thrown down
on the ground for other words to eat.
I can almost taste the tail of the snake
in its own mouth,
if you know what I mean.

But what I’m not sure about is the voice,
which sounds in places very casual, very blue jeans,
but other times seems standoffish,
professorial in the worst sense of the word
like the poem is blowing pipe smoke in my face.
But maybe that’s just what it wants to do.

What I did find engaging were the middle stanzas,
especially the fourth one.
I like the image of clouds flying like lozenges
which gives me a very clear picture.
And I really like how this drawbridge operator
just appears out of the blue
with his feet up on the iron railing
and his fishing pole jigging—I like jigging—
a hook in the slow industrial canal below.
I love slow industrial canal below. All those I’s.

Maybe it’s just me,
but the next stanza is where I start to have a problem.
I mean how can the evening bump into the stars?
And what’s an obligato of snow?
Also, I roam the decaffeinated streets.
At that point I’m lost. I need help.

The other thing that throws me off,
and maybe this is just me,
is the way the scene keeps shifting around.
First, we’re in this big aerodrome
and the speaker is inspecting a row of dirigibles,
which makes me think this could be a dream.
Then he takes us into his garden,
the part with the dahlias and the coiling hose,
though that’s nice, the coiling hose,
but then I’m not sure where we’re supposed to be.
The rain and the mint green light,
that makes it feel outdoors, but what about this wallpaper?
Or is it a kind of indoor cemetery?
There’s something about death going on here.

In fact, I start to wonder if what we have here
is really two poems, or three, or four,
or possibly none.

But then there’s that last stanza, my favorite.
This is where the poem wins me back,
especially the lines spoken in the voice of the mouse.
I mean we’ve all seen these images in cartoons before,
but I still love the details he uses
when he’s describing where he lives.
The perfect little arch of an entrance in the baseboard,
the bed made out of a curled-back sardine can,
the spool of thread for a table.
I start thinking about how hard the mouse had to work
night after night collecting all these things
while the people in the house were fast asleep,
and that gives me a very strong feeling,
a very powerful sense of something.
But I don’t know if anyone else was feeling that.
Maybe that was just me.
Maybe that’s just the way I read it.
Sometimes the notes are ferocious, skirmishes against the author raging along the borders of every page in tiny black script.
If I could just get my hands on you, Kierkegaard, or Conor Cruise O’Brien, they seem to say, I would bolt the door and beat some logic into your head.

Other comments are more offhand, dismissive—“Nonsense.” “Please!” “HA!!”—that kind of thing.
I remember once looking up from my reading, my thumb as a bookmark, trying to imagine what the person must look like who wrote “Don’t be a ninny” alongside a paragraph in The Life of Emily Dickinson.

Students are more modest needing to leave only their spayed footprints along the shore of the page.
One scrawls “Metaphor” next to a stanza of Eliot’s. Another notes the presence of “Irony” fifty times outside the paragraphs of A Modest Proposal.

Or they are fans who cheer from the empty bleachers, hands cupped around their mouths.
“Absolutely,” they shout to Duns Scotus and James Baldwin.
“Yes.” “Bull’s-eye.” “My man!”
Check marks, asterisks, and exclamation points rain down along the sidelines.

And if you have managed to graduate from college without ever having written “Man vs. Nature” in a margin, perhaps now is the time to take one step forward.

We have all seized the white perimeter as our own and reached for a pen if only to show we did not just laze in an armchair turning pages; we pressed a thought into the wayside, planted an impression along the verge.

Even Irish monks in their cold scriptoria jotted along the borders of the Gospels brief aside about the pains of copying, a bird singing near their window, or the sunlight that illuminated their page—anonymous men catching a ride into the future on a vessel more lasting than themselves.

And you have not read Joshua Reynolds, they say, until you have read him enwreathed with Blake’s furious scribbling.

Yet the one I think of most often, the one that dangles from me like a locket, was written in the copy of Catcher in the Rye I borrowed from the local library one slow, hot summer.
I was just beginning high school then, reading books on a davenport in my parents’ living room, and I cannot tell you how vastly my loneliness was deepened, how poignant and amplified the world before me seemed, when I found on one page a few greasy looking smears and next to them, written in soft pencil—by a beautiful girl, I could tell, whom I would never meet—“Part” the egg salad stains, but I’m in love.”

Billy Collins
Memento Mori

Poem BC 7

There is no need for me to keep a skull on my desk, to stand with one foot up on the ruins of Rome, or wear a locket with the sliver of a saint’s bone.

It is enough to realize that every common object in this sunny little room will outlive me—the carpet, radio, bookstand and rocker.

Not one of these things will attend my burial, not even this dented goosenecked lamp with its steady benediction of light,

though I could put worse things in my mind than the image of it waddling across the cemetery like an old servant, dragging the tail of its cord, the small circle of mourners parting to make room.

Billy Collins

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Invective

Poem BC 8

Turn away from me, you, and get lost in the past. Back to ancient Rome you go, with its parallel columns and syllogisms.

Stuff yourself with berries, eat lying on your side. Suck balls of snow carried down from the Alps for dessert.

I don’t care. I am leaving too, but for the margins of history, to a western corner of ninth century Ireland I go, to a vanishing, grey country far beyond your call.

There I will dwell with badgers, fish and deer, birds piercing the air and the sound of little bells. I will stand in pastures of watercress by the salmon-lashing sea.

I will stare into the cold, unblinking eyes of cows.

Billy Collins
Totally like whatever, you know?

In case you hadn't noticed,
it has somehow become totally uncool
to sound like you know what you're talking about?
Or believe strongly in what you're saying?
Invisible question marks and parenthetical (you know?!)s
have been attaching themselves to the ends of our sentences?
Even when those sentences aren't, like, questions? You know?

Declarative sentences — so-called
because they used to, like, DECLARE things to be true
as opposed to other things which were, like, not —
have been infected by a totally hip
and tragically cool interrogative tone? You know?
Like, don't think I'm uncool just because I've noticed this;
this is just like the word on the street, you know?
It's like what I've heard?
I have nothing personally invested in my own opinions, okay?
I'm just inviting you to join me on
the bandwagon of my own uncertainty?

What has happened to our conviction?
Where are the limbs out on which we once walked?
Have they been, like, chopped down
with the rest of the rain forest? You know?
Or do we have, like, nothing to say?
Has society become so, like, totally . . .
I mean absolutely . . . you know?
That we've just gotten to the point where it's just, like . . .
whatever!

And so actually our disarticulation . . . ness
is just a clever sort of . . . thing
to disguise the fact that we've become
the most aggressively inarticulate generation
to come along since . . .
you know, a long, long time ago!

I entreat you, I implore you, I exhort you, and
I challenge you: to speak with conviction.
To say what you believe in a manner that bespeaks
the determination with which you believe it.
Because contrary to the wisdom of the bumper sticker,
it is not enough these days to simply QUESTION AUTHORITY.
You have to speak with it, too.
As far as words go, or,
How to revise your paper

First of all, find a better title.
And make it more like yourself,
inventive, a bit punchy,
but good at heart.

The real problem is
you're not telling me enough
about far too much.

So reach for the pen,
the one with ink as red as your blood
is blue,
and tell me much more,
but about much less.

Sharpen your mind as if it were a pencil;
whet and hone it to its finest point.
Then as you write press harder,
write deeper.

Leave the imprint of your words
so that they can still be read on the
under pages of a loose leaf pad.

If some of your sentences are long, amusing puzzles
with a syntactic complexity that rivals the brain,
make others short.

If your paper were to catch fire,
make your introduction the paragraph
you would rush to save first.

And as far as words go,
mix the luscious Latinate ones
with spicy bits and gritty chunks
of good Germanic stuff.
Luxuriate in the romance of all languages;
make them all your own tongue.

Revise and rewrite, and switch around and scratch things out
(using carets, arrows, and asterisks)
until you stumble at last on the eloquent.

Taylor Marx
Glancing over my shoulder at the past,
I realize the number of students I have taught
is enough to populate a small town.

I can see it nestled in a paper landscape,
chalk dust flurrying down in winter,
nights dark as a blackboard.

The population ages but never graduates.
On hot afternoons they sweat the final in the park
and when it's cold they shiver around stoves
reading disorganized essays out loud.
A bell rings on the hour and everybody zigzags
into the streets with their books.

I forgot all their last names first and their
first names last in alphabetical order.
But the boy who always had his hand up
is an alderman and owns the haberdashery.
The girl who signed her papers in lipstick
leans against the drugstore, smoking,
brushing her hair like a machine.

Their grades are sewn into their clothes
like references to Hawthorne.
The A's stroll along with other A's.
The D's honk whenever they pass another D.

All the creative-writing students recline
on the courthouse lawn and play the lute.
Wherever they go, they form a big circle.
What teachers make, or
You can always go to law school
if things don’t work out

For every teacher who has ever made a difference

He says the problem with teachers is
What’s a kid going to learn
from someone who decided his best option in life
was to become a teacher?
He reminds the other dinner guests that it’s true
what they say about teachers:
Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.

I decide to bite my tongue instead of his
and resist the temptation to remind the dinner guests
that it’s also true what they say about lawyers.

Because we’re eating, after all, and this is polite company.

I mean, you’re a teacher, Taylor.
Be honest. What do you make?

And I wish he hadn’t done that
(asked me to be honest)
because, you see, I have a policy
about honesty and ass-kicking;
if you ask for it, then I have to let you have it.

You want to know what I make?

I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could.
I can make a C+ feel like a Congressional Medal of Honor
and an A- feel like a slap in the face.
How dare you waste my time with anything less
than your very best.

I make kids sit through 40 minutes of study hall
in absolute silence. No, you may not work in groups.

No, you may not ask a question.
Why won’t I let you get a drink of water?
Because you’re not thirsty, you’re bored, that’s why.

I make parents tremble in fear when I call home:
Hi. This is Mr. Mali. I hope I haven’t called at a bad time,
I just wanted to talk to you about something your son said today.
He said, “Leave the kid alone. I still cry sometimes, don’t you?”
And it was noblest act of courage I have ever seen.

I make parents see their children for who they are
and what they can be.

You want to know what I make?

I make kids wonder,
I make them question.
I make them criticize.
I make them apologize and mean it.
I make them write.
I make them read, read, read.
I make them spell definitely beautiful, definitely beautiful,
definitely beautiful
over and over and over again until they will never misspell
either one of those words again.
I make them show all their work in math
and hide it on their final drafts in English.
I make them understand that if you’ve got thts (the brains)
then you follow thts (the heart)
and if someone ever tries to judge you
by what you make, you give them thts (the finger).

Let me break it down for you, so you know what I say is true:
I make a goddamn difference! What about you?
Because my students asked me

what i would want them to do
at my funeral, i told them:

write & perform a collective poem
in which each of you says a line
about what i was like as a teacher,
about how i made you reach for stars
until you became them,
about how much you loved
to pretend
you hated me.

You mean even after you die
you're going to make us do work?

Taylor Mali
Sound and Silence: An Interview with Billy Collins
by Renée H. Shea

Appointed Poet Laureate of the United States in 2001, Billy Collins is the author of six collections of poetry, including Sailing Alone Around the Room, New and Selected Poems (Random House, 2001). He is a recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, a Distinguished Professor of English at Lehman College of the City University of New York, and a visiting writer at Sarah Lawrence College. Collins initiated “Poetry 180: A Poem a Day for American High Schools” (www.loc.gov/poetry/180/) with the hope of making poetry a part of students’ daily lives and edited an anthology of the poems entitled Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry (Random House, 2003).

renée shea: what were your goals for starting the web site poetry 180?

billy collins: my idea was to supplement the teaching of poetry for high school students by providing them with a poem a day, which they would simply hear, maybe as part of the morning announcements. they would not have to write about the poems but simply listen. i think one of the anxieties that sometimes degrades the spirit of poetry in academic settings is students’ uncertainty about how to approach a poem and about dealing with difficulty in poetry. in the introduction to poetry 180, i present a syllogism: “i speak and write english. this poem is written in english. i have no idea what this poem is saying.” that’s a very rudimentary, fundamental frustration!

so i tried to present 180 poems that were clear enough to be received on the first bounce, the first reading. the second motive was to expose students to extremely contemporary poems—because textbooks and anthologies tend to lag behind the times anywhere between 50 and 400 years—to kind of seduce students by hooking them with a poem that’s clear, contemporary, yet interesting. it might be a poem about skateboarding or music or son/daughter relationships to parents.

rs: i read in an anthology entitled First Loves’ that your first poetic love was John Donne’s “The Flea,” which is from the seventeenth century. yet, are you saying that teachers should start with the contemporary?

billy collins: i think reverse chronology is good, using contemporary poetry as a sort of seductive device, of going achronological—doing a contemporary poem, then one by Donne or Hardy, and talking about some common element in both of them, whether it’s humor or love.

billy collins: in your poem entitled “Introduction to Poetry,” you warned against the inclination to say the poem to a chair with rope / and torture a confession out of it / ... beating it with a hose / to find out what it really means,” but don’t we have to teach formal elements of poetry at some point?

billy collins: the drawback in teaching features of poetry is that it’s like dismantling a car and putting the parts out on the floor so you can identify the carburetor and the distributor. what’s a simile and metaphor? but you can’t put the key in the ignition and make the car go.

as far as its formal aspects go, i like to teach poetry in a participatory way. i get students to write three or four lines of iambic tetrameter, for instance. i tell them not to worry about rhyme or even making sense, just to get the best right. even writing nonsense in iambic tetrameter will present obstacles and resistance. i do this so they’ll experience the difficulty that formal poets experience—so they’ll feel the resistance against their expressive desires. i think that’s what formal poetry—or even informal poetry where the form is a little bit submerged, a little less apparent—is about. unless the poet feels some kind of counterpressure or resistance to his or her desire to get up on the branch and sing, i don’t think there’s much critical activity going on.

so whether it’s a strict sonnet form or three-line stanzas, it’s good to put students in the poetry driver’s seat. they’ll resist this, of course, but you have to tell them that they’re not committing acts of literature here! they’re just going through a very simple exercise so they can feel what milton and keats and wordsworth felt, and they’ll appreciate poetry more. i took oil painting classes many years ago for a summer, not because i wanted to become a painter, but i wanted to experience the difficulty of oil painting so i could appreciate it more.

also, if students are made aware of what diction the poet’s in and how to shift, they can use it on any text. i think it’s a good thing to point out that english has two personalities—the very formal latinate one and the more down-to-earth anglo-saxon personality. the latinate tends to be conceptual with words like “institution” and “democratization,” and the anglo-saxon side tends to be concrete and material: “table,” “chin,” “bottle.” any really great poet in english—and shakespeare is the absolute master—knows that he or she has these two facets at their disposal, and they mix the two together. so when shakespeare says,
“the multitudinous sea incarnadine” [from Macbeth], he takes this one little Anglo-Saxon monosyllabic word and puts these Latinate words on either side almost to crush it. Another good example is Theodore Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz”: It starts in Anglo-Saxon, shifts for two lines to Latinize, and then goes back to Anglo-Saxon.

RS: How do we, as teachers, achieve that balance between personal response and critical analysis? I’m afraid we often ask students to respond freely, but then we don’t value that when we ask them to write.

BC: I don’t have an answer to that exactly, because unless their responses are somewhat guided, they’ll be led into lots of irrelevant areas. If students think, “This is poetry, so anything goes,” then a poem about love invites them to talk about their autobiographical traumas with love. They need to be kept on track within the structure of the poem.

I think there are two ways to do that. One is to try to detect the poem’s organization—to find out whether it comes in stanzas or if it doesn’t, where there’s a break, maybe in blocks or lines. Then ask the students to organize their responses according to the organization of the poem. So if the poem has three stanzas, encourage them to make their responses three-part. That means, then, talking about organization and structure first.

Another way that I think is more interesting is to substitute for the question “What does this poem mean?” the question “How does this poem go?” In other words, how does this poem move? You could compare it to maneuvers on a basketball court. How does this poem find its way down the court? One way to start is to look at the very beginning of the poem to see where we are, then look at the end of the poem and see where we wind up.

A good example would be “Dover Beach,” where you start very simply, “The sea is calm tonight / ... the moon lies fair / Upon the straits...” That’s a very tranquil, simple language. How does he [Matthew Arnold] get from there to “where ignorant armies clash by night,” this disturbing, apocalyptic vision of struggle and alarm? So you can see that, well, he escalates at this point, he shifts direction here, introduces the element of love here. So you isolate various “shift points” of the poem, like shift points on a racecar. That relieves the students of saying, “This is what the poem means.” It asks them to follow the poet’s shifts of thought and tone; how do we get from the beginning to the end? Once a student can answer questions like that, the so-called meaning of the poem will be revealed.

RS: In an interview in The Paris Review, you commented, “The basis of trust for a reader used to be meter and end-rhyme. Now it’s tone that establishes the poet’s authority.” But tone is so difficult to teach. Any advice?

BC: The only way to teach tone is by recitation. I know that’s old-fashioned—what we used to call elocution. But if a student came to my office and could recite “Dover Beach”—and I don’t mean with operatic intensity standing up on a chair—but if a student were just able to say the lines in a way that clearly reveals an understanding of the emotional or conceptual run of the poem, I would prefer that to a 10-page paper on the poem.

One way to express tone is to have a number of students read a few lines of a poem. Maybe have one read the first four or five lines, then ask another student to read, [using] different ways of making that sound. You could bring in professional recordings, too.

RS: These days it seems that many of the young male students have no use for poetry. What can we do to challenge the stereotype that poetry isn’t a guy thing?

BC: I think Poetry 180 is one answer. I have poems about cars and kissing...kissing in cars! The idea is that you put out 180 books, especially for the recalcitrant boy with his baseball hat on sideways in full slouch in the back of the classroom, and there will be a poem for him somewhere. All of those poems are meant to be a doorway into why you’re reading.

RS: What about hip-hop and rap? Is it a good idea to use that as a kind of bridge to interest students in poetry?

BC: I don’t think hip-hop particularly leads to reading other poetry. These are fairly separate interests. If you’re trying to get a student interested in music, you play Dixieland, it doesn’t mean he’ll be interested in Mozart. Just because you can put hip-hop and John Donne under the general umbrella of poetry doesn’t mean that one will necessarily lead to the other. There are such discrete differences.

RS: Can you describe the very best teacher of poetry you ever had?

BC: It wasn’t until I got to graduate school, when I met a professor and poet named Robert Peters, who taught Victorian poetry. He taught it from the poet’s point of view, which means
instead of talking about how the poem reflected Victorian attitudes or how it fit into
Tennyson's life, he did close readings of the poem, not even for analysis but for appreciation
of sound. At first I thought I was wasting my time in this course because I was very test-orien-
ted, and I thought, "I'm not learning anything I could be tested on here." But gradually I
realized he was teaching me something more valuable. He had such a sensitive ear for
poetry. For the first time in a classroom, I was really reading poetry as poetry, not as culture,
but as a set of sounds set to rhythm.

RS: What have you learned from your own teaching about teaching poetry?

BC: I think I used to be very analysis-oriented, and I was definitely from the school of New
Criticism. I would lead students through a poem and put on a kind of analytical performance
of the poem. I think I've shifted away from that to some degree in that I try to emphasize
now in my teaching the pleasures of poetry that don't have anything to do with conceptual
pleasure. Unfortunately, these pleasures often don't require a teacher!

I see three things you can do with a poem besides analyzing it or in addition to analyzing.
Memorization is one. Another is to write out the poem in long hand. It's a way of duplicat-
ing the compositional experience, and writing it out slows you down. The other way is
reciting it aloud.

In *Poetry 180*, I write about the introduction of silence into the classroom, which I know is
a very difficult thing to do. This actually goes back to my teacher, Robert Peters. If we were
doing a Tennyson poem, we'd come to an interesting part or a complex part. He'd have us
read it, and then allow maybe 20 seconds, which is a long time. Then someone else would
read it, then another silence. I think that silence as an acceptable mode of being in a class-
room is a very good way to teach poetry.

Notes

1. Carmela Ciuraru, ed., *First Loves: Poets Introduce the Essential Poems That Captivated and

Mary Oliver
A Poetry Handbook
A PROSE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND WRITING POETRY

Everyone knows that poets are born and not made in school. This is true also of painters, sculptors, and musicians. Something that is essential can't be taught; it can only be given, or earned, or formulated in a manner too mysterious to be picked apart and redesigned for the next person.

Still, painters, sculptors, and musicians require a lively acquaintance with the history of their particular field and with past as well as current theories and techniques. And the same is true of poets. Whatever can't be taught, there is a great deal that can, and must, be learned.

This book is about the things that can be learned. It is about matters of craft, primarily. It is about the part of the poem that is a written document, as opposed to a mystical document, which of course the poem is also.
It has always seemed to me curious that the instruction of poetry has followed a path different from that of music or the visual arts, where a step-by-step learning process is usual and accepted as necessary. In an art class, every student may be told to make a drawing of a live model, or a vase of flowers, or three potatoes for that matter. Afterward, the instructor may examine and talk about the various efforts. Everyone in the class recognizes that the intention is not to accomplish a formal total act of creation, but is an example of what must necessarily come first—exercise.

Is anyone worried that creativity may be stifled as a result of such exercise? Not at all. There is, rather, a certain light that dialogue between instructor and student will shed on any number of questions about technique, and give knowledge (power) that will open the doors of process. It is craft, after all, that carries an individual's ideas to the far edge of familiar territory. The student who wishes to write a poem, however, or even, probably, intends. Continuing in this way, the writer never explores or tries other options. After only a chance thing vaguely felt and not understood, but the world is considered a matter of writing. As the writer begins to organize his opportunity to investigate and try other styles and techniques. Soon enough, when the writer's material is initially successful in any particular subject matter, the writer comes to realize how impossible it is to write in the first place. However, poems are to be written in emotional freedom, the work of an amateur. Why should our expectation about a poem be any different? It is too special, and particular, to be written in emotional freedom. Poems must, of course, be written in emotional freedom. The writer has no idea how to proceed, the poem fails, and the writer is frustrated. Perhaps someone will have an idea for a piece of music, you may actually hear, it in the privacy of your mind—and you will realize how impossible it would be to write it down, lacking as much of us do the particular and specialized knowledge of musical form. In the privacy of writing, it is done. It will not

This is why, when I teach a poetry workshop, I do so on the same assigned subject matter, these exercises also dealing with the same technique, and is focusing as well on being taught with the idea that the exercises for a group. The assignments, of course, differ too. Each writer quickly

Any instructor who agrees with the idea can easily

of suitable and helpful exercises. So can the students themselves. When each workshop member is at the same time dealing with the same technique, and is focusing as well on the same assigned subject matter, these exercises also and order up exercises dealing with craft. Since every class is different, the assignments, of course, differ too.

It will be taut and standoffish, the work of an amateur. Why should our expectation about a poem be any different? It is too special, and particular, to be written in emotional freedom. Poems must, of course, be written in emotional freedom. The writer has no idea how to proceed, the poem fails, and the writer is frustrated. Perhaps someone will have an idea for a piece of music, you may actually hear, it in the privacy of your mind—and you will realize how impossible it would be to write it down, lacking as much of us do the particular and specialized knowledge of musical form. In the privacy of writing, it is done. It will not
becomes interested in, and learns from, the work of the other members.

A poet's interest in craft never fades, of course. This book is not meant to be more than a beginning—but it is meant to be a good beginning. Many instructors, for whatever reasons, feel that their "professional" criticism (i.e., opinion) of a student's work is what is called for. This book is written in cheerful disagreement with that feeling. It is written in an effort to give the student a variety of technical skills—that is, options. It is written to empower the beginning writer who stands between two marvelous and complex things—an experience (or an idea or a feeling), and the urge to tell about it in the best possible conjunction of words.

As a room may be lighted by only a few dazzling paintings of the world's many, so these pages are illuminated by a handful of wonderful poems. It is a gesture only. There is no way to include half of what I would like to include—not enough money to pay for them, not enough paper to print them! Anyone who uses this handbook is expected to be reading poems also, intensely and repeatedly, from anthologies. Or, even better, from the authors' own volumes.

A Poetry Handbook was written with writers of poetry most vividly in my mind; their needs and problems and increase have most directly been my concerns. But I am hopeful that readers of poetry will feel welcome here, too, and will gain from these chapters an insight into the thoughtful machinery of the poem, as well as some possibly useful ideas about its history, and, if you please, some idea also of the long work and intense effort that goes into the making of a poem. The final three chapters are especially directed toward issues important to the writer of poems, but here too the reader of poems is heartily welcome.

Throughout the book I have used the following phrases interchangeably: the student, the beginning writer, the writer.
The Journey
by Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do--
determined to save
the only life that you could save.
Musee des Beaux Arts
by W.H. Auden

"Fall of Icarus" by Breughel

1 About suffering they were never wrong,
2 The Old Masters; how well, they understood
3 Its human position; how it takes place
4 While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
6 For the miraculous birth, there always must be
7 Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
8 On a pond at the edge of the wood:
9 They never forgot
10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
11 Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
12 Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
13 Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
14 In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
15 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
16 Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
17 But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
18 As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
19 Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
21 had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

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Reflections on Sept. 11

The only thing I can truly be certain of at this moment is confusion. Slightly awake, slightly asleep, I heard it was burning from the top down. They used words like "Pearl Harbor," "Revenge," "Palestine." I didn't feel like using words. I feel the unspoken is most propitious. All day, I only heard bagpipes playing the most bitter of symphonies. I saw both fall, just like Babylon, just like Icarus, coming much too close to the sun. I felt bad that, underneath the cloud, they couldn't see the sun. I felt guilty that I could. Like a ghost, I moved through the day, drifting with the wind from one place to the next, enjoying the sense of not being seen. I didn't have to talk; I didn't have to formulate opinions, analyses, for not a pair of eyes could find me. My mother told me to remember where I was; she said this day would live in infamy, or was that someone else; I can't remember. How can I remember where I was? I wasn't anywhere; I wasn't alive or dead. December 7th, September 11th, I feel bad for the next generation; they'll have so many dates to remember. I wish I could feel the revenge that I'm told I should feel. But watching small children in American classrooms using words like "cool," "awesome" as they watched this live movie unfold in front of their eyes, I was too consumed with emptiness. I hate that I am old enough to know how it is going to end.

It should have rained that day; it didn't feel sunny. Birds shouldn't have been able to fly that day; their animated flux only added to the surrealism. Flying past 30th-story windows, they may have been able to witness others attempting flight.

On the other side of the world, the birds and sun flew and shone just like usual. Children danced and sang in the streets, having no idea of death, not like this. Or maybe they do, and they're satisfied that I have to feel like them as they dance in my tears.

I went to Latin class; I got my first taste of past tenses. Nothing tragic happened at all; I hoped I would trip on a cracked sidewalk, fall, and tear open my knees and face; I wanted to bare their pain. It seemed fitting that all I came away with was a feeling of past tenses, for that's all I lived in that day. Walking, ate, heard, saw -- all past tense, all detached.

While watching CNN, I could faintly make out a cloaked figure carrying scythe. He lumbered about slowly, examining his patients. He set down his tool, took a few steps back, and sat down on a curb. Skull supported by bony hands, he absorbed the wreckage. Suddenly, he pulled back his hood to reveal our true selves. Despite the numbness his job must bring, a small tear shimmered in the sunlight as it slid quietly down his cheekbone.

As far as mental anguish goes,
the old painters were no fools.
They understood how the mind,
the freakiest dungeon in the castle,
can effortlessly imagine a crab with the face of a priest
or an end table complete with genitals.
And they knew that the truly monstrous
lies not so much in the wildly shocking,
a skeleton spinning a wheel of fire, say,
but in the small proaic touch
added to a tableau of the hellish,
the detail at the heart of the horrid.
In Bosch's The Temptation of St. Anthony,
for instance, how it is not so much
the boar-faced man in the pea-green dress
that frightens, but the white mandolin he carries,
the hooded corpse in a basket
but the way the basket is rigged to hang from a bare branch;
how, what must have driven St. Anthony
to the mossy brink of despair
was not the big, angry-looking fish
in the central panel,
the one with the two mouse-like creatures
conferring on its tail,
but rather what the fish is wearing:
a kind of pale orange officer's cape
and, over that,
a metal body-helmet secured by silvery wires,
and, yes, the ultimate test of faith
the sensible buckled chin strap
and the tiny sword that hangs from the thing,
that nightmare carp,
secure in its brown leather scabbard.
I never liked the World Trade Center.  
When it went up I talked it down  
As did many other New Yorkers.  
The twin towers were ugly monoliths  
That lacked the details the ornament the character  
Of the Empire State Building and especially  
The Chrysler Building, everyone's favorite.  
With its scalloped top, so noble.  
The World Trade Center was an example  
of what was wrong  
With American architecture.  
And it stayed that way for twenty-five years  

Until that Friday afternoon in February  
When the bomb went off and the buildings became  
A great symbol of America, like the Statue  
Of Liberty at the end of Hitchcock's "Saboteur."  
My whole attitude toward the World Trade Center  
Changed overnight. I began to like the way  
It comes into view as you reach Sixth Avenue  
From any side street, the way the tops  
Of the towers dissolve into white skies  
In the vast when you cross the Hudson  
Into the city across the George Washington Bridge.  
"The World Trade Center," by David Lehman, from "Valentine Place" (Scribner, 1996)

I remember very well the day my father died. It was the early morning of a Saturday in 1960. I was 16. My father was 55. I was awakened by the sound of his loud breathing — gasping, really — and by the sound of my mother's voice from the room beside mine. We lived in a new suburban house in Mississippi. "Carrol?" I heard my mother saying. "Carrol, wake up." Her voice was pleading, becoming uncertain, becoming afraid. My father's heavy, gasping breaths continued. I got up and walked down the short hall to the open doorway of his room and looked in. As it was so long ago now, I don't remember if my mother was leaning over his bed, or sitting on it, or if she was touching him, or standing beside him shouting. I only remember that my feet were cold because it was February. And I remember my pajamas being blue. And I remember that what I did was get on my knees in my father's bed and shake him, shake his shoulders, pat his face — he seemed to be sleeping, possibly having a nightmare — saying as I did the name I called him. "Daddy, Daddy, wake up." I could smell his large, sweaty body, feel his flaccid self, loose-limbed and malleable, his cheeks and mouth relaxed. He had quit gasping. I tried to open his mouth with my fingers and breathe in air. I tried to push down hard on his chest. I tried to move him. I put my arms around his shoulders and shook him. I heard my mother say, "Oh, God, no, no, no." And I felt dread and terror, love and ferocity, confusion, physical exertion, a need for greater ingenuity, for greater efficiency, and I felt failure. In short, I experienced all the small and large coefficients of a son's unswerving love.

Of course, I can tell you about all these.

Richard Ford is a novelist.

Photograph by Angel Franco
events, these feelings, about this intimacy, this witness because my father didn’t die by having a jet airplane fly through his window and obliterate him without a thought. He didn’t die by being stupidly stabbed by a stranger in front of other strangers. He didn’t die by jumping out a window and falling 90 floors in terrified resignation. He wasn’t blown to smithereens while huddled in the back of a flying bomb not knowing what in God’s name would happen next but hoping, hoping something good would. And I myself wasn’t left standing on a sunny, bombed-out street holding his picture.

No, indeed not. My father died, if there is such a way to die, properly: in his house, in his bed, possibly in his sleep — before he was ready, to be sure; but in my very arms, and in the presence of his only wife. I think of those events on that cold morning every single day with sorrow, with wonder, with regret and with the confidence that whatever I was capable of doing to help him, I did do, and that perhaps he even knew it.

In Auden’s poem “Musée des Beaux Arts,” the luckless flier Icarus falls into the sea while a ploughman in a nearby field seems not to notice.

Their lives, though amazingly lost, remain indelible and will not by simple death be undone.

“The ploughman may/Have heard the splash,” Auden wrote, “the forsaken cry/But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone/As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green/Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky/Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.”

It is an axiom of the novelist’s grasp on reality that a death’s importance is measured by the significance of the life that has ended. Thus to die, as so many did on Sept. 11 — their singular existences briefly obscured — may seem to cloud and invalidate life entirely. Yet their lives, though amazingly lost, remain indelible and will not by simple death be undone. They live still, and importantly, in all but the most literal ways.

But still. To steal life so, as their lives were stolen — rashly, violently, impersonally, pointlessly, improperly — perplexes not only their last precious moments, but also threatens to overwhelm us all, and to assign us, unwilling, the place of Auden’s ploughman, who, reasonably within his life, cannot give witness to enough. In this way — and we know it is by a terrible, indelicate design — precious life is made to seem unutterable to those of us who remain here, those in whom life must reverberate, must signify, or all is lost.
W.H. Auden: The ‘odour of death/  
Offends the September night’

Editor’s note: The poet W.H. Auden (1907-1973) wrote “September 1, 1939” after the German invasion of Poland. He came to dislike the poem and refused to allow further publication of it during his lifetime, at one point denouncing the line, “We must love one another or die,” as a “damned lie! We must die anyway.” The poem reappeared in collections published after Auden’s death, and it has been widely distributed on the Internet in the last month as readers have noted its relevance to the events of Sept. 11.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939
I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth.

Obessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Litz,
What huge Imago made
A psychopath god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,

The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain

Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism’s face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Clinging to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,

Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.
The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.
From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
“I will be true to the wife,

I’ll concentrate more on my work,”

And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the dead,
Who can speak for the dumb?
All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky;
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I compose like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

— W.H. Auden, 1939.
Auden on Bin Laden
By Eric McHenry
Posted Thursday, Sept. 20, 2001, at 8:30 PM PT

Last Wednesday I e-mailed W.H. Auden’s poem “September 1, 1939” to members of my family. Two days later a friend e-mailed it to me, having received it from another friend who was circulating it. On Saturday my mother told me that Scott Simon had read portions of it on NPR. And on Monday my wife, a prep school teacher, saw it lying on the faculty photocopy machine.

Tragedy sends people to poetry. “Suffering is exact,” Philip Larkin wrote, but the vocabulary of consolation is loaded with abstraction and cliché, as anyone who has tried to write a sympathy note in the past week knows. Naturally, there’s a certain comfort in pillowy, familiar phrases—“This too shall pass,” “Our hearts are with you”—but living through a day like Sept. 11, and listening to all the subsequent cant from public figures and TV personalities, can leave people craving language that’s as precise as their pain.

What’s striking about “September 1, 1939,” which Auden wrote in response to Germany’s invasion of Poland, is how precisely it matches much of what happened last Tuesday, how eerily prescient it seems. Of course, that’s the point: Zealotry and violence are cyclical—“The habit-forming pain,/ Mismanagement and grief:/ We must suffer them all again.” But those weren’t the lines that brought me to my bookshelf last Wednesday, looking for the poem. The passages that had been playing through my head since I first saw the World Trade Center footage were more concrete and actually seemed more specific to the past week than to the poem’s occasion. “Where blind skyscrapers use/ Their full height to proclaim/ The strength of Collective Man,” and “Into the ethical life/ The dense commuters come.” The poem, which is set in Manhattan, opens with the “unmentionable odour of death/ Offend[ing] the September night,” something it could have done only figuratively in 1939, and the poem closes with a candlelight vigil: “May I [...]/ Beleaguered by the same/ Negation and despair,/ Show an affirming flame.” Even when Auden is writing explicitly about Hitler, his language could hardly be altered to better fit the hijackers. Borrowing terms from Jungian psychoanalysis, he wonders “What huge imago made/ A psychopathic god.” My Muslim friends, whose god is unrecognizable in the murderous theology of Osama Bin Laden, have spent the past week wondering the same thing. Ezra Pound defined poetry as “news that stays news,” but even he may not have had this degree of fidelity in mind.

Coincidences aside, “September 1, 1939” stays news because it reveals a little more of itself with each reading. Last Wednesday, it gave me some of the emotional nourishment I had been needing, in the form of concise explanations (“Those to whom evil is done/ Do evil in return”) and bold pronouncements (“There is no such thing as the State/ And no one exists alone [...] We must love one another or die”). By Thursday, though, it had unsettled me again. Those phrases, despite their rhetorical pizzazz, are undermined by Auden’s ambivalence and self-contradiction. Auden seems to doubt whether universal love can obtain in a world where “the error bred in the bone/ Of each woman and each man/ Craves what it cannot have,/ Not universal love/ But to be loved alone.” And his poem is, as the critic John Fuller points out, “a parade of rhetoric designed to question the function of rhetoric.”

A poem, of course, that offered only unambiguous answers to these sorts of questions would neither be news nor stay news. Poetry does justice to life by describing it, not by reducing it to more reasonable dimensions. So all of Auden’s doubts and doublings back only improve the poem—as far as John Fuller and I are concerned, anyway. Auden, apparently, decided that its ambiguities couldn’t be reconciled with its declamatory tone. Rereading it shortly after its publication, he arrived at the line “We must love one another or die” and “said to myself: ‘That’s a damned lie! We must die anyway.’” So, in the next edition, I altered it to “We must love one another and die.” This didn’t seem to do either, so I cut the stanza. Still no good. The whole poem, I realized, was infected with an incurable dishonesty—and must be scrapped.

He banished it from subsequent editions of his work, and I’m not sure, frankly, how it finally found its way back into print. I’m thankful it did. Its thematic ambiguity only strengthens the sense that it is the poem for our present pain. When Auden called it “trash which [he was] ashamed to have written,” as Edward Mendelson observes, he was taking the poem “far more seriously—and taking poetic language far more seriously—than his critics ever did.” By expressing such disappointment in a poem so great, by attaching such a profound sense of failure to it, Auden kept in play the possibility—by no means a certainty—that there are sorrows even the most well-chosen words can’t reach.
Add on to WA: "Musee" - 3 more points!

*Read both criticisms of the poem carefully. On the back of your "Musee" journal, comment on both criticisms.

Auden's Musee Des Beaux Arts
The Explicator, Washington, Spring 1999, Howard L. Hsu

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Poetry

Personal Names: Auden, W H
Brueghel, Pieter (the Elder) (1530-69)
Companies: Musee d'Art Ancien-Brussels Belgium

Abstract: W H Auden's famous poem departs from the tradition of poetic ekphrasis by physically situating Pieter Brueghel's painting of the fall of Icarus in the Musee d'Art Ancien in Brussels. The poem and its ironies are discussed.

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W H Auden's famous poem departs from the tradition of poetic ekphrasis (poems describing artworks) by physically situating Pieter Brueghel's painting of the fall of Icarus in the Musee d'Art Ancien in Brussels. The first stanza, in fact, details a stroll down a corridor of the museum, past several paintings of the "Old Masters" depicting scenes of hope and suffering such as the birth and martyrdom of Christ. The generalizing description of how suffering "takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking fully along / In these paintings suggests the speaker/museum-goer's brief, passing glances and thoughts as he hurries on to more noteworthy paintings. These glances and the abstract thoughts they give rise to pay no more attention to these scenes of torture than the children "skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood" or "the torturer's horse / Scratch[ing] it's innocent behind on a tree."

The irony continues in stanza 2, where the speaker finally stops before Brueghel's Icarus. Despite his purported concern with suffering, the museum-goer cannot help repeating Brueghel's act of aestheticizing Icarus's death by describing the "white legs disappearing into the green / Water" as "Something amazing." Here, as in the previous stanza, the poem suggests an ironic comparison with the museum context in which the paintings are viewed. Just as the "sun shines / As it had to," on Icarus's death, so the museum lighting illuminates the painting, like the "expensive delicate stop / That sailed calmly on," the speaker walking through the galleries has somewhere to get to and continues walking dully along.

If the poem is a less contemplation of suffering itself than a performance of "turn[ing] away / Quite leisurely (from the disaster)," what gives it its mournful tone? "Musee Des Beaux Arts" provides a despondent criticism of the way museums remove art especially the devotional Christian art described in stanza 1, which was painted for display in churches from its natural environment. Just as the "white legs disappearing into the green / Water" do not belong in the pastoral landscape Brueghel painted, scenes of martyrdom do not belong in a museum: Both are bound to be passed by. Museums foster an environment in which these paintings are regarded more as "expensive delicate" vessels than as portraits of real suffering. If the Old Masters were never wrong about the "human position" of suffering, modern viewers who "possess" these paintings in sterile, inhuman museums are dead wrong.

The poem then, suffers precisely because it cannot access the suffering portrayed in the paintings it describes. It suffers from a guilty conscience which compares the speaker to the step that passes Icarus by and the passerby just walking dully along. But what else can a modern viewer do, faced with an artwork presented not as a unique production but rather as one among many products on display? "Musee Des Beaux Arts" is about the fact that one never has quite enough time to spend observing each painting in a museumme hardly has time to glance at them all. It is not about suffering and mourning, but rather about the impossibility of sympathy. The museum-goer who sees a dozen paintings in a matter of minutes cannot truly be said to mourn for the subjects of these paintings; the best he can do is to be conscious of his neglect, to mourn the impossibility of mourning.

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"OUT, OUT"

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled, snarled
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper means
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap
He must have given the signal. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all-
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work though a child at heart-
He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off!"
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then-the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little-less-nothing! - and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

Robert Frost (1874-1963)
John Donne: ‘No man is an island, entire of itself’

Samples of the past millennium’s great rhetoric, every day in December

John Donne, a priest, poet and preacher, was born in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. From 1622 until his death in 1631, he was dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and his popularity as a preacher drew large crowds. Many of Donne’s works focus on issues of death and resurrection; his wife, Anne, died at the age of 33. In “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions,” from which the following is excerpted, Donne wrote lines that have become famous among English speakers everywhere:

Now, this bell tolling softly for another, says to me: Thou must die.

Perchance before whom this bell tolls may be so ill, as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than he, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is Catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me: for that child is thereby connected to that body which is my head too, and grafted into that body whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God’s hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another. As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness. There was a contention as far as a suit (in which both piety and dignity, religion and estimation, were mingled), which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined, that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his, whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it riseth? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who become not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. Neither can we call this a begging of misery, or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves, but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbours. Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did, for affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by and made fit for God by that affliction. If a man carry treasure in bullion, or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current money, his treasure will not defend him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our home, heaven, by it. Another man may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels, as gold in a mine, and be of no use to him; but this bell, that tells me of his affliction, digs out and applies that gold to me: if by this consideration of another’s danger I take mine own into contemplation, and so secure myself, by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

— John Donne, 1624. Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, No. 17.
At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinites
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go;
All whom the flood did and fire shall,
o'erthrow.
All whom war, death, age, aques, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath stain, and you
whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.¹
But let them sleep. Lord, and me mourn a
space:
For, if above all these, my sins abound,
Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground.
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if Thou hadst sealed my pardon with Thy
blood.

¹. and your ... years, those still alive at the Last Judgment and
the end of the world, who will be judged without having died

Death, be not proud, though some have calleth thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost
overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be.
Much pleasure; then from thee much more
must flow.
And soonest our best men with thee do go.
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and
desperate men.⁴

And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell.
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as
well.
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou
then?
One short sleep past. We wake at'th thou shalt
die.

1. poppy, the source of various narcotic drugs
2. swell'at, pull up with pride

Batter my heart, three-personed God;¹ for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, seek to
mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and
bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me
new.

¹. like an usurped town, to another due.
Labour to admit You, but O. to no end:
Reason, Your viceroy in me, I should defend.
But is captivated, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love You, and would be loved
fain.

But am betrothed unto Your enemy.
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again;
Take me to You, imprison me. for I.
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free.
No man or chaste, except You ravish me.
Flight of Icarus
1 As the sun breaks, above the ground,
2 An old man stands on the hill,
3 As the ground warms, to the first rays of light
4 A birdsong shatters the still.
5 His eyes are ablaze,
6 See the madman in his gaze.
7 Fly, on your way, like an eagle,
8 Fly as high as the sun,
9 On your way, like an eagle,
10 Fly and touch the sun.
11 Now the crowd breaks and a young boy appears
12 Looks the old man in the eye
13 As he spreads his wings and shouts at the crowd
14 In the name of God my father I fly.
15 His eyes seem so glazed
16 As he flies on the wings of a dream,
17 Now he knows his father betrayed
18 Now his wings turn to ashes to ashes his grave.
19 Fly, on your way, like an eagle,
20 Fly as high as the sun,
21 On your way, like an eagle,
22 Fly as high as the sun.

by Iron Maiden
Live After Death CD

For Whom The Bell Tolls

1 Make his fight on the hill in the early day
2 Constant chill deep inside
3 Shouting gun, on they run through the endless grey
4 On the fight, for the right, yes, by who's to say?
5 For a hill men would kill, why? They do not know
6 Suffered wounds test their pride
7 Men of five, still alive through the raging glow
8 Gone insane from the pain that they surely know
9 For whom the bell tolls
10 Time marches on
11 For whom the bell tolls
12 Take a look to the sky just before you die
13 It is the last time you will
14 Blackened roar massive roar fills the crumbling sky
15 Shattered goal fills his soul with a ruthless cry
16 Stranger now, are his eyes, to this mystery
17 He hears the silence so loud
18 Crack of dawn, all is gone except the will to be
19 Now they see what will be, blinded eyes to see
20 For whom the bell tolls
21 Time marches on
22 For whom the bell tolls
SECTION TWO:

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Mark the pronunciation of the following words according to the accented and unaccented syllables.

1. because
2. daily
3. delight
4. answer
5. below
6. David
7. Leanne
8. merrily
9. tambourine
10. Eric

B. There are four common patterns of metrical feet we need to remember. Write the correct pattern next to each foot.

Patterns

Feet
1. iambic =
2. trochaic =
3. anapestic =
4. dactylic =

C. Scan the following lines. Go through all steps!
1. Mark the accented and unaccented syllables.
2. (Try all four possibilities—iambic, trochaic, anapestic, dactylic.)
3. Identify the metrical foot and how many feet there are in the line.

a. The hills, the meadows, and the lakes.
   
   metrical foot =
   How many are there? =

b. Sunday's dinner's sad and thankless.
   
   metrical foot =
   How many are there? =

c. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
   
   metrical line =

EC: What type of verse has no end rhyme but is written in iambic pentameter?
Isaac Asimov's Super Quiz

Score 1 point for each correct answer on the freshman level, 2 points on the graduate level and 3 points on the Ph.D. level.

OXYMORONS

Provide the second word to complete the oxymoron. (e.g., Found M___
Answer: Missing)

FRESHMAN LEVEL
1. Genuine I___
2. Almost E___
3. Alone T___

GRADUATE LEVEL
4. Soft R___
5. New C___
6. Sweet S___

PH.D. LEVEL
7. Extinct L___
8. Tight S___
9. Definite M___

A Sonnet Enroll in remedial courses
Dr. Teacher. You really should hit the books. Who reads the questions to you?

Sonnet type:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways,
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace,
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use,
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choo
I shall but love thee better after death.

Sonnet type:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought.
And with old woes new wail my dear time's wast
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless nigh
And week afresh love's long since canceled woe
And moan the expense of many a vanished sigh
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of forebemoaned moan,
Which I new-pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

Sonnet type:
POETRY RESPONSE SHEETS

POEM # __________________ LBT pg. # __________

TITLE: __________________________________________

POET: __________________________________________

After reading this poem, I immediately felt: __________________________________________

"BIG IDEAS"/"UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS/ TRUTHS": _______________________________________

Supporting evidence/line numbers: ____________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

I liked/disliked this poem because _________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Three different poetic devices I noticed were:
  • device: ___________________ line #(s) ___________________ purpose: ___________________
  • device: ___________________ line #(s) ___________________ purpose: ___________________
  • device: ___________________ line #(s) ___________________ purpose: ___________________

Questions/comments: _________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Similar poems (in theme, style, or form): ________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________
Name ___________________________ Hr. __________

POEM #: __________ LBT pg. #: __________

TITLE: __________________________________________

POET: __________________________________________

After reading this poem, I immediately felt: __________________________

__________________________

“BIG IDEAS” / “UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS / TRUTHS”: __________________________

__________________________

Supporting evidence / line numbers: ________________________________________

__________________________

I liked / disliked this poem because __________________________________________

__________________________

Three different poetic devices I noticed were:

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• device: ___________________________ line #(s) ___________________________
  purpose: ____________________________

• device: ___________________________ line #(s) ___________________________
  purpose: ____________________________

Questions / comments: ______________________________________________________

__________________________

Similar poems (in theme, style, or form): ______________________________________

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POETRY RESPONSE SHEETS

POEM #: __________ LBT pg. #: __________

TITLE: __________________________________________

POET: __________________________________________

After reading this poem, I immediately felt: __________________________

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“BIG IDEAS” / “UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS / TRUTHS”: __________________________

__________________________

Supporting evidence / line numbers: ________________________________________

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  purpose: ____________________________

Questions / comments: ______________________________________________________

__________________________

Similar poems (in theme, style, or form): ______________________________________

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After reading this poem, I immediately felt: ____________

"BIG IDEAS"/"UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS/ TRUTHS": ____________

Supporting evidence/line numbers: ____________

I liked/disliked this poem because ____________

Three different poetic devices I noticed were:

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Questions/comments: ____________

Similar poems (in theme, style, or form): ____________

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"BIG IDEAS"/"UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS/ TRUTHS": ____________

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SECTION THREE:

THE POEMS
What I Expected

Stephen Spender

What I expected, was Thunder, fighting, And climbing. Long struggles with men After continual straining, I should grow strong. Then the rocks would shake And I rest long.

I had not foreseen What I had not foreseen Was the gradual day Weakening the will. The lack of good to touch, The lading of body and soul Smoke before wind. Corrupt, unsubstantial.

The wearing of Time, The watching of cripples pass With limbs shaped like questions In their odd twist. The pulverous grief Melting the bones with pity. The sick falling from earth— These, I could not foresee.

When You Are Old.

William Butler Yeats

When you are old and grey and full of sleep, And nodding by the fire, take down this book, And slowly read, and dream of the soft look Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep:

How many loved your moments of glad grace, And loved your beauty with love false or true, But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you, And loved the sorrows of your changing face:

And bending down beside the glowing bars, Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled And paced upon the mountains overhead And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.
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.

Oh, 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.

Wirers
Siegfried Sassoon

"Pass it along, the wiring party's going out"—
And yawning sentries mumble, "Wirers going out."
Unraveling; twisting; hammering stakes with muffled thud, 
They toil with stealthy haste and anger in their blood.

5 The Boche\(^2\) sends up a flare. Black forms stand rigid there, 
Stock-still like posts; then darkness, and the clumsy ghosts 
Stride hither and thither, whispering, tripped by clutching 
snare
Of snags and tangles. 
Ghastly dawn with vaporous coasts

10 Gleams desolate along the sky, night's misery ended.

Young Hughes was badly hit; I heard him carried away, 
Moaning at every lurch; no doubt he'll die today. 
But we can say the front-lit wire's been safely mended.

---

1. Wirers: Soldiers who were responsible for repairing the barbed-wire fences that protected the trenches in World War I.
2. Boche (bôsh): German soldier.