

Poetry Reader

Matsuo Basho (1644 - 1694)

The old pond by Matsuo Basho

Following are several translations
of the 'Old Pond' poem, which may be
the most famous of all haiku:

Furuike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto

-- Basho

Literal Translation

Fu-ru (old) i-ke (pond) ya,
ka-wa-zu (frog) to-bi-ko-mu (jumping into)
mi-zu (water) no o-to (sound)

The old pond--
a frog jumps in,
sound of water.
Translated by Robert Hass

Old pond...
a frog jumps in
water's sound.
Translated by William J. Higginson

Fleas, lice by Matsuo Basho

Fleas, lice,
a horse peeing
near my pillow.

Four Haiku by Matsuo Basho

Spring:

A hill without a name
Veiled in morning mist.

The beginning of autumn:
Sea and emerald paddy
Both the same green.

The winds of autumn
Blow: yet still green
The chestnut husks.

A flash of lightning:
Into the gloom
Goes the heron's cry.

A cicada shell by Matsuo Basho

A cicada shell;
it sang itself
utterly away.

The oak tree by Matsuo Basho

The oak tree:
not interested
in cherry blossoms.

Richard Brautigan (1935 - 1984)

The Fever Monument by Richard Brautigan

I walked across the park to the fever monument.
It was in the center of a glass square surrounded
by red flowers and fountains. The monument
was in the shape of a sea horse and the plaque read
We got hot and died.

Xerox Candy Bar by Richard Brautigan

Ah,
you're just a copy
of all the candy bars
I've ever eaten.

Donner Party by Richard Brautigan

Forsaken, fucking in the cold,
eating each other, lost
runny noses,
complaining all the time
like so many
people
that we know

The Moon Versus Us Ever Sleeping Together Again by Richard Brautigan

I sit here, an arch-villain of romance,
thinking about you. Gee, I'm sorry
I made you unhappy, but there was nothing
I could do about it because I have to be free.
Perhaps everything would have been different
if you had stayed at the table or asked me
to go out with you to look at the moon,
instead of getting up and leaving me alone with
her.

To England by Richard Brautigan

There are no postage stamps that send letters
back to England three centuries ago,
no postage stamps that make letters
travel back until the grave hasn't been dug yet,
and John Donne stands looking out the window,
it is just beginning to rain this April morning,
and the birds are falling into the trees
like chess pieces into an unplayed game,
and John Donne sees the postman coming up the street,
the postman walks very carefully because his cane
is made of glass.

Robinson Jeffers (1887 - 1962)

The Epic Stars by Robinson Jeffers

The heroic stars spending themselves,
Coining their very flesh into bullets for the lost battle,
They must burn out at length like used candles;
And Mother Night will weep in her triumph, taking home her heroes.
There is the stuff for an epic poem--
This magnificent raid at the heart of darkness, this lost battle--
We don't know enough, we'll never know.
Oh happy Homer, taking the stars and the Gods for granted.

End Of The World by Robinson Jeffers

When I was young in school in Switzerland, about the time of the Boer War,
We used to take it for known that the human race
Would last the earth out, not dying till the planet died. I wrote a schoolboy poem
About the last man walking in stoic dignity along the dead shore
Of the last sea, alone, alone, alone, remembering all
His racial past. But now I don't think so. They'll die faceless in flocks,
And the earth flourish long after mankind is out.

Ghost by Robinson Jeffers

There is a jaggel of masonry here, on a small hill
Above the gray-mouthed Pacific, cottages and a thick-walled tower, all made of rough sea rock
And Portland cement. I imagine, fifty years from now,
A mist-gray figure moping about this place in mad moonlight, examining the mortar-joints, pawing the
Parasite ivy: "Does the place stand? How did it take that last earthquake?" Then someone comes
From the house-door, taking a poodle for his bedtime walk. The dog snarls and retreats; the man
Stands rigid, saying "Who are you? What are you doing here?" "Nothing to hurt you," it answers, "I am just looking
At the walls that I built. I see that you have played hell
With the trees that I planted." "There has to be room for people," he answers. "My God," he says, "That still!"

John Donne (1572 - 1631)

Witchcraft By A Picture by John Donne

I fix mine eye on thine, and there
Pity my picture burning in thine eye;
My picture drowned in a transparent tear,
When I look lower I espy.
Hadst thou the wicked skill
By pictures made and mard, to kill,
How many ways mightst thou perform thy will?

But now I have drunk thy sweet salt tears,
And though thou pour more I'll depart;
My picture vanished, vanish fears
That I can be endamaged by that art;
Though thou retain of me
One picture more, yet that will be,
Being in thine own heart, from all malice free.

For Whom The Bell Tolls by John Donne

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each 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 manner of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

At The Round Earth's Imagined Corners Blow by John Donne

At the round earth's imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall, overthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
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'dst sealed my pardon, with Thy blood.

The Flea by John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself, nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true, then learn how false fears be:
Just so much honor, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

Louise Gluck (1943 – present)

Odysseus' Decision by Louise Gluck

The great man turns his back on the island.
Now he will not die in paradise
nor hear again
the lutes of paradise among the olive trees,
by the clear pools under the cypresses. Time

begins now, in which he hears again
that pulse which is the narrative
sea, at dawn when its pull is strongest.
What has brought us here
will lead us away; our ship
sways in the tined harbor water.

Now the spell is ended.
Give him back his life,
sea that can only move forward.

The Triumph Of Achilles by Louise Gluck

In the story of Patroclus
no one survives, not even Achilles
who was nearly a god.
Patroclus resembled him; they wore
the same armor.

Always in these friendships
one serves the other, one is less than the other:
the hierarchy
is always apparant, though the legends
cannot be trusted--
their source is the survivor,
the one who has been abandoned.

What were the Greek ships on fire
compared to this loss?

In his tent, Achilles
grieved with his whole being
and the gods saw
he was a man already dead, a victim
of the part that loved,
the part that was mortal.

The Butterfly by Louise Gluck

Look, a butterfly. Did you make a wish?

You don't wish on butterflies.

You do so. Did you make one?

Yes.

It doesn't count.

The Garden by Louise Gluck

The garden admires you.
For your sake it smears itself with green pigment,
The ecstatic reds of the roses,
So that you will come to it with your lovers.

And the willows--
See how it has shaped these green
Tents of silence. Yet
There is still something you need,
Your body so soft, so alive, among the stone
animals.

Admit that it is terrible to be like them,
Beyond harm.

The Fear Of Burial by Louise Gluck

In the empty field, in the morning,
the body waits to be claimed.
The spirit sits beside it, on a small rock--
nothing comes to give it form again.

Think of the body's loneliness.
At night pacing the sheared field,
its shadow buckled tightly around.
Such a long journey.

And already the remote, trembling lights of the village
not pausing for it as they scan the rows.
How far away they seem,
the wooden doors, the bread and milk
laid like weights on the table.

The Pond by Louise Gluck

Night covers the pond with its wing.
Under the ringed moon I can make out
your face swimming among minnows and the small
echoing stars. In the night air
the surface of the pond is metal.

Within, your eyes are open. They contain
a memory I recognize, as though
we had been children together. Our ponies
grazed on the hill, they were gray
with white markings. Now they graze
with the dead who wait
like children under their granite breastplates,
lucid and helpless:

The hills are far away. They rise up
blacker than childhood.
What do you think of, lying so quietly
by the water? When you look that way I want
to touch you, but do not, seeing
as in another life we were of the same blood.

William Blake (1757 - 1827)

The Lamb by William Blake

Little Lamb, who made thee
Does thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing woolly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice.
Making all the vales rejoice:
Little Lamb who made thee
Does thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee;
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little childh
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by His name,
Little Lamb God bless thee,
Little Lamb God bless thee.

The Tyger by William Blake

Tyger Tyger. burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat.
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp.
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their
spears
And watered heaven with their tears:
Did he smile His work to see?
Did he who made the lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The Garden Of Love by William Blake

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not, writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore,

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

A Poison Tree by William Blake

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

And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears:
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

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

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

Jorge Luis Borges (1899 - 1986)

Adam Cast Forth by Jorge Luis Borges

Was there a Garden or was the Garden a dream?
Amid the fleeting light, I have slowed myself and queried,
Almost for consolation, if the bygone period
Over which this Adam, wretched now, once reigned supreme,

Might not have been just a magical illusion
Of that God I dreamed. Already it's imprecise
In my memory, the clear Paradise,
But I know it exists, in flower and profusion,

Although not for me. My punishment for life
Is the stubborn earth with the incestuous strife
Of Cains and Abels and their brood; I await no pardon.

Yet, it's much to have loved, to have known true joy,
To have had -- if only for just one day --
The experience of touching the living Garden.

The Other Tiger by Jorge Luis Borges

A tiger comes to mind. The twilight here
Exalts the vast and busy Library
And seems to set the bookshelves back in gloom;
Innocent, ruthless, bloodstained, sleek
It wanders through its forest and its day
Printing a track along the muddy banks
Of sluggish streams whose names it does not know
(In its world there are no names or past
Or time to come, only the vivid now)
And makes its way across wild distances
Sniffing the braided labyrinth of smells
And in the wind picking the smell of dawn
And tantalizing scent of grazing deer;
Among the bamboo's slanting stripes I glimpse
The tiger's stripes and sense the bony frame
Under the splendid, quivering cover of skin.
Curving oceans and the planet's wastes keep us
Apart in vain; from here in a house far off
In South America I dream of you,
Track you, O tiger of the Ganges' banks.

It strikes me now as evening fills my soul
That the tiger addressed in my poem
Is a shadowy beast, a tiger of symbols
And scraps picked up at random out of books,
A string of labored tropes that have no life,
And not the fated tiger, the deadly jewel
That under sun or stars or changing moon
Goes on in Bengal or Sumatra fulfilling
Its rounds of love and indolence and death.
To the tiger of symbols I hold opposed
The one that's real, the one whose blood runs hot
As it cuts down a herd of buffaloes,
And that today, this August third, nineteen
Fifty-nine, throws its shadow on the grass;
But by the act of giving it a name,
By trying to fix the limits of its world,
It becomes a fiction not a living beast,
Not a tiger out roaming the wilds of earth.

We'll hunt for a third tiger now, but like
The others this one too will be a form
Of what I dream, a structure of words, and not
The flesh and one tiger that beyond all myths
Paces the earth. I know these things quite well,
Yet nonetheless some force keeps driving me
In this vague, unreasonable, and ancient quest,
And I go on pursuing through the hours
Another tiger, the beast not found in verse.

Walt Whitman (1819 - 1892)

I Hear America Singing. by Walt Whitman

I HEAR America singing, the varied carols I hear;
Those of mechanics—each one singing his, as it should be, blithe and strong;
The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his, as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work;
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat—the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck;
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench—the hatter singing as he stands;
The wood-cutter's song—the ploughboy's, on his way in the morning, or at the noon intermission, or at sundown;
The delicious singing of the mother—or of the young wife at work—or of the girl sewing or washing—Each singing what belongs to her, and to none else;
The day what belongs to the day—At night, the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing, with open mouths, their strong melodious songs.

When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer. by Walt Whitman

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

Laws for Creations. by Walt Whitman

LAWS for Creations,
For strong artists and leaders—for fresh broods of teachers, and perfect literats for America,
For noble savans, and coming musicians.

All must have reference to the ensemble of the world, and the compact truth of the world;
There shall be no subject too pronounced—All works shall illustrate the divine law of indirections.

What do you suppose Creation is?
What do you suppose will satisfy the Soul, except to walk free, and own no superior?
What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God?
And that there is no God any more divine than Yourself?
And that that is what the oldest and newest myths finally mean?
And that you or any one must approach Creations through such laws?

To the Garden the World. by Walt Whitman

TO the garden, the world, anew ascending,
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,
Curious, here behold my resurrection, after slumber;
The revolving cycles, in their wide sweep, have brought me again,
Amorous, mature—all beautiful to me—all wondrous;
My limbs, and the quivering fire that ever plays through them, for reasons, most wondrous;

Existing, I peer and penetrate still,
Content with the present—content with the past,
By my side, or back of me, Eve following,
Or in front, and I following her just the same.

We Two Boys Together Clinging. by Walt Whitman

WE two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going—North and South excursions making,
Power enjoying—elbows stretching—fingers clutching,
Arm'd and fearless—eating, drinking, sleeping, loving,
No law less than ourselves owning—sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening,
Misers, menials, priests alarming—air breathing, water drinking, on the turf or the
sea-beach
dancing,
Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking, feebleness chasing,
Fulfilling our foray.

A Farm-Picture. by Walt Whitman

THROUGH the ample open door of the peaceful country barn,
A sun-lit pasture field, with cattle and horses feeding;
And haze, and vista, and the far horizon, fading away.

Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967)

I, Too, Sing America by Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

Juke Box Love Song by Langston Hughes

I could take the Harlem night
and wrap around you,
Take the neon lights and make a crown,
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,
Taxis, subways,
And for your love song tone their rumble down.
Take Harlem's heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,
Put it on a record, let it whirl,
And while we listen to it play,
Dance with you till day--
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

Advertisement For The Waldorf-Astoria by Langston Hughes

Fine living . . . a la carte?

Come to the Waldorf-Astoria!

LISTEN HUNGRY ONES!

Look! See what Vanity Fair says about the new Waldorf-Astoria:

"All the luxuries of private home. . . ."

Now, won't that be charming when the last flop-house has turned you down this winter?

Furthermore:

"It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted in the hotel world. . . ." It cost twenty-eight million dollars. The famous Oscar Tschirky is in charge of banqueting.

Alexandre Gastaud is chef. It will be a distinguished background for society.

So when you've no place else to go, homeless and hungry ones, choose the Waldorf as a background for your rags-- (Or do you still consider the subway after midnight good enough?)

ROOMERS

Take a room at the new Waldorf, you down-and-outers-- sleepers in charity's flop-houses where God pulls a long face, and you have to pray to get a bed.

They serve swell board at the Waldorf-Astoria. Look at the menu, will you:

GUMBO CREOLE

CRABMEAT IN CASSOLETTE

BOILED BRISKET OF BEEF

SMALL ONIONS IN CREAM

WATERCRESS SALAD

PEACH MELBA

Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless.

Why not?

Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of your labor, who clip coupons with clean white fingers because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed garments, poured steel to let other people draw dividends and live easy.

(Or haven't you had enough yet of the soup-lines and the bitter bread of charity?)

Walk through Peacock Alley tonight before dinner, and get warm, anyway. You've got nothing else to do.

Life Is Fine by Langston Hughes

I went down to the river,
I set down on the bank.
I tried to think but couldn't,
So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and hollered!
I came up twice and cried!
If that water hadn't a-been so cold
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator
Sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love--
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,
And you may see me cry--
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

Night Funeral In Harlem by Langston Hughes

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Where did they get
Them two fine cars?

Insurance man, he did not pay--
His insurance lapsed the other day--
Yet they got a satin box
for his head to lay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Who was it sent
That wreath of flowers?

Them flowers came
from that poor boy's friends--
They'll want flowers, too,
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral
in Harlem:

Who preached that
Black boy to his grave?

Old preacher man
Preached that boy away--
Charged Five Dollars
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

When it was all over
And the lid shut on his head
and the organ had done played
and the last prayers been said
and six pallbearers
Carried him out for dead
And off down Lenox Avenue
That long black hearse done sped,
The street light
At his corner
Shined just like a tear--
That boy that they was mournin'
Was so dear, so dear
To them folks that brought the flowers,
To that girl who paid the preacher man--
It was all their tears that made
That poor boy's
Funeral grand.

Night funeral
In Harlem.

Daybreak In Alabama by Langston Hughes

When I get to be a composer
I'm gonna write me some music about
Daybreak in Alabama
And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist
And falling out of heaven like soft dew.
I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it
And the scent of pine needles
And the smell of red clay after rain
And long red necks
And poppy colored faces
And big brown arms
And the field daisy eyes
Of black and white black white black people
And I'm gonna put white hands
And black hands and brown and yellow hands
And red clay earth hands in it
Touching everybody with kind fingers
And touching each other natural as dew
In that dawn of music when I
Get to be a composer
And write about daybreak
In Alabama.

William Butler Yeats (1865 - 1939)

The Second Coming by William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Leda And The Swan by William Butler Yeats

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

September 1923

Adam's Curse by William Butler Yeats

We sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.
I said, 'A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.'

And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet and low
Replied: 'To be born woman is to know--
Although they do not talk of it at school--
That we must labour to be beautiful.'

I said, 'It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.'

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

Death by William Butler Yeats

Nor dread nor hope attend
A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone -
Man has created death.

The Old Men Admiring Themselves In The Water by William Butler Yeats

I heard the old, old men say,
'Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away.'
They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn-trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say,
'All that's beautiful drifts away
Like the waters.'

The Black Tower by William Butler Yeats

Say that the men of the old black tower,
Though they but feed as the goatherd feeds,
Their money spent, their wine gone sour,
Lack nothing that a soldier needs,
That all are oath-bound men:
Those banners come not in.

There in the tomb stand the dead upright,
But winds come up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

Those banners come to bribe or threaten,
Or whisper that a man's a fool
Who, when his own right king's forgotten,
Cares what king sets up his rule.
If he died long ago
Why do you dread us so?

There in the tomb drops the faint moonlight,
But wind comes up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber
Catching small birds in the dew of the morn
When we hale men lie stretched in slumber
Swears that he hears the king's great horn.
But he's a lying hound:
Stand we on guard oath-bound!

There in the tomb the dark grows blacker,
But wind comes up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

The Witch by William Butler Yeats

Toil and grow rich,
What's that but to lie
With a foul witch
And after, drained dry,
To be brought
To the chamber where
Lies one long sought
With despair?

Duino Elegies: The Fourth Elegy by Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 - 1926)

O trees of life, oh, what when winter comes?

We are not of one mind. Are not like birds
in unison migrating. And overtaken,
overdue, we thrust ourselves into the wind
and fall to earth into indifferent ponds.
Blossoming and withering we comprehend as one.
And somewhere lions roam, quite unaware,
in their magnificence, of any weakness.

But we, while wholly concentrating on one thing,
already feel the pressure of another.
Hatred is our first response. And lovers,
are they not forever invading one another's
boundaries? -although they promised space,
hunting and homeland. Then, for a sketch
drawn at a moment's impulse, a ground of contrast
is prepared, painfully, so that we may see.
For they are most exact with us. We do not know
the contours of our feelings. We only know
what shapes them from the outside.

Who has not sat, afraid, before his own heart's
curtain? It lifted and displayed the scenery
of departure. Easy to understand. The well-known
garden swaying just a little. Then came the dancer.
Not he! Enough! However lightly he pretends to move:
he is just disguised, costumed, an ordinary man
who enters through the kitchen when coming home.
I will not have these half-filled human masks;
better the puppet. It at least is full.
I will endure this well-stuffed doll, the wire,
the face that is nothing but appearance. Here out front
I wait. Even if the lights go down and I am told:
"There's nothing more to come," -even if
the grayish drafts of emptiness come drifting down
from the deserted stage -even if not one
of my now silent forebears sits beside me
any longer, not a woman, not even a boy-
he with the brown and squinting eyes-:
I'll still remain. For one can always watch.

Am I not right? You, to whom life would taste
so bitter, Father, after you - for my sake -
slipped of mine, that first muddy infusion
of my necessity. You kept on tasting, Father,
as I kept on growing, troubled by the aftertaste
of my so strange a future as you kept searching
my unfocused gaze -you who, so often since

you died, have been afraid for my well-being,
within my deepest hope, relinquishing that calmness,
the realms of equanimity such as the dead possess
for my so small fate -Am I not right?

And you, my parents, am I not right? You who loved me
for that small beginning of my love for you
from which I always shyly turned away, because
the distance in your features grew, changed,
even while I loved it, into cosmic space
where you no longer were...: and when I feel
inclined to wait before the puppet stage, no,
rather to stare at it so intensely that in the end
to counter-balance my searching gaze, an angel
has to come as an actor, and begin manipulating
the lifeless bodies of the puppets to perform.
Angel and puppet! Now at last there is a play!
Then what we separate can come together by our
very presence. And only then the entire cycle
of our own life-seasons is revealed and set in motion.
Above, beyond us, the angel plays. Look:
must not the dying notice how unreal, how full
of pretense is all that we accomplish here, where
nothing is to be itself. O hours of childhood,
when behind each shape more than the past lay hidden,
when that which lay before us was not the future.

We grew, of course, and sometimes were impatient
in growing up, half for the sake of pleasing those
with nothing left but their own grown-upness.
Yet, when alone, we entertained ourselves
with what alone endures, we would stand there
in the infinite space that spans the world and toys,
upon a place, which from the first beginning
had been prepared to serve a pure event.

Who shows a child just as it stands? Who places him
within his constellation, with the measuring-rod
of distance in his hand. Who makes his death
from gray bread that grows hard, -or leaves
it there inside his rounded mouth, jagged as the core
of a sweet apple?.....The minds of murderers
are easily comprehended. But this: to contain death,
the whole of death, even before life has begun,
to hold it all so gently within oneself,
and not be angry: that is indescribable.

Adam by Rainer Maria Rilke

High above he stands, beside the many
saintly figures fronting the cathedral's
gothic tympanum, close by the window
called the rose, and looks astonished at his

own deification which placed him there.
Erect and proud he smiles, and quite enjoys
this feat of his survival, willed by choice.

As labourer in the fields he made his start
and through his efforts brought to full fruition
the garden God named Eden. But where was
the hidden path that led to the New Earth?

God would not listen to his endless pleas.
Instead, He threatened him that he shall die.
Yet Adam stood his ground: Eve shall give birth.

Eve by Rainer Maria Rilke

Look how she stands, high on the steep facade
of the cathedral, near the window-rose,
simply, holding in her hand the apple,
judged for all time as the guiltless-guilty

for the growing fruit her body held
which she gave birth to after parting from
the circle of eternities. She left
to face the strange New Earth, so young in years.

Oh, how she would have loved to stay a little
longer in that enchanted garden, where
the peaceful gentle beasts grazed side by side.

But Adam was resolved to leave, to go
out into this New Earth, and facing death
she followed him. God she had hardly known.

The Apple Orchard by Rainer Maria Rilke

Come let us watch the sun go down
and walk in twilight through the orchard's green.
Does it not seem as if we had for long
collected, saved and harbored within us
old memories? To find releases and seek
new hopes, remembering half-forgotten joys,
mingled with darkness coming from within,
as we randomly voice our thoughts aloud
wandering beneath these harvest-laden trees
reminiscent of Durer woodcuts, branches
which, bent under the fully ripened fruit,
wait patiently, trying to outlast, to
serve another season's hundred days of toil,
straining, uncomplaining, by not breaking
but succeeding, even though the burden
should at times seem almost past endurance.
Not to falter! Not to be found wanting!

Thus must it be, when willingly you strive
throughout a long and uncomplaining life,
committed to one goal: to give yourself!
And silently to grow and to bear fruit.

On Hearing Of A Death by Rainer Maria Rilke

We lack all knowledge of this parting. Death
does not deal with us. We have no reason
to show death admiration, love or hate;
his mask of feigned tragic lament gives us

a false impression. The world's stage is still
filled with roles which we play. While we worry
that our performances may not please,
death also performs, although to no applause.

But as you left us, there broke upon this stage
a glimpse of reality, shown through the slight
opening through which you disappeared: green,
evergreen, bathed in sunlight, actual woods.

We keep on playing, still anxious, our difficult roles
declaiming, accompanied by matching gestures
as required. But your presence so suddenly
removed from our midst and from our play, at times

overcomes us like a sense of that other
reality: yours, that we are so overwhelmed
and play our actual lives instead of the performance,
forgetting altogether the applause.

A Micro Prosody Lesson

The Basic Rules:

Poems are composed of lines.

Lines are composed of syllables inside of words.

Syllables can have a rhythm called “meter”.

Words in the lines can rhyme.

Rhymes can appear at the end of lines (and be described by a “rhyme scheme”)

Rhymes can also appear inside of lines.

A brief note on Meter:

In meter, we talk about a multi-syllable unit called a “foot”. The first part of the name of a meter describes how the syllables of the foot are stressed. The second part of the name tells us how many feet are in a line.

Some Common Feet:

Iambic: this kind of foot has two syllables, the first syllable is unstressed, the second stressed.

daDUM

Trochaic: this is the inversion of an iamb.

DUMda

Spondee: Both syllables are stressed

DUMDUM

Dactyl: Here, we have a three-syllable foot where the first is stressed, and the second two are not.

DUMdada

Anapestic: is the inversion of the dactyl

dadaDUM

On the Power of the Line in Poetry

One of the basic effects of poetry is that it is written in lines that break intentionally, thus breaking apart sentences into artistic units. This effect is called “enjambment”. What it does is it forces you to read a line as a unit of thought separate from the whole sentence that line belongs to.

Lines are organized into units called “stanzas”, and can be broken internally by punctuation, creating a pause called a “caesura”.

Besides Rhyming:

The other major sonic effect in poetry, beyond rhyming, is the repeating of other sounds. Repeating sounds in words is called “consonance”. Specifically, you might repeat lots of sounds in groups (as in “pitter patter”), or you might repeat just the initial consonants (a technique called “alliteration” as in Greasy Grimey Gopher Guts), or you might repeat the vowel sounds in words (a technique called “assonance” as with “summer sounds sow soulful bowls of Oreos” which is a line I just made up, and is not very good.)

SOME KINDS OF POEMS:

Haiku:

The traditional English interpretation of the metric of the Haiku is that it be composed of three lines. Traditionally we have 17 syllables in a haiku, split amongst the lines in a 5/7/5 syllable pattern. Traditional Japanese haiku also should have one word that in some way evokes the season of the poem (all haiku are seasonal), and one word at the end that creates sonic/conceptual effect.

However, this Anglicized interpretation doesn't fully reflect the Japanese original. Feel free to practice the discipline of the syllable structure, or to create small 3 line poems which evoke the feelings of Basho in translation.

Sonnet:

The most important thing about the sonnet tradition is that it is a small poem (literally, "soneto" means "little sound"). It is a fourteen-line poem with a regular meter and a regular rhyme scheme.

The Shakespearean Sonnet:

a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g; Notice that there are three four-line groups, and then a final two-line couplet. English sonnets are traditionally written in "iambic pentameter" (therefore, it had five iambs per line, or ten syllables)

Found Poem:

A found poem is not a metrical description, but rather a conceptual description. In a found poem, you take text you find in the real world (like a newspaper articles, or a phone bill) and you arrange the words into lines of poetry without changing their order. You can apply any metrical style to the found text, though often you are constrained by what you find.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN:

There are, of course, an endless number of poetic forms, which I encourage you to seek out and bring into class. If you want to write one of your poems in a form not listed above (and I am sure some of you will) please just include a brief description of the form along with the poem.

Talk about its rhyme scheme, meter, line arrangements, and/or other technical features that define it.