

The Question Does Not Come Before There Is a Quotation

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Each day is attended by surprises



Suzie Grogan, Is Britain Still "Shell-Shocked"? A Question for World Mental Health Day (zenandtheheartoftightropewalking.wordpress.com)

A practical and personal application of inertia / Can be found in the question: / Whose Turn Is It / To Take Out The Garbage? / An empty pair of dance shoes / Is a lot like the answer to this question, / As well as book-length poems / Set in the Midwest.

Cornelius Eady, The Empty Dance Shoes

"Why does poetry suck?" This question echoes down the ages and is echoed by undergraduate students, eyes glazing as they gaze upon their reading lists. "It doesn't," we tell them, but in our hearts, we know different. We know it does.¹

What sucks about poetry? The short answer is the words, and their combinations. The longer answer has to do with how so few of those combinations include the pairing "Nacho Tuesdays." Yes, poetry seems to

lack nachos, and, aside from that, it seems to lack humour. Indeed, no literary genre appears less funny than poetry, where conventional wisdom has it that a "good poem" must move the reader to some epiphany through the subtle revelation of some aspect of the human condition, the least funny condition of all.²

Ryan Fitzpatrick and Jonathan Ball, "Take These Poems—Please!": An Introduction (Why Poetry Sucks)

Joe Wenderoth, not by a long shot / sober, says, I promised my wife I wouldn't fuck / anyone to no one in particular and reads a poem / about how Jesus had no penis. / Meanwhile, the psychiatrist, attractive / in a fatherly way, says, Libido question mark.

Rachel Zucker, Hey Allen Ginsberg Where Have You Gone and What Would You Think of My Drugs?

1. Yes, we know footnotes suck too. Give us a break!

2. Even leprosy has its lighter moments. Look, Ma, no hands!

Popping bullets of sunlight / crack into the subliminal / orifices, and the tree thinks, / "How exquisite. Is this love?"

Ruth Stone, The Questions

The show did not start off / auspiciously, the contestants / were nervous and kept fiddling / with the wires attached / to their privates, the men / being especially anxious / over the question of balls. / The women were more querulous. / The first question, a medical subject, / was why had the anti-abortionists / not mentioned, let alone commented on, / the Baboon Heart transplant? / One terrified contestant guessed / it was because the moral majority's / nervous concern with evolution / precluded their bringing it up. / That hopeful contestant's face / reflected the malicious light / in the eyes of the host who / immediately threw the switch / A powerful surge shot through / the wires and both sexes screamed / and writhed, to the delight of / the vast viewership, estimated / at 100 million, all of whom, / presumably, were delighted / not to be on the show, / because not one in a million / knew the answer.

Edward Dorn, The Price is Right: A Torture Wheel of Fortune

What is the use of a violent kind of delightfulness if there is no pleasure in not getting tired of it. The question does not come before there is a quotation. In any kind of place there is a top to covering and it is a pleasure at any rate there is some venturing in refusing to believe nonsense. It shows what use there is in a whole piece if one uses it and it is extreme and very likely the little things could be dearer but in any case there is a bargain and if there is the best thing to do is to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless and resolved on returning gratitude.

Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons

Yes, but beyond happiness what is there? / The question has not yet been answered. / No great quotations have issued forth / From there, we have no still photographs / Full of men in fine leather hiking boots, / Women with new-cut walking sticks. / So yes, it is the realm of thin tigers / Prowling, out to earn even more stripes; / It is the smell of seven or eight perfumes / Not currently available in America. / Maybe this is wrong, of course. / The place may after all be populated, / Or over-populated, with dented trash cans / In the streets and news of genital herpes / In every smart article in every slick magazine / Everywhere in the place. / But everybody there smiles— / Laughs, even, every time a breath can be caught. / This is all true.

Alberto Ríos, Mason Jars by the Window

Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table; / Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, / The muttering retreats / Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels / And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells: / Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent / To lead you to an overwhelming question ... / Oh, do not ask, "What is it?" / Let us go and make our visit.

T. S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

When the snake bit / Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa / while he was praying / the snake died. (Each day / is attended by surprises / or it is nothing.) / Question: was the bare-footed, / smelly Rabbi more poisonous / than the snake / or so God-adulterated / he'd become immune / to serpent poison?

Dannie Abse, Snake

Well, it all makes for interesting conjecture. / And it occurs to me that what is crucial is to believe / in effort, to believe some good will come of simply *trying*, / a good completely untainted by the corrupt initiating impulse / to persuade or seduce— / What are we without this? / Whirling in the dark universe, / alone, afraid, unable to influence fate— / What do we have really? / Sad tricks with ladders and shoes, / tricks with salt, impurely motivated recurring / attempts to build character. / What do we have to appease the great forces? / And I think in the end this was the question / that destroyed Agamemnon, there on the beach, / the Greek ships at the ready, the sea / invisible beyond the serene harbor, the future / lethal, unstable: he was a fool, thinking / it could be controlled. He should have said / *I have nothing, I am at your mercy.*

Louise Glück, The Empty Glass

They dropped the charges of homicide, filed new charges of / terrorism, dropped the charges of terrorism, filed / new charges of public nudity, dropped the charges of / public nudity, filed new charges of lewd and / lascivious behavior. A spokesman for the FBI / said they found him on the hood of an SUV in a part / of town known as the "Fruit Loop." His penis was in another / man's mouth and in the front seat were vials containing a rare / strand of bacteria known to cause blindness in rats. They / dropped the charges of public nudity and filed new / charges of sodomy. A spokesman for the police department / said they found him with his pants down and it appeared / that his penis was in another man's anus. But since they / could not prove to what degree his penis had penetrated / the other man's

anus they dropped the charges of sodomy / and filed new charges of assault and battery. A / spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security said / that he assaulted a worker from the Department of / Public Health who used a Q-tip to extract from inside of / his urethra a rare strand of bacteria capable / of causing pneumonia in chickens. He was placed in / solitary confinement and a spokesman for the / Department of Corrections suggested that he was a / serious threat to the community. They examined the / strand of bacteria found in his urethra but since they / did not properly store the bacteria in the / appropriate container with the appropriate seals and / signatures they could not charge him with intent to commit crimes / against humanity. They dropped the charges of intent to / commit crimes against humanity and filed new charges / of larceny. They said he had stolen the rare strand of / bacteria from his employer and that he had done so / with the deliberate and malicious intent to harm as / many civilians as possible. They tried to verify / for whom he had worked during the given time period but since / they could not verify the name or location of his / employer they dropped the charges of larceny and filed new / charges of tax fraud. When they discovered he was privately / employed, they dropped the charges of tax fraud and filed new / charges of theft with an unregistered weapon. A / grocery store in his neighbourhood had recently been robbed / and the cashier said that the thief had carried the same model / of weapon that the man in question kept beneath his bed in / case of emergencies. They dropped the charges of theft with an / unregistered weapon when they discovered the cashier was / partially blind and that the weapon the man in question kept / beneath his bed in case of emergencies had been / properly purchased and registered. When they found on his / bookshelves several works of fiction with blind characters, / including *King Lear*, *Oedipus Rex*, *Endgame* and *Blindness* by / José Saramago, they accused him of conspiring / to use the rare strand of bacteria to blind not only / the grocer but the seven other blind residents of his / neighbourhood, each of whom had had perfectly good eyesight / until he came to town. They asked him why he had so many / books about blindness, but he refused to answer the question. / They asked him why he had so many books about blindness and / when his attorney arrived the man in question said that he / did not know why he had so many books about blindness. They / asked his friends and family why he had so many books / about blindness. No one knew why he had so many books / about blindness and they accused him in the press of / anti-social behaviour. When his neighbours testified that / the man in question enjoyed society as much as

he / enjoyed a quiet night at home, they dropped the charges of / anti-social behaviour. They dropped the charges of / anti-social behaviour and filed new charges of / jaywalking. An undercover police officer filmed him / with a video camera as he illegally crossed / the street. At the advice of his attorney, he pleaded / guilty to the charges of jaywalking. He agreed to pay / the fine.

Daniel Borzutzky, The Man in Question

In any case, the ruling was long overdue. / The people are beside themselves with rapture / so we stay indoors. The quest was only another adventure / and the solution problematic, at any rate far off in the future. / The people are beside themselves with rapture / yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria, / and the solution: problematic, at any rate far off in the future. / The saxophone wails, the martini glass is drained. / Yet no one thinks to question the source of so much collective euphoria. / In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort and counsel. / The saxophone wails, the martini glass is drained, / and night like black swansdown settles on the city. / In troubled times one looked to the shaman or priest for comfort and counsel. / Now, only the willing are fated to receive death as a reward, / and night like black swansdown settles on the city. / If we tried to leave, would being naked help us?

John Ashbery, Hotel Lautréamont

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