

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1907

As for 1907, it's neither here
not there. But Auden is born this year!
This birth is the greatest of all prologues!
Still, Pavlov gets interested in dogs.
Next door Mendeleev, his bearded neighbor
who gave the universe the table
of its elements, slips into a coma.
The Cubists' first show, while Oklahoma
becomes the Union's 46th
state. Elsewhere New Zealand seeks
to fly the Union Jack. Lumiere
develops the colored pictures ere
anyone else (we all owe it to him!)
The Roman Pope takes a rather dim
view of modernism: jealous Iago!
Having squashed (4-0) Detroit, Chicago
forever thirsting for Gloria Mundi
wins the World Series. In Swinemunde
Nicholas the IInd meets the German Kaiser
for a cup of tea. That, again, is neither
here not there, like Kalamazoo.

And Carl Hagenbeck opens his cageless zoo
where walruses swim, lions pace, birds fly
proving: animals also can live a lie.

The man of the year, you won't believe,
is Joseph Stalin, then just a tried.
He is young; he is twenty-eight;
but History's there, and he cannot wait.

(Joseph Dzhugashvili, alias Stalin)

"My childhood was rotten, I lived in mud.
I hold up banks 'cause I miss my dad.
So to help the party, for all my troubles
one day I took four hundred grand in roubles.
Thus far, it was the greatest heist
in the Russian history after Christ.
Some call me eager, some call me zealous;
I just like big figures with their crowd of zeroes."

Joseph Brodsky, December 31, 2021

THE MOWER

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

Philip Larkin, December 27, 2021

MERU

Civilisation is hooped together, brought
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Ravening through century after century,
Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality:
Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!

Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,
Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
Or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast
Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
That day bring round the night, that before dawn
His glory and his monuments are gone.

William Butler Yeats, December 24, 2021

CALL INTO DEATH

Since I lost you, my darling, the sky has come near,

And I am of it, the small sharp stars are quite near,
The white moon going among them like a white bird
among snow-berries,
And the sound of her gently rustling in heaven like a
bird I hear.

And I am willing to come to you now, my dear,
As a pigeon lets itself off from a cathedral dome
To be lost in the haze of the sky, I would like to come,
And be lost out of sight with you, and be gone like foam.

For I am tired, my dear, and if I could lift my feet,
My tenacious feet from off the dome of the earth
To fall like a breath within the breathing wind
Where you are lost, what rest, my love, what rest!

David Herbert Lawrence, December 20, 2021

ON THE MOVE "MAN, YOU GOTTA GO"

The blue jay scuffling in the bushes follows
Some hidden purpose, and the gust of birds
That spurts across the field, the wheeling swallows,
Has nested in the trees and undergrowth.
Seeking their instinct, or their poise, or both,
One moves with an uncertain violence
Under the dust thrown by a baffled sense
Or the dull thunder of approximate words.

On motorcycles, up the road, they come:
Small, black, as flies hanging in heat, the Boys,
Until the distance throws them forth, their hum
Bulges to thunder held by calf and thigh.
In goggles, donned impersonality,
In gleaming jackets trophied with the dust,
They strap in doubt – by hiding it, robust –
And almost hear a meaning in their noise.

Exact conclusion of their hardiness
Has no shape yet, but from known whereabouts
They ride, direction where the tyres press.
They scare a flight of birds across the field:
Much that is natural, to the will must yield.
Men manufacture both machine and soul,
And use what they imperfectly control

To dare a future from the taken routes.

It is a part solution, after all.
One is not necessarily discord
On earth; or damned because, half animal,
One lacks direct instinct, because one wakes
Afloat on movement that divides and breaks.
One joins the movement in a valueless world,
Choosing it, till, both hurler and the hurled,
One moves as well, always toward, toward.

A minute holds them, who have come to go:
The self-defined, astride the created will
They burst away; the towns they travel through
Are home for neither bird nor holiness,
For birds and saints complete their purposes.
At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
One is always nearer by not keeping still.

Thom Gunn, December 17, 2021

THE SUN HAS BURST THE SKY

The sun has burst the sky
Because I love you
And the river its banks.

The sea laps the great rocks
Because I love you
And takes no heed of the moon dragging it away
And saying coldly 'Constancy is not for you'.
The blackbird fills the air
Because I love you
With spring and lawns and shadows falling on lawns.

The people walk in the street and laugh
I love you
And far down the river ships sound their hooters
Crazy with joy because I love you.

Jenny Joseph, December 13, 2021

ANGEL OF FIRE AND GENITALS

Angel of fire and genitals, do you know slime,
that green mama who first forced me to sing,
who put me first in the latrine, that pantomime
of brown where I was beggar and she was king?
I said, "The devil is down that festering hole."
Then he bit me in the buttocks and took over my soul.
Fire woman, you of the ancient flame, you
of the Bunsen burner, you of the candle,
you of the blast furnace, you of the barbecue,
you of the fierce solar energy, Mademoiselle,
take some ice, take come snow, take a month of rain
and you would gutter in the dark, cracking up your brain.

Mother of fire, let me stand at your devouring gate
as the sun dies in your arms and you loosen it's terrible weight.

Anne Sexton, December 10, 2021

AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN A SLUM

Far far from gusty waves these children's faces.
Like rootless weeds, the hair torn round their pallor:
The tall girl with her weighed-down head. The paper-
seeming boy, with rat's eyes. The stunted, unlucky heir
Of twisted bones, reciting a father's gnarled disease,
His lesson, from his desk. At back of the dim class
One unnoted, sweet and young. His eyes live in a dream
Of squirrel's game, in tree room, other than this.

On sour cream walls, donations. Shakespeare's head,
Cloudless at dawn, civilized dome riding all cities.
Belled, flowery, Tyrolese valley. Open-handed map
Awarding the world its world. And yet, for these
Children, these windows, not this map, their world,
Where all their future's painted with a fog,
A narrow street sealed in with a lead sky
Far far from rivers, capes, and stars of words.

Surely, Shakespeare is wicked, the map a bad example.
With ships and sun and love tempting them to steal —
For lives that slyly turn in their cramped holes
From fog to endless night? On their slag heap, these children
Wear skins peeped through by bones and spectacles of steel

With mended glass, like bottle bits on stones.
All of their time and space are foggy slum.
So blot their maps with slums as big as doom.

Unless, governor, inspector, visitor,
This map becomes their window and these windows
That shut upon their lives like catacombs,
Break O break open till they break the town
And show the children to green fields, and make their world
Run azure on gold sands, and let their tongues
Run naked into books the white and green leaves open
History theirs whose language is the sun.

Stephen Spender, December 6, 2021

THE EMBANKMENT

(The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.)

Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,
In the flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.
Now see I
That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.
Oh, God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

Thomas Ernest Hulme, December 3, 2021

JAGUAR

The apes yawn and adore their fleas in the sun.
The parrots shriek as if they were on fire, or strut
Like cheap tarts to attract the stroller with the nut.
Fatigued with indolence, tiger and lion

Lie still as the sun. The boa-constrictor's coil
Is a fossil. Cage after cage seems empty, or
Stinks of sleepers from the breathing straw.
It might be painted on a nursery wall.

But who runs like the rest past these arrives
At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,

As a child at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged
Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes

On a short fierce fuse. Not in boredom –
The eye satisfied to be blind in fire,
By the bang of blood in the brain deaf the ear –
He spins from the bars, but there's no cage to him

More than to the visionary his cell:
His stride is wildernesses of freedom:
The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel.
Over the cage floor the horizons come.

Ted Hughes, November 29, 2021

THE BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT

The readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript*
Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.

When evening quickens faintly in the street,
Wakening the appetites of life in some
And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*,
I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to Rochefoucauld,
If the street were time and he at the end of the street,
And I say, "Cousin Harriet, here is the *Boston Evening Transcript*."

Thomas Stearns Eliot, November 26, 2021

REMEMBRANCE

Your hands easy
weight, teasing the bees
hived in my hair, your smile at the
slope of my cheek. On the
occasion, you press
above me, glowing, spouting
readiness, mystery rapes
my reason.

When you have withdrawn
your self and the magic, when

only the smell of your
love lingers between
my breasts, then, only
then, can I greedily consume
your presence.

Maya Angelou, November 22, 2021

HÄSTEN

Sent en natt när livet står och väger
månen borta mörkret viskar
sjunger lockar ser jag på gatan silhuetten av en häst

tecknad under skenet av en lampa. Den frustar, stampar
och jag ser att pojken som försöker hålla den är rädd.
Två vuxna män med lugna röster talar om hur han ska göra.

Svart som kol och vild är hästen och jag står en stund
och ser den dansa, känner doften ända hit
av hetta liv och längtan. Först då gråten.

Ylva Gislén, November 19, 2021

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To die — takes just a little while —
They say it doesn't hurt —
It's only fainter — by degrees —
And then — it's out of sight —

A darker Ribbon — for a Day —
A Crape upon the Hat —
And then the pretty sunshine comes —
And helps us to forget —

The absent — mystic — creature —
That but for love of us —
Had gone to sleep — that soundest time —
Without the weariness —

Emily Dickinson, November 15, 2021

LEDOVCE

V letištní hale navlečená do šatů tak tvrdě modrých, jako by ji do nich někdo chvatně nasoukal. Nacpal tam všecko a pak pozapínal. A pak postrčil kupředu. Žena udeřená modrými šaty.

Ve velké letištní hale chtěl jsem myslet na blížící se zkázu, na paluby od velrybí krve, tající ledovce, na jejich hrdý svislý pád. Teď vedle mne čeká na svůj let žena v modrých šatech. Naslouchá jménům hlášených měst, která jsou přebíjena dalšími a bez ustání zvětšují svět.

Petr Hruška, November 12, 2021

MADRIGAL

Jag ärvde en mörk skog dit jag sällan går. Men det kommer en dag när de döda och levande byter plats. Då sätter sig skogen i rörelse. Vi är inte utan hopp. De svåraste brotten förblir ouppklarade trots insats av många poliser. På samma sätt finns någonstans i våra liv en stor ouppklarad kärlek. Jag ärvde en mörk skog men idag går jag i en annan skog, den ljusa. Allt levande som sjunger slingrar viftar och kryper! Det är vår och luften är mycket stark. Jag har examen från glömskans universitet och är lika tomhänt som skjortan på tvättstreckat.

Tomas Tranströmer, November 8, 2021

TO DEATH

I think of you as a great king, cold and austere;
The throne is not gold but iron, the stones of the high
 hall are black basalt blocks, and the pavement also,
With blood in the corners:
Yet you are merciful; it is for you we labor,
And after a time you give us eternal peace.

I think of you as a mean little servant, but steward of
 the estate,
Pale and a hunchback, shuffling along the corridors,
Tapping at every door. You have the keys of the
 treasury.

You are the arbiter of the games and bestower of prizes.
For you the young men sweat and the boys play battle,
 for your award
Their hot young lives: what can they win with their
 lives –
Whether they bide at home or bleed on the capes of
 Asia,
Or add columns of figures or the fates of Europe –
But eternal peace?
You sit and watch men fighting, and to you they come.
You watch the victors go home, and to you they come.

You have a sister named Life, an opulent treacherous
 woman,
Blonde and a harlot, a great promiser, and very cruel
 too.
Even the meanest minds after some time
Understand her tricks and her guile. You have a cousin
 named Christ
To whom men turn; but presently all to you. To you
 the conquerors
And to you the pale saints. The lions of the desert
And the sky-swimming eagles flock to your feet. Athens
 and Rome
Turned to adore you; and America will, no doubt of
 that:
We are intelligent too; we shall turn and bow down our
 heads.

Robinson Jeffers, November 5, 2021

SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
– Those dying generations – at their song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

William Butler Yeats, November 1, 2021

STREET SONG

By a mad miracle I go intact

Among the common rout
Thronging sidewalk, street,

And bickering shops;
Nobody blinks a lid, gapes,
Or cries that this raw flesh
Reeks of the butcher's cleaver,

Its heart and guts hung hooked
And bloodied as a cow's split frame
Parceled out by white-jacketed assassins.

Oh no, for I strut it clever
As a greenly escaped idiot,
Buying wine, bread,
Yellow-casqued chrysanthemums -
Arming myself with the most reasonable items
To ward off, at all cost, suspicions
Roused by thorned hands, feet, head
And that great wound
Squandering red
From the flayed side.

Even as my each mangled nerve-end
Trills its hurt out
Above pitch of pedestrian ear,
So, perhaps I, knelled dumb by your absence,
Alone can hear
Sun's parched scream,
Every downfall and crash
Of gutted star,
And, more daft than any goose,

This cracked world's incessant gabble and hiss.

Sylvia Plath, October 29, 2021

THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

*(This Marble Monument
Is Erected by the State)*

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

And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.

Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year –
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war he went.
He was married and added children to the population
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd-
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Wystan Hugh Auden, October 25, 2021

KAŽDÁ ROSTLINA ZNÁ MLÉKO SVÉ PŮDY

Země podarovává ohněm, člověk mečem.
– Domy vysmívající se nebesům,
zpupné železo, nestoudný kámen –
Je sváteční den na konečné stanici metra,
sedím na betonové lavičce a pozoruji děti
drnkající dřevěnými šavličkami
o žebra plotu doprovod k své písni.
Vítr občas zabubnuje na tenisové dvorce
a hlas mikrofónů hlásí jména vítězů.
Kdo je vítěz, kdo poražený?
Kdo je vítěz, kdo poražený dnešního dne?

– Mladá žena mně nabízí ke koupi kytici růží:
„Jsou z dobré půdy, pane.“

Jiří Kolář, October 22, 2021

AT GRASS

The eye can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and mane;
Then one crops grass, and moves about
- The other seeming to look on -
And stands anonymous again

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
Two dozen distances sufficed
To fable them: faint afternoons
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
Whereby their names were artificed
To inlay faded, classic Junes -

Silks at the start: against the sky
Numbers and parasols: outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
And littered grass: then the long cry
Hanging unhusht till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows.
Summer by summer all stole away,
The starting-gates, the crowd and cries -
All but the unmolesting meadows.
Almanacked, their names live; they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophesies:
Only the grooms, and the grooms boy,
With bridles in the evening come.

Philip Larkin, October 18, 2021

MYSTERY

Every weathered human face is a story in itself.
And an enormous mystery to me for whom
sifting through living masks is the same as digging
through archeological sites. Buried deep beneath

the wrinkles, as if under the folds of sand dunes,
are the answers to the questions whether a scar on
the chin is from a sword or a razor blade, a crater
above the lip, from a shrapnel or a lust bite.

The eyes, on the contrary, have no memory. From
them an unbribed future is watching, exactly the
same despair of an anonymous being as of one
always marching at the conqueror's hip. The mystery
of disappointment! From the eyes of a man stepping
out of life emerges the gloom of one who just
stepped out of a pantry filled with this and that,
without finding that one thing he was looking for.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), October 15, 2021

ASIDES

Though the season's begun to speak
Its long sentences of darkness,
The upswept boughs of the larch
Bristle with gold for a week,

And then there is only the willow
To make bright interjection,
Its drooping branches decked
With thin leaves, curved and yellow,

Till winter, loosening these
With a first flurry and bluster,
Shall scatter across the snow-crust
Their dropped parentheses.

Richard Wilbur, October 11, 2021

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1906

1906. Time stands at ease.
Having one letter in common with
his subject, Freud adds to our bookshelf
preparing the century for itself.
On the whole, Europeans become much nicer

to each other: in Africa. Still, the Kaiser
when asked of the growth of his navy, lies.
The Japs, for some reason, nationalize
their railroads of whose existence none,
save several spices, had known.
Along the same, so to speak cast-iron
lines, aping the rod of Aaron,
the Simplon Tunnel opens to hit your sight
with a smoking non-stop Vis-a-vis. Aside
from that the civilized world condemns
night shifts (in factories though) for dames.
Prime ministers are leapfrogging in
Russia, as though they've seen
in a crystal ball that the future keeps
no room for these kinds of leaps.
The French Government warily says "pardon"
to Captain Dreyfus, a Jew who's done
ten years in the slimmer on the charge of treason.
Still, this distinction between a prison
and a Jew has no prophetic air.
The U.S. troops have a brief affair
with the Island of Cuba: their first tete-a-tete.
Samuel Beckett is born. Paul Cezanne is dead.

The man of the year is Herr von Pirquet.
He stings like honey-bee.
The sting screams like Prince Hamlet's sick parakeet:
TB or not TB.

(Dr. Clement von Pirquet)

"What I call allergy, you call rash.
I'll give you an analogy: each time you blush,
it shows you're too susceptible to something lurid,
obscene and antiseptical to hope to cure it.
This, roughly, is the principle that guides my needle.
To prove you are invincible it hurts a little;
it plucks from your pale cheeks the blooming roses
and checks their petals for tuberculosis!"

Joseph Brodsky, October 8, 2021

ANGEL OF HOPE AND CALENDARS

Angel of hope and calendars, do you know despair?

That hole I crawl into with a box of Kleenex,
that hole where the fire woman is tied to her chair,
that hole where leather men are wringing their necks,
where the sea has turned into a pond of urine.
There is no place to wash and no marine beings to stir in.

In this hole your mother is crying out each day.
Your father is eating cake and digging her grave.
In this hole your baby is strangling. Your mouth is clay.
Your eyes are made of glass. They break. You are not brave.
You are alone like a dog in a kennel. Your hands
break out in boils. Your arms are cut and bound by bands

of wire. Your voice is out there. Your voice is strange.
There are no prayers here. Here there is no change.

Anne Sexton, October 4, 2021

THE WARM AND THE COLD

Freezing dusk is closing
Like a slow trap of steel
On trees and roads and hills and all
That can no longer feel.
But the carp is in its depth
Like a planet in its heaven.
And the badger in its bedding
Like a loaf in the oven.
And the butterfly in its mummy
Like a viol in its case.
And the owl in its feathers
Like a doll in its lace.

Freezing dusk has tightened
Like a nut screwed tight
On the starry aeroplane
Of the soaring night.
But the trout is in its hole
Like a chuckle in a sleeper.
The hare strays down the highway
Like a root going deeper.
The snail is dry in the outhouse
Like a seed in a sunflower.
The owl is pale on the gatepost
Like a clock on its tower.

Moonlight freezes the shaggy world
Like a mammoth of ice -
The past and the future
Are the jaws of a steel vice.
But the cod is in the tide-rip
Like a key in a purse.
The deer are on the bare-blown hill
Like smiles on a nurse.
The flies are behind the plaster
Like the lost score of a jig.
Sparrows are in the ivy-clump
Like money in a pig.

Such a frost
The flimsy moon
Has lost her wits.

A star falls.

The sweating farmers
Turn in their sleep
Like oxen on spits.

Ted Hughes, October 1, 2021

HARDER THAN GRANITE

It is a pity the shock-waves
Of the present population-explosion must push in here too.
They will certainly within a century
Eat up the old woods I planted and throw down my
Stonework: O only the little tower,
Four-foot-thick-walled and useless may stand for a time.
That and some verses. It is curious that flower-soft verse
Is sometimes harder than granite, tougher than a steel
Cable, more alive than life.

Robinson Jeffers, September 27, 2021

STORM

Plötsligt möter vandraren här den gamla
jätteeken, lik en förstenad älg med
milsvind krona framför septemberhavets
svartgröna fästning.

Nordlig storm. Det är i den tid när rönnbärs-
klasar mognar. Vaken i mörkret hör man
stjärnbilderna stampa i sina spiltor
högt över träden.

Tomas Tranströmer, September 24, 2021

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There is a Languor of the Life
More imminent than Pain—
'Tis Pain's Successor—When the Soul
Has suffered all it can—

A Drowsiness—diffuses—
A Dimness like a Fog
Envelops Consciousness—
As Mists—obliterate a Crag.

The Surgeon—does not blanch—at pain
His Habit—is severe—
But tell him that it ceased to feel—
The Creature lying there—

And he will tell you—skill is late—
A Mightier than He—
Has ministered before Him—
There's no Vitality.

Emily Dickinson, September 20, 2021

REFUSAL

Beloved,
In what other lives or lands
Have I known your lips

Your Hands
Your Laughter brave
Irreverent.
Those sweet excesses that
I do adore.
What surety is there
That we will meet again,
On other worlds some
Future time undated.
I defy my body's haste.
Without the promise
Of one more sweet encounter
I will not deign to die.

Maya Angelou, September 17, 2021

MARKET DAY

White, glittering sunlight fills the market square,
Spotted and spigged with shadows. Double rows
Of bartering booths spread out their tempting shows
Of globed and golden fruit, the morning air
Smells sweet with ripeness, on the pavement there
A wicker basket gapes and overflows
Spilling out cool, blue plums. The market glows,
And flaunts, and clatters in its busy care.
A stately minster at the northern side
Lifts its twin spires to the distant sky,
Pinnacled, carved and buttressed; through the wide
Arched doorway peals an organ, suddenly –
Crashing, triumphant in its pregnant tide,
Quenching the square in vibrant harmony.

Robert Lowell, September 13, 2021

WEDDING-RING

My wedding-ring lies in a basket
as if at the bottom of a well.
Nothing will come to fish it back up
and onto my finger again.
It lies
among keys to abandoned houses,

nails waiting to be needed and hammered
into some wall,
telephone numbers with no names attached,
idle paperclips.

It can't be given away
for fear of bringing ill-luck.
It can't be sold
for the marriage was good in its own
time, though that time is gone.
Could some artificer
beat into it bright stones, transform it
into a dazzling circlet no one could take
for solemn betrothal or to make promises
living will not let them keep? Change it
into a simple gift I could give in friendship?

Denise Levertov, September 10, 2021

RUSKÉ ŠERO

V místnosti odpolední šero, kterému říkám ruské: když rozsvítíš, neuvidíš víc.
Leskne se deska stolu, tmavnou postavy kolem. Není důležité, jestli pijí nebo ne,
ale spíše pijí. Mluví popaměti. Teď právě o smrti.
Opatrně vyjdu ven. Najednou zjišťuji, že znám cestu k útesům. Roste tam už jen
oranžový lišejník na ostrých kamenech. Oranžové skvrny připomínají neznámou
nemoc, kterou jsme oba kdysi společně prodělali.

Petr Hruška, September 6, 2021

REQUIEM

It came to me the other day:
Were I to die, no one would say,
“Oh, what a shame! So young, so full
Of promise – depths unplumbable!”

Instead, a shrug and tearless eyes
Will greet my overdue demise;
The wide response will be, I know,
“I thought he died a while ago.”

For life's a shabby subterfuge,
And death is real, and dark, and huge.
The shock of it will register
Nowhere but where it will occur.

John Updike, September 3, 2021

WORDS HEARD, BY ACCIDENT, OVER THE PHONE

O mud, mud, how fluid! –
Thick as foreign coffee, and with a sluggish pulse.
Speak, speak! Who is it?
It is the bowel-pulse, lover of digestibles.
It is he who has achieved these syllables.

What are these words, these words?
They are plopping like mud.
O god, how shall I ever clean the phone table?
They are pressing out of the many-holed earpiece,
they are looking for a listener.
Is he here?

Now the room is ahiss. The instrument
Withdraws its tentacle.
But the spawn percolate in my heart. They are fertile.
Muck funnel, muck funnel –
You are too big. They must take you back!

Sylvia Plath, August 30, 2021

DRIFTWOOD

In greenwoods once these relics must have known
A rapt, gradual growing,
That are cast here like slag of the old
Engine of grief;

Must have affirmed in annual increase
Their close selves, knowing
Their own nature only, and that
Bringing to leaf.

Say, for the seven cities or a war

Their solitude was taken,
They into masts shaven, or milled into
Oar or plank;

Afterward sailing long and to lost ends,
By groundless water shaken,
Well they availed their vessels till they
Smashed or sank.

Then on the great generality of waters
Floated their singleness,
And in all that deep subsumption they were
Never dissolved;

But shaped and flowingly fretted by the waves'
Ever surpassing stress,
With the gnarled swerve and tangle of tides
Finely involved.

Brought in the end where breakers dump and slew
On the glass verge of the land,
Silver they rang to the stones when the sea
Flung them and turned.

Curious crowns
And scepters they look to me
Here on the gold sand,
Warped, dry, but having the beauty of
Excellence earned.

In a time of continual dry abdications
And of damp complicities,
They are fit to be taken for signs, these emblems
Royally sane,

Which have ridden to homeless wreck, and long revolved
In the lathe of all the seas,
But have saved in spite of it all their dense
Ingenerate grain.

Richard Wilbur, August 27, 2021

I PUT MY MOUTH

I put my mouth
Close to running water:

Flow north, flow south,
It will not matter,
It is not love you will find.

I told the wind:
It took away my words:
It is not love you will find,
Only the bright-tongued birds,
Only a moon with no home.

It is not love you will find:
You have no limbs
Crying for stillness, you have no mind
Trembling with seraphim,
You have no death to come.

Philip Larkin, August 23, 2021

THE BLOODY SIRE

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

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

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

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

Robinson Jeffers, August 20, 2021

PIANO

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cozy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

David Herbert Lawrence, August 16, 2021

TO THE PRESIDENT ELECT

You've climbed the mountain. At its top,
the mountain and the climbing stop.
A peak is where the climber finds
his biggest step is not mankind's.

Proud of your stamina and craft
you stand there being photographed
transfixed between nowhere-to-go
and us who give you vertigo.

Well, strike your tent and have your lunch
before you stir an avalanche
of brand-new taxes whose each cent
will mark the speed of your descent.

Joseph Brodsky, August 13, 2021

THE HARVEST MOON

The flame-red moon, the harvest moon,
Rolls along the hills, gently bouncing,
A vast balloon,
Till it takes off, and sinks upward

To lie on the bottom of the sky, like a gold doubloon.
The harvest moon has come,
Booming softly through heaven, like a bassoon.
And the earth replies all night, like a deep drum.

So people can't sleep,
So they go out where elms and oak trees keep
A kneeling vigil, in a religious hush.
The harvest moon has come!

And all the moonlit cows and all the sheep
Stare up at her petrified, while she swells
Filling heaven, as if red hot, and sailing
Closer and closer like the end of the world.

Till the gold fields of stiff wheat
Cry 'We are ripe, reap us!' and the rivers
Sweat from the melting hills.

Ted Hughes, August 9, 2021

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

She looked over his shoulder
For vines and olive trees,
Marble well-governed cities
And ships upon untamed seas,
But there on the shining metal
His hands had put instead
An artificial wilderness
And a sky like lead.

A plain without a feature, bare and brown,
No blade of grass, no sign of neighborhood,
Nothing to eat and nowhere to sit down,
Yet, congregated on its blankness, stood
An unintelligible multitude,
A million eyes, a million boots in line,
Without expression, waiting for a sign.

Out of the air a voice without a face
Proved by statistics that some cause was just
In tones as dry and level as the place:
No one was cheered and nothing was discussed;
Column by column in a cloud of dust

They marched away enduring a belief
Whose logic brought them, somewhere else, to grief.

She looked over his shoulder
For ritual pieties,
White flower-garlanded heifers,
Libation and sacrifice,
But there on the shining metal
Where the altar should have been,
She saw by his flickering forge-light
Quite another scene.

Barbed wire enclosed an arbitrary spot
Where bored officials lounged (one cracked a joke)
And sentries sweated for the day was hot:
A crowd of ordinary decent folk
Watched from without and neither moved nor spoke
As three pale figures were led forth and bound
To three posts driven upright in the ground.

The mass and majesty of this world, all
That carries weight and always weighs the same
Lay in the hands of others; they were small
And could not hope for help and no help came:
What their foes like to do was done, their shame
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride
And died as men before their bodies died.

She looked over his shoulder
For athletes at their games,
Men and women in a dance
Moving their sweet limbs
Quick, quick, to music,
But there on the shining shield
His hands had set no dancing-floor
But a weed-choked field.

A ragged urchin, aimless and alone,
Loitered about that vacancy; a bird
Flew up to safety from his well-aimed stone:
That girls are raped, that two boys knife a third,
Were axioms to him, who'd never heard
Of any world where promises were kept,
Or one could weep because another wept.

The thin-lipped armorer,
Hephaestos, hobbled away,

Thetis of the shining breasts
Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
Who would not live long.

Wystan Hugh Auden, August 6, 2021

SHARKS' TEETH

Everything contains some silence.
Noise gets its zest from the small
shark's-tooth-shaped fragments
of rest angled in it. An hour of city
holds maybe a minute of these
remnants of a time when silence
reigned, compact and dangerous
as a shark. Sometimes a bit of
a tail or fin can still be sensed in parks.

Kay Ryan, August 2, 2021

DEN STORA GÅTAN

Döden lutar sig
över mig, ett schackproblem.
Och har lösningen.

Tomas Tranströmer, July 30, 2021

THE COLDER THE AIR

We must admire her perfect aim,
this huntress of the winter air
whose level weapon needs no sight,
if it were not that everywhere
her game is sure, her shot is right.
The least of us could do the same.

The chalky birds or boats stand still,

reducing her conditions of chance;
air's gallery marks identically
the narrow gallery of her glance.
The target-center in her eye
is equally her aim and will.

Time's in her pocket, ticking loud
on one stalled second. She'll consult
not time nor circumstance. She calls
on atmosphere for her result.
(It is this clock that later falls
in wheels and chimes of leaf and cloud.)

Elizabeth Bishop, July 26, 2021

ANNA WHO WAS MAD

Anna who was mad,
I have a knife in my armpit.
When I stand on tiptoe I tap out messages.
Am I some sort of infection?
Did I make you go insane?
Did I make the sounds go sour?
Did I tell you to climb out the window?
Forgive. Forgive.
Say not I did.
Say not.
Say.

Speak Mary-words into our pillow.
Take me the gangling twelve-year-old
into your sunken lap.
Whisper like a buttercup.
Eat me. Eat me up like cream pudding.
Take me in.
Take me.
Take.

Give me a report on the condition of my soul.
Give me a complete statement of my actions.
Hand me a jack-in-the-pulpit and let me listen in.
Put me in the stirrups and bring a tour group through.
Number my sins on the grocery list and let me buy.
Did I make you go insane?
Did I turn up your earphone and let a siren drive through?

Did I open the door for the mustached psychiatrist
who dragged you out like a gold cart?
Did I make you go insane?
From the grave write me, Anna!
You are nothing but ashes but nevertheless
pick up the Parker Pen I gave you.
Write me.
Write.

Anne Sexton, July 23, 2021

ESSENTIALS

(Conversation with a Croat)

'I looked at my Shakespeares and said NO!
I looked at my Sartres, which I often read
By candlelight, and couldn't let them go
Even at this time of direst need.

Because he was a Fascist like our Chetnik foes
I lingered for a while at my Célines...
But he's such a serious stylist, so I chose
Das Kapital to cook my AID canned beans!'

Sarajevo
20 september 1995

Tony Harrison, July 19, 2021

LOVERS ON ARAN

The timeless waves, bright, sifting, broken glass,
Came dazzling around, into the rocks,
Came glinting, sifting from the Americas

To possess Aran. Or did Aran rush
to throw wide arms of rock around a tide
That yielded with an ebb, with a soft crash?

Did sea define the land or land the sea?
Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.
Sea broke on land to full identity.

Seamus Heaney, July 16, 2021

WHEN YOU COME

When you come to me, unbidden,
Beckoning me
To long-ago rooms,
Where memories lie.

Offering me, as to a child, an attic,
Gatherings of days too few.
Baubles of stolen kisses.
Trinkets of borrowed loves.
Trunks of secret words,

I cry.

Maya Angelou, July 12, 2021

AN EVENT

As if a cast of grain leapt back to the hand,
A landscapeful of small black birds, intent
On the far south, convene at some command
At once in the middle of the air, at once are gone
With headlong and unanimous consent
From the pale trees and fields they settled on.

What is an individual thing? They roll
Like a drunken fingerprint across the sky!
Or so I give their image to my soul
Until, as if refusing to be caught
In any singular vision of my eye
Or in the nets and cages of my thought,

They tower up, shatter, and madden space
With their divergences, are each alone
Swallowed from sight, and leave me in this place
Shaping these images to make them stay:
Meanwhile, in some formation of their own,
They fly me still, and steal my thoughts away,

Delighted with myself and with the birds,
I set them down and give them leave to be.
It is by words and the defeat of words,
Down sudden vistas of the vain attempt,
That for a flying moment one may see
By what cross-purposes the world is dreamt.

Richard Wilbur, July 9, 2021

YOU SHALL NOT DESPAIR

You shall not despair
Because I have forsaken you
Or cast your love aside;
There is a greater love than mine
Which can comfort you
And touch you with softer hands.
I am no longer
Friendly and beautiful to you;
Your body cannot gladden me,
Nor the splendor of your dark hair,
But I do not humiliate you;
You shall be taken sweetly again
And soothed with slow tears;
You shall be loved enough.

Stevie Smith, July 5, 2021

THE NIHILIST AS HERO

"All our French poets can turn an inspired line;
who has written six passable in sequence?"
said Valery. That was a happy day for Satan...
I want words meat-hooked from the living steer,
but a cold flame of tinfoil licks the metal log,
beautiful unchanging fire of childhood
betraying a monotony of vision...

Life by definition breeds on change,
each season we scrap new cars and wars and women.
But sometimes when I am ill or delicate,
the pinched flame of my match turns unchanging green,
a cornstalk in green tails and seeded tassel...

A nihilist wants to live in the world as is,
and yet gaze the everlasting hills to rubble.

Robert Lowell, July 2, 2021

FORTUNETELLING

You will go a long journey,
In a strange bed take rest,
And a dark girl will kiss you
As softly as the breast
Of an evening bird comes down
Covering its own nest.

She will cover your mouth
Lest memory exclaim
At her bending face,
Knowing it is the same
As one who long since dies
Under a different name.

Philip Larkin, June 28, 2021

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1905

1905. In the news: Japan.
Which means that the century is upon
us. Diminishing the lifespan
of Russian dreadnoughts to naught, Japan
tells urbi et orbi it's loathe to lurk
in the wings of geography. In Petersburg
those whose empty stomachs churn
take to the streets. Yet they won't return
home, for the Cossacks adore long streets.
A salesman of the Singer sewing devices greets
in Latvia the arrival of yet another
daughter, who is to become my mother.
In Spain, unaware of this clever ploy,
Pablo Picasso depicts his "Boy
With Pipe" in blue. While the shades of blonde,
Swedes and Norwegians, dissolve their bond.
And Norway goes independent; yet
that's not enough to turn brunette.

Speaking of things that sound rather queer,
E is equated to MC square
by Albert Einstein, and the Fauvists
(Les Fauves is the French for unruly beasts)
unleash Henri Matisse in Paris.
"The Merry Widow" by Franz Lehar is
the toast of the town. Plus Transvaal gets its
constitution called by the natives "the pits".
And Greta Garbo, La belle dame sans
merci, is born. So are neon signs.

The man of the year, our record tells,
is neither Strindberg nor H.G.Wells,
he is not Albert Schweitzer, not Oscar Wilde:
his name is obscured by his own brain-child.

(Camouflage)

"I am what gentleman wear in the field
when they are afraid that they may be killed.
I am called camouflage. Sporting me, each creature
feels both safer and close to Nature.
The green makes your simper's pupil sore.
That's what forests and swamps are for.
The planet itself wears me: the design
is as French as it is divine."

Joseph Brodsky, June 25, 2021

SOMEWHERE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED, GLADLY BEYOND

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will uncloset me
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

Edward Estlin Cummings, June 21, 2021

SYN

Ale vždyť psal!
Napsal esemesku.
Posílal zprávu.
Přísahábůh.
Že nepřišla, není jeho vina.
Někde tu je,
asi pořád ještě putuje.
Eseseska, aby neměli strach.
Eseseska, kde se všechno vysvětluje.
A objímá.
Přísahábůh,
esemeska obsáhlá jak evangelium.
Snad ještě dojde.
Dával vědět.
Že není důvodů k obavám
a mnohé další věci.
Možná jednou přijde
v nečekané chvíli –
nádherná esemeska.
Mobil modře zasvítí,
jako posvátný kámen
na kraji světa.

Petr Hruška, June 18, 2021

GRANDDAUGHTER

And here's a portrait of my granddaughter Una
When she was two years old: a remarkable painter.
A perfect likeness; nothing tricky nor modernist,
Nothing of the artist fudging his art into the picture,
But simple and true. She stands in a glade of trees with a still inlet
Of blue ocean behind her. Thus exactly she looked then,
A forgotten flower in her hand, those great blue eyes
Asking and wondering.

Now she is five years old
And found herself, she does not ask any more but commands
Sweet and fierce-tempered; that light red hair of hers
Is the fuse for explosions. When she is eighteen
I'll not be here. I hope she will find her natural elements,
Laughter and violence; and in her quiet times
The beauty of things – the beauty of transhuman things,
Without which we are all lost. I hope she will find
Powerful protection and a man like a hawk to cover her.

Robinson Jeffers, June 14, 2021

THE SEVEN SORROWS

The first sorrow of autumn
Is the slow goodbye
Of the garden who stands so long in the evening –
A brown poppy head,
The stalk of a lily,
And still cannot go

The second sorrow
Is the empty feet
Of a pheasant who hangs from a hook with his brothers.
The woodland of gold
Is folded in feathers
With its head in a bag.

And the third sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the sun who has gathered the birds and who gathers
The minutes of evening,
The golden and holy
Ground of the picture.

The fourth sorrow
Is the pond gone black
Ruined and sunken the city of water –
The beetle's palace,
The catacombs
Of the dragonfly.

And the fifth sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the woodland that quietly breaks up its camp.
One day it's gone.
It has only left litter –
Firewood, tentpoles

And the sixth sorrow
Is the fox's sorrow
The joy of the huntsman, the joy of the hounds,
The hooves that pound
Till earth closes her ear
To the fox's prayer.

And the seventh sorrow
Is the slow goodbye
Of the face with its wrinkles that looks through the window
As the year packs up
Like a tatty fairground
That came for the children.

Ted Hughes, June 11, 2021

PEGGY LUTZ, FRED MUTH

December 13, 2008

They've been in my fiction; both now dead,
Peggy just recently, long stricken (like
my Grandma) with Parkinson's disease.
But what a peppy knockout Peggy was! –
cheerleader, hockey star, May Queen, RN.
Pigtailed in kindergarten, she caught my mother's
eye, but she was too much girl for me.
Fred – so bright, so quietly wry – his

mother's eye fell on me, a "nicer" boy

than his son's pet pals. Fred's slight wild streak
was tamed by diabetes. At the end,
it took his toes and feet. Last time we met,
his walk rolled wildly, fetching my coat. With health
he might have soared. As was, he taught me smarts.

Dear friends of childhood, classmates, thank you,
scant hundred of you, for providing a
sufficiency of human types; beauty,
bully, hanger-on, natural,
twin, and fatso – all a writer needs,
all there in Shillington, its trolley cars
and little factories, cornfields and trees,
leaf fires, snowflakes, pumpkins, valentines.

To think of you brings tears less caustic
than those the thought of death brings. Perhaps
we meet our heaven at the start and not
the end of life. Even then were tears
and fear and struggle, but the town itself
draped in plain glory the passing days.

The town forgave me for existing; it
included me in Christmas carols, songfests
(though I sang poorly) at the Shillington,
the local movie house. My father stood,
in back, too restless to sit, but everybody
knew his name, and mine. In turn I knew
my Granddad in the overalled town crew.
I've written these before, these modest facts,

but their meaning has no bottom in my mind.
The fragments in their jiggled scope collide
to form more sacred windows. I had to move
to beautiful New England – its triple
deckers, whited churches, unplowed streets –
to learn how drear and deadly life can be.

John Updike, June 7, 2021

AS THE TEAM'S HEAD-BRASS

As the team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.
I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewed an angle of the fallow, and
Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock. Every time the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word,
About the weather, next about the war.
Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.

The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
The ploughman said. "When will they take it away?"
"When the war's over." So the talk began –
One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute more and the same interval.
"Have you been out?" "No." "And don't want
to, perhaps?"
"If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more... Have many gone
From here?" "Yes." "Many lost?" "Yes, a good few.
Only two teams work on the farm this year.
One of my mates is dead. The second day
In France they killed him. It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree."
"And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world." "Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good." Then
The lovers came out of the wood again:
The horses started and for the last time
I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

Thomas Edward, June 4, 2021

A STORY ABOUT CHICKEN SOUP

In my grandmother's house there was always chicken soup
And talk of the old country – mud and boards,
Poverty,
The snow falling down the necks of lovers.
Now and then, out of her savings
She sent them a dowry.
Imagine
The rice-powdered faces!
And the smell of the bride, like chicken soup.
But the Germans killed them.
I know it's in bad taste to say it,
But it's true.
The Germans killed them all.

Louis Simpson, May 31, 2021

SONNET 66

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,

And guiled honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection rightfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,

And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly doctor-like controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,

And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

William Shakespeare, May 28, 2021

SUICIDE I THE TRENCHES

I knew a simple soldier boy
Who grinned at life in empty joy,
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
He put a bullet through his brain.
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,
Sneak home and pray you'll never know
The hell where youth and laughter go.

Siegfried Sassoon, May 24, 2021

NOTHING VENTURED

Nothing exists as a block
and cannot be parceled up.
So if nothing's ventured
it's not just talk;
it's the big wager.
Don't you wonder
how people think
the banks of space
and time don't matter?
How they'll drain
the big tanks down to
slime and salamanders
and want thanks?

Kay Ryan, May 21, 2021

GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

WHEN THE SUMERIANS HIT ON THE LYRE
AND THE EGYPTIANS THE CAT
AND I TOLD YOU MY HEART WAS ON FIRE
YOU SAID GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

WHEN BIRO SKETCHED OUT THE BALLPOINT
AND STETSON THE TEN GALLON HAT
AND CHARNLEY HIS REPLACEMENT JOINT
YOU SAID GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

WHEN LEVI STRAUSS DREAMT UP BLUE JEANS
AND ADAMS THE BASEBALL BAT
AND PASTEUR HIS RABIES VACCINE
YOU SAID GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

WHEN GLIDDEN PATENTED BARBED WIRE
AND YAHWEH TIT FOR TAT
AND I TOLD YOU MY HEART WAS ON FIRE
YOU SAID GOOD LUCK WITH THAT

Paul Muldoon, May 17, 2021

RUBBISH

All my rubbish is discreetly bagged,
Some heavy with indulgence, some lightweig.
Some sail through the air, and some get dragged,
clinking, down to the gap that was the gate.
I didn't move when roofers fixed my tiles
or when the builder came to point the wall;
with the window cleaner I swap nods and smiles
and don't budge from my littered desk at all,
so why, when two men cross my threadbare lawn
each Monday morning emptying my bins,
as if my refuse was exposed to scorn,
my garbage a glaring index to my sins,
do I bolt from my study and go hide?
I think the reason is I can't abide
being caught pen in hand as gloved men chuck
black plastic sacks of old drafts on their truck.

Tony Harrison, May 14, 2021

THE JACOB'S LADDER

The stairway is not
a thing of gleaming strands

a radiant evanescence
for angels' feet that only glance in their tread, and
need not touch the stone.

It is of stone.

A rosy stone that takes
a glowing tone of softness
only because behind it the sky is a doubtful,
a doubting night gray.

A stairway of sharp
angles, solidly built.

One sees that the angels must spring
down from one step to the next, giving a little
lift of the wings:
and a man climbing
must scrape his knees, and bring
the grip of his hands into play. The cut stone
consoles his groping feet. Wings brush past him.
The poem ascends.

Denise Levertov, May 10, 2021

BY THE ROAD TO THE CONTAGIOUS HOSPITAL

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast-a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines –

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches –

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all

save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind –

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined –
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance – Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken

William Carlos Williams, May 7, 2021

VISITS TO ST ELIZABETHS

This is the house of Bedlam.

This is the man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is the time
of the tragic man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a wristwatch
telling the time
of the talkative man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a sailor
wearing the watch
that tells the time
of the honored man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is the roadstead all of board
reached by the sailor
wearing the watch
that tells the time
of the old, brave man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

These are the years and the walls of the ward,

the winds and clouds of the sea of board
sailed by the sailor
wearing the watch
that tells the time
of the cranky man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
that dances weeping down the ward
over the creaking sea of board
beyond the sailor
winding his watch
that tells the time
of the cruel man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a world of books gone flat.
This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
that dances weeping down the ward
over the creaking sea of board
of the batty sailor
that winds his watch
that tells the time
of the busy man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is a boy that pats the floor
to see if the world is there, is flat,
for the widowed Jew in the newspaper hat
that dances weeping down the ward
waltzing the length of a weaving board
by the silent sailor
that hears his watch
that ticks the time
of the tedious man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

These are the years and the walls and the door
that shut on a boy that pats the floor
to feel if the world is there and flat.
This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
that dances joyfully down the ward
into the parting seas of board
past the staring sailor
that shakes his watch
that tells the time
of the poet, the man

that lies in the house of Bedlam.

This is the soldier home from the war.
These are the years and the walls and the door
that shut on a boy that pats the floor
to see if the world is round or flat.
This is a Jew in a newspaper hat
that dances carefully down the ward,
walking the plank of a coffin board
with the crazy sailor
that shows his watch
that tells the time
of the wretched man
that lies in the house of Bedlam.

Elizabeth Bishop, May 3, 2021

LINEAGE

In the beginning was Scream
Who begat Blood
Who begat Eye
Who begat Fear
Who begat Wing
Who begat Bone
Who begat Granite
Who begat Violet
Who begat Guitar
Who begat Sweat
Who begat Adam
Who begat Mary
Who begat God
Who begat Nothing
Who begat Never
Never Never Never
Who begat Crow
Screaming for Blood
Grubs, crusts
Anything
Trembling featherless elbows in the nest's filth

Ted Hughes, April 30, 2021

FEBRUARY 11, 1977

to my son John

You died nine years ago today.
I see you still sometimes in dreams
in white track-shirt and shorts, running,
against a drop of tropic green.

It seems to be a meadow, lying
open to early morning sun:
no other person is in view,
a quiet forest waits beyond.

Why do you hurry? What's the need?
Poor eager boy, why can't you see
once and for all you've lost this race
though you run for all eternity?

Your youngest brother's passed you by
at last: he's older now than you –
and all our lives have ramified
in meanings which you never knew.

And yet, your eyes still burn with joy,
your body's splendor never fades?
sometimes I seek to follow you
across the greenness, into the shade

of that great forest in whose depths
houses await and lives are lived,
where you haste in gleeful search of me
bearing a message I must have –

but I, before I change, must bide
the "days of my appointed time,"
and so I age from self to self
while you await me, always young.

Frederick Morgan, April 26, 2021

FLY

I have been cruel to a fat pigeon
Because he would not fly

All he wanted was to live like a friendly old man

He had let himself become a wreck filthy and confiding
Wild for his food beating the cat off the garbage
Ignoring his mate perpetually snotty at the beak
Smelling waddling having to be
Carried up the ladder at night content

Fly I said throwing him into the air
But he would drop and run back expecting to be fed
I said it again and again throwing him up
As he got worse
He let himself be picked up every time
Until I found him in the dovecote dead
Of the needless efforts

So that is what I am
Pondering his eye that could not
Conceive that I was a creature to run from

I who have always believed too much in words

William Stanley Merwin, April 23, 2021

PUNISHMENT

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adultress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

Seamus Heaney, April 19, 2021

PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,

It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.

When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Maya Angelou, April 16, 2021

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1904

1904. Things which were in store
hit the counter. There is a war.
Japan, ever so smiling, gnashes
teeth and bites off what, in fact, in Russia's.
Other than that, in Milan police
crack local skulls. But more common is
the touch of the new safety razor blade.
The nuances of the White Slave Trade,
Mount St. Victoire by Monsieur Cezanne
and other trifles under the sun
including popular French disgust
with the Vatican, are discussed
in every Partisan cafeteria.
Radioactivity - still a theory -
is stated by Rutherford (when a particle
brings you a lordship we call it practical).
And as the first Rolls Royce engines churn,
Chekhov dies but Graham Greene is born,
so is George Balanchine, to upgrade the stage,
so too - though it's sin to disclose her age -
is Miss Dietrich, to daunt the screen.
And New York hears its subway's first horrid scream!

The man of the year is a Hottentot.
South-West Africa's where he dwells.
In a German colony. And is being taught
German. So he rebels.

(A Hottentot)

"Germans to me are extremely white.
They are white in broad daylight and what's more, at night.
Plus if you try to win minds and hearts
of locals, you don't call a black guy "schwarz" -
"Schwarz" sounds shoddy and worse than "black".
Change your language and then come back!
Fly, my arrow, and hit a Hans
to cure a Hans of his arrogance!"

Joseph Brodsky, April 12, 2021

DOKTOR SEGER

Jednou jsem viděl ve varieté
bezrukého hrát na trubku
To jsem se měl začít učit
jak mě vzali poprvé pod nůž
Stejně mi je pomalu okrouhají až k ramenům
Ale to je psí život
když se člověk nemůže ani utřít
a musí smrdět
To žádný básník nenapsal a nenapíše
Dva tisíce let ze sebe kdekdo dojí slzy
že mu holka vypálila rybník
škoda mluvit – umění dělají zbabělci –
a když se někdo najde s odvahou
je to zázrak věků
a přece tahle odvaha leží na ulici
kam všichni plivají

Jiří Kolář, April 9, 2021

TUNY

Nakládací jeřáby vyhlížejí ochočeně,
šíje něžně skloněny,
cejchovány čísla tun.
Černá čísla tun.
Záchranné čluny se něžně kolébají
na hácích
proti nebi,

klid našeho věku.
Na nich černá čísla tun.
Dcera,
mladá odjíždějící žena ve slunečních brýlích
s nádhernými zápěstími,
už je na palubě.
Mávnul jsem zespoda.
Slova na boku trajektu
nelidsky veliká.
A černá čísla tun.

Petr Hruška, April 5, 2021

EPITAPH ON A TYRANT

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

Wystan Hugh Auden, April 2, 2021

WARNING

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells
And run my stick along the public railings
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain
And pick flowers in other people's gardens
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practise a little now?
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

Jenny Joseph, March 29, 2021

THE MESS OF LOVE

We've made a great mess of love
since we made an ideal of it.

The moment I swear to love a woman, a certain woman,
all my life
that moment I begin to hate her.

The moment I even say to a woman: I love you! –
my love dies down considerably.

The moment love is an understood thing between us, we
are sure of it,
it's a cold egg, it isn't love any more.

Love is like a flower, it must flower and fade;
if it doesn't fade, it is not a flower,
it's either an artificial rag blossom, or an immortelle, for
the cemetery.

The moment the mind interferes with love, or the will fixes
on it,
or the personality assumes it as an attribute, or the ego
takes possession of it,
it is not love any more, it's just a mess.
And we've made a great mess of love, mind-perverted,
will-perverted, ego-perverted love.

David Herbert Lawrence, March 26, 2021

My friend attacks my friend!
 Oh Battle picturesque!
 Then I turn Soldier too,
 And he turns Satirist!

How martial is this place!
 Had I a mighty gun
 I think I'd shoot the human race
 And then to glory run!

Emily Dickinson, March 22, 2021

TWO VIEWS OF A CADAVER

1

The day she visited the dissecting room
 They had four men laid out, black as burnt turkey,
 Already half unstrung. A vinegary fume
 Of the death vats clung to them;
 The white-smocked boys started working.
 The head of this cadaver had caved in,
 And she could scarcely make out anything
 In that rubble of skull plates and old leather.
 A sallow piece of string held it together
 In their jars the snail-nosed babies moon and glow.
 He hands her the but-out heart like a cracked heirloom.

2

In Brueghel's panorama of smoke and slaughter
 Two people only are blind to the carrion army:
 He, afloat in the sea of her blue satin
 Skirts, sings in the direction
 Of her bare shoulder, while she bends,
 Fingering a leaflet of music, over him,
 Both of them deaf to the fiddle in the hands
 Of the death's-head shadowing their song.
 These Flemish lovers flourish; not for long.
 Yet desolation, stalled in paint, spares the little country
 Foolish, delicate, in the lower right-hand corner.

Sylvia Plath, March 19, 2021

THIS LIFE

It's a pickle, this life.
Even shut down to a trickle
it carries every kind of particle
that causes strife on a grander scale:
to be miniature is to be swallowed
by a miniature whale. Zeno knew
the law that we know: no matter
how carefully diminished, a race
can only be half finished with success;
then comes the endless halving of the rest –
the ribbon's stalled approach, the helpless
red-faced urgings of the coach.

Kay Ryan, March 15, 2021

HISTORICAL CHOICE

(written in 1942)

Strong enough to be neutral – as is now proved, now American power
From Australia to the Aleutian fog-seas, and Hawaii to Africa, rides every
wind – we were misguided
By fraud and fear, by our public fools and a loved leader's ambition,
To meddle in the fever-dreams of decaying Europe. We could have forced
peace, even when France fell; we chose
To make alliance and feed war.

Actum est. There is no returning now.

Two bloody summers from now (I suppose) we shall have to take up the
corrupting burden and curse of victory.
We shall have to hold half the earth: we shall be sick with self-disgust,
And hated by friend and foe, and hold half the earth – or let it go, and go
down with it. Here is a burden
We are not fit for. We are not like Romans and Britons – natural
world-rulers,
Bullies by instinct – but we have to bear it. Who has kissed Fate on the
mouth, and blown out the lamp – must lie with her.

Robinson Jeffers, March 12, 2021

FAR OUT

Beyond the bright cartoons
Are darker spaces where
Small cloudy nests of stars
Seem to float on air.

These have no proper names:
Men out alone at night
Never look up at them
For guidance or delight,

For such evasive dust
Can make so little clear:
Much less is known than not,
More far than near.

Philip Larkin, March 8, 2021

PUNCHLINE

No! Revolution never crossed your mind!
For the kids who never made it through the schools
the Northern working class escaped the grind
as boxers or comedians, or won the pools.

Not lucky, no physique, too shy to joke,
you scraped together almost 3 weeks' pay
to buy a cast-off uke that left broke.
You mastered only two chords, G and A!

That's why when I've heard George Formby that I've wept.
I'd always wondered what the thing was for,
I now know was a plectrum, that you'd kept,
but kept hidden, in your secret condom drawer.

The day of your cremation which I missed
I saw an old man strum a uke he'll never play,
cap spattered with tossed dimes. I made a fist
round my small change, your son, and looked away.

Tony Harrison, March 5, 2021

PLATO TOLD...

plato told

him: he couldn't
believe it (jesus

told him; he
wouldn't believe

it) lao

tsze

certainly told
him, and general

(yes

mam)

sherman;
and even
(believe it

or

not) you

told him: i told

him; we told him

(he didn't believe it, no

sir) it took
a nipponized bit of
the old sixth

avenue

el; in the top of his head: to tell
him

Edward Estlin Cummings, March 1, 2021

HAWK ROOSTING

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray
Are of advantage to me;
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly –
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads –

The allotment of death.
For the one path of my flight is direct
Through the bones of the living.
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.
Nothing has changed since I began.
My eye has permitted no change.
I am going to keep things like this.

Ted Hughe, February 26, 2021

SHOE

Take off your shoe.
The last children's size.
The glue's instructions
in laughably small letters,
you'll have to read yourself.
Bending
over the mussed wet shoe.
We'll scuff the rubber surface
let the chemical process work into the crack.
Understand,
our bodies too are made from the oxygen and carbon
of prehistoric stars.
Distant, lonely stars.
You talk about your mom.

So put your fi nger on the knot
we'll tie the laces around the glued sole.
A shooting night,
A crazily tied shoe.
The last children's size.

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweney), February 22, 2021

THE TOOME ROAD

One morning early I met armoured cars
In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,
All camouflaged with broken alder branches,
And headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets.
How long were they approaching down my roads
As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping.
I had rights-of-way, fields, cattle in my keeping,
Tractors hitched to buckrakes in open sheds,
Silos, chill gates, wet slates, the greens and reds
Of outhouse roofs. Whom should I run to tell
Among all of those with their back doors on the latch
For the bringer of bad news, that small-hours visitant
Who, by being expected, might be kept distant?
Sowers of seed, erectors of headstones...
O charioteers, above your dormant guns,
It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass,
The visible, untoppled omphalos.

Seamus Heaney, February 19, 2021

WHAT THEY WANT

Vallejo writing about
loneliness while starving to
death;
Van Gogh's ear rejected by a
whore;
Rimbaud running off to Africa
to look for gold and finding
an incurable case of syphilis;
Beethoven gone deaf;
Pound dragged through the streets
in a cage;

Chatterton taking rat poison;
Hemingway's brains dropping into
the orange juice;
Pascal cutting his wrists
in the bathtub;
Artaud locked up with the mad;
Dostoevsky stood up against a wall;
Crane jumping into a boat propeller;
Lorca shot in the road by Spanish
troops;
Berryman jumping off a bridge;
Burroughs shooting his wife;
Mailer knifing his.
– that's what they want:
a God damned show
a lit billboard
in the middle of hell.
that's what they want,
that bunch of
dull
inarticulate
safe
dreary
admirers of
carnivals.

Charles Bukowski, February 15, 2021

SEASCAPE

This celestial seascape, with white herons got up as angels,
flying high as they want and as far as they want sidewise
in tiers and tiers of immaculate reflections;
the whole region, from the highest heron
down to the weightless mangrove island
with bright green leaves edged neatly with bird-droppings
like illumination in silver,
and down to the suggestively Gothic arches of the mangrove roots
and the beautiful pea-green back-pasture
where occasionally a fish jumps, like a wildflower
in an ornamental spray of spray;
this cartoon by Raphael for a tapestry for a Pope:
it does look like heaven.
But a skeletal lighthouse standing there
in black and white clerical dress,

who lives on his nerves, thinks he knows better.
He thinks that hell rages below his iron feet,
that that is why the shallow water is so warm,
and he knows that heaven is not like this.
Heaven is not like flying or swimming,
but has something to do with blackness and a strong glare
and when it gets dark he will remember something
strongly worded to say on the subject.

Elizabeth Bishop, February 12, 2021

A SONG

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish you sat on the sofa
and I sat near.
The handkerchief could be yours,
the tear could be mine, chin-bound.
Though it could be, of course,
the other way around.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish we were in my car
and you'd shift the gear.
We'd find ourselves elsewhere,
on an unknown shore.
Or else we'd repair
to where we've been before.

I wish you were here, dear,
I wish you were here.
I wish I knew no astronomy
when stars appear,
when the moon skims the water
that sighs and shifts in its slumber.
I wish it were still a quarter
to dial your number.

I wish you were here, dear,
in this hemisphere,
as I sit on the porch
sipping a beer.
It's evening, the sun is setting;

boys shout and gulls are crying.
What's the point of forgetting
if it's followed by dying?

Joseph Brodsky, February 8, 2021

COMMODORE LOWELL

1887-1950

There were no undesirables or girls in my set,
when I was a boy at Mattapoissett –
only Mother, still her Father's daughter.
Her voice was still electric
with a hysterical, unmarried panic,
when she read to me from the Napoleon book.
Long-nosed Marie Louise
Hapsburg in the frontispiece
had a downright Boston bashfulness,
where she grovelled to Bonaparte, who scratched his navel,
and bolted his food – just my seven years tall!
And I, bristling and manic,
skulked in the attic,
and got two hundred French generals by name,
from A to V – from Augereau to Vandamme.
I used to dope myself asleep,
naming those unpronounceables like sheep.

Having a naval officer
for my Father was nothing to shout
about to the summer colony at "Matt."
He wasn't at all "serious,"
when he showed up on the golf course,
wearing a blue serge jacket and numbly cut
white ducks he'd bought
at a Pearl Harbor commissariat . . .
and took four shots with his putter to sink his putt.
""Bob," they said, "golf's a game you really ought to know how to play,
if you play at all."
They wrote him off as "naval,"
naturally supposed his sport was sailing.
Poor Father, his training was engineering!
Cheerful and cowed
among the seadogs at the Sunday yacht club,
he was never one of the crowd.

“Anchors aweigh,” Daddy boomed in his bathtub,
“Anchors aweigh,”
when Lever Brothers offered to pay
him double what the Navy paid.
I nagged for his dress sword with gold braid,
and cringed because Mother, new
caps on all her teeth, was born anew
at forty. With seamanlike celerity,
Father left the Navy,
and deeded Mother his property.

He was soon fired. Year after year,
he still hummed “Anchors aweigh” in the tub –
whenever he left a job,
he bought a smarter car.
Father’s last employer
was Scudder, Stevens and Clark, Investment Advisors,
himself his only client.
While Mother dragged to bed alone,
read Menninger,
and grew more and more suspicious,
he grew defiant.
Night after night,
à la clarté déserte de sa lampe,
he slid his ivory Annapolis slide rule
across a pad of graphs –
piker speculations! In three years
he squandered sixty thousand dollars.

Smiling on all,
Father was once successful enough to be lost
in the mob of ruling-class Bostonians.
As early as 1928,
he owned a house converted to oil,
and redecorated by the architect
of St. Mark’s School . . . Its main effect
was a drawing room, “longitudinal as Versailles,”
its ceiling, roughened with oatmeal, was blue as the sea.
And once
nineteen, the youngest ensign in his class,
he was “the old man” of a gunboat on the Yangtze.

Robert Lowell, February 5, 2021

WOMAN WORK

I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
The baby to dry
I got company to feed
The garden to weed
I've got shirts to press
The tots to dress
The can to be cut
I gotta clean up this hut
Then see about the sick
And the cotton to pick.

Shine on me, sunshine
Rain on me, rain
Fall softly, dewdrops
And cool my brow again.

Storm, blow me from here
With your fiercest wind
Let me float across the sky
'Til I can rest again.

Fall gently, snowflakes
Cover me with white
Cold icy kisses and
Let me rest tonight.

Sun, rain, curving sky
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone
Star shine, moon glow
You're all that I can call my own.

Maya Angelou, February 1, 2021

MOTHER, AMONG THE DUSTBINS

Mother, among the dustbins and the manure
I feel the measure of my humanity, an allure
As of the presence of God, I am sure

In the dustbins, in the manure, in the cat at play,
Is the presence of God, in a sure way
He moves there. Mother, what do you say?

I too have felt the presence of God in the broom
I hold, in the cobwebs in the room,
But most of all in the silence of the tomb.

Ah! but that thought that informs the hope of our kind
Is but an empty thing, what lies behind? –
Naught but the vanity of a protesting mind

That would not die. This is the thought that bounces
Within a conceited head and trounces
Inquiry. Man is most frivolous when he pronounces.

Well Mother, I shall continue to think as I do,
And I think you would be wise to do so too,
Can you question the folly of man in the creation of God?
Who are you?

Stevie Smith, January 29, 2021

WHEN I WENT TO THE FILM

When I went to the film, and saw all the black-and-white
feelings that nobody felt,
and heard the audience sighing and sobbing with all the
emotions they none of them felt,
and saw them cuddling with rising passions they none of
them for a moment felt,
and caught them moaning from close-up kisses, black-and-
white kisses that could not be felt,
It was like being in heaven, which I am sure has a white
atmosphere
upon which shadows of people, pure personalities
are cast in black and white, and move
in flat ecstasy, supremely unfelt,
and heavenly.

David Herbert Lawrence, January 25, 2021

ARRIVAL

Morning, a glass door, flashes
Gold names off the new city,
Whose white shelves and domes travel
The slow sky all day.
I land to stay here;
And the windows flock open
And the curtains fly out like doves
And a past dries in a wind.

Now let me lie down, under
A wide-branched indifference,
Shovel-faces like pennies
Down the back of the mind,
Find voices coined to
An argot of motor-horns,
And let the cluttered-up houses
Keep their thick lives to themselves.

For this ignorance of me
Seems a kind of innocence.
Fast enough I shall wound it:
Let me breathe till then
Its milk-aired Eden,
Till my own life impound it-
Slow-falling; grey-veil-hung; a theft,
A style of dying only.

Philip Larkin, January 22, 2021

FISH

It is the whales that drive
the small fish into the fiords.
I have seen forty or fifty
of them in the water at one time.
I have been in a little boat
when the water was boiling
on all sides of us
from them swimming underneath.

The noise of the herring
can be heard nearly a mile.
So thick in the water, they are,

you can't dip the oars in.
All silver!

And all those millions of fish
must be taken, each one, by hand.
The women and children
pull out a little piece
under the throat with their fingers
so that the brine gets inside.
I have seen thousands of barrels
packed with the fish on the shore.

In winter they set the gill-nets
for the cod. Hundreds of them
are caught each night.
In the morning the men
pull in the nets and fish
altogether in the boats.
Cod so big – I have seen –
that when a man held one up
above his head
the tail swept the ground.

Sardines, mackerel, anchovies
all of these. And in the rivers
trout and salmon. I have seen
a net set at the foot of a falls
and in the morning sixty trout in it.

But I guess there are not
such fish in Norway nowadays.

On the Lofoten Islands –
till I was twelve.
Not a tree or a shrub on them.
But in summer
with the sun never gone
the grass is higher than here.

The sun circles the horizon.
Between twelve and one at night
it is very low, near the sea,
to the north. Then
it rises a little, slowly,
till midday, then down again
and so for three months, getting
higher at first, then lower,

until it disappears –
In winter the snow is often
as deep as the ceiling of this room.

If you go there you will see
many Englishmen
near the falls and on the bridges
fishing, fishing.
They will stand there for hours
to catch the fish.

Near the shore
where the water is twenty feet or so
you can see the kingflounders
on the sand. They have
red spots on the side. Men come
in boats and stick them
with long pointed poles.

Have you seen how the Swedes drink tea?
So, in the saucer. They blow it
and turn it this way then that: so.

Tall, gaunt
great drooping nose, eyes dark-circled,
the voice slow and smiling:

I have seen boys stand
where the stream is narrow
a foot each side on two rocks
and grip the trout as they pass through.
They have a special way to hold them,
in the gills, so. The long
fingers arched like grapplehooks.

Then the impatient silence
while a little man said:

The English are great sportsmen.
At the winter resorts
where I stayed
they were always the first up
in the morning, the first
on with the skis.
I once saw a young Englishman
worth seventy million pounds –

You do not know the north.
– and you will see perhaps huldra
with long tails
and all blue, from the night,
and the nekke, half man and half fish.
When they see one of them
they know some boat will be lost.

William Carlos Williams, January 18, 2021

PRISONERS

Though the road turn at last
to death's ordinary door,
and we knock there, ready
to enter and it opens
easily for us,
yet
all the long journey
we shall have gone in chains,
fed on knowledge-apples
acid and riddled with grubs.

We taste other food that life,
like a charitable farm-girl,
holds out to us as we pass –
but our mouths are puckered,
a taint of ash on the tongue.

It's not joy that we've lost –
wildfire, it flares
in dark or shine as it will.
What's gone
is common happiness,
plain bread we could eat
with the old apple of knowledge.

That old on – it griped us sometimes,
but it was firm, tart,
sometimes delectable...

The ashen apple of these days
grew from poisoned soil. We are prisoners
and must eat
our ration. All the long road

in chains, even if, after all,
we come to
death's ordinary door, with time
smiling its ordinary
long-ago smile.

Denise Levertov, January 15, 2021

MY SWEET OLD ETCETERA

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds) of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers
etcetera wristers etcetera, my
mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et

cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

Edward Estlin Cummings, January 11, 2021

CREMATION

So when she hears him clearing his throat
every few seconds she's aware what he's raking
's death off his mind; the next attack. The threat
of his dying has her own hands shaking.

The mangle brought it on. Taking it to bits.
She didn't need it now he'd done with pits.

A grip from behind that seems to mean don't go
tightens through bicep till the fingers touch.
His, his dad's and his dad's lifetime down below
crammed into one huge nightshift, and too much.

He keeps back death the way he keeps back phlegm
in company, curled on his tongue. Once left alone
with the last coal fire in the smokeless zone,
he hawks his cold gobful at the brightest flame,
too practised, too contemptuous to miss.

Behind the door she hears the hot coals hiss.

Tony Harrison, January 8, 2021

THE MOTIVE FOR METAPHOR

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead.
The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
And repeats words without meaning.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things,
The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,
The single bird, the obscure moon –

The obscure moon lighting and obscure world
Of things that would never be quite expressed,
Where you yourself were never quite yourself
And did not want nor have to be,

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:

The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being,

The ruddy temper, the hammer
Of red and blue, the hard sound –
Steel against intimation – the sharp flash,
The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X.

Wallace Stevens, January 4, 2021

NEW YEAR ON DARTMOOR

This is newness: every little tawdry
Obstacle glass-wrapped and peculiar,
Glinting and clinking in a saint's falsetto. Only you
Don't know what to make of the sudden slippiness,
The blind, white, awful, inaccessible slant.
There's no getting up it by the words you know.
No getting up by elephant or wheel or shoe.
We have only come to look. You are too new
To want the world in a glass hat.

Sylvia Plath, January 1, 2021