AN ALBUM OF MODERN POETRY

An Anthology Read by the Poets

Edited by Oscar Williams
Acknowledgments


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Robert Frost

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

MY OBJECTION TO BEING STEPPED ON

At the end of the row
I stepped on the toe
Of an unemployed hoe.
It rose in offence
And struck me a blow
In the seat of my sense.
It wasn’t to blame
But I called it a name.
And I must say it dealt
Me a blow that I felt.
Like malice prepense.
You may call me a fool,
But was there a rule
The weapon should be
Turned into a tool?
And what do we see?
The first tool I step on
Turned into a weapon.

AWAY!

Now I out walking
The world desert,
And my shoe and my stocking
Do me no hurt.
I leave behind Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Good friends in town. Of being watched from forty cellar holes
Let them get well-wined As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
And go lie down. As for the woods' excitement over you
Don’t think I leave That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
For the outer dark Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Like Adam and Eve Where were they all not twenty years ago?
Put out of the Park. Don't think I leave Charge that to upstart inexperience.

Forget the myth. For the outer dark
There is no one I Where were they all not twenty years ago?
Am put out with Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
Or put out by. The height of the adventure is the height

Unless I'm wrong Of country where two village cultures faded
I but obey Into each other. Both of them are lost.
The words of a song: And if you're lost enough to find yourself
I'm—bound—away! By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put out with And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain. Then make yourself at home. The only field
The height of the adventure is the height Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
Of country where two village cultures faded First there's the children's house of make believe,
Into each other. Both of them are lost. Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
Don't think I leave The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Charge that to upstart inexperience. Weep for what little things could make them glad.

Forget the myth. Someone's road home from work this once was,
There is no one I Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Am put out with Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
Or put out by. The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded

Unless I'm wrong Into each other. Both of them are lost.
The words of a song: And if you're lost enough to find yourself
I'm—bound—away! By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put out with And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry—
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
And there's a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.

I leave behind Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Good friends in town. Of being watched from forty cellar holes
Let them get well-wined As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
And go lie down. As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they
mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.

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Wallace Stevens

SO-AND-SO RECLINING ON HER COUCH

On her side, reclining on her elbow.
This mechanism, this apparition.
Suppose we call it Projection A.

She floats in air at the level of
The eye, completely anonymous,
Born, as she was, at twenty-one,
Without lineage or language, only
The curving of her hip, as motionless gesture,
Eyes dripping blue, so much to learn.

If just above her head there hung,
Suspected in air, the slightest crown
Of Gothic prong and practick bright,

The suspension, as in solid space,
The suspending hand withdrawn, would be
An invisible gesture. Let this be called

Projection B. To get at the thing
Without gestures is to get at it as
Idea. She floats in the contention, the flux

Between the thing as idea and
The idea as thing. She is half who made her.
This is the final Projection, C.

The arrangement contains the desire of
The artist. But one confides in what has no
Concealed creator. One walks easily

The unpainted shore, accepts the world
As anything but sculpture. Good-bye,
Mrs. Pappadopulos, and thanks.

MOUNTAINS COVERED WITH CATS

The sea full of fishes in shoals, the woods that let
One seed alone grow wild, the railway-stops
In Russia at which the same statue of Stalin
Greets
The same railway passenger, the ancient tree
In the centre of its cones, the resplendent flights

Of red facsimiles through related trees,
White houses in villages, black communicants—
The catalogue is too commodious.

Regard the invalid personality
Instead, outcast, without the will to power
And impotent, like the imagination seeking
To propagate the imagination or like
War’s miracle begetting that of peace.

Freud’s eye was the microscope of potency.
By fortune, his gray ghost may meditate
The spirits of all the impotent dead, seen clear,
And quickly understand, without their flesh,
How truly they had not been what they were.

John Crowe Ransom

CAPTAIN CARPENTER

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime
Put on his pistols and went riding out
But he got well nigh nowhere at that time
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.

It was a pretty lady and all her train
That played with him so sweetly but before
An hour she’d taken a sword with all her main
And twined him of his nose for evermore.

Captain Carpenter mounted up one day
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue
That looked unchristian but be that as it may
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.

But drew upon him out of his great heart
The other swung against him with a club
And cracked his two legs at the shinny part
And let him roll and stick like any tub.

Captain Carpenter rode many a time
From male and female took he sundry harms
He met the wife of Satan crying “I’m
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more arms.”

Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind
I wish he had delivered half his blows
But where she should have made off like a hind
The bitch bit off his arms at the elbows.
And Captain Carpenter parted with his ears
To a black devil that used him in this wise
O Jesus ere his threescore and ten years
Another had plucked out his sweet blue eyes.

Captain Carpenter got up on his roan
And sallied from the gate in hell's despite
I heard him asking in the grimmest tone
If any enemy yet there was to fight?

"To any adversary it is fame
If he risk to be wounded by my tongue
Or burnt in two beneath my red heart's flame
Such are the perils he is cast among.

"But if he can he has a pretty choice
From an anatomy with little to lose
Whether he cut my tongue and take my voice
Or whether it be my round red heart he choose."

It was the neatest knave that ever was seen
Stepping in perfume from his lady's bower
Who at this word put in his merry mien
And fell on Captain Carpenter like a tower.

I would not knock old fellows in the dust
But there lay Captain Carpenter on his back
His weapons were the old heart in his bust
And a blade shook between rotten teeth alack.

The rogue in scarlet and gray soon knew his mind
He wished to get his trophy and depart;
With gentle apology and touch refined
He pierced him and produced the Captain's heart.

God's mercy rest on Captain Carpenter now
I thought him Sirs an honest gentleman
Citizen husband soldier and scholar enow
Let jangling kites eat of him if they can.

But God's deep curses follow after those
That shone him of his goody nose and ears
His legs and strong arms at the two elbows
And eyes that had not watered seventy years.

The curse of hell upon the sleek upstart
Who got the Captain finally on his back
And took the red red vitals of his heart
And made the kites to whet their beaks clack clack.

Marianne Moore

SPENSER'S IRELAND

has not altered;—
a place as kind as it is green,
the greenest place I've never seen.
Every name is a tune.
Denunciations do not affect
the culprit; nor blows, but it
is torture to him not to be spoken to.
They're natural,—
the coat, like Venus' mantle lined with stars,
buttoned close at the neck,—the sleeves new from disuse.

If in Ireland
they play the harp backward at need,
and gather at midday the seed
of the fern, eluding
their 'giants all covered with iron', might
there be fern seed for unlearning obduracy and for reinstating
the enchantment?

Hindered characters
seldom have mothers
in Irish stories, but they all have grandmothers.

It was Irish;
a match not a marriage was made
when my great great grandmother'd said
with native genius for
disunion, 'although your suitor be
perfection, one objection
is enough; he is not
Irish.' Outwitting
the fairies, befriending the furies,
whoever again
and again says, 'I'll never give in,' never sees
that you're not free
until you've been made captive by
supreme belief,—credulity
you say? When large dainty
fingers trembling divide the wings
of the fly for mid-July
with a needle and wrap it with peacock-tail,
or tie wool and
buzzard's wing, their pride,
like the enchanter's
is in care, not madness. Concurring hands
divide

flax for damask
that when bleached by Irish weather
has the silvered chamois-leather
water-tightness of a
skin. Twisted tores and gold new-moon-shaped
lunulae aren't jewelry
like the purple-coral fuchsia-tree's. Eire—
the guillemot
so neat and the hen
of the heath and the
linnet spinet-sweet—bespeak relentlessness?
Then
they are to me
like enchanted Earl Gerald who
changed himself into a stag, to
a great green-eyed cat of
the mountain. Discommodity makes
them invisible; they've dis-
appeared. The Irish say your trouble is their
trouble and your
joy their joy? I wish
I could believe it;
I am troubled, I'm dissatisfied, I'm Irish.

T. S. Eliot

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

'A cold coming we had of it,
just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,

The very dead of winter,'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and
women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of
shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating
the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the
meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over
the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of
silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we con-
tinued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen
birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.
Vacant shuttles
Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob.

GERONTION

Thou has not youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,
And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merris.
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.
I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvencence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut,
flowing judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?
Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
I have not made this show purposelessly
And it is not by any concitation
Of the backward devils.
I would meet you upon this honestly.
I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:

How should I use them for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil

Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

Tenants of the house,
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.
Edwin Muir

IN LOVE FOR LONG

I've been in love for long
With what I cannot tell
And will contrive a song
For the intangible
That has no mould or shape,
From which there's no escape.

It is not even a name,
Yet is all constancy;
Tried or untried, the same,
It cannot part from me;
A breath, yet as still
As the established hill.

It is not any thing,
And yet all being is;
Being, being, being,
Its burden and its bliss.
How can I ever prove
What it is I love?

This happy happy love
Is sieged with crying sorrows,
Crushed beneath and above
Between to-days and morrows;
A little paradise
Held in the world's vice.

And there it is content
And careless as a child,
And in imprisonment
Flourishes sweet and wild;
In wrong, beyond wrong,
All the world's day long.

This love a moment known
For what I do not know
And in a moment gone
Is like the happy doe

William Carlos Williams

THE RIDER VICTORY

The rider Victory reins his horse
Midway across the empty bridge
As if head-tall he had met a wall.
Yet there was nothing there at all,
No bodiless barrier, ghostly ridge
To check the charger in his course
So suddenly, you'd think he'd fall.

Suspended, horse and rider stare,
Leaping on air and legendary.
In front the waiting kingdom lies,
The bridge and all the roads are free;
But halted in implacable air
Rider and horse with stony eyes
Uproar their motionless statuary.

THE YACHTS

content in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses
tortures the biggest hulls, the best man knows
to pit against its beatings, and sinks them piti-
lessly.
Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute
brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bulging
sails
they glide to the wind tossing green water
from their sharp prows while over them the
crew croaks
ant like, solicitously grooming them, releasing, making fast as they turn, lean far over and having caught the wind again, side by side, head for the mark.

In a well guarded arena of open water surrounded by lesser and greater craft which, sycophant, lumbering and flitting follow them, they appear youthful, rare as the light of a happy eye, live with the grace of all that in the mind is feckless, free and naturally to be desired. Now the sea which holds them is moody, lapping their glossy sides, as if feeling for some slightest flaw but fails completely. Today no race. Then the wind comes again. The yachts move, jockeying for a start, the signal is set and they are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

Arms with hand grasping seek to clutch at the prow. Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside. It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind, the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken, beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over.

Robinson Jeffers

THE BLOODY SIRE

It is not bad. Let them play,
Let the guns bark and the bombing-plane
Speak his prodigious blasphemies.
It is not bad, it is high time,
Stark violence is still the sire of all the world's values.

What but the wolf's tooth whistled so fine
The fleet limbs of the antelope?
What but fear winged the birds, and hunger
Jeweled with such eyes the great goshawk's head?
Violence has been the sire of all the world's values.

Who would remember Helen's face
Lacking the terrible halo of spears?
Who formed Christ but Herod and Caesar,
The cruel and bloody victories of Caesar?
Violence, the bloody sire of all the world's values.

Never weep, let them play,
Old violence is not too old to beget new values.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

RECUEIRDO (WE WERE VERY TIRED, WE WERE VERY MERRY)

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.
We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

Robert Graves

THE LEGS

There was this road,
And it led up-hill,
And it led down-hill,
And round and in and out.

And the traffic was legs,
Legs from the knees down,
Coming and going,
Never pausing.

And the gutters gurgled
With the rain's overflow,
And the sticks on the pavement
Blindly tapped and tapped.

What drew the legs along
Was the never-stopping,
And the senseless, frightening
Fate of being legs.

Legs for the road,
The road for legs,
Resolutely nowhere
In both directions.

My legs at least
Were not in that rout:
On grass by the road-side
Entire I stood,

Watching the unstoppable
Legs go by
With never a stumble
Between step and step.

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Though my smile was broad
The legs could not see,
Though my laugh was loud
The legs could not hear.

My head dizzied, then:
I wondered suddenly,
Might I too be a walker
From the knees down?

Gently I touched my skins.
The doubt unchained them:
They had run in twenty puddles
Before I regained them.

THE NAKED AND THE NUDE

For me, the naked and the nude
(By lexicographers construed
As synonyms that should express
The same deficiency of dress
Or shelter) stand as wide apart
As love from lies, or truth from art.

Lovers without reproach will gaze
On bodies naked and ablaze;
The Hippocratic eye will see
In nakedness, anatomy;
And naked shines the Goddess when
She mounts her lion among men.

The nude are bold, the nude are sly
To hold each treasonable eye.
While draping by a showman's trick
Their dishabille in rhetoric,
They grin a mock-religious grin
Of scorn at those of naked skin.

The naked, therefore, who compete
Against the nude may know defeat;
Yet when they both together tread
The briary pastures of the dead,
By Gorgons with long whips pursued,
How naked go the sometime nude!

Conrad Aiken

THE ROOM

Through that window—all else being extinct
Except itself and me—I saw the struggle
Of darkness against darkness. Within the room
It turned and turned, dived downward. Then
I saw
How order might—if chaos wished—become:
And saw the darkness crush upon itself,
Contracting powerfully; it was as if
It killed itself: slowly: and with much pain.

Pain. The scene was pain, and nothing but pain.
What else, when chaos draws all forces inward
To shape a single leaf? . . .

For the leaf came,
Alone and shining in the empty room;
After a while the twig shot downward from it;
And from the twig a bough; and then the trunk,
Massive and coarse; and last the one black root.
The black root cracked the walls. Boughs
burst the window:
The great tree took possession.

Tree of trees!
Remember (when time comes) how chaos died
To shape the shining leaf. Then turn, have courage,

Wrap arms and roots together, be convulsed
With grief, and bring back chaos out of shape.
I will be watching then as I watch now.
I will praise darkness now, but then the leaf.

RIMBAUD AND VERLAINE

Rimbaud and Verlaine, precious pair of poets,
Genius in both (but what is genius?) playing
Chess on a marble table at an inn
With chestnut blossom falling in blond beer
And on their hair and between knight and bishop—
Sunlight squared between them on the chessboard
Cirrus in heaven, and a squeal of music
Blown from the leathern door of Ste. Sulpice—

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Discussing, between moves, iamb and spondee
Anacoluthon and the open vowel
God the great peacock with his angel peacocks
And his dependent peacocks the bright stars:
Disputing too of fate as Plato loved it,
Or Sophocles, who hated and admired,
Or Socrates, who loved and was amused:
Verlaine puts down his pawn upon a leaf
And closes his long eyes, which are dishonest,
And says 'Rimbaud, there is one thing to do:
We must take rhetoric, and wring its neck!...'
Rimbaud considers gravely, moves his Queen;
And then removes himself to Timbuctoo.

And Verlaine dead,—with all his jades and mauves;
And Rimbaud dead in Marseilles with a vision,
His leg cut off, as once before his heart;
And all reported by a later lackey,
Whose virtue is his tardiness in time.

Let us describe the evening as it is:—
The stars disposed in heaven as they are:
Verlaine and Shakespeare rotting, where they rot,
Rimbaud remembered, and too soon forgot;

Order in all things, logic in the dark;
Arrangement in the atom and the spark;
Time in the heart and sequence in the brain—
Such as destroyed Rimbaud and fooled Verlaine.
And let us then take godhead by the neck—
And strangle it, and with it, rhetoric.

Archibald MacLeish

THE END OF THE WORLD

Quite unexpectedly as Vasterot
The armless ambidextrian was lighting
A match between his great and second toe
And Ralph the lion was engaged in biting

The neck of Madame Sossman while the drum
Pointed, and Teeny was about to cough
In waltz-time swinging Jocko by the thumb—
Quite unexpectedly the top blew off:

And there, there overhead, there, there, hung over
Those thousands of white faces, those dazed eyes,
There in the starless dark the poise, the hover,
There with vast wings across the canceled skies,
There in the sudden blackness the black pall
Of nothing, nothing, nothing—nothing at all.

Henry Reed

NAMING OF PARTS

Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday,
We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morn-
ing,
We shall have what to do after firing. But today,
Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens,

And today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
When you are given your slings. And this is
the piling swivel,
Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,
Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.
And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose
of this
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide
it
Rapidly backwards and forwards; we call this
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and
forwards
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the
flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly
easy
If you have any strength in your thumb: like
the bolt,
And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the
point of balance,
Which in our case we have not got; and the
almond-blossom
Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going
backwards and forwards,
For today we have naming of parts.

JUDGING DISTANCES

Not only how far away, but the way that you
say it
Is very important. Perhaps you may never get
The knack of judging a distance, but at least
you know
How to report on a landscape: the central
sector,
The right of arc and that, which we had last
Tuesday,
And at least you know

That maps are of time, not place, so far as the
army
Happens to be concerned—the reason being,
Is one which need not delay us. Again, you
know

There are three kinds of tree, three only, the
fir and the poplar,
And those which have bushy tops to; and lastly
That things only seem to be things.

A barn is not called a barn, to put it more
plainly,
Or a field in the distance, where sheep may be
safely grazing.
You must never be over-sure. You must say,
when reporting:
At five o'clock in the central sector is a dozen
Of what appear to be animals; whatever you
do,
Don't call the bleeders sheep.

I am sure that's quite clear; and suppose, for
the sake of example,
The one at the end, asleep, endeavors to tell us
What he sees over there to the west, and how
far away,
After first having come to attention. There to
the west,
On the fields of summer the sun and the shadows
bestow
Vestments of purple and gold.

The still white dwellings are like a mirage in
the heat,
And under the swaying elms a man and a
woman
Lie gently together. Which is, perhaps, only
to say
That there is a row of houses to the left of arc,
And that under some poplars a pair of what
appear to be humans
Appear to be loving.

Well that, for an answer, is what we might
rightly call
Moderately satisfactory only, the reason being,
Is that two things have been omitted, and those
are important.
The human beings, now: in what direction are
they,
And how far away, would you say? And do not
forget
There may be dead ground in between.

There may be dead-ground in-between; and
I may not have got
The knack of judging a distance; I will only
venture
A guess that perhaps between me and the apparent lovers,
(Who, incidentally, appear by now to have finished.)
At seven o'clock from the houses, is roughly a distance
Of about one year and a half.

Muriel Rukeyser

EYES OF NIGHT-TIME

On the roads at night I saw the glitter of eyes:
My dark around me let shine one ray; that black
allowed their eyes: spangles in the cat's, air in
the moth's eye shine,
mosaic of the fly, ruby-eyed beetle, the eyes that
never weep,
the horned toad sitting and its tear of blood,
fighters and prisoners in the forest, people
aware in this almost total dark, with the difference,
the one broad fact of light.

Eyes on the road at night, sides of a road like rhyme;
the floor of the illumined shadow sea
and shallows with their assembling flash and show
of sight, root, holdfast, eyes of the brittle stars.
And your eyes in the shadowy red room,
scent of the forest entering, various time
calling and the light of wood along the ceiling
and over us birds calling and their circuit eyes.
And in our bodies the eyes of the dead and the living
giving us gifts at hand, the glitter of all their eyes.
 Allen Tate  
SONNETS AT CHRISTMAS

I

This is the day His hour of life draws near,
Let me get ready from head to foot for it
Most handily with eyes to pick the year
For small feed to reward a feathered wit.
Some men would see it an epiphany
At ease, at food and drink, others at chase
Yet I, stung lassitude, with ecstasy
Unspent argue the season's difficult case
So: Man, dull critter of enormous head,
What would he look at in the coiling sky?
But I must kneel again unto the Dead
While Christmas bells of paper white and red,
Figured with boys and girls spilt from a sled,
Ring out the silence I am nourished by.

II

Ah, Christ, I love you rings to the wild sky
And I must think a little of the past:
When I was ten I told a stinking lie
That got a black boy whipped; but now at last
The going years, caught in an accurate glow,
Reverse like balls englished upon green baize—
Let them return, let the round trumpets blow
The ancient crackle of the Christ's deep gaze.
Deafened and blind, with senses yet unfound,
Am I, untutored to the after-wit
Of knowledge, knowing a nightmare has no sound;
Therefore with idle hands and head I sit
In late December before the fire's daze
Punished by crimes of which I would be quit.

Oscar Williams  
THE LEG IN THE SUBWAY

When I saw the woman's leg on the floor of
the subway train,
Protrude beyond the panel (while her body over-
flowed my mind's eye),
When I saw the pink stocking, black shoe, curve
bulging with warmth,
The delicate etching of the hair behind the
flesh-colored gauze,
When I saw the ankle of Mrs. Nobody going
nowhere for a token,
When I saw this foot motionless on the moving
motionless floor,
My mind caught on a nail of a distant star, I
was wrenched out
Of the reality of the subway ride, I hung in a
'socket of distance:
And this is what I saw:

The long tongue of the earth's speed was licking
the leg,
Upward and under and around went the long
tongue of speed:
It was made of a flesh invisible, it dripped the
saliva of miles:
It drank moment, lit shivers of insecurity in
niches between bones:
It was full of eyes, it stopped licking to look at
the passengers:
It was as alive as a worm, and busier than any-
body in the train:
It spoke saying: To whom does this leg belong?
Is it a bonus leg
For the rush hour? Is it a forgotten leg?
Among the many
Myriads of legs did an extra leg fall in from the Out There?
O Woman, sliced off bodily by the line of the panel, shall I roll
Your leg into the abdominal nothing, among the digestive teeth?
Or shall I fit it with the pillars that hold up the headlines?
But nobody spoke, though all the faces were talking silently,
As the train zoomed, a zipper closing up swiftly the seam of time.

Alas, said the long tongue of the speed of the earth quite faintly,
What is one to do with an incorrigible leg that will not melt—
But everybody stopped to listen to the train vomiting cauldrons
Of silence, while somebody’s jolted-out after-thought trickled down
The blazing shirt-front solid with light bulbs, and just then
The planetary approach of the next station exploded atoms of light,
And when the train stopped, the leg had grown a surprising mate,
And the long tongue had slipped hurriedly out through a window:

I perceived through the hole left by the nail of the star in my mind
How civilization was as dark as a wood and dimensional with things
And how birds dipped in chromium sang in the crevices of our deeds.

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer’s horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel’s Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate zip that exploded atoms of light, most have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN
(To JS/07/M/378
This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Pudgie Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn’t a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)

W. H. Auden

MUSÉE DES BEAUX ARTS

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;

page 16
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked
a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper
every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were
normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was
fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hos-
pital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade
Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the
Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern
Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are con-
tent
That he held the proper opinions for the time
of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when
there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the
population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number
for a parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never inter-
fered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question
is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly
have heard.

When the allegorical man came calling,
He told us all he would show us a trick,
And he showed us a flat but inflatable ball.
“Look at this ball,” he told us all,
“Look at the lines marked out on this ball.”
We looked at the ball and the lines on the ball.
England was red and France was brown,
Germany orange and Russia green;
“Look at this ball,” he told us all,
“With a blow of my breath I inflate this ball.”
He blew, and it bounced, and bouncing, falling,
He bounced it against the wall with a kick.
“But without my breath it will flatten and fall,”
Said the allegorical man, and down
Flat came his hand and squashed the ball,
And it fell on the floor with no life at all,
Once his breath had gone out of the ball . . .
It seemed to us all a stupid trick.

Richard Eberhart

THE HORSE CHESTNUT TREE

Boys in sporadic but tenacious droves
Come with sticks, as certainly as Autumn,
To assault the great horse chestnut tree.

There is a law governs their lawlessness.
Desire is in them for a shining amulet
And the best are those that are highest up.

They will not pick them easily from the ground.
With shrill arms they fling to the higher branches,
To hurry the work of nature for their pleasure.

I have seen them trooping down the street
Their pockets stuffed with chestnuts shucked,
unshucked.
It is only evening keeps them from their wish.

Sometimes I run out in a kind of rage
To chase the boys away: I catch an arm,
Maybe, and laugh to think of being the lawgiver.

I was once such a young sprout myself
And fingered in my pocket the prize and trophy.
But still I moralize upon the day.

Theodore Spencer

THE INFLATABLE GLOBE

“No. 43. A balloon in the shape of a
globe, showing the main countries of the earth
and their possessions. Easily inflatable, it is
instructive for children learning geography . . .
50 cents.”
And see that we, outlaws on God's property,
Fling out imagination beyond the skies,
Wishing a tangible good from the unknown.

And likewise death will drive us from the scene
With the great flowering world unbroken yet,
Which we held in idea, a little handful.

THE GROUNDHOG

In June, amid the golden fields,
I saw a groundhog lying dead.
Dead lay he; my senses shook,
And mind outshot our naked frailty.
There lonely in the vigorous summer
His form began its senseless change,
And made my senses waver dim
Seeing nature ferocious in him.
Inspecting close his maggots' might
And seething cauldron of his being,
Half with loathing, half with a strange love,
I poked him with an angry stick.
The fever arose, became a flame
And Vigour circumscribed the skies,
Immense energy in the sun,
And through my frame a sunless trembling.
My stick had done nor good nor harm.
Then stood I silent in the day
Watching the object, as before;
And kept my reverence for knowledge
Trying for control, to be still,
To quell the passion of the blood;
Until I had bent down on my knees
Praying for joy in the sight of decay.
And so I left; and I returned
In Autumn strict of eye, to see
The sap gone out of the groundhog,
But the bony sodden hulk remained.
But the year had lost its meaning,
And in intellectual chains
I lost both love and loathing,
Mured up in the wall of wisdom.
Another summer took the fields again
Massive and burning, full of life,
But when I chanced upon the spot
There was only a little hair left,
And bones bleaching in the sunlight

Beautiful as architecture;
I watched them like a geometer,
And cut a walking stick from a birch.
It has been three years, now.
There is no sign of the groundhog.
I stood there in the whirling summer,
My hand capped a withered heart,
And thought of China and of Greece,
Of Alexander in his tent;
Of Montaigne in his tower,
Of Saint Theresa in her wild lament.

Stephen Spender

ULTIMA RATIO REGUM

The guns spell money's ultimate reason
In letters of lead on the Spring's hillside.
But the boy lying dead under the olive trees
Was too young and too silly
To have been notable to their important eye.
He was a better target for a kiss.

When he lived, tall factory hooters never summoned him
Nor did restaurant plate-glass doors revolve to wave him in
His name never appeared in the papers.
The world maintained its traditional wall
Round the dead with their gold sunk deep as a well,
Whilst his life, intangible as a Stock Exchange rumor drifted outside.

O too lightly he threw down his cap
One day when the breeze threw petals from the trees.
The unflowering wall sprouted with guns,
Machine-gun anger quickly scythed the grasses;
Flags and leaves fell from hands and branches;
The tweed cap rotted in the nettles.

Consider his life which was valueless
In terms of employment, hotel ledgers, news files.
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.

Ask. Was so much expenditure justified
On the death of one so young, and so silly
Lying under the olive trees, O world, O death?

I THINK CONTINUALLY OF THOSE WHO WERE TRULY GREAT

I think continually of those who were truly great.

Who, from the womb, remembered the soul’s history

Through corridors of light where the hours are
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song.

And who hoarded from the Spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious, is never to forget
The essential delight of the blood drawn from

Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.

Never to deny its pleasure in the morning

Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering of the Spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,

See how these names are fêted by the waving grass
And by the streamers of white cloud
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.

The names of those who in their lives fought for life,

Who wore at their hearts the fire’s centre.

Born of the sun, they travelled a short while

And left the vivid air signed with their honour.
No, you never get any fun
Out of the 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 SEA-GULL

Hark to the whimper of the sea-gull;
He weeps because he's not an ea-gull.
Suppose you were, you silly sea-gull,
Could you explain it to your she-gull?

I NEVER EVEN SUGGESTED IT

I know lots of men who are in love and lots of
men who are married and lots of men who are
both,
And to fall out with their loved ones is what all
of them are most loth.
They are conciliatory at every opportunity,
Because all they want is serenity and a certain
amount of impunity.
Yes, many the swain who has finally admitted
that the earth is flat
Simply to sidestep a spat,
Many the masculine Positively or Absolutely
which has been diluted to an If
Simply to avert a tiff,
Many the two-fisted executive whose domestic
conversation is limited to a tactfully inter-
polated Yes,
And then he is amazed to find that he is being
raked backwards over a bed of coals neverthe-
less.
These misguided fellows are under the impres-
sion that it takes two to make a quarrel, that
you can sidestep a crisis by nonaggression and
nonresistance,
Instead of removing yourself to a discreet
distance.

Passivity can be a provoking modus operandi;
Consider the Empire and Gandhi.
Silence is golden, but sometimes invisibility is
golder.
Because loved ones may not be able to make
bricks without straw but often they don't need
any straw to manufacture a bone to pick or
blood in their eye or a chip for their soft
white shoulder.
It is my duty, gentlemen, to inform you that
women are dictators all, and I recommend to
you this moral:
In real life it takes only one to make a quarrel.

Merrill Moore

THE NOISE THAT TIME MAKES

The noise that Time makes in passing by
Is very slight but even you can hear it
Having not necessarily to be near it,
Needing only the slightest will to try!

Hold the receiver of a telephone
To your ear when no one is talking on the line
And what may at first sound to you like the
whine
Of wind over distant wires is Time's own
Garments brushing against a windy cloud.

That same noise again but not so well
Can be heard by taking a small cockle shell
From the sand and holding it against your head;

Then you can hear Time's footsteps as they pass
Over the earth brushing the eternal grass.

William Empson

LEGAL FICTION

Law makes long spokes of the short stakes of
men.
Your well fenced out real estate of mind
No high flat of the nomad citizen
Looks over, or train leaves behind.
Your rights extend under and above your claim
Without bound; you own land in Heaven and
Hell;
Your part of earth's surface and mass the same,
Of all cosmos' volume, and all stars as well.
Your rights reach down where all owners meet,
in Hell's
Pointed exclusive conclave, at earth's centre
(Your spun farm's root still on that axis dwells);
And up, through galaxies, a growing sector.

You are nomad yet; the lighthouse beam you
own
Flashes, like Lucifer, through the firmament.
Earth's axis varies; your dark central cone
Wavers a candle's shadow, at the end.
Gene Derwood

ELEGY ON GORDON BARBER

Lamentably Drowned in His Eighteenth Year

When in the mirror of a permanent tear
Over the iris of your mother's eye
I beheld the dark tremor of your face, austere
With space of death, spun too benign for youth,
Icicle of the past to pierce her living sigh—
I saw you wish the last kiss of mother's mouth,
Who took the salted waters rather in the suck
Of seas, sighing yourself to fill and drench
With water the plum-rich glory of your breast
Where beat the heart escaping from war's luck.

Gone, gone is Gordon, tall and brilliant lad
Whose mind was science. Now hollow his skull
A noble sculpture, is but sunken bone,
His cells from water came by water laid
Grave-deep, to water gone.
Lost, lost the hope he had
Washed to a cipher his splendour and his skill.

But Gordon's gone, it's other boys who live afraid.

Two years, and lads have grown to hold a gun.
In dust must splendid lads go down and choke,
Red dry their hands and dry their one day's sun
From which they earthward fall to fiery tomb
Bomb-weighted, from blooding children's hair.

Never a boy but takes as cross Cain's crime
And goes to death by making death, to pass
Death's gate distorted with the dried brown grime—
Better the watery death than death by air
Or death by sand
Where fall hard fish of fear
Loud in unwetted dust.

Spun on a lucky wave, O early boy!
Now ocean's fish you are
As heretofore.

Perhaps you had sweet mercy's tenderness
To win so soon largesse of choice
That you, by grace, went gayly to the wave
And all our mourning should be to rejoice.
WITH GOD CONVERSING

Red paths that wander through the gray, and
cells
Of strangeness, rutted mouldings in the brain,
Untempered fevers heated by old kills,
By the pampered word, by the pat printed rune,
Unbalanced coil under glaucous blooms of
thought,
A turning mind, unmitigated thinking that
Feeds human hunger and eats us alive
While cringing to the death, expecting love,—
Such make the self we are. And do you make
it?
And practice on us? For we cannot take it.

Big thoughts have got us, hence we organize,
Govern our heroes with unmeant yeas and nays,
And breathe in dungeons of our nervous mesh
An air too blank to snare meandering flesh.

Night melting dawn shall turn the renewed sky,
Aurora Borealis and Australis
Fanfaring leap the poles, the moon fall by;
But if our science does not quickly fail us
How long for us will space blue light the sun
Of populaces, while wonderers eye the sun?
The gloomy silhouettes of wings we forged
With reason reasonless, are now enlarged,
The falsified subconscious, beast a-woken?
We-you? Post-suicides, shall we awaken?

Listen. Grow mild before the flicking lash
Seems welded to your hand, self-wounder.
What are we, cry we, while our pain leaps lash,
Too jungle thick: the jungle where we wander,
No seeded faith before, nor after, miracle,
Of bidden faith in things unseen, no particle.
For we think only through our troubled selves,
We note the worm that in the apple delves,
See gibbous moons and spots upon the sun,
Speak gibberish, and keep the poor in sin.

Plus birth and death must war-lash winnow
While every pod-burst leaf of May sucks lift?
Because we think shall we be less than minnow,
Cat, carrot, rat, bat and such from sense aloof?
What doorless maze is this we wander through
With fuming souls parched of our morning dew?
Reason confounds as it presents to NAUGHT:
Earth-worn, man moving into self-made night.
Reason-begotten science sets war's pace
And, civil-mouthed, makes civilization pass.

Created in your image, made up of words,
Till words reduce you to a zero-0,
We, then, reflecting you, are less than birds,
Bugs, or empty dugs, still less than minus no.
There must be something wrong with being wise—
Talking we go wondering and wandering with woes,

George Barker

THREE MEMORIAL SONNETS FOR TWO
YOUNG SEAMEN LOST OVERBOARD IN A
STORM IN MIDPACIFIC, JANUARY, 1940

The seagull, spreadeagled, splayed on the wind,
Span backwards shrieking, belly facing upward,
Fled backward with a gimlet in its heart
To see the two youths swimming hand in hand
Through green eternity. O swept overboard
Not could the thirty-foot jaws them part,
Or the flouncing skirts that swept them over
Separate what death pronounced was love.

I saw them, the hand flapping like a flag,
And another like a dolphin with a child
Supporting him. Was I the shape of Jesus
When to me hopeward their eyeballs swivelled,
Saw I was standing in the stance of vague
Horror; paralysed with mere pity's peace?

From thorax of storms the voices of verbs
Shall call to me without sound, like the silence
Round which cyclones rage, to nurse my nerve
And hang my heart midway, where the balance
Meets. I taste sea swilling in my bowels
As I sit shivering in the swing of waves
Like a face in a bubble. As the hull heaves
I and my ghost tread water over hell.
The greedy bitch with sailors in her guts
Green as a dream and formidable as God,
Spitting at stars, gnawing at shores, mad randy,
Riots with us on her abdomen and puts
Eternity in our cabins, pitches our pod
To the mouth of the death for which no one is ready.

At midday they looked up and saw their death
Standing up overhead as loud as thunder
As white as angels and as broad as God:
Then, then the shock, the last gasp of breath
As grazing the bulwark they swept over and under,
All the green arms around them that load
Their eyes their ears their stomachs with eternals,
Whirled away in a white pool to the stern.

But the most possible of all miracles
Is that the useless tear that did not fall
From the corner of their eyes, was the prize,
The flowers, the gifts, the crystal sepulchre,
The funeral contribution and memorial,
The perfect and nonexistent obsequies.

SONNET TO MY MOTHER

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,
Under the window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,—
She is a procession no one can follow after
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain
Whom only faith can move, and so I send
O all my faith, and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

NEWS OF THE WORLD I

Cold shuttered loveless star, skulker in clouds,
Streetwalker of the sky,

Where can you hide? No one will take you in.
Happy the morning lights up other worlds
As from sleep they turn a family of faces
To the house proud sun. Outraged, you, outcast,
Leading your one-eyed sister through the night,
From door to door down the locked zodiac,
Never come home.

NEWS OF THE WORLD II

In the first year of the last disgrace
Peace, turning her face away,
Coughing in laurelled fires, weeping,
Drags out from her hatcheted heart
The sunset axe of the day.

And leaning up against the red sky
She mourns over evening cities:
The milky morning springs from her mothering breast
Half choked with happy memories
And fulfillment of miseries.

'I am the wife of the workman world
With an apron full of children—
And happy, happy any hovel was
With my helping hand under his gifted head
And for my sleep his shoulder.

'I wish that the crestfallen stars would fall
Out of his drunken eye and strike
My children cold. I wish the big sea
Would pity them, and pity me,
And smother us all alike.

'Bitter sun, bitter sun, put out your lions
As I have put out my hope.
For he will take them in his clever hand
And teach them how to dismember love
Just as though it was Europe.

'O washing-board Time, my hands are sore
And the backs of the angels ache.
For the redhanded husband has abandoned me
To drag his coat in front of his pride,
And I know my heart will break.'
In the first year of the last disgrace
Peace, turning her face away,
Coughing in fire and laurels, weeping,
Bared again her butchered heart
To the sunrise axe of the day.

NEWS OF THE WORLD III

Let her lie naked here, my hand resting
Light on her broken breast, the sleeping world
Given into our far from careful keeping,
Terrestrial daughter of a disaster of waters
No matter honours. Let her lie tonight
Attended by those visions of bright swords
That never defended but ended life.
My emerald trembler, my sky skipping scullion,
See, now, your sister, dipping into the horizon,
Leaves us in darkness; you, nude, and I
Seeking to loose what the day retrieves,
An immoderation of love. Bend your arm
Under my generation of heads. The seas enfold
My sleepless eye and save it weeping
For the dishonoured star. I hear your grave
Nocturnal lamentation, where, abandoned, far,
You, like Arabia in her tent, mourn through an evening
Of wilderness. Oh what are you grieving for?
From the tiara'd palaces of the Andes
And the last Asiatic terraces, I see
The wringing of the hands of all of the world,
I hear your long lingering of disillusion.
Favour the viper, heaven, with one vision
That it may see what is lost. The crime is blended
With the time and the cause. But at your
Guilty and golden bosom, O daughter of law,
I happy lie tonight, the fingering zephyr
Light and unlikely as a kiss. The shades creep
Out of their holes and graves for a last
Long look at your bare empire as it rolls
Its derelict glory away into darkness. Turn, liar,
Back. Our fate is in your face. Whom do you love
But those whom you doom to the happy disgrace

Of adoring you with degradations? I garb my wife,
The wide world of a bride, in devastations.
She has curled up in my hand, and, like a moth,
Died a legend of splendour along the line of my life.
But the congregation of clouds paces in dolour
Over my head and her never barren belly
Where we lie, summered, together, a world and I.

Her birdflecked hair, sunsetting the weather,
Feathers my eye, she shakes an ear-ring sky,
And her hand of a country trembles against me.
The glittering nightriders gambol through
A zodiac of symbols above our love
Promising, O my star-crossed, death and disasters.
But I want breath for nothing but your possession
Now, now, this summer midnight, before the dawn
Shakes its bright gun in the sky, before
The serried battalions of lies and organizations of hate
Entirely encompass us, buried; before the wolf and friend
Render us enemies. Before all this,
Lie one night in my arms and give me peace.

Vernon Watkins

DISCOVERIES

The poles are flying where the two eyes set:
America has not found Columbus yet.

Ptolemy's planets, playing fast and loose,
Foretell the wisdom of Copernicus.

Dante calls Primum Mobile, the First Cause:
'Love that moves the world and the other stars.'

Great Galileo, twisted by the rack,
Groans the bright sun from heaven, then breathes it back.
Blake, on the world alighting, holds the skies,
And all the stars shine down through human eyes.

Donne sees those stars, yet will not let them lie:
'We're tapers, too, and at our own cost die.'

The shroud-lamp catches. Lips are smiling there.
'Les flammes—déjà?'—The world dies, or Voltaire.

Swift, a cold mourner at his burial-rite,
Burns to the world's heart like a meteorite.

Beethoven deaf, in deafness hearing all,
Unwinds all music from sound's funeral.

Three prophets fall, the litter of one night:
Blind Milton gazes in fixed deeps of light.

Begger of those Minute Particulars,
Yeats lights again the turmoil of the stars.

Motionless motion! Come, Tiresias,
The eternal flies, what's passing cannot pass.

'Solace in flight,' old Heraclitus cries;
Light changing to Von Hügel's butterflies.

Rilke bears all, things like a tree, believes,
Sinks in the hand that bears the falling leaves.

The stars! The signs! Great Angelo hurst them back.
His whirling ceiling draws the zodiac.

The pulse of Keats testing the axiom;
The second music when the sound is dumb.

The Christian Paradox, bringing its great reward
By loss; the moment known to Kierkegaard.

THE HEALING OF THE LEPER

O, have you seen the leper healed,
And fixed your eyes upon his look?
There is the book of God revealed,
And God has made no other book.

The withered hand which time interred
Grabs in a moment the unseen.
The word we had not heard, is heard.
What we are then, we had not been.

Plotinus, preaching on heaven's floor,
Could not give praise like that loud cry
Bursting the bondage of death's door;
For we die once; indeed we die.

What Sandro Botticelli found
Rose from the river where we bathe:
Music the air, the stream, the ground;
Music the dove, the rock, the faith:

And all that music whirled upon
The eyes' deep-sighted, burning rays,
Where all the prayers of labours done
Are resurrected into praise.

But look: his face is like a mask
Surrounded by the beat of wings.
Because he knows that ancient task
His true transfiguration springs.

All fires the prophets' words contained
Fly to those eyes, transfixed above.
Their awful precept has remained:
'Be nothing, first; and then, be love'.

Roy Fuller

MEDITATION

Now the ambassadors have gone, refusing
Our gifts, treaties, anger, compliance;
And in their place the winter has arrived,
Icing the culture-bearing water.
We brood in our respective empires on
The words we might have said which would have breached
The Chinese wall round our superfluous love
And manufactures. We do not brood too deeply.
There are our friends' perpetual, subtle demands
For understanding: visits to those who claim
To show us what is meant by death,
And therefore life, our short and puzzling lives,
And to explain our feelings when we look
Through the dark sky to other lighted worlds—
The well-shaved owners of sanatoria,
And raving, grubby oracles: the books
On diet, posture, prayer and aspirin art:
The claims of frightful weapons to be investigated:
Mad generals to be promoted: and
Our private gulfs to slither down in bed.

Perhaps in spring the ambassadors will return.
Before then we shall find perhaps that bombs,
Books, people, planets, worry, even our wives,
Are not at all important. Perhaps
The preposterous fishing-line tangle of undesired
Human existence will suddenly unravel
Before some staggering equation
Or mystic experience, and God be released
From the moral particle or blue-lit room.
Or, better still, perhaps we shall, before
Anything really happens, be safely dead.
Edgar Lee Masters

ANNE RUTLEDGE

Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music;
"With malice toward none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward
millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these
weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom!

LUCINDA MATLOCK

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy
years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the
sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green
valleys.

At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.

Louise Bogan

THE DREAM

O God, in the dream the terrible horse began
To paw at the air, and make for me with his
blows.
Fear kept for thirty-five years poured through
his mane,
And retribution equally old, or nearly, breathed
through his nose.

Coward complete, I lay and wept on the ground
When some strong creature appeared, and leapt
for the rein.
Another woman, as I lay half in a swound,
Leapt in the air, and clutched at the leather
and chain.

Give him, she said, something of yours as a
charm.
Throw him, she said, some poor thing you alone
claim.
No, no, I cried, he hates me; he's out for harm,
And whether I yield or not, it is all the same.

But, like a lion in a legend, when I flung the
glove
Pulled from my sweating, my cold right hand,
The terrible beast, that no one may understand,
Came to my side, and put down his head in love.
Stanley Kunitz

THE SCIENCE OF THE NIGHT

I touch you in the night, whose gift was you,
My careless sprawler,
And I touch you cold, unstimting, star-bemused,
That are become the land of your self-strangeness.

What long seduction of the bone has led you
Down the imploring roads I cannot take
Into the arms of ghosts I never knew,
Leaving my manhood on a rumpled field
To guard you where you lie so deep
In absent-mindedness,
Caught in the calcium snows of sleep?

And even should I track you to your birth
Through all the cities of your mortal trial,
As in my jealous thought I try to do,
You would escape me—from the brink of earth
Take off to where the lawless auroras run,
You with your wild and metaphysic heart.
My touch is on you, who are light-years gone.
We are not souls but systems, and we move
In clouds of our unknowing

like great nebulae.
Our very motives swirl and have their start
With father lion and with mother crab.

Dreamer, my own lost rib,
Whose planetary dust is blowing
Past archipelagoes of myth and light,
What far Magellans are you mistress of
To whom you speed the pleasure of your art?
As though a glass that magnifies my loss
I see the lines of your spectrum shifting red,
The universe expanding, thinning out,
Our worlds flying, oh flying, fast apart.
From hooded powers and from abstract flight
I summon you, your person and your pride.
Fall to me now from outer space,
Still fastened desperately to my side;
Through gulfs of streaming air
Bring me the mornings of the milky ways
Down to my threshold in your drowsy eyes;
And by the virtue of your honeyed word

Restore the liquid language of the moon,
That in gold mines of secrecy you delve.
Awake!

My whirling hands stay at the noon,
Each cell within my body holds a heart
And all my hearts in unison strike twelve.

Léonie Adams

COUNTRY SUMMER

Now the rich cherry, whose sleek wood,
And top with silver petals traced
Like a strict box its gems encased,
Has split from out that cunning lid,
All in an innocent green round,
Those melting rubies which it hid;
With moss ripe-strawberry-encrusted,
So birds get half, and minds lapse merry
To taste that deep-red, lark’s-bite berry,
And blackcap bloom is yellow-dusted.

The wren that thieved it in the eaves
A trailer of the rose could catch
To her poor droopy sloven thatch,
And side by side with the wren’s brood—
O lovely time of beggar’s luck—
Opens the quaint and hairy bud;
And full and golden is the yield
Of cows that never have to house,
But all night nibble under boughs,
Or cool their sides in the moist field.

Into the rooms flow meadow airs,
The warm farm baking smell’s blown round.
Inside and out, and sky and ground
Are much the same; the wishing star,
Hesperus, kind and early born,
Is risen only finger-far;
All stars stand close in summer air,
And tremble, and look mild as amber;
When wicks are lighted in the chamber,
They are like stars which settled there.

Now straightening from the flowery hay,
Down the still light the mowers look,
Or turn, because their dreaming shook,
And they waked half to other days,
When left alone in the yellow stubble
The rusty-coated mare would graze.
Yet thick the lazy dreams are born,
Another thought can come to mind,
But like the shivering of the wind,
Morning and evening in the corn.

Robert Lowell

WHERE THE RAINBOW ENDS

I saw the sky descending, black and white,
Not blue, on Boston where the winters wore
The skulls to jack-o'-lanterns on the slates,
And Hunger's skin-and-bone retrievers tore
The chickadee and shrike. The thorn tree waits
Its victim and tonight
The worms will eat the deadwood to the foot
Of Ararat: the scythers, Time and Death,
Helmed locusts, move upon the tree of breath;
The wild ingrafted olive and the root
Are withered, and a winter drifts to where
The Pepperpot, ironic rainbow, spans
Charles River and its scales of scorched-earth
miles,
The tree-dabbed suburb where construction
tans
The wrath of God. About the Chapel, piles
Of dead leaves char the air—
And I am a red arrow on this graph
Of Revelations. Every dove is sold
The Chapel's sharp-shined eagle shifts its hold
On serpent-Time, the rainbow's epitaph.

In Boston serpents whistle at the cold.
The victim climbs the altar steps and sings:
"Hosannah to the lion, lamb, and beast
Who fans the furnace face of Is with wings:
I breathe the ether of my marriage feast."
At the high altar, gold
And a fair cloth. I kneel and the wings beat
My cheek. What can the dove of Jesus give
You now but wisdom, exile? Stand and live,
The dove has brought an olive branch to eat.

Theodore Roethke

ELEGY FOR JANE

(My Student, Thrown by a Horse)

I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as
 tendrils;
And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables
leaped for her,
And she balanced in the delight of her thought,
A wren, happy, tail into the wind,
Her song trembling the twigs and small branches.
The shade sang with her;
The leaves, their whispers turned to kissing;
And the mould sang in the bleached valleys
under the rose.

Oh, when she was sad, she cast herself down into
such a pure depth,
Even a father could not find her:
Scraping her cheek against straw;
Stirring the clearest water.

My sparrow, you are not here,
Waiting like a fern, making a spiny shadow.
The sides of wet stones cannot console me,
Nor the moss, wound with the last light.

If only I could nudge you from this sleep,
My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon. Of Revelations. Every dove is sold
Neither father nor lover.

"THE SHIMMER OF EVIL"

The weather wept, and all the trees bent down;
Bent down their birds: the light waves took the
waves;
Each single substance gliddered to the stare;
Each vision purely, purely was its own:
—There was no light; there was no light at all:
Far from the mirrors all the bushes rang
With their hard snow; leaned on the lonely eye;
Cold evil twinkled tighter than a string; a fire
Hung down: And I was only I.
—There was no light; there was no light at all:

Each cushion found itself a field of pins,
Prickling pure wishes with confusion's ire;
Hope's holy wrists: the little burning boys
Cried out their lives an instant and were free.
—There was no light; there was no light at all.

I KNEW A WOMAN

I knew a woman, lovely in her bones,
When small birds sighed, she would sigh back
at them;
Ah, when she moved, she moved more ways than
one:
The shapes a bright container can contain!
Of her choice virtues only gods should speak,
Or English poets who grew up on Greek
(I'd have them sing in chorus, cheek to cheek).

How well her wishes went! She stroked my chin,
She taught me Turn, and Counter-turn, and
Stand;
She taught me Touch, that undulant white
skin;
I nibbled meekly from her proffered hand;
She was the sickle; I, poor I, the rake,
Coming behind her for her pretty sake
(But what prodigious mowing we did make).

Love likes a gander, and adores a goose:
Her full lips pursed, the errant note to seize;
She played it quick, she played it light and loose;
My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;
Her several parts could keep a pure repose,
Or one hip quiver with a mobile nose
(If she moved in circles, and those circles moved).

Let seed be grass, and grass turn into hay:
I'm martyr to a motion not my own;
What's freedom for? To know eternity.
I swear she cast a shadow white as stone.
But who would count eternity in days?
These old bones live to learn her wanton ways:
(I measure time by how a body sways).

Delmore Schwartz

THE HEAVY BEAR WHO GOES WITH ME

"the withness of the body"

The heavy bear who goes with me,
A manifold honey to smear his face,
Clumsy and lumbering here and there,
The central ton of every place,
The hungry beating brutish one
In love with candy, anger, and sleep,
Crazy factotum, dishevelling all,
Climbs the building, kicks the football,
Boxes his brother in the hate-ridden city.

Breathing at my side, that heavy animal,
That heavy bear who sleeps with me,
Howls in his sleep for a world of sugar,
A sweetness intimate as the water's clasp,
Howls in his sleep because the tight-rope
Trembles and shows the darkness beneath.
—The strutting show-off is terrified,
Dressed in his dress-suit, bulging his pants,
Trembles to think that his quivering meat
Must finally wince to nothing at all.

That inescapable animal walks with me,
Has followed me since the black womb held,
Moves where I move, distorting my gesture,
A caricature, a swollen shadow,
A stupid clown of the spirit's motive,
Perplexes and affronts with his own darkness,
The secret life of belly and bone,
Opaque, too near, my private, yet unknown,
Stretches to embrace the very dear
With whom I would walk without him near,
Touches her grossly, although a word
Would bare my heart and make me clear,
Stumbles, flounders, and strives to be fed
Dragging me with him in his mouthing care,
Amid the hundred million of his kind,
The scrimmage of appetite everywhere.
Jean Garrigue

THE STRANGER

Now upon this piteous year
I sit in Denmark beside the quai
And nothing that the fishers say
Or the children carrying boats
Can recall me from that place
Where sense and wish departed me
Whose very shores take on
The whiteness of anon.
For I beheld a stranger there
Who moved ahead of me
So tensile and so dancer made
That like a thief I followed her
Though my heart was so alive
I felt myself the equal beauty.
But when at last a turning came
Like the branching of a river
And I saw if she walked on
She would be gone forever,
Fear then so wounded me
As fell upon my ear
The voice a blind man dreams
And broke on me the smile
I dreamed as deaf men hear,
I stood there like a spy,
My tongue and eyelids taken
In such necessity.
Now upon this piteous year
The rains of Autumn fall.
Where may she be?
I suffered her to disappear
Who hunger in the prison of my fear.
That lean and brown, that stride,
That cold and melting pride,
For whom the river like a clear,
Melodic line and the distant carrousel
Where lovers on their beasts of play
Rose and fell that wayfare where the swan
adorned
With every wave and eddy
The honor of his sexual beauty,
Create her out of sorrow
That, never perishing,
Is a stately thing.

FOREST

There is the star bloom of the moss
And the hairy chunks of light between the conifers;
There are alleys of light as well where the green
leads to a funeral
Down the false floor of needles.
There are rocks and boulders that jut, saw-toothed and urine-yellow.
Other stones in a field look in the distance like sheep grazing,
Grey trunk and trunklike legs and lowered head.
There are short-stemmed forests so close to the ground
You would pity a dog lost there in the spore-budding
Blackness where the sun has never struck down.
There are dying ferns that glow like a gold mine
And weeds and sumac extend the Sodom of color.
Among the divisions of stone and the fissures of branch
Lurk the abashed resentments of the ego.
Do not say this is pleasurable!
Bats, skittering on wires over the lake,
And the bug on the water bristling in light as he measures forward his leaps,
The hills holding back the sun by their notched edges
(What volcanoes lie on the other side
Of heat, light, burning up even the angels)
And the mirrors of forests and hills drawing nearer
Till the lake is all forests and hills made double,
Do not say this is kindly, convenient,
Warms the hands, crosses the senses with promise,
Harries our fear.
Uneasy, we bellow back at the tree frogs
And, night approaching like the entrance of a tunnel,
We would turn back and cannot, we
Surprise our natures; the woods lock us up
In the secret crimes of our intent.
ADVICE TO A PROPHET

When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,

Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.

Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us—
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's are, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken,
Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

In which we have said the rose of our love and
the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.
E. E. Cummings

RAIN OR HAIL

rain or hail
sam done
the best he kin
till they digged his hole
sam was a man
stout as a bridge
rugged as a bear
slickern a weasel
how be you
(sun or snow)
gone into what
like all them kings
you read about
and on him sings
a whippoorwill;
heart was big
as the world aint square
with room for the devil
and his angels too
yes, sir
what may be better
or what may be worse
and what may be clover
clover clover
(nobody'll know)
sam was a man
grinned his grin
done his chores
laid him down.
Sleep well

EXCEPT IN YOUR HONOUR

except in your
honour,
my loveliest,
nothing
may move may rest
—you bring
(out of dark the
earth) a
procession of
wonders
huger than prove
our fears
were hopes: the moon
open
for you and close
will shy
wings of because;
each why
of star (afloat
on not
quite less than all
of time)
gives you skilful
his flame
so is your heart
alert,
of languages
there's none
but well she knows;
and can
perfectly speak
(snowflake
and rainbow mind
and soul
November and
April)

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who younger than begin are, the worlds move in your (and rest, my love) honour

There are no homecomings, of course, no good-byes
In that land, neither yearning nor scorning, Though at night there is the smell of morning.

DIRECTIONS TO A REBEL

Keep away from roads' webs, they always lead To some spider-spot where, once spied, out speeds
The cop. Side-step the strict keeper of paths, The pickets of prerogative; avoid Conforming pass-word. But follow freely The treeless plain of candour where shadows Cannot hide or walk upright. Keep downwind; Beware the water-hole of Want, for there The hunter waits with widespread net of dole And charity to take and tame you in;
(Observe his footmark firm in the meek muck Of softness and servility). Do not On the taut returning tether of self Dally and circle, nor in pond explore Your rare reflection, stopping and stooping. Stride straight on, stay stretched out, anticipate No respite. And let neither friends' defect Nor Joe's respect divert you. On your way You will pass horrible warning corpses Wrecked on the hairpin-bend of reaction: Beyond the burning town of Sloth you'll see The hopeless citizens look back in tears, Salt pillars of self-pity, silhouettes Of blank regret. But waste no word on them, Go your way. Overhead, Fear and Favour, The twin engines of Authority, will Fill and fan your ears with their roaring. Scorn Will curl suddenly round silent corners For there are no ends and no trends, Like bell-less bicycles: and Luxury Draw up beside you, offering a seat Moss-soft in idle limousine; foot-sore, Refuse it. Marginal misgivings lie In ambush. Crooked fingers will beckon, Insistent strangers take you by the hand, Dub you as friend, and plant their guilty coins In unsuspecting pocket. So be you Thorned and thicketed in reticence. Make no loose friends: shun the too-nimble man

W. R. Rodgers

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

In that land all is, and nothing's ought; No owners or notices, only birds; No walls anywhere, only lean wire of words Worming brokenly out from eaten thought; No oats growing, only ankle-lace grass Easing and not resenting the feet that pass; No enormous beasts, only names of them; No bones made, bans laid, or boons expected, No contracts, entails, hereditaments, Anything at all that might tie or hem.

In that land all's lackadaisical; No lakes of coddled spawn, and no locked ponds Of settled purpose, no netted fishes; But only inkling streams and running fronds Fritillaried with dreams, weedy with wishes; Nor arrogant talk is heard, haggling phrase, But undertones, and hesitance, and haze; On clear days mountains of meaning are seen Humped high on the horizon; no one goes To con their meaning, no one cares or knows.

In that land all's flat, indifferent; there Is neither springing house or hanging tent, No aims are entertained, and nothing is meant, For there are no ends and no trends, no roads, Only follow your nose to anywhere. No one is born there, no one stays or dies, For it is a timeless land, it lies Between the act and the attrition, it Marks off bound from rebound, make from break, lit From tat, also today from tomorrow. No Cause there comes to term, but each departs Elsewhere to whelp its deeds, expel its darts;
Avoid the heartening handshake; 
The prefatory fib that leads to worse
(Like gladiators' kisses, boxers' hugs,
The formal overtures to violence).
Accept no candid or contingent gift
From an ambiguous hand, or else like a cog
You must have intercourse with ill, and will
Be geared to new and necessary wrong.
Rise from table! rush from hall! O do not
Acquiesce in their toadying truths, refuse
To sing their subsidised praises, or borrow
Their easy loans; those are the open traps
For apathy: boot and batter them. Be
Intolerant, not backward to applaud
But forward to condemn, giving no ease.
May no insolent stone turn back your step,
No sea-blow dent your boat, no landsfall
End your voyage. Elbowed from port to port,
Signalled from point to point, drop no anchor;
Seek no safe caves or tied and tidy coves.
Let not lax beds or luxurious hugs hold
Or detain you. The harbour gapes, but not
For you; arms open, but they are not yours.
Along your road you will meet no great crowds
Going with gongs to greet you returning
With your gains to an ungrudged conclusion.
Only expulsion, obloquy, and shame
Watch for you. Welcome them. Welcome too
Smooth malice, smarmy enmity, these things
Will shape and sharpen your purpose, stroke and
stop
Your temper, point your passionate aim. So,
Gay in the midst of growling things, you'll go
Tip-toe, songs in your ears, sights in your eyes,
That blind and deafen you to compromise.

Edwin Denby

FIRST WARM DAYS

April, up on a twig a leaf tuft stands
And heaven lifts a hundred miles mildly
Comes and fondles our faces, playing friends—
Such a one day often concludes coldly—
Then in dark coats in the bare afternoon view
Idle people—we few who that day are—
Stroll in the park aimless and stroll by twos
Easy in the weather of our home star.
And human faces—hardly changed after
Millennia—the separate single face
Placid, it turns toward friendly laughing
Or makes an iridescence, being at peace.
We all are pleased by an air like of loving
Going home quiet in the subway-shoving.

Edwin Honig

THE GAZABOS

I saw them dancing,
the gazabos, apes of joy, swains of
their pocket mirrors, to each a world:
a dancing, a gallumphing, a guzzling
of themselves.

They yapped, they cooed,
they flapped their feet and winked grimaces
into grins. They rapped their knuckles on
their teeth and bled and licked
the blood like honey.

Turning the corner
to my street, I spat on each
gazabo as they came. They loved it,
they could barely keep
from following.

I had to beat
them off with barbed wire switches
ripped from neighbors' fences on
the way. I escaped
only when
they paused to smear
their bodies with their trickly wounds,
streaming welled faces ogled—
laughing in the mirrors
sideways.

Why is it now,
safe in my lacquered room, cradled
in my black, spoon-shaped easy
chair, the whitest sheet
of paper on

my knees, I cannot
write a word? I read their eyes,
I taste their wounds. Do they live
because they simply
cannot die?

Friends, multitudes, oh lifelong shadows: are
you my fiend, my worn out longings,
my poems that dog me
till I die?

Howard Nemerov

THE GOOSE FISH

On the long shore, lit by the moon
To show them properly alone,
Two lovers suddenly embraced
So that their shadows were as one.
The ordinary night was graced
For them by the swift tide of blood
That silently they took at flood,
And for a little time they prizéd
Themselves emparadised.

Then, as if shaken by stage-fright
Beneath the hard moon’s bony light,
They stood together on the sand
Embarrassed in each other’s sight
But still conspiring hand in hand,
Until they saw, there underfoot,
As though the world had found them out,

The goose fish turning up, though dead,
His hugely grinning head.

There in the china light he lay,
Most ancient and corrupt and grey.
They hesitated at his smile,
Wondering what it seemed to say
To lovers who a little while
Before had thought to understand,
By violence upon the sand,
The only way that could be known
To make a world their own.

It was a wide and moony grin
Together peaceful and obscene;
They knew not what he would express,
So finished a comedian
He might mean failure or success,
But took it for an emblem of
Their sudden, new and guilty love
To be observed by, when they kissed,
That rigid optimist.

So he became their patriarch,
Dreadfully mild in the half-dark.
His throat that the sand seemed to choke,
His picket teeth, these left their mark
But never did explain the joke
That so amused him, lying there
While the moon went down to disappear
Along the still and tilted track
That bears the zodiac.

Ruth Herschberger

IN PANELLED ROOMS

The love-grip, first excited by the eye,
Fastens its pleasing mortar; then the thigh
Moves like a tractor rocketing to fate.
The head reclines, the mind will gladly wait;
But pearly blood and sockets made of gum,
Less than immobile, seek the pleasing hum
Of fall and exaltation. Eyebrows made
Of ships and shaped like islands cannot shade
The walnut hull of eyes, the husk of brown
Under whose cover lies the kernel-down,
The certainty of love. Each jointed knee
Strolls in the wake of new fraternity
And wishes elbows well; itself does grace
To flesh and bone, extracting from its place
All that made Solomon declare of myrrh,
Frankincense, flowers, upon touching her.

Ted Hughes

THE THOUGHT-FOX

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
Something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
Is entering the loneliness:

Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Joseph Bennett

TO ELIZA, DUCHESS OF DORSET

In the negro gardens negro birds
Plummet in the shadows, falling thirds.
Dorset in sable plumage comes.
A hawk! A raven in his tediums.

Daughter to that good Earl, once President
Of England's Council, and her Parliament,
Duchess, if that falling shadow strikes
And strikes no more, as Dorset softly likes,

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,
Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed.

John Thompson, Jr.

A LOVE FOR PATSY

Eliza strangling on the lawn at Knole,
The flowers sinking toward the twilit Pole,
And walking, calling, Dorset now distends;
Dorset cock and cockatoo; and raven ends.

See the little mumper
Stretch out on the grass!
His heart is burst asunder
The pieces cry Alas.
Upright, fat pink pieces
Of fluffy cloud float overhead.
The little facets of his eyes
Split by salty tears, so tired

And worse, oh worse often than this. Neither
breeze nor bird
Stirring the hazed peace through which the day
climbs.

Of seeing pieces of the world,
Close, and rustling grass,
Caws of an old unpleasant bird
Are sounds that say Alas;

And slower even than the arrows, the few sounds
that come
Paling, as across water, from where farther off
than the hills
The archers move in a different world in the
same

They float like notes in the funny paper,
Round notes with sharp little tails.
Oh I'm blue, the supine moper
Says, I'm trapped in the toils

Of Patsy's black black hair.
Her hair is like the cool dry night
That waves through the window-bar
Where a moody jailbird sits apart

Shuffling his broken heart. I'm sad
As I can be. Her black
Black hair can never be compared
To dull dichotomic

Trees or prickly grass, inflated
Clouds, even a great
One draped on the sun. Over-rated
Senseless things to stare at,

One here one there they're strewn,
Impinging pieces left out of
The world. Her eyes are green!
Oh oh, he says, I die of love.

See the weeping little wretch
He rolls in a frenzy!
In all the world no two things match
But the green eyes of Patsy.

And Thy kingdom where (and the wind so still now)
I stand in pain; and, entered with pain as
always,
Thy kingdom that on these erring shafts comes.

W. S. Merwin

SAINT SEBASTIAN

So many times I have felt them come, Lord,
The arrows (a coward dies often), so many
times,

This is the black sea-brute bulling through
wave-wrack,
Ancient as ocean's shifting hills, who in sea-
toils
Travelling, who furrowing the salt acres
Heavily, his wake hoary behind him,
Shoulders spouting, the fist of his forehead
Over wastes gray-green crashing, among horses
unbroken
From bellowing fields, past bone-wreck of
vessels,
Tide-ruin, wash of lost bodies bobbing
No longer sought for, and islands of ice gleam-
ing,

Who ravening the rank flood, wave-marshalling,
Overmastering the dark sea-marches, finds home
And harvest. Frightening to foolhardiest

Mariners, his size were difficult to describe;
The hulk of him is like hills heaving,
Dark, yet as crags of drift-ice, crowns cracking
in thunder,
Like land's self by night black-looming, surf
churning and trailing
Along his shores' rushing, shoal-water boding
About the dark of his jaws; and who should
moor at his edge
And fare on afoot would find gates of no
gardens,
But the hill of dark underfoot diving,
Closing overhead, the cold deep, and drowning.
He is called Leviathan, and named for rolling,
Though that light is a breath.
First created he was of all creatures,
Closing overhead, the cold deep, and drowning. no cry
Sea-fright he is, and the shadow under the earth. Of the Creator. And he waits for the world
to begin.

Acknowledgments
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