

3 HORSES FACING THE SASKATCHEWAN SUN

They were yellow, brown, golden, tawny.
They were ropy, sinewy, eels in the hands of the three blind men.
They were spirit in the saddle, flesh of belief.
They were posed, they were active, they lived motionless.

Where they stood side by side facing the sun,
where they stood and did not move in the face of the sunshine,
where there they breathed but did not move or twitch,
there they remain in memory and cannot age.

Criminal to tell time to the animals,
brutal to make known one's wish for a change of any kind,
despair to be truthful, cruel to be wishful--
all words to be trampled for the basic right to be.

Mervin Bell, December 31, 2018

ATLANTIS

Being set on the idea
Of getting to Atlantis,
You have discovered of course
Only the Ship of Fools is
Making the voyage this year,
As gales of abnormal force
Are predicted, and that you
Must therefore be ready to
Behave absurdly enough
To pass for one of The Boys,
At least appearing to love
Hard liquor, horseplay and noise.

Should storms, as may well happen,
Drive you to anchor a week
In some old harbour-city
Of Ionia, then speak
With her witty scholars, men
Who have proved there cannot be
Such a place as Atlantis:
Learn their logic, but notice
How its subtlety betrays
Their enormous simple grief;
Thus they shall teach you the ways
To doubt that you may believe.

If, later, you run aground
Among the headlands of Thrace,
Where with torches all night long
A naked barbaric race
Leaps frenziedly to the sound

Of conch and dissonant gong:
On that stony savage shore
Strip off your clothes and dance, for
Unless you are capable
Of forgetting completely
About Atlantis, you will
Never finish your journey.

Again, should you come to gay
Carthage or Corinth, take part
In their endless gaiety;
And if in some bar a tart,
As she strokes your hair, should say
"This is Atlantis, dearie,"
Listen with attentiveness
To her life-story: unless
You become acquainted now
With each refuge that tries to
Counterfeit Atlantis, how
Will you recognise the true?

Assuming you beach at last
Near Atlantis, and begin
That terrible trek inland
Through squalid woods and frozen
Thundras where all are soon lost;
If, forsaken then, you stand,
Dismissal everywhere,
Stone and snow, silence and air,
O remember the great dead
And honour the fate you are,
Travelling and tormented,
Dialectic and bizarre.

Stagger onward rejoicing;
And even then if, perhaps
Having actually got
To the last col, you collapse
With all Atlantis shining
Below you yet you cannot
Descend, you should still be proud
Even to have been allowed
Just to peep at Atlantis
In a poetic vision:
Give thanks and lie down in peace,
Having seen your salvation.

All the little household gods
Have started crying, but say
Good-bye now, and put to sea.
Farewell, my dear, farewell: may
Hermes, master of the roads,
And the four dwarf Kabiri,
Protect and serve you always;

And may the Ancient of Days
Provide for all you must do
His invisible guidance,
Lifting up, dear, upon you
The light of His countenance.

Wystan Hugh Auden, December 28, 2018

A BRAVE AND STARTLING TRUTH

We, this people, on a small and lonely planet
Traveling through casual space
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns
To a destination where all signs tell us
It is possible and imperative that we learn
A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it
To the day of peacemaking
When we release our fingers
From fists of hostility
And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it
When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate
And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed clean
When battlefields and coliseum
No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters
Up with the bruised and bloody grass
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches
The screaming racket in the temples have ceased
When the pennants are waving gaily
When the banners of the world tremble
Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it
When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce
When land mines of death have been removed
And the aged can walk into evenings of peace
When religious ritual is not perfumed
By the incense of burning flesh
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake
By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it
Then we will confess that not the Pyramids
With their stones set in mysterious perfection
Nor the Gardens of Babylon
Hanging as eternal beauty

In our collective memory
Not the Grand Canyon
Kindled into delicious color
By Western sunsets

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into Europe
Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji
Stretching to the Rising Sun
Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Mississippi who, without favor,
Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the shores
These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it
We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace
We, this people on this mote of matter
In whose mouths abide cankerous words
Which challenge our very existence
Yet out of those same mouths
Come songs of such exquisite sweetness
That the heart falters in its labor
And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet
Whose hands can strike with such abandon
That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing,
irresistible tenderness
That the haughty neck is happy to bow
And the proud back is glad to bend
Out of such chaos, of such contradiction
We learn that we are neither devils nor divines

When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

When we come to it
We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it

Maya Angelou, December 24, 2018

COME IN

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music -- hark!
Now if it was dusk outside,
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better its perch for the night,
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went --
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars;
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked;
And I hadn't been.

Robert Frost, December 21, 2018

OLD MAN, DEAD IN A ROOM

this thing upon me is not death
but it's as real
and as landlords full of maggots
pound for rent
I eat walnuts in the sheath
of my privacy
and listen for more important
drummers;
it's as real, it's as real
as the broken-boned sparrow
cat-mouthed, uttering
more than mere
miserable argument;
between my toes I stare
at clouds, at seas of gaunt
sepulcher. . .
and scratch my back
and form a vowel
as all my lovely women
(wives and lovers)
break like engines

into steam of sorrow
to be blown into eclipse;
bone is bone
but this thing upon me
as I tear the window shades
and walk caged rugs,
this thing upon me
like a flower and a feast,
believe me
is not death and is not
glory
and like Quixote's windmills
makes a foe
turned by the heavens
against one man;
...this thing upon me,
great god,
this thing upon me
crawling like snake,
terrifying my love of commonness,
some call Art
some call Poetry;
it's not death
but dying will solve its power
and as my grey hands
drop a last desperate pen
in some cheap room
they will find me there
and never know
my name
my meaning
nor the treasure
of my escape.

Charles Bukowski, December 17, 2018

IN A CHURCHYARD

That flower unseen, that gem of purest ray,
Bright thoughts uncut by men:
Strange that you need but speak them, Thomas Gray,
And the mind skips and dives beyond its ken,

Finding at once the wild supposed bloom,
Or in the imagined cave
Some pulse of crystal staving off the gloom
As covertly as phosphorus in a grave.

Void notions proper to a buried head!
Beneath these tombstones here
Unseenness fills the sockets of the dead,
Whatever to their souls may now appear;

And who but those unfathomably deaf
Who quiet all this ground
Could catch, within the ear's diminished clef,
A music innocent of time and sound?

What do the living hear, then, when the bell
Hangs plumb within the tower
Of the still church, and still their thoughts compel
Pure tollings that intend no mortal hour?

As when a ferry for the shore of death
Glides looming toward the dock,
Her engines cut, her spirits bating breath
As the ranked pilings narrow toward the shock,

So memory and expectation set
Some pulseless clangor free
Of circumstance, and charm us to forget
This twilight crumbling in the churchyard tree,

Those swifts or swallows which do not pertain,
Scuffed voices in the drive,
That light flicked on behind the vestry pane,
Till, unperplexed from all that is alive,

It shadows all our thought, balked imminence
Of uncommitted sound,
And still would tower at the sill of sense
Were not, as now, its honeyed abeyance crowned

With a mauled boom of summons far more strange
Than any stroke unheard,
Which breaks again with unimagined range
Through all reverberations of the word,

Pooling the mystery of things that are,
The buzz of prayer said,
The scent of grass, the earliest-blooming star,
These unseen gravestones, and the darker dead.

Richard Wilbur, December 14, 2018

THE BLACKBIRDS ARE ROUGHT TODAY

lonely as a dry and used orchard
spread over the earth
for use and surrender.

shot down like an ex-pug selling
dailies on the corner.

taken by tears like
an aging chorus girl
who has gotten her last check.

a hanky is in order your lord your
worship.

the blackbirds are rough today
like
ingrown toenails
in an overnight
jail---
wine wine whine,
the blackbirds run around and
fly around
harping about
Spanish melodies and bones.

and everywhere is
nowhere---
the dream is as bad as
flapjacks and flat tires:

why do we go on
with our minds and
pockets full of
dust
like a bad boy just out of
school---
you tell
me,
you who were a hero in some
revolution
you who teach children
you who drink with calmness
you who own large homes
and walk in gardens
you who have killed a man and own a
beautiful wife
you tell me
why I am on fire like old dry
garbage.

we might surely have some interesting
correspondence.
it will keep the mailman busy.
and the butterflies and ants and bridges and
cemeteries
the rocket-makers and dogs and garage mechanics
will still go on a
while
until we run out of stamps
and/or
ideas.

don't be ashamed of
anything; I guess God meant it all
like
locks on
doors.

Charles Bukowski, December 10, 2018

THE QUAKER GRAVEYARD IN NANTUCKET

*Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air
and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the
earth.*

I

A brackish reach of shoal off Madaket,-
The sea was still breaking violently and night
Had steamed into our north Atlantic Fleet,
when the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light
Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,
He grappled at the net
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs;
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of red and whites,
It's open, starring eyes
Were lusterless dead-lights
Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk
Heavy with sand. we weight the body, close
Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came,
Where the heel-headed dogfish barks at its nose
On Ahab's void and forehead; and the name
Is blocked in yellow chalk.
Sailors, who pitch this at the portent at the sea
Where dreadnoughts shall confess
It's hell-bent deity
When you are powerless
To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced
By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste
In his steel scales; ask for no Orphean lute
To pluck life back. The guns of the steeled fleet
Recoiled and then repeat
The hoarse salute

II

Whenever winds are moving and their breath
Heaved at the roped-in bulwarks of this pier,
Then terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death
In these waters. Sailor, can you hear
The Pequod's sea wings, beating landward, fall
Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall

Off 'Sconset, where the yawing S-boats-splash

The bellbuoy, with ballooning spinnakers,
As the entangled, screeching mainsheet clears
The blocks: off Madaket, where lubbers lash
The heavy surf and throw their long lead squids
For blue-fish? Sea-gulls blink their heavy lids
Seaward. The winds' wings beat upon the stones,
Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush
At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush
Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones
Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast
Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East.

III

All you recovered from Poseidon died
With you, my cousin, and the harrowed brine
Is fruitless on the blue beard of the god,
Stretching beyond us to the castles in Spain,
Nantucket's westward haven. To Cape Cod
Guns, cradled on the tide,
Blast, the eelgrass about a waterclock
Of bilge and backwash, roil the salt and the sand
Lashing earth's scaffold, rock
Our warships in the hand
Of the great God, where time's contrition blues
Whatever it was these Quaker sailor's lost
In the mad scramble of their lives. They died
When time was open-eyed,
Wooden and childish; only bones abide
There, in the nowhere, where their boats were tossed
Sky-high, where mariners had fabled news
Of IS, the whited monster. what it cost
Them is their secret. In the sperm-whale's slick
I see the Quakers drown and hear their cry:
"If God himself had not been by our side,
If God himself had not been on our side,
When the Atlantic rose against us, why,
Then it had swallowed us up quick."

IV

This is the end of the whaleroad and the whale
Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell
And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools
To send the Pequod packing off to hell:
This is the end of them, three quarters fools,
Snatching at straws to sail
Seaward and seaward on the turntail whale,
Spouting out blood and water as it rolls
Sick as a dog to these Atlantic shoals:
Clamavimus, O depths. Let the sea-gulls wail
For water, for the deep where the high tide
Mutters to its hurt self, mutters and ebbs.
Waves wallow in their wash, go out and out,
Leave only the death-rattle of the crabs,
The beach increasing, its enormous snout

Sucking the ocean's side.
This is the end of running on the waves;
We are poured out like water. who will dance
The mast-lashed master of Leviathans
Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned graves?

V

When the whales viscera go and the roll
Of its corruption overruns this world
Beyond tree-swept Nantucket and Wood's Hole
whistle and fall and sink into the fat?
In the great ash-pit of Jehoshapat
The bones cry for the blood of the white whale,
The fat flukes arch and whack about its ears,
The death-lance churns into the sanctuary, tears
The gun-blue swingle, heaving like a flail,
And hacks the coiling life out: it works and drags
And rips the sperm-whale's midriff into rags,
Gobbets of blubber spill to wind and weather,
Sailor and gulls go round the stoven timbers
Where the morning stars sing out together
And thunder shakes the white surf and dismembers
The red flag hammered in the mast-head. Hide
Our steel, Jonas Messias, in Thy side.

VI

Our Lady of Walsingham
There once the penitents took off their shoes
and then walked barefoot the remaining mile;
And the small trees, a stream and hedgerows file
Slowly along the munching English lane,
Like cows to the old shrine, until you lose
Track of your dragging pain.
The stream flows down under the druid tree,
Shiloah's whirlpools gurgle and make you glad
And whistled Sion by that stream. But see:
Our Lady, too small for her canopy,
Sits near the altar. There's no comeliness
At all or charm in that expressionless
Face with its heavy eyelids. As before,
This face, for centuries a memory,
Non est species, neque décor
Expressionless expresses God: it goes
Past castled Sion. She knows what God knows,
Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem
Now, and the world shall come to Walsingham.

VII

The empty winds are creaking and the oak
Splatters and splatters on the cenotaph,
The boughs are trembling and a gaff
Bobs on the untimely stroke
Of the greased wash exploding on a shoal-bell
In the old mouth of the Atlantic. It's well;

Atlantic, you are fouled with the blue sailors,
Sea-monsters, upward angel, downward fish:
Unmarried and corroding, spare of flesh
Mart once of supercilious, winged clippers,
Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil
You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
Here in Nantucket and cast up the time
When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime
And breathed into his face the breath of life,
And the blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.
The Lord survives the rainbow of His will.

Robert Lowell, December 7, 2018

LOVE CALLS US TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
As false dawn.
Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
They swoon down in so rapt a quiet
That nobody seems to be there.
The soul shrinks

From all that it is about to remember,
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,
And cries,
"Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven."

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
With a warm look the world's hunks and colors,
The soul descends once more in bitter love
To accept the waking body, saying now
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,

"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,

And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits, keeping their difficult balance."

Richard Wilbur, December 3, 2018

ANNIVERSARY

To Omer Hadžiselimović

One ages, my friar, even on this side!
In the blink of an eye the days of a year
have passed since, like a leather-bound
book, we set you afire in a furnace. You
were somehow vulnerable to death.
Lenient with it even, like with a disabled
child, you embraced it as only a father
would. Because, as you said, nothing ends
and nothing begins with that embrace.
Only a body simply transcends from one
state of matter to another.

A heavy year has run over me, like an
asphalt roller. I thought that shooting stars,
like fish, overtake the grounds of those
recently caught but I don't know, because
the low clouds obscure a too-high sky.
And a daze still lingers, like when the only
plant in town shuts down. The emptiness
doesn't abate, my brother!

Milorad Pejić (translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), November 30, 2018

THE SILKEN TENT

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when the sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,

And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,

But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To every thing on earth the compass round,

And only by one's going slightly taut

In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

Robert Frost, November 26, 2018

MEMORIES OF WEST STREET AND LEPKE

Only teaching on Tuesdays, book-worming
in pajamas fresh from the washer each morning,
I hog a whole house on Boston's
"hardly passionate Marlborough Street,"
where even the man
scavenging filth in the back alley trash cans,
has two children, a beach wagon, a helpmate,
and is "a young Republican."
I have a nine months' daughter,
young enough to be my granddaughter.
Like the sun she rises in her flame-flamingo infants' wear.

These are the tranquilized Fifties,
and I am forty. Ought I to regret my seedtime?
I was a fire-breathing Catholic C.O.,
and made my manic statement,
telling off the state and president, and then
sat waiting sentence in the bull pen
beside a negro boy with curlicues
of marijuana in his hair.

Given a year,
I walked on the roof of the West Street Jail, a short
enclosure like my school soccer court,
and saw the Hudson River once a day
through sooty clothesline entanglements
and bleaching khaki tenements.
Strolling, I yammered metaphysics with Abramowitz,
a jaundice-yellow ("it's really tan")
and fly-weight pacifist,
so vegetarian,
he wore rope shoes and preferred fallen fruit.
He tried to convert Bioff and Brown,
the Hollywood pimps, to his diet.
Hairy, muscular, suburban,
wearing chocolate double-breasted suits,
they blew their tops and beat him black and blue.

I was so out of things, I'd never heard
of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
"Are you a C.O.?" I asked a fellow jailbird.
"No," he answered, "I'm a J.W."
He taught me the "hospital tuck,"
and pointed out the T-shirted back
of Murder Incorporated's Czar Lepke,

there piling towels on a rack,
or dawdling off to his little segregated cell full
of things forbidden to the common man:
a portable radio, a dresser, two toy American
flags tied together with a ribbon of Easter palm.
Flabby, bald, lobotomized,
he drifted in a sheepish calm,
where no agonizing reappraisal
jarred his concentration on the electric chair
hanging like an oasis in his air
of lost connections...

Robert Lowell, November 23, 2018

THE WHITE ROOM

The obvious is difficult
To prove. Many prefer
The hidden. I did, too.
I listened to the trees.

They had a secret
Which they were about to
Make known to me--
And then didn't.

Summer came. Each tree
On my street had its own
Scheherazade. My nights
Were a part of their wild

Storytelling. We were
Entering dark houses,
Always more dark houses,
Hushed and abandoned.

There was someone with eyes closed
On the upper floors.
The fear of it, and the wonder,
Kept me sleepless.

The truth is bald and cold,
Said the woman
Who always wore white.
She didn't leave her room.

The sun pointed to one or two
Things that had survived
The long night intact.
The simplest things,

Difficult in their obviousness.

They made no noise.
It was the kind of day
People described as "perfect."

Gods disguising themselves
As black hairpins, a hand-mirror,
A comb with a tooth missing?
No! That wasn't it.

Just things as they are,
Unblinking, lying mute
In that bright light--
And the trees waiting for the night.

Charles Simic, November 19, 2018

DEATH IS SMOKING MY CIGARS

You know: I'm drunk once again
here
listening to Tchaikovsky
on the radio.
Jesus, I heard him 47 years
ago
when I was a starving writer
and here he is
again
and now I am a minor success as
a writer
and death is walking
up and down
this room
smoking my cigars
taking hits of my
wine
as Tchaik is working away
at the Pathetique,
it's been some journey
and any luck I've had was
because I rolled the dice
right:
I starved for my art, I starved to
gain 5 god-damned minutes, 5 hours,
5 days-
I just wanted to get the word
down;
fame, money, didn't matter:
I wanted the word down;
And "they" wanted me to be a stock boy in a
department store.

well, death says, as he walks by,

I'm going to get you anyhow
no matter what you've been:
writer, cab driver, pimp, butcher,
sky-diver, I'm going to get
you....

o.k. baby, I tell him.

We drink together now
As one a.m. slides to 2
a.m. and
only he knows the
moment, but I worked a con
on him: I got my
5 god-damned minutes
and much
more.

Charles Bukowski, November 16, 2018

NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day
Nothing gold can stay.

Robert Frost, November 12, 2018

THE ANSWER

Then what is the answer?- Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know that great civilizations have broken down into violence,
and their tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose
the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted
and not wish for evil; and not be duped
By dreams of universal justice or happiness. These dreams will
not be fulfilled.
To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear
the whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing and man dissevered from the earth and stars
and his history... for contemplation or in fact...
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
the greatest beauty is

Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty
of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
or drown in despair when his days darken.

Robinson Jeffers, November 9, 2018

POETRY OF DEPARTURES

Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,
As epitaph:
He chucked up everything
And just cleared off,
And always the voice will sound
Certain you approve
This audacious, purifying,
Elemental move.

And they are right, I think.
We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
It's specially-chosen junk,
The good books, the good bed,
And my life, in perfect order:
So to hear it said

He walked out on the whole crowd
Leaves me flushed and stirred,
Like Then she undid her dress
Or Take that you bastard;
Surely I can, if he did?
And that helps me to stay
Sober and industrious.
But I'd go today,

Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,
Crouch in the fo'c'sle
Stubbly with goodness, if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
To create an object:
Books; china; a life
Reprehensibly perfect.

Philip Larkin, November 5, 2018

HONEY AND SALT

A bag of tricks—is it?
And a game smoothies play?
If you're good with a deck of cards
or rolling the bones—that helps?
If you can tell jokes and be a chum
and make an impression—that helps?
When boy meets girl or girl meets boy—
what helps?
They all help: be cozy but not too cozy:
be shy, bashful, mysterious, yet only so-so:
then forget everything you ever heard about love
for it's a summer tan and a winter windburn
and it comes as weather comes and you can't change it:
it comes like your face came to you, like your legs came
and the way you walk, talk, hold your head and hands—
and nothing can be done about it—you wait and pray.
Is there any way of measuring love?
Yes but not till long afterward
when the beat of your heart has gone
many miles, far into the big numbers.
Is the key to love in passion, knowledge, affection?
All three—along with moonlight, roses, groceries,
givings and forgivings, gettings and forgettings,
keepsakes and room rent,
pearls of memory along with ham and eggs.
Can love be locked away and kept hid?
Yes and it gathers dust and mildew
and shrivels itself in shadows
unless it learns the sun can help,
snow, rain, storms can help—
birds in their one-room family nests
shaken by winds cruel and crazy—
they can all help:
lock not away your love nor keep it hid.
How comes the first sign of love?
In a chill, in a personal sweat,
in a you-and-me, us, us two,
in a couple of answers,
an amethyst haze on the horizon,
two dance programs criss-crossed,
jackknifed initials interwoven,
five fresh violets lost in sea salt,
birds flying at single big moments
in and out a thousand windows,
a horse, two horses, many horses,
a silver ring, a brass cry,
a golden gong going ong ong ong-ng-ng,
pink doors closing one by one
to sunset night songs along the west,
shafts and handles of stars,
folds of moonmist curtains,
winding and unwinding wisps of fogmist.

How long does love last?
As long as glass bubbles handled with care
or two hot-house orchids in a blizzard
or one solid immovable steel anvil
tempered in sure inexorable welding—
or again love might last as
six snowflakes, six hexagonal snowflakes,
six floating hexagonal flakes of snow
or the oaths between hydrogen and oxygen
in one cup of spring water
or the eyes of bucks and does
or two wishes riding on the back of a
morning wind in winter
or one corner of an ancient tabernacle
held sacred for personal devotions
or dust yes dust in a little solemn heap
played on by changing winds.
There are sanctuaries holding honey and salt.
There are those who spill and spend.
There are those who search and save.
And love may be a quest with silence and content.
Can you buy love?
Sure every day with money, clothes, candy,
with promises, flowers, big-talk,
with laughter, sweet-talk, lies,
every day men and women buy love
and take it away and things happen
and they study about it
and the longer they look at it
the more it isn't love they bought at all:
bought love is a guaranteed imitation.
Can you sell love?
Yes you can sell it and take the price
and think it over
and look again at the price
and cry and cry to yourself
and wonder who was selling what and why.
Evensong lights floating black night water,
a lagoon of stars washed in velvet shadows,
a great storm cry from white sea-horses—
these moments cost beyond all prices.
Bidden or unbidden? how comes love?
Both bidden and unbidden, a sneak and a shadow,
a dawn in a doorway throwing a dazzle
or a sash of light in a blue fog,
a slow blinking of two red lanterns in river mist
or a deep smoke winding one hump of a mountain
and the smoke becomes a smoke known to your own
twisted individual garments:
the winding of it gets into your walk, your hands,
your face and eyes.

Carl Sandburg, November 2, 2018

WEDDING TOAST

St. John tells how, at Cana's wedding feast,
The water-pots poured wine in such amount
That by his sober count
There were a hundred gallons at the least.

It made no earthly sense, unless to show
How whatsoever love elects to bless
Brims to a sweet excess
That can without depletion overflow.

Which is to say that what love sees is true;
That this world's fullness is not made but found.
Life hungers to abound
And pour its plenty out for such as you.

Now, if your loves will lend an ear to mine,
I toast you both, good son and dear new daughter.
May you not lack for water,
And may that water smack of Cana's wine.

Richard Wilbur, October 29, 2018

SLEEP

she was a short one
getting fat and she had once been
beautiful and
she drank the wine
she drank the wine in bed and
talked and screamed and cursed at
me
and i told her
please, I need some
sleep.
-sleep? sleep? ya son of a
bitch, ya never sleep, ya
don't need any
sleep!
I buried her one morning early
I carried her down the sides of the Hollywood Hills
brambles and rabbits and rocks
running in front of me
and by the time I'd dug the ditch
and stuck her in
belly down
and put the dirt back on
the sun was up and it was warm
and the flies were lazy and
I could hardly see anything out of my eyes
everything was so

warm and yellow.
I managed to drive home and I got into bed and I
slept for 5 days and 4
nights.

Charles Bukowski, October 26, 2018

MY NOVEMBER GUEST

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be;
She loves the bare, the withered tree;
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

Her pleasure will not let me stay.
She talks and I am fain to list:
She's glad the birds are gone away,
She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with clinging mist.

The desolate, deserted trees,
The faded earth, the heavy sky,
The beauties she so truly sees,
She thinks I have no eye for these,
And vexes me for reason why.

Not yesterday I learned to know
The love of bare November days
Before the coming of the snow,
But it were vain to tell her so,
And they are better for her praise.

Robert Frost, October 22, 2018

JULIAN SCOTT

TOWARD the last
The truth of others was untruth to me;
The justice of others injustice to me;
Their reasons for death, reasons with me for life;
Their reasons for life, reasons with me for death;
I would have killed those they saved,
And saved those they killed.
And I saw how a god, if brought to earth,
Must act out what he saw and thought,
And could not live in this world of men
And act among them side by side
Without continual clashes.
The dust's for crawling, heaven's for flying—

Wherefore, O soul, whose wings are grown,
Soar upward to the sun!

Edgar Lee Masters, October 19, 2018

FIRE ON THE HILLS

The deer were bounding like blown leaves
Under the smoke in front the roaring wave of the brush-fire;
I thought of the smaller lives that were caught.
Beauty is not always lovely; the fire was beautiful, the terror
Of the deer was beautiful; and when I returned
Down the back slopes after the fire had gone by, an eagle
Was perched on the jag of a burnt pine,
Insolent and gorged, cloaked in the folded storms of his shoulders
He had come from far off for the good hunting
With fire for his beater to drive the game; the sky was merciless
Blue, and the hills merciless black,
The sombre-feathered great bird sleepily merciless between them.
I thought, painfully, but the whole mind,
The destruction that brings an eagle from heaven is better than mercy.

Robinson Jeffers, October 15, 2018

CAPS

You don't remember anymore what you said
to that little boy with the wet pants
who didn't know where he was going
meanwhile the heads of his parents
in their hockey club caps
banging regularly on the night windows
of the tram
It didn't matter either
what you'd say to him
it was about talking itself
talking to him
all the way to Zábřeh
until his dry sobs
finally woke up those sleepyheads
until he got a good spanking
at some unknown nightstop

Remember
remember here in the dark of Zábřeh
what you told him
remember
those futile tram words

Petr Hruška, October 12, 2018

THE WORST SINNER, JONATHAN EDWARDS' GOD

The earliest sportsman in the earliest dawn,
waking to what redness, waking a killer,
saw the red cane was sweet in his red grip;
the blood of the shepherd matched the blood of the wolf.
But Jonathan Edwards prayed to think himself
worse than any man that ever breathed;
he was a good man, and he prayed with reason-
which of us hasn't thought his same thought worse?
Each night I lie me down to heal in sleep;
two or three mornings a week, I wake to my sin-
sins, not sin; not two or three mornings, seven.
God himself cannot wake five years younger,
and drink away the venom in the chalice-
the best man in the best world possible.

Robert Lowell, October 8, 2018

THE WELL DRESSED MAN WITH A BEARD

After the final no there comes a yes
And on that yes the future world depends.
No was the night. Yes is this present sun.
If the rejected things, the things denied,
Slid over the western cataract, yet one,
One only, one thing that was firm, even
No greater than a cricket's horn, no more
Than a thought to be rehearsed all day, a speech
Of the self that must sustain itself on speech,
One thing remaining, infallible, would be
Enough. Ah! douce campagna of that thing!
Ah! douce campagna, honey in the heart,
Green in the body, out of a petty phrase,
Out of a thing believed, a thing affirmed:
The form on the pillow humming while one sleeps,
The aureole above the humming house...
It can never be satisfied, the mind, never.

Wallace Stevens, October 5, 2018

MAN IN THE SUN

she reads to me from the New Yorker
which I don't buy, don't know
how they get in here, but it's
something about the Mafia
one of the heads of the Mafia
who ate too much and had it too easy
too many fine women patting his

walnuts, and he got fat sucking at good
cigars and young breasts and he
has these heart attacks – and so
one day somebody is driving him
in his big car along the road
and he doesn't feel so good
and he asks the boy to stop and let
him out and the boy lays him out
along the road in the fine sunshine
and before he dies he says:
how beautiful life can be, and
then he's gone.

sometimes you've got to kill 4 or 5
thousand men before you somehow
get to believe that the sparrow
is immortal, money is piss and
that you have been wasting
your time.

Charles Bukowski, October 1, 2018

EXPLANATIONS OF LOVE

There is a place where love begins and a place
where love ends.

There is a touch of two hands that foils all dictionaries.

There is a look of eyes fierce as a big Bethlehem open hearth
furnace or a little green-fire acetylene torch.

There are single careless bywords portentous as a
big bend in the Mississippi River.

Hands, eyes, bywords—out of these love makes
battlegrounds and workshops.

There is a pair of shoes love wears and the coming
is a mystery.

There is a warning love sends and the cost of it
is never written till long afterward.

There are explanations of love in all languages
and not one found wiser than this:

There is a place where love begins and a place
where love ends—and love asks nothing.

Carl Sandburg, September 28, 2018

INSCRIPTION FOR A GRAVESTONE

I am not dead, I have only become inhuman:
That is to say,
Undressed myself of laughable prides and infirmities,
But not as a man
Undresses to creep into bed, but like an athlete
Stripping for the race.
The delicate ravel of nerves that made me a measurer
Of certain fictions
Called good and evil; that made me contract with pain
And expand with pleasure;
Fussily adjusted like a little electroscope:
That's gone, it is true;
(I never miss it; if the universe does,
How easily replaced!)
But all the rest is heightened, widened, set free.
I admired the beauty
While I was human, now I am part of the beauty.
I wander in the air,
Being mostly gas and water, and flow in the ocean;
Touch you and Asia
At the same moment; have a hand in the sunrises
And the glow of this grass.
I left the light precipitate of ashes to earth
For a love-token.

Robinson Jeffers, September 24, 2018

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

I left parts of myself everywhere
The way absent-minded people leave
Gloves and umbrellas
Whose colors are sad from dispensing so much bad luck.

I was on a park bench asleep.
It was like the Art of Ancient Egypt.
I didn't wish to bestir myself.
I made my long shadow take the evening train.

"We give death to a child when we give it a doll,"
Said the woman who had read Djuna Barnes.
We whispered all night. She had traveled to darkest Africa.
She had many stories to tell about the jungle.

I was already in New York looking for work.
It was raining as in the days of Noah.
I stood in many doorways of that great city.
Once I asked a man in a tuxedo for a cigarette.
He gave me a frightened look and stepped out into the rain.

Since "man naturally desires happiness"
According to St. Thomas Aquinas,
Who gave irrefutable proof of God's existence and purpose,
I loaded trucks in the Garment Center.
A black man and I stole a woman's red dress.
It was of silk; it shimmered.

Upon a gloomy night with all our loving ardors on fire,
We carried it down the long empty avenue,
Each holding one sleeve.
The heat was intolerable causing many terrifying human faces
To come out of hiding.

Charles Simic, September 21, 2018

HAVING MISIDENTIFIED A WILD-FLOWER

A thrush, because I'd been wrong,
Burst rightly into song
In a world not vague, not lonely,
Not governed by me only.

Richard Wilbur, September 17, 2018

NEVER AGAIN WOULD BIRD'S SONG BE THE SAME

He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an oversound,

Her tone of meaning but without the words.
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.

Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.

Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came.

Robert Frost, September 14, 2018

JOHN BALLARD

In the lust of my strength
I cursed God, but he paid no attention to me:
I might as well have cursed the stars.
In my last sickness I was in agony, but I was resolute
And I cursed God for my suffering;
Still He paid no attention to me;
He left me alone, as He had always done.
I might as well have cursed the Presbyterian steeple.
Then, as I grew weaker, a terror came over me:
Perhaps I had alienated God by cursing him.
One day Lydia Humphrey brought me a bouquet
And it occurred to me to try to make friends with God,
So I tried to make friends with Him;
But I might as well have tried to make friends with the bouquet.
Now I was very close to the secret,
For I really could make friends with the bouquet
By holding close to me the love in me for the bouquet
And so I was creeping upon the secret, but –

Edgar Lee Masters, September 10, 2018

CHURCH GOING

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
"Here endeth" much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,

And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognizable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

Philip Larkin, September 7, 2018

CONTINENT'S END

At the equinox when the earth was veiled in a late rain,
wreathed with wet poppies, waiting spring,
The ocean swelled for a far storm and beat its boundary,
the ground-swell shook the beds of granite.

I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray,
the established sea-marks, felt behind me
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the continent,
before me the mass and double stretch of water.

I said: You yoke the Aleutian seal-rocks with the lava
and coral sowings that flower the south,
Over your flood the life that sought the sunrise faces ours
that has followed the evening star.

The long migrations meet across you and it is nothing to you,
you have forgotten us, mother.
You were much younger when we crawled out of the womb
and lay in the sun's eye on the tideline.

It was long and long ago; we have grown proud since then
and you have grown bitter; life retains
Your mobile soft unquiet strength; and envies hardness,
the insolent quietness of stone.

The tides are in our veins, we still mirror the stars,
life is your child, but there is in me
Older and harder than life and more impartial, the eye
that watched before there was an ocean.

That watched you fill your beds out of the condensation
of thin vapor and watched you change them,
That saw you soft and violent wear your boundaries down,
eat rock, shift places with the continents.

Mother, though my song's measure is like your
surf-beat's ancient rhythm I never learned it of you.
Before there was any water there were tides of fire,
both our tones flow from the older fountain.

Robinson Jeffers, September 3, 2018

IDENTIFICATION IN BELFAST

(I.R.A. Bombing)

The British Army now carries two rifles,
one with rubber rabbit-pellets for children,
the other's of course for the Provisionals...
'When they first showed me the boy, I thought oh good,
it's not him because he's blonde—
I imagine his hair was singed dark by the bomb.
He had nothing on him to identify him,
except this box of joke trick matches;
he liked to have them on him, even at mass.
The police were unhurried and wonderful,
they let me go on trying to strike a match...

I just wouldn't stop—you cling to anything—
I couldn't believe I couldn't light one match—
only joke matches... Then I knew he was Richard.'

Robert Lowell, August 31, 2018

BRAVE BULL

I did not know
that the Mexicans
did this:
the bull
had been brave
and now
they dragged him
dead
around the ring
by his
tail,
a brave bull
dead,
but not just another bull,
this was a special
bull,
and to me
a special
lesson...
and although Brahms
stole his First from Beethoven's
9th.
and although
the bull
was dead
his head and his horns and
his insides dead,
he had been better than
Brahms,
as good as
Beethoven,
and
as we walked out
the sound and meaning
of him
kept crawling up my arms
and although people bumped me and
stepped on my toes
the bull burned within me
my candle of
jesus,
dragged by his tail
he had nothing to do
having done it all,

and through the long tunnels and minatory glances,
the elbows and feet and eyes, I prayed for California,
and the dead bull
in man
and in me,
and I clasped my hands
deep within my
pockets, seized darkness,
and moved on.

Charles Bukowski, August 27, 2018

CHARON'S COSMOLOGY

With only his dim lantern
To tell him where he is
And every time a mountain
Of fresh corpses to load up

Take them to the other side
Where there are plenty more
I'd say by now he must be confused
As to which side is which

I'd say it doesn't matter
No one complains he's got
Their pockets to go through
In one a crust of bread in another a sausage

Once in a long while a mirror
Or a book which he throws
Overboard into the dark river
Swift and cold and deep

Charles Simic, August 24, 2018

CASSIUS HUEFFER

THEY have chiseled on my stone the words:
"His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him
That nature might stand up and say to all the world,
This was a man."
Those who knew me smile
As they read this empty rhetoric.
My epitaph should have been:
"Life was not gentle to him,
And the elements so mixed in him
That he made warfare on life
In the which he was slain."
While I lived I could not cope with slanderous tongues,

Now that I am dead I must submit to an epitaph
Graven by a fool!

Edgar Lee Masters, August 20, 2018

THE MAN WHOSE PHARYNX WAS BAD

The time of year has grown indifferent.
Mildew of summer and the deepening snow
Are both alike in the routine I know:
I am too dumbly in my being pent.

The wind attendant on the solstices
Blows on the shutters of the metropolises,
Stirring no poet in his sleep, and tolls
The grand ideas of the villages.

The malady of the quotidian . . .
Perhaps if summer ever came to rest
And lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed
Through days like oceans in obsidian

Horizons, full of night's midsummer blaze;
Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate
Through all its purples to the final slate,
Persisting bleakly in an icy haze;

One might in turn become less diffident,
Out of such mildew plucking neater mould
And spouting new orations of the cold.
One might. One might. But time will not relent.

Wallace Stevens, August 17, 2018

STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

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

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

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

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

Robert Frost, August 13, 2018

BOY AT THE WINDOW

Seeing the snowman standing all alone
In dusk and cold is more than he can bear.
The small boy weeps to hear the wind prepare
A night of gnashings and enormous moan.
His tearful sight can hardly reach to where
The pale-faced figure with bitumen eyes
Returns him such a God-forsaken stare
As outcast Adam gave to paradise.

The man of snow is, nonetheless, content,
Having no wish to go inside and die.
Still, he is moved to see the youngster cry.
Though frozen water is his element,
He melts enough to drop from one soft eye
A trickle of the purest rain, a tear
For the child at the bright pane surrounded by
Such warmth, such light, such love, and so much fear.

Richard Wilbur, August 10, 2018

BREASTS

I love breasts, hard
Full breasts, guarded
By a button.

They come in the night.
The bestiaries of the ancients
Which include the unicorn
Have kept them out.

Pearly, like the east
An hour before sunrise,
Two ovens of the only
Philosopher's stone
Worth bothering about.

They bring on their nipples
Beads of inaudible sighs,
Vowels of delicious clarity

For the little red schoolhouse of our mouths.

Elsewhere, solitude
Makes another gloomy entry
In its ledger, misery
Borrows another cup of rice.

They draw nearer: Animal
Presence. In the barn
The milk shivers in the pail.

I like to come up to them
From underneath, like a kid
Who climbs on a chair
To reach the forbidden jam.

Gently, with my lips,
Loosen the button.
Have them slip into my hands
Like two freshly poured beer-mugs.

I spit on fools who fail to include
Breasts in their metaphysics
Star-gazers who have not enumerated them
Among the moons of the earth ...

They give each finger
Its true shape, its joy:
Virgin soap, foam
On which our hands are cleansed.

And how the tongue honors
These two sour buns,
For the tongue is a feather
Dipped in egg-yolk.

I insist that a girl
Stripped to the waist
Is the first and last miracle,
That the old janitor on his deathbed
Who demands to see the breasts of his wife
For the one last time
Is the greatest poet who ever lived.

O my sweet, my wistful bagpipes.
Look, everyone is asleep on the earth.
Now, in the absolute immobility
Of time, drawing the waist
Of the one I love to mine,

I will tip each breast
Like a dark heavy grape
Into the hive
Of my drowsy mouth.

Charles Simic, August 6, 2018

MURMURINGS IN A FIELD HOSPITAL

(They picked him up in the grass where he had lain two days in the rain with a piece of shrapnel in his lungs.)

COME to me only with playthings now. . .
A picture of a singing woman with blue eyes
Standing at a fence of hollyhocks, poppies and sunflowers. . .
Or an old man I remember sitting with children telling stories
Of days that never happened anywhere in the world. . .
No more iron cold and real to handle,
Shaped for a drive straight ahead.
Bring me only beautiful useless things.
Only old home things touched at sunset in the quiet. . .
And at the window one day in summer
Yellow of the new crock of butter
Stood against the red of new climbing roses. . .
And the world was all playthings.

Carl Sandburg, August 3, 2018

THE SOUND OF TREES

I wonder about the trees.
Why do we wish to bear
Forever the noise of these
More than another noise
So close to our dwelling place?
We suffer them by the day
Till we lose all measure of pace,
And fixity in our joys,
And acquire a listening air.
They are that that talks of going
But never gets away;
And that talks no less for knowing,
As it grows wiser and older,
That now it means to stay.
My feet tug at the floor
And my head sways to my shoulder
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,
From the window or the door.
I shall set forth for somewhere,
I shall make the reckless choice
Some day when they are in voice
And tossing so as to scare
The white clouds over them on.

I shall have less to say,
But I shall be gone.

Robert Frost, July 30, 2018

LAYOVER

Making love in the sun, in the morning sun
in a hotel room
above the alley
where poor men poke for bottles;
making love in the sun
making love by a carpet redder than our blood,
making love while the boys sell headlines
and Cadillacs,
making love by a photograph of Paris
and an open pack of Chesterfields,
making love while other men- poor folks-
work.

That moment- to this. . .
may be years in the way they measure,
but it's only one sentence back in my mind-
there are so many days
when living stops and pulls up and sits
and waits like a train on the rails.
I pass the hotel at 8
and at 5; there are cats in the alleys
and bottles and bums,
and I look up at the window and think,
I no longer know where you are,
and I walk on and wonder where
the living goes
when it stops.

Charles Bukowski, July 27, 2018

THE WILLAGE ATHEIST

Ye young debaters over the doctrine
Of the soul's immortality
I who lie here was the village atheist,
Talkative, contentious, versed in the arguments
Of the infidels.
But through a long sickness
Coughing myself to death
I read the Upanishads and the poetry of Jesus.
And they lighted a torch of hope and intuition
And desire which the Shadow,
Leading me swiftly through the caverns of darkness,
Could not extinguish.

Listen to me, ye who live in the senses
And think through the senses only:
Immortality is not a gift,
Immortality is an achievement;
And only those who strive mightily
Shall possess it.

Edgar Lee Masters, July 23, 2018

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Ten minutes or so after midnight, I'm crossing
the Galata Bridge: fishermen packed like sardines
have been standing in the same spot for hours.
Since last year, since birth, they've been tossing their
hooks in the water as if casting something away
from themselves.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 20, 2018

SCIENCE

Man, introverted man, having crossed
In passage and but a little with the nature of things this latter
century
Has begot giants; but being taken up
Like a maniac with self-love and inward conflicts cannot manage
his hybrids.
Being used to deal with edgeless dreams,
Now he's bred knives on nature turns them also inward: they
have thirsty points though.
His mind forebodes his own destruction;
Actaeon who saw the goddess naked among leaves and his hounds
tore him.
A little knowledge, a pebble from the shingle,
A drop from the oceans: who would have dreamed this infinitely
little too much?

Robinson Jeffers, July 16, 2018

PARTISAN SQUARE

So many winter boots at the Vietnamese market
it's exhausting
way too many shoes even for a big northern city
enough boots for the entire Vietnam War
What could one do with them
kick and keep walking

in so many shoes
where could we have been already
Around the drunks' parks
where the trees hang out in gangs
the aluminum glow behind them
A big day
like a slain deer
lying on Partisan Square
Then night shows the naked
moon
it can be seen again a step further
just one single step
on the way home
in cheap Vietnamese shoes

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweney), July 13, 2018

HELAGS

Although we keep coming out of habit, like those in mourning who on a certain day visit the grave of someone whom they've not missed for a long time, I look forward every summer to that same procession: hiking to the summit of Mt. Helags. While in the foothills we wait for the streams to stop their rampage after the morning shower, my knees chatter with impatience. The senses calibrate themselves: the eyes to spot the antenna of a reindeer's horn as soon as it emerges, like the untrimmed cross of a new religion at the seam of earth and sky; the ears to capture the cough of the wind that drapes someone's lost jacket over a big rock's sholders fallen asleep with its head immersed in moss.

How can I keep pure in my memory the day when we for the first time, in this same place, sat and made plans that would fail? What can we today feed our naive strength with on the paths along which nature worshippers are marching? Monitoring the pulse of calories, they do not take their eyes off their cell phones until the aim of a winged Pokémon jumps within the sights--a golden eagle with a crushed tube of pâté in its claws.

Shaking in passing a small can of cured ham, a frowning couple stands in the way of their dog's happiness at seeing us. That's why they'll never know of a shortcut to the glacier that leaks like a roof at the summit of Mt. Helags. And they will not, as they don't deserve, be able to get to see in daylight, in the distance of distances, that unrepeatable sight -

the thin line of the Strait of Eels.* But doesn't the same kind of small rations bar us ourselves also and keep us from thinking to dig a new grave for ourselves in another place?

* *The Norwegian town of Ålesund.*

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 9, 2018

EPILOGUE

Those blessèd structures, plot and rhyme--
why are they no help to me now
I want to make
something imagined, not recalled?
I hear the noise of my own voice:
The painter's vision is not a lens,
it trembles to caress the light.
But sometimes everything I write
with the threadbare art of my eye
seems a snapshot,
lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
heightened from life,
yet paralyzed by fact.
All's misalliance.
Yet why not say what happened?
Pray for the grace of accuracy
Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
stealing like the tide across a map
to his girl solid with yearning.
We are poor passing facts,
warned by that to give
each figure in the photograph
his living name.

Robert Lowell, July 6, 2018

HYMN FROM A WATERMELON PAVILION

You dweller in the dark cabin,
To whom the watermelon is always purple,
Whose garden is wind and moon,

Of the two dreams, night and day,
What lover, what dreamer, would choose
The one obscured by sleep?

Here is the plantain by your door
And the best cock of red feather
That crew before the clocks.

A feme may come, leaf-green,
Whose coming may give revel
Beyond revelries of sleep,

Yes, and the blackbird spread its tail,
So that the sun may speckle,
While it creaks hail.

You dweller in the dark cabin,
Rise, since rising will not waken,
And hail, cry hail, cry hail.

Wallace Stevens, July 2, 2018

STORM FEAR

When the wind works against us in the dark,
And pelts with snow
The lowest chamber window on the east,
And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,
The beast,
'Come out! Come out!'-
It costs no inward struggle not to go,
Ah, no!
I count our strength,
Two and a child,
Those of us not asleep subdued to mark
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length,-
How drifts are piled,
Dooryard and road ungraded,
Till even the comforting barn grows far away
And my heart owns a doubt
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day
And save ourselves unaided.

Robert Frost, June 29, 2018

ICE

Iced over soon; it's nothing; we're used to sickness;
too little perspiration in the bucket—
in the beginning, polio once a summer. Not now;
each day the cork more sweetly leaves the bottle,
except a sudden falseness in the breath
Sooner or later the chalk wears out the smile,
and angrily we skate on blacker ice,
playthings of the current and cold fish—
the naught is no longer asset or disadvantage,
our life too long for comfort and too brief

for perfection—Cro-Magnon, dinosaur . . .
the neverness of meeting nightly like surgeons'
apprentices studying their own skeletons,
old friends and mammoth flesh preserved in ice.

Robert Lowell, June 25, 2018

FINAL SOLILOQUY OF THE INTERIOR PARAMOUR

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we rest and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one...
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

Wallace Stevens, June 22, 2018

AMBULANCES

Closed like confessionals, they thread
Loud noons of cities, giving back
None of the glances they absorb.
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,
They come to rest at any kerb:
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,
Or women coming from the shops
Past smells of different dinners, see
A wild white face that overtops
Red stretcher-blankets momentarily
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness
That lies just under all we do,
And for a second get it whole,
So permanent and blank and true.
The fastened doors recede. Poor soul,
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air
May go the sudden shut of loss
Round something nearly at an end,
And what cohered in it across
The years, the unique random blend
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far
From the exchange of love to lie
Unreachable inside a room
The traffic parts to let go by
Brings closer what is left to come,
And dulls to distance all we are.

Philip Larkin, June 18, 2018

IN THE EVENING YOU LIE DOWN IN BED

and you know you are lying down in vain: tomorrow you will get up still more enervated than when you lay down. In the morning you get up from bed and you know that you are getting up in vain: yesterday's day is awaiting you, with yesterday's stress. With the humiliations of the day before yesterday. With the despair of the day before that. This siege has been going on not for two years but for a single day that has no end.

From this I could find rest, it seems to me,
Only by the sea. And who knows if we will ever see it again?
Will I ever again be able to stand on those cliffs
Where the air currents are so strong they
Return the cap you threw?!

But I do not long, this time, for the sea with the fleshy
Leaves of agaves in which the names
Of love are carved. For the olive trees feverishly
Twisted like green Laocoons. For the hats of jellyfish
That look like silken tents from Oriental
Tales. I do not long for the monotony of waves which the poet compares
To Homer's metrics. I do not long for that ink
With which one could write billions and billions of
Iliads and Odysseys.

I long for that sadness that
Comes over you when, looking at the eternal blueness
You listen to the murmur of that eternity.

For the sadness that tells you that you have a soul again.
Maybe not even for that sadness, but I long for that magnificent
And balmy emptiness.

To plunge the soul into the emptiness that relaxes.
That heals and rejuvenates. To stare for hours not even at the open seas,
Nor above the open seas, but—just so! The Bosnian way. Until you forget
Both what you are and where you are and where you're from and what your name is.
The only thing you know is that within you are—miles and miles of emptiness.
And that the sea's vastness has sucked out of you
All the centuries, all the way to Adam. The blue emptiness stretches
To the end of the world and, backwards, to its beginning.
And you grasp—actually, you don't grasp, you feel it on your palate:
The sweetness that will take over after Judgment Day!
Everything will be obliterated, like a child's scribble on a blackboard

And only pure rapture will remain!
So you taste ahead of time, albeit with a teaspoon only,
The bliss the world will explode in!

Marko Vešović (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), June 15, 2018

AN IMMIGRANT'S DEAL: TWO LIVES FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

When you become an immigrant, you have lost or are in the process of losing much: you lose your country, your language, your culture, your friends. But you also gain much: a new country, new knowledge, new experience, and perhaps new friends. The tension between the loss and the gain—or the debit and the credit side of your life's account—makes you feel as if you were living two lives, one you've left behind, and one you are living at the moment. You have not completely abandoned the old life, and you have not fully absorbed the new life.

When my family and I arrived in America, we changed not only continents but entire worlds, and that is always a difficult thing. It was difficult for me in spite of the fact that my professional life was deeply connected with our country of immigration: I was an English teacher at the University of Sarajevo, and my academic field was American Studies, the study of the United States. In my classes in Sarajevo, I tried to explain something of American culture and history to myself and to my students—a hard task in both instances—but I liked the constant challenge of comparing American culture with my own. My approach was to incorporate material from history, literature, art, language, landscape studies, anthropology, and anything else that could capture and convey some telling essence of American life.

America has always struck me as so different from my part of the world that for a long time I thought of it as strange and exotic—from artifacts to sports to behavior patterns, from small things to big. This strangeness of America was, I'm sure, what attracted me to American Studies. I once compiled a catalog of the visibly different things a Southeastern European sees in the United States: windows that go up and down, like a guillotine, and do not open inside; doorknobs instead of handles; screens on doors and windows; water in toilet bowls; coiled rather than solid burners on the electric range; different measures and sizes; a different voltage; more static electricity; drinking fountains; relative absence of tobacco smoke; sports such as football and baseball; empty streets; lawns in front of homes (and lawn mowers, which provide a typical, inescapable American sound, as

opposed to, for example, the equally inescapable European exact-time beep on the radio); heavily patterned wallpaper in contrast to lightly designed or blank wallpaper; wall calendars wrapped in cellophane and looking like old-fashioned LP albums; acronymic names of radio stations; shorter but wider printer paper.

Becoming an immigrant when you are an adult (say, middle-aged or older) is particularly hard because your previous life “interferes” with your immigrant life in more ways than you expected. So my two lives, the one in Bosnia (or former Yugoslavia), and the other here, in America, are constantly colliding, and I’m always comparing, contrasting my two lands, always “translating” from one into the other. This is of course true of my language situation, my linguistic identity, where translation of a kind always takes place between my native language and English. I “translate” between my two lives in other, perhaps less significant ways. Just to give you some examples, I still have to stop to think whether a date like, say, 08/06/06 is really August 6 or June 8 (as it would be in Europe), or whether Memorial Day or Labor Day falls in May (since in much of the rest of the world Labor Day is May 1), or how tall one is when measured in feet and inches, or what in centigrade is the temperature of 98F, often enriched with humidity, and whether it matches anything from my former experience (it doesn’t).

As soon as you become an immigrant, everything irrevocably changes for you: space, landscape, the weather, the human geography—and even time. This last—time—turns against you: in the new country and in your new life, you are always behind; you want to catch up with things and events, to come up to the time level of everybody else because so much had happened when you weren’t here. You badly need all kinds of practical information, for example, that you constantly ask questions, and that tends to make you feel outdated, lagging behind, and awkward. American society is more opaque in this fundamental informational sense: as a newcomer, you do not learn about people (individual people, their private lives, their power relationships) as easily as elsewhere. In America, in this sense, you feel that people generally do not know much about others, that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing, as it were. But, strangely, this condition of ignorance in which you find yourself also makes you feel younger, like a young person asking basic questions, and gives you a sense of a new beginning, of learning, and exploring, of going through initiation. And starting from scratch keeps you on your toes.

By contrast, when you revisit the old country, in spite of the changes you see, your personal time seems to have stopped at the point of departure, since you remember a life there that is now permanently fixed in your memory. There, you are your old self (or you imagine you are) because you haven’t lived through the changes that occurred. And that is how your old-country friends, acquaintances, and relatives see you—as your old self; what you do and how you live in the new country is of no real interest to them—there is hardly any curiosity about the new you. For all practical purposes, you have disappeared for them. You’ve truly “gone west” for them, as the old phrase has it: “gone west” was an American metaphor for dying. And you wonder if the people there have always been so self-referential or if they have become such only for you.

The immigrant is, psychologically, pulled back toward home by the power of memory, which is a major interference and something that insistently inhabits her/his new world. (Interference is also a linguistic term describing the obstacles presented by our native language when we try to learn a foreign language—it’s always in the way, pulling us back, making it harder for us to master the strange new sounds and word order, for example.) This memory of the old things often starts with me as a visual representation, as images, so, for example, when I see Lake Michigan, close to which I now live, my subconscious thought is directed toward the Adriatic Sea, the large and familiar body of water in my former life and country; or when I see dark-blue clouds piling up on the horizon here, in the

flat Midwest, they often appear to me, momentarily, as distant mountains, like those surrounding my hometown. High-rise apartment buildings here, with tiny identical balconies suggesting congested living, buildings that I never appreciated as architecture, bring to mind the old country, the sense of sharing and of human closeness. And—perhaps most strangely—when I catch a whiff of cigarette smoke, a much rarer thing than in the old country, and I can't stand smoking, that immediately transports me to an earlier geography and to my earlier life.

All this is, of course, nostalgia, that constant companion of an immigrant's life. Although a universal human sentiment, nostalgia is hard to define precisely, and this is confirmed by interesting linguistic information: this concept is handled differently in different languages. The word "nostalgia," as Milan Kundera reminds us, comes from the Greek words "nostos" (return) and "algos" (suffering)—so, suffering because of the inability to return. But its different forms and nuances of meaning range widely in a number of European languages (and not all of them use the Greek-derived word primarily), describing a longing for home, a pain of absence, loneliness, or ignorance of what happens in the home country (Spanish añoranza [anjoransa], añorar—from Lat. ignorare).

Because of the distance traveled and the change experienced, home to the immigrant appears better and sweeter than it actually was, gaining a new, greater value. This feeling can occur when you actually return to the old country: When I am in my hometown of Sarajevo for short visits, the scent in the air on a summer night is uniquely intoxicating, like nothing I experience here in America, and those pine-wooded hills look more beautiful, now that I live elsewhere, than ever before. But nostalgia is mostly about missing people, those with whom I worked, lived, and shared a frame of reference. I miss the urban and urbane life of Sarajevo, its distinct sense of humor, its irony, both gentle and harsh, and its openness to the world. (But most of that was destroyed by the recent war anyway, so my nostalgia in this case is not merely geographic but "historical"—a longing for the past, which is another form of nostalgia. Bosnia, for me, is becoming a country of memory, to borrow Denis de Rougemont's description of Europe—"la patrie de la mémoire.")

Nostalgia, though a real feeling, is also a pleasant lie. "How handsome must our country be when seen and felt from outside!" writes the Spanish author Miguel de Unamuno. Another writer, the Nobel-Prize-winning V.S. Naipaul, offers in one of his novels, *A Bend in the River*, a practical cure for nostalgia—and that is frequent travel by plane:

[T]he airplane is a wonderful thing. You are still in one place when you arrive at the other. The airplane is faster than the heart. You arrive quickly and you leave quickly. You don't grieve too much. ... You can go back many times to the same place. You stop grieving for the past. You see that the past is something in your mind alone, that it doesn't exist in real life. You trample on the past, you crush it. In the beginning it is like trampling on a garden. In the end you are just walking on ground.

Absolute travel, it seems, destroys nostalgia absolutely. In this case, the duality of an immigrant's life truly becomes a reality, and perhaps not a painful one: the two lives can be lived almost simultaneously, not consecutively. But this cure for nostalgia—frequent travel by plane—tends to be expensive. Only the well-to-do can afford it. I know of a Sarajevan living in the United States who often flies home for weekends, revisiting her mother and tasting Bosnian food. This certainly is a different experience of exile than, for example, what many Jews who fled from Spain after 1492 experienced in Bosnia, where for many generations they kept the keys to their houses with them, hoping to return; many families kept the key for generations, just as they clung to their religion, their Spanish language, and their songs.

There are other cures for nostalgia and hardships of immigrant life than frequent flights home—or throwing away your old house key. One is time, which cures everything, as we know, and the other is the immigrant's conscious effort to accept the new life as it comes, rationally and positively, as people in this country like to say—positive being a big word reflecting American cultural optimism, at least until the recent crises. Likewise, the immigrant's main dilemma—how to achieve a livable balance between the two lives, the balance between losing oneself to the new culture and standing apart from it—is often resolved in a natural way: by both retention and acceptance, retention of the old ways one wants or can keep, and acceptance of the new ways one wants or can accept. America, with its freedoms, has always been good at this, allowing so much leeway in people's private lives, and one can here think of religion, language, and other personal pursuits, or of cultivating such “un-American” activities like afternoon naps. In my family, we have so far kept our language but of course use English with others and outside home, and we see no problem with it. We see no problem in starting a sentence in Bosnian and finishing it in English, or vice versa. Using two languages is certainly an advantage, not the least of which is that it Exercises your brain. (It also enables you to gossip about other people in their presence.) Also, I use the two languages when I introduce myself and say my name, because you have to use two sound systems when doing that—English and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. One can imagine what a challenge my last name presents to people with a short attention span. Paradoxically, my last name, which looks intimidating on paper, is only a paper tiger: it can be more easily said in English than my first name, which is more complicated as phonetics since it does not conform to the English sounds.

Levity aside, the condition of immigration or exile makes you go through tough times (life puts you in your place—or America does), but it also offers you “certain rewards,” “a double perspective” and fresh insights, as author Edward Said says; it offers you a place on the margin of the new culture, where you have an opportunity to see more than those in the center, that is, the inhabitants and original practitioners of that culture. That place on the margin gives you a certain freedom and possibilities of self-discovery, too. The Polish-American author Eva Hoffman, herself an immigrant, goes even further than Said when she notes that exile in modern times, and in postmodern theory, “becomes. . . sexy, glamorous, interesting,” and that “nomadism and diasporism have become fashionable terms in intellectual discourse” because they connote “the virtues of instability, marginality, absence, and outsiderness.” But Hoffman warns us that that sexiness and glamour of immigration come with much pain and loss.

So, like many recent immigrants who have come to this country as adults, I'm living my two lives, and I'm doing that both consecutively (I first lived there and now I'm living here) and simultaneously (although I now live here, I'm mentally living there, too). I'm living two lives for the price of one, and that, in commercial terms, is not a bad deal. But even in Bosnia I lived two lives, in a sense: one was my mundane, “real” life, and the other was my professional life, oriented toward America. I used to watch America from Bosnia; now I'm watching Bosnia from America, as I'm moving in my reading, research, and writing from American Studies to Balkan Studies. I used to be a Bosnian Americanist; here, I'm becoming an American Bosnianist. It's always more exciting to study that which is far away. But in another sense, my practical, teaching career has now come full circle, since I now do what I did before: I teach English to foreigners.

The longer I live in America, my two countries—or lives—are beginning to merge and converge; that is, my new country is beginning to look and feel more and more like my old country. Things and events here are beginning to assume *déjà vu* forms, as does my attitude towards them. I wonder if this is a psychological delusion or a process of true acclimatization. What, or who, has changed? I? My memory of the old country? The new country? All of the above? What seems to be true is that human nature and the nature of

things show through the superficial differences: as time passes and as the newness and the romance of America fade, I see and experience here more of what reminds me of the old life. The two countries are becoming alike in a deep, universalizing sense—cause for both consolation and disappointment.

Omer Hadžiselimović, June 11, 2018

SAYS REBECCA WEST

After the Balkan War, the Turks suddenly left,
but the hatred remained. Now it's exploding in Bosnia.
The hatred endures, although its subject has evaporated.
The human soul has always lagged behind the world.
The soul is a whirlpool mirroring in winter the cranes
flown south in autumn.

For five centuries the Turks were their guests.
And they left overnight. Had the hatred died out
what gap would break open in the former serf's soul?
What would warm it? What torch would it
stagger after through darkness? For five centuries you lived
off hatred. You carried it and it carried you. And after one hundred
ninety-one thousand, six hundred twenty-five days
of unjust and utterly undeserved slavery, suddenly—
the culprit has evaporated! So under the empty skies
you remain empty-handed. What do you mirror yourself in?
What will blow under your wing? What do you gather around?
How much water will the Drina carry before
the Turk migrates from his soul? For, as long as
the hatred endures, you are not hay without a stake.
You have something with which and on which to build.
You know who you are, from where, and where you're going.
And how you are named.

Marko Vešović (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), June 8, 2018

KOLO

In march the soldiers
with rifles on their shoulders.
out run through brambles
the locals with their bundles.

Off fly the envoys
contemplating new ways
of creating symmetry
in a future cemetery.

Up go the pundits
explicating bandits.

Clearly outworded,
down go the murdered.

The expensive warriors,
sailing by on carriers
flying Old Glory,
signal hunky-dory.

Far is the neighbor,
loveless or unable,
neutral or bullied.
Near is a bullet.

Deep dig new hermits
sporting blue helmets.
Reasonable offers
manufacture orphans.

Blood as a liquid
shows no spilling limit;
one might build finally
here a refinery.

Home stay the virtuous
with their right to watch this
live, while they are dining:
it's a mealtime dying.

Soiled turns the fabric
of the great republic.
Ethics by a ballot
is what it's all about.

Mourn the slaughtered.
Pray for those squatted
In some concrete lair
facing betrayal.

Joseph Brodsky, June 4, 2018

I, TOO, LIKE PRINCE ANDREY

from a green meadow, wounded, was staring at the sky.
There was nothing for a million miles around.
Yes, miles, as if the immense void that
Roared around me was in fact the open sea.
Stark and boundless. From everything, under the sky,
Only a blind starkness remained that roared brutally.

At first, to be sure, Serb frogs could be heard
In Dobrinja's ponds. But they soon fell silent.
Oh, wonder of wonders: a chorus of frogs is bidding me farewell

To the other world (I thought, if that could be
Called thinking. For it was my skin that was thinking).

I, too, like Prince Andrey, before death,
suddenly felt that there was nothing
In the world but that immeasurable distance
Above me, and the still more immeasurable distance,
Inside. As if the soul was looking upon itself
From an immensity
powerfully healing.
Or as if it were looking on its pain after a million summers.
Pain turned into a white waterfall roaring like the spring of the Bosna.

I, too, like Prince Andrey, realized
that nothing matters more
than those distances multiplied with lightning speed.
Seventy-seven immensities, the soul
drinking from each like from the seventy-seven fountains of home,
The world was, all around, ground to powder,
and looked like that
Ruddy column of dust that surges upward
When a shell smashes into someone's house in Sarajevo.

And I understood that those many distances
Can only come to the good.
And you are happy because, in those distances, you are a tiny wisp,
But a wisp containing all those distances.

And I felt they, those distances, were
Suddenly pouring into me, like Krka Falls near Knin,
But a million times bigger. With a million rainbows
Created in watery dust.

And I listened to those distances rushing to
Cleanse me from the inside, to wash the blood stains in which
The whole world had been dissolved.

Marko Vešović (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), June 1, 2018

AUTUMN EVENING

Though the little clouds ran southward still, the quiet autumnal
Cool of the late September evening
Seemed promising rain, rain, the change of the year, the angel
Of the sad forest. A heron flew over
With that remote ridiculous cry, "Quawk," the cry
That seems to make silence more silent. A dozen
Flops of the wing, a drooping glide, at the end of the glide
The cry, and a dozen flops of the wing.
I watched him pass on the autumn-colored sky; beyond him
Jupiter shone for evening star.
The sea's voice worked into my mood, I thought "No matter

What happens to men . . . the world's well made though."

Robinson Jeffers, May 28, 2018

DAVIS MATLOCK

Suppose it is nothing but the hive:
That there are drones and workers
And queens, and nothing but storing honey —
(Material things as well as culture and wisdom) —
For the next generation, this generation never living,
Except as it swarms in the sun-light of youth,
Strengthening its wings on what has been gathered,
And tasting, on the way to the hive
From the clover field, the delicate spoil.
Suppose all this, and suppose the truth:
That the nature of man is greater
Than nature's need in the hive;
And you must bear the burden of life,
As well as the urge from your spirit's excess —
Well, I say to live it out like a god
Sure of immortal life, though you are in doubt,
Is the way to live it.
If that doesn't make God proud of you,
Then God is nothing but gravitation,
Or sleep is the golden goal.

Edgar Lee Masters, May 25, 2018

THE OLD WORLD

I believe in the soul; so far
It hasn't made much difference.
I remember an afternoon in Sicily.
The ruins of some temple.
Columns fallen in the grass like naked lovers.

The olives and goat cheese tasted delicious
And so did the wine
With which I toasted the coming night,
The darting swallows,
The Saracen wind and moon.

It got darker. There was something
Long before there were words:
The evening meal of shepherds . . .
A fleeting whiteness among the trees . . .
Eternity eavesdropping on time.

The goddess going to bathe in the sea.

She must not be followed.
These rocks, these cypress trees,
May be her old lovers.
Oh to be one of them, the wine whispered to me.

Charles Simic, May 21, 2018

LOVE IS A PIECE OF PAPER TORN TO BITS

all the beers was poisoned and the capt. went down
and the mate and the cook
and we had nobody to grab sail
and the N. wester ripped the sheets like toenails
and we pitched like crazy
the hull tearing its sides
and all the time in the corner
some punk had a drunken slut (my wife)
and was pumping away
like nothing was happening
and the cat kept looking at me
and crawling in the pantry
amongst the clanking dishes
with flowers and vines painted on them
untill I couldnt stand it anymore
and took the thing
and heaved it
over
the side.

Charles Bukowski, May 18, 2018

SKUNK HOUR

(for Elizabeth Bishop)

Nautilus Island's hermit
heiress still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
her sheep still graze above the sea.
Her son's a bishop. Her farmer is first selectman in our village;
she's in her dotage.

Thirsting for
the hierarchic privacy
of Queen Victoria's century
she buys up all
the eyesores facing her shore,
and lets them fall.

The season's ill-
we've lost our summer millionaire,

who seemed to leap from an L. L. Bean
catalogue. His nine-knot yawl
was auctioned off to lobstermen.
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy
decorator brightens his shop for fall;
his fishnet's filled with orange cork,
orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
there is no money in his work,
he'd rather marry.

One dark night,
my Tudor Ford climbed the hill's skull;
I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
they lay together, hull to hull,
where the graveyard shelves on the town....
My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,
'Love, O careless Love....' I hear
my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
as if my hand were at its throat...
I myself am hell;
nobody's here-

only skunks, that search
in the moonlight for a bite to eat.
They march on their solves up Main Street:
white stripes, moonstruck eyes' red fire
under the chalk-dry and spar spire
of the Trinitarian Church.

I stand on top
of our back steps and breathe the rich air-
a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail.
She jabs her wedge-head in a cup
of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
and will not scare.

Robert Lowell, May 14, 2018

COUNTRY FAIR

If you didn't see the six-legged dog,
It doesn't matter.
We did, and he mostly lay in the corner.
As for the extra legs,

One got used to them quickly
And thought of other things.
Like, what a cold, dark night

To be out at the fair.

Then the keeper threw a stick
And the dog went after it
On four legs, the other two flapping behind,
Which made one girl shriek with laughter.

She was drunk and so was the man
Who kept kissing her neck.
The dog got the stick and looked back at us.
And that was the whole show.

Charles Simic, May 11, 2018

AFTER THE LAST BULLETINS

After the last bulletins the windows darken
And the whole city founders readily and deep,
Sliding on all its pillows
To the thronged Atlantis of personal sleep,

And the wind rises. The wind rises and bowls
The day's litter of news in the alleys. Trash
Tears itself on the railings,
Soars and falls with a soft crash,

Tumbles and soars again. Unruly flights
Scamper the park, and taking a statue for dead
Strike at the positive eyes,
Batter and flap the stolid head

And scratch the noble name. In empty lots
Our journals spiral in a fierce noyade
Of all we thought to think,
Or caught in corners cramp and wad

And twist our words. And some from gutters flail
Their tatters at the tired patrolman's feet,
Like all that fisted snow
That cried beside his long retreat

Damn you! damn you! to the emperor's horse's heels.
Oh none too soon through the air white and dry
Will the clear announcer's voice
Beat like a dove, and you and I

From the heart's anarch and responsible town
Return by subway-mouth to life again,
Bearing the morning papers,
And cross the park where saintlike men,

White and absorbed, with stick and bag remove

The litter of the night, and footsteps rouse
With confident morning sound
The songbirds in the public boughs.

Richard Wilbur, May 7, 2018

THE POEM THAT TOOK THE PLACE OF A MOUNTAIN

There it was, word for word,
The poem that took the place of a mountain.

He breathed its oxygen,
Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

It reminded him how he had needed
A place to go to in his own direction,

How he had recomposed the pines,
Shifted the rocks and picked his way among clouds,

For the outlook that would be right,
Where he would be complete in an unexplained completion:

The exact rock where his inexactness
Would discover, at last, the view toward which they had edged,

Where he could lie and, gazing down at the sea,
Recognize his unique and solitary home.

Wallace Stevens, May 4, 2018

AFTERNOONS

Summer is fading:
The leaves fall in ones and twos
From trees bordering
The new recreation ground.
In the hollows of afternoons
Young mothers assemble
At swing and sandpit
Setting free their children.

Behind them, at intervals,
Stand husbands in skilled trades,
An estateful of washing,
And the albums, lettered
Our Wedding, lying
Near the television:
Before them, the wind
Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places
(But the lovers are all in school),
And their children, so intent on
Finding more unripe acorns,
Expect to be taken home.
Their beauty has thickened.
Something is pushing them
To the side of their own lives.

Philip Larkin, April 30, 2018

AN ARUNDEL TOMB

Side by side, their faces blurred,
The earl and countess lie in stone,
Their proper habits vaguely shown
As jointed armour, stiffened pleat,
And that faint hint of the absurd—
The little dogs under their feet.

Such plainness of the pre-baroque
Hardly involves the eye, until
It meets his left-hand gauntlet, still
Clasped empty in the other; and
One sees, with a sharp tender shock,
His hand withdrawn, holding her hand.

They would not think to lie so long.
Such faithfulness in effigy
Was just a detail friends would see:
A sculptor's sweet commissioned grace
Thrown off in helping to prolong
The Latin names around the base.

They would not guess how early in
Their supine stationary voyage
The air would change to soundless damage,
Turn the old tenantry away;
How soon succeeding eyes begin
To look, not read. Rigidly they

Persisted, linked, through lengths and breadths
Of time. Snow fell, undated. Light
Each summer thronged the glass. A bright
Litter of birdcalls strewed the same
Bone-riddled ground. And up the paths
The endless altered people came,

Washing at their identity.
Now, helpless in the hollow of

An unarmorial age, a trough
Of smoke in slow suspended skeins
Above their scrap of history,
Only an attitude remains:

Time has transfigured them into
Untruth. The stone fidelity
They hardly meant has come to be
Their final blazon, and to prove
Our almost-instinct almost true:
What will survive of us is love.

Philip Larkin, April 27, 2018

SLAVE, COM TO MY SERVICE!

I

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«Quick, fetch my chariot, hitch up the horses:
I'll drive to the palace!»
«Drive to the palace, my master. Drive to the palace. The
King will be pleased to see you, he will be benevolent to you».
«No, slave. I won't go to the palace!» «Don't, my master.
Don't go to the palace. The King will send you on a
faraway expedition, down the unknown road, through
hostile mountains; day and night he will make you
experience pain and hardship».

II

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«Fetch water, pour it over my hands:
I am to eat my supper».
«Eat your supper, my master. Eat your supper. Frequent
meals gladden one's heart. Man's supper is the supper of
his god, and clean hands catch the eye of Shamash».
«No, slave. I won't eat my supper!»
«Don't eat your supper, master. Don't eat your supper.
Drink and thirst, food and hunger never leave man alone,
let alone each other».

III

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«Quick, fetch my chariot, hitch up the horses:
I'll go for a ride in the country».
«Do that, my master. Do that. A carefree wanderer always
fills his belly, a stray dog always finds a bone, a migrating
swallow is especially skilled in nesting,
a wild donkey finds the grass in the driest desert».
«No, slave. I won't go for a ride in the country».

«Don't go, my master. Don't bother. The lot of a wanderer is always dicey. A stray dog loses its teeth. The nest of a migrating swallow gets buried in plaster. Naked earth is a wild donkey's bedding».

IV

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«I feel like starting a family, like begetting children».
«Good thinking, my master. Start a family, start a family. Who has children secures his name, repeated in posthumous prayers».
«No, slave. I won't start a family, I won't have children!»
«Don't start it, my master. Don't have them. A family is like a broken door, its hinge is creaking. Only a third of one's children are healthy; two-thirds always sickly».
«So, should I start a family?»
«Don't start a family. Who starts a family wastes his ancestral house».

V

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«I shall yield to my enemy; in the court, I'll stay silent before my detractors». «Right, my master, right. Yield to your enemy; keep silence, my master, before your detractors». «No, slave! I won't be silent, and I won't yield!» «Don't yield, my master, and don't be silent. Even if you don't open your mouth at all your enemies will be merciless and cruel to you, as well as numerous».

VI

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»
«I feel like doing some evil, eh?»
«Do that, my master. By all means, do some evil. For how otherwise can you stuff your belly? How, without doing evil, can you dress yourself warmly?»
«No, slave. I shall do no evil!»
«Evildoers are either killed, or flayed alive and blinded, or blinded and flayed alive and thrown into a dungeon».

VII

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master, Yes?»
«I'll fall in love with a woman». «Fall in love, my master. Fall in love! Who falls in love with a woman forgets his griefs and sorrows».
«No, slave. I won't fall in love with a woman!»
«Don't love, my master. Don't love. Woman is a snare, a trap, a dark pit. Woman is a sharp steel blade slitting man's throat in darkness».

VIII

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»

«Quick, fetch water to wash my hands: I am to make an offering to my god».

«Make an offering, make an offering. Who makes offerings to his god fills his heart with riches; he feels generous, and his purse is open».

«No, slave. I won't make an offering!»

«Rightly so, my master. Rightly so! Can you really train your god to follow you like a doggy? All the time he demands obedience, rituals, sacrifices!»

IX

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»

«I'll invest with the interest, I will loan for the interest».

«Yes, invest with the interest, make loans for the interest.

Who does so preserves his own; his profit, though, is enormous».

«No, slave, I won't lend and I won't invest!»

«Don't invest, my master. Don't lend. To lend is like loving a woman; to receive, like siring bad children: people always curse those whose grain they eat.

They'll resent you or try to reduce your profit».

X

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»

«I shall do a good deed for my nation!» «Very good, my master, very good. You do that! Who does good deeds for his nation has his name in Marduk's gold signet».

«No, slave. I won't do a good deed for my nation».

«Don't do that, my master. Don't bother. Get up and stroll across ancient ruins, scan the skulls of simple folk and nobles: which one of them was a villain, which one a benefactor?»

XI

«Slave, come to my service!» «Yes, my master. Yes?»

«If all this is so, then what is good?»

«To have your neck broken and my neck broken, to be thrown into a river — that's what is good!

Who is so tall as to reach the heavens?

Who so broad as to embrace plains and mountains?»

«If that's so, I should kill you, slave:

I'd rather you go before me».

«And does my master believe that he can survive for three days without me?»

This text dates back to the eleventh or tenth century B. C. and is known among Sumerian scholars as «*The Dialogue of Pessimism*». In antiquity it was regarded as a philosophical text; now some argue that it is, rather, a skit. For my translation, I used two interlinear renditions; one was taken from *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, by W G. Lambert (Oxford, 1960); the other, from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, by James B. Pritchard (Princeton, 1955). - J. B.

Joseph Brodsky, April 23, 2018

CAPS

You don't remember anymore what you said
to that little boy with the wet pants
who didn't know where he was going
meanwhile the heads of his parents
in their hockey club caps
banging regularly on the night windows
of the tram
It didn't matter either
what you'd say to him
it was about talking itself
talking to him
all the way to Zábřeh
until his dry sobs
fi nally woke up those sleepyheads
until he got a good spanking
at some unknown nightstop

Remember
remember here in the dark of Zábřeh
what you told him
remember
those futile tram words

Petr Hruška (translated by Matthew Sweney), April 20, 2018

TERZA RIMA

In this great form, as Dante proved in Hell,
There is no dreadful thing that can't be said
In passing. Here, for instance, one could tell

How our jeep skidded sideways toward the dead
Enemy soldier with the staring eyes,
Bumping a little as it struck his head,

And then flew on, as if toward Paradise.

Richard Wilbur, April 16, 2018

MEDALLION

The brass medallion profile of your face I keep always.
It is not jingling with loose change in my pockets.
It is not stuck up in a show place on the office wall.

I carry it in a special secret pocket in the day
And it is under my pillow at night.
The brass came from a long ways off: it was up against
hell and high water, fire and flood, before the
face was put on it.
It is the side of a head; a woman wishes; a woman waits;
a woman swears behind silent lips that the
sea will bring home what is gone.

Carl Sandburg, April 13, 2018

CRIMSON CHANGES PEOPLE

Did I see a crucifix in your eyes
and nails and Roman soldiers
and a dusk Golgotha?

Did I see Mary, the changed woman,
washing the feet of all men,
clean as new grass
when the old grass burns?

Did I see moths in your eyes, lost moths,
with a flutter of wings that meant:
we can never come again.

Did I see No Man's Land in your eyes
and men with lost faces, lost loves,
and you among the stubs crying?

Did I see you in the red death jazz of war
losing moths among lost faces,
speaking to the stubs who asked you
to speak of songs and God and dancing,
of bananas, northern lights or Jesus,
any hummingbird of thought whatever
flying away from the red death jazz of war?

Did I see your hand make a useless gesture
trying to say with a code of five fingers
something the tongue only stutters?
did I see a dusk Golgotha?

Carl Sandburg, April 9, 2018

WATER

If I were called in
To construct a religion

I should make use of water.

Going to church
Would entail a fording
To dry, different clothes ;

My liturgy would employ
Images of sousing,
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east
A glass of water
Where any-angled light
Would congregate endlessly

Philip Larkin, April 6, 2018

CASSANDRA

The mad girl with the staring eyes and long white fingers
Hooked in the stones of the wall,
The storm-wrack hair and screeching mouth: does it matter, Cassandra,
Whether the people believe
Your bitter fountain? Truly men hate the truth, they'd liefer
Meet a tiger on the road.
Therefore the poets honey their truth with lying; but religion —
Vendors and political men
Pour from the barrel, new lies on the old, and are praised for kindly
Wisdom. Poor bitch be wise.
No: you'll still mumble in a corner a crust of truth, to men
And gods disgusting — you and I, Cassandra.

Robinson Jeffers, April 2, 2018

THE HOUSE-DOG'S GRAVE

I've changed my ways a little; I cannot now
Run with you in the evenings along the shore,
Except in a kind of dream; and you,
If you dream a moment,
You see me there.

So leave awhile the paw-marks on the front door
Where I used to scratch to go out or in,
And you'd soon open; leave on the kitchen floor
The marks of my drinking-pan.

I cannot lie by your fire as I used to do
On the warm stone,
Nor at the foot of your bed; no,

All the nights through I lie alone.

But your kind thought has laid me less than six feet
Outside your window where firelight so often plays,
And where you sit to read,
And I fear often grieving for me,
Every night your lamplight lies on my place.

You, man and woman, live so long, it is hard
To think of you ever dying.
A little dog would get tired, living so long.
I hope that when you are lying
Under the ground like me your lives will appear
As good and joyful as mine.

No, dears, that's too much hope:
You are not so well cared for as I have been.
And never have known the passionate undivided
Fidelities that I knew.
Your minds are perhaps too active, too many-sided...
But to me you were true.

You were never masters, but friends. I was your friend.
I loved you well, and was loved. Deep love endures
To the end and far past the end. If this is my end,
I am not lonely. I am not afraid. I am still yours.

Robinson Jeffers, March 30, 2018

EUCALYPTUS TREES

Thankful, my country, be to him who first
Brought hither from Australia oversea
Sapling or seed of the undeciduous tree
Whose grave and sombre foliage fears no burst
Of heat from summer-naked heavens, nor thirst
Though all the winter is rainless, and the bee
Starves, finding not a blossom. Patiently
The great roots delve, and feel though deep-immersed
Some layer of ancient moisture, and the leaves
Perish not, hanging pointed in the sky.
To see these lofty trunks gray-barked and broad
Wall with clear shade a long white southern road
I have been as one devoted, who receives
An impulse or a promise from on high.

Robinson Jeffers, March 26, 2018

THE LIFE OF BORODIN

the next time you listen to Borodin
remember he was just a chemist
who wrote music to relax;
his house was jammed with people:
students, artists, drunkards, bums,
and he never knew how to say: no.
the next time you listen to Borodin
remember his wife used his compositions
to line the cat boxes with
or to cover jars of sour milk;
she had asthma and insomnia
and fed him soft-boiled eggs
and when he wanted to cover his head
to shut out the sounds of the house
she only allowed him to use the sheet;
besides there was usually somebody
in his bed
(they slept separately when they slept
at all)
and since all the chairs
were usually taken
he often slept on the stairway
wrapped in an old shawl;
she told him when to cut his nails,
not to sing or whistle
or put too much lemon in his tea
or press it with a spoon;
Symphony #2, in B Minor
Prince Igor
On the Steppes of Central Asia
he could sleep only by putting a piece
of dark cloth over his eyes
in 1887 he attended a dance
at the Medical Academy
dressed in a merrymaking national costume;
at last he seemed exceptionally gay
and when he fell to the floor,
they thought he was clowning.
the next time you listen to Borodin,
remember...

Charles Bukowski, March 23, 2018

HERMAN ALTMAN

Did I follow Truth wherever she led,
And stand against the whole world for a cause,
And uphold the weak against the strong?
If I did I would be remembered among men
As I was known in life among the people,

And as I was hated and loved on earth,
Therefore, build no monument to me,
And carve no bust for me,
Lest, though I become not a demi-god,
The reality of my soul be lost,
So that thieves and liars,
Who were my enemies and destroyed me,
And the children of thieves and liars,
May claim me and affirm before my bust
That they stood with me in the days of my defeat.
Build me no monument
Lest my memory be perverted to the uses
Of lying and oppression.
My lovers and their children must not be dispossessed of me;
I would be the untarnished possession forever
Of those for whom I lived.

Edgar Lee Masters, March 19, 2018

AMELIA GARRICK

Yes, here I lie close to a stunted rose bush
In a forgotten place near the fence
Where the thickets from Siever's woods
Have crept over, growing sparsely.
And you, you are a leader in New York,
The wife of a noted millionaire,
A name in the society columns,
Beautiful, admired, magnified perhaps
By the mirage of distance.
You have succeeded, I have failed
In the eyes of the world.
You are alive, I am dead.
Yet I know that I vanquished your spirit;
And I know that lying here far from you,
Unheard of among your great friends
In the brilliant world where you move,
I am really the unconquerable power over your life
That robs it of complete triumph.

Edgar Lee Masters, March 16, 2018

DISILLUSIONMENT OF TEN O`CLOCK

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,

Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches Tigers
In red weather.

Wallace Stevens, March 12, 2018

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

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

Robert Lowell, March 9, 2018

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, March 5, 2018

DOCKERY AND SON

'Dockery was junior to you,
Wasn't he?' said the Dean. 'His son's here now.'
Death-suited, visitant, I nod. 'And do
You keep in touch with—' Or remember how
Black-gowned, unbreakfasted, and still half-tight
We used to stand before that desk, to give
'Our version' of 'these incidents last night'?
I try the door of where I used to live:

Locked. The lawn spreads dazzlingly wide.
A known bell chimes. I catch my train, ignored.
Canal and clouds and colleges subside
Slowly from view. But Dockery, good Lord,
Anyone up today must have been born
In '43, when I was twenty-one.
If he was younger, did he get this son
At nineteen, twenty? Was he that withdrawn

High-collared public-schoolboy, sharing rooms
With Cartwright who was killed? Well, it just shows
How much ... How little ... Yawning, I suppose
I fell asleep, waking at the fumes
And furnace-glares of Sheffield, where I changed,
And ate an awful pie, and walked along
The platform to its end to see the ranged
Joining and parting lines reflect a strong

Unhindered moon. To have no son, no wife,
No house or land still seemed quite natural.
Only a numbness registered the shock
Of finding out how much had gone of life,
How widely from the others. Dockery, now:
Only nineteen, he must have taken stock
Of what he wanted, and been capable
Of ... No, that's not the difference: rather, how

Convinced he was he should be added to!
Why did he think adding meant increase?
To me it was dilution. Where do these
Innate assumptions come from? Not from what
We think truest, or most want to do:
Those warp tight-shut, like doors. They're more a style
Our lives bring with them: habit for a while,
Suddenly they harden into all we've got

And how we got it; looked back on, they rear
Like sand-clouds, thick and close, embodying
For Dockery a son, for me nothing,

Nothing with all a son's harsh patronage.
Life is first boredom, then fear.
Whether or not we use it, it goes,
And leaves what something hidden from us chose,
And age, and then the only end of age.

Philip Larkin, March 2, 2018

EPITAPH FOR A CENTAUR

To say that he was unhappy is either to say too much
or too little: depending on who's the audience.
Still, the smell he'd give off was a bit too odious,
and his canter was also quite hard to match.
He said, They meant just a monument, but something went astray:
the womb? the assembly line? the economy?
Or else, the war never happened, they befriended the enemy,
and he was left as it is, presumably to portray
Intransigence, Incompatibility – that sort of things which proves
not so much one's uniqueness or virtue, but probability.
For years, resembling a cloud, he wandered in olive groves,
marveling at one-leggedness, the mother of immobility.
Learned to lie to himself, and turned it into an art
for want of a better company, also to check his sanity.
And he died fairly young – because his animal part
turned out to be less durable than his humanity.

Joseph Brodsky, February 26, 2018

BLUES

Eighteen years I've spent in Manhattan.
The landlord was good, but he turned bad.
A scumbag, actually. Man, I hate him.
Money is green, but it flows like blood.

I guess I've got to move across the river.
New Jersey beckons with its sulfur glow.
Say, numbered years are a lesser evil.
Money is green, but it doesn't grow.

I'll take away my furniture, my old sofa.
But what should I do with my windows' view?
I feel like I've been married to it, or something.
Money is green, but it makes you blue.

A body on the whole knows where it's going.
I guess it's one's soul that makes one pray,
even though above it's just a Boeing.
Money is green, and I am gray.

Joseph Brodsky, February 23, 2018

CAFÉ TRIESTE: SAN FRANCISCO

To this corner of Grant and Vallejo
I've returned like an echo
to the lips that preferred
then a kiss to a word.

Nothing has changed here. Neither
the furniture nor the weather.
Things, in one's absence, gain
permanence, stain by stain.

Cold, through the large steamed windows
I watch the gesturing wierdos,
the bloated breams that warm
up their aquarium.

Evolving backward, a river
becomes a tear, the real
becomes memory which
can, like fingertips, pinch

just the tail of a lizard
vanishing in the desert
which was eager to fix
a traveler with a sphinx.

Your golden mane! Your riddle!
The lilac skirt, the brittle
ankles! The perfect ear
rendering "read" as "dear."

Under what cloud's pallor
now throbs the tricolor
of your future, your past
your present, swaying the mast?

Upon what linen waters
do you drift bravely toward
new shores, clutching your beads
to meet the savage needs?

Still, if sins are forgiven,
that is, if souls break even
with flesh elsewhere, this joint,
too, must be enjoyed

as afterlife's sweet parlor
where, in the clouded squalor,

saints and the ain'ts take five,
where I was first to arrive.

Joseph Brodsky, February 19, 2018

SHIVA

There is a hawk that is picking the birds out of our sky,
She killed the pigeons of peace and security,
She has taken honesty and confidence from nations and men,
She is hunting the lonely heron of liberty.
She loads the arts with nonsense, she is very cunning
Science with dreams and the state with powers to catch them at last.
Nothing will escape her at last, flying nor running.
This is the hawk that picks out the star's eyes.
This is the only hunter that will ever catch the wild swan;
The prey she will take last is the wild white swan of the beauty of things.
Then she will be alone, pure destruction, achieved and supreme,
Empty darkness under the death-tent wings.
She will build a nest of the swan's bones and hatch a new brood,
Hang new heavens with new birds, all be renewed.

Robinson Jeffers, February 16, 2018

STONE

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river,
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed.
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star charts
On the inner walls.

Charles Simic, February 12, 2018

BUTCHER SHOP

Sometimes walking late at night
I stop before a closed butcher shop.
There is a single light in the store
Like the light in which the convict digs his tunnel.

An apron hangs on the hook:
The blood on it smeared into a map
Of the great continents of blood,
The great rivers and oceans of blood.

There are knives that glitter like altars
In a dark church
Where they bring the cripple and the imbecile
To be healed.

There's a wooden block where bones are broken,
Scraped clean — a river dried to its bed
Where I am fed,
Where deep in the night I hear a voice.

Charles Simic, February 9, 2018

OLD TIMERS

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

On the soup wagons of Xerxes I was a cleaner of pans.
On the march of Miltiades' phalanx I had a haft and head;
I had a bristling gleaming spear-handle.

Red-headed Cæsar picked me for a teamster.
He said, "Go to work, you Tuscan bastard,
Rome calls for a man who can drive horses."

The units of conquest led by Charles the Twelfth,
The whirling whimsical Napoleonic columns:
They saw me one of the horseshoers.

I trimmed the feet of a white horse Bonaparte swept the night stars with.

Lincoln said, "Get into the game; your nation takes you."
And I drove a wagon and team and I had my arm shot off
At Spottsylvania Court House.

I am an ancient reluctant conscript.

Carl Sandburg, February 5, 2018

THE RIVER OF RIVERS IN CONNECTICUT

There is a great river this side of Stygia
Before one comes to the first black cataracts
And trees that lack the intelligence of trees.

In that river, far this side of Stygia,
The mere flowing of the water is a gayety,
Flashing and flashing in the sun. On its banks,

No shadow walks. The river is fateful,
Like the last one. But there is no ferryman.
He could not bend against its propelling force.

It is not to be seen beneath the appearances
That tell of it. The steeple at Farmington
Stands glistening and Haddam shines and sways.

It is the third commonness with light and air,
A curriculum, a vigor, a local abstraction . . .
Call it, one more, a river, an unnamed flowing,

Space-filled, reflecting the seasons, the folk-lore
Of each of the senses; call it, again and again,
The river that flows nowhere, like a sea.

Wallace Stevens, February 2, 2018

HOME AGAIN

Although it's still summer
the surrounding peaks
are white with clouds of snow.
The creek by the road is springing like a goat.
You think, here it's more beautiful than in heaven
but that overpowering thought is relieved
by a sudden shower: you seek shelter
in a bower gone wild by a ruined house.
In the living room, kitchen, hallway,
a plum tree, rose hip, nettles, thistles.
Behind the house an orchard,
a field
of mines.
Drops
of rain
dripping
from leaves,
from bunches

– grapes.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), January 29, 2018

TRÄUMEREI

In this dream that dogs me I am part
Of a silent crowd walking under a wall,
Leaving a football match, perhaps, or a pit,
All moving the same way. After a while
A second wall closes on our right,
Pressing us tighter. We are now shut in
Like pigs down a concrete passage. When I lift
My head, I see the walls have killed the sun,
And light is cold. Now a giant whitewashed D
Comes on the second wall, but much too high
For them to recognise: I await the E,
Watch it approach and pass. By now
We have ceased walking and travel
Like water through sewers, steeply, despite
The tread that goes on ringing like an anvil
Under the striding A. I crook
My arm to shield my face, for we must pass
Beneath the huge, decapitated cross,
White on the wall, the T, and I cannot halt
The tread, the beat of it, it is my own heart,
The walls of my room rise, it is still night,
I have woken again before the word was spelt.

Philip Larkin, January 26, 2018

A POSTCARD FROM THE VOLCANO

Children picking up our bones
Will never know that these were once
As quick as foxes on the hill;

And that in autumn, when the grapes
Made sharp air sharper by their smell
These had a being, breathing frost;

And least will guess that with our bones
We left much more, left what still is
The look of things, left what we felt

At what we saw. The spring clouds blow
Above the shuttered mansion-house,
Beyond our gate and the windy sky

Cries out a literate despair.

We knew for long the mansion's look
And what we said of it became

A part of what it is ... Children,
Still weaving budded aureoles,
Will speak our speech and never know,

Will say of the mansion that it seems
As if he that lived there left behind
A spirit storming in blank walls,

A dirty house in a gutted world,
A tatter of shadows peaked to white,
Smeared with the gold of the opulent sun.

Wallace Stevens, January 22, 2018

TWO STRANGERS BREAKFAST

THE LAW says you and I belong to each other, George.
The law says you are mine and I am yours, George.
And there are a million miles of white snowstorms,
a million furnaces of hell,
Between the chair where you sit and the chair where I sit.
The law says two strangers shall eat breakfast together
after nights on the horn of an Arctic moon.

Carl Sandburg, January 19, 2018

3:16 AND ONE HALF

here I'm supposed to be a great poet
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
here I am aware of death like a giant bull
charging at me
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
here I'm aware of wars and men fighting in the ring
and I'm aware of good food and wine and good women
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
I'm aware of a woman's love
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon,
I lean into the sunlight behind a yellow curtain
I wonder where the summer flies have gone
I remember the most bloody death of Hemingway and
I'm sleepy in the afternoon.

some day I won't be sleepy in the afternoon
some day I'll write a poem that will bring volcanoes
to the hills out there
but right now I'm sleepy in the afternoon

and somebody asks me, "Bukowski, what time is it?"
and I say, "3:16 and a half."
I feel very guilty, I feel obnoxious, useless,
demented, I feel
sleepy in the afternoon,
they are bombing the churches, o.k., that's o.k.,
the libraries are filled with thousands of books of knowledge,
great music sits inside the nearby radio
and I am sleepy in the afternoon,
I have this tomb within myself that says,
ah, let the others do it, let them win,
let me sleep,
the wisdom is in the dark
sweeping through the dark like brooms,
I'm going where the summer flies have gone,
try to catch me.

Charles Bukowski, January 15, 2018

THE OTHER ROOM

there is always somebody in the other room
listening beyond the wall.
there is always somebody in the other room
who wonders what you are doing
there without them.
there is always somebody in the other room
who is afraid you feel better being alone.
there is always somebody in the other room
who thinks you are thinking of someone else
or who thinks you don't care for anybody
except yourself in that other room.
there is always somebody in the other room
who no longer cares for you as much as they used to.
there is always somebody in the other room
who is angry when you drop something
or who is displeased when you cough.
there is always somebody in the other room pretending
to read a book.
there is always somebody in the other room
talking for hours on the telephone.
there is always somebody in the other room
and you don't quite remember who it is
and you are surprised when they make a sound
or go down the hall to the bathroom.
but there isn't always somebody in the other
room because
sometimes there isn't another room.
and if there isn't
sometimes there isn't anybody here at all.

Charles Bukowski, January 12, 2018

22,000 DOLLARS IN 3 MONTHS

night has come like something crawling
up the bannister, sticking out its tongue
of fire, and I remember the
missionaries up to their knees in muck
retreating across the beautiful blue river
and the machine gun slugs flicking spots of
fountain and Jones drunk on the shore
saying shit shit these Indians
where'd they get the fire power?
and I went in to see Maria
and she said, do you think they'll attack,
do you think they'll come across the river?
afraid to die? I asked her, and she said
who isn't?
and I went to the medicine cabinet
and poured a tall glassful, and I said
we've made 22,000 dollars in 3 months building roads
for Jones and you have to die a little
to make it that fast Do you think the communists
started this? she asked, do you think it's the communists?
and I said, will you stop being a neurotic bitch.
these small countries rise because they are getting
their pockets filled from both sides and she
looked at me with that beautiful schoolgirl idiocy
and she walked out, it was getting dark but I let her go,
you've got to know when to let a woman go if you want to
keep her,
and if you don't want to keep her you let her go anyhow,
so it's always a process of letting go, one way or the other,
so I sat there and put the drink down and made another
and I thought, whoever thought an engineering course at Old Miss
would bring you where the lamps swing slowly
in the green of some far night?
and Jones came in with his arm around her blue waist
and she had been drinking too, and I walked up and said,
man and wife? and that made her angry for if a woman can't
get you by the nuts and squeeze, she's done,
and I poured another tall one, and
I said, you 2 may not realize it
but we're not going to get out of here alive.
we drank the rest of the night.
you could hear, if you were real still,
the water coming down between the god trees,
and the roads we had built
you could hear animals crossing them
and the Indians, savage fools with some savage cross to bear.
and finally there was the last look in the mirror
as the drunken lovers hugged
and I walked out and lifted a piece of straw

from the roof of the hut
then snapped the lighter, and I
watched the flames crawl, like hungry mice
up the thin brown stalks, it was slow but it was
a real, and then not real, something like an opera,
and then I walked down toward the machine gun sounds,
the same river, and the moon looked across at me
and in the path I saw a small snake, just a small one,
looked like a rattler, but it couldn't be a rattler,
and it was scared seeing me, and I grabbed it behind the neck
before it could coil and I held it then
its little body curled around my wrist
like a finger of love and all the trees looked with eyes
and I put my mouth to its mouth
and love was lightning and remembrance,
dead communists, dead fascists, dead democrats, dead gods and
back in what was left of the hut Jones
had his dead black arm around her dead blue waist.

Charles Bukowski, January 8, 2018

BLUEBIRD

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say, stay in there, I'm not going
to let anybody see
you.
there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I pour whiskey on him and inhale
cigarette smoke
and the whores and the bartenders
and the grocery clerks
never know that
he's
in there.

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say,
stay down, do you want to mess
me up?
you want to screw up the
works?
you want to blow my book sales in
Europe?
there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too clever, I only let him out

at night sometimes
when everybody's asleep.
I say, I know that you're there,
so don't be
sad.
then I put him back,
but he's singing a little
in there, I haven't quite let him
die
and we sleep together like
that
with our
secret pact
and it's nice enough to
make a man
weep, but I don't
weep, do
you?

Charles Bukowski, January 5, 2018

NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS, 2016

I met with Grgur Flakierski, a Polish Jew
without a country, in secret and we sat down
at the Bear's Den inn. When we got out, the
fireworks had already been well under way
and the dome of light above the city in the
valley was rising like a beer belly. The roosters
of democracy were crowing about human rights
with firmly closed eyes so as not to see the ghost,
bottled up for seventy years, now ceremoniously
let out and soaring into the sky from the charred
remains of 2015. In the murk of the parking
lot we firmly shook hands and swore to courage.

I have no one along the highway with hundreds
of exits, so I returned among the tattooed truckers
who watch their steps. I'd pledged courage to
Grgur but was myself unready before the sight
of history repeating itself: a child of long ago
from the wintry side of Velebit slept all night
on the bus and woke up just in time for boarding
the ferry for Pag. Seeing the sea for the first time,
and the morning swimmers, he rubbed his eyes
and asked plaintively, "Mother, do I know how
to swim, too?"

Milorad Pejić (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), January 1, 2018