Introduction to Poetry By Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

**Love Is Not all: It Is Not Meat nor Drink** By [Edna St. Vincent Millay](http://www.poemhunter.com/edna-st-vincent-millay/poems/)

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink  
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;   
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink   
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;   
Love cannot fill the thickened lung with breath,   
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;   
Yet many a man is making friends with death   
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.   
It well may be that in a difficult hour,   
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,   
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,   
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,   
Or trade the memory of this night for food.   
It well may be. I do not think I would.

**How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)** By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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 every day’s

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

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 choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

**Sonnet 30 (Fire And Ice)** [by Edmund Spenser](http://www.eliteskills.com/a/Edmund+Spenser)

My love is like to ice, and I to fire:  
how comes it then that this her cold so great  
is not dissolv'd through my so hot desire,  
but harder grows, the more I her entreat?  
  
Or how comes it that my exceeding heat  
is not delayed by her heart frozen cold,  
but that I burn much more in boiling sweat,  
and feel my flames augmented manifold?  
  
What more miraculous thing may be told  
that fire, which all thing melts, should harden ice:  
and ice which is congealed with senseless cold,  
should kindle fire by wonderful device?  
  
Such is the pow'r of love in gentle mind  
that it can alter all the course of kind.

**Fire and Ice** by Robert Frost

Some say the world will end in fire,   
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,   
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

**Sonnet 130**  By William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red than her lips' red;

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head;

I have seen roses damasked, red and white,

But no such roses see I in her cheeks;

And in some pérfumes is there more delight

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know

That music hath a far more pleasing sound.

I grant I never saw a goddess go;

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.

  And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare

  As any she belied with false compare.

**To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time** By Robert Herrick

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,

Old Time is still a-flying;

And this same flower that smiles today

Tomorrow will be dying.

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.

That age is best which is the first,

When youth and blood are warmer;

But being spent, the worse, and worst

Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time, Robert Herrick, 1591 - 1674

And while ye may, go marry;

For having lost but once your prime,

You may forever tarry.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Bad Morning** by Langston Hughes

Here I sit  
With my shoes mismated.  
Lawdy-mercy!  
I's frustrated!

**We Real Cool** by Gwendolyn Brooks

We real cool. We  
Left School. We  
  
Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We  
  
Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We  
  
Jazz June. We  
Die soon.

**Fog** by Carl Sandberg

The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches

**i carry your heart with me e e cummings**

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in   
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere   
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done   
by only me is your doing, my darling)   
i fear no fate(for you are my fate, my sweet)i want   
no world(for beautiful you are my world, my true)   
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant   
and whatever a sun will always sing is you   
  
here is the deepest secret nobody knows   
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud   
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows   
higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)   
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart   
  
i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

**The Kiss**  by Sarah Teasdale

I hoped that he would love me,   
And he has kissed my mouth,   
But I am like a stricken bird   
That cannot reach the south.   
  
For though I know he loves me,   
To-night my heart is sad;   
His kiss was not so wonderful   
As all the dreams I had.

**On Turning Ten** by Billy Collins

The whole idea of it makes me feel  
like I'm coming down with something,  
something worse than any stomach ache  
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light--  
a kind of measles of the spirit,  
a mumps of the psyche,  
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.  
  
You tell me it is too early to be looking back,  
but that is because you have forgotten  
the perfect simplicity of being one  
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.  
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.  
At four I was an Arabian wizard.  
I could make myself invisible  
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.  
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.  
  
But now I am mostly at the window  
watching the late afternoon light.  
Back then it never fell so solemnly  
against the side of my tree house,  
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage  
as it does today,  
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.  
  
This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,  
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.  
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,  
time to turn the first big number.  
  
It seems only yesterday I used to believe  
there was nothing under my skin but light.  
If you cut me I could shine.  
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,  
I skin my knees. I bleed.

**Hope**      Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers   
That perches in the soul,   
And sings the tune--without the words,   
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;   
And sore must be the storm   
That could abash the little bird   
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,   
And on the strangest sea;   
Yet, never, in extremity,   
It asked a crumb of me.

**My Shadow** by Robert Louis Stevenson

I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,  
And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.  
He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;  
And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.

The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow--  
Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;  
For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,  
And he sometimes goes so little that there's none of him at all.  
  
He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,  
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.  
He stays so close behind me, he's a coward you can see;  
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!  
  
One morning, very early, before the sun was up,  
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;  
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,  
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed.

**A BRAND NEW DAY**  Author: Aeni

Rest your head and close your eyes  
Everything will be okay  
For when you wake with the sweet sunrise  
It will be a brand new day  
Turn down the lights and pull me close  
Feel only the beating of our hearts as we lay  
For when you wake with the soft morning breeze  
It will be a brand new day  
Relax your body and caress my soft hair  
Let all of life's worries melt away  
For when you wake with the warm summer scent  
It will be a brand new day  
Fall fast asleep and dream with me  
Whisper "I love you, I'm here to stay"  
For when we wake in each others arms  
It will be a brand new day

**Nothing Gold Can Stay** By Robert Frost

Nature’s first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf’s a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

**A BRAND NEW DAY**  by Aeni

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Whisper "I love you, I'm here to stay"  
For when we wake in each others arms  
It will be a brand new day

**A Cure Was Not To Be** by Ciara

God took a look around his garden and found an empty place

he took a look upon the earth and saw your tired face

he put his arm around you granddad and lifted you to rest

Gods garden must be beautiful for he only picks the best

God knows that you were tired and a cure was not to be

so he closed your weary eyelids and whispered come to me

with tearful eyes I watched you and saw you slip away

although I loved you dearly I knew you could not stay

it broke my heart to lose you but you never went alone

part of me went with you on that day

God had called you home

if you have a granddad cherish him with care

cause you will never feel a heartache until you see his vacant chair.

**I, Too**  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

**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings** by Maya Angelou

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream till the current ends and dips his wings in the orange sun rays and dares to claim the sky.  But a bird that stalks down his narrow cage can seldom see through his bars of rage his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.  The caged bird sings with fearful trill of the things unknown but longed for still and is tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom  The free bird thinks of another breeze an the trade winds soft through the sighing trees and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn and he names the sky his own.  But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing  The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom. |

**Mighty Casey at the Bat** by Ernest Thayer

The Outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:  
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play.  
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,  
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest  
Clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast;  
They thought, if only Casey could get but a whack at that -  
We'd put up even money, now, with Casey at the bat.

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,  
And the former was a lulu and the latter was a cake;  
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,  
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,  
And Blake, the much despis-ed, tore the cover off the ball;

And when the dust had lifted, and the men saw what had occurred,  
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from 5,000 throats and more there rose a lusty yell;  
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;  
It knocked upon the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,  
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;  
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face.  
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,  
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;  
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt.  
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,  
Defiance gleamed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,  
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.  
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped-  
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one," the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,  
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore.  
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;  
And its likely they'd a-killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;  
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;  
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;  
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said, "Strike two."

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered fraud;  
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.  
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,  
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate;  
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate.  
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,  
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,  
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout;  
But there is no joy in Mudville - mighty Casey has struck out.

**Still I Rise**  by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history   
With your bitter, twisted lies,   
You may trod me in the very dirt   
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?   
Why are you beset with gloom?   
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells   
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,   
With the certainty of tides,   
Just like hopes springing high,   
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?   
Bowed head and lowered eyes?   
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,   
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?   
Don't you take it awful hard   
'Cause I laugh like I got gold mines   
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,   
You may cut me with your eyes,   
You may kill me with your hatefulness,   
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?   
Does it come as a surprise   
That I dance like I've got diamonds   
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame   
I rise 

Up from a past that's rooted in pain   
I rise 

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,   
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear   
I rise 

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear   
I rise 

Bringing the gifts my ancestors gave,   
I am the dream and the hope of the slave. 

I rise   
I rise   
I rise.

**The Highwayman** by Alfred Noyes

                                        PART ONE

                                                 I

    THE wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,   
    The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,   
    The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,   
    And the highwayman came riding—   
                      Riding—riding—   
    The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

  II

    He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,   
    A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin;   
    They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots were up to the thigh!   
    And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,   
                      His pistol butts a-twinkle,   
    His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

                                                 III

    Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard,   
    And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred;   
    He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there   
    But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,   
                      Bess, the landlord's daughter,   
    Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

                                                 IV

    And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked   
    Where Tim the ostler listened; his face was white and peaked;   
    His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,   
    But he loved the landlord's daughter,   
                      The landlord's red-lipped daughter,   
    Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

                                                 V

    "One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,   
    But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;   
    Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,   
    Then look for me by moonlight,   
                      Watch for me by moonlight,   
    I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way."

VI

    He rose upright in the stirrups; he scarce could reach her hand,   
    But she loosened her hair i' the casement! His face burnt like a brand   
    As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;   
    And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,   
                      (Oh, sweet, black waves in the moonlight!)   
    Then he tugged at his rein in the moonliglt, and galloped away to the West.

                                        PART TWO

                                                 I

    He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon;   
    And out o' the tawny sunset, before the rise o' the moon,   
    When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,   
    A red-coat troop came marching—   
                      Marching—marching—   
    King George's men came matching, up to the old inn-door.

                                                 II

    They said no word to the landlord, they drank his ale instead,   
    But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot of her narrow bed;   
    Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!   
    There was death at every window;   
                      And hell at one dark window;   
    For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he* would ride.

                                                 III

    They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest;   
    They had bound a musket beside her, with the barrel beneath her breast!   
    "Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her.   
                      She heard the dead man say—   
    *Look for me by moonlight;*   
                      *Watch for me by moonlight;*   
    *I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!*

                                                 IV

    She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!   
    She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!   
    They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,   
    Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,   
                      Cold, on the stroke of midnight,   
    The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

                                                 V

    The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more for the rest!   
    Up, she stood up to attention, with the barrel beneath her breast,   
    She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;   
    For the road lay bare in the moonlight;   
                      Blank and bare in the moonlight;   
    And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbed to her love's refrain .

                                                 VI

*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot!* Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs ringing clear;   
    *Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot,* in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?   
    Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,   
    The highwayman came riding,   
                      Riding, riding!   
    The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still!

                                                 VII

*Tlot-tlot,* in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing night!   
    Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!   
    Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,   
    Then her finger moved in the moonlight,   
                      Her musket shattered the moonlight,   
    Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

                                                 VIII

    He turned; he spurred to the West; he did not know who stood   
    Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own red blood!   
    Not till the dawn he heard it, his face grew grey to hear   
    How Bess, the landlord's daughter,   
                      The landlord's black-eyed daughter,   
    Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

                                                 IX

    Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,   
    With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high!   
    Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat,   
    When they shot him down on the highway,   
                      Down like a dog on the highway,   
    And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of lace at his throat.

                  \*           \*           \*           \*           \*           \*

                                                 X

    And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,   
    When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,   
    When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,   
    A highwayman comes riding—   
                      Riding—riding—   
    A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

                                                 XI

    Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard;   
    He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred;   
    He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there   
    But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,   
                      Bess, the landlord's daughter,   
    Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

**Tonight I can write the saddest lines** by Pablo Neruda

Tonight I can write the saddest lines

Write, for example, 'The night is shattered,  
and the blue stars shiver in the distance.'  
The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too.

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.  
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.

She loved me, and sometimes I loved her too.  
How could one not have loved her great still eyes?

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.  
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.  
To hear the immense night, still more immense without her,  
And the verse falls to the snow like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her.  
That night is shattered and she is not with me.   
This is all. In the distance someone is singing.

In the distance.  
My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.  
My sight searches for her as though to go to her.  
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.  
We, of that time, are no longer the same.  
I no longer love her, that is certain, but how I loved her.  
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. Like my kisses before.  
Her voice. Her bright body. Her infinite eyes,  
I no longer love her, that is certain, but maybe I love her.  
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms  
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer,  
and these the last verses that I write for her.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.  
Escribir, por ejemplo : 'La noche está estrellada,  
y tiritan, azules, los astros, a lo lejos'.  
El viento de la noche gira en el cielo y canta.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.  
Yo la quise, y a veces ella también me quiso.  
En las noches como ésta la tuve entre mis brazos.  
La besé tantas veces bajo el cielo infinito.

Ella me quiso, a veces yo también la quería.  
Cómo no haber amado sus grandes ojos fijos.  
Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.  
Pensar que no la tengo. Sentir que la he perdido.

Oir la noche immensa, más inmensa sin ella.   
Y el verso cae al alma como al pasto el rocío.  
Qué importa que mi amor no pudiera guardarla.  
La noche está estrellada y ella no está conmigo.

Eso es todo. A lo lejos alguien canta. A lo lejos.  
Mi alma no se contenta con haberla perdido.  
Como para acercarla mi mirada la busca.  
Mi corazón la busca, y ella no está conmigo.

La misma noche que hace blanquear los mismos arboles.  
Nosotros, los de entonces, ya no somos los mismos.  
Ya no la quiero, es cierto pero cuánto la quise.  
Mi voz buscaba el viento para tocar su oído.

De otro. Será de otro. Como antes de mis besos.  
Su voz, su cuerpo claro. Sus ojos infinitos.  
Ya no la quiero, es cierto, pero tal vez la quiero.  
Es tan corto al amor, y es tan largo el olvido.

Porque en noches como ésta la tuve entre mis brazos,  
mi alma no se contenta con haberla perdido.  
Aunque ésta sea el último dolor que ella me causa,  
y éstos sean los últimos versos que yo le escribo.