

# The Stazione Zoologica di Napoli

Apologies to Edmund Spencer (1552-1599)

1. In this Acquario all the goodly creatures  
Wherewith Dame Nature doth her beautify  
And advertises aspects of her marine features,  
Are gathered. Here is a collection  
Of all things that are born to live and die  
From out the sea. Long work it is we bear  
Here to account the endless progeny  
Of all the beasts, experiments and business there  
But so much as doth need, I'll recount with all care.
2. It sited is in fruitful soil of old,  
And girt in now with park on either side,  
A building of white stone, classical and bold  
And many privy rooms where scientists do hide.  
Two gates it has, one open wide,  
By which both in and out men might go,  
The one large and square, the other round the side.  
There many porters are, which many natures show,  
And white coated workers with strange speech and slow.
3. These come from far to work here, and out do wend  
About the city, as much as they desire.  
A thousand marine creatures daily do attend  
Upon their interest, as daily they require,  
And night and day, researches do them tire,  
Such as list, at least; and some that novelty create,  
Are ordained with hopes that they should sire  
Great works: to be published duly, these work late,  
And go out tardy by the lateral gate.
4. Innumerable creatures are here in rank  
And uncouth forms which none yet ever knew,  
And every sort is in a separate tank  
Set by itself: especially those most rare  
And fit for reasonable souls to view,  
Some for experiment, some for public stare.  
And all the fruitful spawn of fishy hue  
Considered is; and thus we try  
To follow how they live and multiply.

5. Daily are fished and daily forth are sent,  
About the building, always are wanted more,  
There to be used for great experiment,  
But yet the stock remains in everlasting store,  
As it first created was, of yore.  
For in the wide womb of the Bay there lies  
In hateful darkness, and some on shore,  
An huge eternal chaos which supplies  
The bulk of Acquario's fruitful progenies.
6. And were it not that time my troubler is,  
All that in this delightful garden grows  
Should studied be; for here eternal bliss,  
For here, all interest and all pleasure flows,  
And sweet discourse many-tongued goes  
Among great Company; and if ideas succeed,  
Each stimulated creature responds and shows  
All his nervous mechanism that he doth need  
To wriggle and behave according to his breed.

## The hen and the egg

"I am old enough to be your grandfather"  
Said the egg to the hen.  
"In that case, best get cracking"  
replied the hen.  
"Not so"  
"Longer quiescent, the better fit for destined purposes"  
Said the egg.  
"Indeed, How so ?" asked the hen.  
"Politics" answered the egg,  
and the hen pondered long.

## Jungle war will tantalise

Shall water drips and biting flies  
Be our only lullabies;  
Shall the morrow's east lit skies  
Reveal a man who, sleeping, dies ?

Dream tonight of apple pies,  
Of women's soft scented sighs,  
And rabbits of enormous size,  
In fevered brain that magnifies.

Let's tell the tale of Yankee guys,  
Whose paper notes will subsidize,  
Our food and weapons, even spies  
And subterfuge they catalyse

Comrades of this enterprise  
Let hopes and thoughts forever rise,  
Until we get some new supplies,  
Or repatriate with fond good byes.

Reader note with no surprise  
How poets can economise.  
But on the whole it isn't wise  
To limit rhymes or specialise.

## Zoology Lecture, The Snail

My foot extends from my tail to my chin.  
The sole support of my weight,  
Footwear it saves by muscular waves  
With slime to lubricate.

I squirt myself out when I want to extend.  
A fact that you might mention,  
I can only contract and counteract  
Hydrostatic extension.

With four long horns on the front of my head  
In the place where my eyes might be,  
I slide and squeeze over gravel and leaves  
Where all the world can see.

For I have a house, a helical house  
Where I quickly retire and hide  
There compressed, I take a rest,  
Securely contracted inside.

Sometimes I open a hole in my side,  
The entrance to my lung,  
And a gardener's grief are a million teeth  
In rows on a rasping tongue.

Now you should know that in one snail,  
There is both man and wife.  
But it takes two snails for all that entails  
Continuance of mollusc life.

There are some houseless naked snails  
Equally slimy and fleet,  
Although no shell, they survive quite well,  
Being horrible things to eat.

A snail is a snail and always is.  
It never turns into a fly.  
It has its feelings and in all its dealings  
Is slow retiring and shy.