

LUCINDA MATLOCK

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the midnight 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.

Edgar Lee Masters, December 29, 2017

TERMINAL DAYS AT BEVERLY FARMS

At Beverly Farms, a portly, uncomfortable boulder
bulked in the garden's center
an irregular Japanese touch.
After his Bourbon "old fashioned," Father,
bronzed, breezy, a shade too ruddy,
swayed as if on deck duty
under his six pointed star-lantern-
last July's birthday present.
He smiled his oval Lowell smile,
he wore his cream gaberdine dinner-jacket,
and indigo cummerbund,
His head was efficient and hairless,
his newly dieted figure was vitally trim.

Father and mother moved to Beverly Farms
to be a two-minute walk from the station,
half an hour by train from the Boston doctors.
They had no sea-view,
but sky-blue tracks of the commuters' railroad shone
like a double-barreled shotgun
through the scarlet late August sumac,
multiplying like cancer
at their garden's border.

Father had had two coronaries.
He still treasured underhand economies,
but his best friend was his little black Chevy,
garaged like a superficial steer
with gilded hooves,
yet sensationally sober,
and with less side than an old dancing pump.
The local dealer, a "buccanneer,"
had been bribed a "king's ransom"
to quickly deliver a car without chrome.

Each morning at eight-thirty,
inattentive and beaming,
loaded with his "calc" and "trig" books,
his clipper ship statistics,
and his ivory slide rule,
father stole off with the Chevie
to loaf in the Maritime Museum at Salem.
He called the curator
"the commander of the Swiss Navy."

Father's death was abrupt and unprotesting.
His vision was still twenty-twenty.
After a morning of anxious, repetitive smiling,
his last words to Mother were:
"I feel awful."

Robert Lowell, December 25, 2017

ALFRED CORNING CLARK

You read the New York Times
every day at recess,
but in its dry
obituary, a list

of your wives, nothing is news,
except the ninety-five
thousand dollar engagement ring
you gave the sixth.
Poor rich boy,
you were unseasonably adult
at taking your time,
and died at forty-five.
Poor Al Clark
behind your enlarged,
hardly recognizable photograph,
I feel the pain.
You were alive. You are dead.
You wore bow-ties and dark
blue coats, and sucked
wintergreen or cinnamon lifesavers
to sweeten your breath.
There must be something –
some one to praise
your triumphant diffidence,
your refusal of exertion,
the intelligence
that pulsed in the sensitive,
pale concavities of your forehead.
You never worked,
and were third in the form.
I owe you something –
I was befogged,
and you were too bored,
quick and cool to laugh.
You are dear to me, Alfred;
our reluctant souls united
in our unconventional
illegal games of chess
on the St Mark's quadrangle.
You usually won –
motionless
as a lizard in the sun.

Robert Lowell, December 22, 2017

THE SUPREME MOMENT

As an ant is powerless
Against a raised boot,

And only has an instant
To have a bright idea or two.
The black boot so polished,
He can see himself
Reflected in it, distorted,
Perhaps made larger
Into a huge monster ant
Shaking his arms and legs
Threateningly?

The boot may be hesitating,
Demurring, having misgivings,
Gathering cobwebs,
Dew?
Yes, and apparently no.

Charles Simic, December 18, 2017

THEFT

Our stuff from our stolen bag
certainly somewhere by the river
thrown into a disappointed heap:
checkered shirts,
envelopes,
a woman's red barrette.

Certainly lying in the snow,
forever, useless.
Envelopes sometimes move.
The blue of a shirt leeches out.
When's the last time we were
so together?

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweeney), December 15, 2017

MILTON MILES

Whenever the Presbyterian bell
Was rung by itself, I knew it as the Presbyterian bell.
But when its sound was mingled
With the sound of the Methodist, the Christian,
The Baptist and the Congregational,

I could no longer distinguish it,
Nor any one from the others, or either of them.
And as many voices called to me in life
Marvel not that I could not tell
The true from the false,
Nor even, at last, the voice that I should have known.

Edgar Lee Masters, December 11, 2017

THE EYE

The Atlantic is a stormy moat; and the Mediterranean,
The blue pool in the old garden,
More than five thousand years has drunk sacrifice
Of ships and blood, and shines in the sun; but here the Pacific--
Our ships, planes, wars are perfectly irrelevant.
Neither our present blood-feud with the brave dwarfs
Nor any future world-quarrel of westering
And eastering man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, clash of faiths--
Is a speck of dust on the great scale-pan.
Here from this mountain shore, headland beyond stormy headland
plunging like dolphins through the blue sea-smoke
Into pale sea--look west at the hill of water: it is half the planet:
this dome, this half-globe, this bulging
Eyeball of water, arched over to Asia,
Australia and white Antarctica: those are the eyelids that never close;
this is the staring unsleeping
Eye of the earth; and what it watches is not our wars.

Robinson Jeffers, December 8, 2017

THE BIRD WITH THE DARK PLUMES

The bird with the dark plumes in my blood,
That never for one moment however I patched my truces
Consented to make peace with the people,
It is pitiful now to watch her pleasure In a breath of tempest
Breaking the sad promise of spring.
Are these that morose hawk's wings, vaulting, a mere
mad swallow's,
The snow-shed peak, the violent precipice?
Poor outlaw that would not value their praise do you
prize their blame?

"Their liking" she said "was a long creance,
But let them be kind enough to hate me that opens the sky."
It is almost as foolish my poor falcon
To want hatred as to want love; and harder to win.

Robinson Jeffers, December 4, 2017

GODWIN JAMES

Harry Wilmans! You who fell in a swamp
Near Manila, following the flag,
You were not wounded by the greatness of a dream,
Or destroyed by ineffectual work,
Or driven to madness by Satanic snags;
You were not torn by aching nerves,
Nor did you carry great wounds to your old age.
You did not starve, for the government fed you.
You did not suffer yet cry "forward"
To an army which you led
Against a foe with mocking smiles,
Sharper than bayonets. You were not smitten down
By invisible bombs. You were not rejected
By those for whom you were defeated.
You did not eat the savorless bread
Which a poor alchemy had made from ideals.
You went to Manila, Harry Wilmans,
While I enlisted in the bedraggled army
Of bright-eyed, divine youths,
Who surged forward, who were driven back and fell,
Sick, broken, crying, shorn of faith,
Following the flag of the Kingdom of Heaven.
You and I, Harry Wilmans, have fallen
In our several ways, not knowing
Good from bad, defeat from victory,
Nor what face it is that smiles
Behind the demoniac mask.

Edgar Lee Masters, December 1, 2017

HENRY LAYTON

Whoever thou art who passest by
Know that my father was gentle,
And my mother was violent,

While I was born the whole of such hostile halves,
Not intermixed and fused,
But each distinct, feebly soldered together.
Some of you saw me as gentle,
Some as violent,
Some as both.
But neither half of me wrought my ruin.
It was the falling asunder of halves,
Never a part of each other,
That left me a lifeless soul.

Edgar Lee Masters, November 27, 2017

ELIZABETH CHILDERS

Dust of my dust,
And dust with my dust,
O, child who died as you entered the world,
Dead with my death!
Not knowing breath, though you tried so hard,
With a heart that beat when you lived with me,
And stopped when you left me for Life.
It is well, my child. For you never traveled
The long, long way that begins with school days,
When little fingers blur under the tears
That fall on the crooked letters.
And the earliest wound, when a little mate
Leaves you alone for another;
And sickness, and the face of Fear by the bed;
The death of a father or mother;
Or shame for them, or poverty;
The maiden sorrow of school days ended;
And eyeless Nature that makes you drink
From the cup of Love, though you know it's poisoned;
To whom would your flower-face have been lifted?
Botanist, weakling? Cry of what blood to yours?---
Pure or fool, for it makes no matter,
It's blood that calls to our blood.
And then your children---oh, what might they be?
And what your sorrows? Child! Child!
Death is better than Life!

Edgar Lee Masters, November 24, 2017

TO THE ROCK THAT WILL BE A CORNERSTONE OF THE HOUSE

Old garden of grayish and ochre lichen,
How long a rime since the brown people who have vanished from here
Built fires beside you and nestled by you
Out of the ranging sea-wind? A hundred years, two hundred,
You have been dissevered from humanity
And only known the stubble squirrels and the headland rabbits,
Or the long-fetlocked plowhorses
Breaking the hilltop in December, sea-gulls following,
Screaming in the black furrow; no one
Touched you with love, the gray hawk and the red hawk touched you
Where now my hand lies. So I have brought you
Wine and white milk and honey for the hundred years of famine
And the hundred cold ages of sea-wind.

I did not dream the taste of wine could bind with granite,
Nor honey and milk please you; but sweetly
They mingle down the storm-worn cracks among the mosses,
Interpenetrating the silent
Wing-prints of ancient weathers long at peace, and the older
Scars of primal fire, and the stone
Endurance that is waiting millions of years to carry
A corner of the house, this also destined.
Lend me the stone strength of the past and I will lend you
The wings of the future, for I have them.
How dear you will be to me when I too grow old, old comrade.

Robinson Jeffers, November 20, 2017

VILLAGE IN LATE SUMMER

LIPS half-willing in a doorway.
Lips half-singing at a window.
Eyes half-dreaming in the walls.
Feet half-dancing in a kitchen.
Even the clocks half-yawn the hours
And the farmers make half-answers.

Carl Sandburg, November 17, 2017

A SPHINX

Close-mouthed you sat five thousand years and never let out a whisper.
Processions came by, marchers, asking questions you answered
with grey eyes never blinking, shut lips never talking.
Not one croak of anything you know has come from your cat crouch of ages.
I am one of those who know all you know and I keep my questions:
I know the answers you hold.

Carl Sandburg, November 13, 2017

THE HANGMAN ATT HOME

What does a hangman think about
When he goes home at night from work?
When he sits down with his wife and
Children for a cup of coffee and a
Plate of ham and eggs, do they ask
Him if it was a good day's work
And everything went well or do they
Stay off some topics and kill about
The weather, baseball, politics
And the comic strips in the papers
And the movies? Do they look at his
Hands when he reaches for the coffee
Or the ham and eggs? If the little
Ones say, Daddy, play horse, here's
A rope--does he answer like a joke:
I seen enough rope for today?
Or does his face light up like a
Bonfire of joy and does he say:
It's a good and dandy world we live
'In. And if a white face moon looks
In through a window where a baby girl
Sleeps and the moon-gleams mix with
Baby ears and baby hair--the hangman--
How does he act then? It must be easy
For him. Anything is easy for a hangman,
I guess.

Carl Sandburg, November 10, 2017

SAILING HOME FROM RAPALLO

[February 1954]

Your nurse could only speak Italian,
but after twenty minutes I could imagine your final week,
and tears ran down my cheeks....

When I embarked from Italy with my Mother's body,
the whole shoreline of the Golfo di Genova
was breaking into fiery flower.
The crazy yellow and azure sea-sleds
blasting like jack-hammers across
the spumante-bubbling wake of our liner,
recalled the clashing colors of my Ford.
Mother traveled first-class in the hold;
her Risorgimento black and gold casket
was like Napoleon's at the Invalides....

While the passengers were tanning
on the Mediterranean in deck-chairs,
our family cemetery in Dunbarton
lay under the White Mountains
in the sub-zero weather.
The graveyard's soil was changing to stone—
so many of its deaths had been midwinter.
Dour and dark against the blinding snowdrifts,
its black brook and fir trunks were as smooth as masts.
A fence of iron spear-hafts
black-bordered its mostly Colonial grave-slates.
The only "unhistoric" soul to come here
was Father, now buried beneath his recent
unweathered pink-veined slice of marble.
Even the Latin of his Lowell motto:
Occasionem cognosce,
seemed too businesslike and pushing here,
where the burning cold illuminated
the hewn inscriptions of Mother's relatives:
twenty or thirty Winslows and Starks.
Frost had given their names a diamond edge....

In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother's coffin,
Lowell had been misspelled LOVEL.
The corpse
was wrapped like panettone in Italian tinfoil.

OSSIAN'S GRAVE

PREHISTORIC MONUMENT NEAR CUSHENDALL IN ANTRIM

Steep up in Lubitavish townland stands
A ring of great stones like fangs, the shafts of the stones
Grown up with thousands of years of gradual turf,
The fangs of the stones still biting skyward; and hard
Against the stone ring, the oblong enclosure
Of an old grave guarded with erect slabs; gray rocks
Backed by broken thorn-trees, over the gorge of Glenaan;
It is called Ossian's Grave. Ossian rests high then,
Haughtily alone.
If there were any fame or burial or monument
For me to envy,
Warrior and poet they should be yours and yours.
For this is the pure fame, not caged in a poem,
Fabulous, a glory untroubled with works, a name in the north
Like a mountain in the mist, like Aura
Heavy with heather and the dark gray rocks, or Trostan
Dark purple in the cloud: happier than what the wings
And imperfections of work hover like vultures
Above the carcass.
I also make a remembered name;
And I shall return home to the granite stones
On my cliff over the greatest ocean
To be blind ashes under the butts of the stones:
As you here under the fanged limestone columns
Are said to lie, over the narrow north straits
Toward Scotland, and the quick-tempered Moyle. But written
reminders
Will blot for too long a year the bare sunlight
Above my rock lair, heavy black birds
Over the field and the blood of the lost battle.
Oh but we lived splendidly
In the brief light of day
Who now twist in our graves.
You in the guard of the fanged
Erect stones; and the man-slayer
Shane O'Neill dreams yonder at Cushendun
Crushed under his cairn;
And Hugh McQuillan under his cairn
By his lost field in the bog on Aura;
And I a foreigner, one who has come to the country of the dead

Before I was called,
To eat the bitter dust of my ancestors;
And thousands on tens of thousands in the thronged earth
Under the rotting freestone tablets
At the bases of broken round towers;
And the great Connaught queen on her mountain-summit
The high cloud hoods, it creeps through the eyes of the cairn,

We dead have our peculiar pleasures, of not
Doing, of not feeling, of not being.
Enough has been felt, enough done, Oh and surely
Enough of humanity has been. We lie under stones
Or drift through the endless northern twilights
And draw over our pale survivors the net of our dream.
All their lives are less
Substantial than one of our deaths, and they cut turf
Or stoop in the steep
Short furrows, or drive the red carts, like weeds waving
Under the glass of water in a locked bay,
Which neither the wind nor the wave nor their own will
Moves; when they seem to awake
It is only to madden in their dog-days for memories of dreams
That lost all meaning many centuries ago.

Oh but we lived splendidly
In the brief light of day,
You with hounds on the mountain
And princes in palaces,
I on the western cliff
In the rages of the sun:
Now you lie grandly under your stones
But I in a peasant's hut
Eat bread bitter with the dust of dead men;
The water I draw at the spring has been shed for tears

Ten thousand times,
Or wander through the endless northern twilights
From the rath to the cairn, through fields
Where every field-stone's been handled
Ten thousand times,
In a uterine country, soft
And wet and worn out, like an old womb
That I have returned to, being dead.

Oh but we lived splendidly
Who now twist in our graves.
The mountains are alive;

Tievebuilleagh lives, Trostan lives,
Lurigethan lives;
And Aura, the black-faced sheep in the belled heather;
And the swan-haunted loughs; but also a few of us dead
A life as inhuman and cold as those.

Robinson Jeffers, November 3, 2017

END OFF THE WORLD

When I was young in school in Switzerland, about the time of the
Boer War,
We used to take it for known that the human race
Would last the earth out, not dying till the planet died.
I wrote a schoolboy poem
About the last man walking in stoic dignity
along the dead shore
Of the last sea, alone, alone, alone, remembering all
His racial past. But now I don't think so. They'll die
faceless in flocks,
And the earth flourish long after mankind is out.

Robinson Jeffers, October 30, 2017

HOMAGE TO A GOVERNMENT

Next year we are to bring all the soldiers home
For lack of money, and it is all right.
Places they guarded, or kept orderly,
We want the money for ourselves at home
Instead of working. And this is all right.

It's hard to say who wanted it to happen,
But now it's been decided nobody minds.
The places are a long way off, not here,
Which is all right, and from what we hear
The soldiers there only made trouble happen.
Next year we shall be easier in our minds.

Next year we shall be living in a country
That brought its soldiers home for lack of money.
The statues will be standing in the same
Tree-muffled squares, and look nearly the same.

Our children will not know it's a different country.
All we can hope to leave them now is money.

Philip Larkin, October 27. 2017

TRANSATLANTIC

The last twenty years were good for practically everybody
save the dead. But maybe for them as well.
Maybe the Almighty Himself has turned a bit bourgeois
and uses a credit card. For otherwise time's passage
makes no sense. Hence memories, recollections,
values, deportment. One hopes one hasn't
spent one's mother or father or both, or a handful of friends entirely
as they cease to hound one's dreams. One's dreams,
unlike the city, become less populous
the older one gets. That's why the eternal rest
cancels analysis. The last twenty years were good
for practically everybody and constituted
the afterlife for the dead. Its quality could be questioned
but not its duration. The dead, one assumes, would not
mind attaining a homeless status, and sleep in archways
or watch pregnant submarines returning
to their native pen after a worldwide journey
without destroying life on earth, without
even a proper flag to hoist.

Joseph Brodsky, October 23. 2017

BELFAST TUNE

Here's a girl from a dangerous town
She crops her dark hair short
so that less of her has to frown
when someone gets hurt.

She folds her memories like a parachute.
Dropped, she collects the peat
and cooks her veggies at home: they shoot
here where they eat.

Ah, there's more sky in these parts than, say,
ground. Hence her voice's pitch,

and her stare stains your retina like a gray
bulb when you switch

hemispheres, and her knee-length quilt
skirt's cut to catch the squall,
I dream of her either loved or killed
because the town's too small.

Joseph Brodsky, October 20, 2017

BOSNIA TUNE

As you pour yourself a scotch,
crush a roach, or scratch your crotch,
as your hand adjusts your tie,
people die.

In the towns with funny names,
hit by bullets, caught in flames,
by and large not knowing why,
people die.

In small places you don't know
of, yet big for having no
chance to scream or say good-bye,
people die.

People die as you elect
brand-new dudes who preach neglect,
self-restraint, etc. – whereby
people die.

Too far off to practice love
for thy neighbor/brother Slav,
where your cherubs dread to fly,
people die.

While the statues disagree,
Cain's version, history
for its fuel tends to buy
those who die.

As you watch the athletes score,
check your latest statement, or

sing your child a lullaby,
people die.

Time, whose sharp bloodthirsty quill
parts the killed from those who kill,
will pronounce the latter band
as your brand.

Joseph Brodsky, October 16, 2017

LETTER TO AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

Citizen, enemy, mama's boy, sucker, utter
garbage, panhandler, swine, refujew, verrucht;
a scalp so often scalded with boiling water
that the puny brain feels completely cooked.
Yes, we have dwelt here: in this concrete, brick, wooden
rubble which you now arrive to sift.
All our wires were crossed, barbed, tangled, or interwoven.
Also: we didn't love our women, but they conceived.
Sharp is the sound of pickax that hurts dead iron;
still, it's gentler than what we've been told or have said ourselves.
Stranger! move carefully through our carrion:
what seems carrion to you is freedom to our cells.
Leave our names alone. Don't reconstruct those vowels,
consonants, and so forth: they won't resemble larks
but a demented bloodhound whose maw devours
its own traces, feces, and barks, and barks.

Joseph Brodsky, October 13, 2017

MY MOTHER

She was always careful
when looking at blood.
No, she did not avert her eyes,
nor disregard,
she looked curiously or objectively.
People stood on the linoleum, hands held,
sat on the examination table,
bleeding somewhere
and my mother wiped up,
she'd say something

and look so carefully
as if she could
easily toss everything
into terrible
ridicule.

My mother is really tired,
you'll find her in the back,
watching the afternoon soaps.

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweeney), October 9, 2017

TAPESTRY

It hangs from heaven to earth.
There are trees in it, cities, rivers,
small pigs and moons. In one corner
the snow falling over a charging cavalry,
in another women are planting rice.

You can also see:
a chicken carried off by a fox,
a naked couple on their wedding night,
a column of smoke,
an evil-eyed woman spitting into a pail of milk.

What is behind it?
— Space, plenty of empty space.

And who is talking now?
— A man asleep under his hat.

What happens when he wakes up?
— He'll go into a barbershop.
They'll shave his beard, nose, ears, and hair,
To make him look like everyone else.

Charles Simic, October 6, 2017

ROCK AND HAWK

Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts

Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall
On the headland, where the seawind
Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signed
By ages of storms: on its peak
A falcon has perched.

I think here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness;

Life with calm death; the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud.

Robinson Jeffers, October 2, 2017

MY FRIEND WILLIAM

My friend William is a fortunate man:
he lacks the imagination to suffer

he kept his first job
his first wife

can drive a 50,000 miles
without a brake job

he dances like a swan
and has the prettiest blank eyes
this side of El Paso

his garden is a paradise
the heels of his shoes are always level

and his handshake is firm

people love him

when my friend William dies
it will hardly be from madness or cancer

he'll walk right past the devil
and into heaven

you'll see him at the party tonight
grinning
over his martini

blissful and delightful
as some guy
fucks his wife in the bathroom.

Charles Bukowski, September 29, 2017

SIGNATURE

Something has changed between me and people since I became a parent to one of them. – Paul Claudel

I'm running home with my little daughter –
again, shells have surprised us on the street.
Shells have, for centuries, been falling every day,
and every time they surprise us.
I'm hurrying her on with angry words:
transferring my rage from the Serb gunners
to a child awaited for ten years.
Let me write my name, she tells me, as we pass
a patch of virgin snow in the park.
Instead of scolding her,
I - God knows why - let her forefinger
break the delicate whiteness,
and then, around the Cyrillic IVANA VEŠOVIĆ
my forefinger describes a circle,
impenetrable.

Like in fairy-tales.

Marko Vešović (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 25, 2017

THE LITERARY WORLD

I

'Finally, after five months of my life during which I could write nothing that would have satisfied me, and for which no power will compensate me . . .'

My dear Kafka,
When you've had five years of it, not five months,
Five years of an irresistible force meeting an
Immoveable object right in your belly,
Then you'll know about depression.

II

Mrs. Alfred Tennyson

Answered

begging letters
admiring letters
insulting letters
enquiring letters
business letters
and publishers' letters.

She also

looked after his clothes
saw to his food and drink

entertained visitors

Protected him from gossip and criticism

And finally

(apart from running the household)

Brought up and educated the children.

While all this was going on

Mister Alfred Tennyson sat like a baby

Doing his poetic business.

Philip Larkin, September 22, 2017

MUSEUM PIECE

The good gray guardians of art
Patrol the halls on spongy shoes,
Impartially protective, though
Perhaps suspicious of Toulouse.

Here dozes one against the wall,

Disposed upon a funeral chair.

A Degas dancer pirouettes

Upon the parting of his hair.

See how she spins! The grace is there,

But strain as well is plain to see.

Degas loved the two together:

Beauty joined to energy.

Edgar Degas purchased once

A fine El Greco, which he kept

Against the wall beside his bed

To hang his pants on while he slept.

Richard Wilbur, September 18, 2017

THE BED BY THE WINDOW

I chose the bed downstairs by the sea-window for a good death-bed

When we built the house, it is ready waiting,

Unused unless by some guest in a twelvemonth, who hardly suspects

Its latter purpose. I often regard it,

With neither dislike nor desire; rather with both, so equalled

That they kill each other and a crystalline interest

Remains alone. We are safe to finish what we have to finish;

And then it will sound rather like music

When the patient daemon behind the screen of sea-rock and sky

Thumps with his staff, and calls thrice: 'Come, Jeffers.'

Robinson Jeffers, September 15, 2017

ARCHIBALD HIGBIE

I loathed you, Spoon River. I tried to rise above you,

I was ashamed of you. I despised you

As the place of my nativity.

And there in Rome, among the artists,

Speaking Italian, speaking French,

I seemed to myself at times to be free

Of every trace of my origin.

I seemed to be reaching the heights of art

And to breathe the air that the masters breathed,

And to see the world with their eyes.

But still they'd pass my work and say:
"What are you driving at, my friend?
Sometimes the face looks like Apollo's
At others it has a trace of Lincoln's."
There was no culture, you know, in Spoon River,
And I burned with shame and held my peace.
And what could I do, all covered over
And weighted down with western soil,
Except aspire, and pray for another
Birth in the world, with all of Spoon River
Rooted out of my soul?

Edgar Lee Masters, September 11, 2017

DOMINATION OF BLACK

At night, by the fire,
The colors of the bushes
And of the fallen leaves,
Repeating themselves,
Turned in the room,
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
Yes: but the color of the heavy hemlocks
Came striding.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

The colors of their tails
Were like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
In the twilight wind.
They swept over the room,
Just as they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks
Down to the ground.
I heard them cry -- the peacocks.
Was it a cry against the twilight
Or against the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind,
Turning as the flames
Turned in the fire,
Turning as the tails of the peacocks
Turned in the loud fire,
Loud as the hemlocks
Full of the cry of the peacocks?
Or was it a cry against the hemlocks?

Out of the window,
I saw how the planets gathered
Like the leaves themselves
Turning in the wind.
I saw how the night came,
Came striding like the color of the heavy hemlocks
I felt afraid.
And I remembered the cry of the peacocks.

Wallace Stevens, September 8, 2017

BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID

To Dana and Anna

Redford and Newman, in the famous movie from '69. The idols of generations.
And why wouldn't they be when they look good, shoot with precision and,
in the most dramatic of moments, conduct dialogue with composure?

Even when wounded and surrounded they know what to do: from Bolivia
they would find refuge in Australia. "There we won't be foreigners, there
they speak English," says Butch. It bothers them that they're foreigners
and not murderers and robbers.

Smoke has joined the earth and the sky, but nobody understands smoke
signals with an accent. Lack of understanding kills. Butch Cassidy and
the Sundance Kid are heroes. Ausländer raus!

Whenever I'm in a hopeless situation, I, too, want to find refuge in a distant
country in which they speak my language. At such a time I usually
go for coffee at the Counseling Center for Refugees.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 4, 2017

BARK

The mother watches
her son imitating a retriever again.
He's twenty-seven,
she's forty-five,
both have had enough of the world.
They've tried everything,

mostly through classified ads and doctors,
Both evidently religious.
Both regulars in the all-night bar,
real as the beauty hook.
The son propped against the table,
the mother inert, listening
how far off can that retriever's bark
be coming from.

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweeney), September 1, 2017

LUCK

once
we were young
at this
machine...
drinking
smoking
typing
it was a most
splendid
miraculous
time
still
is
only now
instead of
moving toward
time
it
moves toward
us
makes each word
drill
into the
paper
clear
fast
hard
feeding a
closing
space.

Charles Bukowski, August 28, 2017

MOVES

Never after, in our countless moves, did we feel
sick to our stomach as that first time when we
were leaving our native town for ever. Only then
did we fear removing ourselves too much from
what we were escaping. Later, we moved painlessly.
We hopped from continent to continent with ease,
like green frogs from one lotus leaf to another,
neither grieving for what we were leaving nor hoping
we would ever, anywhere, have a home again.

Still, I get entangled in my night thoughts like
a weakened spider in its own web. Everywhere
I turn, of all places, only tiny Pello on the Finnish
border truly loved us. We stopped there by accident,
just to take a breather by the water but, caught by
a cloudburst, we decided to spend the night in a crooked
watermill. We believed that, thus secluded, amid
the whisper of leaves and raindrops, no one could
notice us, but come morning, housewarming gifts
had turned up outside the door: a bag of children's toys,
a basketful of apples...

Of all the places we had left for ever, I long only
for the little village on the Finnish border. For those
stunted trees that, bent over the Torne River, are taking
root.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), August 25, 2017

THE OLD FLAME

My old flame, my wife!
Remember our lists of birds?
One morning last summer, I drove
by our house in Maine. It was still
on top of its hill -

Now a red ear of Indian maize
was splashed on the door.
Old Glory with thirteen stripes

hung on a pole. The clapboard
was old-red schoolhouse red.

Inside, a new landlord,
a new wife, a new broom!
Atlantic seaboard antique shop
pewter and plunder
shone in each room.

A new frontier!
No running next door
now to phone the sheriff
for his taxi to Bath
and the State Liquor Store!

No one saw your ghostly
imaginary lover
stare through the window
and tighten
the scarf at his throat.

Health to the new people,
health to their flag, to their old
restored house on the hill!
Everything had been swept bare,
furnished, garnished and aired.

Everything's changed for the best -
how quivering and fierce we were,
there snowbound together,
simmering like wasps
in our tent of books!

Poor ghost, old love, speak
with your old voice
of flaming insight
that kept us awake all night.
In one bed and apart,

we heard the plow
groaning up hill -
a red light, then a blue,
as it tossed off the snow
to the side of the road.

WHITE ASH

There is a woman on Michigan Boulevard keeps a parrot and
goldfish and two white mice.

She used to keep a houseful of girls in kimonos
and three pushbuttons on the front door.

Now she is alone with a parrot and goldfish and two white
mice ... but these are some of her thoughts:

The love of a soldier on furlough or a sailor on shore leave
burns with a bonfire red and saffron.

The love of an emigrant workman whose wife is a thousand miles away
burns with a blue smoke.

The love of a young man whose sweetheart married an older man for money
burns with a sputtering uncertain flame.

And there is a love ... one in a thousand ... burns clean
and is gone leaving a white ash....

And this is a thought she never explains to the parrot
and goldfish and two white mice.

Carl Sandburg, August 18, 2017

MRS. WILLIAMS

I was the milliner
Talked about, lied about,
Mother of Dora,
Whose strange disappearance
Was charged to her rearing.
My eye quick to beauty
Saw much beside ribbons
And buckles and feathers
And leghorns and felts,
To set off sweet faces,
And dark hair and gold.
One thing I will tell you
And one I will ask:

The stealers of husbands
Wear powder and trinkets,
And fashionable hats.
Wives, wear them yourselves.
Hats may make divorces—
They also prevent them.
Well now, let me ask you:
If all of the children, born here in Spoon River
Had been reared by the County, somewhere on a farm;
And the fathers and mothers had been given their freedom
To live and enjoy, change mates if they wished,
Do you think that Spoon River
Had been any the worse?

Edgar Lee Masters, August 14, 2017

TO MY WIFE

Choice of you shuts up that peacock-fan
The future was, in which temptingly spread
All that elaborative nature can.
Matchless potential! but unlimited
Only so long as I elected nothing;
Simply to choose stopped all ways up but one,
And sent the tease-birds from the bushes flapping.
No future now. I and you now, alone.

So for your face I have exchanged all faces,
For your few properties bargained the brisk
Baggage, the mask-and-magic-man's regalia.
Now you become my boredom and my failure,
Another way of suffering, a risk,
A heavier-than-air hypostasis.

Philip Larkin, August 11, 2017

EXPLORERS

They arrive inside
The object at evening.
There's no one to greet them.

The lamps they carry

Cast their shadows
Back into their own minds.

They write in their journals:

The sky and the earth
Are of the same impenetrable color.
If there are rivers and lakes,
They must be under the ground.
Of the marvels we sought, no trace.
Of the strange new stars, nothing.
There's not even wind or dust,
So we must conclude that someone
Passed recently with a broom . . .

As they write, the new world
Gradually stitches
Its black thread into them.

Eventually nothing is left
Except a low whisper,
Which might belong
Either to one of them
Or to someone who came before.

It says: "I'm happy
We are finally all here . . .

Let's make this our home."

Charles Simic, August 7, 2017

DAUGHTER

*I hope on the way
to buy that bread
I get hit by a car!*

you yelled
inside the house
And what do you think
I should have done with my father hands
the whole time
until you came home?

Sit down at the table
take the butter
hard and white as a wall
and get ready –

we're gonna eat for some time

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweeney), August 4, 2017

FIDDLER JONES

The earth keeps some vibration going
There in your heart, and that is you.
And if the people find you can fiddle,
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.
What do you see, a harvest of clover?
Or a meadow to walk through to the river?
The wind's in the corn; you rub your hands
For beeves hereafter ready for market;
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth;
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy
Stepping it off to 'Toor-a-Loor.'
How could I till my forty acres
Not to speak of getting more,
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins
And the creak of a wind-mill- only these?
And I never started to plow in my life
That some one did not stop in the road
And take me away to a dance or picnic.
I ended up with forty acres;
I ended up with a broken fiddle-
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,
And not a single regret.

Edgar Lee Masters, July 31, 2017

FOR THE UNION DEAD

The old South Boston Aquarium stands
in a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are boarded.
The bronze weathervane cod has lost half its scales.
The airy tanks are dry.

Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass;
my hand tingled to burst the bubbles
drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.

My hand draws back. I often sign still
for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom
of the fish and reptile. One morning last March,
I pressed against the new barbed and galvanized

fence on the Boston Common. Behind their cage,
yellow dinosaur steamshovels were grunting
as they cropped up tons of mush and grass
to gouge their underworld garage.

Parking spaces luxuriate like civic
sandpiles in the heart of Boston.
a girdle of orange, Puritan-pumpkin colored girders
braces the tingling Statehouse,

shaking over the excavations, as it faces Colonel Shaw
and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry
on St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief,
propped by a plank splint against the garage's earthquake.

Two months after marching through Boston,
half of the regiment was dead;
at the dedication,
William James could almost hear the bronze Negroes breathe.

Their monument sticks like a fishbone
in the city's throat.
Its Colonel is as lean
as a compass-needle.

He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
a greyhound's gentle tautness;
he seems to wince at pleasure,
and suffocate for privacy.

He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely,

peculiar power to choose life and die-
when he leads his black soldiers to death,
he cannot bend his back.

On a thousand small town New England greens
the old white churches hold their air
of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic

The stone statutes of the abstract Union Soldier
grow slimmer and younger each year-
wasp-waisted, they doze over muskets
and muse through their sideburns...

Shaw's father wanted no monument
except the ditch,
where his son's body was thrown
and lost with his 'niggers.'

The ditch is nearer.

There are no statutes for the last war here;
on Boylston Street, a commercial photograph
shows Hiroshima boiling

over a Mosler Safe, the 'Rock of Ages'
that survived the blast. Space is nearer.
when I crouch to my television set,
the drained faces of Negro school-children rise like balloons.

Colonel Shaw
is riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessed break.

The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease.

Robert Lowell, July 28, 2017

TO THE STONE-CUTTERS

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion

Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems.

Robinson Jeffers, July 24, 2017

SHAME

It is a cramped little state with no foreign policy,
Save to be thought inoffensive. The grammar of the language
Has never been fathomed, owing to the national habit
Of allowing each sentence to trail off in confusion.
Those who have visited Scusi, the capital city,
Report that the railway-route from Schuldig passes
Through country best described as unrelieved.
Sheep are the national product. The faint inscription
Over the city gates may perhaps be rendered,
"I'm afraid you won't find much of interest here."
Census-reports which give the population
As zero are, of course, not to be trusted,
Save as reflecting the natives' flustered insistence
That they do not count, as well as their modest horror
Of letting one's sex be known in so many words.
The uniform grey of the nondescript buildings, the absence
Of churches or comfort-stations, have given observers
An odd impression of ostentatious meanness,
And it must be said of the citizens (muttering by
In their ratty sheepskins, shying at cracks in the sidewalk)
That they lack the peace of mind of the truly humble.
The tenor of life is careful, even in the stiff
Unsmiling carelessness of the border-guards
And douaniers, who admit, whenever they can,
Not merely the usual carloads of deodorant
But gypsies, g-strings, hasheesh, and contraband pigments.
Their complete negligence is reserved, however,
For the hoped-for invasion, at which time the happy people
(Sniggering, ruddily naked, and shamelessly drunk)
Will stun the foe by their overwhelming submission,
Corrupt the generals, infiltrate the staff,

Usurp the throne, proclaim themselves to be sun-gods,
And bring about the collapse of the whole empire.

Richard Wilbur, July 21, 2017

APOCALYPSE

In one and the same apocalypse the world ends twice.

First the future is annulled by the hell of fire and ice.
They scare us with it forever and keep us in obedience
hissing from oaken pulpits like over upright coffins.
We curse and spit, but when the time comes we'll go
out peaceably as we go out to stand in line for bread
or in line for water.

The other calamity is more brutal but just, for it will
erase us from the past leaving not a grain of hope to
anybody. Into it we fall like into a shredding machine,
a dense, whimpering comb of knives sifting the letters.
It brings us back into nothing, just like in a fast-rewind
video depraved old men are rejuvenated into unborn
children.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 17, 2017

GRAVE, CAVERN

O, Arabic writing, you are full of curved
Sabers and crescent moons.

There are no more dragons in the Ropušnica Cavern
But the treasure is also gone upon which they once lay

Through here, who knows when,
The conquerors rode their horses,
And even now, we still sneeze from the dust
That their hooves
Disturbed.

And where has it gone now, the hundred-eared soul of the child
That listened to the paths of the snowflakes.
Listened to the steps of the shades from before the Nemanjićes.

Are you crumbling, o world, o flower of the orange tree,
Or am I ever more gossamer,
Just as this writing from Asia is shallower and shallower every day,
Fainter and fainter

These Damascus swords, these new moons
On the slanting gravestone.

Marko Vešović (translated by Weyles Browne and Omer Hadžiselimović), July 14, 2017

THE ROOSTER

I was four, or five,
from my grandma's lap
I peer from the corner of my eye:
Uncle Salih is slaughtering a rooster.

He holds it in his left hand
and with his right, in one blow,
he buries the axe into the stump:
the head on one, the body
on the other side.

I thought – this is the end,
but I hid my face in vain
in the shalwars: the rooster's body
keeps flying as if only now, after
death, it got wings.
Headless it tries to break free of
it in the swirl of bloody feathers,
its little legs twitching,
wings wildly flapping
around the yard.

As if frantic,
like I,
like the entire town,
which started to move
only after it fell.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 10, 2017

FISH CRIER

I know a Jew fish crier down on Maxwell Street
with a voice like a north wind blowing over corn stubble in January.
He dangles herring before prospective customers evincing
a joy identical with that of Pavlowa dancing.
His face is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish,
terribly glad that God made fish, and customers to whom
he may call his wares, from a pushcart.

Carl Sandburg, July 7, 2017

THE LAST DAYS OF THE SUICIDE KID

I can see myself now
after all these suicide days and nights,
being wheeled out of one of those sterile rest homes
(of course, this is only if I get famous and lucky)
by a subnormal and bored nurse
there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair
almost blind, eyes rolling backward into the dark part of my skull
looking
for the mercy of death
Isn't it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski
O, yeah, yeah
the children walk past and I don't even exist
and lovely women walk by
with big hot hips
and warm buttocks and tight hot everything
praying to be loved
and I don't even
exist
It's the first sunlight we've had in 3 days,
Mr. Bukowski.
Oh, yeah, yeah.
there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair,
myself whiter than this sheet of paper,
bloodless,
brain gone, gamble gone, me, Bukowski,
gone
Isn't it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski
O, yeah, yeah pissing in my pajamas, slop drooling out of
my mouth.
2 young schoolboys run by —
Hey, did you see that old guy

Christ, yes, he made me sick!
after all the threats to do so
somebody else has committed suicide for me
at last.
the nurse stops the wheelchair, breaks a rose from a nearby bush,
puts it in my hand.
I don't even know
what it is. it might as well be my pecker
for all the good
it does.

Charles Bukowski, July 3, 2017

ELSA WERTMAN

I was a peasant girl from Germany,
Blue-eyed, rosy, happy and strong.
And the first place I worked was at Thomas Greene's.
On a summer's day when she was away
He stole into the kitchen and took me
Right in his arms and kissed me on my throat,
I turning my head. Then neither of us
Seemed to know what happened.
And I cried for what would become of me.
And cried and cried as my secret began to show.
One day Mrs. Greene said she understood,
And would make no trouble for me,
And, being childless, would adopt it.
(He had given her a farm to be still.)
So she hid in the house and sent out rumors,
As if it were going to happen to her.
And all went well and the child was born - They were so kind to me.
Later I married Gus Wertman, and years passed.
But -- at political rallies when sitters-by thought I was crying
At the eloquence of Hamilton Greene -
That was not it.
No! I wanted to say:
That's my son!
That's my son!

Edgar Lee Masters, June 30, 2017

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Our fathers wrung their bread from stocks and stones
And fenced their gardens with the Redmen's bones;
Embarking from the Nether Land of Holland,
Pilgrims unhoused by Geneva's night,
They planted here the Serpent's seeds of light;
And here the pivoting searchlights probe to shock
The riotous glass houses built on rock,
And candles gutter by an empty altar,
And light is where the landless blood of Cain
Is burning, burning the unburied grain.

Robert Lowell, June 26, 2017

ONE MORE THING I WANT

On the news a Polish schoolgirl
hung herself.

I can't get there
past the other incoming news,
to hug her
around the knees.

And
slightly raise her.

Petr Hruška, (translated by Matthew Sweeney), June 23, 2017

THE BROKEN BALANCE

III

That light blood-loving weasel, a tongue of yellow
Fire licking the sides of the gray stones,
Has a more passionate and more pure heart
In the snake-slender flanks than man can imagine;
But he is betrayed by his own courage,
The man who kills him is like a cloud hiding a star.

Then praise the jewel-eyed hawk and the tall blue heron;
The black cormorants that fatten their sea-rock

With shining slime; even that ruiner of anthills
The red-shafted woodpecker flying,
A white star between blood-color wing-clouds,
Across the glades of the wood and the green lakes of shade.

These live their felt natures; they know their norm
And live it to the brim; they understand life.
While men moulding themselves to the anthill have choked
Their natures until the souls the in them;
They have sold themselves for toys and protection:
No, but consider awhile: what else? Men sold for toys.

Uneasy and fractional people, having no center
But in the eyes and mouths that surround them,
Having no function but to serve and support
Civilization, the enemy of man,
No wonder they live insanely, and desire
With their tongues, progress; with their eyes, pleasure; with their hearts, death.

Their ancestors were good hunters, good herdsman and swordsman,
But now the world is turned upside down;
The good do evil, the hope's in criminals; in vice
That dissolves the cities and war to destroy them.
Through wars and corruptions the house will fall.
Mourn whom it falls on. Be glad: the house is mined, it will fall.

Robinson Jeffers, June 19, 2017

THE GIFT OUTRIGHT

The land was ours before we were the land's.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England's, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,

But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.

Robert Frost, June 16, 2017

EMPIRE OF DREAMS

On the first page of my dreambook
It's always evening
In an occupied country.
Hour before the curfew.
A small provincial city.
The houses all dark.
The storefronts gutted.

I am on a street corner
Where I shouldn't be.
Alone and coatless
I have gone out to look
For a black dog who answers to my whistle.
I have a kind of Halloween mask
Which I am afraid to put on.

Charles Simic, June 12, 2017

MAMIE

MAMIE beat her head against the bars of a little Indiana
town and dreamed of romance and big things off
somewhere the way the railroad trains all ran.
She could see the smoke of the engines get lost down
where the streaks of steel flashed in the sun and
when the newspapers came in on the morning mail
she knew there was a big Chicago far off, where all
the trains ran.
She got tired of the barber shop boys and the post office
chatter and the church gossip and the old pieces the
band played on the Fourth of July and Decoration Day
And sobbed at her fate and beat her head against the
bars and was going to kill herself
When the thought came to her that if she was going to
die she might as well die struggling for a clutch of
romance among the streets of Chicago.

She has a job now at six dollars a week in the basement
of the Boston Store

And even now she beats her head against the bars in the
same old way and wonders if there is a bigger place
the railroads run to from Chicago where maybe
there is

romance
and big things
and real dreams
that never go smash.

Carl Sandburg, June 9, 2017

PARABOLE

I read how Quixote in his random ride
Came to a crossing once, and lest he lose
The purity of chance, would not decide

Whither to fare, but wished his horse to choose.
For glory lay wherever turned the fable.
His head was light with pride, his horse's shoes

Were heavy, and he headed for the stable.

Richard Wilbur, June 5, 2017

DAYS

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

Philip Larkin, June 2, 2017

ROBERT FULTON TANNER

If a man could bite the giant hand
That catches and destroys him,
As I was bitten by a rat
While demonstrating my patent trap,
In my hardware store that day.
But a man can never avenge himself
On the monstrous ogre Life.
You enter the room--that's being born;
And then you must live--work out your soul,
Aha! the bait that you crave is in view:
A woman with money you want to marry,
Prestige, place, or power in the world.
But there's work to do and things to conquer--
Oh, yes! the wires that screen the bait.
At last you get in--but you hear a step:
The ogre, Life, comes into the room,
(He was waiting and heard the clang of the spring)
To watch you nibble the wondrous cheese,
And stare with his burning eyes at you,
And scowl and laugh, and mock and curse you,
Running up and down in the trap,
Until your misery bores him.

Edgar Lee Masters, May 29, 2017

PARADISE MOTEL

Millions were dead; everybody was innocent.
I stayed in my room. The President
Spoke of war as of a magic love potion.
My eyes were opened in astonishment.
In a mirror my face appeared to me
Like a twice-canceled postage stamp.

I lived well, but life was awful.
there were so many soldiers that day,
So many refugees crowding the roads.
Naturally, they all vanished
With a touch of the hand.
History licked the corners of its bloody mouth.

On the pay channel, a man and a woman
Were trading hungry kisses and tearing off
Each other's clothes while I looked on
With the sound off and the room dark
Except for the screen where the color
Had too much red in it, too much pink.

Charles Simic, May 26, 2017

MY FATHER

was a truly amazing man
he pretended to be
rich
even though we lived on beans and mush and weenies
when we sat down to eat, he said,
"not everybody can eat like this."

and because he wanted to be rich or because he actually
thought he was rich
he always voted Republican
and he voted for Hoover against Roosevelt
and he lost
and then he voted for Alf Landon against Roosevelt
and he lost again
saying, "I don't know what this world is coming to,
now we've got that god damned Red in there again
and the Russians will be in our backyard next!"

I think it was my father who made me decide to
become a bum.

I decided that if a man like that wants to be rich
then I want to be poor.

and I became a bum.

I lived on nickles and dimes and in cheap rooms and
on park benches.

I thought maybe the bums knew something.

but I found out that most of the bums wanted to be
rich too.

they had just failed at that.

so caught between my father and the bums

I had no place to go
and I went there fast and slow.
never voted Republican
never voted.

buried him
like an oddity of the earth
like a hundred thousand oddities
like millions of other oddities,
wasted.

Charles Bukowski, May 22, 2017

KID

Kid!
You saw me,
carrying a full bottle.
You intently watched
my fingers.
You heard
the fools cutting down the walnut trees on the street
one after the other,
so the town would look new.
Yesterday on the internet somebody offered you
another life.
You crumpled and smoothed
your cap
when your mother asked
if love means anything to me.

You have her eyes and my fingers.
You're ready,
kid.

Just wait,
now the steam from the morning buffet
rises into the confused swath of the sun
and changes
into orange smoke.

Today by the river
you yelled something out at me

across the muddy rapids
I couldn't understand you,
sounded like
Dharmata!
Diddled dharmata!

The river was incredibly long,
you yelled at me,
kid,
waved a rotten branch
and your eyes were wide open.
Like credit.

- - -

I made
tomato salad on the balcony
in this undermined town.
Will you remember that?
A defiant slice of red
in the glass bowls
on the edge of the concrete ledge
in August.
In short, a celebration.

I lied to you the whole time,
kid,
that I don't hang around with futility.
That I go to bed after you
and stay out of the hell of my hermitage
with the testicle of a naked bulb on the ceiling.
I lied to you,
that the messes on the walls
are good maps,
that I've read the contract with the world
and it's written in comprehensible letters
similar to your mom's handwriting.
I lied.
Only the tomatoes on the cement
are true.

Petr Hruška, (translated by Matthew Sweeney), May 19, 2017

TO THE ETRUSCAN POETS

Dream fluently, still brothers, who when young
Took with your mother's milk the mother tongue,

In which pure matrix, joining world and mind,
You strove to leave some line of verse behind

Like still fresh tracks across a field of snow,
Not reckoning that all could melt and go.

Richard Wilbur, May 15, 2017

A FENCE

Now the stone house on the lake front is finished and the
workmen are beginning the fence.

The palings are made of iron bars with steel points that
can stab the life out of any man who falls on them.

As a fence, it is a masterpiece, and will shut off the rabble
and all vagabonds and hungry men and all wandering
children looking for a place to play.

Passing through the bars and over the steel points will go
nothing except Death and the Rain and To-morrow.

Carl Sandburg, May 12, 2017

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD

I

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the black bird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III

The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.

VI

Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII

O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,

It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X

At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.

XI

He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII

It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Wallace Stevens, May 8, 2017

A MINOR BIRD

I have wished a bird would fly away,
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.

Robert Frost, May 5, 2017

TO SPEAK OF WOE THAT IS IN MARRI

*'It is the future generation that presses into being by means of
these exuberant feelings and supersensible soap bubbles of ours.'
Schopenhauer*

'The hot night makes us keep our bedroom windows open.
Our magnolia blossoms. Life begins to happen.
My hopped up husband drops his home disputes,
and hits the streets to cruise for prostitutes,
free-lancing out along the razor's edge.
This screwball might kill his wife, then take the pledge.
Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust..
It's the injustice... he is so unjust-
whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.
My only thought is how to keep alive.
What makes him tick? Each night now I tie
ten dollars and his car key to my thigh....
Gored by the climacteric of his want,
he stalls above me like an elephant.'

Robert Lowell, May 1, 2017

SHINE, PERISHING REPUBLIC

While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening
to empire
And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the
mass hardens,
I sadly smiling remember that the flower fades to make fruit, the fruit rots
to make earth.
Out of the mother; and through the spring exultances, ripeness and deca-
dence; and home to the mother.

You making haste haste on decay: not blameworthy; life is good, be it stub-
bornly long or suddenly
A mortal splendor: meteors are not needed less than mountains:
shine, perishing republic.
But for my children, I would have them keep their distance from the thick-

ening center; corruption

Never has been compulsory, when the cities lie at the monster's feet there
are left the mountains.

And boys, be in nothing so moderate as in love of man, a clever servant,
insufferable master.

There is the trap that catches noblest spirits, that caught--they say--
God, when he walked on earth.

Robinson Jeffers, April 28, 2017

WHY DID I DREAM OF YOU LAST NIGHT

Why did I dream of you last night?

Now morning is pushing back hair with grey light

Memories strike home, like slaps in the face;

Raised on elbow, I stare at the pale fog
beyond the window.

So many things I had thought forgotten

Return to my mind with stranger pain:

- Like letters that arrive addressed to someone

Who left the house so many years ago.

Philip Larkin, April 24, 2017

A REAL TUNA

A real tuna

to shake us up

the ever-shining silver of fish

slapped into sheets of newspaper

dead news for fish

A real tuna

that would last for some time

so we would once again

feel the chill in the wrists

over the heavy silver of the world

to slip it past

the steep backs

of the banking houses

and unwrap the news at home together

the campaign faces splashed with fish slime

looking even more sly

a big body on the newspaper shallows
on the table shallows
A real tuna
until the faded frills of the silent home
stir
until we suddenly remember
what all in hell
we wanted here

Petr Hruška, (translated by Matthew Sweeney), April 21, 2017

STILLNESS AND SOLITUDE OF WOODS

It is a stillness and solitude from which perhaps God begins
Green and blue they are like polar ice
The stillness and solitude one can find only in a soul that,
Having just torn itself from its flesh and, delivered from the world's
Evil, is looking upon the earthly globe from above
With the eyes of an eagle.

It is a stillness and solitude when you listen to a baby bird's feathers
Growing, when you listen to an elder tree
Sprouting from human absence amid the ramparts,
And when rocks start looking, for a moment,
Like gigantic layers of police files
With the fingerprints of millions of vanished beings
Whose murmur is heard anew.

It is a stillness and solitude on a fairy's steed which,
While flying, stands still.
In that stillness and solitude even a blade of grass has
Sway over the soul.

In that stillness and solitude the cry of a hawk
Can light up the soul
Like headlights a hare
By the roadside at night.
The soul, suddenly, in that stillness and solitude,
Has nothing
Needs nothing
Either to give or take away.

As it listens to the trees rustling their leaves in darkness
Like the audience their programs
It is a stillness and solitude in which hours

Stand still, while passing.
It is a stillness which by the cavities of trees
Is looking through you.
The stillness of woods in which to the will of God
You surrender like a plant.

Marko Vešović, (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), April 17, 2017

THE LAST CYNIC

J. was a good friend of my parents. For me he was a favourite uncle. It was always a joy when he came to visit, or when we all went on trips together. However, I don't remember that we ever visited him and his wife at their home. Perhaps memory fails me as it so often does. It's also possible that I remember correctly and that there were good reasons for not visiting them. Reasons that as a child I would neither understand nor care about.

J. must have been about the same age as my parents but he had a much more youthful appearance. Looking like a farm boy he was somewhat stout, always wore his hair in a crew cut and didn't look at all Jewish. During the occupation years this was referred to as "good appearance," an expression that survived the war and was used later, often with sarcastic or mocking undertones.

Oddly enough, J's wife looked fairly Jewish even though she was from an authentic Polish peasant family. Also they had no children which in the postwar baby boom era was quite unusual and gave rise to much speculation and some savage rumours. If this was why J. did so well with children I don't know but it was apparent that he did. As soon as he came to our house he would leave adult company and instead seek to learn how things were with me. Not in that adult way with its implied requirements for order, diligence and discipline in a young person's life nor with sights set on a successful future following in the footsteps of one's parents but on quite a different level. More as a buddy with a, "How's it going? Had any fun lately?"

His 'close friend' attitude was not a sham. Now, much later in life, I can understand that against all odds he had retained something of a childlike mind and as a result was now inclined to express himself that way whenever the opportunity presented itself. His dealings with children was of course a great opportunity to give expression to that desire and to at least recall something of the childhood of which he had been so brutally deprived.

Treating children as equals was a given. He loved kicking a ball around, wrestling in the grass (despite his somewhat portly stature he was surprisingly agile). Being curious about school, sports and other subjects which would be likely to occupy the mind of any healthy youngster was a natural ability.

I revealed my dream of being an author to him. I was perhaps about 10 years old when I took out an exercise book in which I had written a humorous story. I don't really remember what it was about, only that I had plagiarised it from somewhere.

He read it carefully taking his time, even though the text wasn't very long. Then he closed the exercise book and observed seriously, "It's good, very good, but it's missing something." He looked at me sternly and said, "You need to write down all the swear words you know. There's no such thing as 'good literature' without profanity. Write them down in the back of your note book."

I tried the best I could to hide my shock, probably without much success, then nodded in agreement and enthusiastically got on with the task.

I wrote a long list of swear words. Not everything I knew of course as there were several words and expressions that I'd picked up from the older boys which were definitely not for public consumption. There was no way I was going to admit to knowing such gross profanities! It actually made me think and I wondered whether I ought to re-consider my decision before definitely selecting a literary career.

Although J. was really an academic he concerned himself mostly with journalism. He was a feature writer in several prestigious newspapers and magazines and was known to be an unusually gifted writer.

He also had a reputation for writing whatever nonsense he was told to. Spouting nonsense was certainly something that many did at that time and for that matter many still do. It was however, most uncommon in J's circles. There one guarded one's integrity and avoided, in the main, any compromise with one's own conscience. This was definitely aided by the fact that most of that particular social circle were still ultimately loyal to the existing system. If there were any opposition, and there was, it only ever happened within the system's own boundaries.

The system, in any event, did little about it and implemented only mild forms of intimidation against the most stubborn, which in the worst case scenarios might turn into something a little more serious with stiffer penalties. Such would attract a certain amount of anger but in any case everybody was well aware of the rules of the game and to be subject to the regime's displeasure gave a kind of moral justification to one's point of view and at the same time bestowed a certain air of noble resistance.

But not J. He never suffered the regime's disapproval. On the contrary, he was honoured with small favours which in a social system of 'uniform grey equality' could appear quite privileged. He and his wife lived in a beautiful apartment, owned a car and his wife also had a Vespa for her own use. J. himself frequently travelled abroad which was indeed a rare luxury in those days. Mostly he was in Germany from where he wrote satirical articles mocking what some called, "the Federal Republic's revanchist capitalist crisis economy."

Was then the jovial uncle, my favourite uncle, nothing but a materialistic fool, a cheap sybarite willing to sell out his pen and his conscience for a few measly privileges? To be sure he was something of a snob with a taste for the good life, but no, it wasn't that simple.

Perhaps, just as accurately one could say he would never sell his soul for stylish suits, good dinners, trips abroad or even a Yugoslavian license-produced Fiat.

I once heard my father quarrelling with him. It was during a visit to what I remember as a cozy little restaurant just outside of town.

"You must realise that it throws us several years back in time!"

Dad spoke calmly but it was clear he was pretty upset.

"After all, we have advanced our position slightly, the air has become easier to breathe. But there you are consorting with the dinosaurs within the Party, as you do, with your cleverly worded articles," he gave him a wry smile to highlight the irony of the situation.

"I mean, just look, we're already sliding backwards. Is that what you want?"

J. smiled sadly and answered with a gentle voice,

"What difference does it make?"

“What difference does it make! What do you mean?”

Dad was becoming angry.

“It has incalculable consequences! Can’t you see that?”

“See what? that my modest journalistic contributions are going to effect any kind of influence on the country’s power elite — you must be joking.”

He was still smiling and he still spoke with the same gentle voice but there was also no mistaking a certain biting undertone.

“You attach too greater importance to me. It really doesn’t matter. They will always decide what they want. And yes, yes, I know they need some sort of cover, some pseudo-scientific rational to provide a foundation for their ideological nonsense, something that takes them above a dogma of yet another idiotic belief system. Yes, yes, I know! So what does it matter what I write?”

He paused then continued.

“You know that unless I write that crap, someone else will and you know very well what that would mean.”

He looked expectantly at my dad who just shook his head in disbelief without answering.

J. gave the answer himself, “It means it would be badly written and even more stupid. Would that be better? I hardly think so. So, you see,” he said forcefully, his voice in a slow staccato, “it-really-does-not-matter-in-the- least!”

“He doesn’t believe in anything,” I heard my parents say repeatedly. “Nothing really does matter to him.”

In a world where everyone believed very strongly in something, even vastly different things of minor or major importance, J. stood out as an odd bird, a renegade with no convictions.

The discrepancy between fun uncle and cynical professional was for a child too difficult to grasp. How was it possible that a grown man who mixed with children so easily, an intelligent, talented and charming man so obviously appreciated in social life was also a man who didn’t believe in anything? A cynic who whilst obviously aware of everything my parents stood for, especially my father, just shrugged it all off.

Such was the human soul’s twisted perception, offering a lack of coherence and logic which far exceeded a ten year old’s conceptual horizons.

An explanation was called for!

It would be a few years later but the explanation did come. I would be about twelve or thirteen years old at the time I suppose, but curiously I don’t remember the context. It was my mother who told me. Some inner compulsion, sparked no doubt by some dramatic happening. It was mother’s way of describing and explaining the world in human terms. The humanising of events, and so much the better if they were of a spectacular variety. Yet I have no recollection of any conversation or event that might have driven her to recount J.’s history. A history that would perhaps explain his cynicism.

She held nothing back and told me the whole dreadful story. In the retelling we discussed many aspects. We talked about cynicism and principles and explored the significance of an outspoken manner.

Were we really talking about J. ?

The memory fails me. Maybe it was the blood curdling horror story that shocked the young adolescent into consigning such memories into a shaded but safe forgetfulness. An instant but focused blackout. Who knows?

There remains only J.'s story.

“Posters and notices in both German and Polish were put up everywhere in the ghetto. Trains for the new settlement areas would be departing from the station in ‘B’ and everyone was to present themselves at the gravel-yard behind the railway station tomorrow morning. Private belongings were allowed. Anyone failing to attend would be severely punished. Signed by the Executive Director of the ‘B’ ghetto.

My parents spent the whole evening discussing what to do. Dad was skeptical and thought the whole thing suspicious. Mother feared the consequences of disobeying orders and thought it best to do as instructed.

“It can’t be any worse than here,” she offered, “perhaps it’s as they say and we really will be given work some place in the east. Why wouldn’t it be the case?” she reasoned, “after all, it’s good to have us working for them, and the war isn’t going to last forever.”

“Just so long as it doesn’t end for us quicker than we think. There’s been some rumours and...” Dad’s reply was abruptly cut short.

“Stop this nonsense!” Mother’s interruption was quite brusque, not at all in keeping with her normal manner. She glanced uneasily in my direction and continued. “Why would you want to help spread such rubbish? It’s just stupid people who let their sick imaginations run wild. No normal person would believe such terrible things.”

“Actually it’s not just ‘stupid’ people who are saying such things. One of the messengers from the ghetto in ...”

“Enough!” Mother screamed at him in way I’d never heard her do before.

“I don’t want to hear anymore.” Angrily she continued, “And just what do you think we should do then? Where are we supposed to go? Do we really have a choice?” “Maybe I could talk to Z.?” Attempted father.

Mother was unyielding now in her opposition. She spoke calmly, slowly and articulate, but with clear mockery in her voice.

“Ah, OK. We just simply sneak out. Perhaps you hadn’t noticed but there’s rather a lot of guards out there at the moment? Anyway, once we have managed to get past them we can get ourselves to Z.’s home. Z. of course will quite naturally be willing to risk life and limb on our behalf and hide us under the bed. We can stay there until after the war.

“Please, don’t be like that. Perhaps we could find some place ...

“No! I don’t intend being holed-up in some cellar like a rat.” She glanced in my direction again.

“Be realistic now. Tomorrow morning we’ll go to the railway station and we’ll go to wherever they are sending us. It’s bound to be good. Well, not great perhaps but it’ll be fine.

They continued to discuss practical things. In the evening, after I had gone to bed, I couldn’t fall asleep so I heard how they sat in the kitchen whispering. I couldn’t however make out what they were saying.

The next day I woke early. My parents were already up and our bags were packed. Each of us would carry our own suitcase. It was mostly winter clothes and such. No one said much. The atmosphere was heavy and I thought the whole thing was pretty unpleasant but a little exciting too.

The station was surrounded by German military police and Slovakian militia. Many people were already gathered and many more continued to arrive dragging their luggage with them. I recognised most of them. People stood in small groups talking quietly but anxiously. We placed ourselves together with some old friends, the family B. Poor Mrs. B. was totally distraught, appearing to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She was trembling all over and repeated incessantly, "What will become of us, what will become of us?" It was quite annoying actually.

Mr B. tried to comfort his wife, "It'll be alright my dear, you'll see." he said. "I know the Germans they are a civilised people."

"Well so far their civilisation hasn't shown its most illustrious side." objected my dad with his usual irony and was rewarded with a scathing look from mother.

Just then a goods train rattled into the station. The brakes screeched and it stopped with a violent jerk. There was immediate concern in the crowd and a vibrating hum spread as a collective wave of mistrust.

"What! is that our transport?"

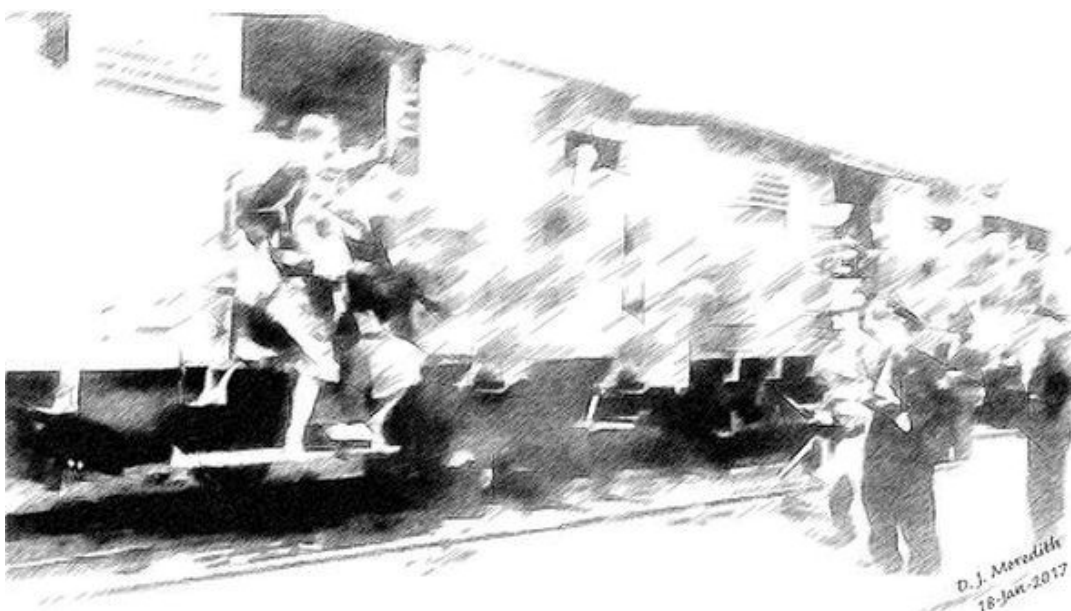
A raspy voice vibrated through the loud-speakers in Polish:

"Prepare for boarding! Approach the train as families and bring your luggage with you. Observe good order and discipline, and follow all personnel instructions. Obstructions will be punished!"

"Obstruction?" My father said with genuine surprise, but fell silent when he saw the German military police and the Slovak militiamen approaching with weapons pointing at us. It was just to grab the bags and get to the train.

The doors of the goods wagons had been slid to one-side and the people began to heave themselves up and in. In the beginning it was calm but then the guards started to inflame the situation by forcefully speeding things up. People were thrust brusquely in as they were tugged and jerked by the arms and pressed up and into the goods wagons. There was screaming, small children crying and somebody who fell under the train was brutally kicked. The guards grew angrier and became even more heavy-handed. The Slovaks were the worst.

I got into the wagon and thought at first to find a place at the edge near a wall but then I saw my parents standing a little more in towards the middle so I made my way there instead. It proved to be a big mistake. As there came more and more people into the wagon the crush became unbearable but still they continued to squeeze more people in.



“Not a promising start for our new future.” Dad said, more sadly than sarcastically. Still, I thought mother would comment in some way but she didn’t.

Then the doors slid shut and a dim obscurity descended upon the packed to overflowing goods wagon. One could still hear screaming and crying. Suddenly a shot rang out and then another, and then there was silence. It was the quietest silence I have ever experienced in my entire life.

I don’t know how long the train stood in the station. It’s easy to lose all concept of time in such a situation and then greatly exaggerate the amount of time that has actually passed. In any case, it must have been a few hours. It was almost impossible to change position thus causing arms and legs to become numb. The whole body felt rigid as if someone had stretched it out and not pulled it back together again. The stench inside the wagon was horrible, everyone smelled pungently of fear and some couldn’t even control their bodily functions. I recalled a painting I had seen in a book in which hell was portrayed and I remember thinking, ‘this is how it must be and now I am there myself’.

Irrespective of how much time had actually passed it seemed like an eternity to those of us trapped in those overcrowded wagons but finally the train began to move. The movement actually improved things a little as it drew in fresh air through the cracks. As the train picked up speed tongues began to loosen. Soon the wagon was seething with questions, speculations, curses and exclamations of despair.

“What do you think people, where are we going?”

“Oh my God, they’re going to kill us all!”

“Leave your god out of it and stop talking nonsense!”

“Shouldn’t we get some water and what about food?”

“Did anyone see Szmil Meyer at the station?”

“May all Germans and their descendants of seven generations burn in hell!”

“Shut-up you idiot!”

A man who was standing at the door and peering anxiously through the cracks stated objectively, “Wherever this train is going it’s not east in any event.” Everyone’s attention now turned towards him and the questions came thick and fast.

“Where are we, where are we going, what do you see out there?”

“Dammed if I know, but it looks possible that we may have crossed the Czech border and gone south into the Czech Republic.” the man replied after he had observed some more.

After a while I entered a state of what I can only call ‘desensitised apathy’. It was as if I had no body. I couldn’t smell anything anymore and I perceived nothing of the cacophony of voices.

Then suddenly the train stopped. Afterwards I realised that the journey could not have taken more than a few hours but now the train was standing still and German voices could be heard outside. The door was shot violently to one side and the sudden influx of light dazzled painfully. Hardly had we chance to cover our eyes when the shouting began, “Raus, raus, schnell!” People jumped down, some fell and got up again or were brutally pulled up by some other people dressed in strange striped clothes. These others wore round caps, ill-fitting jackets with buttons on the front and pants that hung loose also all striped. On their feet they had rough clogs and in their hands they carried cudgels with which they beat out wildly, all the while roaring madly. A short distance away stood armed German guards with angrily barking German shepherd dogs.

Someone tried to turn back to the train to retrieve his luggage but he was beaten by one of the people in the striped clothing who screamed at him to leave the luggage where it was, it would be retrieved later.



We were ordered to form ourselves into lines and move forward. We walked a short distance alongside the rails in the direction of the red-brick buildings surrounded by barbed wire and contained between high watchtowers. We passed through a gate and came into a rather large gravelled area. A German SS officer, who was surrounded by several other Germans, stood pointing at the people in the lines as they approached. He then motioned for them to go either to the left or right. The entire procedure went quickly but nevertheless the queue inevitably began to slow.

I walked beside my father, mother walked in front of us side by side with an unknown woman. I noticed how my father looked fixedly towards what was happening at the front. He had all his attention on the SS man.

Slowly we approached the German who sent people either to the right or to the left. As we moved forward dad shifted his gaze and leaned his head to one side.

“Remember, you are 15 years old,” he whispered in my ear.
“But ...” I started to object.

With a sharp voice that cut deep into my ear, he asserted, “You are 15 years old! Now stand fully erect and stretch yourself so as to appear as tall as possible.”

Mother was waved to the right without a word. I straightened up and suddenly felt the hurt in every muscle. The SS officer made a sign for me to come forward. With a totally indifferent voice, he inquired, “How old?”

“15” I replied, trying to sound as adult as possible.

The German nodded and said “Ja, gut” and pointed to the left.

With a straight back and a vigorous step I positioned myself in the group that stood to the left. I thought Dad would follow me but he didn't. Without waiting for the SS officer's sign he went off to the right side. The German raised his eyebrows in a surprised gesture and nodded towards father. Another SS man walked quickly up to Dad and grabbed him by the arm.

“And just where do you think you're going Jew?” he bleated with an unusually high-pitched voice.

Dad tried to detach himself from the German's grip and answered, “I'm going with my wife ...”

“So, you want to be together with your wife. Yes, certainly, we can arrange that. Quicker than you think. In fact, now, at once.”

He spoke with an exhilarated and somewhat sarcastic voice whilst looking for common agreement from his colleagues. They rewarded him with a collective laugh.

The German took hold of dad's collar and dragged him away. Dad didn't resist, his body appeared completely limp. He seemed so small and helpless.

The SS man dragged father to the edge of the gravel yard where a ditch we had passed on the way from the train ran. It was filled with brownish dirty water which stunk of sewage and rotting food scraps. The German stopped at the edge of the ditch and turned towards the others as if he wanted to ensure that his exploits didn't go unnoticed. He climbed down into the ditch in his long well-polished leather boots, dragging dad with him and pushing his head under the water.

I held my breath as if it were my head that was underwater. The world ceased to exist and everything became totally surreal. Through a crack in my fading consciousness the realisation that the German was about to drown my dad in dirty ditch water seeped in when suddenly he pulled dad up.

Holding him firmly by the neck he shook him and screamed in his high-pitched voice, "So Jew, are you on your way to your wife now? Is that what you wanted, eh?" He looked over at his SS-colleagues who laughed with satisfaction.

My father fought to get air. He was gasping for breath, wheezing violently, spitting and hissing. His body was wriggling like a puppet in the German's grip. Just when it looked like he had recovered some and finally stopped shaking the SS-man screamed, "Nah, Jew, now it's time for you to swim away and join your wife." Then he pushed dad's head under the water again.

After a few minutes. Two, three, five? The German released dad and climbed out of the ditch. He looked with distaste at his boots and beckoned to a couple of the men in striped clothing who stood nearby. They immediately came running, pulled dad's body up and dragged it away.

I stood there until the selection was complete. Then the Americans came, but that was several years later. A few years ago I was at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw. There, among lush trees and crumbling tombstones, I saw a memorial stone that read:
In memory of my parents. J.

Grzegorz Flakierski (translated by David and Katarina Meredith), April 14, 2017

OF MODERN POETRY

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated what
Was in the script.
Then the theatre was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.
It has to face the men of the time and to meet
The women of the time. It has to think about war
And it has to find what will suffice. It has
To construct a new stage. It has to be on that stage,
And, like an insatiable actor, slowly and
With meditation, speak words that in the ear,
In the delicatest ear of the mind, repeat,
Exactly, that which it wants to hear, at the sound
Of which, an invisible audience listens,
Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
In an emotion as of two people, as of two
Emotions becoming one. The actor is
A metaphysician in the dark, twanging
An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise.
It must
Be the finding of a satisfaction, and may
Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

Wallace Stevens, April 10, 2017

JACK

Jack was a swarthy, swaggering son-of-a-gun.
He worked thirty years on the railroad, ten hours a day,
and his hands were tougher than sole leather.
He married a tough woman and they had eight children
and the woman died and the children grew up

and went away and wrote the old man every two years.
He died in the poorhouse sitting on a bench in the sun
telling reminiscences to other old men whose women
were dead and children scattered.
There was joy on his face when he died as there was
joy on his face when he lived — he was a swarthy,
swaggering son-of-a-gun.

Carl Sandburg, April 7, 2017

THE SECRET

Ever since I was entrusted with keeping
the secret, I don't recognize myself. I don't
trust myself anymore. I chew every word
a long time before uttering it. Nights I sleep
awake lest I reveal it in a dream even to you
who are lying next to me. In the morning,
over coffee, I inspect you with a Kafkaian eye.
It is only with the dog and cats that I speak
like a man.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), April 3, 2017

AUBADE

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
- The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused-nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade
Created to pretend we never die,
And specious stuff that says No rational being
Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing
That this is what we fear - no sight, no sound,
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with,
The anaesthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
A small unfocused blur, a standing chill
That slows each impulse down to indecision.
Most things may never happen: this one will,
And realisation of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink. Courage is no good:

It means not scaring others. Being brave
Lets no one off the grave.
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
Have always known, know that we can't escape,
Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
Work has to be done.
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

Philip Larkin, March 31, 2017

MY SHOES

Shoes, secret face of my inner life:
Two gaping toothless mouths,
Two partly decomposed animal skins
Smelling of mice-nests.

My brother and sister who died at birth
Continuing their existence in you,
Guiding my life
Toward their incomprehensible innocence.

What use are books to me
When in you it is possible to read
The Gospel of my life on earth
And still beyond, of things to come?

I want to proclaim the religion
I have devised for your perfect humility
And the strange church I am building
With you as the altar.

Ascetic and maternal, you endure:
Kin to oxen, to Saints, to condemned men,
With your mute patience, forming
The only true likeness of myself.

Charles Simic, March 27, 2017

IN MEMORIAM, ETHNICALLY CLEANSED

Dušan Karpatský (February 28, 1935 — January 31, 2017)

Gone is a man who has indebted Yugoslav literature like few before him. While writing the epilogue for a book and compressing his life's work into a single sentence, this is what I said about him: "Were it not for his work on the Czech and South Slavic cross-cultural relations, a black hole, impossible to fill, would gape there right now". Sadness caused by his passing is accompanied by the nauseating media reactions coming from the South Slavic regions, to whose literatures he devoted his entire life. These reactions range from a failure to acknowledge his work, to ignoring it completely, to ostentatiously and loudly recognizing only portions of it. Dušan Karpatský used to hate it when writers like Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović were either claimed or rejected, and now he himself is being both claimed and disowned.

His departure has been recognized in the Croatian media "in a worthy manner". One such (brief) article (Novilist.hr) uses the word Croatian and Croatia 25 times (as if the state passed away, not he), while overlooking almost half of his literary opus. Pure mastery! Not a single sentence about him is a lie, but the whole picture is distorted. Everything has been sifted through a nationalistic sieve.

While praised in the Croatian media as the "tireless translator of Croatian writers", in Serbia, his passing has been met by silence. Not only are they silent, but it has become obvious that a widely accepted notion from the 1990s that Dušan Karpatský is a Croatian nationalist, still prevails.

Everyone interested in knowing what kind of a man he really was should check the bibliography of his translations (the Czech Translators Association website, for instance) while paying attention to the authors and the years of publication.

Another beacon that might be helpful to an uninformed reader in evading the shallow nationalistic waters is *Epistolar* – a book by Dušan Karpatský, a collection of letters he received in “the last fifty years, while engaged with the literatures in the former Yugoslavia, especially Croatian, and former Czechoslovakia, especially Czech”.*

Epistolar is not only an important document for literary historians, but a rich source of information for general historians as well. The book, for example, includes a fragment of a conversation, in which the author also participated, that took place on January 22, 1966 at the home of Vojo Kuzmanović. The host mildly provoked Krleža by asking him if socialism was the right solution for Yugoslavia. Krleža's answer was: “You know, Kuzmanović, I probably understand better than you all the things that are wrong in this country, but remember, it is still all milk and honey now compared to what might happen”.

As I leaf through *Epistolar* for the umpteenth time, it is hard for me to grasp that as recently as January 14, 2017, I received an e-mail from its very author, Dušan Karpatský, the same person who used to hang out with Ranko Marinković in Prague in 1958, or Vasko Popa in 1960. The latter thanked him with this simple note:

“Belgrade, October 16, 1960

Dear Dušan,

I write to say how much I enjoyed your company in your golden Prague, to send greetings from Belgrade, and promise not to forget you.

Vasko

P.S. Be good with your children. Do not torture them with knowledge. They'll get it once they grow up.
V.”

Those who only say that a “tireless translator of Croatian literature” passed away, without mentioning his translations of the authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, even Macedonia and Slovenia (let's not use the “from Vardar to Triglav” phrase), do not show one morsel of respect for this man because they neglect almost half of his work. It seems that even an in memoriam has to be ethnically cleansed.

Those who claim that it is either an anti-Serb translator or a Croat nationalist who passed away, should know that Dušan Karpatský:

- was a Krležian.
- was one of the founders of the Czech Friends for Indivisible Bosnia and Herzegovina Society.
- translated in 1992 the famous Danilo Kiš essay *About Nationalism*, which describes nationalism as both a collective and individual form of paranoia.
- refused in 1995 to translate an anthology of Croatian war poetry by Sanader and Stamać titled, *At This Terrible Moment*.
- refused in 1996 to translate Franjo Tuđman's *Destiny of the People* or *Horrors of War*.
- was, until his death, a member of Lastavica (Swallow), a Prague society of citizens from former Yugoslavia, and that his most recent books of translations were published in cooperation with this society.

To say 'no' to Ivo Sanader or to ambassador Zlatko Stahuljak, who personally pressured him to translate the “valuable” work of Franjo Tuđman, meant closing many doors and being denied many opportunities...

Ambassador Stahuljak wrote in his April 30, 1996 letter: “You remember that I never urged you, let alone forced you to translate the book of poetry by Sanader and Stamać, *At This Terrible Moment* ... (...) The situation is different now. Franjo Tuđman's *Destiny of the People*, as you say yourself, is the best he has written so far, an objectively worthy book that depicts Croatia and Croats in a positive light... And it is a different situation for me, as well, as I personally will be put to a test if I don't do anything, because this book is really one of a great value. You are the best one, the only one who can interpret it and capture the book's exact spirit and translate it into highly understandable Czech, so we can publish the book here and ensure its future positive impact for Croatia (...)”

Despite numerous attempts (let's admit it, a tremendous pressure, out of the ordinary monetary compensation, and an extra bonus in the form of an opportunity to meet the President and visit Brioni), Dušan Karpatský still did not translate the book, knowing very well that someone else certainly will. The “tireless translator of Croatian literature” described his relationship with Ambassador Stahuljak as follows: “Our cooperation, unfortunately, was not a very good one: I did not want to translate what the Ambassador asked me to, and he, on the other hand, did not show any interest in what I was translating and was able to publish without the help of the state he was representing”.

And what was the tireless translator translating at the time? He was translating works by Miroslav Krleža, Dubravka Ugrešić, Predrag Matvejević, but also Danilo Kiš, Raymond Rehnicker... He did love Croatia, but which one?

It is obvious that Karpatský, as a Krležian, and consequently an internationalist, has risen above the pitiful nationalist standards, towards which both the Croatian and Serbian nationalists kept pushing him. The nationalists, by doing so, do not actually care whether he is a translator of Croatian or Serbian authors, they only care that their black-and-white, nationalistic world view persists.

The last farewell and cremation of Dušan Karpatský took place at the Olšanské cemetery in Prague on February 9, 2017. It is the same cemetery where the commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian occupying force, with the typical Austrian name of Filipović, was buried. This reminded me of an episode from that period: when the Austro-Hungarian military was in the process of 'liberating' Mostar in 1878, an operation led by a general with another typical Austrian name, Jovanović, a huge confusion broke out among the population of Mostar as they could not agree on whether to greet the 'liberators' with signs in Cyrillic or Latin. They finally agreed on the Latin signage to be mixed with Serbian flags. In addition, a Turkish-looking triumphal arch was erected, made from very expensive cloth and velvet, with a Turkish sign on it. And all four Jewish families, numbering 19 souls altogether, prepared a warm reception as well...

It is customary among Czech people to play three songs during funeral or cremation services. Three years ago, when we said our goodbyes to Mrs. Ema Karpatský, the wife of Dušan, a woman with whom he spent half of a century, the last song played was Goodbye by Arsen Dedić. With that song we said farewell to our Dušan. As the final curtain fell, the familiar voice of Arsen echoed:

*“You'll go by train,
I by ship,
Goodbye”*

And so Dušan Karpatský left us to be with his Ema, his Krleža, all while listening to Arsen's verses, the singer with whom he shared an extraordinary and respectful friendship. Just two days after Dušan's passing, his friend, Predrag Matvejević, who used to greet Dušan with “Sincere (Krležian) greetings”, joined him.

Dear Dušan, I, too, send my sincere Krležian greetings to you, with the hope that in the happy hunting grounds up there where you are headed, no such people exist whose works you would refuse to translate.

**All quotations are from: Karpatský, Dušan: Epistolary. Češki i slovački pisana pisma prevela i pjesme prepjevala Dubravka Dorotić Sesar. Zagreb, Pula, Sarajevo, 2010.*

Adin Ljuca, (translated by Esma Hadžiselimović), March 24, 2017

HURT HAWKS

I

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,

No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.

He stands under the oak-bush and waits
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom
And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.

He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
The curs of the day come and torment him
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,

The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.

You do not know him, you communal people, or you have forgotten him;
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying, remember him.

II

I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk;
but the great redtail
Had nothing left but unable misery
From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that trailed under his talons when he moved.

We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death,
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
Implacable arrogance.

I gave him the lead gift in the twilight.
What fell was relaxed, Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.

Robinson Jeffers, March 20, 2017

A LITERARY ROMANCE

I met her somehow through correspondence
or poetry or magazines and she began sending me
very sexy poems about rape and lust, and this
being mixed in with a minor intellectualism
confused me somewhat and
I got in my car and drove North
through the mountains and valleys and freeways
without sleep, coming off a drunk, just divorced,
jobless, aging, tired, wanting mostly to sleep
for five or ten years, I finally found the motel
in a small sunny town by a dirt road,
and I sat there smoking a cigarette
thinking, you must really be insane,
and then I got out an hour late
to meet my date; she was pretty damned old,
almost as old as I, not very sexy
and she gave me a very hard raw apple
which I chewed on with my remaining teeth;
she was dying of some unnamed disease
something like asthma, and she said,
I want to tell you a secret, and I said,
I know: you are a virgin, 35 years old.
and she got out a notebook, ten or twelve poems:
a life's work and I had to read them
and I tried to be kind
but they were very bad.
and I took her somewhere, the boxing matches,
and she coughed in the smoke
and kept looking around and around
at all the people
and then at the fighters
clenching her hands.
you never get excited, do you? she asked.
but I got pretty excited in the hills that night,
and met her three or four more times
helped her with some of her poems
and she rammed her tongue halfway down
my throat but when I left her
she was still a virgin
and a very bad poetess.
I think that when a woman has kept her
legs closed for 35 years
it's too late
either for love
or for
poetry.

Charles Bukowski, March 17, 2017

MRS. BENJAMIN PANTIER

I know that he told that I snared his soul
With a snare which bled him to death.
And all the men loved him,
And most of the women pitied him.
But suppose you are really a lady, and have delicate tastes,

And loathe the smell of whiskey and onions.
And the rhythm of Wordsworth's "Ode" runs in your ears,
While he goes about from morning till night
Repeating bits of that common thing;
"Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"
And then, suppose:
You are a woman well endowed,
And the only man with whom the law and morality
Permit you to have the marital relation
Is the very man that fills you with disgust
Every time you think of it - hile you think of it
Every time you see him?
That's why I drove him away from home
To live with his dog in a dingy room
Back of his office.

Edgar Lee Maters, March 13, 2017

HISTORY

History has to live with what was here,
clutching and close to fumbling all we had -
it is so dull and gruesome how we die,
unlike writing, life never finishes.
Abel was finished; death is not remote,
a flash-in-the-pan electrifies the skeptic,
his cows crowding like skulls against high-voltage wire,
his baby crying all night like a new machine.
As in our Bibles, white-faced, predatory,
the beautiful, mist-drunken hunter's moon ascends -
a child could give it a face: two holes, two holes,
my eyes, my mouth, between them a skull's no-nose.
O there's a terrifying innocence in my face
drenched with the silver salvage of the mornfrost.

Robert Lowell, March 10, 2017

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.

Robert Frost, March 6, 2017

THIS IS THE FIRST THING

This is the first thing
I have understood:
Time is the echo of an axe
Within a wood.

Philip Larkin, March 3, 2017

ACHILL

I lie and imagine a first light gleam in the bay
After one more night of erosion and nearer the grave,
Then stand and gaze from the window at break of day
As a shearwater skims the ridge of an incoming wave;
And I think of my son a dolphin in the Aegean,
A sprite among sails knife-bright in a seasonal wind,
And wish he were here where currachs walk on the ocean
To ease with his talk the solitude locked in my mind.

I sit on a stone after lunch and consider the glow
Of the sun through mist, a pearl bulb containedly fierce;
A rain-shower darkens the schist for a minute or so
Then it drifts away and the sloe-black patches disperse.
Croagh Patrick towers like Naxos over the water
And I think of my daughter at work on her difficult art
And wish she were with me now between thrush and plover,
Wild thyme and sea-thrift, to lift the weight from my heart.

The young sit smoking and laughing on the bridge at evening
Like birds on a telephone pole or notes on a score.
A tin whistle squeals in the parlour, once more it is raining,
Turf-smoke inclines and a wind whines under the door;
And I lie and imagine the lights going on in the harbor
Of white-housed Náousa, your clear definition at night,
And wish you were here to upstage my disconsolate labour
As I glance through a few thin pages and switch off the light.

Derek Mahon, February 27, 2017

ANECDOTE OF THE JAR

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

Wallace Stevens, February 24, 2017

FRIENDLY ADVICE TO A LOT OF YOUNG MEN

Go to Tibet
Ride a camel.

Read the bible.
Dye your shoes blue.
Grow a beard.
Circle the world in a paper canoe.
Subscribe to The Saturday Evening Post.
Chew on the left side of your mouth only.
Marry a woman with one leg and shave with a straight razor.
And carve your name in her arm.

Brush your teeth with gasoline.
Sleep all day and climb trees at night.
Be a monk and drink buckshot and beer.
Hold your head under water and play the violin.
Do a belly dance before pink candles.
Kill your dog.
Run for mayor.
Live in a barrel.
Break your head with a hatchet.
Plant tulips in the rain.

But don't write poetry.
Charles Bukowski, February 20, 2017

FORK

This strange thing must have crept
Right out of hell.
It resembles a bird's foot
Worn around the cannibal's neck.

As you hold it in your hand,
As you stab with it into a piece of meat,
It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird:
Its head which like your fist
Is large, bald, beakless, and blind.

Charles Simic, February 17, 2017

GRASS

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work -
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:

What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

Carl Sandburg, February 13, 2017

HOD PUTT

HERE I lie close to the grave
Of Old Bill Piersol,
Who grew rich trading with the Indians, and who
Afterwards took the bankrupt law

And emerged from it richer than ever.
Myself grown tired of toil and poverty
And beholding how Old Bill and others grew in wealth,
Robbed a traveler one night near Proctor's Grove,
Killing him unwittingly while doing so,
For the which I was tried and hanged.
That was my way of going into bankruptcy.
Now we who took the bankrupt law in our respective ways
Sleep peacefully side by side.
Edgar Li Masters, February 10, 2017

A SUPERMARKET IN CALIFORNIA

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for
I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache
self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went
into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families
shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the
avocados, babies in the tomatoes! - and you, Garcia Lorca, what
were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery
boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the
pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans
following you, and followed in my imagination by the store
detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our
solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen
delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in
an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the
supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The
trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be
lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher,
what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and
you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat
disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

Allen Ginsberg, February 6, 2017

ABANDON ME NOT, WORLD!

(Omer Hadziselimovic 1946-2016, In Memoriam)

Abandon me not, world, do not leave, naive swallow... Omer's death is more than two months old, but these verses by Miljkovic¹ still drum in my head and have been doing so since the day that brief message arrived in November of last year (only three days before his final exit) that nothing more could be done. We had known each other for only four years, but our friendship was honest and deep, like a forty-year-old well. When, from time to time, I toss a memory pebble into it, a whisper comes out. That is how I still communicate with Omer Hadziselimovic. I told him in recent days that I can't come to terms with the void he birthed, that his absence from life is unexcused - and his death utterly unfounded.

We found each other late in life, under strange circumstances, and, like in that unforgettable Eugenio Montale poem, I can say that **even so it has been short, our long journey**, I still went, arm in arm with Omer, **down a million stairs** of his translator's workshop. He led me into secret chambers, unlocked treasure trunks, entrusted me with valuable documents, taught me to love at least five American poets of whom I **only knew** before, but to whose poetry I am now addicted. Even my own poems are more recognizable to me today because of Omer; by translating them into English, he sharpened the farsighted focus on that one pair of my glasses:

FR. OMER

Dedicated to Omer Hadžiselimović

*Just as we are soft when it comes to the faults
of our own children, I could not step back from
my poems and view them with objective eyes.
I was not capable of reading them as someone
else's until the time when, at a resting-place for
diligences, my path crossed with Fr. Omer's.*

*Fr. Omer sat in a darkened room going through
freshly arrived mail. Now and then, coughing
or putting down his monocle, he'd startle the flame
on the candle. He'd bring my letters to his ear
and listen to them for a long time before copying
them to the reserve language and arranging
them in a shoebox. Today I got the package
and am sorting the mail that has just arrived.
I'm bringing my poems to my ear and listening
to them for the first time as someone else.*

He was born in 1946, and lived in Sarajevo until 1994. Majored in English and German, got his Master's degree, then his doctorate, taught at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, and along the way was promoted to the top academic ranks. It was as if he didn't remember any of it! His academic interests centered around English and American history and American literature. I never asked questions! He lived through the two most difficult years of the Sarajevo siege. Never talked much about it! From 1994 on he lived in the United States, taught at Loyola University in Chicago, participated in a number of literary projects, wrote, translated, received a number of recognitions, awards... Never boasted! With Marko Vesovic, the best contemporary living expert on how to read poetry, translated to and from English. Totally opposite personalities, yet top notch translations... I, too, remember exchanging up to twenty messages with Fra Omer before settling upon the perfect English words while translating some tough verses of mine. I don't know how he had the patience, or how he could even put up with an English language ignoramus like me.

Plans are made to fail, and when I peer into my sehara² filled with memories of Omer, the first thing I see is what's missing: a planned reunion on Hvar in the summer of 2016, strolls along the plowed sea, hikes to the old tavern in the abandoned village of Humac ... His Dina and Belma, so far away, whom he misses all the time, his Esma, always at his side, never whimpering. Who will translate *this* poetry for us now? Then again, haven't we already translated everything, is there even anything left to say?

TYPESSETTER

*I have all the words, in all their nuances,
but there is nothing to speak anymore.*

*It's clear I'm in pitch darkness, the only
light - the eyes of keyholes. It's unclear
which side the precipices are on.*

*I have all the keys, I keep them in coded
safes. But I find it harder and harder to love:
there is no one to open them to anymore.*

Omer has been dead for more than two months now, and I don't know if his ashes have been given to the winds to scatter selflessly across continents. I haven't asked! Because it doesn't matter. When you are dust in one place, you are dust everywhere. That way you're returning home. Perhaps by the same road, carrying with you the same beauty and the same dangers so they can surprise you in an unfamiliar place.

Judging by the anachronistic moral principles he followed, Omer Hadžiselimovic wasn't really of this world. Rather, I would say that he belonged to another long-extinct human species, but somehow, like in a bad movie, accidentally slipped into the future. Now everything is in its right place again, and I believe that someone will soon stumble upon Omer's stecak³ while wandering through some Bosnian Bogumil⁴ necropolis. And that, on that ancient stone, one will still be able to glimpse the fitting epitaph:
He never said MINE or YOURS, never that icy word 5.

¹ Branko Miljković. A post-World War Serbian poet who ended his own life aged twenty-seven.

² Sehara, an artfully adorned box or trunk used for keeping the most precious belongings

³ Stećak, medieval tombstones in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighboring countries.

⁴ Bogumili, members of the medieval Bosnian church, followers of the religious and political movement that originated in the tenth century as a response to the social stratification and as opposition to the state and church authorities.

⁵ Lightly modified verse of Greek poet Konstantinos Kavafis

Milorad Pejić (translated by Esma Hadžiselimović), February 3, 2017

SONNET

All we need is fourteen lines, well, thirteen now,
and after this one just a dozen
to launch a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas,
then only ten more left like rows of beans.
How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan
and insist the iambic bongos must be played
and rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,
one for every station of the cross.
But hang on here while we make the turn
into the final six where all will be resolved,
where longing and heartache will find an end,
where Laura will tell Petrarch to put down his pen,
take off those crazy medieval tights,
blowout the lights, and come at last to bed.

Billy Collins, January 30, 2017

THE TRAGEDY OF LEAVES

I awakened to dryness and the ferns were dead,
the potted plants yellow as corn;
my woman was gone
and the empty bottles like bled corpses
surrounded me with their uselessness;
the sun was still good, though,
and my landlady's note cracked in fine and
undemanding yellowness; what was needed now
was a good comedian, ancient style, a jester
with jokes upon absurd pain; pain is absurd
because it exists, nothing more;
I shaved carefully with an old razor
the man who had once been young and
said to have genius; but
that's the tragedy of the leaves,
the dead ferns, the dead plants;
and I walked into a dark hall
where the landlady stood
execrating and final,
sending me to hell,
waving her fat, sweaty arms
and screaming
screaming for rent
because the world has failed us
both

Charles Bukowski, January 27, 2017

IN MONTECITO

In a fashionable suburb of Santa Barbara,
Montecito, there visited me one night at midnight
A scream with breasts. As it hung there in the sweet air
That was always the right temperature, the contractors,
Who had undertaken to dismantle it, stripped off
The lips, let the air out of the breasts.

People disappear
Even in Montecito, Greenie Taliaferro,
In her with maillot, her good figure almost firm,
Her old pepper-and-salt hair stripped by the hairdresser
To nothing and dyed platinum - Greenie has left her Bentley.
They have thrown away her electric toothbrush; someone else slips
The key into the lock of her safeti-deposit box

At the Crocker-Anglo Bank; her seat at the cricket matches
Is warmed by buttocks less delectable than hers.
Greenie's girdle is empty.

A scream hangs there in the night:
They strip off the lips, let the air out of the breast,
And Greenie has gone into Greater Montecito
That surrounds Montecito like the echo of a scream.
Randahl Jarrell, January 23, 2017

THE 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, sorefooted, 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 continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might 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.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, January 20, 2017

ORCA

Sea-lions loafed in the swinging tide in the inlet, long fluent creatures
Bigger than horses, and at home in their element
As if the Pacific Ocean has been made for them. Farther off the shore the island-rocks
Bristled with quiet birds, gulls, cormorants, pelicans, hundreds and thousands

Standing thick as grass on a cut of turf. Beyond these, blue, gray, green, wind scaked, the ocean
Looked vacant; but then I saw a little black sail
That left a foam-line; while I watched there were two of them, two black triangles, tacking and veering, converging
Toward the rocks and the shore. I knew well enough
What they were: the dorsal fins of two killer whales: but how the sea-lions
Low-floating within the rock-throat knew it, I know not. Whether they heard of they smelled them, suddenly
They were in panic; and some swam for the islands, others
Blindly along the granite cliffs of the inlet; one of them, more pitiful, scrabbled the cliff
In hope to climb it: at that moment black death drove in,
Silently like a shadow into the sea-gorge. It had the shape, the size, and it seemed the speed
Of one of those flying vipers with which the Germans lashed London. The water boiled for a moment
And nothing seen; and at that same moment
The birds went up from the islands, the soaring gulls, laborious pelicans, arrowy cormorants, a screaming
And wheeling sky. Meanwhile, below me, brown blood and foam
Striped the water of the inlet.
Here was death, and with terror, yet it looked clean and bright, it was beautiful.
Why? Because there was nothing human involved, suffering nor causing; no lies, no smirk and no malice;
All strict and decent; the will of man had nothing to do here.
The earth is a star, its human element
Is what darkens it. War is evil, the peace will be evil, cruelty is evil; death is not evil. But the breed of man
Has been queer from the start. It looks like a botched experiment that has run wild and ought to be stopped.

Robinson Jeffers, January 16, 2017

A HOLE IN THE FLOOR

for René Magritte

The carpenter's made a hole
In the parlor floor, and I'm standing
Staring down into it now
At four o'clock in the evening,
As Schliemann stood when his shovel
Knocked on the crowns of Troy.

A clean-cut sawdust sparkles
On the grey, shaggy laths,
And here is a cluster of shavings
From the time when the floor was laid.
They are silvery-gold, the color
Of Hesperian apple-parings.

Kneeling, I look in under
Where the joists go into hiding.
A pure street, faintly littered
With bits and strokes of light,
Enters the long darkness
Where its parallels will meet.

The radiator-pipe
Rises in middle distance
Like a shuttered kiosk, standing
Where the only news is night.
Here's it's not painted green,
As it is in the visible world.

For God's sake, what am I after?
Some treasure, or tiny garden?
Or that untrodden place,
The house's very soul,
Where time has stored our footbeats
And the long skein of our voices?

Not these, but the buried strangeness
Which nourishes the known:
That spring from which the floor-lamp
Drinks now a wilder bloom,
Inflaming the damask love-seat
And the whole dangerous room.

Richard Wilbur, January 13, 2017

PERSONAL HELICON

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

A shallow one under a dry stone ditch
Fructified like any aquarium.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch
A white face hovered over the bottom.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
With a clean new music in it. And one
Was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall
Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

Seamus Heaney, January 9, 2017

OMER

Gentle. Bright. Amused - and amusing. This was Omer, my friend from 1969 to 2016.

The geography of our friendship ranged around YU and the Middle West: Bohinj, Sarajevo, Granville OH, Oberlin OH, Mljet, Lopud, Visegrad, Bloomington IN, Columbus OH, Madison IN, Promajna, Dayton OH, Richmond IN, Chicago. The memories flood me.

First in Omer came love of Bosnia. Dizdar, Berber, stecci, banje, turcizmi. He took son Dan and me to see Goat Bridge, and up Trebevic. There was dinner at Ilidza. And he led me into the library for research.

Our friendship was lexical, syntactic, all about usage. He loved it that English had no word for "tepati." He enjoyed referring to his diminutive and adored Esma as his "wifelet." He thought it fun when some bureaucrat made him Irish: "O'Hadzisel." And he couldn't address Bruce and me simply as "Bigelows": we were Bigelowi, Bigelovi, Bigelovci, Bigelowljevi, Bigelowskys!

In 1973 he proposed "mljetovanje" instead of the less "pioneering" "lopudovanje." But, he warned, "The real problem is that there are scorpions, snakes, mongooses etc on Mljet and they like to bite, eat or nibble at tourists, especially foreign..." We had a super time.

The miracle was that during the war, when his daughter Belma was living with me, he had it in him to write entertaining letters complete with cartoons (e.g. Omer bicycling for water). The man was skin and bones when he arrived at the Dayton airport.

These last decades he shared the joys of his daughters' early adulthood, he co-created The Spirit of Bosnia and he delighted in sharing the bond of Samizdat with Mišo Pejić. He thrived in the world of words, and I loved joining him there.

Ann/ Ana Bigelow, January 6, 2017

DREAMLESS

Old grey-haired waitresses
in cafes at night
have given it up,
and as I walk down sidewalks of
light and look into windows
of nursing homes
I can see that it is no longer
with them.
I see people sitting on park benches
and I can see by the way they
sit and look
that it is gone.
I see people driving cars
and I see by the way
they drive their cars
that they neither love nor are
loved -
nor do they consider
sex. It is all forgotten
like an old movie.
I see people in department stores and
supermarkets
walking down aisles
buying things
and I can see by the way their clothing
fits them and by the way they walk
and by their faces and their eyes
that they care for nothing
and that nothing cares
for them.
I see a hundred people a day
who have given up
entirely.
if I go to the racetrack
or a sporting event
I can see thousands
that feel for nothing or
no one
and get no feeling
back.
everywhere I see those who
crave nothing but
food, shelter, and
clothing; they concentrate
on that,
dreamlessly
I do not understand why these people do not
vanish
I do not understand why these people do not
expire
why the clouds
do not murder them
or why the dogs
do not murder them
or why the flowers and the children
do not murder them,
I do not understand.
I suppose they are murdered
yet I can't adjust to the
fact of them
because they are so many.
each day,
each night,
there are more of them
in the subways and
in the buildings and
in the parks
they feel no terror
at not loving

or at not
being loved
so many many many
of my fellow
creatures

Charles Bukowski, January 2, 2017