

STUDENT EDITION

On Wings of Verse

ANNA MARIA MALKOÇ

POEMS FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRACTICE



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Selected and Prepared for the EFL Classroom
by

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ON WINGS OF VERSE: STUDENT EDITION

TO THE STUDENT

These poems have been carefully selected for a special group of readers: students of English on an intermediate to advanced level of comprehension and proficiency.

Each poem has *Notes* to give you some background of the poem and more language to talk about it.

Each poem has a *Vocabulary* that will also give you more words and expressions for discussing the poem. The definitions and explanations for the words *as they are used in the context* will help you in developing your vocabulary.

The *Questions* are designed to help you interpret the poems—without doing the interpreting for you. Each reader will find different meaning and melody in poetry. In fact, each time you read or listen to a poem, you will discover new facets of meaning, shining like a turning prism.

The main purpose of this book, then, is to enrich your English language skills through poetry—through the color, sounds, and imaginative figures of speech. We hope these poems will open pleasant windows on your new world of English!

Anna Maria Malkoç

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A Window

A place to look
And see
The beautiful trees,
A place for wind and air
To come and go
As they please.
Most of all,
A window is a picture
Hanging on my wall.

—David Bear's Heart

NOTES ON THE POEM

This poem about a window is a simple poetic thought, expressed in simple words.

The poet is a nonnative speaker of English, an American Indian boy living on a Sioux reservation in South Dakota. For him, life is not as simple as city dwellers may imagine. Although he doesn't face the complicated problems of the big city, he knows the hardships of nature—finding food, feeding the animals, and protecting himself against the weather. At the same time, nature is a gift-giver, and this young boy is close to all the wonders of nature and the natural elements. The wind and air give him pleasure as they move in and out of his window.

The window itself gives the poet the most pleasure of all. From it, he can view his world—even when he is shut away from it, inside his little house. There is always a marvelous panorama of the changing seasons to see through this window.

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. What does a window mean to this poet?
2. What can the poet see now from his window? What do you think that he can see at other times of the year?
3. Have you ever thought about a window in the way that this poet does?
4. Think of a window in your life: a window in your school or your own home. Is it like a "picture on the wall"? What can you see from it?
5. In your opinion, is "A Window" a true poem? Why do you think so?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

1. Make a list of all things you can see from some interesting window.
2. Do any of these words or phrases rhyme? Can you arrange them into a kind of free verse?

Dirge for a Soldier

Close his eyes; his work is done!
What to him is friend or foe-man,
Rise of moon, or set of sun,
Hand of man, or kiss of woman?
Lay him low, lay him low,
In the clover or the snow!
What cares he? He cannot know:
Lay him low!

As man may, he fought his fight,
Proved his truth by his endeavor;
Let him sleep in solemn night,
Sleep forever and forever.
Lay him low, lay him low,
In the clover or the snow!
What cares he? He cannot know:
Lay him low!

Fold him in his country's stars,
Roll the drum and fire the volley!
What to him are all our wars,
What but death bemocking folly?
Lay him low, lay him low,
In the clover or the snow!
What cares he? He cannot know:
Lay him low!

Leave him to God's watching eye,
Trust him to the hand that made him,
Mortal love weeps idly by:
God alone has power to aid him.
Lay him low, lay him low,
In the clover or the snow!
What cares he? He cannot know:
Lay him low!

—George Henry Boker

NOTES ON THE POEM

The words in this sad poem fit the bugle call that soldiers play at sunset every evening. Symbolically, the same music is played at a soldier's funeral. *Ta - ta - ta! Ta - ta - ta! Lay him low! Bury him deep!* sounds the horn softly and unhurriedly.

The poet is paying a last salute, perhaps to his friend, perhaps to all soldiers who have died in a war. "Farewell, soldier, sleep well."

VOCABULARY

bemocking (poetic): mocking; ridiculing; making fun of

clover: a kind of green, grassy plant

dirge: a slow, sad song; funeral music

endeavor (noun): effort; strength

fire the volley (poetic): shoot off the cannon

foeman (poetic): man who is a foe; enemy

folly: foolishness; poor judgment; lack of wisdom

idly: helplessly; making no effort

mortal: human; earthly; anything that will die

rise of moon (poetic): moonrise; when the moon comes out at night

roll the drum (poetic): play the drum

set of sun (poetic): sunset; when the sun goes down at the end of the day

solemn: serious; dignified

stars: his country's stars: the national flag

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. Who is the poet talking about?
2. What has happened to the soldier?
3. How does the soldier feel? Why?
4. Who will help the soldier now?
5. What are the poet's feelings about the soldier? Does he respect or disrespect him? What gives you this idea?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

Notice that some of the lines in each verse are inverted, turned around, to fit the rhythm of the lines. Paraphrase each paragraph by changing these inverted lines to regular word order.

Example: What to him is friend or foeman....
What is friend or foeman to him....

Poem of Praise

**Swift things are beautiful:
Swallows and deer,
And lightning that falls
Bright-veined and clear,
Rivers and meteors,
Wind in the wheat,
The strong-withered horse,
The runner's sure feet.**

**And slow things are beautiful:
The closing of day,
The pause of the wave
That curves downward to spray,
The ember that crumbles,
The opening flower,
And the ox that moves on
In the quiet of power.**

—Elizabeth Coatsworth

NOTES ON THE POEM

The poet is showing her appreciation of things that move swiftly: birds and animals; flashes of lightning; rivers; falling stars; wind in a wheat field; fast-moving athletes. Speed gives them all a special beauty—we must look quickly before they are gone.

The poet also admires some things that move slowly: the sunset; an ocean wave; a burning ember in the fire; a young flower that opens into a blossom; a strong, silent ox in the field. These all have a slow gracefulness—we must wait quietly and patiently to see their beauty.

VOCABULARY

bright-veined (poetic): having clearly marked lines like veins

crumble: to fall apart into little pieces

ember: a red, glowing coal of fire

ox (plural: oxen): a large, strong animal related to the cow, used to pull carts, wagons, plows, etc.; a beast of burden

praise: an expression of approval; the highest form of compliment for good work, achievement, etc.

strong-withered: having strong shoulders

swallows: small, fast-flying birds with long, pointed wings and tail

swift (usually poetic): fast; speedy, quick; moving rapidly

wheat: a kind of cereal grain (used to make flour for bread, called *corn* in England)

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. What are some things in the poem that are swift and beautiful?
2. What are some things in the poem that are slow and beautiful?
3. What are some other swift birds and animals that you know? Do you think they are beautiful? Why?
4. What are some other slow-moving animals that you know? Do you think they are beautiful? Why?
5. In your opinion, what are some other swift-moving or slow-moving *things* that are beautiful? Why do you think they are beautiful?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

1. Write a list of animals and things in nature that you enjoy watching. Tell whether they are fast-moving or slow-moving. Can you divide them into two groups like this poem?
2. Write a short poem of several lines, praising something that you like. Try to follow the poet's simple style.

Eyes Are Lit Up

*Someone whom no man can see
Is lighting candles in the tree.*

*Star by star, on every bough
There is a taper burning now.*

*Quietly, the forest through,
Eyes are lit up, two by two.*

*The silky moles and velvet mice
Have eyes as sharp as cracks in ice.*

*Dark-lanterns of the owls begin
To burn like emeralds and sin.*

*The raccoon built of hidden wire
Prowls by the glow of his brain-fire.*

*Hérons stand as still as years
And see the fish swim through their tears.*

*All the creatures of the night
Are busy being their own light.*

—Robert P. Tristram Coffin

NOTES ON THE POEM

The poet is describing a forest scene at night. The small animals that come out to hunt in the trees can see in the dark; their eyes shine with a yellow-green light. In the blackness of the forest, their shining eyes look like star lights or candles burning on the tree branches, or like lights burning on a Christmas tree.

In the water nearby, perhaps a pool or stream, the heron also hunts for its food, standing patiently waiting for the fish to swim by. Each creature makes its own light to see with in the dark.

VOCABULARY

bough: a branch or limb of a tree

brain-fire (poetic): the light of intelligence

creature: living thing; animal

dark-lanterns (poetic): lanterns or lamps that light up in the dark (The poet is referring to the big yellow-green eyes of the owl.)

heron: a long-legged bird that lives and feeds in the water

mole: a small, furry animal that lives underground in the dark and doesn't see in the light

owl: a bird that hunts its food at night; its call is distinctive: "To-whoo! To-whoo!"

prowl: to move slyly and quietly, so no one can see or hear

raccoon: a furry animal that hunts its food at night, always washing it in water before eating it

taper: a candle or burning light

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. How many creatures does the poet mention? (including fish, birds)
2. Do the animals' eyes all look alike? If not, how are they different?
3. What sounds can you hear in the forest? What colors can you see? What textures can you feel?
4. In the poet's eyes, is the forest at night a friendly place? Why do you think so?
5. In your opinion, is a forest friendly at night? Have you ever been in a forest at night? How did you feel?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

1. List all the creatures that the poet sees in the forest at night; for each one, make one sentence that includes the name of the creature and a short description of it.
2. Look carefully at your sentences. Do any of the descriptive words rhyme? Can you change any of them so they create a poem?

Vendor's Song

*My songs to sell, good sir!
I pray you buy.
Here's one will win a lady's tears,
Here's one will make her gay,
Here's one will charm your true love true
Forever and a day;
Good sir, I pray you buy!*

Oh, no, he will not buy.

*My songs to sell, sweet maid!
I pray you buy.
This one will teach you Lilith's lore,
And this what Helen knew,
And this will keep your gold hair gold,
And this your blue eyes blue;
Sweet maid, I pray you buy!*

Oh, no, she will not buy.

*If I'd as much money as I could tell,
I never would cry my songs to sell.
I never would cry my songs to sell.*

—Adelaide Crapsey

NOTES TO THE STUDENT

Like a flower seller, this person is selling songs on a street corner. Each song is good for something special: the songs for the gentleman can make his sweetheart cry or laugh or make her love him forever and ever. The songs for the lady, on the other hand, can teach her the magic of the ancient witch Lilith, or give her the knowledge of Helen of Troy (the most beautiful woman in the world) or tell her other kinds of beauty secrets.

VOCABULARY

charm: to bewitch; to cast a spell on; to attract or please greatly
cry (poetic, old English): to shout; to advertise something to sell

gay: happy; lighthearted

Good sir! (poetic, old English): Sir! (old term of address)

pray (poetic): to beg; to ask someone to do something

I pray you buy: I beg you to buy. Please, won't you buy....

sweet maid! (poetic, old English): Miss! (old term of address)

vendor: seller; someone who sells things on the street

win a lady's tears: to make a lady cry; to make her unhappy

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. Who is speaking in this poem, and what is this person doing?
2. Who is the vendor speaking to in the first verse? In the second? In the third?
3. Is the vendor successful? How does the vendor feel about selling songs?
4. Who would want to buy songs from the vendor?
5. Does this poem remind you of other superstitions, such as good luck charms?

All in Green Went My Love Riding

*All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.*

*four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.*

*Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift sweet deer
the red rare deer.*

*Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.*

*Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.*

*four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.*

*Softer be they than slippers sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.*

*Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.*

*Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.*

*four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.*

*Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.*

*Four tall stags at a green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.*

*All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.*

*four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.*

—e.e. cummings

NOTES ON THE POEM

This poem is like a strange dream: the reader may interpret it in different ways. One way is to read it like an old English ballad—the brave young hero rides off to the hunt or to war and leaves his sweetheart at home with a broken heart.

There is a feeling of movement, with the hunter on horseback, the running deer, and the crouching hounds. There are the sounds of the bugle, the hunting horn, echoing down the mountain. There is a feeling of suspense, of tragedy coming nearer and nearer.

But no matter how you read or interpret the poem, the beauty and the melody of the sounds, the delicacy and richness of the colors create a romantic mood.

VOCABULARY

bugle: hunting horn

crouch: to bend down, with legs close to the ground

cruel: unkind; hard-hearted

dappled: spotted; having many different colors

dawn: early morning light; sunrise

doe: a female deer

famished: hungry; starving

fleet: swift; rapid; very fast

fleet flown: they are fleet; they are faster

fleeter be they (poetic): they are fleet; they are faster

hip: waist; side of the body

hound: hunting dog

lean: thin; having no fat on (their) bones

lithe: flexible; bending easily

meadow: flat grassy land

peaks: mountain tops; sharp rocky points

roebuck: a male deer, of a European species

sheer: sharp; straight up and down

sleek: smooth; having a smooth skin

slim: long/tall and thin; not fat

slipper sleep (poetic): moving quietly; wearing soft slippers that make no noise

stag: a male deer

tense: nervous; with muscles stretched tightly, ready to move quickly

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. What is the general scene of the poem? (Who is going where?)
2. What details tell us how the hero is dressed and what he is doing?
3. What animals play a part in the poem? What feelings do you have about them?
4. Who do you think is telling the story? (Who is the "speaker" or voice of the poet?)
5. Can you interpret the last two lines in different ways? How?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

1. Write a short descriptive sentence for each of the following: The rider, the rider's horse, the hounds, the deer, the stags. (You may use the poet's adjectives to describe them.) Can you arrange these sentences to make a kind of poem?
2. Write a paragraph or short story about the action in this poem as you interpret it.

The Chariot

*Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And immortality.*

*We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labour, and my leisure too,
For his civility.*

*We passed the school where children played
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.*

*We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling on the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.*

*Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.*

—Emily Dickinson

NOTES ON THE POEM

This poem is an example of *poetic personification*, in which the poet talks about death as if it were a person, with human characteristics. As in many symbolic poems, we are free to interpret the meanings and to imagine the action taking place. This is part of the mystery and magic of poetry.

VOCABULARY

carriage: a horse-drawn cart; a vehicle (pulled by horses) in which people ride

civility: politeness; gentleness; being civil or polite

cornice: a decoration on the top of a building or wall

eternity: infinite time; time without beginning or end

gazing grain (poetic): wheat fields, where the wheat seems to simply stand and look quietly

haste: hurry; rush

immortality: deathlessness; the state of living forever

leisure: play time, activities for fun and entertainment

put away my labor (poetic): I stopped working

scarcely visible: could hardly be seen; it was almost impossible to see it

swelling on the ground (poetic): a round, small hill

surmise: to guess; imagine

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENDING AND APPRECIATING THE POEM

1. What is the general action of the poem? (Where is the speaker at the beginning, and at the end of the poem?)
2. What does the poet see on the way?
3. What is the pace or tempo of the poem? Would you say it moves quickly? What words tell you this?
4. How does this poet feel about Death? (frightened? amused? accepting?) What words tell you this?
5. In your opinion, why couldn't the poet stop for Death?

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING PRACTICE

1. Examine each verse for the main idea. Try to express each one in a simple sentence.
2. Combine your five sentences into a single paragraph. (You may need to add transition words, adverbs, etc.) Give your short essay a title.

Promise

*I grew a rose within a garden fair,
And, tending it with more than loving care,
I thought how, with the glory of its bloom,
I should the darkness of my life illumine;
And, watching, ever smiled to see the lusty bud
Drink freely in the summer sun to tinct its blood.*

*My rose began to open, and its hue
Was sweet to me as to its sun and dew;
I watched it taking on its ruddy flame
Until the day of perfect blooming came,
Then hastened I with smiles to find it blushing red—
Too late! Some thoughtless child had plucked my rose and fled!*

—Paul Laurence Dunbar

NOTES ON THE POEM

The poet uses the rose as a symbol of the beauty in life; he uses color as a symbol of his own existence as a black man in a white society. This use of symbols and style remind us of the Romantic poets of 17th and 18th centuries in England.

In modern English, this poem might have been written like this:

I planted a rose in a pretty garden
And took care of it with love
In the hope that when it bloomed
It would light up my dark life with its beauty.
As I watched it grow, I smiled
To see it drink in the sunshine, turning red.

My rose began to bloom, and its color was as wonderful to me
As sun and water were to the rose itself.
Every day I watched it growing redder and redder.
On the day it was ready to open up, I hurried to see it.
But I was too late! Some child, without thinking,
Had picked it and run away!