

**To the Nightingale**  
**By Countess of Winchilsea Anne Finch**

Exert thy voice, sweet harbinger of spring!

This moment is thy time to sing,

This moment I attend to praise,

And set my numbers to they lays.

Free as thine shall be my song;

As they music, short, or long.

Poets, wild as thee, were born,

Pleasing best when unconfined,

When to please is least designed,

Soothing but their cares to rest;

Cares do still their thoughts molest,

And still th' unhappy poet's breast,

Like thine, when best he sings, is placed against a thorn.

She begins, Let all be still!

Muse, they promise now fulfill!

Sweet, oh! sweet, still sweeter yet

Can thy words such accents fit,

Canst thou syllables refine,

Melt a sense that shall retain

Still some spirit of the brain,

Till with sounds like these it join.

'Twill not be! then change thy note;

Let division shake thy throat.

Hark! Division now she tries;

Yet as far the Muse outflies.

Cease then, prithee, cease thy tune;

Trifler, wilt thou sing till \*June\*?

Till thy business all lies waste,

And the time of building's past!

Thus we poets that have speech,

Unlike what they forests teach,

If a fluent vein be shown

That's transcendent to our own,  
Criticize, reform, or preach,  
Or censure what we cannot reach.

(Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47656/to-the-nightingale>)

## **Israfel**

**By Edgar Allan Poe**

*And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute, and who has the sweetest voice  
of all God's creatures. —KORAN*

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell  
“Whose heart-strings are a lute”;  
None sing so wildly well  
As the angel Israfel,  
And the giddy stars (so legends tell),  
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell  
Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above  
In her highest noon,  
The enamoured moon  
Blushes with love,  
While, to listen, the red levin  
(With the rapid Pleiads, even,  
Which were seven,)  
Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir  
And the other listening things)  
That Israfeli's fire  
Is owing to that lyre  
By which he sits and sings—  
The trembling living wire  
Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,  
Where deep thoughts are a duty,  
Where Love's a grown-up God,  
Where the Houri glances are

Imbued with all the beauty  
Which we worship in a star.

Therefore, thou art not wrong,  
Israfeli, who despisest  
An unimpassioned song;  
To thee the laurels belong,  
Best bard, because the wisest!  
Merrily live, and long!

The ecstasies above  
With thy burning measures suit—  
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,  
With the fervour of thy lute—  
Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this  
Is a world of sweets and sours;  
Our flowers are merely—flowers,  
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss  
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell  
Where Israfel  
Hath dwelt, and he where I,  
He might not sing so wildly well  
A mortal melody,  
While a bolder note than this might swell  
From my lyre within the sky.

(Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48628/israfel>)

**Reveille**  
**By A.E. Housman**

Wake: the silver dusk returning  
Up the beach of darkness brims,  
And the ship of sunrise burning  
Strands upon the eastern rims.

Wake: the vaulted shadow shatters,  
Trampled to the floor it spanned,  
And the tent of night in tatters  
Straws the sky-pavilioned land.

Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying:  
Hear the drums of morning play;  
Hark, the empty highways crying  
"Who'll beyond the hills away?"

Towns and countries woo together,  
Forelands beacon, belfries call;  
Never lad that trod on leather  
Lived to feast his heart with all.

Up, lad: thews that lie and cumber  
Sunlit pallets never thrive;  
Morns abed and daylight slumber  
Were not meant for man alive.

Clay lies still, but blood's a rover;  
Breath's a ware that will not keep.  
Up, lad: when the journey's over  
There'll be time enough to sleep.

(From *A Shropshire Lad* (1896))

**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-o  
f-the-moon](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/49192/full-length-portrait-of-the-moon))

## **Still I Rise**

### **By Maya Angelou**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise

That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

(From *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems*. Random House, 1978.)

## **Forgetfulness**

### **By Billy Collins**

The name of the author is the first to go  
followed obediently by the title, the plot,  
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel  
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,  
never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor  
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,  
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye  
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,  
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,

something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,  
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember  
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,  
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river  
whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall,  
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those  
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night  
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.  
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted  
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.

(Retrieved from <https://poets.org/poem/forgetfulness>)

## 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>)