Sir Phillip Sydney Astrophil & Stella 1580

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,

That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,

Pleasure might cause her read,reading might make her know,

Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,

Oft turning others’ leaves to see if thence would flow

Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burned brain.

But words came halting forth, wanting invention’s stay;

Invention, nature’s child, fled step-dame Study’s blows,

And others’ feet still seemed but strangers in my way.

Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,

Fool, said my muse to me, look in thy heart and write.

Edmund Spenser - Sonnet 75 1595

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,

But came the waves and washed it away:

Again I wrote it with a second hand,

But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

Vain man, said she, that doest in vain assay

A mortal thing so to immortalize,

For I myself shall like to this decay,

And eek my name be wiped out likewise.

Not so (quoth I), let baser things devise

To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:

My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,

And in the heavens write your glorious name.

Where whenas Death shall all the world subdue,

Out love shall live, and later life renew.

Shakespeare Sonnet XVIII- 1598

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimmed,

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Anne Bradstreet The Author to Her Book 1650

Thou ill-form’d offspring of my feeble brain,

Who after birth didst by my side remain,

Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true,

Who thee abroad, expos’d to publick view,

Made thee in raggs, halting to th’ press to trudge,

Where errors were not lessened (all may judg).

At thy return my blushing was not small,

My rambling brat (in print) should mother call,

I cast thee by as one unfit for light,

Thy Visage was so irksome in my sight;

Yet being mine own, at length affection would

Thy blemishes amend, if so I could:

I wash’d thy face, but more defects I saw,

And rubbing off a spot, still made a flaw.

I stretched thy joynts to make thee even feet,

Yet still thou run’st more hobling then is meet;

In better dress to trim thee was my mind,

But nought save home-spun Cloth, i’ th’ house I find.

In this array ’mongst Vulgars mayst thou roam.

In Criticks hands, beware thou dost not come;

And take thy way where yet thou art not known,

If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:

And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,

Which caus’d her thus to send thee out of door.

Alexander Pope Sound and Sense 1711

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,

As those move easiest who have learned to dance.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offense,

The sound must seem an echo to the sense:

Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,

And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;

But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,

The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar;

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,

The line too labors, and the words move slow;

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,

Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main.

Hear how Timotheus' varied lays surprise,

And bid alternate passions fall and rise!

Emily Dickinson "There is No Frigate Like a Book" 1873

There is no frigate like a book

. To take us lands away,

Nor any coursers like a page

. Of prancing poetry.

This traverse may the poorest take

. Without oppress of toll;

How frugal is the chariot

. That bears a human soul!

Jorge Luis Borges The Art of Poetry 1925

To gaze at a river made of time and water

and remember Time is another river.

To know we stray like a river

and our faces vanish like water.

To feel that waking is another dream

that dreams of not dreaming and that the death

we fear in our bones is the death

that every night we call a dream.

To see in every day and year a symbol

of all the days of man and his years,

and convert the outrage of the years

into a music, a sound, and a symbol.

To see in death a dream, in the sunset

a golden sadnesssuch is poetry,

humble and immortal, poetry,

returning, like dawn and the sunset.

Sometimes at evening there's a face

that sees us from the deeps of a mirror.

Art must be that sort of mirror,

disclosing to each of us his face.

They say Ulysses, wearied of wonders,

wept with love on seeing Ithaca,

humble and green. Art is that Ithaca,

a green eternity, not wonders.

Art is endless like a river flowing,

passing, yet remaining, a mirror to the same

inconstant Heraclitus, who is the same

and yet another, like the river flowing.

Marianne Moore Poetry 1967

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond

all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one

discovers in

it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes

that can dilate, hair that can rise

if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because

they are

useful. When they become so derivative as to become

unintelligible,

the same thing may be said for all of us, that we

do not admire what

we cannot understand: the bat

holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless

wolf under

a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse

that feels a flea, the base-

ball fan, the statistician--

nor is it valid

to discriminate against "business documents and

school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must make

a distinction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the

result is not poetry,

nor till the poets among us can be

"literalists of

the imagination"--above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them,"

shall we have

it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,

the raw material of poetry in

all its rawness and

that which is on the other hand

genuine, you are interested in poetry.

**The Arrival of the Bee Box- 1963**

I ordered this, clean wood box   
Square as a chair and almost too heavy to lift.   
I would say it was the coffin of a midget   
Or a square baby   
Were there not such a din in it.   
  
The box is locked, it is dangerous.   
I have to live with it overnight   
And I can't keep away from it.   
There are no windows, so I can't see what is in there.   
There is only a little grid, no exit.   
  
I put my eye to the grid.   
It is dark, dark,   
With the swarmy feeling of African hands   
Minute and shrunk for export,   
Black on black, angrily clambering.   
  
How can I let them out?   
It is the noise that appalls me most of all,   
The unintelligible syllables.   
It is like a Roman mob,   
Small, taken one by one, but my god, together!   
  
I lay my ear to furious Latin.   
I am not a Caesar.   
I have simply ordered a box of maniacs.   
They can be sent back.   
They can die, I need feed them nothing, I am the owner.   
  
I wonder how hungry they are.   
I wonder if they would forget me   
If I just undid the locks and stood back and turned into a tree.   
There is the laburnum, its blond colonnades,   
And the petticoats of the cherry.   
  
They might ignore me immediately   
In my moon suit and funeral veil.   
I am no source of honey   
So why should they turn on me?   
Tomorrow I will be sweet God, I will set them free.   
  
The box is only temporary.

**Sylvia Plath**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Digging 1966** |  | |  |  | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Between my finger and my thumb The squat pen rests; as snug as a gun.  Under my window a clean rasping sound When the spade sinks into gravelly ground: My father, digging. I look down  Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds Bends low, comes up twenty years away Stooping in rhythm through potato drills Where he was digging.  The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft Against the inside knee was levered firmly. He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep To scatter new potatoes that we picked Loving their cool hardness in our hands.  By God, the old man could handle a spade, Just like his old man.  My grandfather could cut more turf in a day Than any other man on Toner's bog. Once I carried him milk in a bottle Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up To drink it, then fell to right away Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods Over his shoulder, digging down and down For the good turf. Digging.  The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge Through living roots awaken in my head. But I've no spade to follow men like them.  Between my finger and my thumb The squat pen rests. I'll dig with it.   **Seamus Heaney** | |

Richard Wilbur The Writer 1970

In her room at the prow of the house

Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,

My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing

From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys

Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff

Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:

I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,

As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.

A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,

And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor

Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling

Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;

How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;

And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,

We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature

Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove

To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,

For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits

Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,

Beating a smooth course for the right window

And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,

Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish

What I wished you before, but harder.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **The Poem You Asked For -1980** |  | |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | My poem would eat nothing.  I tried giving it water  but it said no,   worrying me.  Day after day,  I held it up to the llight,   turning it over,  but it only pressed its lips  more tightly together.   It grew sullen, like a toad  through with being teased.  I offered it money,   my clothes, my car with a full tank.  But the poem stared at the floor.  Finally I cupped it in   my hands, and carried it gently  out into the soft air, into the  evening traffic, wondering how   to end things between us.  For now it had begun breathing,  putting on more and   more hard rings of flesh.  And the poem demanded the food,  it drank up all the water,   beat me and took my money,  tore the faded clothes  off my back,   said Shit,  and walked slowly away,  slicking its hair down.   Said it was going  over to your place.     **Larry Levis** | |

Mark Strand Eating Poetry 1990

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.

There is no happiness like mine.

I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.

Her eyes are sad

and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.

The light is dim.

The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,

their blond legs burn like brush.

The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.

When I get on my knees and lick her hand,

she screams.

I am a new man.

I snarl at her and bark.

I romp with joy in the bookish dark.