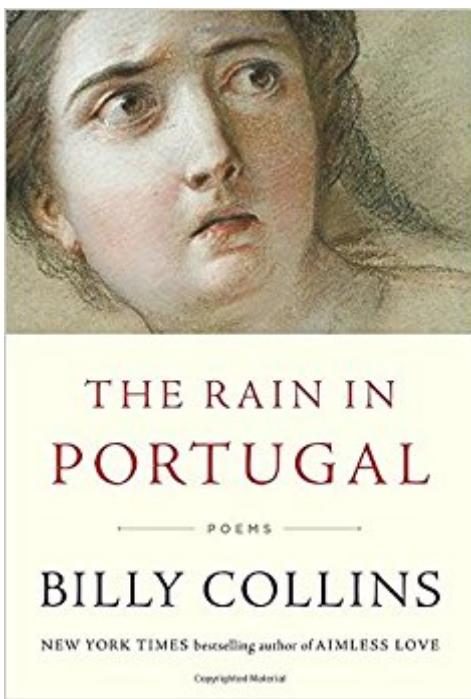


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# The Rain In Portugal: Poems



## Synopsis

From former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins comes a twelfth collection of poetry offering nearly fifty new poems that showcase the generosity, wit, and imaginative play that prompted The Wall Street Journal to call him "America's favorite poet." The Rain in Portugal "a title that admits he's not much of a rhymers" sheds Collins' ironic light on such subjects as travel and art, cats and dogs, loneliness and love, beauty and death. His tones range from the whimsical "the dogs of Minneapolis . . . / have no idea they're in Minneapolis" to the elegiac in a reaction to the death of Seamus Heaney. A student of the everyday, here Collins contemplates a weather vane, a still life painting, the calendar, and a child lost at a beach. His imaginative fabrications have Shakespeare flying comfortably in first class and Keith Richards supporting the globe on his head. By turns entertaining, engaging, and enlightening, The Rain in Portugal amounts to another chorus of poems from one of the most respected and familiar voices in the world of American poetry. On Rhyme It's possible that a stitch in time might save as many as twelve or as few as three, and I have no trouble remembering that September has thirty days. So do June, November, and April. I like a cat wearing a chapeau or a trilby, Little Jack Horner sitting on a sofa, old men who are not from Nantucket, and how life can seem almost unreal when you are gently rowing a boat down a stream. That's why instead of recalling today that it mostly pours in Spain, I am going to picture the rain in Portugal, how it falls on the hillside vineyards, on the surface of the deep harbors where fishing boats are swaying, and in the narrow alleys of the cities where three boys in tee shirts are kicking a soccer ball in the rain, ignoring the window-cries of their mothers.

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## Customer Reviews

Regular readers of Billy Collins' poetry will recognize his usual subjects in his new book of poems *THE RAIN IN PORTUGAL* (the phrase shows up in the poem "On Rhyme," which is not my favorite poem): cats, dogs, a breakfast meal, distant cities, travel, nature, other poets (Donald Hall, W. H. Auden, Cavafy, Shakespeare et al). And as we have come to expect, he writes with gentle humor. ("A Note to J. Alfred Prufrock" is one example of many.) A poem that begins as whimsical, however, sometimes may turn serious and surprise you. Practically every poem in this collection is the kind that Garrison Keillor would choose to read for his daily "The Reader's" Almanac on NPR. Mr. Collins said in an interview some years ago that the subject of most poems is death. Three of my favorite poems here have to do with the subject. In "December 1st" he remembers his mother who, if she were alive, would be 114: "Today is my mother's birthday,/but she's not here to celebrate/by opening a flowery card/or looking calmly out a window." (Has there ever been a mother on earth who did not love those Hallmark cards that we always sent them I ask.) The poem "Portrait goes to the bone." The narrator of the poem observes a woman with a ponytail disappear in a crowd: "Now neither of us was either here nor there and would fail to make our mark on the history of civilization. And that reminded me of the day I stood in a museum before a somber painting then bent close to read the little printed card that told me it was a portrait of an anonymous Dutch family by an anonymous Dutch painter." My favorite poem, "at least for today as I might change my mind tomorrow," is the poem "Helium."

Nobody is more surprised than I am that I love poetry. I wasn't in my early years, I didn't have the patience for it. But hearing T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" read aloud was an epiphany for me, not so much, "Oh now I get it." as "Oh yeah, that's what it's all about..." (It's a poem I've read a hundred times, once or twice a year, mining new meanings, new ideas.) I love many poets and their poems, none unreservedly, but in the same way I love my friends. I see their flaws and it makes them the dearer to me for those flaws. So when I see people slagging Billy Collins as middlebrow, I have to scratch my head because I don't know what highbrow poetry is supposed to be. For me it's all of a piece, and poetry is poetry. Like porn you know it when you see it. Collins is a relatively accessible poet, and perhaps that's why some people don't consider him cerebral enough. I'm not sure that's a worthy measure, though. Consider Cocteau's definition of poetry: "Such is the role of poetry. It unveils, in the strict sense of the word. It lays bare, under a light which shakes off torpor, the

surprising things which surround us and which our senses record mechanically." and you'll see that Collins' work fits that definition admirably. Often while reading one of his poems, I'll feel a little impatience and think, "What is he on about?" And then I'll reach the end and find myself smiling and nodding. "Oh yeah, that's what it's all about." He's made me laugh or nod in recognition of universal experiences on any number of occasions. One of the things I like about this particular volume is that many of the poems are replies to other artists and their work.

If you're any kind of literature reader, you must have heard the name of the poet Billy Collins at some point, even if you've never read any of his work. I hadn't really avoided him *per se*, but I'm pretty anti-establishment so the fact that he is so famous and also served as poet laureate of the US to me were marks AGAINST him. So when I offered early access to his newest book of poems, *The Rain In Portugal*, to be published October 4, 2016, I approached it with some reservation. This was my first time actually reading any of his poems. To make a long story short, I loved it! I had really fallen away from modern poetry for the longest time, but last year I got a subscription to Poetry Magazine to get back into the groove of things. After a year of reading the mag, I got a little blaise thinking "ok, THIS is modern poetry" and was disappointed because I could count the number of poems in the issues I read on around 3 fingers. Reading Billy Collins for the first time, I realized that there is a lot more breadth in terms of style and subject than I previously thought existed in contemporary poems. Collins writes about many things in this volume, including his cat, opera, Greece, a meditation room in his house, and lost children. At one point he even imagines William Shakespeare sharing a jetflight with him. It seems like no topic is too big or too trivial for Collins. I was impressed by his mastery and ability to bring power and art to whatever he was writing about. Another thing that I liked about the poems was the poet's sense of humor. In "2128" he muses about he and his fellow poet, Donald Hall, reaching the age of 200 and wondering how they're still alive. Even when Collins writes about death, he thinks of it with irony and humor.

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