

# COOP

chickens of our poetry



free range 1

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Content Warning: Some poems portray animal death.

**Front cover art: "Chicks and Worm"**  
by Ohara Koson, 1900-1930  
Via Rijks Studio  
Color Woodcut

**Back cover art: "Two Chicks Fighting Over a Butterfly"**  
by Ohara Koson, 1900-1910  
Via Rijks Studio  
Color Woodcut

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## Enigma

Joseph Auslander  
Via *Poetry Magazine*

The swallowed thud of cattle shouldering through  
Cool translucent distances of dew;  
The blue dawn like a shell warmed by their lowing;  
The patter of pigeon-feet on the roof; the rooster crowing;  
The tepid interval when pale birds cheep  
Beneath their wings; the flutter muffled with sleep;  
Crickets on dripping planks; the delighted noises of things  
                    that creep  
In subterranean softness: things too small for a name  
Moving through private tunnels down to their instant of  
                    flame...  
Strange, how beautiful these things are; how these  
Things are still beautiful; strange  
That our sweet flesh falters, knows ghastly change—  
And these things are still beautiful under the hawk-dark  
                    trees!



## A Corner of My Garden

Marie Danse, 1877 - 1909  
Via Rijks Studio  
Etching

## Geography

Hilda Conkling  
Via Project Gutenberg

I can tell balsam trees  
By their grayish bluish silverish look of smoke.  
Pine trees fringe out.  
Hemlocks look like Christmas.  
The spruce tree is feathered and rough  
Like the legs of the red chickens in our poultry yard.  
I can study my geography from chickens  
Named for Plymouth Rock and Rhode Island,  
And from trees out of Canada.  
No; I shall leave the chickens out.  
I shall make a new geography of my own.  
I shall have a hillside of spruce and hemlock  
Like a separate country,  
And I shall mark a walk of spires on my map,  
A secret road of balsam trees  
With blue buds.  
Trees Fat smell like a wind out of fairy-land  
Where little people live  
Who need no geography  
But trees.

# Street with steps in Taormina, Sicily

Bernard Essers, 1921

Via Rijks Studio



# Poultry and a Dog

Jan Griffier 1667-1718

Via Rijks Studio

Print

# A White Hen Sitting

Christina Georgina Rossetti  
Via My Poetic Side

A white hen sitting  
On white eggs three:  
Next, three speckled chickens  
As plump as plump can be.  
An owl, and a hawk,  
And a bat come to see:  
But chicks beneath their mother's wing  
Squat safe as safe can be.



Chicken with Chicks and Hatching Eggs

Isaac Weissenbruch  
Via Rijks Studio  
Print



## Birds Nest with Eggs

Julie de Graag, 1887 - 1924  
Via Rijks Studio  
Ink and Watercolor



## Chicks

Jakuun (possibly), 1900 - 1910  
Via Rijks Studio  
Color woodcut



# Ballad of Another Ophelia

D.H. Lawrence  
Via My Poetic Side

Oh the green glimmer of apples in the orchard,  
Lamps in a wash of rain!  
Oh the wet walk of my brown hen through the stackyard,  
Oh tears on the window pane!

Nothing now will ripen the bright green apples,  
Full of disappointment and of rain,  
Brackish they will taste, of tears, when the yellow dapples  
Of autumn tell the withered tale again.

All round the yard it is cluck, my brown hen,  
Cluck, and the rain-wet wings,  
Cluck, my marigold bird, and again  
Cluck for your yellow darlings.

For the grey rat found the gold thirteen  
Huddled away in the dark,  
Flutter for a moment, oh the beast is quick and keen,  
Extinct one yellow-fluffy spark.

Once I had a lover bright like running water,  
Once his face was laughing like the sky;  
Open like the sky looking down in all its laughter  
On the buttercups, and the buttercups was I.

What, then, is there hidden in the skirts of all the blossom?  
What is peeping from your wings, oh mother hen?  
'Tis the sun who asks the question, in a lovely haste for wisdom;  
What a lovely haste for wisdom is in men!

Yea, but it is cruel when undressed is all the blossom,  
And her shift is lying white upon the floor,  
That a grey one, like a shadow, like a rat, a thief, a rain-storm,  
Creeps upon her then and gathers in his store.

Oh the grey garner that is full of half-grown apples,  
Oh the golden sparkles laid extinct!  
And oh, behind the cloud-sheaves, like yellow autumn dapples,  
Did you see the wicked sun that winked!



## June Calendar Page with Chicks

Theo van Hoytema, 1878-1915  
Via Rijks Studio

## Hen's Nest

John Clare  
Via Public Domain Poetry

Among the orchard weeds, from every search,  
 Snugly and sure, the old hen's nest is made,  
 Who cackles every morning from her perch  
 To tell the servant girl new eggs are laid;  
 Who lays her washing by, and far and near  
 Goes seeking all about from day to day,  
 And stung with nettles tramples everywhere;  
 But still the cackling pullet lays away.  
 The boy on Sundays goes the stack to pull  
 In hopes to find her there, but naught is seen,  
 And takes his hat and thinks to find it full,  
 She's laid so long so many might have been.  
 But naught is found and all is given o'er  
 Till the young brood come chirping to the door.



## Seven Chicks

Melchior d'Hondecoeter, c. 1665 - c. 1668  
Via Rijks Studio  
Oil



## Chicken Standing on the Back of a Swimming Duck

Miep de Feijter, c. 1928 - c. 1941  
Via Rijks Studio  
Ink

# Contentment

Eugene Field  
Via Public Domain Poetry

Once on a time an old red hen  
Went strutting 'round with pompous clucks,  
For she had little babies ten,  
A part of which were tiny ducks.  
"T is very rare that hens," said she,  
"Have baby ducks as well as chicks~  
But I possess, as you can see,  
Of chickens four and ducklings six!"

A season later, this old hen  
Appeared, still cackling of her luck,  
For, though she boasted babies ten,  
Not one among them was a duck!  
"T is well," she murmured, brooding o'er  
The little chicks of fleecy down~  
"My babies now will stay ashore,  
And, consequently, cannot drown!"

The following spring the old red hen  
Clucked just as proudly as of yore~  
But lo! her babes were ducklings ten,  
Instead of chickens, as before!  
"T is better," said the old red hen,

As she surveyed her waddling brood;  
"A little water now and then  
Will surely do my darlings good!"

But oh! alas, how very sad!  
When gentle spring rolled round again  
The eggs eventuated bad,  
And childless was the old red hen!  
Yet patiently she bore her woe,  
And still she wore a cheerful air,  
And said: "T is best these things are so,  
For babies are a dreadful care!"

I half suspect that many men,  
And many, many women, too,  
Could learn a lesson from the hen  
With foliage of vermilion hue;  
She ne'er presumed to take offence  
At any fate that might befall,  
But meekly bowed to Providence~  
She was contented~that was all!



Ducks, Birds, and Rooster Near a  
Frozen Lake

Henri Verstijnen, 1892 - 1940  
Via Rijks Studio  
Ink

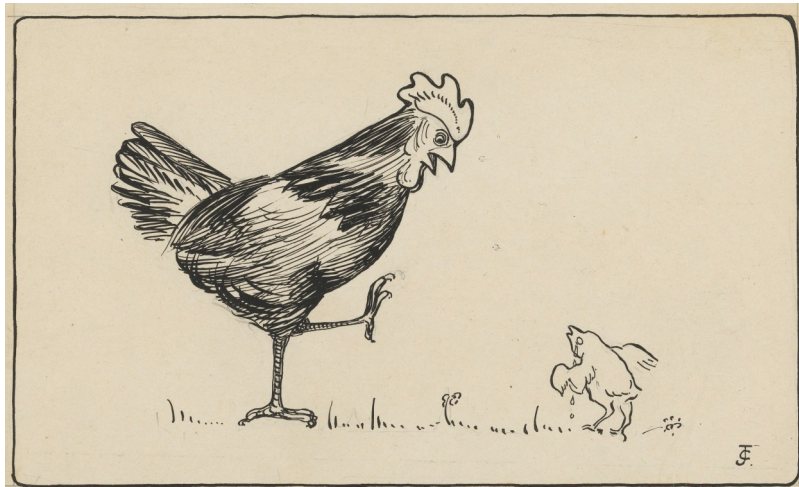
## Old Hen and Young Cock

John Gay  
Via Public Domain Poetry

Once an old hen led forth her brood  
To scratch and glean and peck for food;  
A chick, to give her wings a spell,  
Fluttered and tumbled in a well.  
The mother wept till day was done,  
When she met with a grown-up son,  
And thus addressed him: - "My dear boy,  
Your years and vigour give me joy:  
You thrash all cocks around, I'm told;  
'Tis right, cocks should be brave and bold:  
But never - fears I cannot quell -  
Never, my son, go near that well;  
A hateful, false, and wretched place,  
Which is most fatal to my race.  
Imprint that counsel on your breast,  
And trust to providence the rest."

He thanked the dame's maternal care,  
And promised never to go near.  
Yet still he burned to disobey,  
And hovered round it day by day;  
And communed thus: "I wonder why?  
Does mother think my soul is shy?  
Thinks me a coward? or does she  
Store grain in yonder well from me?  
I'll find that out, and so here goes."  
So said, he flaps his wings and crows,

Mounted the margin, peered below,  
 Where to repel him rose a foe.  
 His choler rose, his plumes upreared -  
 With ruffled plumes the foe appeared.  
 Challenged to fight - he dashed him down  
 Upon the mirrored wave to drown;  
 And drowning uttered: "This condition  
 Comes from my mother's prohibition.  
 Did she forget, or not believe,  
 That I too am a son of Eve?"



Two Chickens

Unknown, c. 1900 - c. 1940  
 Via Rijks Studio  
 Ink



Cock and Dog

Kubota Shunman, 1816  
 Via Rijks Studio  
 Color Woodcut

## A Question

Ellis Parker Butler  
Via Public Domain Poetry

Whene'er I feed the barnyard folk  
My gentle soul is vexed;  
My sensibilities are torn  
And I am sore perplexed.

The rooster so politely stands  
While waiting for his food,  
But when I feed him, what a change!  
He then is rough and rude.

He crowds his gentle wives aside  
Or pecks them on the head;  
Sometimes I think it would be best  
If he were never fed.

And so I often stand for hours  
Deciding which is right—  
To impolitely have enough,  
Or starve and be polite.



## Egoyomi for the Year of the Rooster

Anonymous, 1789  
Via Rijks Studio  
Color woodcut

# How Can We Fool the Rooster?

Alan L. Strang  
Via Public Domain Poetry

*Written when the clock was set ahead one hour on April 1, 1918.*

Our Rooster wakes at half-past five  
And crows with all his might,  
He tries to wake the people up  
Before the day is light.  
When Daddy hears the rooster crow  
He knows he should awake  
And light the kitchen fire, so Ma  
Can cook the Johnny cake.

Now, maybe we can fool my Dad  
That it's half-past five when it's half-past four,  
And maybe the system's the best we have had  
To fool some thousands of people or more;  
But, how can we fool that rooster?

I have always thought our rooster had  
A clock inside of his head,  
And I don't know how we can fix it so  
We can set the clock ahead.  
I asked my Dad, and he said to me,  
"Why, son, you surely know  
A rooster's instinct wakens him  
And tells him when to crow."

Now the hands of the clock we can turn ahead,  
We can fool the people and feel content;  
But the thing that worries me night and day,  
And on which my entire thought is bent  
Is, how can we fool that rooster?



January Calendar with White Rooster

Theo van Hoytema, 1901  
Via Rijks Studio



# Roosters

Robert Frost

At four o'clock  
in the gun-metal blue dark  
we hear the first crow of the first cock

just below  
the gun-metal blue window  
and immediately there is an echo

off in the distance,  
then one from the backyard fence,  
then one, with horrible insistence,

grates like a wet match  
from the broccoli patch,  
flares, and all over town begins to catch.

Cries galore  
come from the water-closet door,  
from the dropping-plastered henhouse floor,

where in the blue blur  
their rusting wives admire,  
the roosters brace their cruel feet and glare

with stupid eyes  
while from their beaks there rise  
the uncontrolled, traditional cries.

Deep from protruding chests  
in green-gold medals dressed,  
planned to command and terrorize the rest,

the many wives  
who lead hens' lives  
of being courted and despised;

deep from raw throats  
a senseless order floats  
all over town. A rooster gloats

over our beds  
from rusty irons sheds  
and fences made from old bedsteads,

over our churches  
where the tin rooster perches,  
over our little wooden northern houses,

making sallies  
from all the muddy alleys,  
marking out maps like Rand McNally's:

glass-headed pins,  
oil-golds and copper greens,  
anthracite blues, alizarins,

each one an active  
displacement in perspective;  
each screaming, "This is where I live!"

Each screaming  
"Get up! Stop dreaming!"  
Roosters, what are you projecting?

You, whom the Greeks elected  
to shoot at on a post, who struggled  
when sacrificed, you whom they labeled

"Very combative..."  
what right have you to give  
commands and tell us how to live,

cry "Here!" and "Here!"  
and wake us here where are  
unwanted love, conceit and war?

The crown of red  
set on your little head  
is charged with all your fighting blood

Yes, that excrescence  
makes a most virile presence,  
plus all that vulgar beauty of iridescence

Now in mid-air  
by two they fight each other.  
Down comes a first flame-feather,

and one is flying,  
with raging heroism defying  
even the sensation of dying.

And one has fallen  
but still above the town  
his torn-out, bloodied feathers drift down;

and what he sung  
no matter. He is flung  
on the gray ash-heap, lies in dung

with his dead wives  
with open, bloody eyes,  
while those metallic feathers oxidize.

St. Peter's sin  
was worse than that of Magdalen  
whose sin was of the flesh alone;

of spirit, Peter's,  
falling, beneath the flares,  
among the "servants and officers."

Old holy sculpture  
could set it all together  
in one small scene, past and future:

Christ stands amazed,  
Peter, two fingers raised  
to surprised lips, both as if dazed.

But in between  
a little cock is seen  
carved on a dim column in the travertine,

explained by gallus canit;  
flet Petrus underneath it,  
There is inescapable hope, the pivot;

yes, and there Peter's tears  
run down our chanticleer's  
sides and gem his spurs.

Tear-encrusted thick  
as a medieval relic  
he waits. Poor Peter, heart-sick,

still cannot guess  
those cock-a-doodles yet might bless,  
his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness,

a new weathervane  
on basilica and barn,  
and that outside the Lateran

there would always be  
a bronze cock on a porphyry  
pillar so the people and the Pope might see

that event the Prince  
of the Apostles long since  
had been forgiven, and to convince

all the assembly  
that "Deny deny deny"  
is not all the roosters cry.

In the morning  
a low light is floating  
in the backyard, and gilding

from underneath  
the broccoli, leaf by leaf;  
how could the night have come to grief?

gilding the tiny  
floating swallow's belly  
and lines of pink cloud in the sky,

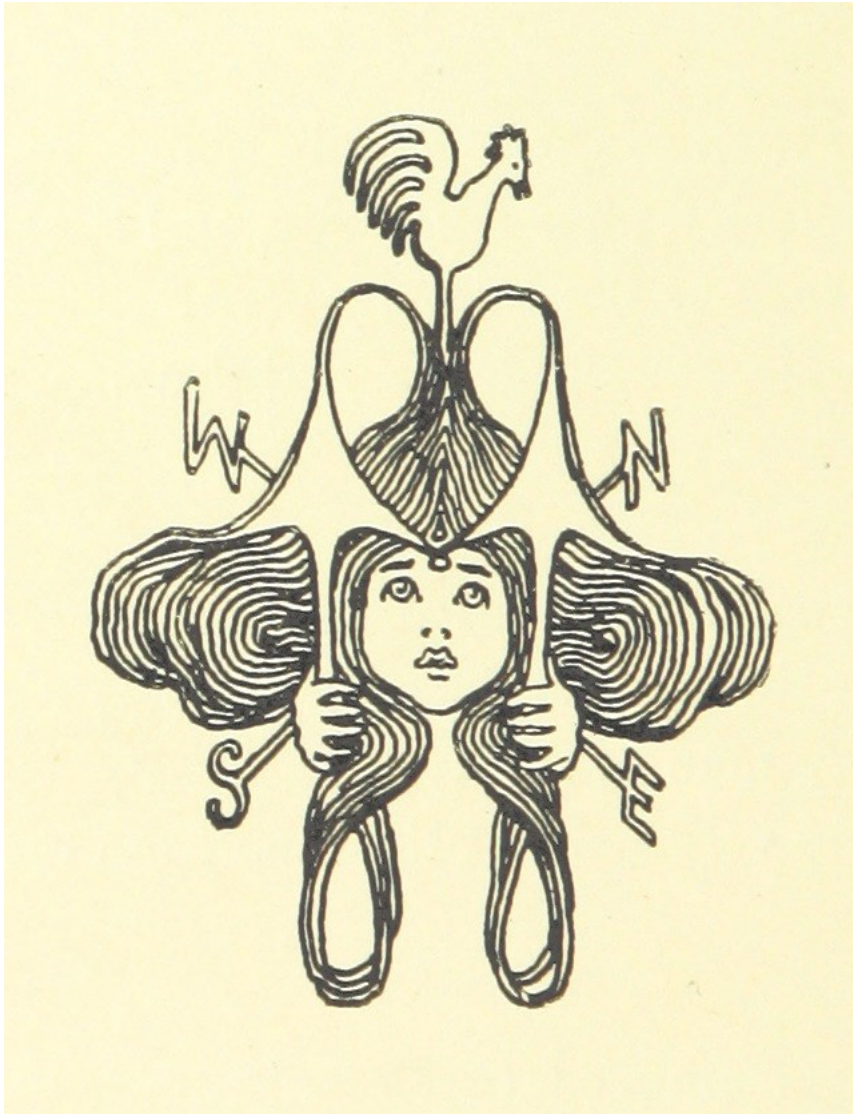
the day's preamble  
like wandering lines in marble,  
The cocks are now almost inaudible.

The sun climbs in,  
following "to see the end,"  
faithful as enemy, or friend.



Weather Vane - Iron Rooster

Albert Eyth, c. 1937  
Via The National Gallery of Art  
Watercolor and graphite



*From Songs for Little People*

H. Stratton, 1896  
Via Flickr  
Monograph

## Editor's Note

The grand tradition of chicken art and poetry is a long one. As I set out to find chicken poetry in the public domain, I was surprised both at how much and how little I was able to find. I scoured the depths of countless websites. I brought all my Boolean search skills to bear. I trawled a literal century of dusty publications on Archive.org. I thought, "Chickens are so charismatic and seemingly ubiquitous. Shouldn't there be more poems about them that aren't just nursery rhymes for children?"

But when I turned around to view the meager amount I had found, I was surprised to discover that there were too many poems and too much art to fit in a single volume. Hence why this special edition bears a number: 1. There will be more Free Range editions in the future, so keep an eye out!

The grand tradition of chicken art and poetry is long, but it is also deep. I'm so excited to be able to share these old and perhaps forgotten bits of history with you all. I hope they inspire you to think about our favorite barnyard bird in a new way, to explore the deep vein of chicken history for yourself, or to create your own art or poetry.

If you do end up making some chicken art or poetry of your own, send it in! We'd love to see it and to publish you alongside the chickeny greats that you've seen in this special edition.

Rook



find more at [coopzine.wordpress.com](http://coopzine.wordpress.com)