

English Poetry

Translations by Ken Eckert

The Cuckoo Song

Anonymous, 14th century

Sing, cuccu, nu. Sing, cuccu.
Sing, cuccu. Sing, cuccu, nu.

Sumer is i-cumin in—
Lhude sing, cuccu!
Groweth sed and bloweth med
And springth the wude nu.
Sing, cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu,
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth—
Murie sing, cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes thu, cuccu.
Ne swik thu naver nu!

The Lover in Winter Plaineth for the Spring

Anonymous, 16th century

O western wind, when wilt thou blow
That the small rain down can rain?
Christ, that my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!

My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing like the Sun

William Shakespeare, 1609

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The Cuckoo Song

Anonymous

Sing, cuckoo, now! Sing, cuckoo!
Sing, cuckoo! Sing, cuckoo, now!

Summer is coming in,
Sing loudly, cuckoo!
Plants are growing and the meadow is blooming,
And the woods are springing new.
Sing, cuckoo!

Sheep call after lambs,
Cows call after calves,
Bulls jump, deer fart!
Sing merrily, cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo,
You sing well, cuckoo.
Never stop singing, cuckoo!

The Lover in Winter Begs for Spring

Anonymous, 16th century

Oh, western wind, when will you blow
So that the light showers can rain down?
Christ, if only my love were in my arms
And I were in my own bed again!

My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing like the Sun

William Shakespeare

My lady's eyes are not at all like the sun,
And coral rocks are redder than her lips.
If snow is white, then her body is just grey!
If hair is wire, black wire grows on her head.
I have seen beautiful roses, red and white,
But I don't see any roses in her cheeks.
And there is more joy in perfume
Than in the smell of my lady's breath.
I love to hear her talk, yet I know very well
That music has a much nicer sound.
I admit I never saw a goddess walking;
When my lady walks, it's just on the ground.
And yet I think my love for her is just as great
As any silly comparisons she might make.

To Celia, 1616

Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

Drink to me, only, with thine eyes,
 And I will pledge with mine;
 Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
 And I'll not look for wine.
 The thirst that from the soul doth rise,
 Doth ask a drink divine:
 But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
 I would not change for thine.

I sent thee, late, a rosy wreath,
 Not so much honouring thee,
 As giving it a hope, that there
 It could not withered be.
 But thou thereon didst only breathe,
 And sent'st back to me:
 Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
 Not of itself, but thee.

I Care Not for These Ladies*Thomas Campion, 1601*

I care not for these ladies,
 That must be wooed and prayed:
 Give me kind Amaryllis,
 The wanton country maid.
 Nature art disdaineth,
 Her beauty is her own.
 Here when we court and kiss,
 She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
 But when we come where comfort is,
 She never will say no.

If I love Amaryllis,
 She gives me fruit and flowers:
 But if we love these ladies,
 We must give golden showers.
 Give them gold, that sell love,
 Give me the nut-brown lass,
 Who, when we court and kiss,
 She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
 But when we come where comfort is,
 She never will say no.

These ladies must have pillows,
 And beds by strangers wrought;
 Give me a bower of willows,
 Of moss and leaves unbought,
 And fresh Amaryllis,
 With milk and honey fed;
 Who, when we court and kiss,
 She cries, "Forsooth, let go!"
 But when we come where comfort is,
 She never will say no.

Drink to me with only your eyes,
 And I will answer with mine;
 Or just leave a kiss in the cup,
 And I won't look for wine.
 The thirst that rises from one's soul,
 Asks for a divine drink:
 But even if I could sip from God's nectar,
 I would not change it for you.

Not long ago I sent you a wreath of roses,
 Not so much to honor you,
 But to give it hope, for in your presence
 It could never become withered.
 But you only breathed on it,
 And sent it back to me:
 Since then it grows, and smells, I swear,
 Not of itself, but of you.

I Care Not for These Ladies*Thomas Campion*

I don't really like these ladies
 Who need to be fussed over and chased.
 Give me kind Amaryllis,
 The fun-loving country girl!
 Nature has nothing to do with art;
 Her beauty is her own, not made.
 When I try to kiss her in public
 She cries, "Stop it, really!"
 But when we go where we can be comfortable
 She will never say no to me.

If I show love to Amaryllis,
 She gives me fruit and flowers.
 But if we want to show love to these ladies,
 We need to pour gold over them!
 Give gold to the women who sell their love!
 Give me the nut-brown girl,
 Who when I try to kiss her in public,
 She cries, "Stop it, really!"
 But when we go where we are comfortable,
 She will never say no.

These ladies must have elegant pillows,
 And beautiful beds made by strangers!
 Give me a bed of tree branches,
 Made with moss and leaves, for nothing,
 And fresh Amaryllis,
 A girl fed with milk and honey!
 A girl who when I try to kiss in public,
 She cries, "Stop it, really!"
 But when we go where we are comfortable,
 She will never say no.

Holy Sonnets: Death, Be not Proud*John Donne, 1633*

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
 Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
 For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
 Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
 Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
 And soonest our best men with thee do go,
 Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
 Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
 And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
 And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
 One short sleep past, we wake eternally
 And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*Robert Herrick, 1648*

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,
 Old Time is still a-flying;
 And this same flower that smiles today
 Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
 The higher he's a-getting,
 The sooner will his race be run,
 And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
 When youth and blood are warmer;
 But being spent, the worse, and worst
 Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
 And while ye may, go marry;
 For having lost but once your prime,
 You may forever tarry.

Easter Wings*George Herbert, 1633*

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
 Though foolishly he lost the same,
 Decaying more and more,
 Till he became
 Most poore:
 With thee
 O let me rise
 As larks, harmoniously,
 And sing this day thy victories:
 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

Holy Sonnets: Death, Be not Proud*John Donne*

Death, don't be so proud, even if some have
 Called you mighty and dreadful, for you aren't.
 For the people you think you have conquered
 Don't really die, poor Death, including me.
 The feeling similar to you—rest and sleep—is
 Pleasurable, and so you will be pleasurable too,
 And soon the best people go with you
 To rest their bodies, and with their souls saved.
 You're just a slave to luck, kings, and desperate
 Men, and your friends are poison, war, and illness.
 Poison flowers and charms can do the same thing
 As you, and quicker, so why brag?
 And after one quick sleep, we'll be awake forever,
 And there will be no more death; Death, you'll die.

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time*Robert Herrick*

Gather the rosebuds up while you can,
 For Time is still moving on,
 And the same flower that looks nice today
 Will be dying tomorrow.

The beautiful lamp of heaven, the sun—
 The higher it gets in the sky,
 The sooner it's job for the day is done,
 And the near it is to setting.

Young age is the best,
 When youth and blood are warm,
 But when it's gone, worse, and then the
 Worst times will follow.

So don't be shy, but use your time well,
 And while you can, get married;
 For once you've lost your best opportunity,
 You might wait forever.

Easter Wings*George Herbert*

Lord, who created man in riches and plenty,
 Though man foolishly lost them,
 Becoming corrupt more and more,
 Until he became
 Completely poor;
 With you
 Let me rise up
 Like small birds in song,
 And sing about your victories this day,
 And my fall will make my rise all the greater.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne
 And still with sicknesses and shame.
 Thou didst so punish sinne,
 That I became
 Most thinne.
 With thee
 Let me combine,
 And feel thy victorie:
 For, if I imp my wing on thine,
 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

To His Coy Mistress
Andrew Marvell, 1681

Had we but world enough and time,
 This coyness, lady, were no crime.
 We would sit down, and think which way
 To walk, and pass our long love's day.
 Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
 Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
 Of Humber would complain. I would
 Love you ten years before the flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 Till the conversion of the Jews.
 My vegetable love should grow
 Vaster than empires and more slow;
 An hundred years should go to praise
 Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
 Two hundred to adore each breast,
 But thirty thousand to the rest;
 An age at least to every part,
 And the last age should show your heart.
 For, lady, you deserve this state,
 Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
 Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.
 Thy beauty shall no more be found;
 Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
 My echoing song; then worms shall try
 That long-preserved virginity,
 And your quaint honour turn to dust,
 And into ashes all my lust;
 The grave's a fine and private place,
 But none, I think, do there embrace.
 Now therefore, while the youthful hue
 Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
 And while thy willing soul transpires
 At every pore with instant fires,
 Now let us sport us while we may,
 And now, like amorous birds of prey,
 Rather at once our time devour
 Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
 Let us roll all our strength and all

My young years began in sadness
 And with sickness and shame.
 You punished my sin
 So that I became
 Completely empty.
 With you
 Let me join myself to you
 And feel your victory.
 For if I join my wings to yours
 My troubles will cause me to fly stronger.

To His Coy Mistress
Andrew Marvell

If we had all the world and all its time,
 Lady, your shyness wouldn't be a crime.
 We could sit down and think about
 Where we would walk the whole day.
 You could look for gems by the Ganges in India,
 And I could sit by the dirty river of the Humber
 And complain! I would
 Love you from ten years before Noah's flood,
 And if you wanted to, you could refuse me
 Until the end of the world.
 My love would have time to grow like vegetables,
 Larger than empires and even more slowly.
 I'd have a hundred years to praise your eyes,
 And to look at your face;
 Two hundred years to love each breast,
 And thirty thousand years for the rest of you.
 An era, at least, for every part of you,
 And the last era to love your heart.
 Lady, you deserve this to happen,
 And I wouldn't want to love you more slowly.
 But behind my back I always hear
 Time's chariot hurrying toward us.
 And before us there is only
 Empty deserts of vast eternity.
 Your beauty will not be known any more,
 Nor will my singing be heard in your grave.
 And then worms will be the only creatures
 To take your long-guarded virginity,
 And your reputation turn to dust,
 And my desire will be only ashes.
 The grave is a nice and private place,
 But I don't think any lovers embrace there.
 And so, while the color of youth
 Sits on your skin like morning dew,
 And will your willing soul glows
 From every inch of your skin with fire,
 Let's have fun together while we can,
 And now, like vultures and birds of prey,
 Eat up all of our time at once,
 Rather than waste it in Time's will.
 Let's roll up our strength and everything that

Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife
 Thorough the iron gates of life:
 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Is sweet into one cannonball
 And shoot our pleasures like a battle
 Through the iron gates of life!
 For we can't make the sun stand still,
 But we can make it run to catch us!

Romantic Poetry (1798- 1837)
Victorian Poetry (1837 – 1901)

London (1794)

William Blake (1757 – 1827)

I wander through each chartered street,
 Near where the chartered Thames does flow.
 And mark in every face I meet
 Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
 Every blackening Church appalls,
 And the hapless Soldiers sigh
 Runs in blood down Palace walls

In every cry of every Man,
 In every Infants cry of fear,
 In every voice: in every ban,
 The mind-forged manacles I hear

But most through midnight streets I hear
 How the youthful Harlots curse
 Blasts the new-born Infants tear
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Jerusalem (1804)

William Blake

And did those feet in ancient time
 Walk upon England's mountains green?
 And was the holy Lamb of God
 On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
 Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
 And was Jerusalem builded here
 Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold:
 Bring me my arrows of desire:
 Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold!
 Bring me my chariot of fire.

I will not cease from mental fight,
 Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
 Till we have built Jerusalem
 In England's green and pleasant land.

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud (1804)

William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host, of golden daffodils;
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
 Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the milky way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:

Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed - and gazed - but little thought

Dark House, By Which Once More I Stand (1833)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)
(From *In Memoriam*)

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasped no more—
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
And like a guilty thing I creep
At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly through the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day.

My Last Duchess (1842)

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,

What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

O days and hours, your work is this,
To hold me from my proper place,
A little while from his embrace,
For fuller gain of after bliss:

That out of distance might ensue
Desire of nearness doubly sweet;
And unto meeting when we meet,
Delight a hundredfold accrue,

For every grain of sand that runs,
And every span of shade that steals,
And every kiss of toothed wheels,
And all the courses of the suns.

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark?"—and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
 E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretense
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43) (1850)
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 – 1861)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of every day's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love with a passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints, -- I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! -- and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

Remember (1862)*Christina Rossetti* (1830 – 1894)

Remember me when I am gone away,
 Gone far away into the silent land;
 When you can no more hold me by the hand,
 Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
 Remember me when no more day by day
 You tell me of our future that you planned:
 Only remember me; you understand
 It will be late to counsel then or pray.
 Yet if you should forget me for a while
 And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
 For if the darkness and corruption leave
 A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
 Better by far you should forget and smile
 Than that you should remember and be sad.

Dover Beach (1867)*Matthew Arnold* (1822- 1888)

The sea is calm to-night.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand;
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.
 Sophocles long ago
 Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.
 The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.
 Ah, love, let us be true
 To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Jabberwocky (1872)

Lewis Carroll (1832 – 1898)

(from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872)

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought --
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,

Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

God's Grandeur (1877)

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

If (1895)

Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936)

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,

Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim,
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same:
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
 And never breathe a word about your loss:
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings---nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much:
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

Hap (1898)

Thomas Hardy (1840 – 1928)

If but some vengeful god would call to me
 From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
 Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
 that thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
 Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
 Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
 Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
 And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
 --Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
 And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . .
 These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
 Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.