

Two Poems

by Arsenio Orteza (April 2018)

Gathering Moss



Both Feet not too Firmly Planted, Alex Kanevsky, 2014

I'm a check waiting to bounce, a basket holding all of
my eggs, a nest feathered with

the moltings of birds worth only one in the
bush. I am the waste made by haste,

a lender, a borrower, the
looker of gift horses in the mouth; the illness,

poverty, and folly
of those who went to bed late and rose even

later. My twain have met, and neither had a mother

who told him, "If you can't say anything nice,

be worth your weight in the gold that is

silence." I bloom,
but not where I'm

planted. I only brighten the

corner where I live

after I
paint

myself

into

it.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Wallace
Stevens' *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a
Blackbird*



Two Men Sitting With a Table, Honore Daumier, 19th c.

I

Among Stevens' many moving poems,
The one that moves the most
is the one about a blackbird.

II

It's in thirteen brief parts,
Like a sonnet cycle
In haiku-cycle's clothing.

III

The Beatles' "Blackbird" is
a fourteenth way of looking at a blackbird.

IV

Though segmented, Stevens' "Blackbird"
is really one poem.

Hell, Stevens's *Collected Poems*
is really one poem.

V

I do not know whether to divide
The poem into its thirteen parts
And give one to each of my
Thirteen lady friends
Or just buy them chocolate.

VI

Numerals number the lachrymose pages

On which the poem appears.

Aramaic, they should be easy

To distinguish from

The Roman numerals numbering

The poem's thirteen sections.

Should be, but ain't.

VII

O voluptuous women of Walmart,

Why do you read the tabloids?

Do you not see that reading Stevens

Would make you much more beguiling

To any man worth inveigling?

VIII

I know Hopkins' "Spring and Fall" by heart,

sprung rhythms and all;

One day, I will memorize

Stevens' blackbird poem too

If it kills me.

IX

When I misplaced my copy of *Harmonium*,

I almost took a sharpened knife

To one of my two wrists.

X

At the very thought of reading it

Or even hearing it read,

I forgive the hags whose hagiographies

Most incense my senses.

XI

She escaped the gendarmes

With a blackbird's élan.

Twice, they did double-takes

To make sure

They weren't seeing Stevens' poetry

In motion.

XII

I read "The blackbird must be flying."

I know Stevens' poem must be ending.

XIII

I spent a week with you one night.

We were partying,

And we were going to party some more.

A smoldering cigarette made a hole

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Arsenio Orteza teaches secondary-school English in China and writes about music for [WORLD Magazine](#). He has also written for the *Village Voice*, *Blender*, and the *Wittenburg Door*. From 1985 to 1987, he studied with David Wagoner and Heather McHugh at the University of Washington in Seattle. His poems have appeared in *Exquisite Corpse* and *Poetry Northwest*.

