Introduction to Poetry
Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,
or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.
Did I Miss Anything?

Tom Wayman

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 percent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz:
worth 50 percent

Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning.
Take as many days off as you like:
any activities we undertake as a class
I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose.

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light suddenly descended and an angel
or other heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter.
This is the last time the class will meet
before we disperse to bring the good news to all people
on earth.

Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered

but it was one place

And you weren't here.

From Did I Miss Anything? Selected Poems 1973-1993