

## Billy Collins

Billy Collins was born in 1941 and raised in New York. He received his Ph.D. in romantic poetry from the University of California, Riverside, and began teaching at Lehman College after his graduation. His poems have been published widely. Several of his poetry collections, including *Questions About Angels* (1991) and *The Art of Drowning* (1995), have become popular as well as critical successes, a rarity for poetry books.

Collins writes about what he calls the “serious bits of fluff in our lives” that people experience and that poetry can pay attention to. He often uses humor and commonplace associations to connect with his readers as he writes about the simple and profound moments of everyday life.

### Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem’s room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author’s name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

[2001]

## Edwidge Danticat

Born in Haiti in 1969, Danticat immigrated to the United States when she was twelve. As a young girl in Brooklyn, Danticat had a hard time negotiating the cultural differences between Haiti and America. In college, she began writing about cultural difference and dislocation. Her master’s thesis at Brown University became her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). A collection of short stories *Krik? Krak!* (1995) was also highly successful. Her second novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) won an American Book Award.

Danticat often writes about the problems immigrants face in new cultures, the customs of her native Haiti, as well as Haitian American politics.

### New York Day Women

Today, walking down the street, I see my mother. She is strolling with a happy gait, her body thrust toward the don’t walk sign and the yellow taxicabs that make forty-five-degree turns on the corner of Madison and Fifty-seventh Street.

I have never seen her in this kind of neighborhood, peering in Chanel and Tiffany’s and gawking at the jewel glowing in the Bulgari