

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.

from *The Apple that Astonished Paris*, 1996
University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, Ark.

Sidekicks

Ronald Koertge *

They were never handsome and often came
with a hormone imbalance manifested by corpulence,
a yodel of a voice or ears big as kidneys.

But each was brave. More than once a sidekick
has thrown himself in front of our hero in order
to receive the bullet or blow meant for that
perfect face and body.

Thankfully, heroes never die in movies and leave
the sidekick alone. He would not stand for it.
Gabby or Pat, Pancho or Andy remind us of a part
of ourselves,

the dependent part that can never grow up,
the part that is painfully eager to please,
always wants a hug and never gets enough.

Who could sit in a darkened theatre, listen
to the organ music and watch the best
of ourselves lowered into the ground while
the rest stood up there, tears pouring off
that enormous nose.

from *Life on the Edge of the Continent: Selected Poems*, 1982
University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, Ark.

Sidekick: a person who works with someone who is more important than they are:

Is this a poem or a story?

The Summer I Was Sixteen

Geraldine Connolly

The turquoise pool rose up to meet us,
its slide a silver afterthought down which
we plunged, screaming, into a mirage of bubbles.
We did not exist beyond the gaze of a boy.

Shaking water off our limbs, we lifted
up from ladder rungs across the fern-cool
lip of rim. Afternoon. Oiled and sated,
we sunbathed, rose and paraded the concrete,

danced to the low beat of "Duke of Earl".
Past cherry colas, hot-dogs, Dreamsicles,
we came to the counter where bees staggered
into root beer cups and drowned. We gobbled

cotton candy torches, sweet as furtive kisses,
shared on benches beneath summer shadows.
Cherry. Elm. Sycamore. We spread our chenille
blankets across grass, pressed radios to our ears,

mouthed the old words, then loosened
thin bikini straps and rubbed baby oil with iodine
across sunburned shoulders, tossing a glance
through the chain link at an improbable world.

from *Province of Fire*, 1998
Iris Press, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

This poem uses the many meanings
of the word "line" to talk about love.

Lines

Martha Collins

Draw a line. Write a line. There.
Stay in line, hold the line, a glance
between the lines is fine but don't
turn corners, cross, cut in, go over
or out, between two points of no
return's a line of flight, between
two points of view's a line of vision.
But a line of thought is rarely
straight, an open line's no party
line, however fine your point.
A line of fire communicates, but drop
your weapons and drop your line,
consider the shortest distance from x
to y , let x be me, let y be you.

from *Some Things Words Can Do*, 1998
The Sheep Meadows Press, Riverdale-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Marcus Millsap: School Day Afternoon

Dave Etter

I climb the steps of the yellow school bus,
move to a seat in back, and we're off,
bouncing along the bumpy blacktop.
What am I going to do when I get home?
I'm going to make myself a sugar sandwich
and go outdoors and look at the birds
and the gigantic blue silo
they put up across the road at Motts'.
This weekend we're going to the farm show.
I like roosters and pigs, but farming's no fun.
When I get old enough to do something big,
I'd like to grow orange trees in a greenhouse.
Or maybe I'll drive a school bus
and yell at the kids when I feel I'm mad:
"Shut up back there, you hear me?"
At last, my house, and I grab my science book
and hurry down the steps into the sun.
There's Mr. Mott, staring at his tractor.
He's wearing his DeKalb cap
with the crazy winged ear of corn on it.
He wouldn't wave over here to me
if I was handing out hundred dollar bills.
I'll put brown sugar on my bread this time,
then go lie around by the water pump,
where the grass is very green and soft,
soft as the body of a red-winged blackbird.
Imagine, a blue silo to stare at,
and Mother not coming home till dark!

from *Alliance, Illinois*
Spoon River Poetry Press, 1983

Because You Left Me A Handful of Daffodils

Max Garland

I suddenly thought of Brenda Hatfield, queen
of the 5th grade, Concord Elementary.

A very thin, shy girl, almost
as tall as Audrey Hepburn,
but blond.

She wore a dress based upon the principle
of the daffodil: puffed sleeves,
inflated bodice, profusion
of frills along the shoulder blades
and hemline.

A dress based upon the principle of girl
as flower; everything unfolding, spilling
outward and downward: ribbon, stole,
corsage, sash.

It was the only thing I was ever
elected. A very short king.
I wore a bow tie, and felt
like a third-grader.

Even the scent of the daffodils you left
reminds me. It was a spring night.
And escorting her down the runway
was a losing battle, trying to march
down among the full, thick folds
of crinoline, into the barrage of her
father's flashbulbs, wading
the backwash of her mother's
perfume: scared, smiling,
tiny, down at the end
of that long, thin, Audrey Hepburn arm,
where I was king.

from *The Postal Confessions*, 1995
(University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, MA. 1995)

Fat Is Not a Fairy Tale

Jane Yolen

I am thinking of a fairy tale,
Cinder Elephant,
Sleeping Tubby,
Snow Weight,
where the princess is not
anorexic, wasp-waisted,
flinging herself down the stairs.

I am thinking of a fairy tale,
Hansel and Great,
Repoundsel,
Bounty and the Beast,
where the beauty
has a pillowed breast,
and fingers plump as sausage.

I am thinking of a fairy tale
that is not yet written,
for a teller not yet born,
for a listener not yet conceived,
for a world not yet won,
where everything round is good:
the sun, wheels, cookies, and the princess.

from *Such a Pretty Face* May 2000
Meisha-Merlin Publishing, Inc

Found Poetry

Found poetry is the rearrangement of words or phrases taken randomly from other sources (example: clipped newspaper headlines, bits of advertising copy, handwritten cards pulled from a hat) in a manner that gives the rearranged words a completely new meaning.

The Unknown

As we know,
There are known knowns.
There are things we know we know.
We also know
There are known unknowns.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.
But there are also unknown unknowns,
The ones we don't know
We don't know.

Donald Rumsfeld