

An Irish Airman Foresees His Death

by William Butler Yeats

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

The Trouble with Poetry by Billy Collins

The trouble with poetry, I realized
as I walked along a beach one night –
cold Florida sand under my bare feet,
a show of stars in the sky –

the trouble with poetry is
that it encourages the writing of more poetry,
more guppies crowding the fish tank,
more baby rabbits
hopping out of their mothers into the dewy
grass.

And how will it ever end?
unless the day finally arrives
when we have compared everything in the
world to everything else in the world,

and there is nothing left to do
but quietly close our notebooks

and sit with our hands folded on our desks.

Poetry fills me with joy
and I rise like a feather in the wind.
Poetry fills me with sorry
and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge.

But mostly poetry fills me
with the urge to write more poetry,
to sit in the dark and wait for a little flame
to appear at the tip of my pencil.

And along with that, the longing to steal,
to break into the poems of others
with a flashlight and a ski mask.

And what an unmerry band of thieves we are,
cut-purses, common shoplifters,
I thought to myself

as a cold wave swirled around my feet
and the lighthouse moved its megaphone over
the sea,
which is an image I stole directly from
Lawrence Ferlinghetti –
to be perfectly honest for a moment –

the bicycling poet of San Francisco
whose little amusement park of a book
I carried in a side pocket of my uniform
up and down the treacherous halls of high
school.