Poems for *Station Eleven*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Ars Poetica?* BY [CZESLAW MILOSZ](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/czeslaw-milosz) TRANSLATED BY [CZESLAW MILOSZ](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/czeslaw-milosz)

I have always aspired to a more spacious form

that would be free from the claims of poetry or prose

and would let us understand each other without exposing

the author or reader to sublime agonies.

In the very essence of poetry there is something indecent:    *(5)*

a thing is brought forth which we didn’t know we had in us,

so we blink our eyes, as if a tiger had sprung out

and stood in the light, lashing his tail.

That’s why poetry is rightly said to be dictated by a daimonion,

though it’s an exaggeration to maintain that he must be an angel.    *(10)*

It’s hard to guess where that pride of poets comes from,

when so often they’re put to shame by the disclosure of their frailty.

What reasonable man would like to be a city of demons,

who behave as if they were at home, speak in many tongues,

and who, not satisfied with stealing his lips or hand,    *(15)*

work at changing his destiny for their convenience?

It’s true that what is morbid is highly valued today,

and so you may think that I am only joking

or that I’ve devised just one more means

of praising Art with the help of irony.    *(20)*

There was a time when only wise books were read,

helping us to bear our pain and misery.

This, after all, is not quite the same

as leafing through a thousand works fresh from psychiatric clinics.

And yet the world is different from what it seems to be    *(25)*

and we are other than how we see ourselves in our ravings.

People therefore preserve silent integrity,

thus earning the respect of their relatives and neighbors.

The purpose of poetry is to remind us

how difficult it is to remain just one person,    *(30)*

for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,

and invisible guests come in and out at will.

What I'm saying here is not, I agree, poetry,

as poems should be written rarely and reluctantly,

under unbearable duress and only with the hope    *(35)*

that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument.

Answer the following questions using line numbers to cite your proof.

1. *Ars Poetica* is a treatise on the art of poetry and, more recently, a poem about poetry. With this in mind, what is the thesis or claim of the poem?
2. What are the connotations of the word “indecent” in line 5?
3. What role do “daimonion[s]” (demons) have in writing poetry?
4. What are the effects of the poet’s choice to use 1st person and 2nd person and 1st person plural?
5. Discuss the use of comparison in stanza 6.
6. In which stanza is the most significant shift in content and tone? What does it shift from and where is it going?
7. Explain the metaphor in stanza 8.
8. What are the instructions given to us in the last stanza?

“A Song on the End of the World” by Czesław Miłosz

On the day the world ends  
A bee circles a clover,  
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.  
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,  
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing  
And the snake is gold-skinned as it should always be.

On the day the world ends  
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,  
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,  
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street  
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,  
The voice of a violin lasts in the air  
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder  
Are disappointed.  
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps  
Do not believe it is happening now.  
As long as the sun and the moon are above,  
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,  
As long as rosy infants are born  
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet  
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,  
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:  
No other end of the world will there be,  
No other end of the world will there be.

Complete the following questions.

1. Discuss the positive images in contrast to the title of the poem.
2. What is the effect of the repetition?
3. Describe the listing in the first two stanzas.
4. Where does the poem shift and what does it shift from? To?
5. Choose any contrast in the poem and explain how it helps to create the theme. Describe the theme as a complete sentence.
6. The poem was written in 1944 in Warsaw, Poland. This was the year of the Warsaw Uprising; for 63 days the Polish resistance fought the Nazis (thinking the Russians would come to their aid). The Nazis then destroyed the city completely. Does the historical information aid in interpretation? Why or why not?
7. Extra Credit: Write a poem in the format of “A Song at the End of the World.”