Portrait of the Young Artist as a Prematurely Old Man
Ogden Nash

It is common knowledge to every schoolboy and even every Bachelor of Arts,
That all sin is divided into two parts.
One kind of sin is called a sin of commission, and that is very important,
And it is what you are doing when you are doing something you ortant,
And the other kind of sin is just the opposite and is called a sin of omission
and is equally bad in the eyes of all right-thinking people, from
Billy Sunday to Buddha,
And it consists of not having done something you shuddha.
I might as well give you my opinion of these two kinds of sin as long as,
in a way, against each other we are pitting them,
And that is, don't bother your head about the sins of commission because
however sinful, they must at least be fun or else you wouldn't be
committing them.
It is the sin of omission, the second kind of sin,
That lays eggs under your skin.
The way you really get painfully bitten
Is by the insurance you haven't taken out and the checks you haven't added up
the stubs of and the appointments you haven't kept and the bills you
haven't paid and the letters you haven't written.
Also, about sins of omission there is one particularly painful lack of beauty,
Namely, it isn't as though it had been a riotous red-letter day or night every
time you neglected to do your duty;
You didn't get a wicked forbidden thrill
Every time you let a policy lapse or forget to pay a bill;
You didn't slap the lads in the tavern on the back and loudly cry Whee,
Let's all fail to write just one more letter before we go home, and this round
of unwritten letters is on me.
No, you never get any fun
Out of things you haven't done,
But they are the things that I do not like to be amid,
Because the suitable things you didn't do give you a lot more trouble than the
unsuitable things you did.
The moral is that it is probably better not to sin at all, but if some kind of
sin you must be pursuing,
Well, remember to do it by doing rather than by not doing.

The Bells
Edgar Allan Poe

I
Hear the sledges with the bells-
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells-
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II
Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And an in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon! Oh, from out the sounding cells,

Air and Angels
John Donne

TWICE or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame
Angels affect us oft, and worshipp'd be.
Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing did I see.
But since my soul, whose child love is,
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,
More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love ask, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.
Whilst thus to ballast love I thought,
And so more steadily to have gone,
With wares which would sink admiration,
I saw I had love's pinnace overfraught;
Thy every hair for love to work upon
Is much too much ; some fitter must be sought;
For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scattering bright, can love inhere;
Then as an angel face and wings
Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear,
So thy love may be my love's sphere;
Just such disparity
As is 'twixt air's and angels' purity,
'Twixt women's love, and men's, will ever be.

Dear Reader
Billy Collins

Baudelaire considers you his brother,
and Fielding calls out to you every few paragraphs
as if to make sure you have not closed the book,
and now I am summoning you up again,
attentive ghost, dark silent figure standing
in the doorway of these words.

Pope welcomes you into the glow of his study,
takes down a leather-bound Ovid to show you.
Tennyson lifts the latch to a moated garden,
and with Yeats you lean against a broken pear tree,
the day hooded by low clouds.

But now you are here with me, composed in the open field of this page,
no room or manicured garden to enclose us,
no Zeitgeist marching in the background,
no heavy ethos thrown over us like a cloak.

Instead, our meeting is so brief and accidental,
unnoticed by the monocled eye of History,
you could be the man I held the door for
this morning at the bank or post office
or the one who wrapped my speckled fish.
You could be someone I passed on the street
or the face behind the wheel of an oncoming car.

The sunlight flashes off your windshield,
and when I look up into the small, posted mirror,
I watch you diminish—my echo, my twin—
and vanish around a curve in this whip
of a road we can't help traveling together.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist
could send one into the past more suddenly—
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp
by a deep Adirondack lake
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

The other day I was ricocheting slowly
off the blue walls of this room,
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary
where my eyes fell upon the word lanyard.

The Lanyard
Billy Collins

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,
but that did not keep me from crossing
strand over strand again and again
until I had made a boxy
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,
and I gave her a lanyard.
She nursed me in many a sick room,
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,
laid cold face-cloths on my forehead,
and then led me out into the airy light
and taught me to walk and swim,
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.
Here are thousands of meals, she said,
and here is clothing and a good education.
And here is your lanyard, I replied,
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,
strong legs, bones and teeth,
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.
And here, I wish to say to her now,
is a smaller gift—not the worn truth
that you can never repay your mother,
but the tuteful admission that when she took
the two-tone lanyard from my hand,
I was as sure as a boy could be
that this useless, worthless thing I wove
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which drops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!