Walt Whitman

1819–1892

Walt Whitman is America’s world poet—a latter-day successor to Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare. InLeaves of Grass (1855), he celebrated democracy, nature, love, and friendship. This monumental work chanted praises to the body as well as to the soul, and found beauty and reassurance even in death.

Along with [Emily Dickinson](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=1775), Whitman is regarded as one of America’s most significant nineteenth century poets. Born on Long Island, Whitman grew up in Brooklyn and received limited formal education. His occupations during his lifetime included printer, schoolteacher, reporter, and editor.  Whitman’s self-published Leaves of Grass was inspired in part by his travels through the American frontier and by his admiration for[Ralph Waldo Emerson](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=81524). This important publication underwent eight subsequent editions during his lifetime as Whitman expanded and revised the poetry and added more to the original collection of twelve poems. Emerson himself declared the first edition was “the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed.”

Whitman published his own enthusiastic review of Leaves of Grass. Critics and readers alike, however, found both Whitman’s style and subject matter unnerving. According to TheLongman Anthology of Poetry, “Whitman received little public acclaim for his poems during his lifetime for several reasons:  this openness regarding sex, his self-presentation as a rough working man, and his stylistic innovations.” A poet who “abandoned the regular meter and rhyme patterns” of his contemporaries, Whitman was “influenced by the long cadences and rhetorical strategies of Biblical poetry.” Upon publishing Leaves of Grass, Whitman was subsequently fired from his job with the Department of the Interior. Despite his mixed critical reception in the U.S., he was favorably received in England, with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne among the British writers who celebrated his work.

During the Civil War, Whitman worked as a clerk in Washington, DC. For three years, he visited soldiers during his spare time, dressing wounds and giving solace to the injured. These experiences led to the poems in his 1865 publication, Drum-Taps, which includes, “[When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=174748),” Whitman’s elegy for President Lincoln.

After suffering a serious stroke in 1873, Whitman moved to his brother’s home in Camden, New Jersey. While his poetry failed to garner popular attention from his American readership during his lifetime, over 1,000 people came to view his funeral. And as the first writer of a truly American poetry, Whitman’s legacy endures. According to The Longman Anthology of Poetry, Whitman’s “ambition, expansiveness, and embrace of all the high and low features of American life influenced many poets of the twentieth century, including D.H. Lawrence, [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=81496), [Hart Crane](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=1491), and [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=2547).”

You can read and inspect many of Whitman's books, letters, and manuscripts at [the Walt Whitman Archive](http://whitmanarchive.org/), a digital edition at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, directed by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price.

# A Noiseless Patient Spider

**by Walt Whitman
(1819-1892)**

A noiseless patient spider,

I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated,

Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,

It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,

Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,

Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,

Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,

Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor hold,

Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

**There Was a Child Went Forth**

**by Walt Whitman
(1819-1892)**

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the
day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.
The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass and white and red morning-glories, and white and red
clover, and the song of the phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the
mare's foal and the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barnyard or by the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there, and the
beautiful curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads, all became part of
him.
The field-sprouts of Fourth-month and Fifth-month became part of him,
Winter-grain sprouts and those of the light-yellow corn, and the
esculent roots of the garden,
And the apple-trees cover'd with blossoms and the fruit afterward,
and wood-berries, and the commonest weeds by the road,
And the old drunkard staggering home from the outhouse of the
tavern whence he had lately risen,
And the schoolmistress that pass'd on her way to the school,
And the friendly boys that pass'd, and the quarrelsome boys,
And the tidy and fresh-cheek'd girls, and the barefoot negro boy and girl,
And all the changes of city and country wherever he went.
His own parents, he that had father'd him and she that had conceiv'd
him in her womb and birth'd him,
They gave this child more of themselves than that,
They gave him afterward every day, they became part of him.
The mother at home quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table,
The mother with mild words, clean her cap and gown, a wholesome
odor falling off her person and clothes as she walks by,
The father, strong, self-sufficient, manly, mean, anger'd, unjust,
The blow, the quick loud word, the tight bargain, the crafty lure,
The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture, the
yearning and swelling heart,
Affection that will not be gainsay'd, the sense of what is real, the
thought if after all it should prove unreal,
The doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-time, the curious
whether and how,
Whether that which appears so is so, or is it all flashes and specks?
Men and women crowding fast in the streets, if they are not flashes
and specks what are they?
The streets themselves and the facades of houses, and goods in the
windows,
Vehicles, teams, the heavy-plank'd wharves, the huge crossing at
the ferries,
The village on the highland seen from afar at sunset, the river between,
Shadows, aureola and mist, the light falling on roofs and gables of
white or brown two miles off,
The schooner near by sleepily dropping down the tide, the little
boat slack-tow'd astern,
The hurrying tumbling waves, quick-broken crests, slapping,
The strata of color'd clouds, the long bar of maroon-tint away
solitary by itself, the spread of purity it lies motionless in,
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt marsh
and shore mud,
These became part of that child who went forth every day, and who
now goes, and will always go forth every day.

# W. B. Yeats

Born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1865, William Butler Yeats was the son of a well-known Irish painter, John Butler Yeats. He spent his childhood in County Sligo, where his parents were raised, and in London. He returned to Dublin at the age of fifteen to continue his education and study painting, but quickly discovered he preferred poetry. Born into the Anglo-Irish landowning class, Yeats became involved with the Celtic Revival, a movement against the cultural influences of English rule in Ireland during the Victorian period, which sought to promote the spirit of Ireland's native heritage. Though Yeats never learned Gaelic himself, his writing at the turn of the century drew extensively from sources in Irish mythology and folklore. Also a potent influence on his poetry was the Irish revolutionary Maud Gonne, whom he met in 1889, a woman equally famous for her passionate nationalist politics and her beauty. Though she married another man in 1903 and grew apart from Yeats (and Yeats himself was eventually married to another woman, Georgie Hyde Lees), she remained a powerful figure in his poetry.

Yeats was deeply involved in politics in Ireland, and in the twenties, despite Irish independence from England, his verse reflected a pessimism about the political situation in his country and the rest of Europe, paralleling the increasing conservativism of his American counterparts in London, [T. S. Eliot](http://www.poets.org/tseli) and [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun). His work after 1910 was strongly influenced by Pound, becoming more modern in its concision and imagery, but Yeats never abandoned his strict adherence to traditional verse forms. He had a life-long interest in mysticism and the occult, which was off-putting to some readers, but he remained uninhibited in advancing his idiosyncratic philosophy, and his poetry continued to grow stronger as he grew older. Appointed a senator of the Irish Free State in 1922, he is remembered as an important cultural leader, as a major playwright (he was one of the founders of the famous Abbey Theatre in Dublin), and as one of the very greatest poets—in any language—of the century. W. B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923 and died in 1939 at the age of 73.

# - See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/117#sthash.JNK1R7KC.dpuf>

# Sailing to Byzantium

  by [W. B. Yeats](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/117)

That is no country for old men. The young

In one another's arms, birds in the trees

—Those dying generations—at their song,

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal dress,

Nor is there singing school but studying

Monuments of its own magnificence;

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium.

O sages standing in God's holy fire

As in the gold mosaic of a wall,

Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,

And be the singing-masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take

My bodily form from any natural thing,

But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make

Of hammered gold and gold enamelling

To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;

Or set upon a golden bough to sing

To lords and ladies of Byzantium

Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/20310#sthash.p1w88DyP.dpuf>

# The Second Coming

  by [W. B. Yeats](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/117)

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?

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15527#sthash.2HeAM2mC.dpuf>

# Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound is generally considered the poet most responsible for defining and promoting a modernist aesthetic in poetry. In the early teens of the twentieth century, he opened a seminal exchange of work and ideas between British and American writers, and was famous for the generosity with which he advanced the work of such major contemporaries as [W. B. Yeats](http://www.poets.org/wbyea), [Robert Frost](http://www.poets.org/rfros), [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poets.org/wcwil), [Marianne Moore](http://www.poets.org/mmoor), [H. D.](http://www.poets.org/hdool), James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and especially [T. S. Eliot](http://www.poets.org/tseli).

His own significant contributions to poetry begin with his promulgation of [Imagism](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5658), a movement in poetry which derived its technique from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry—stressing clarity, precision, and economy of language and foregoing traditional rhyme and meter in order to, in Pound's words, "compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome." His later work, for nearly fifty years, focused on the encyclopedic epic poem he entitled *The Cantos*.

Ezra Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, in 1885. He completed two years of college at the University of Pennsylvania and earned a degree from Hamilton College in 1905. After teaching at Wabash College for two years, he travelled abroad to Spain, Italy and London, where, as the literary executor of the scholar Ernest Fenellosa, he became interested in Japanese and Chinese poetry. He married Dorothy Shakespear in 1914 and became London editor of the *Little Review* in 1917.

In 1924, he moved to Italy; during this period of voluntary exile, Pound became involved in Fascist politics, and did not return to the United States until 1945, when he was arrested on charges of treason for broadcasting Fascist propaganda by radio to the United States during the Second World War. In 1946, he was acquitted, but declared mentally ill and committed to St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. During his confinement, the jury of the Bollingen-Library of Congress Award (which included a number of the most eminent writers of the time) decided to overlook Pound's political career in the interest of recognizing his poetic achievements, and awarded him the prize for the *Pisan Cantos* (1948). After continuous appeals from writers won his release from the hospital in 1958, Pound returned to Italy and settled in Venice, where he died, a semi-recluse, in 1972.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/161#sthash.AecFP8Ar.dpuf>

# In a Station of the Metro

  by [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/161)

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15421#sthash.L9vNX0fp.dpuf>

# The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter

  by [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/161)

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead

I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.

You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.

And we went on living in the village of Chokan:

Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.

I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.

Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,

I desired my dust to be mingled with yours

Forever and forever and forever.

Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed,

You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,

And you have been gone five months.

The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.

By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,

Too deep to clear them away!

The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August

Over the grass in the West garden;

They hurt me. I grow older.

If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,

Please let me know beforehand,

And I will come out to meet you

 As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

 By Rihaku

"The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" is based on the first of Li Po's "Two Letters from Chang-Kan." Copyright © 1956, 1957 by Ezra Pound. - See more at: http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15425#sthash.zbLZv97c.dpuf

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15425#sthash.zbLZv97c.dpuf>

# H. D.

On September 10, 1886, Hilda Doolittle was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. She attended Bryn Mawr, as a classmate of [Marianne Moore](http://www.poets.org/mmoor), and later the University of Pennsylvania where she befriended [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun) and [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poets.org/wcwil).

She travelled to Europe in 1911, intending to spend only a summer, but remained abroad for the rest of her life.

Through Pound, H. D. grew interested in and quickly became a leader of the [Imagist movement](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5658). Some of her earliest poems gained recognition when they were published by Harriet Monroe in *Poetry*.

Her work is characterized by the intense strength of her images, economy of language, and use of classical mythology. Her poems did not receive widespread appreciation and acclaim during her lifetime, in part because her name was associated with the Imagist movement even as her voice had outgrown the movement's boundaries, as evidenced by her book-length works, *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*.

As Alicia Ostriker said in *American Poetry Review*, "H.D. by the end of her career became not only the most gifted woman poet of our century, but one of the most original poets—the more I read her the more I think this—in our language."

Neglect of H. D. can also be attributed to her times, as many of her poems spoke to an audience which was unready to respond to the strong feminist principles articulated in her work. She died in 1961.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/234#sthash.MGsVPELW.dpuf>

# Sea Rose

  by [H. D.](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/234)

Rose, harsh rose,

marred and with stint of petals,

meagre flower, thin,

sparse of leaf,

more precious

than a wet rose

single on a stem—

you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,

you are flung on the sand,

you are lifted

in the crisp sand

that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose

drip such acrid fragrance

hardened in a leaf?

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/22957#sthash.0HPIGq55.dpuf>

# Robert Frost

Robert Frost was born on March 26, 1874, in San Francisco, where his father, William Prescott Frost Jr., and his mother, Isabelle Moodie, had moved from Pennsylvania shortly after marrying. After the death of his father from tuberculosis when Frost was eleven years old, he moved with his mother and sister, Jeanie, who was two years younger, to Lawrence, Massachusetts. He became interested in reading and writing poetry during his high school years in Lawrence, enrolled at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1892, and later at Harvard University in Boston, though he never earned a formal college degree.

Frost drifted through a string of occupations after leaving school, working as a teacher, cobbler, and editor of the Lawrence *Sentinel*. His first published poem, "My Butterfly," appeared on November 8, 1894, in the New York newspaper *The Independent*.

In 1895, Frost married Elinor Miriam White, whom he'd shared valedictorian honors with in high school and who was a major inspiration for his poetry until her death in 1938. The couple moved to England in 1912, after they tried and failed at farming in New Hampshire. It was abroad that Frost met and was influenced by such contemporary British poets as [Edward Thomas](http://www.poets.org/ethom), [Rupert Brooke](http://www.poets.org/rbroo), and [Robert Graves](http://www.poets.org/rgrav). While in England, Frost also established a friendship with the poet [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun), who helped to promote and publish his work.

By the time Frost returned to the United States in 1915, he had published two full-length collections, *A Boy's Will* (Henry Holt and Company, 1913) and *North of Boston* (Henry Holt and Company, 1914), and his reputation was established. By the 1920s, he was the most celebrated poet in America, and with each new book—including *New Hampshire* (Henry Holt and Company, 1923), *A Further Range* (Henry Holt and Company, 1936), *Steeple Bush* (Henry Holt and Company, 1947), and *In the Clearing* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1962)—his fame and honors (including four Pulitzer Prizes) increased.

Though his work is principally associated with the life and landscape of New England—and though he was a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics who remained steadfastly aloof from the poetic movements and fashions of his time—Frost is anything but merely a regional poet. The author of searching and often dark meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken, in the psychological complexity of his portraits, and in the degree to which his work is infused with layers of ambiguity and irony.

In a 1970 review of *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, the poet [Daniel Hoffman](http://www.poets.org/dhoff) describes Frost's early work as "the Puritan ethic turned astonishingly lyrical and enabled to say out loud the sources of its own delight in the world," and comments on Frost's career as The American Bard: "He became a national celebrity, our nearly official Poet Laureate, and a great performer in the tradition of that earlier master of the literary vernacular, Mark Twain."

About Frost, President John F. Kennedy, at whose inauguration the poet delivered a poem, said, "He has bequeathed his nation a body of imperishable verse from which Americans will forever gain joy and understanding."

Robert Frost lived and taught for many years in Massachusetts and Vermont, and died in Boston on January 29, 1963.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/192#sthash.8CNoJuCu.dpuf>

**The Road Not Taken**

  by [Robert Frost](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/192)

* 00:00
* 01:04

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15717#sthash.qgCImCWv.dpuf>

# After Apple-Picking

  by [Robert Frost](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/192)

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree

Toward heaven still,

And there's a barrel that I didn't fill

Beside it, and there may be two or three

Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.

But I am done with apple-picking now.

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,

The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight

I got from looking through a pane of glass

I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough

And held against the world of hoary grass.

It melted, and I let it fall and break.

But I was well

Upon my way to sleep before it fell,

And I could tell

What form my dreaming was about to take.

Magnified apples appear and disappear,

Stem end and blossom end,

And every fleck of russet showing clear.

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,

It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.

I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.

And I keep hearing from the cellar bin

The rumbling sound

Of load on load of apples coming in.

For I have had too much

Of apple-picking: I am overtired

Of the great harvest I myself desired.

There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,

Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.

For all

That struck the earth,

No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,

Went surely to the cider-apple heap

As of no worth.

One can see what will trouble

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.

Were he not gone,

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his

Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,

Or just some human sleep.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19975#sthash.8DTpsHKJ.dpuf>

# Wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, on October 2, 1879. He attended Harvard University as an undergraduate from 1897 to 1900. He planned to travel to Paris as a writer, but after a working briefly as a reporter for the *New York Herald Times*, he decided to study law. He graduated with a degree from New York Law School in 1903 and was admitted to the U.S. Bar in 1904. He practised law in New York City until 1916.

Though he had serious determination to become a successful lawyer, Stevens had several friends among the New York writers and painters in Greenwich Village, including the poets [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poets.org/wcwil), [Marianne Moore](http://www.poets.org/mmoor), and [E. E. Cummings](http://www.poets.org/eecum).

In 1914, under the pseudonym "Peter Parasol," he sent a group of poems under the title "Phases" to Harriet Monroe for a war poem competition for *Poetry* magazine. Stevens did not win the prize, but was published by Monroe in November of that year.

Stevens moved to Connecticut in 1916, having found employment at the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co., of which he became vice president in 1934. He had begun to establish an identity for himself outside the world of law and business, however, and his first book of poems, *Harmonium*, published in 1923, exhibited the influence of both the [English Romantics](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5670) and the [French symbolists](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5674), an inclination to aesthetic philosophy, and a wholly original style and sensibility: exotic, whimsical, infused with the light and color of an Impressionist painting.

For the next several years, Stevens focused on his business life. He began to publish new poems in 1930, however, and in the following year, Knopf published an second edition of *Harmonium*, which included fourteen new poems and left out three of the decidedly weaker ones.

More than any other modern poet, Stevens was concerned with the transformative power of the imagination. Composing poems on his way to and from the office and in the evenings, Stevens continued to spend his days behind a desk at the office, and led a quiet, uneventful life.

Though now considered one of the major American poets of the century, he did not receive widespread recognition until the publication of his *Collected Poems*, just a year before his death. His major works include *Ideas of Order* (1935), *The Man With the Blue Guitar*(1937), *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction*(1942), and a collection of essays on poetry, *The Necessary Angel*(1951).

Stevens died in Hartford in 1955.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/124#sthash.y8QO5QSb.dpuf>

# Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

  by [Wallace Stevens](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/124)

**I**

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

**II**

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

**III**

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

**IV**

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

**V**

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

**VI**

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

**VII**

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

**VIII**

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

**IX**

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

**X**

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

**XI**

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

**XII**

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

**XIII**

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15746#sthash.vTmapiX2.dpuf>

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| --- |
| Wilfred OwenOn March 18, 1893, Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born in Shropshire, England. After the death of his grandfather in 1897, the family moved to Birkenhead, where Owen was educated at the Birkenhead Institute. After another move in 1906, he continued his continued his studies at the Technical School in Shrewsbury. Interested in the arts at a young age, Owen began to experiment with poetry at 17.After failing to gain entrance into the University of London, Owen spent a year as a lay assistant to Reverend Herbert Wigan in 1911 and went on to teach in France at the Berlitz School of English. By 1915, he became increasingly interested in World War I and enlisted in the Artists' Rifles group. After training in England, Owen was commissioned as a second lieutenant.He was wounded in combat in 1917 and evacuated to Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh after being diagnosed with shell shock. There he met another patient, poet Siegfried Sassoon, who served as a mentor and introduced him to well-known literary figures such as [Robert Graves](http://www.poets.org/rgrav) and H. G. Wells.It was at this time Owen wrote many of his most important poems, including "Anthem for Doomed Youth" and "Dulce et Decorum Est". His poetry often graphically illustrated both the horrors of warfare, the physical landscapes which surrounded him, and the human body in relation to those landscapes. His verses stand in stark contrast to the patriotic poems of war written by earlier poets of Great Britain, such as Rupert Brooke.Owen rejoined his regiment in Scarborough, June 1918, and in August returned to France. He was awarded the Military Cross for bravery at Amiens. He was killed on November 4 of that year while attempting to lead his men across the Sambre canal at Ors. He was 25 years old. The news reached his parents on November 11, the day of the Armistice. The collected Poems of Wilfred Owen appeared in December 1920, with an introduction by Sassoon, and he has since become one of the most admired poets of World War I.A review of Owen's poems published on December 29th, 1920, just two years after his death, read "Others have shown the disenchantment of war, have unlegended the roselight and romance of it, but none with such compassion for the disenchanted nor such sternly just and justly stern judgment on the idyllisers."About Owen's post-war audience, the writer Geoff Dyer said, "To a nation stunned by grief the prophetic lag of posthumous publication made it seem that Owen was speaking from the other side of the grave. Memorials were one sign of the shadow cast by the dead over England in the twenties; another was a surge of interest in spiritualism. Owen was the medium through whom the missing spoke." |

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/305#sthash.To7bMLIO.dpuf>

# Dulce et Decorum Est

  by [Wilfred Owen](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/305)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs

And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots

But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;

Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots

Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;

But someone still was yelling out and stumbling

And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,

As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,

He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace

Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,

His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*

*Pro patria mori*.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19389#sthash.vWPj7Lce.dpuf>

# Wilfred Owen

## Disabled

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light-blue trees
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,
— In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race,
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.
One time he liked a bloodsmear down his leg,
After the matches carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. He wonders why . . .
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts.

That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts,
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
Smiling they wrote his lie; aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of; and no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul.
Now, he will spend a few sick years in Institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.
To-night he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

# E. E. Cummings

Edward Estlin Cummings was born at home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 14, 1894. He began writing poems as early as 1904 and studied Latin and Greek at the Cambridge Latin High School.

He received his BA in 1915 and his MA in 1916, both from Harvard. His studies there introduced him to avant garde writers, such as [Gertrude Stein](http://www.poets.org/gstei) and [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun).

In 1917, Cummings published an early selection of poems in the anthology *Eight Harvard Poets*. The same year, Cummings left the United States for France as a volunteer ambulance driver in World War I. Five months after his assignment, however, he and a friend were interned in a prison camp by the French authorities on suspicion of espionage (an experience recounted in his novel, *The Enormous Room*) for his outspoken anti-war convictions.

After the war, he settled into a life divided between houses in rural Connecticut and Greenwich Village, with frequent visits to Paris. He also traveled throughout Europe, meeting poets and artists, including Pablo Picasso, whose work he particularly admired.

In 1920, The Dial published seven poems by Cummings, including "[Buffalo Bill's](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15399)." Serving as Cummings' debut to a wider American audience, these "experiments" foreshadowed the synthetic cubist strategy Cummings would explore in the next few years.

In his work, Cummings experimented radically with form, punctuation, spelling and syntax, abandoning traditional techniques and structures to create a new, highly idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. Later in his career, he was often criticized for settling into his signature style and not pressing his work towards further evolution. Nevertheless, he attained great popularity, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful mode and his attention to subjects such as war and sex.

The poet and critic [Randall Jarrell](http://www.poets.org/rjarr) once noted that Cummings is "one of the most individual poets who ever lived—and, though it sometimes seems so, it is not just his vices and exaggerations, the defects of his qualities, that make a writer popular. But, primarily, Mr. Cummings' poems are loved because they are full of sentimentally, of sex, of more or less improper jokes, of elementary lyric insistence."

During his lifetime, Cummings received a number of honors, including an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1958, and a Ford Foundation grant.

At the time of his death, September 3, 1962, he was the second most widely read poet in the United States, after [Robert Frost](http://www.poets.org/rfros). He is buried in Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston, Massachusetts. - See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/156#sthash.0gDIHBrl.dpuf>

# anyone lived in a pretty how town

  by [E. E. Cummings](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/156)

anyone lived in a pretty how town

(with up so floating many bells down)

spring summer autumn winter

he sang his didn't he danced his did

Women and men(both little and small)

cared for anyone not at all

they sowed their isn't they reaped their same

sun moon stars rain

children guessed(but only a few

and down they forgot as up they grew

autumn winter spring summer)

that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf

she laughed his joy she cried his grief

bird by snow and stir by still

anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones

laughed their cryings and did their dance

(sleep wake hope and then)they

said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon

(and only the snow can begin to explain

how children are apt to forget to remember

with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess

(and noone stooped to kiss his face)

busy folk buried them side by side

little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep

and more by more they dream their sleep

noone and anyone earth by april

wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men(both dong and ding)

summer autumn winter spring

reaped their sowing and went their came

sun moon stars rain

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15403#sthash.jwxYl4Gf.dpuf>

# T. S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888. He lived in St. Louis during the first eighteen years of his life and attended Harvard University. In 1910, he left the United States for the Sorbonne, having earned both undergraduate and masters degrees and having contributed several poems to the *Harvard Advocate*.

After a year in Paris, he returned to Harvard to pursue a doctorate in philosophy, but returned to Europe and settled in England in 1914. The following year, he married Vivienne Haigh-Wood and began working in London, first as a teacher, and later for Lloyd's Bank.

It was in London that Eliot came under the influence of his contemporary [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun), who recognized his poetic genius at once, and assisted in the publication of his work in a number of magazines, most notably "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in *Poetry* in 1915. His first book of poems, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917, and immediately established him as a leading poet of the avant-garde. With the publication of *The Waste Land* in 1922, now considered by many to be the single most influential poetic work of the twentieth century, Eliot's reputation began to grow to nearly mythic proportions; by 1930, and for the next thirty years, he was the most dominant figure in poetry and literary criticism in the English-speaking world.

As a poet, he transmuted his affinity for the English metaphysical poets of the 17th century (most notably [John Donne](http://www.poets.org/jdonn)) and the 19th century French symbolist poets (including [Baudelaire](http://www.poets.org/cbaud) and Laforgue) into radical innovations in poetic technique and subject matter. His poems in many respects articulated the disillusionment of a younger post-World-War-I generation with the values and conventions—both literary and social—of the Victorian era. As a critic also, he had an enormous impact on contemporary literary taste, propounding views that, after his conversion to orthodox Christianity in the late thirties, were increasingly based in social and religious conservatism. His major later poems include *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1943); his books of literary and social criticism include *The Sacred Wood* (1920), *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), *After Strange Gods* (1934), and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1940). Eliot was also an important playwright, whose verse dramas include *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, and *The Cocktail Party*.

He became a British citizen in 1927; long associated with the publishing house of Faber & Faber, he published many younger poets, and eventually became director of the firm. After a notoriously unhappy first marriage, Eliot separated from his first wife in 1933, and was remarried, to Valerie Fletcher, in 1956. T. S. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948, and died in London in 1965.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/18#sthash.03aNulSS.dpuf>

# The Waste Land

  by [T. S. Eliot](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/18)

"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi
in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: **Σιβυλλα
τι θελεις**; respondebat illa: **αποθανειν θελω**."

For Ezra Poundil miglior fabbro.

**I. The Burial of the Dead**

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.
Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee
With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar kine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the archduke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

   What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.
               Frisch weht der Wind               Der Heimat zu,               Mein Irisch Kind,               Wo weilest du?
"You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
"They called me the hyacinth girl."
–Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Oed' und leer das Meer.

   Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,
The lady of situations.
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

   Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: "Stetson!
"You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable—mon frère!"

**II. A Game of Chess**

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of seven branched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood-fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvèd dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed.
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Clawed into words, then would be savagely still.

   "My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
   "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

   I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

   "What is that noise?"
                              The wind under the door.
"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"
                              Nothing again nothing.
                                                            "Do
"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
"Nothing?"

   I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
"Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?"
                                                                          But

O O O O that Shakespearean Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent
"What shall I do now? What shall I do?"
"I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
"With my hair down, so. What shall we do to-morrow?
"What shall we ever do?"
                              The hot water at ten.
And if it rains, a closed car at four.
And we shall play a game of chess,
Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

   When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—
I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.
He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you
To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.
You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,
He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.
And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,
He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,
And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.
Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.
Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said,
Others can pick and choose if you can't.
But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.
You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.
(And her only thirty-one.)
I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be alright, but I've never been the same.
You are a proper fool, I said.
Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,
What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goodnight Bill. Goodnight Lou. Goodnight May. Goodnight.
Ta ta. Goodnight. Goodnight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

**III. The Fire Sermon**

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept. . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

   Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.
Tereu

   Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

   At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire,
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit. . .

   She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

   "This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

   The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.
The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs,
                  Weialala leia
                  Wallala leialala

   Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
                  Weialala leia
                  Wallala leialala

   "Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. "Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees
Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

   "My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised 'a new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"

   "On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
                  la la

   To Carthage then I came

   Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

**IV. Death by Water**

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
                                   A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
                                 Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

**V. What the Thunder Said**

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience

   Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
                                           If there were water
   And no rock
   If there were rock
   And also water
   And water
   A spring
   A pool among the rock
   If there were the sound of water only
   Not the cicada
   And dry grass singing
   But sound of water over a rock
   Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
   Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
   But there is no water

   Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

   What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

   A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

   In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

   Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence,
Then spoke the thunder
DA
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: The boat responded
Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar
The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

                                       I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affinaQuando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow
Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie
These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
            Shantih shantih shantih

NOTES ON "THE WASTE LAND"

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: From Ritual to Romance (Macmillan). Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston's book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble. To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean The Golden Bough; I have used especially the two volumes Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Anyone who is acquainted with these works will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.

I. The Burial of the Dead

     Line 20. Cf. Ezekiel II, i.
     23. Cf. Ecclesiastes XII, v.
     31. V. Tristan und Isolde, I, verses 5-8.
     42. Id, III, verse 24.
     46. I am not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience. The Hanged Man, a member of the traditional pack, fits my purpose in two ways: because he is associated in my mind with the Hanged God of Frazer, and because I associate him with the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V. The Phoenician Sailor and the Merchant appear later; also the "crowds of people," and Death by Water is executed in Part IV. The Man with Three Staves (an authentic member of the Tarot pack) I associate, quite arbitrarily, with the Fisher King himself
     60. Cf. Baudelaire:
          "Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
          "Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant."
     63. Cf. Inferno III, 55-57:
                                             "si Iunga tratta
          di gente, ch'io non avrei mai creduto
               che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta."
     64, Cf. Inferno IV, 25-27:
          "Quivi, secondo che per ascoltare,
          "non avea pianto, ma' che di sospiri,
          "che l'aura eterna facevan tremare."
     68, A phenomenon which I have often noticed.
     74, Cf. the Dirge in Webster's White Devil.
     76. V. Baudelaire, Preface to Fleurs du Mal.

II. A Game of Chess

     77. Cf. Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii, I. 190.
     92. Laquearia. V. Aeneid, I, 726:
          dependent Iychni laquearibus aureis incensi, et noctem flammis funalia vincunt.
     98. Sylvan scene, V. Milton, Paradise Lost, IV, 140.
     99. V. Ovid, Metamorphoses, VI, Philomela.
     100. C£ Part III, I. 204.
     115. Cf, Part III, I. 195.
     118. Cf. Webster: "Is the wind in that door still?"
     126. Cf, Part I, I. 37,48.
     138. Cf. the game of chess in Middleton's Women beware Women.
     176. V. Spencer, Prothalamion.
     192. Cf. The Tempest, I, ii,
     196. Cf. Marvell, To His Coy Mistress.
     197. Cf. Day, Parliament of Bees:
          "When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear,
          "A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring
          "Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
          "Where all shall see her naked skin . . . "
     199. I do not know the origin of the ballad from which these lines are taken: it was reported to me from Sydney, Australia.
     202. V. Verlaine, Parsifal.
     210. The currants were quoted at a price "carriage and insurance free to London"; and the Bill of Lading etc. were to be handed to the buyer upon payment of the sight draft.
     218. Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a "character," is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, se1ler of currants, melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so a1l the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias, What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem. The whole passage from Ovid is of great anthropological interest:
          '. . . Cum Iunone iocos et maior vestra profecto est
          Quam, quae contingit maribus,' dixisse, 'voluptas.'
          Illa negat; placuit quae sit sententia docti
          Quaerere Tiresiae: venus huic erat utraque nota,
          Nam duo magnorum viridi coeuntia silva
          Corpora serpentum baculi violaverat ictu
          Deque viro factus, mirabile, femina septem
          Egerat autumnos; octavo rursus eosdem
          Vidit et 'est yestrae si tanta potentia plagae:
          Dixit 'ut auctoris sortem in contraria mutet,
          Nunc quoque vos feriam!' percussis anguibus isdem
          Forma prior rediit genetivaque venit imago.
          Arbiter hic igitur sumptus de lite iocosa
          Dicta Iovis firmat; gravius Saturnia iusto
          Nec pro materia fertur doluisse suique
          Iudicis aeterna damnavit lumina nocte,
          At pater omnipotens (neque enim Iicetinrita cuiquam
          Facta dei fecisse deo) pro Iumine adempto
          Scire futura dedit poenamque levavit honore.
     221. This may not appear as exact as Sappho's lines, but I had In mind the "longshore" or "dory" fisherman, who returns at nightfall.
     253. V. Goldsmith, the song in The Vicar of Wakefield.
     257. V. The Tempest, as above.
     264. The interior of St. Magnus Martyr is to my mind one of the finest among Wren's interiors.. See The Proposed Demolillon of Nineteen City Churches: (P. S. King & Son, Ltd.).
     266. The Song of the (three) Thames-daughters begins here. From line 292 to 306 inclusive they speak in tum. V. Götterdämmerung, III, i: the Rhine-daughters.
     279. V. Froude, Elizabeth, Vol. I, ch. iv, letter of De Quadra to Philip of Spain:
"In the aflemoon we were in a barge, watching the games on the river. (The queen) was alonne with Lord Robert and myself on the poop, when they began to talk nonsense, and went so far that Lord Robert at last said, as I was on the spot there was no reason why they should not be married if the queen pleased."
     293. Cf. Purgatorio, V, 133:
          "Ricorditi di me, che son la Pia;
          "Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma."
     307. V. St. Augustine's Confessions: "to Carthage then I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves sang all about mine ears."
     308. The complete text of the Buddha's Fire Sermon (which corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount) from which these words are taken, will be found translated in the late Henry Clarke Warren's Buddhism in Translation (Harvard Oriental Series). Mr. Warren was one of the great pioneers of Buddhist studies in the Occident.
     309. From St. Augustine's Confessions again. The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident.

V. What the Thunder Said

     In the first part of Part V three themes are employed: the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous (see Miss Weston's book) and the present decay of eastern Europe.
     357. This is Turdus aonalaschkae pallasii, the hermit-thrush which I have heard in Quebec County. Chapman says (Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America) "it is most at home in secluded woodland and thickety retreats. . . . Its notes are not remarkable for variety or volume, but in purity and sweetness of tone and exquisite modulation they are unequalled." Its "water-dripping song" is justly celebrated.
     360. The following lines were stimulated by the account of one of the Antarctic expeditions (I forget which, but I think one of Shackleton's): it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted.
     367-77, Cf. Hermann Hesse, Blick ins Chaos: "Schon ist halb Europa, schon ist zumindest der halbe Osten Europas auf dem Wege zum Chaos, fährt betrunken im heiligem Wahnam Abgrund entlang und singt dazu, singt betrunken und hymnisch wie Dmitri Karamasoff sang. Ueber diese Lieder lacht der Burger beleidigt, der Heilige und Seher hört sie mit Tränen."
     402. "Datta, dayadhvam, damyata" (Give, sympathise, control). The fable of the meaning of the Thunder is found in the Brihadaranyaka – Upanishad, 5, 1. A translation is found in Deussen's Sechzig Upanishads des Veda, p, 489.
     408. Cf. Webster, The White Devil, V, vi:
                                                            ". . . they'll remarry
          Ere the worm pierce your winding-sheet, ere the spider
          Make a thin curtain for your epitaphs."
     412. Cf. Inferno, XXXIII, 46:
          "ed io sentii chiavar l'uscio di sotto
          all'orribile torre."
     Aho F H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 346.
"My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experiences falls within my alike, every sphere is opaque to the others which surround it. . . . In for each is peculiar and private to that soul."
     425. V. Weston: From Ritual to Romance; chapter on the Fisher King.
     428. V. Purgatorio, XXXVI, 148.
          "'Ara vos prec per aquella valor
          'que vos guida al som de l'escalina,
          'sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor.'
          Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina."
     429. V. Pervigilium Veneris. Cf. Philomela in Parts II and III.
     430. V. Gerard de Nerval, Sonnet El Desdichado.
     432. V. Kyd's Spanish Tragedy.
     434. Shantih. Repeated as here, a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The Peace which passeth understanding" is a feeble translation of the content of this word.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/18993#sthash.cKjcFEsz.dpuf>

# Marianne Moore

Born near St. Louis, Missouri, on November 15, 1887, Marianne Moore was raised in the home of her grandfather, a Presbyterian pastor. After her grandfather's death, in 1894, Moore and her family stayed with other relatives, and in 1896 they moved to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. She attended Bryn Mawr College and received her B.A. in 1909. Following graduation, Moore studied typing at Carlisle Commercial College, and from 1911 to 1915 she was employed as a school teacher at the Carlisle Indian School. In 1918, Moore and her mother moved to New York City, and in 1921, she became an assistant at the New York Public Library. She began to meet other poets, such as [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poets.org/wcwil) and [Wallace Stevens](http://www.poets.org/wstev), and to contribute to the *Dial*, a prestigious literary magazine. She served as acting editor of the *Dial* from 1925 to 1929. Along with the work of such other members of the Imagist movement as [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun), Williams, and [H. D.](http://www.poets.org/hdool), Moore's poems were published in the *Egoist*, an English magazine, beginning in 1915. In 1921, H.D. published Moore's first book, *Poems*, without her knowledge.

Moore was widely recognized for her work; among her many honors were the Bollingen prize, the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. She wrote with the freedom characteristic of the other modernist poets, often incorporating quotes from other sources into the text, yet her use of language was always extraordinarily condensed and precise, capable of suggesting a variety of ideas and associations within a single, compact image. In his 1925 essay "Marianne Moore," William Carlos Williams wrote about Moore's signature mode, the vastness of the particular: "So that in looking at some apparently small object, one feels the swirl of great events." She was particularly fond of animals, and much of her imagery is drawn from the natural world. She was also a great fan of professional baseball and an admirer of Muhammed Ali, for whom she wrote the liner notes to his record, *I Am the Greatest!* Deeply attached to her mother, she lived with her until Mrs. Moore's death in 1947. Marianne Moore died in New York City in 1972.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/96#sthash.XkhiO5r2.dpuf>

**The mind is an enchanting thing**

**is an enchanted thing**

 **like the glaze on a**

**katydid-wing**

 **subdivided by sun**

 **till the nettings are legion.**

**Like Gieseking playing Scarlatti;**

**like the apteryx-awl**

 **as a beak, or the**

**kiwi's rain-shawl**

 **of haired feathers, the mind**

 **feeling its way as though blind,**

**walks with its eyes on the ground.**

**It has memory's ear**

 **that can hear without**

**having to hear.**

 **Like the gyroscope's fall,**

 **truly unequivocal**

**because trued by regnant certainty,**

**it is a power of**

 **strong enchantment. It**

**is like the dove-**

 **neck animated by**

 **sun; it is memory's eye;**

**it's conscientious inconsistency.**

**It tears off the veil; tears**

 **the temptation, the**

**mist the heart wears,**

 **from its eyes -- if the heart**

 **has a face; it takes apart**

**dejection. It's fire in the dove-neck's**

**iridescence; in the**

 **inconsistencies**

**of Scarlatti.**

 **Unconfusion submits**

 **its confusion to proof; it's**

**not a Herod's oath that cannot change.**

**-- Marianne Moore (1887-1972).**

 **See The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore**

 **(Penguin, 1982), pp. 134-5.**

**What are years?**

**by Marianne Moore**

What is our innocence,

what is our guilt? All are

naked, none is safe. And whence

is courage: the unanswered question,

the resolute doubt, -

dumbly calling, deafly listening-that

in misfortune, even death,

encourage others

and in it's defeat, stirs

the soul to be strong? He

sees deep and is glad, who

accedes to mortality

and in his imprisonment rises

upon himself as

the sea in a chasm, struggling to be

free and unable to be,

in its surrendering

finds its continuing.

So he who strongly feels,

behaves. The very bird,

grown taller as he sings, steels

his form straight up. Though he is captive,

his mighty singing

says, satisfaction is a lowly

thing, how pure a thing is joy.

This is mortality,

this is eternity.

|  |
| --- |
| **William Carlos Williams**In 1883, William Carlos Williams was born in Rutherford, New Jersey. He began writing poetry while a student at Horace Mann High School, at which time he made the decision to become both a writer and a doctor. He received his MD from the University of Pennsylvania, where he met and befriended [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/epoun).Pound became a great influence on his writing, and in 1913 arranged for the London publication of Williams's second collection, *The Tempers*. Returning to Rutherford, where he sustained his medical practice throughout his life, Williams began publishing in small magazines and embarked on a prolific career as a poet, novelist, essayist, and playwright.Following Pound, he was one of the principal poets of the [Imagist](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5658) movement, though as time went on, he began to increasingly disagree with the values put forth in the work of Pound and especially [Eliot](http://www.poets.org/tseli), who he felt were too attached to European culture and traditions. Continuing to experiment with new techniques of meter and lineation, Williams sought to invent an entirely fresh—and singularly American—poetic, whose subject matter was centered on the everyday circumstances of life and the lives of common people.His influence as a poet spread slowly during the twenties and thirties, overshadowed, he felt, by the immense popularity of Eliot's "The Waste Land"; however, his work received increasing attention in the 1950s and 1960s as younger poets, including [Allen Ginsberg](http://www.poets.org/agins) and the Beats, were impressed by the accessibility of his language and his openness as a mentor. His major works include *Kora in Hell* (1920), *Spring and All* (1923), *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), the five-volume epic *Paterson*(1963, 1992), and *Imaginations* (1970).Williams's health began to decline after a heart attack in 1948 and a series of strokes, but he continued writing up until his death in New Jersey in 1963. |

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/119#sthash.yQRyTxUD.dpuf>

**The Red Wheelbarrow**

  by [William Carlos Williams](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/119)

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15537#sthash.eNNwZV4a.dpuf>

**W. H. Auden**

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, England, in 1907. He moved to Birmingham during childhood and was educated at Christ Church, Oxford. As a young man he was influenced by the poetry of [Thomas Hardy](http://www.poets.org/thard) and [Robert Frost](http://www.poets.org/rfros), as well as [William Blake](http://www.poets.org/wblak), [Emily Dickinson](http://www.poets.org/edick), [Gerard Manley Hopkins](http://www.poets.org/gmhop), and Old English verse. At Oxford his precocity as a poet was immediately apparent, and he formed lifelong friendships with two fellow writers, [Stephen Spender](http://www.poets.org/sspen) and Christopher Isherwood.

In 1928, his collection *Poems* was privately printed, but it wasn't until 1930, when another collection titled *Poems* (though its contents were different) was published, that Auden was established as the leading voice of a new generation.

Ever since, he has been admired for his unsurpassed technical virtuosity and an ability to write poems in nearly every imaginable verse form; the incorporation in his work of popular culture, current events, and vernacular speech; and also for the vast range of his intellect, which drew easily from an extraordinary variety of literatures, art forms, social and political theories, and scientific and technical information. He had a remarkable wit, and often mimicked the writing styles of other poets such as Dickinson, [W. B. Yeats](http://www.poets.org/wbyea), and Henry James. His poetry frequently recounts, literally or metaphorically, a journey or quest, and his travels provided rich material for his verse.

He visited Germany, Iceland, and China, served in the Spanish Civil war, and in 1939 moved to the United States, where he met his lover, Chester Kallman, and became an American citizen. His own beliefs changed radically between his youthful career in England, when he was an ardent advocate of socialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, and his later phase in America, when his central preoccupation became Christianity and the theology of modern Protestant theologians. A prolific writer, Auden was also a noted playwright, librettist, editor, and essayist. Generally considered the greatest English poet of the twentieth century, his work has exerted a major influence on succeeding generations of poets on both sides of the Atlantic.

W. H. Auden was a [Chancellor](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/34) of the Academy of American Poets from 1954 to 1973, and divided most of the second half of his life between residences in New York City and Austria. He died in Vienna in 1973.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/120#sthash.pW98UScF.dpuf>

**The Unknown Citizen**

  by [W. H. Auden](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/120)

*(To JS/07 M 378
This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)*

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,

And all the reports on his conduct agree

That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a

 saint,

For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Except for the War till the day he retired

He worked in a factory and never got fired,

But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.

Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,

For his Union reports that he paid his dues,

(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)

And our Social Psychology workers found

That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,

And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan

And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,

A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content

That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;

When there was peace, he was for peace: when there was war, he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his

 generation.

And our teachers report that he never interfered with their

 education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15549#sthash.g8TY6gzL.dpuf>

**Adrienne Rich**

On May 16, 1929, Adrienne Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland. She attended Radcliffe College, graduating in 1951, and was selected by [W.H. Auden](http://www.poets.org/whaud) for the Yale Series of Younger Poets prize for *A Change of World* that same year.

In 1953, she married Harvard University economist Alfred H. Conrad. Two years later, she published her second volume of poetry, *The Diamond Cutters*, of which [Randall Jarrell](http://www.poets.org/rjarr) wrote: "The poet [behind these poems] cannot help seeming to us a sort of princess in a fairy tale."

But the image of the fairytale princess would not be long-lived. After having three sons before the age of thirty, Rich gradually changed both her life and her poetry. Throughout the 1960s she wrote several collections, including *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) and *Leaflets* (1969). The content of her work became increasingly confrontational—exploring such themes as women’s role in society, racism, and the Vietnam war. The style of these poems also revealed a shift from careful metric patterns to free verse. In 1970, Rich left her husband, who committed suicide later that year.

It was in 1973, in the midst of the feminist and civil rights movements, the Vietnam War, and her own personal distress that Rich wrote [*Diving into the Wreck*](http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5975), a collection of exploratory and often angry poems, which garnered her the National Book Award in 1974. Rich accepted the award on behalf of all women and shared it with her fellow nominees, Alice Walker and [Audre Lorde](http://www.poets.org/alord).

Since then, Rich has published numerous collections, including *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems 2007-2010* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2010); *Telephone Ringing in the Labyrinth: Poems 2004–2006* (2006); *The School Among the Ruins: Poems 2000-2004* (2004), which won the Book Critics Circle Award; *Fox: Poems 1998-2000* (2001), *Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995-1998* (1999); *Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995* (1995); *Collected Early Poems: 1950-1970* (1993); *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988-1991* (1991), a finalist for the National Book Award; *Time's Power: Poems 1985-1988*(1989); *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New 1950-1984* (1984); and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978).

Rich is also the author of several books of nonfiction prose, including *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (W. W. Norton, 2001), *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1993) and *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986).

About Rich's work, the poet [W.S. Merwin](http://www.poets.org/wsmer) has said, "All her life she has been in love with the hope of telling utter truth, and her command of language from the first has been startlingly powerful."

Rich has received the Bollingen Prize, the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award, the [Academy of American Poets Fellowship](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/106), the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the [Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/108), the National Book Award, and a MacArthur Fellowship; she is also a former [Chancellor](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/34) of the Academy of American Poets.

In 1997, she refused the National Medal of Arts, stating that "I could not accept such an award from President Clinton or this White House because the very meaning of art, as I understand it, is incompatible with the cynical politics of this administration." She went on to say: "[Art] means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of the power which holds it hostage."

The same year, Rich was awarded the Academy's [Wallace Stevens Award](http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/107) for outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry. She died on March 27, 2012, at the age of 82.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/49#sthash.UQq9hhb7.dpuf>

# Diving into the Wreck

  by [Adrienne Rich](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/49)

First having read the book of myths,

and loaded the camera,

and checked the edge of the knife-blade,

I put on

the body-armor of black rubber

the absurd flippers

the grave and awkward mask.

I am having to do this

not like Cousteau with his

assiduous team

aboard the sun-flooded schooner

but here alone.

There is a ladder.

The ladder is always there

hanging innocently

close to the side of the schooner.

We know what it is for,

we who have used it.

Otherwise

it is a piece of maritime floss

some sundry equipment.

I go down.

Rung after rung and still

the oxygen immerses me

the blue light

the clear atoms

of our human air.

I go down.

My flippers cripple me,

I crawl like an insect down the ladder

and there is no one

to tell me when the ocean

will begin.

First the air is blue and then

it is bluer and then green and then

black I am blacking out and yet

my mask is powerful

it pumps my blood with power

the sea is another story

the sea is not a question of power

I have to learn alone

to turn my body without force

in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget

what I came for

among so many who have always

lived here

swaying their crenellated fans

between the reefs

and besides

you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes.

The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done

and the treasures that prevail.

I stroke the beam of my lamp

slowly along the flank

of something more permanent

than fish or weed

the thing I came for:

the wreck and not the story of the wreck

the thing itself and not the myth

the drowned face always staring

toward the sun

the evidence of damage

worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty

the ribs of the disaster

curving their assertion

among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.

And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair

streams black, the merman in his armored body.

We circle silently

about the wreck

we dive into the hold.

I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes

whose breasts still bear the stress

whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies

obscurely inside barrels

half-wedged and left to rot

we are the half-destroyed instruments

that once held to a course

the water-eaten log

the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are

by cowardice or courage

the one who find our way

back to this scene

carrying a knife, a camera

a book of myths

in which

our names do not appear.

- See more at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15228#sthash.a4e9LWfj.dpuf>