

There is no frigate like a book

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.
This traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of toll;
How frugal is the chariot
That bears a human soul!

VOCAB

frigate—a fighting ship
courser—a swift horse
frugal—thrifty with money

Introduction to Poetry (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.

The Red Wheelbarrow

William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

In the Station at the Metro (Ezra Pound)

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

1913

Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway Car

(Dan Pagis)

here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son
cain son of man
tell him that i

Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (Robert Frost (1874-1963))

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

1923

Tell the truth but tell it slant
(Emily Dickinson)

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind –

Richard Cory
(Edward Arlington Robinson (1869-1935))

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich - yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

1919

My Papa's Waltz

(Theodore Roethke (1908-1963))

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

This is just to say

William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

Dulce et Decorum Est

(Wilfred Owen (1893-1918))

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 disappointed shells 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 floundering 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.

January 1918

The Road Not Taken (Robert Frost)

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.

Traveling through the Dark

(William Stafford)

Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all--my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

1962

To take us lands away, Nor any coursers like a page. Of prancing poetry. This traverse may the poorest take. There came a wind like a bugle. Part Three: Nature 27. A spider sewed at night. * * * There is no Frigate like a Book To take us Lands away Nor any Coursers like a Page Of prancing Poetry This Traverse may the poorest take Without oppress of Toll How frugal is the Chariot That bears the Human soul. Emily Elizabeth Dickinson. Emily Elizabeth Dickinson's other poems: I Reason, Earth Is Short. They Say That "Time Assuages". The Grass. It's Coming the Postponeless Creature. There's Grief of Want and grief of Cold A sort they call "Despair" There's Banishment from native Eyes In sight of Native Air. And though I may not guess the kind Correctly yet to me A piercing Comfort it affords In passing Calvary. To note the fashions of the Cross And how they're mostly worn Still fascinated to presume That Some are like my own. Emily Dickinson. 1951. The Savior must have been a docile Gentleman (1487). The Savior must have been A docile Gentleman To come so far so cold a Day For little Fellowmen. The Road to Bethlehem Since There is no frigate like a book (line 1) might even suggest that reading is better than travelling in real life. In addition, the contrasting themes of freedom and confinement are also implied. The implication is that though our everyday lives may seem limited, there are ways of escaping and venturing out into the world. Overall Style and Tone: Emily Dickinson's poems tend to have an enigmatic tone. In "There is no frigate like a Book" the speaker is unclear, and the only clue there is, lies in the word "œus" in line 2. The subject of Dickinson's poems tend to be, and are seemingly disembodied. However, there's more to it than that. "There is no Frigate like a Book" can also be read as a touching version of a theme that many of Dickinson's tougher and weirder poems embrace: escape. The famously reclusive poet tells us here how we can all take a vacation from our own lives by reading. A book, the poem suggests, is the best way to travel to mystical lands and far-off places, if only in our imaginations. Knowing what we know about Dickinson's hermit-like life, it makes sense that she would seek escape through reading-inspired flights of fancy. What is There is n...