

Spirits of the Dead
BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

I.

Thy soul shall find itself alone
'Mid dark thoughts of the gray tombstone—
Not one, of all the crowd, to pry
Into thine hour of secrecy.

II.

Be silent in that solitude,
 Which is not loneliness—for then
The spirits of the dead who stood
 In life before thee are again
In death around thee—and their will
Shall overshadow thee: be still.

III.

The night, tho' clear, shall frown—
And the stars shall look not down
From their high thrones in the heaven,
With light like Hope to mortals given—
But their red orbs, without beam,
To thy weariness shall seem
As a burning and a fever
Which would cling to thee for ever.

IV.

Now are thoughts thou shalt not banish,
Now are visions ne'er to vanish;
From thy spirit shall they pass
No more—like dew-drop from the grass.

V.

The breeze—the breath of God—is still—
And the mist upon the hill,
Shadowy—shadowy—yet unbroken,
Is a symbol and a token—
How it hangs upon the trees,
A mystery of mysteries!

(Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48632/spirits-of-the-dead>)

Disabled

BY WILFRED OWEN

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 blood-smear 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, all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. 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.
Tonight 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?

(Retrieve from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57285/disabled>)

Cage Bird

BY MAYA ANGELOU

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

(From *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*. Random House, 1994.)

Full-Length Portrait of the Moon

BY ALICE OSWALD

She could be any woman at all,
caught off-guard on-guard.
With her hands stroking or strangling and maybe
with her intentions half-interred.
But she is as she is. Her gaze is always
filing away at its cord.
And what she's really after
is you to love her.

She forgets who she is.
She could be so small
she almost has no smell.
She feels like anyone at all.
When you walk up to her,
she keeps quite still,
but what she answers to
is never loud enough to know.

Eaten away by outwardness,
her eyes are empty.
They could be watching you
or not. They work indifferently,
like lit-up glass and if you ask
why she won't speak, why should she?
When what she really wants
is silence.

You know what women are like:
Kay, Moira, Sandra.
They move through a dark room,
peering round under
the hoods of their names.
Alcestis, Clytemnestra.
She could be either of those.
She scarcely knows.

She goes on thinking something
just over your shoulder.
This could be the last night
before you lose her.
But what's the use
of saying one thing or another.
When what she's really after
is you to love her.

(Retrieved from

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/49192/full-length-portrait-of-the-moon>)

Writing In The Afterlife
BY BILLY COLLINS

I imagined the atmosphere would be clear,
shot with pristine light,
not this sulphurous haze,
the air ionized as before a thunderstorm.

Many have pictured a river here,
but no one mentioned all the boats,
their benches crowded with naked passengers,
each bent over a writing tablet.

I knew I would not always be a child
with a model train and a model tunnel,
and I knew I would not live forever,
jumping all day through the hoop of myself.

I had heard about the journey to the other side
and the clink of the final coin
in the leather purse of the man holding the oar,
but how could anyone have guessed

that as soon as we arrived
we would be asked to describe this place
and to include as much detail as possible—
not just the water, he insists,

rather the oily, fathomless, rat-happy water,
not simply the shackles, but the rusty,
iron, ankle-shredding shackles—
and that our next assignment would be

to jot down, off the tops of our heads,
our thoughts and feelings about being dead,
not really an assignment,
the man rotating the oar keeps telling us—

think of it more as an exercise, he groans,
think of writing as a process,
a never-ending, infernal process,
and now the boats have become jammed together,

bow against stern, stern locked to bow,
and not a thing is moving, only our diligent pens.

(Retrieved from <https://allpoetry.com/Billy-Collins>)

Rich in Vitamin C
BY J. H. PRYNNE

Under her brow the snowy wing-case
delivers truly the surprise
of days which slide under sunlight
past loose glass in the door
into the reflection of honour spread
through the incomplete, the trusted. So
darkly the stain skips as a livery
of your pause like an apple pip,
the baltic loved one who sleeps.

Or as syrup in a cloud, down below in
the cup, you excuse each folded
cry of the finch's wit, this flush
scattered over our slant of the
day rocked in water, you say
this much. A waver of attention at
the surface, shews the arch there and
the purpose we really cut;
an ounce down by the water, which

in cross-fire from injustice too large
to hold he lets slither
from starry fingers
noting the herbal jolt of cordite
and its echo: is this our screen, on some
street we hardly guessed could mark
an idea bred to idiocy by the clear
sight-lines ahead. You come in
by the same door, you carry

what cannot be left for its own
sweet shimmer of reason, its false blood;
the same tint I hear with the pulse it touches
and will not melt. Such shading
of the rose to its stock tips the bolt

from the sky, rising in its effect of what
motto we call peace talks. And yes the
quiet turn of your page is the day
tilting so, faded in the light.

(Retrieved from <http://jacketmagazine.com/06/pryn-kins.html>)

Corpse Song
BY MARGARET ATWOOD

I enter your night
like a darkened boat, a smuggler

These lanterns, my eyes
and heart are out

I bring you something
you do not want:

news of the country
I am trapped in,

news of your future:
soon you will have no voice

(I resent your skin, I resent
your lungs, your glib assumptions

Therefore sing now
while you have the choice

(My body turned against me
too soon, it was not a tragedy

(I did not become
a tree or a constellation

(I became a winter coat the children
thought they saw on the street corner

(I became this illusion,
this trick of ventriloquism

this blind noun, this bandage
crumpled at your dream's edge

