

## LOSSES

It was not dying: everybody died.  
It was not dying: we had died before  
In the routine crashes-- and our fields  
Called up the papers, wrote home to our folks,  
And the rates rose, all because of us.  
We died on the wrong page of the almanac,  
Scattered on mountains fifty miles away;  
Diving on haystacks, fighting with a friend,  
We blazed up on the lines we never saw.  
We died like aunts or pets or foreigners.  
(When we left high school nothing else had died  
For us to figure we had died like.)

In our new planes, with our new crews, we bombed  
The ranges by the desert or the shore,  
Fired at towed targets, waited for our scores--  
And turned into replacements and woke up  
One morning, over England, operational.

It wasn't different: but if we died  
It was not an accident but a mistake  
(But an easy one for anyone to make.)  
We read our mail and counted up our missions--  
In bombers named for girls, we burned  
The cities we had learned about in school--  
Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among  
The people we had killed and never seen.  
When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;  
When we died they said, 'Our casualties were low.'

They said, 'Here are the maps'; we burned the cities.

It was not dying --no, not ever dying;  
But the night I died I dreamed that I was dead,  
And the cities said to me: 'Why are you dying?  
We are satisfied, if you are; but why did I die?'

*Randahl Jarrell, December 30, 2019*

## CHRISTO'S

Two Workmen were carrying a sheet of asbestos  
down the main street of Dingle;  
it must have been nailed, at a slight angle,  
to the same-sized gap between Brandon

and whichever's the next mountain.  
Nine o'clock. We watched the village dogs  
take turns to spritz the hotel's refuse-sacks.  
I remembered Tralee's unbiodegradable flags

from the time of the hunger-strikes.  
We drove all day past mounds of sugar-beet,  
hay-stacks, silage-pits, building-sites,  
a thatched cottage even—

all of them draped in black polythene  
and weighted against the north-east wind  
by concrete blocks, old tyres; bags of sand  
at a makeshift army post

across the border. By the time we got to Belfast  
the whole of Ireland would be under wraps  
like, as I said, 'one of your man's landscapes'.  
'Your man's? You don't mean Christo's?'

*Paul Muldoon, December 27, 2019*

### **BRUSSELS IN WINTER**

Wandering through cold streets tangled like old string,  
Coming on fountains rigid in the frost,  
Its formula escapes you; it has lost  
The certainty that constitutes a thing.

Only the old, the hungry and the humbled  
Keep at this temperature a sense of place,  
And in their misery are all assembled;  
The winter holds them like an Opera-House.

Ridges of rich apartments loom to-night  
Where isolated windows glow like farms,  
A phrase goes packed with meaning like a van,

A look contains the history of man,  
And fifty francs will earn a stranger right  
To take the shuddering city in his arms.

*Wystan Hugh Auden, December 23, 2019*

### **WAITING FOR THE TYPHOON**

A middle-class district. The hammers tapping  
All day, and all the radios talking of so many  
Metres per second, and all the aerials flapping.  
Cans and candles have vanished from the shops.  
The price of timber, for boarding the windows,  
Has gone up and up. The tapping never stops.  
The worst since—when was it? Oh damn it all,  
It is always the worst something since sometime—  
The worst rainy season, the worst A-bomb, the  
Worst H-bomb, the worst political scandal, the  
Worst harvest, or the worst outbreak of sex-crime.  
Listening to the hammers and the chattered warning,  
Watching the tethered trees and the urgent clouds—  
    tonight or tomorrow morning?  
One thinks of those who are truly embarrassed,  
Whose houses would faint at the sight of a hammer,  
Whose homes, tomorrow, will have fallen down  
    in the worst way since last time.

Even the cicadas begin to sound a little harassed.  
Turning a desperate somersault,  
A small green insect shelters in the bowels of my  
quivering typewriter—  
Good reason for me to call a halt.

*Dennis Joseph Enright, December 20, 2019*

### **THE CYCLES OF DONJI VAKUF**

We take Emerald to Bugojno, then the Opal route  
to Donji Vakuf where Kalashnikovs still shoot  
at retreating Serbs or at the sky  
to drum up the leaden beat of victory.  
Once more, though this time Serbian, homes  
get pounded to façades like honeycombs.  
This time it's the Bosnian Muslims' turn  
to 'cleanse' a taken town, to loot, and burn  
Donji Vakuf fell last night at 11.  
Victory's signaled by firing rounds to Heaven  
and for the god to whom their victory's owed.  
We see some victors cycling down the road  
on bikes that they're too big for. They feel so tall  
as victors, all conveyances seem small,  
but one, whose knees keep bumping on his chin,  
rides a kid's cycle, with a mandolin,  
also childish size, strapped to the saddle,  
jogging against him as he tries to pedal.  
His machine gun and the mandolin impede  
his furious pedaling, and slow down the speed  
appropriate to victors, huge limned and big-booted,  
and he's defeated by the small bike that he's looted.

The luckiest looters come down dragging cattle,  
two and three apiece they've won in battle.  
A goat whose udder seems about to burst  
squirts milk to quench a victor's thirst  
which others quench with a shared beer, as a cow,  
who's no idea she's a Muslim's now,  
sprays a triumphal arch of piss across  
the path of her new happy Bosnian boss.  
Another struggles with stuffed rucksack, gun, and bike,  
small and red, he knows his kid will like,  
and he hands me his Kalashnikov to hold  
to free his hands. Rain makes it wet and cold.  
When he's balanced his booty, he makes off,  
for a moment forgetting his Kalashnikov,  
which he slings with all his looted load  
on to his shoulder, and trudges down the road  
where a solitary reaper passes by,  
scythe on his shoulder, wanting fields to dry,  
hoping, listening to the thunder, that the day  
will brighten up enough to cut his hay.

And tonight some small boy will be glad  
he's got the present of a bike from soldier dad,  
who braved the Serb artillery and fire

to bring back a scuffed red bike with one flat tyre.  
And among the thousands fleeing north, another  
with all his gladness gutted, with his mother,  
knowing the nightmare they are cycling in,  
will miss the music of his mandolin.

*Tony Harrison, December 16, 2019*

## **THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF SARAJEVO**

After the hours that Sarajevans pass  
queuing with empty canisters for gas  
to get the refills they wheel home in prams,  
or queuing for the precious meager grams  
of bread they're rationed to each day,  
and often dodging snipers on the way,  
or struggling up sometimes eleven flights  
of stairs with water, then you'd think that the nights  
of Sarajevo would be totally devoid  
of people walking streets Serb shells destroyed,  
but tonight in Sarajevo that's just not the case—

The young go walking at a stroller's pace,  
black shapes impossible to mark  
as Muslim, Serb or Croat in such dark.  
In unlit streets you can't distinguish who  
calls bread hljeb or hleb or calls it kruh.  
All take the evening air with stroller's stride,  
no torches guide them but they don't collide  
except as one of the flirtatious ploys  
when a girl's dark shape is fancied by some boy's.

Then the tender radar of the tone of voice  
shows by its signals she approves his choice.  
Then match or lighter to a cigarette  
to check in her eyes if he's made progress yet.

And I see a pair who've certainly progressed  
beyond the tone of voice and match flare test  
and he's about, I think, to take her hand  
and lead her away from where they stand  
on two shell splash scars, where in '92  
Serb mortars massacred the breadshop queue  
and blood-dunked crusts of shredded bread  
lay on the pavement with the broken dead.  
And at their feet in holes made by the mortar  
that caused the massacre, now full of water  
from the rain that's poured down half the day,  
though now even the smallest clouds have cleared away,  
leaving the Sarajevo star-filled evening sky  
ideally bright and clear for bomber's eye,  
in those two rain-full shell-holes the boy sees  
fragments of the splintered Pleiades,  
sprinkled on those death-deep, death-dark wells  
splashed on the pavement by Serb mortar shells.

The dark boy shape leads dark girl shape away

To share one coffee in a candlelit café  
Until the curfew, and he holds her hand  
Behind AID flour sacks refilled with sand.

*Tony Harrison, December 13, 2019*

### **THE RAIN**

All night the sound had  
come back again,  
and again falls  
this quite, persistent rain.

What am I to myself  
that must be remembered,  
insisted upon  
so often? Is it

that never the ease,  
even the hardness,  
of rain falling  
will have for me

something other than this,  
something not so insistent--  
am I to be locked in this  
final uneasiness.

Love, if you love me,  
lie next to me.  
Be for me, like rain,  
the getting out

of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-  
lust of intentional indifference.  
Be wet  
with a decent happiness.

*Robert Creeley, December 9, 2019*

### **A DREAM OF SUFFOCATION**

Accountants hover over the earth like helicopters,  
Dropping bits of paper engraved with Hegel's name.  
Badgers carry the papers on their fur  
To their den, where the entire family dies in the night.

A chorus girl stands for hours behind her curtains  
Looking out at the street.  
In a window of a trucking service  
There is a branch painted white.  
A stuffed baby alligator grips that branch tightly  
To keep away from the dry leaves on the floor.

The honeycomb at night has strange dreams:

Small black trains going round and round--  
Old warships drowning in the raindrop.

*Robert Bly, December 6, 2019*

## **THE MAP**

Land lies in water; it is shadowed green.  
Shadows, or are they shallows, at its edges  
showing the line of long sea-weeded ledges  
where weeds hang to the simple blue from green.  
Or does the land lean down to lift the sea from under,  
drawing it unperturbed around itself?  
Along the fine tan sandy shelf  
is the land tugging at the sea from under?

The shadow of Newfoundland lies flat and still.  
Labrador's yellow, where the moony Eskimo  
has oiled it. We can stroke these lovely bays,  
under a glass as if they were expected to blossom,  
or as if to provide a clean cage for invisible fish.  
The names of seashore towns run out to sea,  
the names of cities cross the neighboring mountains  
-the printer here experiencing the same excitement  
as when emotion too far exceeds its cause.  
These peninsulas take the water between thumb and finger  
like women feeling for the smoothness of yard-goods.

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,  
lending the land their waves' own conformation:  
and Norway's hare runs south in agitation,  
profiles investigate the sea, where land is.  
Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?  
-What suits the character or the native waters best.  
Topography displays no favorites; North's as near as West.  
More delicate than the historians' are the map-makers' colors.

*Elizabeth Bishop, December 2, 2019*

## **SONG**

The weight of the world  
is love.  
Under the burden  
of solitude,  
under the burden  
of dissatisfaction

the weight,  
the weight we carry  
is love.

Who can deny?  
In dreams  
it touches

the body,  
in thought  
constructs  
a miracle,  
in imagination  
anguishes  
till born  
in human--  
looks out of the heart  
burning with purity--  
for the burden of life  
is love,

but we carry the weight  
wearily,  
and so must rest  
in the arms of love  
at last,  
must rest in the arms  
of love.

No rest  
without love,  
no sleep  
without dreams  
of love--  
be mad or chill  
obsessed with angels  
or machines,  
the final wish  
is love  
--cannot be bitter,  
cannot deny,  
cannot withhold  
if denied:

the weight is too heavy

--must give  
for no return  
as thought  
is given  
in solitude  
in all the excellence  
of its excess.

The warm bodies  
shine together  
in the darkness,  
the hand moves  
to the center  
of the flesh,  
the skin trembles  
in happiness  
and the soul comes  
joyful to the eye--

yes, yes,  
that's what

I wanted,  
I always wanted,  
I always wanted,  
to return  
to the body  
where I was born.

*Allen Ginsberg, November 29, 2019*

### **TIMER**

Gold survives the fire that's hot enough  
to make you ashes in a standard urn  
An envelope of coarse official buff  
contains your wedding ring which wouldn't burn.  
Dad told me to tell them at St James's  
that the ring should go in the incinerator.  
That 'eternity' inscribed with both their names is  
his surety that they'd be together, 'later'.  
I signed for the parcelled clothing as the son,  
a cardy, apron, pants, bra, dress –  
the clerk phoned down: 6-8-8-3-1  
Has she still a ring on? (Slight pause) Yes!  
It's on my warm palm now, your burnished ring!  
I feel your ashes, head, arms, breasts, womb, legs,  
sift through its circle slowly, like that thing  
you used to let me watch to time the eggs.

*Tony Harrison, November 25, 2019*

### **THE LAUGHING HYENA BY HOKUSAI**

For him, it seems, everything was molten. Court ladies flow in gentle streams,  
Or, gathering lotus, strain sideways from their curving boat,  
A donkey prances, or a kite dances in the sky, or soars like sacrificial smoke.  
All is flux: waters fall and leap, and bridges leap and fall.  
Even his Tortoise undulates, and his Spring Hat is lively as a pool of fish.  
All he ever saw was sea: a sea of marble splinters--  
Long bright fingers claw across his pages, fjords and islands and shattered trees--

And the Laughing Hyena, cavalier of evil, as volcanic as the rest:  
Elegant in a flowered gown, a face like a bomb-burst,  
Featured with fangs and built about a rigid laugh,  
Ever moving, like a pond's surface where a corpse has sunk.

Between the raised talons of the right hand rests and object--  
At rest, like a pale island in a savage sea -- a child's head,  
Immobile, authentic, torn and bloody--  
The point of repose in the picture, the point of movement in us.

Terrible enough, this demon. Yet it is present and perfect,  
Firm as its horns, curling among its thick and handsome hair.  
I find it an honest visitant, even consoling, after all  
Those sententious phantoms, choked with rage and uncertainty,  
Who grimace from contemporary pages. It, at least,

Knows exactly why it laughs.

*Dennis Joseph Enright, November 22, 2019*

### **THE TROUBLE WITH POETRY**

The trouble with poetry, I realized  
as I walked along a beach one night --  
cold Florida sand under my bare feet,  
a show of stars in the sky --  
the trouble with poetry is  
that it encourages the writing of more poetry,  
more guppies crowding the fish tank,  
more baby rabbits  
hopping out of their mothers into the dewy grass.  
And how will it ever end?  
unless the day finally arrives  
when we have compared everything in the world  
to everything else in the world,  
and there is nothing left to do  
but quietly close our notebooks  
and sit with our hands folded on our desks.  
Poetry fills me with joy  
and I rise like a feather in the wind.  
Poetry fills me with sorrow  
and I sink like a chain flung from a bridge.  
But mostly poetry fills me  
with the urge to write poetry,  
to sit in the dark and wait for a little flame  
to appear at the tip of my pencil.  
And along with that, the longing to steal,  
to break into the poems of others  
with a flashlight and a ski mask.  
And what an unmerry band of thieves we are,  
cut-purses, common shoplifters,  
I thought to myself  
as a cold wave swirled around my feet  
and the lighthouse moved its megaphone over the sea,  
which is an image I stole directly  
from Lawrence Ferlinghetti --  
to be perfectly honest for a moment --  
the bicycling poet of San Francisco  
whose little amusement park of a book  
I carried in a side pocket of my uniform  
up and down the treacherous halls of high school.

*Billy Collins, November 18, 2019*

### **SOMETHING**

I approach with such  
a careful tremor, always  
I feel the finally foolish

question of how it is,

then, supposed to be felt,  
and by whom. I remember

once in a rented room on  
27th street, the woman I loved  
then, literally, after we

had made love on the large  
bed sitting across from  
a basin with two faucets, she

had to pee but was nervous,  
embarrassed I suppose I  
would watch her who had but

a moment ago been completely  
open to me, naked, on  
the same bed. Squatting, her

head reflected in the mirror,  
the hair dark there, the  
full of her face, the shoulders,

sat spread-legged, turned on  
one faucet and shyly pissed. What  
love might learn from such a sight.

*Robert Creeley, November 15, 2019*

### **IN DANGER FROM THE OUTER WORLD**

This burning in the eyes, as we open doors,  
This is only the body burdened down with leaves,  
The opaque flesh, heavy as November grass,  
Growing stubbornly, triumphant even at midnight.

And another day disappears into the cliff,  
And the Eskimos come to greet it with sharp cries--  
The black water swells up over the new hole.  
The grave moves forward from its ambush,

Moving over the hills on black feet,  
Living off the country,  
Leaving dogs and sheep murdered where it slept;  
Some shining thing, inside, that has served us well

Shakes its bamboo bars--  
It may be gone before we wake . . .

*Robert Bly, November 11, 2019*

### **LITTLE FATHER POEM**

We must stay away from our fathers,  
who have big ears. We must stay away

from our fathers, who are the snow.  
We must avoid the touch of the leaves  
who are our proud fathers. We must  
watch out for our father underfoot. Father  
forgave us when we did nothing wrong,  
Father made us well when we were healthy,  
now Father wants to support us  
when we weigh nothing, Father in his grave  
gives us everything we ever wanted,  
in a boat crossing who-knows-where,  
mist flat over the water,  
the sand smooth because soft.

*Mervin Bell, November 8, 2019*

## **URNS**

I thought it made me look more 'working class'  
(as if a bit of chequered cloth could bridge that gap!)  
I did a turn in it before the glass.  
My mother said: It suits you, your dad's cap.  
(She preferred me to wear suits and part my hair:  
You're every bit as good as that lot are!)

All the pension queue came out to stare.  
Dad was sprawled beside the postbox (still VR) ,  
his cap turned inside up beside his head,  
smudged H A H in purple Indian ink  
and Brylcreem slicks displayed so folks might think  
he wanted charity for dropping dead.

He never begged. For nowt! Death's reticence  
crowns his life, and me, I'm opening my trap  
to busk the class that broke him for the pence  
that splash like brackish tears into our cap.

*Tony Harrison, November 4, 2019*

## **THE FISH**

I caught a tremendous fish  
and held him beside the boat  
half out of water, with my hook  
fast in a corner of his mouth.  
He didn't fight.  
He hadn't fought at all.  
He hung a grunting weight,  
battered and venerable  
and homely. Here and there  
his brown skin hung in strips  
like ancient wallpaper,  
and its pattern of darker brown  
was like wallpaper:  
shapes like full-blown roses  
stained and lost through age.

He was speckled with barnacles,  
fine rosettes of lime,  
and infested  
with tiny white sea-lice,  
and underneath two or three  
rags of green weed hung down.  
While his gills were breathing in  
the terrible oxygen  
—the frightening gills,  
fresh and crisp with blood,  
that can cut so badly—  
I thought of the coarse white flesh  
packed in like feathers,  
the big bones and the little bones,  
the dramatic reds and blacks  
of his shiny entrails,  
and the pink swim-bladder  
like a big peony.  
I looked into his eyes  
which were far larger than mine  
but shallower, and yellowed,  
the irises backed and packed  
with tarnished tinfoil  
seen through the lenses  
of old scratched isinglass.  
They shifted a little, but not  
to return my stare.  
—It was more like the tipping  
of an object toward the light.  
I admired his sullen face,  
the mechanism of his jaw,  
and then I saw  
that from his lower lip  
—if you could call it a lip—  
grim, wet, and weaponlike,  
hung five old pieces of fish-line,  
or four and a wire leader  
with the swivel still attached,  
with all their five big hooks  
grown firmly in his mouth.  
A green line, frayed at the end  
where he broke it, two heavier lines,  
and a fine black thread  
still crimped from the strain and snap  
when it broke and he got away.  
Like medals with their ribbons  
frayed and wavering,  
a five-haired beard of wisdom  
trailing from his aching jaw.  
I stared and stared  
and victory filled up  
the little rented boat,  
from the pool of bilge  
where oil had spread a rainbow  
around the rusted engine  
to the bailer rusted orange,  
the sun-cracked thwarts,  
the oarlocks on their strings,  
the gunnels—until everything

was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!  
And I let the fish go.

*Elizabeth Bishop, November 1, 2019*

### **I AM A CAMERAMAN**

They suffer, and I catch only the surface.  
The rest is inexpressible, beyond  
What can be recorded. You can't be them.  
If they'd talk to you, you might guess  
What pain is like though they might spit on you.

Film is just a reflection  
Of the matchless despair of the century.  
There have been twenty centuries since charity began.  
Indignation is day-to-day stuff;  
It keeps us off the streets, it keeps us watching.

Film has no words of its own.  
It is a silent waste of things happening.  
Without us, when it is too late to help.  
What of the dignity of those caught suffering?  
It hurts me. I robbed them of privacy.

My young friends think Film will be all of Art.  
It will be revolutionary proof  
Their films will not guess wrongly and will not lie.  
They'll film what is happening behind barbed wire.  
They'll always know the truth and be famous.

Politics softens everything.  
Truth is known only to its victims.  
All else is photographs--a documentary  
The starving and the playboys perish in.  
Life disguises itself with professionalism.

Life tells the biggest lies of all,  
And draws wages from itself.  
Truth is a landscape the saintly tribes live on,  
And all the lenses of Japan and Germany  
Wouldn't know how to focus on it.

Life flickers on the frame like beautiful hummingbirds.  
That is the film that always comes out blank.  
The painting the artist can't get shapes to fit.  
The poem that shrugs off every word you try.  
The music no one has ever heard.

*Douglas Dunn, October 28, 2019*

### **ODE TO FAILURE**

"Many prophets have failed, their voices silent  
ghost-shouts in basements nobody heard dusty laughter in family attics

nor glanced them on park benches weeping with relief under empty sky  
Walt Whitman viva'd local losers - courage to Fat Ladies in the Freak Show!  
nervous prisoners whose mustached lips dripped sweat on chow lines -  
Mayakovsky cried, Then die! my verse, die like the workers' rank & file fusilladed in Petersburg!  
Prospero burned his Power books & plummeted his magic wand to the bottom of dragon seas  
Alexander the Great failed to find more worlds to conquer!  
O Failure I chant your terrifying name, accept me your 54 year old Prophet  
epicking Eternal Flop! I join your Pantheon of mortal bards, & hasten this ode with high blood pressure  
rushing to the top of my skull as if I wouldn't last another minute, like the Dying Gaul! to  
You, Lord of blind Monet, deaf Beethoven, armless Venus de Milo, headless Winged Victory!  
I failed to sleep with every bearded rosy-cheeked boy I jacked off over  
My tirades destroyed no Intellectual Unions of KGB & CIA in turtlenecks & underpants, their woolen  
suits & tweeds  
I never dissolved Plutonium or dismantled the nuclear Bomb before my skull lost hair  
I have not yet stopped the Armies of entire Mankind in their march toward World War III  
I never got to Heaven, Nirvana, X, Whatchamacallit, I never left Earth,  
I never learned to die."

*Allen Ginsberg, October 25, 2019*

### **SIGHTSEEING IN SIAM**

Along the long wide temple wall  
Extends a large and detailed painting.

A demon's head, its mouth square open,  
Inside the mouth a room of people squatting.

Its fangs the polished pillars of the room,  
The crimson carpet on the floor its tongue.

Inside this room a painting on the wall,  
A demon's head, its mouth square open.

Inside the mouth a room of people squatting,  
Their faces blank, the artist did not care.

Inside that room a painting on the wall,  
A demon's head, its mouth square open.

Somewhere you are squatting, somewhere there.  
Imagination, like the eyes that strain

Against the wall, is happily too weak  
To number all the jaws there are to slip.

*Dennis Joseph Enright, October 21, 2019*

### **THE FIRST NIGHT**

*The worst thing about death must be  
the first night.  
—Juan Ramón Jiménez*

Before I opened you, Jiménez,  
it never occurred to me that day and night

would continue to circle each other in the ring of death,

but now you have me wondering  
if there will also be a sun and a moon  
and will the dead gather to watch them rise and set

then repair, each soul alone,  
to some ghastly equivalent of a bed.  
Or will the first night be the only night,

a darkness for which we have no other name?  
How feeble our vocabulary in the face of death,  
How impossible to write it down.

This is where language will stop,  
the horse we have ridden all our lives  
rearing up at the edge of a dizzying cliff.

The word that was in the beginning  
and the word that was made flesh—  
those and all the other words will cease.

Even now, reading you on this trellised porch,  
how can I describe a sun that will shine after death?  
But it is enough to frighten me

into paying more attention to the world's day-moon,  
to sunlight bright on water  
or fragmented in a grove of trees,

and to look more closely here at these small leaves,  
these sentinel thorns,  
whose employment it is to guard the rose.

*Billy Collins, October 18, 2019*

## **THE ELEPHANT IS SLOW TO MATE**

The elephant, the huge old beast,  
is slow to mate;  
he finds a female, they show no haste  
they wait

for the sympathy in their vast shy hearts  
slowly, slowly to rouse  
as they loiter along the river-beds  
and drink and browse

and dash in panic through the brake  
of forest with the herd,  
and sleep in massive silence, and wake  
together, without a word.

So slowly the great hot elephant hearts  
grow full of desire,  
and the great beasts mate in secret at last,  
hiding their fire.

Oldest they are and the wisest of beasts  
so they know at last  
how to wait for the loneliest of feasts  
for the full repast.

They do not snatch, they do not tear;  
their massive blood  
moves as the moon-tides, near, more near  
till they touch in flood.

*David Herbert Lawrence, October 14, 2019*

### **AFTER LORCA**

The church is a business, and the rich  
are the business men.  
When they pull on the bells, the  
poor come piling in and when a poor man dies, he has a  
wooden  
cross, and they rush through the ceremony.

But when a rich man dies, they  
drag out the Sacrament  
and a golden Cross, and go doucement, doucement  
to the cemetery.

And the poor love it  
and think it's crazy.

*Robert Creeley, October 11, 2019*

### **THE BURIED TRAIN**

Tell me about the train that people say got buried  
By the avalanche--was it snow?--It was  
In Colorado, and no one saw it happen.  
There was smoke from the engine curling up

Lightly through fir tops, and the engine sounds.  
There were all those people reading--some  
From Thoreau, some from Henry Ward Beecher.  
And the engineer smoking and putting his head out.

I wonder when that happened. Was it after  
High School, or was it the year we were two?  
We entered this narrow place, and we heard the sound  
Above us--the train couldn't move fast enough.

It isn't clear what happened next. Are you and I  
Still sitting there in the train, waiting for the lights  
To go on? Or did the real train get really buried;  
So at night a ghost train comes out and keeps going...

*Robert Bly, October 4, 2019*

## IN THE WAITING ROOM

In Worcester, Massachusetts,  
I went with Aunt Consuelo  
to keep her dentist's appointment  
and sat and waited for her  
in the dentist's waiting room.  
It was winter. It got dark  
early. The waiting room  
was full of grown-up people,  
arctics and overcoats,  
lamps and magazines.  
My aunt was inside  
what seemed like a long time  
and while I waited I read  
the National Geographic  
(I could read) and carefully  
studied the photographs:  
the inside of a volcano,  
black, and full of ashes;  
then it was spilling over  
in rivulets of fire.  
Osa and Martin Johnson  
dressed in riding breeches,  
laced boots, and pith helmets.  
A dead man slung on a pole  
--"Long Pig," the caption said.  
Babies with pointed heads  
wound round and round with string;  
black, naked women with necks  
wound round and round with wire  
like the necks of light bulbs.  
Their breasts were horrifying.  
I read it right straight through.  
I was too shy to stop.  
And then I looked at the cover:  
the yellow margins, the date.  
Suddenly, from inside,  
came an oh! of pain  
--Aunt Consuelo's voice--  
not very loud or long.  
I wasn't at all surprised;  
even then I knew she was  
a foolish, timid woman.  
I might have been embarrassed,  
but wasn't. What took me  
completely by surprise  
was that it was me:  
my voice, in my mouth.  
Without thinking at all  
I was my foolish aunt,  
I--we--were falling, falling,  
our eyes glued to the cover  
of the National Geographic,  
February, 1918.  
I said to myself: three days  
and you'll be seven years old.  
I was saying it to stop  
the sensation of falling off

the round, turning world.  
into cold, blue-black space.  
But I felt: you are an I,  
you are an Elizabeth,  
you are one of them.  
Why should you be one, too?  
I scarcely dared to look  
to see what it was I was.  
I gave a sidelong glance  
--I couldn't look any higher--  
at shadowy gray knees,  
trousers and skirts and boots  
and different pairs of hands  
lying under the lamps.  
I knew that nothing stranger  
had ever happened, that nothing  
stranger could ever happen.  
Why should I be my aunt,  
or me, or anyone?  
What similarities--  
boots, hands, the family voice  
I felt in my throat, or even  
the National Geographic  
and those awful hanging breasts--  
held us all together  
or made us all just one?  
How--I didn't know any  
word for it--how "unlikely". . .  
How had I come to be here,  
like them, and overhear  
a cry of pain that could have  
got loud and worse but hadn't?  
The waiting room was bright  
and too hot. It was sliding  
beneath a big black wave,  
another, and another.  
Then I was back in it.  
The War was on. Outside,  
in Worcester, Massachusetts,  
were night and slush and cold,  
and it was still the fifth  
of February, 1918.

*Elizabeth Bishop, October 4, 2019*

## **THINGS WE DREAMT WE DIED FOR**

Flags of all sorts.  
The literary life.  
Each time we dreamt we'd done  
the gentlemanly thing,  
covering our causes  
in closets full of bones  
to remove ourselves forever  
from dearest possibilities,  
the old weapons re-injured us,  
the old armies conscripted us,

and we gave in to getting even,  
la little less like us  
if a lot less like others.  
Many, thus, gained fame  
in the way of great plunderers,  
retiring to the university  
to cultivate grand plunder-gardens  
in the service of literature,  
the young and no more wars.  
Their continuing tributes  
make them our greatest saviors,  
whose many fortunes are followed  
by the many who have not one.

*Mervin Bell, September 30, 2019*

### **GIBRALTAR**

Empire has rotted back,  
Like a man-eater  
After its aeon of terror, to one fang.

Apes! on their last legs--  
Rearguard of insolence--  
Snapping at peanuts and defecating.

The heirloom garrison's sold as a curio  
With a flare of Spanish hands  
And a two-way smile, wafer of insult,

Served in carefully-chipped English.  
The taxi-driver talking broken American  
Has this rock in his palm.

When the next Empire noses this way  
Let it sniff here.

*Ted Hughes, September 27, 2019*

### **LAST NIGHT IN CALCUTTA**

Still night. The old clock Ticks,  
half past two. A ringing of crickets  
awake in the ceiling. The gate is locked  
on the street outside sleepers, mustaches,  
nakedness, but no desire. A few mosquitos  
waken the itch, the fan turns slowly  
a car thunders along the black asphalt,  
a bull snorts, something is expected  
Time sits solid in the four yellow walls.  
No one is here, emptiness filled with train  
whistles & dog barks, answered a block away.  
Pushkin sits on the bookshelf, Shakespeare's  
complete works as well as Blake's unread  
O Spirit of Poetry, no use calling on you

babbling in this emptiness furnished with beds  
under the bright oval mirror perfect  
night for sleepers to dissolve in tranquil  
blackness, and rest there eight hours  
Waking to stained fingers, bitter mouth  
and lung gripped by cigarette hunger,  
what to do with this big toe, this arm  
this eye in the starving skeleton-filled  
sore horse tramcar-heated Calcutta in  
Eternity sweating and teeth rotted away  
Rilke at least could dream about lovers,  
the old breast excitement and trembling belly,  
is that it? And the vast starry space  
If the brain changes matter breathes  
fearfully back on man But now  
the great crash of buildings and planets  
breaks thru the walls of language and drowns  
me under its Ganges heaviness forever.  
No escape but thru Bangkok and New York death.  
Skin is sufficient to be skin, that's all  
it ever could be, tho screams of pain in the kidney  
make it sick of itself, a wavy dream  
dying to finish its all to famous misery  
Leave immortality for another to suffer like a fool,  
not get stuck in the corner of the universe  
sticking morphine in the arm and eating meat.

*Allen Ginsberg, September 23, 2019*

### **A SMILE TO REMEMBER**

we had goldfish and they circled around and around  
in the bowl on the table near the heavy drapes  
covering the picture window and  
my mother, always smiling, wanting us all  
to be happy, told me, 'be happy Henry!'  
and she was right: it's better to be happy if you  
can  
but my father continued to beat her and me several times a week while  
raging inside his 6-foot-two frame because he couldn't  
understand what was attacking him from within.

my mother, poor fish,  
wanting to be happy, beaten two or three times a  
week, telling me to be happy: 'Henry, smile!  
why don't you ever smile?'

and then she would smile, to show me how, and it was the  
saddest smile I ever saw

one day the goldfish died, all five of them,  
they floated on the water, on their sides, their  
eyes still open,  
and when my father got home he threw them to the cat  
there on the kitchen floor and we watched as my mother  
smiled

*Charles Bukowski, September 20, 2019*

### **AROUND, OSTRAVA**

I'm right and I got kids  
he's vulgar to the last table  
he scars the pub  
with his thin-veined stories  
about a Japanese waitress from Přívoz  
in overalls  
a drinker's voice  
the pub laughs  
Japanese hair everywhere  
yanked out of context  
around is Ostrava  
and kids

*Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweney), September 16, 2019*

### **LIES ABOUT LOVE**

We are liars, because  
the truth of yesterday becomes a lie tomorrow,  
whereas letters are fixed,  
and we live by the letter of truth.  
The love I feel for my friend, this year,  
is different from the love I felt last year.  
If it were not so, it would be a lie.  
Yet we reiterate love! love! love!  
as if it were a coin with a fixed value  
instead of a flower that dies, and opens a different bud.

*David Herbert Lawrence, September 13, 2019*

### **TALK IN THE DARK**

We live in history, says one.  
We're flies on the hide of Leviathan, says another.

Either way, says one,  
fears and losses.

And among losses, says another,  
the special places our own roads were to lead to.

Our deaths, says one.  
That's right, says another,  
Now it's to be a mass death.

Mass graves, says one, are nothing new.  
No, says another, but this time there'll be no graves,  
all the dead will lie where they fall.

Except, says one, those that burn to ash.  
And are blown in the fiery wind, says another.

How can we live in this fear? Says one.  
From day to day, says another.

I still want to see, says one,  
where my own road's going.

I want to live, says another, but where can I live  
if the world is gone?

*Denise Levertov, September 9, 2019*

### **IN MY DREAMS**

In my dreams I am always saying goodbye and riding away,  
Whither and why I know not nor do I care.  
And the parting is sweet and the parting over is sweeter,  
And sweetest of all is the night and the rushing air.

In my dreams they are always waving their hands and saying goodbye,  
And they give me the stirrup cup and I smile as I drink,  
I am glad the journey is set, I am glad I am going,  
I am glad, I am glad, that my friends don't know what I think.

*Stevie Smith, September 6, 2019*

### **SNAKE**

A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.  
In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree  
I came down the steps with my pitcher  
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before  
me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of  
the stone trough  
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,  
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,  
He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,  
And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,  
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,  
And stooped and drank a little more,  
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth

On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.  
The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed,  
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man  
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,  
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough  
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,  
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him? Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him? Was it  
humility, to feel so honoured?  
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:  
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid, But even so, honoured still more  
That he should seek my hospitality  
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough  
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,  
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,  
Seeming to lick his lips,  
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,  
And slowly turned his head,  
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,  
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round  
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,  
And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered farther,  
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid black hole,  
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after,  
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
I picked up a clumsy log  
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,  
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified haste.  
Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,  
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.  
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!  
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

And I thought of the albatross  
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,

Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
Of life.  
And I have something to expiate:  
A pettiness.

*David Herbert Lawrence, September 2, 2019*

## THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:  
Not till about  
One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday  
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,  
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense  
Of being in a hurry gone. We ran  
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street  
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence  
The river's level drifting breadth began,  
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept  
For miles inland,  
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.  
Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and  
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;  
A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped  
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass  
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth  
Until the next town, new and nondescript,  
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

At first, I didn't notice what a noise  
The weddings made  
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys  
The interest of what's happening in the shade,  
And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls  
I took for porters larking with the mails,  
And went on reading. Once we started, though,  
We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls  
In parodies of fashion, heels and veils,  
All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

As if out on the end of an event  
Waving goodbye  
To something that survived it. Struck, I leant  
More promptly out next time, more curiously,  
And saw it all again in different terms:  
The fathers with broad belts under their suits  
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;  
An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,  
The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,  
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.  
Yes, from cafés

And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed  
Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days  
Were coming to an end. All down the line  
Fresh couples climbed aboard: the rest stood round;  
The last confetti and advice were thrown,  
And, as we moved, each face seemed to define  
Just what it saw departing: children frowned  
At something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical;  
The women shared  
The secret like a happy funeral;  
While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared  
At a religious wounding. Free at last,  
And loaded with the sum of all they saw,  
We hurried towards London, shuffling gouts of steam.  
Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast  
Long shadows over major roads, and for  
Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem

Just long enough to settle hats and say  
I nearly died,  
A dozen marriages got under way.  
They watched the landscape, sitting side by side  
—An Odeon went past, a cooling tower,  
And someone running up to bowl—and none  
Thought of the others they would never meet  
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.  
I thought of London spread out in the sun,  
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:

There we were aimed. And as we raced across  
Bright knots of rail  
Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss  
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail  
Travelling coincidence; and what it held  
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power  
That being changed can give. We slowed again,  
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled  
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower  
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

*Philip Larkin, August 30, 2019*

## **YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE**

The Polar DEW has just warned that  
A nuclear rocket strike of  
At least one thousand megatons  
Has been launched by the enemy  
Directly at our major cities.  
This announcement will take  
Two and a quarter minutes to make,  
You therefore have a further  
Eight and a quarter minutes  
To comply with the shelter  
Requirements published in the Civil

Defence Code – section Atomic Attack.  
A specially shortened Mass  
Will be broadcast at the end  
Of this announcement -  
Protestant and Jewish services  
Will begin simultaneously -  
Select your wavelength immediately  
According to instructions  
In the Defence Code. Do not  
Take well-loved pets (including birds)  
Into your shelter – they will consume  
Fresh air. Leave the old and bed-  
Ridden, you can do nothing for them.  
Remember to press the sealing  
Switch when everyone is in  
The shelter. Set the radiation  
Aerial, turn on the Geiger barometer.  
Turn off your television now.  
Turn off your radio immediately  
The services end. At the same time  
Secure explosion plugs in the ears  
Of each member of your family. Take  
Down your plasma flasks. Give your children  
The pills marked one and two  
In the C D green container, then put  
Them to bed. Do not break  
The inside airlock seals until  
The radiation All Clear shows  
(Watch for the cuckoo in your  
Perspex panel), or your District  
Touring Doctor rings your bell.  
If before this your air becomes  
Exhausted or if any of your family  
Is critically injured, administer  
The capsules marked 'Valley Forge'  
(Red pocket in No 1 Survival Kit)  
For painless death. (Catholics  
Will have been instructed by their priests  
What to do in this eventuality.)  
This announcement is ending. Our President  
Has already given orders for  
Massive retaliation – it will be  
Decisive. Some of us may die.  
Remember, statistically  
It is not likely to be you.  
All flags are flying fully dressed  
On Government buildings – the sun is shining.  
Death is the least we have to fear.  
We are all in the hands of God,  
Whatever happens happens by His will.  
Now go quickly to your shelters.

*Peter Porter, August 26, 2019*

## **MY PARENTS KEPT ME FROM CHILDREN WHO WERE ROUGH**

My parents kept me from children who were rough

Who threw words like stones and wore torn clothes  
Their thighs showed through rags they ran in the street  
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron  
Their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms  
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys  
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe they sprang out behind hedges  
Like dogs to bark at my world. They threw mud  
While I looked the other way, pretending to smile.  
I longed to forgive them but they never smiled.

*Stephen Spender, August 23, 2019*

### **ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS**

The Rav  
of Northern White Russia declined,  
in his youth, to learn the  
language of birds, because  
the extraneous did not interest him; nevertheless  
when he grew old it was found  
he understood them anyway, having  
listened well, and as it is said, 'prayed  
with the bench and the floor.' He used  
what was at hand--as did  
Angel Jones iz Molda, čije su meditacije  
Bile ušite u kapute i hlače(?nemam ovu riječ u rječniku).  
Angel Jones of Mold, whose meditations  
were sewn into coats and britches.  
Well, I would like to make,  
thinking some line still taut between me and them,  
poems direct as what the birds said,  
hard as a floor, sound as a bench,  
mysterious as the silence when the tailor  
would pause with his needle in the air.

*Denise Levertov, August 19, 2019*

### **NO SPEECH FROM THE SCAFFOLD**

There will be no speech from  
the scaffold, the scene must  
be its own commentary.

The glossy chipped  
surface of the block is like  
something for kitchen use.

And he masked man with his  
chopper: we know him: he  
works in a warehouse nearby.

Last, the prisoner, he  
is pale, he walks through  
the dewy grass, nodding

a goodbye to acquaintances.  
There will be no speech. And we  
have forgotten his offence.

What he did is, now,  
immaterial. It is the  
execution that matters, or,

rather, it is his conduct  
as he rests there, while  
he is still a human.

*Thom Gunn, August 16, 2019*

### **REMOVAL FROM TERRY STREET**

On a squeaking cart, they push the usual stuff,  
A mattress, bed ends, cups, carpets, chairs,  
Four paperback westerns. Two whistling youths  
In surplus U S Army battle-jackets  
Remove their sister's goods. Her husband  
Follows, carrying on his shoulders the son  
Whose mischief we are glad to see removed,  
And pushing, of all things, a lawnmower.  
There is no grass in Terry Street. The worms  
Come up cracks in concrete yards in moonlight.  
That man, I wish him well. I wish him grass.

*Douglas Dunn, August 12, 2019*

### **THE SECOND COMING**

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

*William Butler Yeats, August 9, 2019*

### **NOT WAVING BUT DROWNING**

Nobody heard him, the dead man,  
But still he lay moaning:  
I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking  
And now he's dead  
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,  
They said.

Oh, no no no, it was too cold always  
(Still the dead one lay moaning)  
I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.

*Stevie Smith, August 5, 2019*

### **HOW BEASTLY THE BOURGEOIS IS**

How beastly the bourgeois is  
especially the male of the species--

Presentable, eminently presentable--  
shall I make you a present of him?

Isn't he handsome? Isn't he healthy? Isn't he a fine specimen?  
Doesn't he look the fresh clean Englishman, outside?  
Isn't it God's own image? tramping his thirty miles a day  
after partridges, or a little rubber ball?  
wouldn't you like to be like that, well off, and quite the  
thing

Oh, but wait!  
Let him meet a new emotion, let him be faced with another  
man's need,  
let him come home to a bit of moral difficulty, let life  
face him with a new demand on his understanding  
and then watch him go soggy, like a wet meringue.  
Watch him turn into a mess, either a fool or a bully.  
Just watch the display of him, confronted with a new  
demand on his intelligence,  
a new life-demand.

How beastly the bourgeois is  
especially the male of the species--

Nicely groomed, like a mushroom  
standing there so sleek and erect and eyeable--  
and like a fungus, living on the remains of a bygone life  
sucking his life out of the dead leaves of greater life  
than his own.

And even so, he's stale, he's been there too long.  
Touch him, and you'll find he's all gone inside  
just like an old mushroom, all wormy inside, and hollow  
under a smooth skin and an upright appearance.

Full of seething, wormy, hollow feelings  
rather nasty--  
How beastly the bourgeois is!

Standing in their thousands, these appearances, in damp  
England  
what a pity they can't all be kicked over  
like sickening toadstools, and left to melt back, swiftly  
into the soil of England.

*David Herbert Lawrence, August 2, 2019*

## **THE GYPSY**

A fortnight before Christmas Gypsies were everywhere:  
Vans were drawn up on wastes, women trailed to the fair.  
'My gentleman,' said one, 'you've got a lucky face.'  
'And you've a luckier,' I thought, 'if such grace  
And impudence in rags are lucky.' 'Give a penny  
For the poor baby's sake.' 'Indeed I have not any  
Unless you can give change for a sovereign, my dear.'  
'Then just half a pipeful of tobacco can you spare?'  
I gave it. With that much victory she laughed content.  
I should have given more, but off and away she went  
With her baby and her pink sham flowers to rejoin  
The rest before I could translate to its proper coin  
Gratitude for her grace. And I paid nothing then,  
As I pay nothing now with the dipping of my pen  
For her brother's music when he drummed the tambourine  
And stamped his feet, which made the workmen passing grin,  
While his mouth-organ changed to a rascally Bacchanal dance  
'Over the hills and far away.' This and his glance  
Outlasted all the fair, farmer, and auctioneer,  
Cheap-jack, balloon-man, drover with crooked stick, and steer,  
Pig, turkey, goose, and duck, Christmas corpses to be.  
Not even the kneeling ox had eyes like the Romany.  
That night he peopled for me the hollow wooded land,  
More dark and wild than the stormiest heavens, that I searched and scanned  
Like a ghost new-arrived. The gradations of the dark  
Were like an underworld of death, but for the spark  
In the Gypsy boy's black eyes as he played and stamped his tune,  
'Over the hills and far away,' and a crescent moon.

*Edward Thomas, July 29, 2019*

## **AN EPITAPH**

Here lies a most beautiful lady,  
Light of step and heart was she;  
I think she was the most beautiful lady  
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes, beauty passes;  
However rare -- rare it be;  
And when I crumble, who will remember  
This lady of the West Country.

*Walter de la Mare, July 26, 2019*

## **HEDGEHOG**

The snail moves like a  
Hovercraft, held up by a  
Rubber cushion of itself,  
Sharing its secret

With the hedgehog. The hedgehog  
Shares its secret with no one.  
We say, Hedgehog, come out  
Of yourself and we will love you.

We mean no harm. We want  
Only to listen to what  
You have to say. We want  
Your answers to our questions.

The hedgehog gives nothing  
Away, keeping itself to itself.  
We wonder what a hedgehog  
Has to hide, why it so distrusts.

We forget the god  
under this crown of thorns.  
We forget that never again  
will a god trust in the world.

*Paul Muldoon, July 22, 2019*

## **PROVERBS OF HELL**

In seed-time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.  
Drive your cart and your plough over the bones of the dead.  
The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.  
Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by Incapacity.  
He who desires, but acts not, breeds pestilence.  
The cut worm forgives the plough.  
Dip him in the river who loves water.  
A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.  
He whose face gives no light shall never become a star.  
Eternity is in love with the productions of time.

The busy bee has no time for sorrow.  
The hours of folly are measured by the clock,  
but of wisdom no clock can measure.  
All wholesome food is caught without a net or a trap.  
Bring out number, weight, and measure in a year of dearth.  
No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.  
A dead body revenges not injuries.  
The most sublime act is to set another before you.  
If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.  
Folly is the cloak of knavery.  
Shame is Pride's cloak.  
Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of religion.  
The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.  
The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.  
The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.  
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.  
Excess of sorrow laughs, excess of joy weeps.  
The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea,  
and the destructive sword, are portions of Eternity too great for the eye of man.  
The fox condemns the trap, not himself.  
Joys impregnate, sorrows bring forth.

*William Blake, July 19, 2019*

## **AFTER AUSCHWITZ**

Anger,  
as black as a hook,  
overtakes me.  
Each day,  
each Nazi  
took, at 8: 00 A.M., a baby  
and sauteed him for breakfast  
in his frying pan.

And death looks on with a casual eye  
and picks at the dirt under his fingernail.

Man is evil,  
I say aloud.  
Man is a flower  
that should be burnt,  
I say aloud.  
Man  
is a bird full of mud,  
I say aloud.

And death looks on with a casual eye  
and scratches his anus.

Man with his small pink toes,  
with his miraculous fingers  
is not a temple  
but an outhouse,  
I say aloud.  
Let man never again raise his teacup.  
Let man never again write a book.

Let man never again put on his shoe.  
Let man never again raise his eyes,  
on a soft July night.  
Never. Never. Never. Never. Never.  
I say those things aloud.

I beg the Lord not to hear.

*Anne Sexton, July 15, 2019*

### **THE HANGING MAN**

By the roots of my hair some god got hold of me.  
I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet.

The nights snapped out of sight like a lizard's eyelid :  
A world of bald white days in a shadeless socket.

A vulturous boredom pinned me in this tree.  
If he were I, he would do what I did.

*Sylvia Plath, July 12, 2019*

### **LIFE**

Autoplay next video  
I leave the office, take the stairs,  
in time to mail a letter  
before 3 in the afternoon--the last dispatch.  
The red, white and blue air mail  
falls past the slot for foreign mail  
and hits bottom with a sound  
that tells me my letter is alone.  
They will have to bring in a plane  
from a place of coastline and beaches,  
from a climate of fresh figs and apricot,  
to cradle my one letter. Up in the air  
it will leave behind some of its ugly nuance,  
its unpleasant habit of humanity  
which wants to smear itself over others:  
the spot in which it wasn't clear, perhaps,  
how to take my words, which were suggestive,  
the paragraph in which the names of flowers,  
ostensibly to indicate travel,  
make a bed for lovers,  
the parts that contain spit and phlegm,  
the words only a wet tongue can manage,  
hissing sounds and letters of the alphabet  
which can only be formed  
by biting down on the bottom lip.  
In the next-to-last paragraph, some hair  
came off in the comb. Then clothes  
were gathered from everywhere in the room  
in one sentence, and the sun rose  
while a door closed with sincerity.

No doubt such sincerity will be judged,  
but first the investigation of the postmark.  
Am I where I was expected? Did I have at hand  
the right denominations of stamps,  
or did I make a childish quilt of ones and sevens?  
Ah yes, they will have to cancel me twice.  
Once to make my words worthless.  
Once more to stop me from writing.

*Mervin Bell, July 08, 2019*

### **AMERICAN POETRY**

Whatever it is, it must have  
A stomach that can digest  
Rubber, coal, uranium, moons, poems.

Like the shark it contains a shoe.  
It must swim for miles through the desert  
Uttering cries that are almost human.

*Louis Simpson, July 05, 2019*

### **THE LOST PILOT**

*for my father, 1922-1944*

Your face did not rot  
like the others—the co-pilot,  
for example, I saw him

yesterday. His face is corn-  
mush: his wife and daughter,  
the poor ignorant people, stare

as if he will compose soon.  
He was more wronged than Job.  
But your face did not rot

like the others—it grew dark,  
and hard like ebony;  
the features progressed in their

distinction. If I could cajole  
you to come back for an evening,  
down from your compulsive

orbiting, I would touch you,  
read your face as Dallas,  
your hoodlum gunner, now,

with the blistered eyes, reads  
his braille editions. I would  
touch your face as a disinterested

scholar touches an original page.  
However frightening, I would  
discover you, and I would not

turn you in; I would not make  
you face your wife, or Dallas,  
or the co-pilot, Jim. You

could return to your crazy  
orbiting, and I would not try  
to fully understand what

it means to you. All I know  
is this: when I see you,  
as I have seen you at least

once every year of my life,  
spin across the wilds of the sky  
like a tiny, African god,

I feel dead. I feel as if I were  
the residue of a stranger's life,  
that I should pursue you.

My head cocked toward the sky,  
I cannot get off the ground,  
and, you, passing over again,

fast, perfect, and unwilling  
to tell me that you are doing  
well, or that it was mistake

that placed you in that world,  
and me in this; or that misfortune  
placed these worlds in us.

*James Tate, July 01, 2019*

## **1002**

Aurora is the effort  
Of the Celestial Face  
Unconsciousness of Perfectness  
To simulate, to Us.

*Emily Dickinson, June 28, 2019*

## **RICHARD CORY**

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,  
We people on the pavement looked at him:  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,  
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,

And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—  
And admirably schooled in every grace:  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

*Edwin Arlington Robinson, June 24, 2019*

### **CHRISTMAS: 1924**

Peace upon earth!" was said. We sing it,  
And pay a million priests to bring it.  
After two thousand years of mass  
We've got as far as poison-gas.

*Thomas Hardy, June 21, 2019*

### **ON THE EXTINCTION OF THE VENETIAN REPUBLIC**

ONCE did she hold the gorgeous East in fee;  
And was the safeguard of the West: the worth  
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,  
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty.

She was a maiden City, bright and free;  
No guile seduced, no force could violate;  
And, when she took unto herself a mate,  
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.

And what if she had seen those glories fade,  
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay;  
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid

When her long life hath reach'd its final day:  
Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade  
Of that which once was great is pass'd away.

*Villiam Wordsworth, June 17, 2019*

### **PATIENCE**

Patience is wider  
than one once envisioned,  
with ribbons of rivers

and distant ranges  
and tasks undertaken  
and finished with modest  
relish by natives  
in their native dress.  
Who would have  
guessed it possible  
that waiting is  
sustainable — a place  
with its own harvests.  
Or that in time's  
fullness the diamonds  
of patience couldn't be  
distinguished from  
the genuine in  
brilliance or hardness.

*Kay Ryan, June 14, 2019*

### **NO SECOND TROY**

Why should I blame her that she filled my days  
With misery, or that she would of late  
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,  
Had they but courage equal to desire?  
What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
That nobleness made simple as a fire,  
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind  
That is not natural in an age like this,  
Being high and solitary and most stern?  
Why, what could she have done, being what she is?  
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

*William Butler Yeats, June 10, 2019*

### **MORT AUX CHATS**

There will be no more cats.  
Cats spread infection,  
Cats pollute the air,  
Cats consume seven times  
their own weight in food a week,  
Cats were worshipped in  
decadent societies (Egypt  
and Ancient Rome); the Greeks  
had no use for cats. Cats  
sit down to pee (our scientists  
have proved it). The copulation  
of cats is harrowing; they  
are unbearably fond of the moon.  
Perhaps they are all right in  
their own country but their  
traditions are alien to ours.  
Cats smell, they can't help it,

you notice it going upstairs.  
Cats watch too much television,  
they can sleep through storms,  
they stabbed us in the back  
ast time. There have never been  
any great artists who were cats.  
They don't deserve a capital C  
except at the beginning of a sentence.  
I blame my headaches and my  
plants dying on cats.  
Our district is full of them,  
property values are falling.  
When I dream of God I see  
a Massacre of Cats. Why  
should they insist on their own  
language and religion, who  
needs to purr to make his point?  
Death to all cats! The Rule  
of Dogs shall last a thousand years!

*Peter Porter, June 7, 2019*

### **HEREDITY**

How you became a poet's a mystery!  
Wherever did you get your talent from?

I say: I had two uncles, Joe and Harry-  
one was a stammerer, the other dumb.

*Tony Harrison, June 3, 2019*

### **ULTIMA RATIO REGUM**

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

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

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

Consider his life which was valueless  
In terms of employment, hotel ledgers, news files.  
Consider. One bullet in ten thousand kills a man.  
Ask. Was so much expenditure justified  
On the death of one so young and so silly  
Lying under the olive tree, O world, O death?

*Stephen Spender, May 31, 2019*

### **THE WHITE HORSE**

The youth walks up to the white horse, to put its halter on  
and the horse looks at him in silence.  
They are so silent, they are in another world.

*David Herbert Lawrence, May 27, 2019*

### **AUTUMN**

A touch of cold in the Autumn night --

I walked abroad,  
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge  
Like a red-faced farmer.  
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,  
And round about were the wistful stars  
With white faces like town children.

*Thomas Ernest Hulme, May 24, 2019*

### **KALEIDOSCOPE**

To climb these stairs again, bearing a tray,  
Might be to find you pillowed with your books,  
Your inventories listing gowns and frocks  
As if preparing for a holiday.  
Or, turning from the landing, I might find  
My presence watched through your kaleidoscope,  
A symmetry of husbands, each redesigned  
In lovely forms of foresight, prayer and hope.  
I climb these stairs a dozen times a day  
And, by the open door, wait, looking in  
At where you died. My hands become a tray  
Offering me, my flesh, my soul, my skin.  
Grief wrongs us so. I stand, and wait, and cry  
For the absurd forgiveness, not knowing why.

*Douglas Dunn, May 20, 2019*

### EPITAPH ON A PESSIMIST

I'm Smith of Stoke aged sixty odd  
I've lived without a dame all my life  
And wish to God  
My dad had done the same.

*Thomas Hardy, May 17, 2019*

### THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

*William Butler Yeats, May 13, 2019*

### CREEPER

With what stoic delicacy does  
Virginia creeper let go:  
the feeblest tug brings down  
a sheaf of leaves kite-high,  
as if to say, *To live is good  
but not to live--to be pulled down  
with scarce a ripping,  
still flourishing, still  
stretching toward the sun--  
is good also, all photosynthesis  
abandoned, quite quits.* Next spring  
the hairy rootlets left unpulled  
snake out a leafy afterlife  
up that same smooth-barked oak.

*John Updike, May 10, 2019*

### THE NEW HOUSE

Now first, as I shut the door,  
I was alone  
In the new house; and the wind  
Began to moan.

Old at once was the house,  
And I was old;  
My ears were teased with the dread  
Of what was foretold,

Nights of storm, days of mist, without end;  
Sad days when the sun  
Shone in vain: old griefs and griefs  
Not yet begun.

All was foretold me; naught  
Could I foresee;  
But I learned how the wind would sound  
After these things should be.

*Edward Thomas, May 6, 2019*

### **THE HAND THAT SIGNED THE PAPER**

The hand that signed the paper felled a city;  
Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath,  
Doubled the globe of dead and halved a country;  
These five kings did a king to death.

The mighty hand leads to a sloping shoulder,  
The finger joints are cramped with chalk;  
A goose's quill has put an end to murder  
That put an end to talk.

The hand that signed the treaty bred a fever,  
And famine grew, and locusts came;  
Great is the hand that holds dominion over  
Man by a scribbled name.

The five kings count the dead but do not soften  
The crusted wound nor pat the brow;  
A hand rules pity as a hand rules heaven;  
Hands have no tears to flow.

*Thomas Dylan, May 3, 2019*

### **A PRAYER**

When I am dying, let me know  
That I loved the blowing snow  
Although it stung like whips;  
That I loved all lovely things  
And I tried to take their stings  
With gay unembittered lips;  
That I loved with all my strength,  
To my soul's full depth and length,  
Careless if my heart must break,  
That I sang as children sing  
Fitting tunes to everything,

*Sara Teasdale, April 29, 2019*

## **REQUIEM**

UNDER the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie:  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you 'grave for me:  
Here he lies where he long'd to be;  
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.

*Robert Louis Stevenson, April 26, 2019*

## **GRANNY SCARECROW**

Tears flowed at the chapel funeral,  
more beside the grave on the hill. Nevertheless,  
after the last autumn ploughing,  
they crucified her old flowered print housedress  
live, on a pole.

Marjorie and Emily, shortcutting to school,  
used to pass and wave; mostly Gran would wave back  
Two white Sunday gloves  
flapped good luck from the crossbar; her head's plastic sack  
would nod, as a rule.

But when winter arrived her ghost thinned.  
The dress began to look starved in its field of snowcorn.  
One glove blew off and was lost.  
The other hung blotchy with mould from the hedgerow, torn  
by the wind.

Emily and Marjorie noticed this.  
Without saying why, they started to avoid the country way  
through the cornfield. Instead they walked  
from the farm up the road to the stop where they  
caught the bus.

And it caught them. So in time they married.  
Marjorie, divorced, rose high in the catering profession.  
Emily had children and grandchildren, though,  
with the farm sold, none found a cross to fit their clothes when  
Emily and Marjorie died.

*Anne Stevenson, April 22, 2019*

## **ALONE IN THE WOODS**

Alone in the woods I felt  
The bitter hostility of the sky and the trees  
Nature has taught her creatures to hate  
Man that fusses and fumes  
Unquiet man  
As the sap rises in the trees  
As the sap paints the trees a violent green  
So rises the wrath of Nature's creatures  
At man  
So paints the face of Nature a violent green.  
Nature is sick at man  
Sick at his fuss and fume  
Sick at his agonies  
Sick at his gaudy mind  
That drives his body  
Ever more quickly  
More and more  
In the wrong direction.

*Stevie Smith, April 19, 2019*

## **AMERICAN DREAMS**

In dreams my life came toward me,  
my loves that were slender as gazelles.  
But America also dreams...  
Dream, you are flying over Russia,  
dream, you are falling in Asia.

As I look down the street  
on a typical sunny day in California  
it is my house that is burning  
and my dear ones that lie in the gutter  
as the American army enters.

Every day I wake far away  
from my life, in a foreign country.  
These people are speaking a strange language.  
It is strange to me  
and strange, I think, even to themselves.

*Louis Simpson, April 15, 2019*

## **AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN**

You said the anger would come back  
just as the love did.

I have a black look I do not  
like. It is a mask I try on.  
I migrate toward it and its frog  
sits on my lips and defecates.  
It is old. It is also a pauper.

I have tried to keep it on a diet.  
I give it no unction.

There is a good look that I wear  
like a blood clot. I have  
sewn it over my left breast.  
I have made a vocation of it.  
Lust has taken plant in it  
and I have placed you and your  
child at its milk tip.

Oh the blackness is murderous  
and the milk tip is brimming  
and each machine is working  
and I will kiss you when  
I cut up one dozen new men  
and you will die somewhat,  
again and again.

*Anne Sexton, April 12, 2019*

### **GLORY OF WOMEN**

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,  
Or wounded in a mentionable place.  
You worship decorations; you believe  
That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.  
You make us shells. You listen with delight,  
By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled.  
You crown our distant ardours while we fight,  
And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.  
You can't believe that British troops "retire"  
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,  
Trampling the terrible corpses - blind with blood.  
O German mother dreaming by the fire,  
While you are knitting socks to send your son  
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.

*Siegfried Sassoon, April 8, 2019*

### **A CERTAIN KIND OF EDEN**

It seems like you could, but  
you can't go back and pull  
the roots and runners and replant.  
It's all too deep for that.  
You've overprized intention,  
have mistaken any bent you're given  
for control. You thought you chose  
the bean and chose the soil.  
You even thought you abandoned  
one or two gardens. But those things  
keep growing where we put them —  
if we put them at all.  
A certain kind of Eden holds us thrall.

Even the one vine that tendrils out alone  
in time turns on its own impulse,  
twisting back down its upward course  
a strong and then a stronger rope,  
the greenest saddest strongest  
kind of hope.

*Kay Ryan, April 5, 2019*

## **AUGUST 1914**

What in our lives is burnt  
In the fire of this?  
The heart's dear granary?  
The much we shall miss?

Three lives hath one life –  
Iron, honey, gold.  
The gold, the honey gone –  
Left is the hard and cold.

Iron are our lives  
Molten right through our youth.  
A burnt space through ripe fields  
A fair mouth's broken tooth.

*Isaac Rosenberg, April 1, 2019*

## **ELEGI FOR JANE**

(My student, thrown by a horse)

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

Oh, when she was sad, she cast herself down into such a pure depth,  
Even a father could not find her:  
Scraping her cheek against straw,  
Stirring the clearest water.  
My sparrow, you are not here,  
Waiting like a fern, making a spiney shadow.  
The sides of wet stones cannot console me,  
Nor the moss, wound with the last light.

If only I could nudge you from this sleep,  
My maimed darling, my skittery pigeon.  
Over this damp grave I speak the words of my love:  
I, with no rights in this matter,  
Neither father nor lover.

*Teodore Roethke, March 29, 2019*

### **ENVOI**

Go, dumb-born book,  
Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes:  
Hadst thou but song  
As thou hast subjects known,  
Then were there cause in thee that should condone  
Even my faults that heavy upon me lie  
And build her glories their longevity.

Tell her that sheds  
Such treasure in the air,  
Recking naught else but that her graces give  
Life to the moment,  
I would bid them live  
As roses might, in magic amber laid,  
Red overwrought with orange and all made  
One substance and one colour  
Braving time.

Tell her that goes  
With song upon her lips  
But sings not out the song, nor knows  
The maker of it, some other mouth,  
May be as fair as hers,  
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,  
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,  
Siftings on siftings in oblivion,  
Till change hath broken down  
All things save Beauty alone.

*Ezra Pound, March 25, 2019*

### **IN PLASTER**

I shall never get out of this! There are two of me now:  
This new absolutely white person and the old yellow one,  
And the white person is certainly the superior one.  
She doesn't need food, she is one of the real saints.  
At the beginning I hated her, she had no personality --  
She lay in bed with me like a dead body  
And I was scared, because she was shaped just the way I was

Only much whiter and unbreakable and with no complaints.  
I couldn't sleep for a week, she was so cold.  
I blamed her for everything, but she didn't answer.  
I couldn't understand her stupid behavior!  
When I hit her she held still, like a true pacifist.  
Then I realized what she wanted was for me to love her:  
She began to warm up, and I saw her advantages.

Without me, she wouldn't exist, so of course she was grateful.

I gave her a soul, I bloomed out of her as a rose  
Blooms out of a vase of not very valuable porcelain,  
And it was I who attracted everybody's attention,  
Not her whiteness and beauty, as I had at first supposed.  
I patronized her a little, and she lapped it up --  
You could tell almost at once she had a slave mentality.

I didn't mind her waiting on me, and she adored it.  
In the morning she woke me early, reflecting the sun  
From her amazingly white torso, and I couldn't help but notice  
Her tidiness and her calmness and her patience:  
She humored my weakness like the best of nurses,  
Holding my bones in place so they would mend properly.  
In time our relationship grew more intense.

She stopped fitting me so closely and seemed offish.  
I felt her criticizing me in spite of herself,  
As if my habits offended her in some way.  
She let in the drafts and became more and more absent-minded.  
And my skin itched and flaked away in soft pieces  
Simply because she looked after me so badly.  
Then I saw what the trouble was: she thought she was immortal.

She wanted to leave me, she thought she was superior,  
And I'd been keeping her in the dark, and she was resentful --  
Wasting her days waiting on a half-corpse!  
And secretly she began to hope I'd die.  
Then she could cover my mouth and eyes, cover me entirely,  
And wear my painted face the way a mummy-case  
Wears the face of a pharaoh, though it's made of mud and water.

I wasn't in any position to get rid of her.  
She'd supported me for so long I was quite limp --  
I had forgotten how to walk or sit,  
So I was careful not to upset her in any way  
Or brag ahead of time how I'd avenge myself.  
Living with her was like living with my own coffin:  
Yet I still depended on her, though I did it regretfully.

I used to think we might make a go of it together --  
After all, it was a kind of marriage, being so close.  
Now I see it must be one or the other of us.  
She may be a saint, and I may be ugly and hairy,  
But she'll soon find out that that doesn't matter a bit.  
I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her,  
And she'll perish with emptiness then, and begin to miss me.

*Sylvia Plath, March 22, 2019*

### **WHY BROWNLEE LEFT**

Why Brownlee left, and where he went,  
Is a mystery even now.  
For if a man should have been content  
It was him; two acres of barley,  
One of potatoes, four bullocks,  
A milker, a slated farmhouse.

He was last seen going out to plough  
On a March morning, bright and early.

By noon Brownlee was famous;  
They had found all abandoned, with  
The last rig unbroken, his pair of black  
Horses, like man and wife,  
Shifting their weight from foot to  
Foot, and gazing into the future.

*Paul Muldoon, March 18, 2019*

### **THE STEP**

From where you are at any moment you  
may step off into death.  
Is it not a clinching thought?  
I do not mean a stoical bravado  
of making the great decision blade in hand  
but the awareness, all so simple, that  
right in the middle of the day  
you may be called to an adjoining room.

*Frederick Morgan, March 15, 2019*

### **SPENSER'S IRELAND**

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

If in Ireland  
they play the harp backward at need,  
and gather at midday the seed  
of the fern, eluding  
their "giants all covered with iron," might  
there be fern seed for unlearn  
ing obduracy and for reinstating  
the enchantment?  
Hindered characters  
seldom have mothers  
in Irish stories, but they all have grandmothers.

It was Irish;  
a match not a marriage was made  
when my great grandmother'd said  
with native genius for

disunion, "Although your suitor be  
perfection, one objection  
is enough; he is not  
Irish." Outwitting  
the fairies, befriending the furies,  
whoever again  
and again says: "I'll never give in," never sees

that you're not free:  
until you've been made captive by  
supreme belief-credulity  
you say? When large dainty  
fingers tremblingly divide the wings  
of the fly for mid-July  
with a needle and wrap it with peacock tail,  
or tie wool and  
buzzard's wing, their pride,  
like the enchanter's  
is in care, not madness. Concurring hands divide

flax for damask  
that when bleached by Irish weather  
has the silvered chamois-leather  
water-tightness of a  
skin. Twisted tores and gold new moon-shaped  
lunulae aren't jewelry  
like the purple-coral fuchsia-tree's. Eire -  
the guillemot  
so neat and the hen  
of the heath and the  
linnet spinet-sweet-bespeak relentlessness? Then

they are to me  
like enchanted Earl Gerald who  
changed himself into a stag, to  
a great green-eyed cat of  
the mountain. Discommodity makes  
them invisible; they've dis-  
appeared. The Irish say your trouble is their  
trouble and your  
joy their joy? I wish  
I could believe it;  
I am troubled, I'm dissatisfied, I'm Irish.

*Marianne Moor, March 11, 2019*

## **THE COURAGE THAT MY MOTHER HAD**

The courage that my mother had  
Went with her, and is with her still:  
Rock from New England quarried;  
Now granite in a granite hill.

The golden brooch my mother wore  
She left behind for me to wear;  
I have no thing I treasure more:  
Yet, it is something I could spare.

Oh, if instead she'd left to me  
The thing she took into the grave!—  
That courage like a rock, which she  
Has no more need of, and I have.

*Edna St. Vincent Milla, March 8, 2019*

## **A SOLITUDE**

A blind man. I can stare at him  
ashamed, shameless. Or does he know it?  
No, he is in a great solitude.

O, strange joy,  
to gaze my fill at a stranger's face.  
No, my thirst is greater than before.

In his world he is speaking  
almost aloud. His lips move.  
Anxiety plays about them. And now joy

of some sort trembles into a smile.  
A breeze I can't feel  
crosses that face as if it crossed water.

The train moves uptown, pulls in and  
pulls out of the local stops. Within its loud  
jarring movement a quiet,

the quiet of people not speaking,  
some of them eyeing the blind man  
only a moment though, not thirsty like me,

and within that quiet his  
different quiet, not quiet at all, a tumult  
of images, but what are his images,

he is blind? He doesn't care  
that he looks strange, showing  
his thoughts on his face like designs of light

flickering on water, for he doesn't know  
what look is.  
I see he has never seen.

And now he rises, he stands at the door ready,  
knowing his station is next. Was he counting?  
No, that was not his need.

When he gets out I get out.  
“Can I help you towards the exit?”  
“Oh, alright.” An indifference.

But instantly, even as he speaks,  
even as I hear indifference, his hand  
goes out, waiting for me to take it,

and now we hold hands like children.  
His hand is warm and not sweaty,  
the grip firm, it feels good.

And when we have passed through the turnstile,  
he going first, his hand at once  
waits for mine again.

“Here are the steps. And here we turn  
to the right. More stairs now.” We go  
up into sunlight. He feels that,

the soft air. “A nice day,  
isn't it?” says the blind man. Solitude  
walks with me, walks

beside me, he is not with me, he continues  
his thoughts alone. But his hand and mine  
know one another,

it's as if my hand were gone forth  
on its own journey. I see him  
across the street, the blind man,

and now he says he can find his way. He knows  
where he is going, it is nowhere, it is filled  
with presences. He says. I am.

*Priscilla Denise Levertov, March 4, 2019*

### **AT THE BANK IN SPAIN**

Even the old priest, in his long black robe and silvery hair  
came to the counter with his hat off, humble at the shrine,  
and was immensely flattered when one of the fat little  
clerks of the bank  
shook hands with him.

*David Herbert Lawrence, March 1, 2019*

### **ONE FLESH**

Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,  
He with a book, keeping the light on late,  
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,  
All men elsewhere -- it is as if they wait  
Some new event: the book he holds unread,  
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.

Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,  
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,  
Or if they do, it is like a confession  
Of having little feeling -- or too much.  
Chastity faces them, a destination

For which their whole lives were a preparation.

Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,  
Silence between them like a thread to hold  
And not wind in. And time itself's a feather  
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,  
These two who are my father and my mother  
Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?

*Elizabeth Jennings, February 25, 2019*

### **A WOMAN UNCONSCIOUS**

Russia and America circle each other;  
Threats nudge an act that were without doubt  
A melting of the mould in the mother,  
Stones melting about the root.

The quick of the earth burned out:  
The toil of all our ages a loss  
With leaf and insect. Yet flitting thought  
(Not to be thought ridiculous)

Shies from the world-cancelling black  
Of its playing shadow: it has learned  
That there's no trusting (trusting to luck)  
Dates when the world's due to be burned;

That the future's no calamitous change  
But a malingering of now,  
Histories, towns, faces that no  
Malice or accident much derange.

And though bomb be matched against bomb,  
Though all mankind wince out and nothing endure --  
Earth gone in an instant flare --  
Did a lesser death come

Onto the white hospital bed  
Where one, numb beyond her last of sense,  
Closed her eyes on the world's evidence  
And into pillows sunk her head.

*Ted Hughes, February 22, 2019*

### **REQUIEM FOR THE CROPPIES**

The pockets of our greatcoats full of barley...  
No kitchens on the run, no striking camp...  
We moved quick and sudden in our own country.  
The priest lay behind ditches with the tramp.  
A people hardly marching... on the hike...  
We found new tactics happening each day:  
We'd cut through reins and rider with the pike  
And stampede cattle into infantry,

Then retreat through hedges where cavalry must be thrown.  
Until... on Vinegar Hill... the final conclave.  
Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon.  
The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.  
They buried us without shroud or coffin  
And in August... the barley grew up out of our grave.

*Seamus Heaney, February 18, 2019*

## **BOOK ENDS**

Baked the day she suddenly dropped dead  
we chew it slowly that last apple pie.  
Shocked into sleeplessness you're scared of bed.  
We never could talk much, and now don't try.

You're like book ends, the pair of you, she'd say,  
Hog that grate, say nothing, sit, sleep, stare...  
The 'scholar' me, you, worn out on poor pay,  
only our silence made us seem a pair.

Not as good for staring in, blue gas,  
too regular each bud, each yellow spike.  
At night you need my company to pass  
and she not here to tell us we're alike!

You're life's all shattered into smithereens.  
Back in our silences and sullen looks,  
for all the Scotch we drink, what's still between 's  
not the thirty or so years, but books, books, books.

*Tony Harrison, February 15, 2019*

## **THE BUTCHER'S SON**

Mr Pierce the butcher  
Got news his son was missing  
About a month before  
The closing of the war.  
A bald man, tall and careful,  
He stood in his shop and found  
No bottom to his sadness,  
Nowhere for it to stop.  
When my aunt came through the door  
Delivering the milk,  
He spoke, with his quiet air  
Of a considerate teacher,  
But words weren't up to it,  
He turned back to the meat.

The message was in error.  
Later that humid summer  
At a local high school fete,  
I saw, returned, the son  
Still in his uniform.

Mr Pierce was not there  
But was as if implied  
In the son who looked like him  
Except he had red hair.  
For I recall him well  
Encircled by his friends,  
Beaming a life charged now  
Doubly because restored,  
And recall also how  
Within his hearty smile  
His lips contained his father's  
Like a light within the light  
That he turned everywhere.

*Thom Gunn, February 11, 2019*

### **THE PERSIAN VERSION**

Truth-loving Persians do not dwell upon  
The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon.  
As for the Greek theatrical tradition  
Which represents that summer's expedition  
Not as a mere reconnaissance in force  
By three brigades of foot and one of horse  
(Their left flank covered by some obsolete  
Light craft detached from the main Persian fleet)  
But as a grandiose, ill-starred attempt  
To conquer Greece - they treat it with contempt;  
And only incidentally refute  
Major Greek claims, by stressing what repute  
The Persian monarch and the Persian nation  
Won by this salutary demonstration:  
Despite a strong defence and adverse weather  
All arms combined magnificently together.

*Robert Graves, February 8, 2019*

### **AUTUMN LEAVES**

At 66 just learning how to take care of my body  
Wake cheerful 8 A.M. & write in a notebook  
rising from bed side naked leaving a naked boy asleep by the wall  
mix miso mushroom leeks & winter squash breakfast (macrobiotic),  
Check bloodsugar, clean teeth exactly, brush, toothpick, floss, mouth  
wash  
oil my feet (or anoint my feet with oil), put on white shirt white pants white sox  
sit solitary by the sink  
a moment before brushing my hair, happy not yet  
to be a corpse.

*Allen Ginsberg, February 4, 2019*

## ON THE DEATH OF A CHILD

The greatest griefs shall find themselves inside the smallest cage.  
It's only then that we can hope to tame their rage.

The monsters we must live with. For it will not do  
To hiss humanity because one human threw  
Us out of heart and home. Or part

At odds with life because one baby failed to live  
Indeed, as little as its subject, is the wreath we give --

The big words fail to fit. Like giant boxes  
Round small bodies. Taking up improper room,  
Where so much withering is, and so much bloom.

*Dennis Joseph Enright, February 1, 2019*

## A SONG FOR SIMEON

Lord, the Roman hyacinths are blooming in bowls and  
The winter sun creeps by the snow hills;  
The stubborn season has made stand.  
My life is light, waiting for the death wind,  
Like a feather on the back of my hand.  
Dust in sunlight and memory in corners  
Wait for the wind that chills towards the dead land.

Grant us thy peace.  
I have walked many years in this city,  
Kept faith and fast, provided for the poor,  
Have taken and given honour and ease.  
There went never any rejected from my door.  
Who shall remember my house, where shall live my children's children  
When the time of sorrow is come?  
They will take to the goat's path, and the fox's home,  
Fleeing from the foreign faces and the foreign swords.

Before the time of cords and scourges and lamentation  
Grant us thy peace.  
Before the stations of the mountain of desolation,  
Before the certain hour of maternal sorrow,  
Now at this birth season of decease,  
Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,  
Grant Israel's consolation  
To one who has eighty years and no to-morrow.

According to thy word,  
They shall praise Thee and suffer in every generation  
With glory and derision,  
Light upon light, mounting the saints' stair.  
Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,  
Not for me the ultimate vision.  
Grant me thy peace.  
(And a sword shall pierce thy heart,  
Thine also).  
I am tired with my own life and the lives of those after me,

I am dying in my own death and the deaths of those after me.  
Let thy servant depart,  
Having seen thy salvation.

*Thomas Stearns Eliot, January 28, 2019*

### **MODERN LOVE**

It is summer, and we are in a house  
That is not ours, sitting at a table  
Enjoying minutes of a rented silence,  
The upstairs people gone. The pigeons lull  
To sleep the under-tens and invalids,  
The tree shakes out its shadows to the grass,  
The roses rove through the wilds of my neglect.  
Our lives flap, and we have no hope of better  
Happiness than this, not much to show for love  
Than how we are, and how this evening is,  
Unpeopled, silent, and where we are alive  
In a domestic love, seemingly alone,  
All other lives worn down to trees and sunlight,  
Looking forward to a visit from the cat.

*Douglas Dunn, January 25, 2019*

### **YOU SHALL ABOVE ALL THINGS BE GLAD AND YOUNG...**

you shall above all things be glad and young  
For if you're young, whatever life you wear

It will become you; and if you are glad  
whatever's living will yourself become.  
Girlboys may nothing more than boygirls need:  
i can entirely her only love

whose any mystery makes every man's  
flesh put space on; and his mind take off time

that you should ever think, may god forbid  
and (in his mercy) your true lover spare:  
for that way knowledge lies, the foetal grave  
called progress, and negation's dead undoom.

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing  
than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance

*Edward Estlin Cummings, January 21, 2019*

### **THE WORLD**

I wanted so ably  
to reassure you, I wanted  
the man you took to be me,

to comfort you, and got  
up, and went to the window,  
pushed back, as you asked me to,

the curtain, to see  
the outline of the trees  
in the night outside.

The light, love,  
the light we felt then,  
greyly, was it, that

came in, on us, not  
merely my hands or yours,  
or a wetness so comfortable,

but in the dark then  
as you slept, the grey  
figure came so close

and leaned over,  
between us, as you  
slept, restless, and

my own face had to  
see it, and be seen by it,  
the man it was, your

grey lost tired bewildered  
brother, unused, untaken—  
hated by love, and dead,

but not dead, for an  
instant, saw me, myself  
the intruder, as he was not.

I tried to say, it is  
all right, she is  
happy, you are no longer

needed. I said,  
he is dead, and he  
went as you shifted

and woke, at first afraid,  
then knew by my own knowing  
what had happened –

and the light then  
of the sun coming  
for another morning  
in the world.

*Robert Creeley, January 18, 2019*



More slowly falling into sight  
and showering into stippled faces,  
darkening, condensing all his light;  
in spite of all the dreaming  
squandered upon him with that look,  
suffers our uses and abuses,  
sinks through the drift of bodies,  
sinks through the drift of classes  
to evening to the beggar in the park  
who, weary, without lamp or book  
prepares stupendous studies:  
the fiery event  
of every day in endless  
endless assent.

*Elizabeth Bishop, January 7, 2019*

### **DREAM SONGS No 67: I DON'T OPERATE OFTEN**

I don't operate often. When I do,  
persons take note.  
Nurses look amazed. They pale.  
The patient is brought back to life, or so.  
The reason I don't do this more (I quote)  
is: I have a living to fail —

because of my wife & son — to keep from earning.  
— Mr Bones, I sees that.  
They for these operations thanks you, what?  
not pays you. — Right.  
You have seldom been so understanding.  
Now there is further a difficulty with the light:

I am obliged to perform in complete darkness  
operations of great delicacy  
on my self.  
— Mr Bones, you terrifies me.  
No wonder they didn't pay you. Will you die?  
— My  
friend, I succeeded. Later.

*John Berryman, January 4, 2019*