

## CUT

*For Susan O'Neill Roe*

What a thrill -  
My thumb instead of an onion.  
The top quite gone  
Except for a sort of hinge

Of skin,  
A flap like a hat,  
Dead white.  
Then that red plush.

Little pilgrim,  
The Indian's axed your scalp.  
Your turkey wattle  
Carpet rolls

Straight from the heart.  
I step on it,  
Clutching my bottle  
Of pink fizz. A celebration, this is.  
Out of a gap  
A million soldiers run,  
Redcoats, every one.

Whose side are they on?  
O my  
Homunculus, I am ill.  
I have taken a pill to kill

The thin  
Papery feeling.  
Saboteur,

Kamikaze man -

The stain on your  
Gauze Ku Klux Klan  
Babushka  
Darkens and tarnishes and when  
The balled  
Pulp of your heart  
Confronts its small  
Mill of silence

How you jump -  
Trepanned veteran,  
Dirty girl,  
Thumb stump.

*Sylvia Plath, December 30, 2024*

## **THE EXPATRIATES**

My dear, it was a moment  
to clutch at for a moment  
so that you may believe in it  
and believing is the act of love, I think,  
even in the telling, wherever it went.

In the false New England forest  
where the misplanted Norwegian trees  
refused to root, their thick synthetic  
roots barging out of the dirt to work on the air,  
we held hands and walked on our knees.  
Actually, there was no one there.

For forty years this experimental  
woodland grew, shaft by shaft in perfect rows

where its stub branches held and its spokes fell.  
It was a place of parallel trees, their lives  
filed out in exile where we walked too alien to know  
our sameness and how our sameness survives.

Outside of us the village cars followed  
the white line we had carefully walked  
two nights before toward our single beds.  
We lay halfway up an ugly hill and if we fell  
it was here in the woods where the woods were caught  
in their dying and you held me well.

And now I must dream the forest whole  
and your sweet hands, not once as frozen  
as those stopped trees, nor ruled, nor pale,  
nor leaving mine. Today, in my house, I see  
our house, its pillars a dim basement of men  
holding up their foreign ground for you and me.

My dear, it was a time,  
butchered from time  
that we must tell of quickly  
before we lose the sound of our own  
mouths calling mine, mine, mine.

*Anne Sexton, December 27, 2024*

## **VÝJEV, KTERÝ BY MĚL ZNÍT KONEJŠIVĚ**

Vlastně se mi nic nestalo  
povedlo se mi dostat z města dřív  
než zajali mou žlutou hedvábnou košili  
než mi bajonetem zkrátili  
příliš dlouhé sukně  
které se ti stejně nelíbily protože schovávaly kolena

Říkám že se nic nestalo

Ale

ještě pořád se chvěju bosa na mokrém betonu  
nějakého tábora

a už mě nikdo nikdy nenajde

Daleko ode všeho dělám každodenní práce

úplně svobodná

Ale

v každém snu mě znovu zajmou

a já se bráním snažím se utéct pláču

všechno mě bolí tak že když jsem vzhůru

bojím se pohnout

Když se nikdo nedívá po hmatu hledám opuchliny

a počítám nehty na prstech když se držím madla

v tramvaji

Normálně mluvím směju se píšu milostnou poezii

jím s chutí a pravidelně

Ale

ve skutečnosti schoulená v koutě nějakého tábora bosa

na mokrém betonu pláču

Když televizní předpověď hlásí pokles teploty

severní vítr a na horách sníh

třesu se vedle horkého radiátoru

protože stojím v suchém mrazu bosa nad jámou

a čekám až mě vyvolají

Když s tebou po telefonu domlouvám kávu

na kterou se těším

kreslím na papír velice přesně mříže

Mě už nikdy nikdo nedokáže osvobodit

a ty mi říkáš spi nic se nestalo.

*Jozefina Dautbegović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'ánová),  
December 23, 2024*

VÝJEVY KTERÉ SI PŘEJI III

Hvězdy nejsou od toho, aby nám zkrášlovaly  
noční nebe  
Jsou černé uhlíky zbytky hmoty  
která se nešetřila  
shořely vlastním ohněm a teď žijí  
jen když na ně dopadne světlo  
jiných těles která také hoří nešetrně  
Stejně tak bude na nás pokud nezištně až do konce  
shoříme dopadat záře cizí lásky  
zviditelní nás v naprosté temnotě  
Ve všeobecném rozkladu bude zář jiných hvězd  
dopadat na naše mrtvá těla  
a z dálky se bude zdát že stále žhneme  
pulzujeme vysíláme světlo  
Iluze je také formou existence  
dokud se nezhroutí  
Vždycky se bude někde konat oheň  
a vždycky bude existovat šťastná možnost  
že naše zuhelnatělé tělo vstoupí do zářného kruhu  
znenadání zaplane a vyšle světlo dál  
proto není třeba vzdávat se vzdalování

*Jozefína Dautbegović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová),  
December 20, 2024*

## THE MOON AND THE YEW TREE

This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary.  
The trees of the mind are black. The light is blue.  
The grasses unload their griefs on my feet as if I were God,  
Prickling my ankles and murmuring of their humility.  
Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place  
Separated from my house by a row of headstones.  
I simply cannot see where there is to get to.

The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,  
White as a knuckle and terribly upset.  
It drags the sea after it like a dark crime; it is quiet  
With the O-gape of complete despair. I live here.  
Twice on Sunday, the bells startle the sky—  
Eight great tongues affirming the Resurrection.  
At the end, they soberly bong out their names.

The yew tree points up. It has a Gothic shape.  
The eyes lift after it and find the moon.  
The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.  
Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.  
How I would like to believe in tenderness—  
The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,  
Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

I have fallen a long way. Clouds are flowering  
Blue and mystical over the face of the stars.  
Inside the church, the saints will be all blue,  
Floating on their delicate feet over the cold pews,  
Their hands and faces stiff with holiness.  
The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild.  
And the message of the yew tree is blackness—blackness and silence.

*Sylvia Plath, December 16, 2024*

DĚSNĚ

*Vesu Radomilovi*

Když přišlo na svět slovo  
Děsně oblaka byla nedostižná

Bylo děsné to Děsně  
Navíc to Děsně vyrostlo

Od těch dob děsně

A teď už nemám slovo  
Pro Děsně! Děsné!

*Ilija Ladin (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), December 13,  
2024*

## MOJI PŘEDKOVÉ

*Stačí, že mám krevní oběh  
nepotřebuji dědictví!*

Moji předkové leží skromně  
Nemají pomník Aby se vědělo: tady a tady tak a tak  
Nic!

Všechno bylo a nemůže se opakovat  
Kromě slunce a měsíce!  
Všechno bylo a nemůže se opakovat  
Teď je to hlína! Je to obláček a vítr!

A ať je to: tak jak to je  
A je to správně: tak jak to je

Tak jako něčí odpočívají  
Tam pod katedrálami pyramidami a  
kolosey  
Ať moji předkové ještě klidněji odpočívají pod čistými  
oblaky!  
Pod všemi těmi blesky a hromy v oblacích!  
Pod dunami a v přehrších větru:  
Je nemůže nic zasáhnout!  
Všechno bylo a nemůže se opakovat  
Teď je to hlína! Je to útes a propast!  
Tak jako něčí odpočívají

Tam pod katedrálami pyramidami a  
kolosey  
Ať moji předkové ještě klidněji odpočívají nad černými  
propastmi!  
Nad všemi těmi proudy a útesy v propastech!  
Nad světly a při zkoumání pekla:  
Je nemůže nic zasáhnout!  
Ani jeden ischias nevzali s sebou do hrobu  
Ani jeden halíř  
Pro hříšnou duši!  
Moji předkové leží skromně  
Nemají ani pomník  
Aby se vědělo: tady a tady tak a tak Nic

A ať je to: tak jak to je  
A je to správně: tak jak to je  
A i já až budu vstávat například  
Bude to jako by se zvedala sama země!  
A oblak a vítr!

*Ilija Ladin (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), December 9, 2024*

## VEČER ULÉHÁŠ DO POSTELE

a víš, že uléháš marně: zítra budeš vstávat vyčerpanější  
než jsi uléhal. Ráno vstáváš z postele  
a víš, že vstáváš marně: čeká tě včerejší den  
se včerejšími stresy. S předvčerejším  
ponížením. S předvčerejším zoufalstvím.  
Tohle obléhání netrvá dva roky,  
ale jeden (tý)den, který nebere konce.

Od toho bych, mám dojem, našel odpočinek  
jedině u moře. A kdo ví, jestli ho  
ještě někdy uvidíme? Jestli ještě někdy



vkročím na útesy, kde jsou vzdušné proudy  
tak silné, že se ti hozená čepice vrátí zpátky?

Ale tentokrát netoužím po moři s masitými  
listy agáve, do kterých milenci  
vyřezali svá jména. Po olivách zkroucených  
v křeči jak zelení láokoóni. Po kloboucích  
medúz, které připomínají hedvábné stany  
z orientálních pohádek. Netoužím po půvabné  
jednotvárnosti vln, které básník srovnává  
s Homérovou metrikou. Netoužím po tomhle inkoustu,  
kterým by šly napsat miliardy  
a miliardy Iliad a Odysseí.

Toužím po smutku, který se tě zmocní  
když zahleděn do věčné modři  
nasloucháš šumění té věčnosti.  
Po smutku, který ti říká, že máš zase duši.  
Možná ani ne po smutku. Spíš toužím po té nádherné  
lécivé prázdnotě.

Ponořit duši do prázdna, které zotavuje.  
Léčí. Omlazuje. Hodiny zírat ne na širé moře,  
ne nad širé moře, ale - jen tak! Po bosensku.  
Až dokud nezapomeneš, co jsi a kde jsi  
a odkud jsi a jak se jmenuješ.  
Víš jenom, že jsou v tobě - míle a míle prázdnoty.  
A že mořská rozlehlost z tebe vysála  
všechna staletí až k Adamovi. Siná prázdnota se rozpukla  
na konec světa a, pozpátku, na jeho začátek.  
A pochopíš. A co - pochopíš?! Pocítíš to na patře:  
jaká laskavost zavládne po soudném dni!  
Všechno se setře, jako ze školní tabule  
dětská čmáranice a zůstane jenom čiré potěšení!  
A ty ochutnáš předem aspoň kávovou lžičku  
blaženství, do kterého se roztříští svět!

*Marko Vešović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), December 6, 2024*

## PODPIS

*Něco se mezi mnou a lidmi změnilo od té doby, co jsem rodičem jednoho z nich.*  
Paul Claudel

Běžím se svou dcerkou domů –  
granáty nás opět překvapily na ulici.  
Granáty už po staletí padají každý den,  
a pokaždé překvapí.  
Popoháním ji hlasitě a zlostně:  
vztek na srbské dělostřelce  
si vylívám na dítě čekané deset let.  
Jen se podepíšu, říká mi, když procházíme  
kolem sněhové plochy, nedotčené, v parku.  
Místo abych ji pokáral,  
dovolím - kdo ví proč - aby její ukazováček  
tu jemnou bělost narušil,  
a pak kolem cyrilicí napsaného  
IVANE VEŠOVIĆ  
můj ukazováček opsal kruh  
neprůstřelný

jako v pohádkách.

*Marko Vešović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), December 2, 2024*

## KŘÍŽOVATKY

Otce na té křižovatce v listopadu 1969  
srazilo auto

táhlo ho za sebou  
tak nějak chlapsky  
Dneska ho někdy před deštěm  
zabolí kosti

O třiadvacet listopadů později  
na stejné křižovatce  
mě místo auta  
srazila kulka  
prorazila kůži  
jako nylon

Jen jsem si pomyslel  
je snad tohle všechno  
Dnes  
když přecházím křižovatku  
tu nebo nějakou jinou  
to je jedno  
nepřemýšlím o všem možném  
nepátrám po smyslu  
neřeším hádanky

V těch chvílích  
Moje myšlenky nelétají  
jako mouchy  
od jedné ke druhé skupině čehosi  
Myslím tehdy velmi konkrétně na to  
jak je člověk  
vlastně  
zranitelná bytost  
jako například  
můj tatík a já

Co vám mám povídat

*Marko Čejović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), November 29,  
2024*

## ČÍŇAN

Zimní noc je bez mrazu  
ale kočka usnula se psem –  
A v kavárně Bugatti  
je jeden zamilovaný pár  
unesen dotyky  
natolik  
že netknuté kávy před nimi  
už dávno vystydly –  
Oni jsou ti kdo si vyměňují teplo  
protože mládí je taktilní –  
Dohromady je jim stěží 35  
a všechno nasvědčuje, že kují plány  
30 minut před policejní hodinou –

Přesně v tu chvíli  
ani trochu odlišnou od jiných  
od dveří kavárny Bugatti  
zableskne sklíčko rolexek –  
Ten s hodinkami je Číňan  
který pohledem hlavy počítá hosty  
s arogancí typickou pro šviháky  
protože skutečný městský zloděj je muž velkého světa  
a ostatně proto švihák

s culíkem Karla Lagerfelda –  
Co může být pro takového k vidění  
v kavárně Bugatti  
30 minut před policejní hodinou?

To, co teď přijde  
je příběh o tání sněhu  
tíze lidské hmoty a síle světa  
kde se každá vášnivá touha  
dočká naplnění  
ale s takovým zpožděním

že se obrátí v trest –  
Být bez přání  
je tichá víra, že smrt existuje –  
Nikdy nemá připravený plán  
ale s velkým darem improvizace  
Číňan už svádí mladíka  
bez jediného náznaku, jímž by dal najevo  
že si všímá dívky –  
Tak je získána důvěra muže  
který před sebou vidí chlapa s rolexkami –  
S takovou lehkostí je slíben  
odchod z města  
že už i dívka uvěřila  
s důvodem  
že to, co nemůže ministr  
zloděj s reputací jistě zmůže

10 minut před policejní hodinou –  
A když už Bugatti zavírá  
pak je čas zastavit se naproti  
na 100 metrech čtverečních Číňanova parketu –

Sotva je otevřená láhev –  
Podle majitele bytu  
je francouzský koňak síla –  
V pořádku  
netrpěliví, ať hned vyplní formuláře  
ale pořádně a čitelně  
byrokracie je nemilosrdná –  
Je třeba být dnes večer spokojený  
protože jen spokojení patří do velkého světa  
jak by měli vědět ti  
kdo se rozhodnou pro formulář –  
Kolik je jen třeba mužské vůle  
aby celá duše vyšla tunelem  
na jihu města  
tunelem, ve kterém mezi kabely kape voda

a živé tělo poznává  
jak je vlastně tělu v hrobě –

Čtvrt láhve je míra  
a Číňan zná tu chvíli  
vhodnou pro dramatický zvrat –  
Simulovaná opilost

náhle otevře velké pole svobody –  
L'Occident je natolik děsivý  
že se v něm nemůžou vyznat  
milenci ve svém naivním romantismu  
ale jen ti, kdo mohou vyjít ze solipsismu –  
Ach, 4 krát  
Číňan vyslovil solipsismus  
přesvědčený, že dva mladí  
neznají význam slova –  
A to je celá pravda  
přivedl je do svého jazyka  
čínského –  
a milenci jsou už připraveni na cokoli –  
Konečně  
dívka věnuje pozornost jeho tesáku  
a diamantu vsazenému do toho zubu –

Milovat se před Číňanem? zvládnou  
a už se svlékla  
ale ani to nestačí  
na přežití ve velkém světě –  
Pak přijde poslední zvrat  
finále fatální strategie  
a teď se nad ženským tělem  
vztyčuje kobra  
na širokém hrudníku vytetovaná  
Číňanovi za deštivé noci –

Taje sníh ve světě

a láska se v něm stává trestem  
pro ty, kdo se v solipsismu  
nazí s našpulenými rty  
opírají o sílu světa –  
Vyděšené ženské oči  
uhýbají šíleném pohledu mladíka –  
Ženské rty mu říkají miluji tě  
dřív než se ženské oči úplně zavřou  
odevzdávající se divočejšímu objetí  
ve chvíli průchodu tamtím tunelem  
ve kterém živé tělo poznává  
jak je tělu v hrobě.

*Semezdin Mehmedinović (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'ánová),  
November 25, 2024*

## BEYOND THE END

In 'nature' there's no choice --  
flowers  
swing their heads in the wind, sun & moon  
are as they are. But we seem  
almost to have it (not just  
available death)

It's energy: a spider's thread: not to  
'go on living' but to quicken, to activate: extend:  
Some have it, they force it --  
with work or laughter or even  
the act of buying, if that's  
all they can lay hands on--

the girls crowding the stores, where light,  
color, solid dreams are - what gay  
desire! It's their festival.

ring game, wassail, mystery.

It has no grace like that of  
the grass, the humble rhythms, the  
falling & rising of leaf and star;  
it's barely  
a constant. Like salt:  
take it or leave it

The 'hewers of wood' & so on; every damn  
craftsman has it while he's working  
but it's not  
a question of work: some  
shine with it, in repose. Maybe it is  
response, the will to respond--('reason  
can give nothing at all/like  
response to desire') maybe  
a gritting of teeth, to go  
just that much further, beyond the end  
beyond whatever ends: to begin, to be, to defy.

*Denise Levertov, November 22, 2024*

## PRÁZDNÝ LIST

Ani Euripidovy olejové lampy  
Ani Shakespearovy voskovice  
V postelektrické době ó

Stěžuji si ti, Bože  
Na tmu  
Na skvrny na měsíci  
I na skvrny na slunci

Vzal jsem tužku za špatnou stranu



A dnes ráno čtu  
Prázdný list

A na nebeskou klenbu celou, Den Druhý: něco  
Potopa přišla shora – i Ty jsi počal ve tmě: stěžuji si ti,  
Bože  
Na rostliny a stromy, Den Třetí: něco  
Neříkej stromy – i Ty jsi počal ve tmě: stěžuji si ti,  
Bože

Roční období, Den Čtvrtý: něco  
Zpožděná v příchodu zpožděná v odchodu – i Ty jsi počal  
ve tmě: stěžuji si ti, Bože  
Na ptáky a ryby, Den Pátý: něco  
Větší polyká menší to není v pořádku – i Ty jsi  
počal ve tmě: stěžuji si ti, Bože  
Na zvíře a člověka, Den Šestý: něco  
Krev jež je prolitá jež je vypitá –  
Mi říká Ne nebylo to dobré  
I ty jsi počal ve tmě Všechno jsi počal ve tmě

Za kterou ty jsi stranu  
Náradí vzal  
Když jsi tvořil svět  
Bože tvořil svět? Nebo stůl

Psací  
Můj  
Běda místo pokušení tvého bylo  
Ještě jedno? Jak to bylo, Bože?

*Ilija Ladin (Přeložili Adin Ljuca a Dominika Křest'anová), November 18,  
2024*

TWILIGHT

*for Aaron Bushnell*

I wander through the metropolis like a blind poet  
and sing about what everyone sees:  
tourists visit monuments,  
lobbyists lobby,  
Congressmen approve.  
Proper people  
don't ask improper questions,  
but as a sign of protest  
indignant drivers honk their horns  
– a column of protesters is in their way.

Noise and fury  
of the lost generations  
of a lost civilization,  
and flags all around,  
– patriotism is on sale cheap again.

Not even a foot of daylight left,  
but even in the dark my verses are accurate,  
adapted to darkness I move deftly  
through the twilight of the metropolis  
and sing about what everyone sees:  
veterans return their medals  
and burn their uniforms,  
like homeless men  
gathered round a fire in a barrel.

Senile old men kill children,  
people set themselves on fire in the streets,  
but the glow of their burning bodies  
scarcely eats away a foot of the darkness.

Not even a foot of daylight left,  
even the blind man dwelling in darkness sees it

– in the freest country  
in the world,  
that keeps its citizens  
and the rest of the world  
– keeps them in check.

*Adin Ljuca (Translated by Wayles Browne), November 15, 2024*

## IN CELEBRATION OF MY UTERUS

Everyone in me is a bird.  
I am beating all my wings.  
They wanted to cut you out  
but they will not.  
They said you were immeasurably empty  
but you are not.  
They said you were sick unto dying  
but they were wrong.  
You are singing like a school girl.  
You are not torn.

Sweet weight,  
in celebration of the woman I am  
and of the soul of the woman I am  
and of the central creature and its delight  
I sing for you. I dare to live.  
Hello, spirit. Hello, cup.  
Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.  
Hello to the soil of the fields.  
Welcome, roots.

Each cell has a life.  
There is enough here to please a nation.  
It is enough that the populace own these goods.  
Any person, any commonwealth would say of it,

"It is good this year that we may plant again  
and think forward to a harvest.  
A blight had been forecast and has been cast out."  
Many women are singing together of this:  
one is in a shoe factory cursing the machine,  
one is at the aquarium tending a seal,  
one is dull at the wheel of her Ford,  
one is at the toll gate collecting,  
one is tying the cord of a calf in Arizona,  
one is straddling a cello in Russia,  
one is shifting pots on the stove in Egypt,  
one is painting her bedroom walls moon color,  
one is dying but remembering a breakfast,  
one is stretching on her mat in Thailand,  
one is wiping the ass of her child,  
one is staring out the window of a train  
in the middle of Wyoming and one is  
anywhere and some are everywhere and all  
seem to be singing, although some can not  
sing a note.

*Anne Sexton, November 11, 2024*

NO

Again they corral us into a maze  
of false choices to make.  
How low have we fallen?  
They don't even pretend much any more...  
2024 just like 1984.

Still it's not hard to say:  
I won't give you my vote!  
And between the two short words:  
Yes and No

I pick: No!

It's not hard,  
since stories of the helplessness of the helpless  
are overblown  
like the myths of free will and freedom.

Pigs of war stay pigs of war,  
sometimes disguised as charming ladies,  
who, once they retire,  
like to teach the young  
and pass along their knowledge,  
or sometimes as immaculately groomed,  
usually gray-haired gentlemen,  
with carefully chosen neckties  
and politically correct rhetoric.

Pigs of war stay pigs of war.  
Remain smiling on billboards.  
False — as a truth wrung out by torture.

But don't worry, friend,  
because if you're born for a noose round your neck  
you won't drown in shallow water.

On the road to the unknown,  
a road all planned out  
and predictable,  
the smell of election billboards  
like the smell of a road-kill skunk  
comes in through our closed car windows  
as we rush to God knows where,  
we'll never catch up with the sun  
before it sets forever.

And I don't care if the devil takes me  
to Hell or to Hades,

I won't vote for either one.

*Adin Ljuca (Translated by Wayles Browne), November 8, 2024*

## FAMOUS BLUE RAINCOAT

It's four in the morning, the end of December  
I'm writing you now just to see if you're better  
New York is cold, but I like where I'm living  
There's music on Clinton Street all through the evening

I hear that you're building your little house deep in the desert  
You're living for nothing now, I hope you're keeping some kind of record

Yes, and Jane came by with a lock of your hair  
She said that you gave it to her  
That night that you planned to go clear  
Did you ever go clear?

Ah, the last time we saw you you looked so much older  
Your famous blue raincoat was torn at the shoulder  
You'd been to the station to meet every train, and  
You came home without Lili Marlene

And you treated my woman to a flake of your life  
And when she came back she was nobody's wife

Well I see you there with the rose in your teeth  
One more thin gypsy thief  
Well, I see Jane's awake  
She sends her regards

And what can I tell you my brother, my killer  
What can I possibly say?

I guess that I miss you, I guess I forgive you  
I'm glad you stood in my way

If you ever come by here, for Jane or for me  
Well, your enemy is sleeping, and his woman is free

Yes, and thanks, for the trouble you took from her eyes  
I thought it was there for good so I never tried

And Jane came by with a lock of your hair  
She said that you gave it to her  
That night that you planned to go clear

Sincerely, L Cohen

*Leonard Cohen, November 4, 2024*

## BLACK ROOK IN RAINY WEATHER

On the stiff twig up there  
Hunches a wet black rook  
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain-  
I do not expect a miracle  
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire  
In my eye, nor seek  
Any more in the desultory weather some design,  
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall  
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,  
Occasionally, some backtalk  
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:

A certain minor light may still  
Lean incandescent

Out of kitchen table or chair  
As if a celestial burning took  
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then —  
Thus hallowing an interval  
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largesse, honor  
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk  
Wary (for it could happen  
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); sceptical  
Yet politic, ignorant

Of whatever angel any choose to flare  
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook  
Ordering its black feathers can so shine  
As to seize my senses, haul  
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear  
Of total neutrality. With luck,  
Trekking stubborn through this season  
Of fatigue, I shall  
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur.  
If you care to call those spasmodic  
Tricks of radiance  
Miracles. The wait's begun again,  
The long wait for the angel,

For that rare, random descent.

*Sylvia Plath, November 1, 2024*



## EVERYBODY KNOWS

Everybody knows that the dice are loaded  
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed  
Everybody knows the war is over  
Everybody knows the good guys lost  
Everybody knows the fight was fixed  
The poor stay poor, the rich get rich  
That's how it goes  
Everybody knows  
Everybody knows that the boat is leaking  
Everybody knows that the captain lied  
Everybody got this broken feeling  
Like their father or their dog just died  
Everybody talking to their pockets  
Everybody wants a box of chocolates  
And a long-stem rose  
Everybody knows  
Everybody knows that you love me baby  
Everybody knows that you really do  
Everybody knows that you've been faithful  
Oh, give or take a night or two  
Everybody knows you've been discreet  
But there were so many people you just had to meet  
Without your clothes  
Everybody knows  
Everybody knows, everybody knows  
That's how it goes  
Everybody knows  
Everybody knows, everybody knows  
That's how it goes  
Everybody knows  
And everybody knows that it's now or never  
Everybody knows that it's me or you  
And everybody knows that you live forever

When you've done a line or two  
Everybody knows the deal is rotten  
Old Black Joe's still picking cotton  
For your ribbons and bows  
And everybody knows  
And everybody knows that the Plague is coming  
Everybody knows that it's moving fast  
Everybody knows that the naked man and woman  
Are just a shining artifact of the past  
Everybody knows the scene is dead  
But there's gonna be a meter on your bed  
That will disclose  
What everybody knows  
And everybody knows that you're in trouble  
Everybody knows what you've been through  
From the bloody cross on top of Calvary  
To the beach of Malibu  
Everybody knows it's coming apart  
Take one last look at this Sacred Heart  
Before it blows  
Everybody knows

*Leonard Cohen, October 28, 2024*

## CHILD

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.  
I want to fill it with color and ducks,  
The zoo of the new

Whose name you meditate —  
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,  
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,

Pool in which images  
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous  
Wringing of hands, this dark  
Ceiling without a star.

*Sylvia Plath, October 25, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

11

Peace to the world in time or in a year,  
But always all our lives this peace was ours.  
Peace is not hard to have, it lies more near  
Than breathing to the breast. When brigand powers  
Of anger or pain or the sick dream of sin  
Break our soul's house outside the ruins we weep.  
We look through the breached wall, why there within  
All the red while our peace was lying asleep.  
Smiling in dreams while the broad knives drank blood,  
The robbers triumphed, the roof burned overhead,  
The eternal living and untroubled God  
Lying asleep upon a lily bed.  
Men screamed, the bugles screamed, walls broke in the air,  
We never knew till then that He was there.

*Robinson Jeffers, October 21, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

10

All in a simple innocence I strove  
To give myself away to any power,  
Wasting on women's bodies wealth of love,  
Worshiping every sunrise mountain tower;  
Some failure mocked me still denying perfection,  
Parts of me might be spent not the whole,  
I sought of wine surrender and self-correction,  
I failed, I could not give away my soul.  
Again seeking to give myself I sought  
Outward in vain through all things, out through God,  
And tried all heights, all gulfs, all dreams, all thought.  
I found this wisdom on the wonderful road,  
The essential Me cannot be given away,  
The single Eye, God cased in blood-shot clay.

*Robinson Jeffers, October 18, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

9

It does not worship him, it will not serve.  
And death and life within that Eye combine,  
Within that only untorturable nerve  
Of those that make a man, within that shrine  
Which there is nothing ever can profane,  
Where life and death are sister and brother and lovers,  
The golden voice of Christ were heard in vain,  
The holy spirit of God visibly hovers.  
Small-breasted girls, lithe women heavy-haired,  
Loves that once grew into our nerves and veins,  
Yours Freedom was desire that deeper dared  
To the citadel where mastery remains,  
Yours to the spirit ... discount the penny that is  
Ungivable, this Eye, this God, this Peace.

*Robinson Jeffers, October 14, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

8

That ice within the soul, the admonisher  
Of madness when we're wildest, the unwinking eye  
That measures all things with indifferent stare,  
Choosing far stars to check near objects by,  
That quiet lake inside and underneath,  
Strong, undisturbed by any angel of strife,  
Being so tranquil seems the presence of death,  
Being so central seems the essence of life.  
Is it perhaps that death and life make truce  
In neutral zone while their old feud beyond  
Fires the towered cities? Surely for a strange use  
He sphered that eye of flawless diamond.  
It does not serve him but with line and rod  
Measures him, how indeed should God serve God?

*Robinson Jeffers, October 11, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

7

After all, after all we endured, who has grown wise?  
We take our mortal momentary hour  
With too much gesture, the derisive skies  
Twinkle against our wrongs, our rights, our power.  
Look up the night, starlight's a steadying draught

For nerves at angry tension. They have all meant well,  
Our enemies and the knaves at whom we've laughed,  
The liars, the clowns in office, the kings in hell,  
They have all meant well in the main... some of them tried  
The mountain road of tolerance ... They have made war,  
Conspired, oppressed, robbed, murdered, lied and lied,  
Meant well, played the loud fool ... and star by star  
Winter Orion pursues the Pleiades  
In pale and huge parade, silence and peace.

*Robinson Jeffers, October 7, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

6

Women cried that morning, bells rocked with mirth,  
We all were glad a long while afterward,  
But still in dreary places of the earth  
A hundred hardly fed shall labor hard  
To clothe one belly and stuff it with soft meat,  
Blood paid for peace but still those poor shall buy it,  
This sweat of slaves is no good wine but yet  
Sometimes it climbs to the brain. Be happy and quiet,  
Be happy and live, be quiet or God might wake.  
He sleeps in the mountain that is heart of man's heart,  
He also in promontory fists, and make  
Of stubborn-muscled limbs, he will not start  
For a little thing ... his great hands grope, uncloze,  
Feel out for the main pillars ... pull down the house ...

*Robinson Jeffers, October 4, 2024*

## THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE

5

South of the Big Sur River up the hill  
Three graves are marked thick weeds and grasses heap,  
Under the forest there I have stood still  
Hours, thinking it the sweetest place to sleep ...  
Strewing all-sufficient death with compliments  
Sincere and unrequired, coveting peace.  
Boards at the head not stones, the text's rude paints  
Mossed, rain-rubbed ... wasting hours of scanty lease  
To admire their peace made perfect. From that height  
But for the trees the whole valley might be seen,  
But for the heavy dirt, the eye-pits no light  
Enters, the heavy dirt, the grass growing green  
Over the dirt, the molelike secretness,  
The immense withdrawal, the dirt, the quiet, the peace.

*Robinson Jeffers, September 30, 2024*

## THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE

4

Peace now poor earth. They fought for freedom's sake,  
She was starving in a corner while they fought.  
They knew not whom they stabbed by Onega Lake,  
Whom lashed from Archangel, whom loved, whom sought.  
How can she die, she is the blood unborn,  
The energy in earth's arteries beating red,  
The world will flame with her in some great morn,  
The whole great world flame with her, and we be dead.  
Here in the west it grows by dim degrees,  
In the east flashed and will flame terror and light.

Peace now poor earth, peace to that holier peace  
Deep in the soul held secret from all sight.  
That crystal, the pure home, the holier peace,  
Fires flaw not, scars the cruelest cannot crease.

*Robinson Jeffers, September 27, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

3

Peace to the world in time or in a year,  
In the inner world I have touched the instant peace.  
Man's soul's a flawless crystal coldly clear,  
A cold white mansion that he yields in lease  
To tenant dreams and tyrants from the brain  
And riotous burnings of the lovelier flesh.  
We pour strange wines and purples all in vain.  
The crystal remains pure, the mansion fresh.  
All the Asian bacchanals and those from Thrace  
Lived there and left no wine-mark on the walls.  
What were they doing in that more sacred place  
All the Asian and the Thracian bacchanals?  
Peace to the world to-morrow or in a year,  
Peace in that mansion white, that crystal clear.

*Robinson Jeffers, September 23, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

2

Peace now, though purgatory fires were hot



They always had a heart something like ice  
That coldly peered and wondered, suffering not  
Nor pleased in any park, nor paradise  
Of slightly swelling breasts and beautiful arms  
And throat engorged with very carnal blood.  
It coldly peered and wondered, 'Strong God your charms  
Are glorious, I remember solitude.  
Before youth towered we knew a time of truth  
To have eyes was nearly rapture.' Peace now, for war  
Will find the cave that childhood found and youth.  
Ten million lives are stolen and not one star  
Dulled; wars die out, life will die out, death cease,  
Beauty lives always and the beauty of peace.

*Robinson Jeffers, September 20, 2024*

## **THE TRUCE AND THE PEACE**

1

Peace now for every fury has had her day,  
Their natural make is moribund, they cease,  
They carry the inward seeds of quick decay,  
Build breakwaters for storm but build on peace.  
The mountains' peace answers the peace of the stars,  
Our petulances are cracked against their term.  
God built our peace and plastered it with wars,  
Those frescoes fade, flake off, peace remains firm.  
In the beginning before light began  
We lay or fluttered blind in burdened wombs,  
And like that first so is the last of man,  
When under death for husband the amorous tombs  
Are covered and conceive; nine months go by  
No midwife called, nine years no baby's cry.

*Robinson Jeffers, September 16, 2024*

## **A MAP OF THE WESTERN PART OF THE COUNTY OF ESSEX IN ENGLAND**

Something forgotten for twenty years: though my fathers  
and mothers came from Cordova and Vitepsk and Caernarvon,  
and though I am a citizen of the United States and less a  
stranger here than anywhere else, perhaps,  
I am Essex-born:  
Cranbrook Wash called me into its dark tunnel,  
the little streams of Valentines heard my resolves,  
Roding held my head above water when I thought it was  
drowning me; in Hainault only a haze of thin trees  
stood between the red doubledecker buses and the boar-hunt,  
the spirit of merciful Phillipa glimmered there.  
Pergo Park knew me, and Clavering, and Havering-atte-Bower,  
Stanford Rivers lost me in osier beds, Stapleford Abbots  
sent me safe home on the dark road after Simeon-quiet evensong,  
Wanstead drew me over and over into its basic poetry,  
in its serpentine lake I saw bass-viols among the golden dead leaves,  
through its trees the ghost of a great house. In  
Ilford High Road I saw the multitudes passing pale under the  
light of flaring sundown, seven kings  
in somber starry robes gathered at Seven Kings  
the place of law  
where my birth and marriage are recorded  
and the death of my father. Woodford Wells  
where an old house was called The Naked Beauty (a white  
statue forlorn in its garden)  
saw the meeting and parting of two sisters,  
(forgotten? and further away  
the hill before Thaxted? where peace befell us? not once  
but many times?).  
All the Ivans dreaming of their villages

all the Marias dreaming of their walled cities,  
picking up fragments of New World slowly,  
not knowing how to put them together nor how to join  
image with image, now I know how it was with you, an old map  
made long before I was born shows ancient  
rights of way where I walked when I was ten burning with desire  
for the world's great splendors, a child who traced voyages  
indelibly all over the atlas, who now in a far country  
remembers the first river, the first  
field, bricks and lumber dumped in it ready for building,  
that new smell, and remembers  
the walls of the garden, the first light.

*Denise Levertov, September 13, 2024*

## **MONEY**

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:

'Why do you let me lie here wastefully?

I am all you never had of goods and sex,

You could get them still by writing a few cheques.'

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:

They certainly don't keep it upstairs.

By now they've a second house and car and wife:

Clearly money has something to do with life

- In fact, they've a lot in common, if you enquire:

You can't put off being young until you retire,

And however you bank your screw, the money you save

Won't in the end buy you more than a shave.

I listen to money singing. It's like looking down

From long French windows at a provincial town,

The slums, the canal, the churches ornate and mad  
In the evening sun. It is intensely sad.

*Philip Larkin, September 9, 2024*

## **IN EXCELSIS**

It is half winter, half spring,  
and Barbara and I are standing  
confronting the ocean.  
Its mouth is open very wide,  
and it has dug up its green,  
throwing it, throwing it at the shore.  
You say it is angry.  
I say it is like a kicked Madonna.  
Its womb collapses, drunk with its fever.  
We breathe in its fury.

I, the inlander,  
am here with you for just a small space.  
I am almost afraid,  
so long gone from the sea.  
I have seen her smooth as a cheek.  
I have seen her easy,  
doing her business,  
lapping in.  
I have seen her rolling her hoops of blue.  
I have seen her tear the land off.  
I have seen her drown me twice,  
and yet not take me.  
You tell me that as the green drains backward  
it covers Britain,  
but have you never stood on that shore  
and seen it cover you?

We have come to worship,  
the tongues of the surf are prayers,  
and we vow,  
the unspeakable vow.  
Both silently.  
Both differently.  
I wish to enter her like a dream,  
leaving my roots here on the beach  
like a pan of knives.  
And my past to unravel, with its knots and snarls,  
and walk into ocean,  
letting it explode over me  
and outward, where I would drink the moon  
and my clothes would slip away,  
and I would sink into the great mother arms  
I never had,  
except here where the abyss  
throws itself on the sand  
blow by blow,  
over and over,  
and we stand on the shore  
loving its pulse  
as it swallows the stars,  
and has since it all began  
and will continue into oblivion,  
past our knowing  
and the wild toppling green that enters us today,  
for a small time  
in half winter, half spring.

*Ann Sexton, September 6, 2024*

**DEATH & CO.**

Two, of course there are two.  
It seems perfectly natural now--  
The one who never looks up, whose eyes are lidded  
And balled, like Blake's.  
Who exhibits

The birthmarks that are his trademark--  
The scald scar of water,  
The nude  
Verdigris of the condor.  
I am red meat. His beak

Claps sidewise: I am not his yet.  
He tells me how badly I photograph.  
He tells me how sweet  
The babies look in their hospital  
Icebox, a simple

Frill at the neck  
Then the flutings of their Ionian  
Death-gowns.  
Then two little feet.  
He does not smile or smoke.

The other does that  
His hair long and plausible  
Bastard  
Masturbating a glitter  
He wants to be loved.

I do not stir.  
The frost makes a flower,  
The dew makes a star,  
The dead bell,  
The dead bell.

Somebody's done for.

*Sylvia Plath, September 2, 2024*

## **QUIA ABSURDUM**

Guard yourself from the terrible empty light of space, the bottomless  
Pool of the stars. (Expose yourself to it: you might learn something.)

Guard yourself from perceiving the inherent nastiness of man and woman.  
(Expose yourself to it: you might learn something.)

Faith, as they now confess, is preposterous, an act of will. Choose the  
Christian sheep-cote  
Or the Communist rat-fight: faith will cover your head from the man-  
devouring stars.

*Robinson Jeffers, August 30, 2024*

## **THE DEATH KING**

I hired a carpenter  
to build my coffin  
and last night I lay in it,  
braced by a pillow,  
sniffing the wood,  
letting the old king  
breathe on me,  
thinking of my poor murdered body,  
murdered by time,  
waiting to turn stiff as a field marshal,  
letting the silence dishonor me,  
remembering that I'll never cough again.

Death will be the end of fear  
and the fear of dying,  
fear like a dog stuffed in my mouth,  
fear like dung stuffed up my nose,  
fear where water turns into steel,  
fear as my breast flies into the Disposall,  
fear as flies tremble in my ear,  
fear as the sun ignites in my lap,  
fear as night can't be shut off,  
and the dawn, my habitual dawn,  
is locked up forever.

Fear and a coffin to lie in  
like a dead potato.  
Even then I will dance in my dire clothes,  
a crematory flight,  
blinding my hair and my fingers,  
wounding God with his blue face,  
his tyranny, his absolute kingdom,  
with my aphrodisiac.

*Anne Sexton, August 26, 2024*

## **RIMBAUD**

The nights, the railway-arches, the bad sky,  
His horrible companions did not know it;  
But in that child the rhetorician's lie  
Burst like a pipe: the cold had made a poet.

Drinks bought him by his weak and lyric friend  
His five wits systematically deranged,  
To all accustomed nonsense put an end;  
Till he from lyre and weakness was estranged.



Verse was a special illness of the ear;  
Integrity was not enough; that seemed  
The hell of childhood: he must try again.

Now, galloping through Africa, he dreamed  
Of a new self, a son, an engineer,  
His truth acceptable to lying men.

*Wystan Hugh Auden, August 23, 2024*

## **MOTHER, SUMMER, I**

My mother, who hates thunder storms,  
Holds up each summer day and shakes  
It out suspiciously, lest swarms  
Of grape-dark clouds are lurking there;  
But when the August weather breaks  
And rains begin, and brittle frost  
Sharpens the bird-abandoned air,  
Her worried summer look is lost.

And I her son, though summer-born  
And summer-loving, none the less  
Am easier when the leaves are gone;  
Too often summer days appear  
Emblems of perfect happiness  
I can't confront: I must await  
A time less bold, less rich, less clear:  
An autumn more appropriate.

*Philip Larkin, August 19, 2024*

## **PATRONYMIC**

What ancestor of mine in wet Wales or wild Scotland  
Was named Godfrey? – from which by the Anglo-French erosion  
Geoffrey, Jeffry's son, Jeffry's, Jeffers in Ireland –  
A totally undistinguished man; the whirlwinds of history  
Passed him and passed him by. They marked him no doubt,  
Hurt him or helped him, they rolled over his head  
And he I suppose fought back, but entirely unnoticed;  
Nothing of him remains.

I should like to meet him,  
And sit beside him, drinking his muddy beer,  
Talking about the Norman nobles and parish politics  
And the damned foreigners: I think his tales of woe  
Would be as queer as ours, and even farther  
From reality. His mind was as quick as ours  
But perhaps even more credulous.

He was a Christian  
No doubt – I am not dreaming back into prehistory –  
And christened Godfrey, which means the peace of God.  
He never in his life found it, when he died it found him.  
He has been dead six or eight centuries,  
Mouldering in some forgotten British graveyard, nettles and rain-slime.

Nettlebed: I remember a place in Oxfordshire,  
That prickly name, I have twisted and turned on a bed of nettles  
All my life long: an apt name for life: nettlebed.  
Deep under it swim the dead, down the dark tides and bloodshot eras of  
time, bathed in God's peace.

*Robinson Jeffers, August 16, 2024*

**WORDS**

Axes

After whose stroke the wood rings,  
And the echoes!  
Echoes traveling  
Off from the center like horses.

The sap

Wells like tears, like the  
Water striving  
To re-establish its mirror  
Over the rock

That drops and turns,  
A white skull,  
Eaten by weedy greens.  
Years later I  
Encounter them on the road-

Words dry and riderless,  
The indefatigable hoof-taps.  
While  
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars  
Govern a life.

*Sylvia Plath, August 12, 2024*

## **SIGN-POST**

Civilized, crying: how to be human again; this will tell you how.  
Turn outward, love things, not men, turn right away from humanity,  
Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,  
Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity  
Make your veins cold; look at the silent stars, let your eyes  
Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.  
Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;

Things are the God; you will love God and not in vain,  
For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature. At length  
You will look back along the star's rays and see that even  
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.  
Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of strength  
And sickness; but now you are free, even to be human,  
But born of the rock and the air, not of a woman.

*Robinson Jeffers, August 9, 2024*

## **WAYS OF CONQUEST**

You invaded my country by accident,  
not knowing you had crossed the border.  
Vines that grew there touched you.  
You ran past them,  
shaking raindrops off the leaves – you or the wind.  
It was toward the hills you ran,  
inland –

I invaded your country with all my  
'passionate intensity',  
pontoons and parachutes of my blindness.  
But living now in the suburbs of the capital  
incognito,  
my will to take the heart of the city  
has dwindled. I love  
its unsuspecting life,  
its adolescents who come to tell me their dreams in the dusty park  
among the rocks and benches,  
I the stranger who will listen.  
I love  
the wild herons who return each year to the marshy outskirts.  
What I invaded has  
invaded me.

*Denise Levertov, August 5, 2024*

## **THE WIFEBEATER**

There will be mud on the carpet tonight  
and blood in the gravy as well.  
The wifebeater is out,  
the childbeater is out  
eating soil and drinking bullets from a cup.  
He strides back and forth  
in front of my study window  
chewing little red pieces of my heart.  
His eyes flash like a birthday cake  
and he makes bread out of rock.  
Yesterday he was walking  
like a man in the world.  
He was upright and conservative  
but somehow evasive, somehow contagious.  
Yesterday he built me a country  
and laid out a shadow where I could sleep  
but today a coffin for the madonna and child,  
today two women in baby clothes will be hamburg.  
With a tongue like a razor he will kiss,  
the mother, the child,  
and we three will color the stars black  
in memory of his mother  
who kept him chained to the food tree  
or turned him on and off like a water faucet  
and made women through all these hazy years  
the enemy with a heart of lies.  
Tonight all the red dogs lie down in fear  
and the wife and daughter knit into each other  
until they are killed.

*Anne Sexton, August 2, 2024*

## **HERE**

Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows  
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields  
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,  
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields  
Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude  
Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,  
And the widening river's slow presence,  
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud,

Gathers to the surprise of a large town:  
Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster  
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,  
And residents from raw estates, brought down  
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,  
Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires—  
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,  
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers—

A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling  
Where only salesmen and relations come  
Within a terminate and fishy-smelling  
Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,  
Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;  
And out beyond its mortgaged half-build edges  
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,  
Isolate villages where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands  
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,  
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,  
Luminously-peopled air ascends;

And past the poppies bluish neutral distance  
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach  
Of shapes and shingles. Here is unfettered existence:  
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

*Philip Larkin, July 29, 2024*

## **A BIRTHDAY PRESENT**

What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?  
It is shimmering, has it breasts, has it edges?

I am sure it is unique, I am sure it is what I want.  
When I am quiet at my cooking I feel it looking, I feel it thinking

'Is this the one I am too appear for,  
Is this the elect one, the one with black eye-pits and a scar?

Measuring the flour, cutting off the surplus,  
Adhering to rules, to rules, to rules.

Is this the one for the annunciation?  
My god, what a laugh!

But it shimmers, it does not stop, and I think it wants me.  
I would not mind if it were bones, or a pearl button.

I do not want much of a present, anyway, this year.  
After all I am alive only by accident.

I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way.  
Now there are these veils, shimmering like curtains,

The diaphanous satins of a January window  
White as babies' bedding and glittering with dead breath. O ivory!

It must be a tusk there, a ghost column.  
Can you not see I do not mind what it is.

Can you not give it to me?  
Do not be ashamed—I do not mind if it is small.

Do not be mean, I am ready for enormity.  
Let us sit down to it, one on either side, admiring the gleam,

The glaze, the mirrory variety of it.  
Let us eat our last supper at it, like a hospital plate.

I know why you will not give it to me,  
You are terrified

The world will go up in a shriek, and your head with it,  
Bossed, brazen, an antique shield,

A marvel to your great-grandchildren.  
Do not be afraid, it is not so.

I will only take it and go aside quietly.  
You will not even hear me opening it, no paper crackle,

No falling ribbons, no scream at the end.  
I do not think you credit me with this discretion.

If you only knew how the veils were killing my days.  
To you they are only transparencies, clear air.

But my god, the clouds are like cotton.  
Armies of them. They are carbon monoxide.

Sweetly, sweetly I breathe in,  
Filling my veins with invisibles, with the million



Probable notes that tick the years off my life.  
You are silver-suited for the occasion. O adding machine—

Is it impossible for you to let something go and have it go whole?  
Must you stamp each piece purple,

Must you kill what you can?  
There is one thing I want today, and only you can give it to me.

It stands at my window, big as the sky.  
It breathes from my sheets, the cold dead center

Where split lives congeal and stiffen to history.  
Let it not come by the mail, finger by finger.

Let it not come by word of mouth, I should be sixty  
By the time the whole of it was delivered, and too numb to use it.

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.  
If it were death

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes.  
I would know you were serious.

There would be a nobility then, there would be a birthday.  
And the knife not carve, but enter

Pure and clean as the cry of a baby,  
And the universe slide from my side.

*Sylvia Plath, July 26, 2024*

## **HOUSWIFE**

Some women marry houses.

It's another kind of skin; it has a heart,  
a mouth, a liver and bowel movements.  
The walls are permanent and pink.  
See how she sits on her knees all day,  
faithfully washing herself down.  
Men enter by force, drawn back like Jonah  
into their fleshy mothers.  
A woman is her mother.  
That's the main thing.

*Anne Sexton, July 22, 2024*

### **LULLABY FOR THE CAT**

Minnow, go to sleep and dream,  
Close your great big eyes;  
Round your bed Events prepare  
The pleasantest surprise.

Darling Minnow, drop that frown,  
Just cooperate,  
Not a kitten shall be drowned  
In the Marxist State.

Joy and Love will both be yours,  
Minnow, don't be glum.  
Happy days are coming soon —  
Sleep, and let them come...

*Elizabeth Bishop, July 19, 2024*

### **NOTHING TO BE SAID**

For nations vague as weed,  
For nomads among stones,  
Small-statured cross-faced tribes  
And cobble-close families  
In mill-towns on dark mornings  
Life is slow dying.

So are their separate ways  
Of building, benediction,  
Measuring love and money  
Ways of slowly dying.  
The day spent hunting pig  
Or holding a garden-party,

Hours giving evidence  
Or birth, advance  
On death equally slowly.  
And saying so to some  
Means nothing; others it leaves  
Nothing to be said.

*Philip Larkin, July 15, 2024*

## **THE NOVEL**

A wind is blowing. The book being written  
shifts, halts, pages  
yellow and white drawing apart  
and inching together in  
new tries. A single white half sheet  
skims out under the door.

And cramped in their not yet  
halfwritten lives, a man and a woman  
grimace in pain. Their cat

yawning its animal secret,  
stirs in the monstrous limbo of erasure.  
They live (when they live) in fear

of blinding, of burning, of choking under a  
mushroom cloud in the year of the roach.  
And they want (like us) the eternity  
of today, they want this fear to be  
struck out at once by a thick black  
magic marker, everywhere, every page,

the whole sheets of it crushed, crackling,  
and tossed in the fire  
and when they were fine ashes  
the stove would cool and be cleaned  
and a jar of flowers would be put to stand  
on top of the stove in the spring light.

Meanwhile from page to page they  
buy things, acquiring the look of a  
full life; they argue, make silence bitter,  
plan journeys, move house, implant  
despair in each other  
and then in the nick of time

they save one another with tears,  
remorse, tenderness —  
hooked on those wonder-drugs.  
Yet they do have —  
don't they — like us —  
their days of grace, they

halt, stretch, a vision  
breaks in on the cramped grimace,  
inscape of transformation.  
Something sundered begins to knit.

By scene, by sentence, something is rendered  
back into life, back to the gods.

*Denise Levertov, July 12, 2024*

## **STREET LAMPS**

When night slinks, like a puma, down the sky,  
And the bare, windy streets echo with silence,  
Street lamps come out, and lean at corners, awry.  
Casting black shadows, oblique and intense;  
So they burn on, impersonal, through the night,  
Hearing the hours slowly topple past  
Like cold drops from glistening stalactite,  
Until grey planes splinter the gloom at last;  
Then they go out.

I think I noticed once,  
— T'was morning—one sole street-lamp still bright-lit,  
Which, with a senile grin, like an old dunce,  
Vied the blue sky, and tried to rival it;  
And, leering pallid  
Though its use was done,  
Tried to cast shadows contrary to the sun.

*Philip Larkin, July 8, 2024*

## **HOPE IS NOT FOR THE WISE**

Hope is not for the wise, fear is for fools;  
Change and the world, we think, are racing to a fall,  
Open-eyed and helpless, in every newscast that is the news:  
The time's events would seem mere chaos but all

Drift the one deadly direction. But this is only  
The August thunder of the age, not the November.  
Wise men hope nothing, the wise are naturally lonely  
And think November as good as April, the wise remember  
That Caesar and even final Augustulus had heirs,  
And men lived on; rich unplanned life on earth  
After the foreign wars and the civil wars, the border wars  
And the barbarians: music and religion, honor and mirth  
Renewed life's lost enchantments. But if life even  
Had perished utterly, Oh perfect loveliness of earth and heaven.

*Robinson Jeffers, July 5, 2024*

### **AMONG THE NARCISSI**

Spry, wry, and gray as these March sticks,  
Percy bows, in his blue peajacket, among the narcissi.  
He is recuperating from something on the lung.

The narcissi, too, are bowing to some big thing :  
It rattles their stars on the green hill where Percy  
Nurses the hardship of his stitches, and walks and walks.

There is a dignity to this; there is a formality-  
The flowers vivid as bandages, and the man mending.  
They bow and stand: they suffer such attacks!

And the octogenarian loves the little flocks.  
He is quite blue; the terrible wind tries his breathing.  
The narcissi look up like children, quickly and whitely.

*Sylvia Plath, July 1, 2024*

### **THE POET OF IGNORANCE**

Perhaps the earth is floating,  
I do not know.  
Perhaps the stars are little paper cutups  
made by some giant scissors,  
I do not know.  
Perhaps the moon is a frozen tear,  
I do not know.  
Perhaps God is only a deep voice  
heard by the deaf,  
I do not know.

Perhaps I am no one.  
True, I have a body  
and I cannot escape from it.  
I would like to fly out of my head,  
but that is out of the question.  
It is written on the tablet of destiny  
that I am stuck here in this human form.  
That being the case  
I would like to call attention to my problem.

There is an animal inside me,  
clutching fast to my heart,  
a huge crab.  
The doctors of Boston  
have thrown up their hands.  
They have tried scalpels,  
needles, poison gasses and the like.  
The crab remains.  
It is a great weight.  
I try to forget it, go about my business,  
cook the broccoli, open the shut books,  
brush my teeth and tie my shoes.  
I have tried prayer  
but as I pray the crab grips harder  
and the pain enlarges.

I had a dream once,  
perhaps it was a dream,  
that the crab was my ignorance of God.  
But who am I to believe in dreams?

*Anne Sexton, June 28, 2024*

## **HANDOVER OF POWER**

I admit defeat, Adolf, and leave the people  
to you to use as you wish! Deal with that  
impersonal, treacherous mass however you  
see fit. Democracy is a miracle. Without a shot  
fired, nor, so to speak, a drop of blood spilled,  
you've earned a mandate to kill. Now you're  
dropping bombs all over the world, hard  
at work, as if sowing wheat. The blackshirts of all  
colors tear the children from their sleep in night  
raids and deport them in their pajamas.

I have no complaints about your victory, Adolf,  
but I'm a sore loser, so I toss and turn in bed  
all night like a lamb on a spit. I rarely dream,  
yet when I do, I see a giant bird that has just laid  
a bunker, and now, in exasperation, screeches  
on the branch, as if it didn't get to do all the things  
it planned for that day. In the bunker, on the table,  
a bottle of cyanide and a loaded gun. Come in,  
Milorad, help yourself!

*Milorad Pejić (Translated by Esma Hadžiselimović) June 24, 2024*



## SUMMER HOLIDAY

When the sun shouts and people abound  
One thinks there were the ages of stone and the age of  
bronze  
And the iron age; iron the unstable metal;  
Steel made of iron, unstable as his mother; the tow-  
ered-up cities  
Will be stains of rust on mounds of plaster.  
Roots will not pierce the heaps for a time, kind rains  
will cure them,  
Then nothing will remain of the iron age  
And all these people but a thigh-bone or so, a poem  
Stuck in the world's thought, splinters of glass  
In the rubbish dumps, a concrete dam far off in the  
mountain...

*Robinson Jeffers, June 21, 2024*

## TALKING TO GRIEF

Ah, grief, I should not treat you  
like a homeless dog  
who comes to the back door  
for a crust, for a meatless bone.  
I should trust you.

I should coax you  
into the house and give you  
your own corner,  
a worn mat to lie on,  
your own water dish.

You think I don't know you've been living  
under my porch.

You long for your real place to be readied  
before winter comes. You need  
your name,  
your collar and tag. You need  
the right to warn off intruders,  
to consider my house your own  
and me your person  
and yourself  
my own dog.

*Denise Levertov, June 17, 2024*

## **SANDPIPER**

The roaring alongside he takes for granted,  
and that every so often the world is bound to shake.  
He runs, he runs to the south, finical, awkward,  
in a state of controlled panic, a student of Blake.

The beach hisses like fat. On his left, a sheet  
of interrupting water comes and goes  
and glazes over his dark and brittle feet.  
He runs, he runs straight through it, watching his toes.

- Watching, rather, the spaces of sand between them  
where (no detail too small) the Atlantic drains  
rapidly backwards and downwards. As he runs,  
he stares at the dragging grains.

The world is a mist. And then the world is  
minute and vast and clear. The tide  
is higher or lower. He couldn't tell you which.  
His beak is focused; he is preoccupied,

looking for something, something, something.

Poor bird, he is obsessed!

The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray  
mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.

*Elizabeth Bishop, June 14, 2024*

## **ABROAD**

Tickets are expensive. So are the hotels.

Names range from Rita to Juanita.

In walks a policeman, and what he tells

You is "You are persona non grata in terra incognita."

*Joseph Brodsky, June 10, 2024*

## **ONE WHITE DAY**

For my fifth birthday I received a large gift wrapped in colorful paper. When I lifted it up, I heard a strange sound. I tore off the paper and found a wooden box with black and white squares painted on it. Inside the box were a bunch of little wooden pieces. *This is a chess set*, I was told. I looked over the box and the pieces trying to figure out how this game was played. In a short period of time I was able to learn the names of the chess pieces and how they move around the board. The game could begin!

Around that time, I easily learned the alphabet but didn't know how to connect the letters to make words or to write whole words or read them. Playing chess came more easily to me than writing or reading. Later in school, my teacher tried to help me as much as she could, but there were more than thirty kids in my class and not enough time for her to pay attention to my problems. In the time I read a complex sentence I could finish a rapid chess game. My father noticed that I was struggling and decided to help. Every day after work and dinner he would lie down on the

sofa, read the newspaper and take a nap. This was a ritual we children were expected to be quiet for. We knew this well, and during that time we stayed silent. One day, he said: "Son, you know how important it is for me to read the newspaper. But I am very tired today. Will you read it for me?" I was both confused and honored. Reading the newspaper was a serious matter, something only grownups do. He pointed to an article in *Oslobodjenje*, lay down and said, "Here, read it.". The newspaper, when opened, was as big as a blanket, so I couldn't see my father any more. While I was struggling reading words that were too hard for a first grader, my dad enjoyed his afternoon nap. The role reversal – I helping him instead of him helping me, that was a masterstroke.

For us, chess was a family game. My father was an excellent player, but the game was never his chief preoccupation. His job always occupied first place. He graduated from the High School of Mines in Tuzla after the end of the World War II. "I went from being a student in a high school to becoming a mining specialist and manager. But instead of managing regular folks, I was working with inmates. Mostly petty criminals, but some were war criminals, war prisoners, ustashe, chetniks, all kinds. I was young and inexperienced, knew very little about anything, and these men had all already been through thick and thin. Once, in a tunnel, at a crossroads 500 meters underground I caught one of these guys trying to light a match, with a pile of extinguished matches already lying on the ground around him. If the methane had exploded, I wouldn't be here! And who knows how many others wouldn't be? I had to report him. Never saw him again." At the time he worked in the mine, my father was the chess champion of Zenica.

Later on, in addition to spending his time and energy on work and girls, he also managed to get the title of chess master candidate. He was so good that he could play an entire match in his head. I remember one scene vividly: I was seven or eight, we were on a train travelling somewhere, and the compartment was full. We were all silently staring at my father and another traveler – both deadly serious as if attending some important party meeting or a church mass – exchanging some mysterious and coded words: e4 g6, bishop on d4 g7, knight on f3 d6, bishop on c4 knight on f6, queen on e2 bishop on g4, e5... I suspected something exciting was going on but I couldn't see what.

My father taught his younger brother to play chess. This was in the fifties. At that time there were no chess schools in Bosnia, or anywhere in Yugoslavia. As it happened, his younger brother was really talented. He soon became the first youth chess champion of Bosnia and Herzegovina, winning the championship without a single draw. After graduating from high school, he was drafted to play for a well-known chess club in Indjija, a town near Beograd. Everything was fine until the time he was scheduled to compete for the title of grand master. That's when everything went downhill. My uncle won the title, as did another player, who, the story goes, bribed some members of the jury. In protest, my uncle refused to accept the title while the other player was more than happy to take it. I don't know how many grand masters there are today, but in the 1970s there were only about one hundred or so of them in the world. A big scandal broke out, but scandals come and go, and titles stay. My uncle continued to play "only" at the level of an international master. He remained well regarded and he often played with grand masters as his equals, sometimes even being assigned to the First Board simply because he was a better player than the grand master. But Bosnian spite only takes you so far before you get eaten by injustice and bitterness along the way. That is exactly what happened to my uncle.

I heard this story about my uncle refusing to accept the grand master title years later, in Sarajevo, from a person I was close to but not related to by blood -- we both shared a love for poetry and chess. I hadn't heard it earlier because this episode was never discussed in my family, probably for educational reasons. My parents probably knew that insisting on justice might have disastrous consequences on people, and not only in the Balkans. Stories like these weren't told in front of children but were hushed up on principle. Growing up, we were only fed "good" and "positive" stories, and our parents went to great pains not to let anything "bad" or "negative" impact our personal and spiritual development. I can understand that. The problem is just that parents tend not to notice when we become grownups and even age. They continue to shield us, even today, from anything "negative" that could poison us. Perhaps here lies the root of my constant dissatisfaction with my worldview -- whichever way I arrange things, the picture is always black and white, the images never vivid enough. I seem

not to be able to reach that ultimate level of contentment with the world... I'm in my late forties now (the age my uncle was when he died -- killed himself or was murdered), and my father still refuses to tell me the true story. "I don't know what happened," he angrily replied when I asked him "Why did he really refuse the title of grand master?"

And that's the tragedy: it seems like every war in this part of the world had as its main goal the destruction of national books, libraries and archives, so the only way to learn about your roots and your ancestors is through family testimonies, the stories and legends the family members are willing to tell. But they often tell these stories not the way they really happened, but how they want you to believe they happened. Unfortunately, most of us are not skilled in decoding the past the way Champollion\* was.

My father did indeed play chess from memory with an unknown fellow traveler. What is not known is which chess variant they played. The opening moves I described earlier in this story are borrowed from the match between my uncle Mirsad Ljuca and Jan Timman, a well-known Dutch grand master, one of the world's leading players in the early 1980s, behind only Anatoly Karpov. I found a book on the Internet about the International Chess Tournament in Sombor, in 1974. The ad for the book says *for chess enthusiasts only*. Who else would order a book like this today, in 2013? I ordered it. From it I learned that my uncle did not fare well at that tournament. Timman won both the game and the tournament. But I could tell that my uncle's performance at that tournament was gutsy and fair – he even won a match against the Latvian-American grand master Edmar Mednis, whose rating at that time was 2455 points – a rating my uncle never scored. It's just that my uncle never took pride in his wins, it was his losses that he kept pondering. But in life, one should not only learn from mistakes. As Mikhail Botvinnik, former world champion, used to say to his younger colleagues, *keep analyzing the matches you won*. My uncle definitely missed Botvinnik's advice.

There are only a handful of people left in our town who still remember my uncle. When they are gone, not a trace of him will be left in his own country. But his name is still on the International Chess Federation's (FIDE) rating lists for the years between 1976 and 1990. His highest rating – 2315

points – was in 1980. Twenty-three years after his death, all I could come up with about his life are the notes about the games he played at various tournaments. And he played quite a few, going, like a medieval knight, from one tournament to another. Based on an analysis of those notes a talented person who was educated in chess could write a study of his character. I can't do it. I don't have that gift. I just played a bit, while my uncle was a chess player.

When I was a kid, chess was *the* game. It was more than just a game. Now it's a highly specialized world unto itself. Every daily newspaper used to print a detailed analysis of the most recent domestic or international chess game or chess problem. We envied the children in Armenia where chess was a mandatory subject in school. In every village and every town at that time, it was well known who the best chess player was. Friends used to bring a chess set along when visiting, just in case the host didn't have one. It was impossible to go on vacation without a chess set – it brought meaning to those long hours on the beach. Once, in the Writers' Club in Sarajevo, when all the chess sets were in use, Avdo called a cab, gave the driver his home address and said: *Tell my wife to give you the chess set and bring it back here.* The duels between the titans were watched by the entire world: Fisher vs Spassky, Karpov vs Korchnoi, Karpov vs Kasparov. Only some boxing matches – Ali vs Frazier or Ali vs Foreman – could generate as much excitement... Then Kasparov decided to play against a computer. I want a rematch! he said after losing to IBM's Deep Blue by 3.5-2.5. However, when he was defeated by a computer, everything stopped making sense. Now, people play chess with themselves. *There are still tournaments, sure, but once the match is over, people don't linger to talk about the game. Everybody rushes to sit at the computer and analyze the game for themselves. We used to analyze the match with our opponent afterward,* said Ljubomir Ljubojević in one interview. Ljubojević, who for fifteen years – from 1976 to 1990 – was always one place and some three hundred points ahead of my uncle on the FIDE alphabetized rating lists. For fifteen years, nobody in the world got in between *Ljub* and *Ljuc*.

Life is sometimes like the game of chess: one hasty move and all is lost. My friend Željko wasn't destroyed by injustice or spite like my uncle. He was destroyed by an accident. Željko got killed on August 16, 1988. The two of

us played countless matches. He knew every single opening: Indian defense, Sicilian, Nimzowitsch, Russian Game, Alekhine's... but nothing could save him from touching a high voltage electric wire – 10,000 v one morning at work! He went to work and never came back. One careless move, or just a fluke, and his life was over. If that one match had started an explosion in the Zenica mine many years ago, I would have never found out what chess was. I probably never would have played one single game.

When Željko got killed, I was asleep, and hadn't dreamt anything.

Around that time I first read the poem Chess by Marin Sorescu: "I move a white day./ He moves a black night./ I advance with a dream./ He takes me to war./ He attacks my lungs./ I think for a year in the hospital."

One night, before the war, Zoran Kršul and I sat in a seedy bar sipping *Sarajevsko pivo*, when he, in that deep voice of his, started reciting one of his poems about a bishop figuring out the paroxysm that his white body and his black head are causing. I stopped playing chess then, retiring to the ranks of the kibitzers.

To be honest, I never even began to be a serious chess player. *If you can't be the best at something even in your own family, then it's not for you*, I reasoned. In my case, chess was obviously something you do for fun, for socializing, for jokes. Chess, for me, was not a game played only on those sixty-four black and white squares. It was everything happening around the chess board that I liked, all the psychological sparring, spiced with hilarious jokes. We would play everywhere, most frequently in fire departments. It could get so heated that a fire department seemed to be the only appropriate place for us to play – in case it burst into flames. The most brutal reaction to my performance that I remember was one without words. Jasko and I were playing, Željko sat on the side and kibitzed. He held Damir, Jasko's three-year-old son, in his lap. After I made my final move, Željko put his hand over little Damir's eyes. He didn't say it, but the meaning was clear: *Don't let the kid see this massacre*.

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\* Jean-François Champollion (1790 -1832), French historian and linguist who deciphered the Rosetta Stone and first read the hieroglyphic script.



*Adin Ljuca (Translated by Esma Hadžiselimović), June 7, 2024*

## **JOY**

Though joy is better than sorrow joy is not great;  
Peace is great, strength is great.  
Not for joy the stars burn, not for joy the vulture  
Spreads her gray sails on the air  
Over the mountain; not for joy the worn mountain  
Stands, while years like water  
Trench his long sides. "I am neither mountain nor bird  
Nor star; and I seek joy."  
The weakness of your breed: yet at length quietness  
Will cover those wistful eyes.

*Robinson Jeffers, June 3, 2024*

## **I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER**

Coming up England by a different line  
For once, early in the cold new year,  
We stopped, and, watching men with number plates  
Sprint down the platform to familiar gates,  
'Why, Coventry!' I exclaimed. 'I was born here.'

I leant far out, and squinnied for a sign  
That this was still the town that had been 'mine'  
So long, but found I wasn't even clear  
Which side was which. From where those cycle-crates  
Were standing, had we annually departed

For all those family hols? . . . A whistle went:  
Things moved. I sat back, staring at my boots.

'Was that,' my friend smiled, 'where you "have your roots"?'  
No, only where my childhood was unspent,  
I wanted to retort, just where I started:

By now I've got the whole place clearly charted.  
Our garden, first: where I did not invent  
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,  
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat.  
And here we have that splendid family

I never ran to when I got depressed,  
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest,  
Their comic Ford, their farm where I could be  
'Really myself'. I'll show you, come to that,  
The bracken where I never trembling sat,

Determined to go through with it; where she  
Lay back, and 'all became a burning mist'.  
And, in those offices, my doggerel  
Was not set up in blunt ten-point, nor read  
By a distinguished cousin of the mayor,

Who didn't call and tell my father There  
Before us, had we the gift to see ahead -  
'You look as though you wished the place in Hell,'  
My friend said, 'judging from your face.' 'Oh well,  
I suppose it's not the place's fault,' I said.

'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.'

*Philip Larkin, May 31, 2024*

## **BIRDS**

The fierce musical cries of a couple of sparrowhawks hunting

on the headland,  
Hovering and darting, their heads northwestward,  
Prick like silver arrows shot through a curtain the noise of the ocean  
Trampling its granite; their red backs gleam  
Under my window around the stone corners; nothing gracefuller, nothing  
Nimbler in the wind. Westward the wave-gleaners,  
The old gray sea-going gulls are gathered together, the north-  
west wind wakening  
Their wings to the wild spirals of the wind-dance.  
Fresh as the air, salt as the foam, play birds in the bright wind, fly falcons  
Forgetting the oak and the pinewood, come gulls  
From the Carmel sands and the sands at the river-mouth, from  
Lobos and out of the limitless  
Power of the mass of the sea, for a poem  
Needs multitude, multitudes of thoughts, all fierce, all flesh-eaters,  
musically clamorous  
Bright hawks that hover and dart headlong, and ungainly  
Gray hungers fledged with desire of transgression, salt slimed  
beaks, from the sharp  
Rock-shores of the world and the secret waters.

*Robinson Jeffers, May 27, 2024*

## **SINCE THE MAJORITY OF ME**

Since the majority of me  
Rejects the majority of you,  
Debating ends forthwith, and we  
Divide. And sure of what to do

We disinfect new blocks of days  
For our majorities to rent  
With unshared friends and unwalked ways,  
But silence too is eloquent:

A silence of minorities  
That, unopposed at last, return  
Each night with cancelled promises  
They want renewed. They never learn.

*Philip Larkin, May 24, 2024*

## **FIERCE MUSIC**

All night long the rush and trampling of water  
And hoarse withdrawals, the endless ocean throwing his  
skirmish-lines against granite,  
Come to my ears and stop there. I have heard them so long  
That I don't hear them – How long? Forty years.  
But that fierce music has gone on for a thousand  
Millions of years. Oh well, we get our share. But weep  
That we lose so much  
Because mere use won't cover up the glory.  
We have our moments: but mostly we are too tired to  
hear and too dull to see.

*Robinson Jeffers, May 20, 2024*

## **EVENING EBB**

The ocean has not been so quiet for a long while; five night-herons  
Fly shorelong voiceless in the hush of the air  
Over the calm of an ebb that almost mirrors their wings.  
The sun has gone down, and the water has gone down  
From the weed-clad rock, but the distant cloud-wall rises.  
The ebb whispers.  
Great cloud-shadows float in the opal water.  
Through rifts in the screen of the world pale gold gleams, and the evening

Star suddenly glides like a flying torch.  
As if we had not been meant to see her; rehearsing behind  
The screen of the world for another audience.

*Robinson Jeffers, May 17, 2024*

## **ESSENTIAL BEAUTY**

In frames as large as rooms that face all ways  
And block the ends of streets with giant loaves,  
Screen graves with custard, cover slums with praise  
Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon, shine  
Perpetually these sharply-pictured groves  
Of how life should be. High above the gutter  
A silver knife sinks into golden butter,  
A glass of milk stands in a meadow, and  
Well-balanced families, in fine  
Midsummer weather, owe their smiles, their cars,  
Even their youth, to that small cube each hand  
Stretches towards. These, and the deep armchairs  
Aligned to cups at bedtime, radiant bars  
(Gas or electric), quarter-profile cats  
By slippers on warm mats,  
Reflect none of the rained-on streets and squares

They dominate outdoors. Rather, they rise  
Serenely to proclaim pure crust, pure foam,  
Pure coldness to our live imperfect eyes  
That stare beyond this world, where nothing's made  
As new or washed quite clean, seeking the home  
All such inhabit. There, dark rafted pubs  
Are filled with white-clothed ones from tennis-clubs,  
And the boy puking his heart out in the Gents  
Just missed them, as the pensioner paid  
A halfpenny more for Granny Graveclothes' Tea

To taste old age, and dying smokers sense  
Walking towards them through some dappled park  
As if on water that unfocused she  
No match lit up, nor drag ever brought near,  
Who now stands newly clear,  
Smiling, and recognising, and going dark.

*Philip Larkin, May 13, 2024*

## **EXETER REVISITED**

Playing chess on the oil tablecloth at Sparky's  
Café, with half & half for whites,  
against your specter at noon, two flights  
down from that mattress, and seven years later. Scarcely  
a gambit, by any standard. The fan's dust-plagued  
shamrock still hums in your window – seven  
years later and pints of semen  
under the bridge – apparently not unplugged.  
What does it take to pledge allegiance  
to another biography, ocean, creed?  
The expiration date on the Indian Deed?  
A pair of turtledoves, two young pigeons?  
The Atlantic whose long-brewed invasion looks,  
on the beaches of Salisbury, self-defeating?  
Or the town hall cupola, still breast-feeding  
its pale, cloud-swaddled Lux?

*Joseph Brodsky, May 10, 2024*

## **LADY LAZARUS**

I have done it again.

One year in every ten  
I manage it –

A sort of walking miracle, my skin  
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,  
My right foot

A paperweight,  
My face a featureless, fine  
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin  
O my enemy.  
Do I terrify? –

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?  
The sour breath  
Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh  
The grave cave ate will be  
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.  
I am only thirty.  
And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.  
What a trash  
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.  
The peanut-crunching crowd  
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot –  
The big strip tease.

Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands  
My knees.  
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.  
The first time it happened I was ten.  
It was an accident.

The second time I meant  
To last it out and not come back at all.  
I rocked shut

As a seashell.  
They had to call and call  
And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying  
Is an art, like everything else.  
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.  
I do it so it feels real.  
I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.  
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.  
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day  
To the same place, the same face, the same brute  
Amused shout:

'A miracle!'  
That knocks me out.  
There is a charge



For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge  
For the hearing of my heart –  
It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge  
For a word or a touch  
Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.  
So, so, Herr Doktor.  
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,  
I am your valuable,  
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.  
I turn and burn.  
Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash –  
You poke and stir.  
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there –

A cake of soap,  
A wedding ring,  
A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer  
Beware  
Beware.

Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air.

*Sylvia Plath, May 6, 2024*

## **A POSTCARD**

The country is so populous that polygamists and serial  
killers get off scot-free and airplane crashes  
are reported (usually on the evening news) only when they occur  
in a wooded area—the difficulty of access  
is most grievous if it's tinged with feelings for the environment.  
Theaters are packed, both stalls and stage.  
An aria is never sung by a single tenor:  
normally they use six at once, or one that's as fat as six.  
And the same goes for the government, whose offices stay lit up  
through the night, working in shifts, like factories,  
hostage to the census. Everything is pandemic.  
What is loved by one is loved by many,  
be it an athlete, a perfume or a bouillabaisse.  
Therefore, no matter what you say or do is loyal.  
Nature too seems to have taken note of the common denominator,  
and whenever it rains, which is seldom, clouds linger longest over  
not the army and navy stadium but the cemetery.

*Joseph Brodsky, May 3, 2024*

## **SONNET**

I am in need of music that would flow  
Over my fretful, feeling finger-tips,  
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,  
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.  
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,  
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,

A song to fall like water on my head,  
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:  
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool  
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep  
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,  
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,  
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.

*Elizabeth Bishop, April 29, 2024*

## **THE OTHER TWO**

All summer we moved in a villa brimful of echos,  
Cool as the pearly interior of a conch.  
Bells, hooves, of the high-stipping black goats woke us.  
Around our bed the baronial furniture  
Foundered through levels of light seagreen and strange.  
Not one leaf wrinkled in the clearing air.  
We dreamed how we were perfect, and we were.

Against bare, whitewashed walls, the furniture  
Anchored itself, griffin-legged and darkly grained.  
Two of us in a place meant for ten more-  
Our footsteps multiplied in the shadowy chambers,  
Our voices fathomed a profounder sound:  
The walnut banquet table, the twelve chairs  
Mirrored the intricate gestures of two others.

Heavy as a statuary, shapes not ours  
Performed a dumbshow in the polished wood,  
That cabinet without windows or doors:  
He lifts an arm to bring her close, but she  
Shies from his touch: his is an iron mood.

Seeing her freeze, he turns his face away.  
They poise and grieve as in some old tragedy.

Moon-blanced and implacable, he and she  
Would not be eased, released. Our each example  
Of tenderness dove through their purgatory  
Like a planet, a stone, swallowed in a great darkness,  
Leaving no sparky track, setting up no ripple.  
Nightly we left them in their desert place.  
Lights out, they dogged us, sleepless and envious:

We dreamed their arguments, their stricken voices.  
We might embrace, but those two never did,  
Come, so unlike us, to a stiff impasse,  
Burdened in such a way we seemed the lighter-  
Ourselves the haunters, and they, flesh and blood;  
As if, above love's ruinage, we were  
The heaven those two dreamed of, in despair.

*Sylvia Plath, April 26, 2024*

## **CRUMBS OR THE LOAF**

If one should tell them what's clearly seen  
They'd not understand; if they understood they would not believe;  
If they understood and believed they'd say,  
"Hater of men, annihilating with a sterile enormous  
Splendor our lives: where are our lives?"  
A little chilled perhaps, but not hurt. But it's quite true  
The invulnerable love is not bought for nothing.  
It is better no doubt to give crumbs than the loaf: make fables again,  
Tell people not to fear death, toughen  
Their bones if possible with bitter fables not to fear life.  
— And one's own, not to have pity too much;  
For it seems compassion sticks longer than the other colors,

in this bleaching cloth.

*Robinson Jeffers, April 22, 2024*

## **WANTING TO DIE**

Since you ask, most days I cannot remember.  
I walk in my clothing, unmarked by that voyage.  
Then the almost unnameable lust returns.

Even then I have nothing against life.  
I know well the grass blades you mention,  
the furniture you have placed under the sun.

But suicides have a special language.  
Like carpenters they want to know which tools.  
They never ask why build.

Twice I have so simply declared myself,  
have possessed the enemy, eaten the enemy,  
have taken on his craft, his magic.

In this way, heavy and thoughtful,  
warmer than oil or water,  
I have rested, drooling at the mouth-hole.

I did not think of my body at needle point.  
Even the cornea and the leftover urine were gone.  
Suicides have already betrayed the body.

Still-born, they don't always die,  
but dazzled, they can't forget a drug so sweet  
that even children would look on and smile.

To thrust all that life under your tongue! —

that, all by itself, becomes a passion.  
Death's a sad bone; bruised, you'd say,

and yet she waits for me, year after year,  
to so delicately undo an old wound,  
to empty my breath from its bad prison.

Balanced there, suicides sometimes meet,  
raging at the fruit a pumped-up moon,  
leaving the bread they mistook for a kiss,

leaving the page of the book carelessly open,  
something unsaid, the phone off the hook  
and the love whatever it was, an infection.

*Anne Sexton, April 19, 2024*

## **HYPOCRITE WOMEN**

Hypocrite women, how seldom we speak  
of our own doubts, while dubiously  
we mother man in his doubt!

And if at Mill Valley perched in the trees  
the sweet rain drifting through western air  
a white sweating bull of a poet told us

our cunts are ugly – why didn't we  
admit we have thought so too? (And  
what shame? They are not for the eye!)

No, they are dark and wrinkled and hairy,  
caves of the Moon... And when a  
dark humming fills us, a

coldness towards life,  
we are too much women to  
own to such unwomanliness.

Whorishly with the psychopomp  
we play and plead – and say  
nothing of this later. And our dreams,

with what frivolity we have pared them  
like toenails, clipped them like ends of  
split hair.

*Denise Levertov, April 15, 2024*

## **THIS BE THE VERSE**

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.  
They may not mean to, but they do.  
They fill you with the faults they had  
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn  
By fools in old-style hats and coats,  
Who half the time were soppy-stern  
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.  
It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
And don't have any kids yourself.

*Philip Larkin, April 12, 2024*

## INSOMNIA

The moon in the bureau mirror  
looks out a million miles  
(and perhaps with pride, at herself,  
but she never, never smiles)  
far and away beyond sleep, or  
perhaps she's a daytime sleeper.

By the Universe deserted,  
she'd tell it to go to hell,  
and she'd find a body of water,  
or a mirror, on which to dwell.  
So wrap up care in a cobweb  
and drop it down the well

into that world inverted  
where left is always right,  
where the shadows are really the body,  
where we stay awake all night,  
where the heavens are shallow as the sea  
is now deep, and you love me.

*Elizabeth Bishop, April 8, 2024*

## SEPARATION

I unsubscribe from people! It's more humane  
to be a beast among beasts than to be a costume  
among gray costumes, hovering, like over a game  
of chess, over the pile of premature babies, who,  
cast out of their incubators, flail like lobsters before  
being put into a boiling pot.

Bomb, bomb, you monster, kill water fountains,



cemeteries and hospitals, I want no part in mankind  
any more! I'm breaking up with you, too, my comrade  
friend, a professor of freedom, whose language once  
was sharp as a firing pin, yet, nowadays, in TV debates,  
you let them sweep and polish around your word  
like in front of the curling stone, guiding it into  
the fold with the softest possible collision on ice.

I'm cutting ties with people! The times of rebellion  
and resistance are over, and the dog will lie with  
the cur once more.

*Milorad Pejić (Translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), April 5, 2024*

## **STOP ALL THE CLOCKS, CUT OFF THE TELEPHONE**

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

*Wystan Hugh Auden, April 1, 2024*

## **THE GREAT BLACK HERON**

Since I stroll in the woods more often  
than on this frequented path, it's usually  
trees I observe; but among fellow humans  
what I like best is to see an old woman  
fishing alone at the end of a jetty,  
hours on end, plainly content.

The Russians mushroom-hunting after a rain  
trail after themselves a world of red sarafans,  
nightingales, samovars, stoves to sleep on  
(though without doubt those are not  
what they can remember). Vietnamese families  
fishing or simply sitting as close as they can  
to the water, make me recall that lake in Hanoi  
in the amber light, our first, jet-lagged evening,  
peace in the war we had come to witness.

This woman engaged in her pleasure evokes  
an entire culture, tenacious field-flower  
growing itself among the rows of cotton  
in red-earth country, under the feet  
of mules and masters. I see her  
a barefoot child by a muddy river  
learning her skill with the pole. What battles  
has she survived, what labors?

She's gathered up all the time in the world  
– nothing else – and waits for scanty trophies,  
complete in herself as a heron.

*Denise Levertov, March 29, 2024*

## THE STARRY NIGHT

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of—shall I say the  
word —religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars.*

*Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother*

The town does not exist  
except where one black-haired tree slips  
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.  
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.  
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons  
to push children, like a god, from its eye.  
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die:

into that rushing beast of the night,  
sucked up by that great dragon, to split  
from my life with no flag,  
no belly,  
no cry.

*Anne Sexton, March 25, 2024*

## MORNING SONG

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.  
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your bald cry  
Took its place among the elements.

Our voices echo, magnifying your arrival. New statue.  
In a drafty museum, your nakedness  
Shadows our safety. We stand round blankly as walls.

I'm no more your mother  
Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow  
Effacement at the wind's hand.

All night your moth-breath  
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:  
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral  
In my Victorian nightgown.  
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and swallows its dull stars. And now you try  
Your handful of notes;  
The clear vowels rise like balloons.

*Sylvia Plath, March 22, 2024*

## **WILD OATS**

About twenty years ago  
Two girls came in where I worked —  
A bosomy English rose  
And her friend in specs I could talk to.  
Faces in those days sparked  
The whole shooting-match off, and I doubt  
If ever one had like hers:  
But it was the friend I took out,

And in seven years after that  
Wrote over four hundred letters,

Gave a ten-guinea ring  
I got back in the end, and met  
At numerous cathedral cities  
Unknown to the clergy. I believe  
I met beautiful twice. She was trying  
Both times (so I thought) not to laugh.

Parting, after about five  
Rehearsals, was an agreement  
That I was too selfish, withdrawn,  
And easily bored to love.  
Well, useful to get that learnt.  
In my wallet are still two snaps  
Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.  
Unlucky charms, perhaps.

*Philip Larkin, March 18, 2024*

## **THIS IS THE FIRST THING**

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

*Philip Larkin, March 15, 2024*

## **EX VOTO**

*Джонатану Аарону*

Нечто как поле в Венгрии, кажется только без  
невинности такового. Нечто долгое, как река,

но без мостов последней. Взгляд прищуренных глаз - разрез,  
даже в пейзаже боль вызывающий. Наверняка  
посмертная перспектива там, где слову дано  
эхо, что в общем больше, чем названный им предмет.  
Здесь даже ангел чем-то блондинку напомним, но  
ту, что Освенцим сэйлов давно разменял на нет.  
Здесь отмечают камнем место, где воробей  
сизивал прежде. Пальмы в аквариумах витрин  
предскажут mosquito будущее, его боевой судьбе -  
новую плоскость - из-за потребности быть внутри  
виллы, а лучше - отеля. Чем дальше уводит след,  
тем больше в руках пространства напоминаешь воск.  
Айсберг плывёт бесцельно. И, подходя к земле,  
тает мучительно, формой напоминая мозг.

*Joseph Brodsky, March 11, 2024*

## **INVITATION TO MISS MARIANNE MOORE**

From Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,  
please come flying.  
In a cloud of fiery pale chemicals,  
please come flying,  
to the rapid rolling of thousands of small blue drums  
descending out of the mackerel sky  
over the glittering grandstand of harbor-water,  
please come flying.

Whistles, pennants and smoke are blowing. The ships  
are signaling cordially with multitudes of flags  
rising and falling like birds all over the harbor.  
Enter: two rivers, gracefully bearing  
countless little pellucid jellies  
in cut-glass epergnes dragging with silver chains.  
The flight is safe; the weather is all arranged.

The waves are running in verses this fine morning.  
Please come flying.

Come with the pointed toe of each black shoe  
trailing a sapphire highlight,  
with a black capeful of butterfly wings and bon-mots,  
with heaven knows how many angels all riding  
on the broad black brim of your hat,  
please come flying.

Bearing a musical inaudible abacus,  
a slight censorious frown, and blue ribbons,  
please come flying.  
Facts and skyscrapers glint in the tide; Manhattan  
is all awash with morals this fine morning,  
so please come flying.

Mounting the sky with natural heroism,  
above the accidents, above the malignant movies,  
the taxicabs and injustices at large,  
while horns are resounding in your beautiful ears  
that simultaneously listen to  
a soft uninvented music, fit for the musk deer,  
please come flying.

For whom the grim museums will behave  
like courteous male bower-birds,  
for whom the agreeable lions lie in wait  
on the steps of the Public Library,  
eager to rise and follow through the doors  
up into the reading rooms,  
please come flying.

We can sit down and weep; we can go shopping,  
or play at a game of constantly being wrong  
with a priceless set of vocabularies,  
or we can bravely deplore, but please  
please come flying.

With dynasties of negative constructions  
darkening and dying around you,  
with grammar that suddenly turns and shines  
like flocks of sandpipers flying,  
    please come flying.

Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,  
come like a daytime comet  
with a long unnebulous train of words,  
from Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,  
    please come flying.

*Elizabeth Bishop, March 8, 2024*

## **WHO'S WHO**

A shilling life will give you all the facts:  
How Father beat him, how he ran away,  
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts  
Made him the greatest figure of his day;  
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,  
Though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea:  
Some of the last researchers even write  
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one  
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;  
Did little jobs about the house with skill  
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still  
Or potter round the garden; answered some  
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none.

*Wystan Hugh Auden, March 4, 2024*



## TO MY DAUGHTER

Give me another life, and I'll be singing  
in Caffè Rafaella. Or simply sitting  
there. Or standing there, as furniture in the corner,  
in case that life is a bit less generous than the former.

Yet partly because no century from now on will ever manage  
without caffeine or jazz. I'll sustain this damage,  
and through my cracks and pores, varnish and dust all over,  
observe you, in twenty years, in your full flower.

On the whole, bear in mind that I'll be around. Or rather,  
that an inanimate object might be your father,  
especially if the objects are older than you, or larger.  
So keep an eye on them always, for they no doubt will judge you.

Love those things anyway, encounter or no encounter.  
Besides, you may still remember a silhouette, a contour,  
while I'll lose even that, along with the other luggage.  
Hence, these somewhat wooden lines in our common language.

*Joseph Brodsky, March 1, 2024*

## WHEN I BEHOLD THE GREATEST

When I behold the greatest and most wise  
Fall out of heaven, wings not by pride struck numb  
Like Satan's, but to gain some humbler crumb  
Of pittance from penurious granaries;  
And when I see under each new disguise  
The same cowardice of custom, the same dumb  
Devil that drove our Wordsworth to become

Apologist of kings and priests and lies;  
And how a man may find in all he loathes  
Contentment after all, and so endear it  
By cowardly craft it grows his inmost own; –  
Then I renew my faith with firmer oaths,  
And bind with more tremendous vows a spirit  
That, often fallen, never has lain prone.

*Robinson Jeffers, February 26, 2024*

## **TO A FRIEND WHOSE WORK HAS COME TO TRIUMPH**

Consider Icarus, pasting those sticky wings on,  
testing that strange little tug at his shoulder blade,  
and think of that first flawless moment over the lawn  
of the labyrinth. Think of the difference it made!  
There below are the trees, as awkward as camels;  
and here are the shocked starlings pumping past  
and think of innocent Icarus who is doing quite well.  
Larger than a sail, over the fog and the blast  
of the plushy ocean, he goes. Admire his wings!  
See the fire at his neck and see how casually  
he glances up and is caught, wondrously tunneling  
into that hot eye. Who cares that he fell back to the sea?  
See him acclaiming the sun and come plunging down  
while his sensible daddy goes straight into town.

*Anne Sexton, February 23, 2024*

## **LAST WORDS**

I do not want a plain box, I want a sarcophagus  
With tigery stripes, and a face on it

Round as the moon, to stare up.  
I want to be looking at them when they come  
Picking among the dumb minerals, the roots.  
I see them already — the pale, star-distance faces.  
Now they are nothing, they are not even babies.  
I imagine them without fathers or mothers, like the first gods.  
They will wonder if I was important.  
I should sugar and preserve my days like fruit!  
My mirror is clouding over —  
A few more breaths, and it will reflect nothing at all.  
The flowers and the faces whiten to a sheet.

I do not trust the spirit. It escapes like steam  
In dreams, through mouth-hole or eye-hole. I can't stop it.  
One day it won't come back. Things aren't like that.  
They stay, their little particular lusters  
Warmed by much handling. They almost purr.  
When the soles of my feet grow cold,  
The blue eye of my tortoise will comfort me.  
Let me have my copper cooking pots, let my rouge pots  
Bloom about me like night flowers, with a good smell.  
They will roll me up in bandages, they will store my heart  
Under my feet in a neat parcel.  
I shall hardly know myself. It will be dark,  
And the shine of these small things sweeter than the face of Ishtar.

*Sylvia Plath, February 19, 2024*

## **DIVINELY SUPERFLUOUS BEAUTY**

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game  
of seals,  
Over and under the ocean ...  
Divinely superfluous beauty  
Rules the games, presides over destinies,

makes trees grow  
And hills tower, waves fall.  
The incredible beauty of joy  
Stars with fire the joining of lips, O let our  
loves too  
Be joined, there is not a maiden  
Burns and thirsts for love  
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals  
while the wings  
Weave like a web in the air  
Divinely superfluous beauty.

*Robinson Jeffers, February 16, 2024*

## **THE WINGS**

Something hangs in back of me,  
I can't see it, can't move it.

I know it's black,  
a hump on my back.

It's heavy. You  
can't see it.

What's in it? Don't tell me  
you don't know. It's

what you told me about –  
black

inimical power, cold  
whirling out of it and

around me and  
sweeping you flat.

But what if,  
like a camel, it's

pure energy I store,  
and carry humped and heavy?

Not black, not  
that terror, stupidity

of cold rage; or black  
only for being pent there?

What if released in air  
it became a white

source of light, a fountain  
of light? Could all that weight

be the power of flight?  
Look inward: see me

with embryo wings, one  
feathered in soot, the other

blazing ciliations of ember, pale  
flare-pinions. Well—

could I go  
on one wing,

the white one?

*Denise Levertov, February 12, 2024*

## THE FIRST GRASS

It rained three autumn days; then close to frost  
Under clear starlight the night shivering was.  
The dawn rose cold and colorless as glass,  
And when we wakened rains and clouds were lost.  
The ocean surged and shouted stormy-tossed.  
I went down to companion him. Alas,  
What faint voice by the way? The sudden grass  
Cried with thin lips as I the valley crossed,  
Saying blade by blade, "Although the warm sweet rain  
Awakened us, this world is all too cold.  
We never dreamed it thus."—"Your champion bold  
Is risen," I said; "he in an hour or twain  
Will comfort you." I passed. Above the dune  
Stood the wan splendorless daylight-waning moon.

*Robinson Jeffers, February 9, 2024*

## THE APPLICANT

First, are you our sort of a person?  
Do you wear  
A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,  
A brace or a hook,  
Rubber breasts or a rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? Then  
How can we give you a thing?  
Stop crying.  
Open your hand.  
Empty? Empty. Here is a hand

To fill it and willing  
To bring teacups and roll away headaches  
And do whatever you tell it.  
Will you marry it?  
It is guaranteed

To thumb shut your eyes at the end  
And dissolve of sorrow.  
We make new stock from the salt.  
I notice you are stark naked.  
How about this suit - -

Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.  
Will you marry it?  
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof  
Against fire and bombs through the roof.  
Believe me, they'll bury you in it.

Now your head, excuse me, is empty.  
I have the ticket for that.  
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.  
Well, what do you think of that ?  
Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,  
In fifty, gold.  
A living doll, everywhere you look.  
It can sew, it can cook,  
It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.  
You have a hole, it's a poultice.  
You have an eye, it's an image.  
My boy, it's your last resort.  
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

*Sylvia Plath, February 5, 2024*

## MERRITT PARKWAY

As if it were  
forever that they move, that we  
keep moving –

Under a wan sky where  
as the lights went on a star  
pierced the haze & now  
follows steadily  
a constant  
above our six lanes  
the dreamlike continuum...

And the people—ourselves!  
the humans from inside the  
cars apparent  
only at gasoline stops  
unsure,  
eying each other

drink coffee hastily at the  
slot machines & hurry  
back to the cars  
vanish  
into them forever, to  
keep moving —

Houses now & then beyond the  
sealed road, the trees/tress, bushes  
passing by, passing  
the cars that  
keep moving ahead of  
us, past us, pressing behind us



and  
over left, those that come  
toward us shining too brightly  
moving relentlessly

in six lanes, gliding  
north & south, speeding with  
a slurred sound —

*Denise Levertov, February 2, 2024*

## **AND THE STARS**

Perhaps you did not know how bright last night,  
Especially above your seaside door,  
Was all the marvelous starlit sky, and wore  
White harmonies of very shining light.  
Perhaps you did not want to seek the sight  
Of that remembered rapture any more. —  
But then at least you must have heard the shore  
Roar with reverberant voices thro' the night.

Those stars were lit with longing of my own,  
And the ocean's moan was full of my own pain.  
Yet doubtless it was well for both of us  
You did not come, but left me there alone.  
I hardly ought to see you much again;  
And stars, we know, are often dangerous.

*Robinson Jeffers, January 29, 2024*

## **GALATEA ENCORE**

As though the mercury's under its tongue, it won't  
talk. As though with the mercury in its sphincter,  
immobile, by a leaf-coated pond  
a statue stands white like a blight of winter.  
After such snow, there is nothing indeed: the ins  
and outs of centuries, pestered heather.  
That's what coming full circle means -  
when your countenance starts to resemble weather,  
when Pygmalion's vanished. And you are free  
to cloud your folds, to bare the navel.  
Future at last! That is, bleached debris  
of a glacier amid the five-lettered "never."  
Hence the routine of a goddess, nee  
alabaster, that lets roving pupils gorge on  
the heart of color and the temperature of the knee.  
That's what it looks like inside a virgin.

*Joseph Brodsky, January 26, 2024*

## **XLVII**

De döda ett namn  
de levande ett ansikte och tio fingrar

*Pentti Saarikoski, January 22, 2024*

## **ARIEL**

Stasis in darkness.  
Then the substanceless blue  
Pour of tor and distances.

God's lioness,

How one we grow,  
Pivot of heels and knees! — The furrow

Splits and passes, sister to  
The brown arc  
Of the neck I cannot catch,

Nigger-eye  
Berries cast dark  
Hooks —

Black sweet blood mouthfuls,  
Shadows.  
Something else

Hauls me through air —  
Thighs, hair;  
Flakes from my heels.

White  
Godiva, I unpeel —  
Dead hands, dead stringencies.

And now I  
Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas.  
The child's cry

Melts in the wall.  
And I  
Am the arrow,

The dew that flies  
Suicidal, at one with the drive  
Into the red  
Eye, the cauldron of morning.

*Sylvia Plath, January 19, 2024*

## THE SPRINGTIME

The red eyes of rabbits  
aren't sad. No one passes  
the sad golden village in a barge  
any more. The sunset  
will leave it alone. If the  
curtains hang askew  
it is no one's fault.

Around and around and around  
everywhere the same sound  
of wheels going, and things  
growing older, growing  
silent. If the dogs  
bark to each other  
all night, and their eyes  
flash red, that's  
nobody's business. They have  
a great space of dark to  
bark across. The rabbits  
will bare their teeth at  
the spring moon.

*Denise Levertov, January 15, 2024*

## THE LIFE WITH A HOLE IN IT

When I throw my head back and howl  
People (women mostly) say  
But you've always done what you want,  
You always get your own way  
— A perfectly vile and foul

Inversion of all that's been.  
What the old ratbags mean  
Is I've never done what I don't.

So the shit in the shuttered chateau  
Who does his five hundred words  
Then parts out the rest of the day  
Between bathing and booze and birds  
Is far off as ever, but so  
Is that spectacted schoolteaching sod  
(Six kids, and the wife in pod,  
And her parents coming to stay)...

Life is an immobile, locked,  
Three-handed struggle between  
Your wants, the world's for you, and (worse)  
The unbeatable slow machine  
That brings what you'll get. Blocked,  
They strain round a hollow stasis  
Of havings-to, fear, faces,  
Days sift down it constantly. Years.

*Philip Larkin, January 12, 2024*

## **THE LOW SKY**

No vulture is here, hardly a hawk,  
Could long wings or great eyes fly  
Under this low-lidded soft sky?

On the wide heather the curlew's whistle  
Dies of its echo, it has no room  
Under the lid of this tomb.

But one to whom mind and imagination

Sometimes used to seem burdensome  
Is glad to lie down awhile in the tomb.

Among stones and quietness  
The mind dissolves without a sound,  
The flesh drops into the ground.

*Robinson Jeffers, January 8, 2024*

## **MIRROR**

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
Whatever I see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful,  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

*Sylvia Plath, January 5, 2024*