

Contemporary poets are still finding new ways of handling it.

Why Did The

Because the cackling of the cocks and hens
Had raised his hackles for too many years.
Because the pecking order made no sense,
But simply fattened the inferiors.

Because the smells—not only of the yard,
But of the mental air—had made him sick,
With every hatching hurrying to discard
The truths he had been raised on as a chick.

Because his spirit was oppressed by Freud,
The prince of darkness, and by Darwin's laws
That left the whole farm falling into void
No fowl could find a reason for. Because
The barnyard now seemed ready to explode,
With hope in flight, the chicken crossed the road.

[2003]
THOMAS CARPER (b. 1936)

E. E. Cummings wrote many sonnets in both the Italian and English mode. Though thought of as experimental, Cummings turned to the sonnet more often than to any other form: More than one-fourth of his published poems are sonnets.

Edmund Spenser, inventor of the Spenserian stanza, devised a matching sonnet form that bears his name. It rhymes *abab, bcbe, cdcd, ee*.

Many poets have taken liberties with the traditional arrangements of the rhymes. Gwendolyn Brooks, like some poets before her, eases the Italian pattern into an *abba cdcd c* octave in one of her sonnets.

The Rites for Cousin Vit

Carried her unprotesting out the door.
Kicked back the caskey-stand. But it can't hold her,
That stuff and satin aiming to enfold her,
The lid's contrition nor the bolts before.

Oh oh. Too much. Too much. Even now, surmise,
She rises in the sunshine. There she goes,
Back to the bars she knew and the repose
In love-rooms and the things in people's eyes.
Too vital and too squeaking. Must emerge.

Even now she does the snake-hips with a hiss,
Slops the bad wine across her shantung, talks
Of pregnancy, guitars and bridgework, walks
In parks or alleys, comes happily on the verge
Of happiness, happily hysterics. Is.

[1949]
GWENDOLYN BROOKS (b. 1917)

The rhyme scheme of the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet is less demanding: *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*—three quatrains and a final couplet.

Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

[1609]
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

³/*bootless: useless, unavailing*

¹⁰/*haply: perhaps, by chance*

Howard Nemerov

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Howard Nemerov was born in 1920 in New York City. After graduating from Harvard, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and flew in England in World War II. His most recent books are The Collected Poems, which won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1978, Sentences (1980), Inside the Onion (1984), and New and Selected Essays (1985). He lives in St. Louis, where he is Edward Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor of English at Washington University.

A PRIMER OF THE DAILY ROUND

A peels an apple, while B kneels to God,
C telephones to D, who has a hand
On E's knee, F coughs, G turns up the sod
For H's grave, I do not understand
But J is bringing one clay pigeon down

HOWARD NEMEROV

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While K brings down a nightstick on L's head,
And M takes mustard, N drives into town,
O goes to bed with P, and Q drops dead,
R lies to S, but happens to be heard
By T, who tells U not to fire V
For having to give W the word
That X is now deceiving Y with Z,
Who happens just now to remember A
Peeling an apple somewhere far away.

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TED KOOSER

ANNIVERSARY

At dinner, in that careful rouge of light
of five or six martinis, you could pass
for Ginger Rogers; we could dance all night
on tiny tabletops as slick as glass
in flying, shiny shoes. As Fred Astaire,
my wrinkles grow distinguished as we dine,
my bald spot festers with the growth of hair,
I grow intelligent about the wine.
But such high life is taxing; urgencies
excuse us from the table. Hand in hand
we seek the restrooms, trembling at the knees,
and find our grins grown horrid in that land
of flare-lit, glaring mirrors. Through the wall
you flush your toilet like a lonely call.

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Floyd Skloot

Floyd Skloot was born in Brooklyn in 1947 and educated at Franklin and Marshall College and Southern Illinois University. The author of Rough Edges (1979), he has received a writing grant from the Illinois Arts Council and the Emily Dickinson Award from the Poetry Society of America. He resides in Portland, Oregon, where he works as a public policy and management consultant.

MY DAUGHTER CONSIDERS HER BODY

She examines her hand, fingers spread wide.
Seated, she bends over her crossed legs
to search for specks or scars and cannot hide
her awe when any mark is found. She begs
me to look, twisting before her mirror,
at some tiny bruise on her hucklebone.
Barely awake, she studies creases her
arm developed as she slept. She has grown
entranced with blemish, begun to know
her body's facility for being
flawed. She does not trust its will to grow

whole again, but may learn that too, freeing
herself to accept the body's deep thirst
for risk. Learning to touch her wounds comes first.

Van K. Brock

Van K. Brock was born in Boston, Georgia, in 1932. After doing undergraduate work at Emory University, he took M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Iowa. The poetry editor of National Forum and founder of Anbanga Press and Sun Dog, he has published several books, among them Final Belief (1972), Spelunking (1977), The Hard Essential Landscape (1980), and The Window (1981), and he has recently completed a book-length sequence entitled Unspeakable Strangers. He lives in Tallahassee, where he co-directs the writing program at Florida State University.

LYING ON A BRIDGE

We saw anchored worlds in a shallow stream.
The current tugged at clouds, the sun, our faces.
And while we stared, as though into a dream,
The stream moved on; the anchors kept their places.
Even the white rose thorned into your hair
Stayed there, though its refracted, scattered aura
Circled your abstract face, like snow in air;
Then the rose fell onto that gentle water,
Shattering our faces with their mirror. But sun
And clouds, and all their height and depth of light,
Could not feel so involved, nor watch when one
Bloom touched that current and waltzed it out of sight.
Though rising, we saw how all things float in space:
The stars and clouds, ourselves, each other's face.