**Poetry Unit 1**

**Sir Patrick Spence**

The king sits in Dumferling toune,

Drinking the blude-reid wine:

"O whar will I get guid sailor,

To sail this schip of mine?"

Up and spak an eldern knicht,

Sat at the kings richt kne:

"Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor

That sails upon the se."

The king has written a braid letter,

And signd it wi his hand,

And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,

Was walking on the sand.

The first line that Sir Patrick red,

A loud lauch lauched he;  *laugh*

The next line that Sir Patrick red,

The teir blinded his ee. *eye*

"O who is this has don this deid,

This ill deed done to me

To send me out this time o' the yeir,

To sail upon the se!

"Mak hast, mak haste, my mirry men all,

Our guid schip sails the morne:"

"O say na sae, my master deir,

For I feir a deadlie storme.

"Late late yestreen I saw the new moone, *evening*

Wi the auld moone in hir arme,

And I feir, I feir, my deir master,

That we will cum to harme."

O our Scots nobles wer richt laith  *very loath*

To weet their cork-heild schoone;  *shoes*

Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd,

Thair hats they swam aboone.   *above*

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,

Wi thair fans into their hand,

Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spence

Cum sailing to the land.

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,

Wi thair gold kems in their hair,

Waiting for thair ain deir lords,

For they'll se thame na mair.  *more*

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,

It's fiftie fadom deip,

And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,

Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

**May He Lose His Way**

*Archilochus (7th cent. B.C.E.)*

May he lose his way on the cold sea

And swim to the heathen Salmydessos,

May the ungodly Thracians\* with their hair

Done up in a fright on the top of their heads

Grab him, that he know what it is to be alone

Without friend or family.  May he eat slave's bread! And suffer the plague and freeze naked,

Laced about with the nasty trash of the sea.

May his teeth knock the top on the bottom

As he lies on his face, spitting brine,

At the edge of the cold sea, like a dog.

And all this it would be a privilege to watch,

Giving me great satisfaction as it would,

For he took back the word he gave in honor,

Over the salt and table at a friendly meal.

*\*Now Bulgaria, Greece, & Turkey*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter** | |  |
| Translated by [Ezra Pound](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/161) | | |
|  | | |
| While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,  You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  And we went on living in the village of Chokan:  Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.  At fourteen I married My Lord you.  I never laughed, being bashful.  Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.  At fifteen I stopped scowling,  I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  Forever and forever and forever.  Why should I climb the look out?  At sixteen you departed,  You went into far Ku-to-yen, by the river of swirling eddies,  And you have been gone five months.  The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.  You dragged your feet when you went out.  By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,  Too deep to clear them away!  The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  Over the grass in the West garden;  They hurt me. I grow older.  If you are coming down through the narrows of the river Kiang,  Please let me know beforehand,  And I will come out to meet you  As far as Cho-fu-Sa.  By Rihaku | | |
|  | | |

SAPPHO (7th Century BCE)

**Then**

In gold sandals

dawn like a thief

fell upon me.

***In Absence from Becchina*.**

Cecco Angiolieri (c. 1260-c. 1312)

* My heart's so heavy with a hundred things
* That I feel dead a hundred times a day:
* Yet death would be the least of sufferings,
* For life's all suffering save what's slept away:
* Though even in sleep there is no dream but brings
* From dream-land such dull torture as it may.
* And yet one moment would pluck out these stings,
* If for one moment she were mine to-day
* Who gives my heart the anguish that it has.
* Each thought that seeks my heart for its abode
* Becomes a wan and sorrow-stricken guest:
* Sorrow has brought me to so sad a pass
* That men look sad to meet me on the road;

Nor any road is mine that leads to rest.

*(Translation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)*

**Seeing Hsia Chan Off by River**

Po Chu-I (A.C.E. 772-846)

Because you are old and departing I have wetted my handkerchief,

You who are homeless at seventy, belonging to the wilderness.

Anxiously I watch the wind rising as the boat sails away,

A white-headed man amid white-headed waves.

Six Tanka

*Lady Kasa (8th cent.)*

Like the pearl of dew

On the grass in my garden

In the evening shadows,

I shall be no more.

Even the grains of sand

On a beach eight hundred days wide

Would not be more than my love,

Watchman of the island coast.

The breakers of the Ise [Eyes] Sea

Roar like thunder on the shore.

As fierce as they, as proud as they,

Is he who pounds my heart.

I dreamt of a sword

Girded [belted] to my side.

What does it signify?

That I shall meet you?

The bell has rung, the sign

For all to go to sleep.

Yet thinking of my love

How can I sleep?

To love a man without return

Is to offer a prayer

To a devil’s back

In a huge temple.\*

\*Devils depicted in the back of temples were warnings.

**The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse**

To yow, my purse, and to noon other wight\* *person*

 Complayne I, for ye be my lady dere.

 I am so sory, now that ye been lyght;

 For certes\* but\* ye make me hevy chere, *surely unless*

 Me were as leef be layd upon my bere; *I would like to be*

 For which unto your mercy thus I crye,

 Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moote I dye. *must*

 Now voucheth sauf\* this day or\* yt be nyght *vouchsafe before*

 That I of yow the blisful sound may here

 Or see your colour lyk the sonne bryght

 That of yelownesse hadde never pere.

 Ye be my lyf, ye be myn hertes stere\*. *guide*

 Quene of comfort and of good companye,

 Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moot I dye.

 Now purse that ben to me my lyves lyght

 And saveour as\* doun in this world here, *while*

 Out of this toune helpe me thurgh your myght,

 Syn that ye wole nat ben my tresorere;

 For I am shave as nye as any frère\*. *close as any friar*

 But yet I pray unto your curtesye,

 Beth hevy agen, or elles moot I dye.

*Lenvoy de Chaucer: Diplomatic message from Chaucer*

O conquerour of Brutes Albyon\*, *Brutus’s England*

 Which that by lyne and free eleccion

 Been verray\* kyng, this song to yow I sende, *true*

 And ye, that mowen\* alle oure harmes amende, *can*

 Have mynde upon my supplicacion.

“More Light! More Light!”

BY [ANTHONY HECHT](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/anthony-hecht)

*for Heinrich Blücher and Hannah Arendt*

Composed in the Tower before his execution

These moving verses, and being brought at that time

Painfully to the stake, submitted, declaring thus:

“I implore my God to witness that I have made no crime.”

Nor was he forsaken of courage, but the death was horrible,

The sack of gunpowder failing to ignite.

His legs were blistered sticks on which the black sap

Bubbled and burst as he howled for the Kindly Light.

And that was but one, and by no means one of the worst;

Permitted at least his pitiful dignity;

And such as were by made prayers in the name of Christ,

That shall judge all men, for his soul’s tranquillity.

We move now to outside a German wood.

Three men are there commanded to dig a hole

In which the two Jews are ordered to lie down

And be buried alive by the third, who is a Pole.

Not light from the shrine at Weimar beyond the hill

Nor light from heaven appeared. But he did refuse.

A Lüger settled back deeply in its glove.

He was ordered to change places with the Jews.

Much casual death had drained away their souls.

The thick dirt mounted toward the quivering chin.

When only the head was exposed the order came

To dig him out again and to get back in.

No light, no light in the blue Polish eye.

When he finished a riding boot packed down the earth.

The Lüger hovered lightly in its glove.

He was shot in the belly and in three hours bled to death.

No prayers or incense rose up in those hours

Which grew to be years, and every day came mute

Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through crisp air,

And settled upon his eyes in a black soot.

Anthony Hecht, “ ‘More Light! More Light!’ ” from *Collected Earlier Poems.* Copyright © 1990 by Anthony Hecht. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.

Source: *Collected Earlier Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1990)

**Sample analysis**

"More Light! More Light!" enacts the multiplication of historical agony . . . and it does so within a repetitive structure of commands whose totalitarian rigor becomes yet another image of fate itself.

The strict quatrains with their ballad rhyme-scheme reinforce this by their allusion to narratives of unavoidable fatality. And once again, the poem has a ritual quality, for it describes savage ceremonies of execution and entombment, the last of which even involves a grotesque kind of game. As the German officer orders the Pole to bury the two Jews alive, then reverses the order after the Pole’s refusal only to reverse it yet again and finally to kill all three, he is degrading their very desire for survival. And the poem itself plays against our desire that at least someone survive the transaction. We become horribly implicated in this poem, beyond merely wondering "what would *we* have done?" For if we are somehow made to witness the events, we also survive them—in the company of the only other survivor, the Nazi killer. It is this manner in which Hecht has trapped himself and his readers within the uncanny association of narrator-observer, survivor, and killer that most thoroughly seals the darkness of the poem and enforces the most despairing vision of the relation between poetry and the bearing of historical witness.

This time, there is no question of prayer. In the earlier execution, centuries ago, the spectators prayed for the victim's soul, their prayers more than ironized as the dying man "howled for the Kindly Light." In the later scene "No prayers or incense rose up" as the Pole lay bleeding to death. In a literal sense within the poem there were no witnesses (least of all, God!); or if *we* have been somehow "present," the unavailability of any offered forms of response leaves us arrested in a frozen silence so mute as to render us almost absent. Perhaps this is the ghostly position most of us occupy in relation to the historical events around us. If we resist association with the killer, perhaps in our muteness we should recognize our similarity to the only final attendants on the corpse: "every day came mute / Ghosts from the ovens, sifting through crisp air, / And settled upon his eyes in a black soot."

from *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht*. Copyright © 1989 by the University of Georgia Press.

**Ode to a Nightingale**

John Keats (1795-1821)

I

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or empties some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards\* had sunk:

‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

But being too happy in thine happiness,--

That thou, light –winged Dryad\* of the trees,

In some melodious plot

Of beechen green and shadows numberless,

Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

II

O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been

Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,

Tasting of Flora\* and the country green,

Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!

O for a beaker full of the warm South,

Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,\*

With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,

And purple-stained mouth;

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

III

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs,

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

IV

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus\* and his pards\*,

But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

Already with thee! tender is the night,

And haply the Queen-Moon in on her throne,

Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays;\*

But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown

Through verdurous glooms & winding mossy ways.

\*Lethe is the river that separates the upper world and the underworld. \*Dryad is a tree spirit . \*Flora is the goddess of flowers. \*Hippocrene is a mythological spring whose waters inspired poetry. \*Bacchus is the god of wine and “pards” are leopards. \*Fays are fairies

V

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,

Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,

But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet

Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;

Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;

And mid-May’s eldest child,

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

VI

Darking I listen; and, for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,

Call’d him soft names in many amused rhyme,

To take into the air my quiet breath;

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

While thou art puring forth thy soul abroad

In such an ecstasy!

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—

To thy high requiem become a sod.

VII

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!

No hungry genrations tread thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard

In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path

Through the sad heart of Ruth,\* when, sick for home,

She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

The same that oft-times hath

Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

VIII

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well

As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.

Adieu! Adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Up the hill-side; and now ‘tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?

\*In the *Bible*, Ruth was a Moabite who left her people to stay with her husband, Boaz, and her mother-in-law, Naomi.