

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1903

1903. You may start to spy
on the future. Old Europe's sky
is a little dim. To increase its dimness,
The Krupp Works in Essen erect their chimneys.
(Thus the sense of Geld breeds the sense of guilt.)
Still, more smoke comes from London, from a smoke-filled
room where with guile and passion
Bolsheviks curse Mensheviks in Russian.
Speaking of Slavs: The Serbian King and Queen
are done by local well-wishers in.
Painters Whistler, Gauguin, Pissarro are gone.
Panama rents us its Canal Zone.
While bidding their maidens bye-bye and cheerio,
the tommies sail off to grab Nigeria
and turn it into a British colony:
to date, a nation's greatest felony
is if it's neither friend nor foe.
My father is born. So is Evelyn Waugh.

Man of the year, I am proud to say
is two men. They are brothers. Together, they
sport two heads, four legs and four hands-which brings
us to their bird's four wings.

(The Wright Brothers)

"We are Orville and Wilbur Wright.
Our name simply rhymes with 'flight'!
This may partially explain
why we decided to build a plane.
Oh there are no men in the skies, just wind!
Cities look like newspaper print.
Mountains glitter and rivers bend.
But the ultimate plane'd rather bomb than land!"

Joseph Brodsky, December 28, 2020

THE HORNS OF THE MORNING

The horns of the morning
Are blowing, are shining,

The meadows are bright
 With the coldest dew;
The dawn reassembles,
Like the clash of gold cymbals
The sky spreads its vans out
 The sun hangs in view.

Here, where no love is,
All that was hopeless
And kept me from sleeping
 Is frail and unsure;
For never so brilliant,
Neither so silent
Nor so unearthly, has
 Earth grown before.

Philip Larkin, December 25, 2020

THE EDGES OF TIME

It is at the edges
that time thins.
Time which had been
dense and viscous
as amber suspending
intentions like bees
unseizes them. A
humming begins,
apparently coming
just in back. A
racket of claims now,
as time flattens. A
glittering fan of things
competing to happen,
brilliant and urgent
as fish when seas
retreat.

Kay Ryan, December 21, 2020

MAD GIRL'S LOVE SONG

I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;
I lift my lids and all is born again.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,
And arbitrary blackness gallops in:
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:
Exit seraphim and Satan's men:
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I fancied you'd return the way you said,
But I grow old and I forget your name.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

I should have loved a thunderbird instead;
At least when spring comes they roar back again.
I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)

Sylvia Plath, December 18, 2020

THINGS MEN HAVE MADE

Things men have made with wakened hands, and put soft life into
are awake through years with transferred touch, and go on glowing
for long years.
And for this reason, some old things are lovely
warm still with the life of forgotten men who made them.

David Herbert Lawrence, December 14, 2020

EXAMINATION AT THE WOMB-DOOR

Who owns those scrawny little feet? Death.
Who owns this bristly scorched-looking face? Death.
Who owns these still-working lungs? Death.
Who owns this utility coat of muscles? Death.
Who owns these unspeakable guts? Death.
Who owns these questionable brains? Death.
All this messy blood? Death.
These minimum-efficiency eyes? Death.
This wicked little tongue? Death.
This occasional wakefulness? Death.

Given, stolen, or held pending trial?
Held.

Who owns the whole rainy, stony earth? Death.
Who owns all of space? Death.

Who is stronger than hope? Death.
Who is stronger than the will? Death.
Stronger than love? Death.
Stronger than life? Death.

But who is stronger than Death?
Me, evidently.
Pass, Crow.

Ted Hughes, December 11, 2020

THE GODDESS

“She in whose lip service
I passed my time,
whose name I knew, but not her face,
came upon me where I lay in Lie Castle!

Flung me across the room, and
room after room (hitting the wall, re-
bounding – to the last
sticky wall – wrenching away from it
pulled hair out!)
till I lay

outside the outer walls!

There in cold air
lying still where her hand had thrown me,
I tasted the mud that splattered my lips:
the seeds of a forest were in it,
asleep and growing! I tasted
her power!

The silence was answering my silence,
a forest was pushing itself
out of sleep between my submerged fingers.

I bit on a seed and it spoke on my tongue
of day that shone already among the stars
in the water-mirror of low ground,

and a wind rising ruffled the lights:
she passed near me in returning from the encounter,
she who plucked me from the close rooms,

without whom nothing
flowers, fruits, sleeps in season,
without whom nothing
speaks in its own tongue, but returns
lie for lie!"

Denise Levertov, December 7, 2020

FLORIDA

The state with the prettiest name,
the state that floats in brackish water,
held together by mangrove roots
that bear while living oysters in clusters,
and when dead strew white swamps with skeletons,
dotted as if bombarded, with green hummocks
like ancient cannon-balls sprouting grass.
The state full of long S-shaped birds, blue and white,
and unseen hysterical birds who rush up the scale
every time in a tantrum.
Tanagers embarrassed by their flashiness,
and pelicans whose delight it is to clown;

who coast for fun on the strong tidal currents
in and out among the mangrove islands
and stand on the sand-bars drying their damp gold wings
on sun-lit evenings.

Enormous turtles, helpless and mild,
die and leave their barnacled shells on the beaches,
and their large white skulls with round eye-sockets
twice the size of a man's.

The palm trees clatter in the stiff breeze
like the bills of the pelicans. The tropical rain comes down
to freshen the tide-looped strings of fading shells:
Job's Tear, the Chinese Alphabet, the scarce Junonia,
parti-colored pectins and Ladies' Ears,
arranged as on a gray rag of rotted calico,
the buried Indian Princess's skirt;
with these the monotonous, endless, sagging coast-line
is delicately ornamented.

Thirty or more buzzards are drifting down, down, down,
over something they have spotted in the swamp,
in circles like stirred-up flakes of sediment
sinking through water.

Smoke from woods-fires filters fine blue solvents.
On stumps and dead trees the charring is like black velvet.

The mosquitoes
go hunting to the tune of their ferocious obligatos.

After dark, the fireflies map the heavens in the marsh
until the moon rises.

Cold white, not bright, the moonlight is coarse-meshed,
and the careless, corrupt state is all black specks
too far apart, and ugly whites; the poorest
post-card of itself.

After dark, the pools seem to have slipped away.

The alligator, who has five distinct calls:
friendliness, love, mating, war, and a warning –
whimpers and speaks in the throat
of the Indian Princess.

Elizabeth Bishop, December 4, 2020

HORNET

A red-hot needle
hangs out of him, he steers by it
as if it were a rudder, he
would get in the house any way he could
and then he would bounce from window
to ceiling, buzzing and looking for you.
Do not sleep for he is there wrapped in the curtain.
Do not sleep for he is there under the shelf.
Do not sleep for he wants to sew up your skin,
he want to leap into your body like a hammer
with a nail, do not sleep he wants to get into
your nose and make a transplant, he wants do not
sleep he wants to bury your fur and make
a nest of knives, he wants to slide under your
fingernail and push in a splinter, do not sleep
he wants to climb out of the toilet when you sit on it
and make a home in the embarrassed hair do not sleep
he wants you to walk into him as into a dark fire.

Anne Sexton, November 30, 2020

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The Lamp burns sure – within –
Tho' Serfs – supply the Oil –
It matters not the busy Wick –
At her phosphoric toil!

The Slave – forgets – to fill –
The Lamp – burns golden – on
Unconscious that the oil is out –
As that the Slave – is gone.

Emily Dickinson, November 27, 2020

TO LIFE

O life with the sad seared face,
I weary of seeing thee,

And thy draggled cloak, and thy hobbling pace,
And thy too-forced pleasantry!

I know what thou would'st tell
Of Death, Time, Destiny –
I have known it long, and know, too, well
What it all means for me.

But canst thou not array
Thyself in rare disguise,
And feign like truth, for one mad day,
That Earth is Paradise?

I'll tune me to the mood,
And mumm with thee till eve;
And maybe what as interlude
I feign, I shall believe!

Thomas Hardy, November 23, 2020

THE SEED CUTTERS

They seem hundreds of years away. Brueghel,
You'll know them if I can get them true.
They kneel under the hedge in a half-circle
Behind a windbreak wind is breaking through.
They are the seed cutters. The tuck and frill
Of leaf-sprout is on the seed potatoes
Buried under that straw. With time to kill,
They are taking their time. Each sharp knife goes
In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam,
And, at the centre, a dark watermark.
Oh, calendar customs! Under the broom
Yellowing over them, compose the frieze
With all of us there, our anonymities.

Seamus Heaney, November 20, 2020

DEATH AND FAME

When I die

I don't care what happens to my body

throw ashes in the air, scatter 'em in East River

bury an urn in Elizabeth New Jersey, B'nai Israel Cemetery

But I want a big funeral

St. Patrick's Cathedral, St. Mark's Church, the largest synagogue in
Manhattan

First, there's family, brother, nephews, spry aged Edith stepmother
96, Aunt Honey from old Newark,

Doctor Joel, cousin Mindy, brother Gene one eyed one ear'd, sister-
in-law blonde Connie, five nephews, stepbrothers & sisters
their grandchildren,

companion Peter Orlovsky, caretakers Rosenthal & Hale, Bill Morgan –
Next, teacher Trungpa Vajracharya's ghost mind, Gelek Rinpoche,
there Sakyong Mipham, Dalai Lama alert, chance visiting
America, Satchitananda Swami

Shivananda, Dehorahava Baba, Karmapa XVI, Dudjom Rinpoche,
Katagiri & Suzuki Roshi's phantoms

Baker, Whalen, Daido Lorie, Qwong, Frail White-haired Kapleau
Roshis, Lama Tarchen –

Then, most important, lovers over half-century

Dozens, a hundred, more, older fellows bald & rich

young boys met naked recently in bed, crowds surprised to see each
other, innumerable, intimate, exchanging memories

"He taught me to meditate, now I'm an old veteran of the thousand
day retreat –"

"I played music on subway platforms, I'm straight but loved him he
loved me"

"I felt more love from him at 19 than ever from anyone"

"We'd lie under covers gossip, read my poetry, hug & kiss belly to belly
arms round each other"

"I'd always get into his bed with underwear on & by morning my
skivvies would be on the floor"

"Japanese, always wanted take it up my bum with a master"

"We'd talk all night about Kerouac & Cassady sit Buddhalike then
sleep in his captain's bed."

"He seemed to need so much affection, a shame not to make him happy"

"I was lonely never in bed nude with anyone before, he was so gentle my
stomach

shuddered when he traced his finger along my abdomen nipple to hips –"

"All I did was lay back eyes closed, he'd bring me to come with mouth
& fingers along my waist"

"He gave great head"

So there be gossip from loves of 1948, ghost of Neal Cassady commingling with flesh and youthful blood of 1997
and surprise – "You too? But I thought you were straight!"
"I am but Ginsberg an exception, for some reason he pleased me."
"I forgot whether I was straight gay queer or funny, was myself, tender and affectionate to be kissed on the top of my head, my forehead throat heart & solar plexus, mid-belly. on my prick, tickled with his tongue my behind"
"I loved the way he'd recite 'But at my back allways hear/ time's winged chariot hurrying near,' heads together, eye to eye, on a pillow –"
Among lovers one handsome youth straggling the rear
"I studied his poetry class, 17 year-old kid, ran some errands to his walk-up flat,
seduced me didn't want to, made me come, went home, never saw him again never wanted to... "
"He couldn't get it up but loved me," "A clean old man." "He made sure I came first"
This the crowd most surprised proud at ceremonial place of honor –
Then poets & musicians – college boys' grunge bands – age-old rock star Beatles, faithful guitar accompanists, gay classical conductors, unknown high Jazz music composers, funky trumpeters, bowed bass & french horn black geniuses, folksinger fiddlers with dobro tamborine harmonica mandolin auto-harp pennywhistles & kazoos
Next, artist Italian romantic realists schooled in mystic 60's India, Late fauve Tuscan painter-poets, Classic draftsman Massachusetts surreal jackanapes with continental wives, poverty sketchbook gesso oil watercolor masters from American provinces
Then highschool teachers, lonely Irish librarians, delicate bibliophiles, sex liberation troops nay armies, ladies of either sex
"I met him dozens of times he never remembered my name I loved him anyway, true artist"
"Nervous breakdown after menopause, his poetry humor saved me from suicide hospitals"
"Charmant, genius with modest manners, washed sink, dishes my studio guest a week in Budapest"
Thousands of readers, "Howl changed my life in Libertyville Illinois"
"I saw him read Montclair State Teachers College decided be a poet –"
"He turned me on, I started with garage rock sang my songs in Kansas City"
"Kaddish made me weep for myself & father alive in Nevada City"
"Father Death comforted me when my sister died Boston 1982"
"I read what he said in a newsmagazine, blew my mind, realized

others like me out there"
Deaf & Dumb bards with hand signing quick brilliant gestures
Then Journalists, editors's secretaries, agents, portraitists & photo-
graphy aficionados, rock critics, cultured laborors, cultural
historians come to witness the historic funeral
Super-fans, poetasters, aging Beatnicks & Deadheads, autograph-
hunters, distinguished paparazzi, intelligent gawkers
Everyone knew they were part of "History" except the deceased
who never knew exactly what was happening even when I was alive

Allen Ginsberg, November 16, 2020

TO THE WESTERN WORLD

A siren sang, and Europe turned away
From the high castle and the shepherd's crook.
Three caravels went sailing to Cathay
On the strange ocean, and the captains shook
Their banners out across the Mexique Bay.

And in our early days we did the same.
Remembering our fathers in their wreck
We crossed the sea from Palos where they came
And saw, enormous to the little deck,
A shore in silence waiting for a name.

The treasures of Cathay were never found.
In this America, this wilderness
Where the axe echoes with a lonely sound,
The generations labor to possess
And grave by grave we civilize the ground.

Louis Simpson, November 13, 2020

FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

my father was a practical man.
he had an idea.
you see, my son, he said,
I can pay for this house in my lifetime,
then it's mine.

when I die I pass it on to you.
now in your lifetime you can acquire a house
and then you'll have two houses
and you'll pass those two houses on to your
son, and in his lifetime he acquires a house,
then when he dies, his son -
I get it, I said.
my father died while trying to drink a
glass of water. I buried him. solid
mahogany casket, after the funeral I went
to the racetrack, met a high yellow, after
the races we went to her apartment for
dinner and goodies.
I sold his house after about a month.
I sold his car and his furniture
and gave away all his paintings except one
and all his fruit jars
(filled with fruit boiled in the heat of summer)
and put his dog in the pound.
I dated his girlfriend twice
but getting nowhere
I gave it up.
I gambled and drank away the money.
now I live in a cheap front court in
Hollywood and take out the garbage to
hold down the rent.
my father was a practical man.
he choked on that glass of water and
saved on hospital bills.

Charles Bukowski, November 9, 2020

SILET

When I behold how black, immortal ink
Drips from my deathless pen-ah, well-away!
Why should we stop at all for what I think?
There is enough in what I chance to say.

It is enough that we once came together;
What is the use of setting it to rime?
When it is autumn do we get spring weather,

Or gather may of harsh northwindish time?

It is enough that we once came together;
What if the wind have turned against the rain?
It is enough that we once came together;
Time has seen this, and will not turn again;

And who are we, who know that last intent,
To plague to-morrow with a testament!

Ezra Pound, November 6, 2020

THE BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE

It is curious I cannot feel it yet.
To pile up weapons on both sides of a ditch makes war
 certain as sunrise
Yet I cannot feel its approach.
There have been two, there will be a third, to be fought
 with what weapons? These that we test and stockpile.
And every test makes the earth
At such and such a place uninhabitable. We must not
 test them too much, they are too deadly,
We store them. If ours and theirs
Went off at once they'd probably infect the elements and
 blight the whole earth. We have general death on
 our hands,
But wait ten years of peace we'll have more.
Do you think we'll not use them? When a great nation is
 in trouble – when a great nation is in danger of be-
 ing conquered
It will use the whole arsenal.
So – be prepared to die. Those whom the blasts miss, the
 air and water will poison them. Those who survive,
Their children will be dying monsters.
I have thought for a long time that we are too many –
 Three thousand million is it? – this will adjust us.
I have pitied the beautiful earth
Ridden by such a master as the human race. Now, if we
 die like dinosaurs, the beautiful
Planet will be the happier.
She is not domesticated, she weeps in her service, the
 lovely forehead bowed down to the sleek knees –

Or is she laughing? Good luck to her.
But this fantastic third world-war and self-destruction:
 curious I cannot feel them yet. The idea is logical
But not intuitive: distrust it.
However – not thus – will find other means. The
 troublesome race of man, Oh, beautiful planet, is
 not immortal.

Robinson Jeffers, November 2, 2020

ANYONE LIVED IN A PRETTY HOW TOWN

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someones married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then) they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)

one day anyone died i guess

(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
busy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain

Edward Estlin Cummings, October 29, 2020

INFELICE

Walking swiftly with a dreadful duchess,
He smiled too briefly, his face was pale as sand,
He jumped into a taxi when he saw me coming,
Leaving my alone with a private meaning,
He loves me so much, my heart is singing.
Later at the Club when I rang him in the evening
They said: Sir Rat is dining, is dining, is dining,
No madam, he left no messafe, ah how his silence speaks,
He loves me too much for words, my heart is singing.
The Pullman seats are here, the tickets for Paris, I am waiting,
Presently the telephone rings, it is his valet speaking,
Sir Rat is called away, to Scotland, his constituents,
(Ah the dreadful duchess, but he loves me best)
Best pleasure to the last, my heart is singing,
One night he came, it was four in the morning,
Walking slowly upstairs, he stands beside my bed,
Dear darling, lie beside me, it is too cold to stand speaking,
He lies down beside me, his face is like the sand,
He is in a sleep of love, my heart is singing.
Sleeping softly softly, in the morning I must wake him,
And waking he murmurs, I only came to sleep.
The words are so sweetly cruel, how deeply he loves me,
I say them to myself alone, my heart is singing.
Now the sunshine strenghtens, it is ten in the morning,
He is so timid in love, he only needs to know,

He is my little child, how can he come if I do not call him,
I will write and tell him everything, I take the pen and write:
I love you so much, my heart is singing.

Stevie Smith, October 26, 2020

SAID THE POET TO THE ANALYST

My business is words. Words are like labels,
or coins, or better, like swarming bees.
I confess I am only broken by the sources of things;
as if words were counted like dead bees in the attic,
unbuckled from their yellow eyes and their dry wings.
I must always forget how one word is able to pick
out another, to manner another, until I have got
something I might have said...
but did not.

Your business is watching my words. But I
admit nothing. I work with my best, for instances,
when I can write my praise for a nickel machine,
that one night in Nevada: telling how the magic jackpot
came clacking three bells out, over the lucky screen.
But if you should say this is something it is not,
then I grow weak, remembering how my hands felt funny
and ridiculous and crowded with all
the believing money.

Anne Sexton, October 23, 2020

INTRUSION

After I had cut off my hands
and grown new ones

something my former hands had longed for
came and asked to be rocked.

After my plucked out eyes
had withered, and new ones grown

something my former eyes had wept for
came asking to be pitied.

Denise Levertov, October 19, 2020

PASTORAL

The little sparrows
Hop ingenuously
About the pavement
Quarreling
With sharp voices
Over those things
That interest them.
But we who are wiser
Shut ourselves in
On either hand
And no one knows
Whether we think good
Or evil.

Then again,
The old man who goes about
Gathering dog lime
Walks in the gutter
Without looking up
And his tread
Is more majestic than
That of the Episcopal minister
Approaching the pulpit
Of a Sunday.
These things
Astonish me beyond words.

William Carlos Williams, October 16, 2020

TO AN AMERICAN POET JUST DEAD

In the *Boston Sunday Herald* just three lines
Of no-point type for you who used to sing
The praises of imaginary wines,
And died, or so I'm told, of the real thing.

Also gone, but a lot less forgotten,
Are an eminent cut-rate druggist, a lover of Giving,
A lender, and various brokers; gone from this rotten
Taxable world to a higher standard of living.

It is out in the comfy suburbs I read you are dead,
And the soupy summer is settling, full of the yawns
Of Sunday fathers loitering late in bed,
And the sssh of sprays on all the little lawns.

Will the sprays weep wide for you their chaplet tears?
For you will the deep-freeze units melt and mourn?
For you will Studebakers shred their gears
And sound from each garage a muted horn?

They won't. In summer sunk and stupefied
The suburbs deepen in their sleep of death.
And though they sleep the sounder since you died
It's just as well that now you save your breath.

Richard Wilbur, October 12, 2020

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1902

1902. Just another bland
peaceful year. They dissect a gland
and discover hormones. And a hormone
once discovered is never gone.
The Boer War (ten thousand dead) is over.
Elsewhere, kind Europeans offer
railroad chains to a noble savage.
A stork leaves a bundle in a Persian cabbage
patch, and the tag reads "Khomeini". Greeks, Serbs, Croats,
and Bulgars are at each others' throats.
Claude Monet paints bridges nevertheless.
The population of the U.S.
is approximately 76
million: all of them having sex
to affect our present rent.
Plus Teddy Roosevelt's the President.

The man of the year is Arthur Conan Doyle,

a writer. The subjects of his great toil
are a private dick and a paunchy doc;
occasionally, a dog.

(Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)

"Imagine the worst: your subconscious is
as dull as your conscience. And you, a noble
soul, grab a Luger and make Swiss cheese
out of your skull. Better take my novel
about the Hound of the Baskervilles!
It'll save a handful of your brain cells
and beef up your dreams. For it simply kills
time and somebody else!"

Joseph Brodsky, October 9, 2020

SELF-PITY

I never saw a wild thing
sorry for itself.
A small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough
without ever having felt sorry for itself.

David Herbert Lawrence, October 5, 2020

STALIN

Winds on the stems make them creak like things of man;
a hedge of vines and bushes — three or four
kinds, grape-leaf, elephant-ear and alder,
an arabesque, imperfect and alive,
a hundred hues of green, the darkest shades
fall short of black, the whitest leaf-back short of white.
The state, if we could see behind the wall,
is woven of perishable vegetation.
Stalin? What shot him clawing up the tree of power —
millions plowed under with the crops they grew,
his intimates dying like the spider-bridegroom?
The large stomach could only chew success. What raised him
was an unusual lust to break the icon,

joke cruelly, seriously, and be himself.

Robert Lowell, October 2, 2020

LAMEN

Listen, children:
Your father is dead.
From his old coats
I'll make you little jackets;
I'll make you little trousers
From his old pants.
There'll be in his pockets
Things he used to put there,
Keys and pennies
Covered with tobacco;
Dan shall have the pennies
To save in his bank;
Anne shall have the keys
To make a pretty noise with.
Life must go on,
And the dead be forgotten;
Life must go on,
Though good men die;
Anne, eat your breakfast;
Dan, take your medicine;
Life must go on;
I forget just why.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, September 28, 2020

WAS THERE A TIME

Was there a time when dancers with their fiddles
In children's circuses could stay their troubles?
There was a time they could cry over books,
But time has sent its maggot on their track.
Under the arc of the sky they are unsafe.
What's never known is safest in this life.
Under the skysigns they who have no arms

have cleanest hands, and, as the heartless ghost
Alone's unhurt, so the blind man sees best.

Thomas Dylan, September 25, 2020

SEQUOIA TREES

Mountains are moving, rivers
are hurrying. But we are still.

We have the thoughts of giants —
clouds, and at night the stars.

And we have names — guttural, grotesque —
Hamet, Og — names with no syllables.

And perish, one by one, our roots
gnawed by the mice. And fall.

And are too slow for death, and change
to stone. Or else too quick,

like candles in a fire. Giants
are lonely. We have waited long

for someone. By our waiting, surely
there must be someone at whose touch

our boughs would bend; and hands
to gather us; a spirit

to whom we are light as the hawthorn tree.
O if there is a poet

let him come now! We stand at the Pacific
like great unmarried girls,

turning in our heads the stars and clouds,
considering whom to please.

Louis Simpson, September 21, 2020

DIGGING

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rest; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney, September 18, 2020

ALL YOUR HORSES

Say when rain
cannot make
you more wet
or a certain
thought can't
deepen and yet
you think it again:
you have lost
count. A larger
amount is
no longer a
larger amount.
There has been
a collapse; perhaps
in the night.
Like a rupture
in water (which
can't rupture
of course). All
your horses
broken out with
all your horses.

Kay Ryan, September 14, 2020

DUBLINESQUE

Down stucco sidestreets,
Where light is pewter
And afternoon mist
Brings lights on in shops
Above race-guides and rosaries,
A funeral passes.

The hearse is ahead,
But after there follows
A troop of streetwalkers
In wide flowered hats,
Leg-of-mutton sleeves,
And ankle-length dresses.

There is an air of great friendliness,
As if they were honouring
One they were fond of;
Some caper a few steps,
Skirts held skilfully
(Someone claps time),

And of great sadness also.
As they wend away
A voice is heard singing
Of Kitty, or Katy,
As if the name meant once
All love, all beauty.

Philip Larkin, September 11, 2020

KIN

to Bailey

We were entwined in red rings
Of blood and loneliness before
The first snows fell
Before muddy rivers seeded clouds
Above a virgin forest, and
Men ran naked, blue and black
Skinned into the warm embraces
Of Sheba, Eve and Lilith.
I was your sister.

You left me to force strangers
Into brother molds, exacting
Taxations they never
Owed or could ever pay.

You fought to die, thinking
In destruction lies the seed
Of birth. You may be right.

I will remember silent walks in
Southern woods and long talks
In low voices
Shielding meaning from the big ears

Of overcurious adults.

You may be right.
Your slow return from
Regions of terror and bloody
Screams, races my heart.
I hear again the laughter
Of children and see fireflies
Bursting tiny explosions in
An Arkansas twilight.

Maya Angelou, September 7, 2020

THE PEN AND THE GUN

There's never a time I use this fountain pen
without I'm haunted by a pigeon's pain.

This pen scrats out the panic that it felt.
It took almost two days dying. All my fault.

My friend Pinhead got an airgun once
and what we did with it still makes me wince.

His mam bought him it when his dad died.
She thought it'd help him not to miss his dad.

It was the thing that Pinhead wanted most.
He had the first few goes, and always missed

The pigeon on his chimney, nowhere near,
so wide the bird stayed basking, unaware.

Then I tried and got, beginner's luck, a hit,
of sorts, with my first ever shot.

It fell in the gutter out of reach and sight
but for its claws that scraped against the slate

and scratched all day, all night, and not until
teatime the next day were those claws still.

I was young enough to cry. Never again

did I show any interest in a gun

I grew to think the pen far mightier than
though the scraped claw sound still haunts me from
back then.

This pen scratching like its slowly blunting claw
has haunted me for fifty years or more.

Tony Harrison, September 4, 2020

DEPARTURE

While the far farewell music thins and fails,
And the broad bottoms rip the bearing brine –
All smalling slowly to the gray sea line –
And each significant red smoke-shaft pales,

Keen sense of severance everywhere prevails,
Which shapes the late long tramp of mounting men
To seeming words that ask and ask again:
"How long, O striving Teutons, Slavs, and Gaels

Must your wroth reasonings trade on lives like these,
That are as puppets in a playing hand? –
When shall the saner softer polities
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,
And patriotism, grown Godlike, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?"

Thomas Hardy, August 31, 2020

BRAMA

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;

The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, August 28, 2020

FLOCK

*It has been calculated the each copy of
the Gutenberg Bible...required the
skins of 300 sheep.
- from an article on printing*

I can see them squeezed into the holding pen
behind the stone building
where the printing press is housed,

all of them squirming around
to find a little room
and looking so much alike

it would be nearly impossible
to count them,
and there is no telling

which one will carry the news
that the Lord is a shepherd,
one of the few things they already know.

Billy Collins, August 24, 2020

VARIATIONS ON A SUMMER DAY

I

Say of the gulls that they are flying
In light blue air over dark blue sea.

II

A music more than a breath, but less
Than the wind, sub-music like sub-speech,
A repetition of unconscious things,
Letters of rock and water, words
Of the visible elements and of ours.

III

The rocks of the cliffs are the heads of dogs
That turn into fishes and leap
Into the sea.

IV

Star over Monhegan, Atlantic star,
Lantern without a bearer, you drift,
You, too, are drifting, in spite of your course;
Unless in the darkness, brightly-crowned,
You are the will, if there is a will,
Or the portent of a will that was,
One of the portents of the will that was.

V

The leaves of the sea are shaken and shaken.
There was a tree that was a father,
We sat beneath it and sang our songs.

VI

It is cold to be forever young,
To come to tragic shores and flow,
In sapphire, round the sun-bleached stones,
Being, for old men, time of their time.

VII

One sparrow is worth a thousand gulls,
When it sings. The gull sits on chimney-tops.
He mocks the guinea, challenges
The crow, inciting various modes.
The sparrow requites one, without intent.

VIII

An exercise in viewing the world.
On the motive! But one looks at the sea
As one improvises, on the piano.

IX

This cloudy world, by aid of land and sea,
Night and day, wind and quiet, produces
More nights, more days, more clouds, more
 worlds.

X

To change nature, not merely to change ideas,
To escape from the body, so to feel
Those feelings that the body balks,
The feelings of the natures round us here:
As a boat feels when it cuts blue water.

XI

Now, the timothy at Pemaquid
That rolled in heat is silver-tipped
And cold. The moon follows the sun like a
 French
Translation of a Russian poet.

XII

Everywhere the spruce trees bury soldiers:
Hugh March, a sergeant, a redcoat, killed,
With his men, beyond the barbican.
Everywhere spruce trees bury spruce trees.

XIII

Cover the sea with the sand rose. Fill
The sky with the radiantiana
Of spray. Let all the salt be gone.

XIV

Words add to the senses. The words for the
dazzle
Of mica, the dithering of grass,
The Arachne integument of dead trees,
Are the eye grown larger, more intense.

XV

The last island and its inhabitant,
The two alike, distinguish blues,
Until the difference between air
And sea exists by grace alone,
In objects, as white this, white that.

XVI

Round and round goes the bell of the water
And round and round goes the water itself
And that which is the pitch of its motion,
The bell of its dome, the patron of sound.

XVII

Pass through the door and through the walls,
Those bearing balsam, its field fragrance,
Pine-figures bringing sleep to sleep.

XVIII

Low tide, flat water, sultry sun.
One observes profoundest shadows rolling.
Damariscotta da da doo.

XIX

One boy swims under a tub, one sits
On top. Hurroo, the man-boat comes,

In a man-makenesse, neater than Naples.

XX

You could almost see the brass on her gleaming,
Not quite. The mist was to light what red
Is to fire. And her mainmast tapered to nothing,
Without teetering a millimeter's measure
The beads on her rails seemed to grasp at trans-
parency.
It was not yet the hour to be dauntlessly leaping.

Wallace Stevens, August 21, 2020

GOD'S GRANDEUR

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Ted Hughes, August 17, 2020

MY PAPA'S WALTZ

The whiskey on your breath
Could make a small boy dizzy;
But I hung on like death:
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans

Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother's countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

Theodore Roethke, August 14, 2020

LIVING

The fire in leaf and grass
so green it seems
each summer the last summer.

The wind blowing, the leaves
shivering in the sun,
each day the last day.

A red salamander
so cold and so
easy to catch, dreamily

moves his delicate feet
and long tail. I hold
my hand open for him to go.

Each minute the last minute.

Denise Levertov, August 10, 2020

SEAWARD

Darling, you think it's love, it's just a midnight journey.
Best are the dales and rivers removed by force,
as from the next compartment throttles "Oh, stop it, Bernie,"
yet the rhythm of those paroxysms is exactly yours.
Hook to the meat! Brush to the red-brick dentures,
alias cigars, smokeless like a driven nail!
Here the works are fewer than monkey wrenches,
and the phones are whining, dwarfed by to-no-avail.
Bark, then, with joy at Clancy, Fitzgibbon, Miller.
Dogs and block letters care how misfortune spells.
Still, you can tell yourself in the john by the spat-at mirror,
slamming the flush and emerging with clean lapels.
Only the liquid furniture cradles the dwindling figure.
Man shouldn't grow in size once he's been portrayed.
Look: what's been left behind is about as meager
as what remains ahead. Hence the horizon's blade.

Joseph Brodsky, August 7, 2020

METAPHORS

I'm a riddle in nine syllables.
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Sylvia Plath, August 3, 2020

OVER THE HILLS

Often and often it came back again
To mind, the day I passed the horizon ridge
To a new country, the path I had to find
By half-gaps that were stiles once in the hedge,

The pack of scarlet clouds running across
The harvest evening that seemed endless then
And after, and the inn where all were kind,
All were strangers. I did not know my loss
Till one day twelve months later suddenly
I leaned upon my spade and saw it all,
Though far beyond the sky-line. It became
Almost a habit through the year for me
To lean and see it and think to do the same
Again for two days and a night. Recall
Was vain: no more could the restless brook
Ever turn back and climb the waterfall
To the lake that rests and stirs not in its nook,
As in the hollow of the collar-bone
Under the mountain's head of rush and stone.

Thomas Edward, July 31, 2020

AND DEATH SHALL HAVE NO DOMINION

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;

Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be made and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.

Thomas Dylan, July 27, 2020

UTAH

Somewhere nowhere in Utah, a boy by the roadside,
gun in his hand, and the rare dumb hard tears flowing.
Beside him, a greyheaded man has let one arm slide
awkwardly over his shoulders, is talking and pointing
at whatever it is, dead, in the dust on the ground.

By the old parked Chevy, two women, talking and watching.
Their skirts flag forward, bandanna twist with their hair.
Around them, sheep and a fence and the sagebrush burning
and burning with a blue flame. In the distance, where
mountains are clouds, lightning, but no rain.

Anne Stevenson, July 24, 2020

FEBRUARY 11, 1977

to my son John

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

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

Why do you hurry? What's the need?
Poor eager boy, why can't you see

once and for all you've lost this race
though you run for all eternity?

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

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

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

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

Frederick Morgan, July 20, 2020

THE AVENUE

Now that we've come to the end
I've been trying to piece it together,
Not that distance makes anything clearer.
It began in the half-light
While we walked through the dawn chorus
After a party that lasted all night,
With the blackbird, the wood-pigeon,
The song-thrush taking a bludgeon
To a snail, our taking each other's hand
As if the whole world lay before us.

Paul Muldoon, July 17, 2020

REFUGEE BLUES

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew;
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said:
'If you've got no passport, you're officially dead';
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go today, my dear, but where shall we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread';
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: 'They must die';
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

Wystan Hugh Auden, July 13, 2020

712

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

Emily Dickinson, July 10, 2020

THE BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

Wherever in the Ruapehu region they once were sown, these warning signs (falling rocks, shooting stars, burping vulcanos...) have sprouted in all the right places. Beauty resists! Hence no one makes any decisions and nothing happens until Lilly comes back from work and starts moving things in an unfamiliar direction.

That's how the story about Franklin evolved, a neighbor, an immigrant from India, whose heart packed up while, slouched on the couch, he was watching a game of cricket. Rejected was my theory that the pain struck at the very moment when his country got defeated and we all agreed that it was indeed an easy death, a gentle passing that everyone would wish for.

This has brought me, a man of sixty and feeble plans, to the Bridge to Nowhere, the right place where that painless passage is possible. Like a letter in cursive, I lean over a concrete parapet. A gentle crossing from nothing into nothing.

Milorad Pejić (translated by Adisa Azapagić and Slobodan Perdan) July 6, 2020

STALACTITE

To attain that beauty – you must be patient, like a stalactite. To drip and wait. And fulfill no one's expectations. Sparingly drip to completion the words that have poured over from a world that no longer exists into a body that is no longer the one consigned to you once. If they discover you, or if you open up to them, your end awaits you. Until then – only quiet underground work and patience. Only darkness, and the silence of dripping.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 3, 2020

THE TERM

A rumpled sheet
Of brown paper
About the length

And apparent bulk
Of a man was
Rolling with the

Wind slowly over
And over in
The street as

A car drove down
Upon it and
Crushed it to

The ground. Unlike
A man it rose
Again rolling

With the wind over
And over to be as
It was before.

William Carlos Williams, June 29, 2020

DEATH OF A NATURALIST

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
Of the townland; green and heavy headed
Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.
Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.
Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
There were dragon-flies, spotted butterflies,
But best of all was the warm thick slobber
Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring
I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied
Specks to range on window-sills at home,
On shelves at school, and wait and watch until

The fattening dots burst into nimble-
Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how
The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too
For they were yellow in the sun and brown
In rain. Then one hot day when fields were rank
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

Seamus Heaney, June 26, 2020

SNOWFALL IN THE AFTERNOON

1

The grass is half-covered with snow.
It was the sort of snowfall that starts in late afternoon
And now the little houses of the grass are growing dark.

2

If I reached my hands down near the earth
I could take handfuls of darkness!
A darkness was always there which we never noticed.

3

As the snow grows heavier the cornstalks fade farther away
And the barn moves nearer to the house.
The barn moves all alone in the growing storm.

The barn is full of corn and moves toward us now
 Like a hulk blown toward us in a storm at sea;
 All the sailors on deck have been blind for many years.

Robert Bly, June 22, 2020

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1901

1901. A swell, modest time.
 A T-bone steak is about a dime.
 Queen Victoria dies; but then Australia
 repeats her silhouette and, inter alia,
 joins the Commonwealth. In the humid woods
 of Tahiti, Gauguin paints his swarthy nudes.
 In China, the Boxers take the rap.
 Max Planck in his lab (not on his lap
 yet) in studying radiation.
 Verdi dies too. But our proud nation,
 represented by Mrs. Disney, awards the world
 with a kid by the name of Walt
 who'll animate the screen. Off screen,
 the British launch their first submarine.
 But it's a cake-walk or a Strindberg play
 or Freud's "Psychopathology of Everyday
 Life" that really are not to be missed!
 And McKinley's shot dead by an anarchist.

The man of the year is Signore Marconi.
 He is an Italian, a Roman.
 His name prophetically rhymes with "Sony":
 they have a few things in common.

(Guglieimo Marconi)

"In a Catholic country where the sky is blue
 and clouds look like cherubs' vestiges,
 one daily receives through the air a few
 wordless but clear messages.
 Regular speech has its boring spoils:
 it leads to more speech, to violence,
 it looks like spaghetti, it also coils.

That's why I've built the wireless!"

Joseph Brodsky, June 19, 2020

FAMILY AFFAIRS

You let down, from arched
Windows,
Over hand-cut stones of your
Cathedrals, seas of golden hair

While I, pulled by dusty braids,
Left furrows in the
Sands of African beaches

Princes and commoners
Climbed over waves to reach
Your vaulted boudoirs,
As the sun, capriciously,
Struck silver fire from waiting
Chains, where I was bound.

My screams never reached
The rare tower where you
Lay, birthing masters for
My sons, and for my
Daughters, a swarm of
Unclean badgers, to consume
Their history.

Tired now of pedestal existence
For fear of flying
And vertigo, you descend
And step lightly over
My centuries of horror
And take my hand,

Smiling, call me
Sister.

Sister, accept
That I must wait a
While. Allow an age

Of dust to fill
Ruts left on my
Beach in Africa.

Maya Angelou, June 15, 2020

PARTIAL RESEMBLANCE

A doll's hair concealing
an eggshell skull delicately
throbbing, within which
maggots in voluptuous unrest
jostle and shrug. Oh, Eileen, my
big doll, your gold hair was
not more sunny than this
human fur, but
your head was
radiant in its emptiness,
a small clean room.

Her warm and rosy mouth
is telling lies – she would
believe them if she could believe:
her pretty eyes
search out corruption. Oh, Eileen
how kindly your silence was, and
what virtue
shone in the opening and shutting of your
ingenious blindness.

Denise Levertov, June 12, 2020

CASABIANCA

Love's the boy stood on the burning deck
trying to recite 'The boy stood on
the burning deck.' Love's the son
stood stammering elocution
while the poor ship in flames went down.

Love's the obstinate boy, the ship,

even the swimming sailors, who
would like a schoolroom platform, too,
or an excuse to stay
on deck. And love's the burning boy.

Elizabeth Bishop, June 8, 2020

CONSCRIPT

for James Ballard Sutton

The ego's county he inherited
From those who tended it like farmers; had
All knowledge that the study merited,
The requisite contempt of good and bad;

But one Spring day his land was violated;
A bunch of horsemen curtly asked his name,
Their leader in a different dialect stated
A war was on for which he was to blame,

And he must help them. The assent he gave
Was founded on desire for self-effacement
In order not to lose his birthright; brave,
For nothing would be easier than replacement,

Which would not give him time to follow further
The details of his own defeat and murder.

Philip Larkin, June 5, 2020

ANGEL OF CLEAN SHEETS

Angel of clean sheets, do you know bedbugs?
Once in the madhouse they came like specks of cinnamon
as I lay in a choral cave of drugs,
as old as a dog, as quiet as a skeleton.
Little bits of dried blood. One hundred marks
upon the sheet. One hundred kisses in the dark.
White sheets smelling of soap and Clorox
have nothing to do with this night of soil,

nothing to do with barred windows and multiple locks
and all the webbing in the bed, the ultimate recoil.
I have slept in silk and in red and in black.
I have slept on sand and, on fall night, a haystack.

I have known a crib. I have known the tuck-in of a child
but inside my hair waits the night I was defiled.

Anne Sexton, June 1, 2020

TO DOROTHY

You are not beautiful, exactly.
You are beautiful, inexactly.
You let a weed grow by the mulberry
And a mulberry grow by the house.
So close, in the personal quiet
Of a windy night, it brushes the wall
And sweeps away the day till we sleep.

A child said it, and it seemed true:
"Things that are lost are all equal."
But it isn't true. If I lost you,
The air wouldn't move, nor the tree grow.
Someone would pull the weed, my flower.
The quiet wouldn't be yours. If I lost you,
I'd have to ask the grass to let me sleep.

Mervin Bell, May 29, 2020

THE GREEKS ARE COMING!

Little islands out at sea, on the horizon
keep suddenly showing a whiteness, a flesh and a furl, a hail
of something coming, ships a-sail from over the rim of the
sea.

And every time, it is ships, it is ships,
it is ships of Cnossos coming, out of the morning end of
the sea,
it is Aegean ships, and men with archaic pointed beards

coming out of the eastern end.

But it is far-off foam.

And an ocean liner, going east, like a small beetle walking
the edge
is leaving a long thread of dark smoke
like a bad smell.

David Herbert Lawrence, May 25, 2020

CREMATION

It nearly cancels my fear of death, my dearest said,
When I think of cremation. To rot in the earth
Is a loathsome end, but to roar up in flame – besides, I
am used to it,
I have flamed with love or fury so often in my life,
No wonder my body is tired, no wonder it is dying.
We had a great joy of my body. Scatter the ashes.

Robinson Jeffers, May 22, 2020

ORPHEUS

What does the song hope for? And the moved hands
A little way from the birds, the shy, the delightful?
To be bewildered and happy,
Or most of all the knowledge of life?

But the beautiful are content with the sharp notes of the air;
The warmth is enough. O if winter really
Oppose, if the weak snowflake,
What will the wish, what will the dance do?

Wystan Hugh Auden, May 18, 2020

THE PLAIN SENSE OF THINGS

After the leaves have fallen, we return
To a plain sense of things. It is as if
We had come to an end of the imagination,
Inanimate in an inert savoir.

It is difficult even to choose the adjective
For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
The great structure has become a minor house.
No turban walks across the lessened floors.

The greenhouse never so badly needed paint.
The chimney is fifty years old and slants to one side.
A fantastic effort has failed, a repetition
In a repetitiousness of men and flies.

Yet the absence of the imagination had
Itself to be imagined. The great pond,
The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing silence

Of a sort, silence of a rat come out to see,
The great pond and its waste of the lilies, all this
Had to be imagined as an inevitable knowledge,
Required, as a necessity requires.

Wallace Stevens, May 15, 2020

ANGEL OF BEACH HOUSES AND PICNICS

Angel of beach houses and picnics, do you know solitaire?
Fifty-two reds and blacks and only myself to blame.
My blood buzzes like a hornet's nest. I sit in a kitchen chair
at a table set for one. The silverware is the same
and the glass and the sugar bowl. I hear my lungs fill and expel
as in an operation. But I have no one left to tell.

Once I was a couple. I was my own king and queen
with cheese and bread and rosé on the rocks of Rockport.
Once I sunbathed in the buff, all brown and lean,
watching the toy sloops go by, holding court
for busloads of tourists. Once I called breakfast the sexiest

meal of the day. Once I invited arrest

at the peace march in Washington. Once I was young and bold
and left hundreds of unmatched people out in the cold.

Anne Sexton, May 11, 2020

FIGHTING FOR JERUSALEM

The man who seems to be dead
With Buddha in his smile
With Jesus in his stretched out arms
With Mahomet in his humbled forehead
With his feet in hell
With his hands in heaven
With his back to the earth
Is escorted
To his eternal reward
By singing legions
Of what seem to be flies

Ted Hughes, May 8, 2020

HAZARDOUS OCCUPATIONS

Jugglers keep six bottles in the air.
Club swingers toss up six and eight.
The knife throwers miss each other's
ears by a hair and the steel quivers
in the target wood.
The trapeze battlers do a back-and-forth
high in the air with a girl's feet
and ankles upside down.
So they earn a living till they miss
once, twice, even three times.
So they live on hate and love as gypsies
live in satin skins and shiny eyes.
In their graves do the elbows jostle once
in a blue moon and wriggle to throw
a kiss answering a dreamed-of applause?

Do the bones repeat : It's a good act
we got a good hand.... ?

Carl Sandburg, May 4, 2020

I HAVE STARTED TO SAY

I have started to say
"A quarter of a century"
Or "thirty years back"
About my own life.

It makes me breathless
It's like falling and recovering
In huge gesturing loops
Through an empty sky.

All that's left to happen
Is some deaths (my own included).
Their order, and their manner,
Remain to be learnt.

Philip Larkin, May 1, 2020

THE NIAGARA RIVER

As though
the river were
a floor, we position
our table and chairs
upon it, eat, and
have conversation.
As it moves along,
we notice – as
calmly as though
dining room paintings
were being replaced –
the changing scenes
along the shore. We
do know, we do
know this is the

Niagara River, but
it is hard to remember
what that means.

Kay Ryan, April 27, 2020

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1900

1900. A quiet year, you bet.
True: none of you is alive as yet.
The '00' stands for the lack of you.
Still, things are happening, quite a few.
In China, the Boxers are smashing whites.
In Russia, A.P. Chekhov writes.
In Italy, Floria Tosca screams.
Freud, in Vienna, interprets dreams.
The Impressionists paint, Rodin still sculpts.
In Africa, Boers grab the British scalps
or vice versa (who cares, my dear?).
And McKinley is re-elected here.
There are four great empires, three good democracies.
The rest of the world sports loin-cloths and moccasins,
speaking both figuratively and literally.
Upstaging "Umberto's" in Little Italy,
in the big one Umberto the Ist's shot dead.
(Not all that's written on walls is read).
And marking the century's real turn,
Friedrich Nietzsche dies, Louis Armstrong's born
to refute the great Kraut's unholy
"God is dead" with "Hello, Dolly."

The man of the year, though, is an engineer.
John Browning is his name.
He's patented something. So let us hear
about John's claim to fame.

(John Moses Browning)

"I looked at the calendar, and I saw
that there are a hundred years to go.
That made me a little nervous
for I thought of my neighbors.
I've multiplied them one hundred times:

it came to them being all over!
So I went to my study that looks out on limes
and invented this cute revolver!"

Joseph Brodsky, April 24, 2020

BEING BUT MEN

Being but men, we walked into the trees
Afraid, letting our syllables be soft
For fear of waking the rooks,
For fear of coming
Noiselessly into a world of wings and cries.

If we were children we might climb,
Catch the rooks sleeping, and break no twig,
And, after the soft ascent,
Thrust out our heads above the branches
To wonder at the unfailing stars.

Out of confusion, as the way is,
And the wonder, that man knows,
Out of the chaos would come bliss.

That, then, is loveliness, we said,
Children in wonder watching the stars,
Is the aim and the end.

Thomas Dylan, April 20, 2020

THE WAKING

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me, so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

Theodore Roethke, April 17, 2020

I REMEMBER

It was my bridal night I remember,
An old man of seventy-three
I lay with my young bride in my arms,
A girl with t.b.
It was wartime, and overhead
The Germans were making a particularly heavy raid on
Hampstead.

What rendered the confusion worse, perversely
Our bombers had chosen that moment to set out for Germany.
Harry, do they ever collide?
I do not think it has ever happened,
Oh my bride, my bride.

Stevie Smith, April 13, 2020

THE LAST WORDS OF MY ENGLISH GRANDMOTHER

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed –

Wrinkled and nearly blind

she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,

Gimme something to eat –
They're starving me –
I'm all right – I won't go
to the hospital.No, no, no

Give me something to eat!
Let me take you
to the hospital, I said
and after you are well

you can do as you please.
She smiled, Yes
you do what you please first
then I can do what I please –

Oh, oh, oh! she cried
as the ambulance men lifted
her to the stretcher –
Is this what you call

making me comfortable?
By now her mind was clear –
Oh you think you're smart
you young people,

she said, but I'll tell you
you don't know anything.
Then we started.
On the way

we passed a long row
of elms. She looked at them
awhile out of
the ambulance window and said,

What are all those
fuzzy looking things out there?
Trees? Well, I'm tired
of them and rolled her head away.

William Carlos Williams, April 10, 2020

OLD PEOPLE'S HOME

All are limitory, but each has her own
nuance of damage. The elite can dress and decent themselves,
are ambulant with a single stick, adroit
to read a book all through, or play the slow movements of
easy sonatas. (Yet, perhaps their very
carnal freedom is their spirit's bane: intelligent
of what has happened and why, they are obnoxious
to a glum beyond tears.) Then come those on wheels, the average
majority, who endure T.V. and, led by
lenient therapists, do community-singing, then
the loners, muttering in Limbo, and last
the terminally incompetent, as improvident,
unspeakable, impeccable as the plants
they parody. (Plants may sweat profusely but never
sully themselves.) One tie, though, unites them: all
appeared when the world, though much was awry there, was more
spacious, more comely to look at, it's Old Ones
with an audience and secular station. Then a child,
in dismay with Mamma, could refuge with Gran
to be revalued and told a story. As of now,
we all know what to expect, but their generation
is the first to fade like this, not at home but assigned
to a numbered frequent ward, stowed out of conscience
as unpopular luggage.

As I ride the subway
to spend half-an-hour with one, I revisage
who she was in the pomp and sumpture of her hey-day,
when week-end visits were a presumptive joy,
not a good work. Am I cold to wish for a speedy
painless dormition, pray, as I know she prays,
that God or Nature will abrupt her earthly function?

Wystan Hugh Auden, April 6, 2020

AWAKING IN NEW YORK

Curtains forcing their will
against the wind,
children sleep,
exchanging dreams with
seraphim. The city

drags itself awake on
subway straps; and
I, an alarm, awake as a
rumor of war,
lie stretching into dawn,
unmasked and unheeded.

Maya Angelou, April 3, 2020

DISTANT RAINFALL

Like mourning women veiled to the feet
Tall slender rainstorms walk slowly against
gray cloud along the far verge.
The ocean is green where the river empties,
Dull gray between the points of the headlands,
purple where the women walk.
What do they want? Whom are they mourning?
What hero's dust in the urn between the two
hands hidden in the veil?
Titaness after Titaness proudly
Bearing her tender magnificent sorrow at her heart,
the lost battle's beauty.

Robinson Jeffers, March 30, 2020

I DREAMED THAT IN A CITY DARK AS PARIS

I dreamed that in a city dark as Paris
I stood alone in a deserted square.
The night was trembling with a violet
Expectancy. At the far edge it moved
And rumbled; on that flickering horizon
The guns were pumping color in the sky.

There was the Front. But I was lonely here,
Left behind, abandoned by the army.
The empty city and the empty square
Was my inhabitation, my unrest.
The helmet with its vestige of a crest,
The rifle in my hands, long out of date,

The belt I wore, the trailing overcoat
And hobnail boots, were those of a poilu.
I was the man, as awkward as a bear.

Over the rooftops where cathedrals loomed
In speaking majesty, two aeroplanes
Forlorn as birds, appeared. Then growing large,
The German Taube and the Nieuport Scout,
They chased each other tumbling through the sky,
Till one streamed down on fire to the earth.

These wars have been so great, they are forgotten
Like the Egyptian dynasts. My confrere
In whose thick boots I stood, were you amazed
To wander through my brain four decades later
As I have wandered in a dream through yours?

The violence of waking life disrupts
The order of our death. Strange dreams occur,
For dreams are licensed as they never were.

Louis Simpson, March 27, 2020

I REMEMBER

By the first of August
the invisible beetles began
to snore and the grass was
as tough as hemp and was
no color – no more than
the sand was a color and
we had worn our bare feet
bare since the twentieth
of June and there were times
we forgot to wind up your
alarm clock and some nights
we took our gin warm and neat
from old jelly glasses while
the sun blew out of sight
like a red picture hat and
one day I tied my hair back
with a ribbon and you said
that I looked almost like

a puritan lady and what
I remember best is that
the door to your room was
the door to mine.

Anne Sexton, March 23, 2020

THE READER

She is going back, these days, to the great stories
That charmed her younger mind. A shaded light
Shines on the nape half-shadowed by her curls,
And a page turns now with a scuffing sound.
Onward they come again, the orphans reaching
For a first handhold in a stony world,
The young provincials who at last look down
On the city's maze, and will descend into it,
The serious girl, once more, who would live nobly,
The sly one who aspires to marry so,
The young man bent on glory, and that other
Who seeks a burden. Knowing as she does
What will become of them in bloody field
Or Tuscan garden, it may be that at times
She sees their first and final selves at once,
As a god might to whom all time is now.
Or, having lived so much herself, perhaps
She meets them this time with a wiser eye,
Noting that Julien's calculating head
Is from the first too severed from his heart.
But the true wonder of it is that she,
For all that she may know of consequences,
Still turns enchanted to the next bright page
Like some Natasha in the ballroom door –
Caught in the flow of things wherever bound,
The blind delight of being, ready still
To enter life on life and see them through.

Richard Wilbur, March 20, 2020

DUTCH MISTRESS

A hotel in whose ledgers departures are
more prominent than arrivals.
With wet Koh-i-noors the October rain
strokes what's left of the naked brain.
In this country laid flat for the sake of rivers,
beer smells of Germany and the seaguls are
in the air like a page's soiled corners.
Morning enters the premises with a coroner's
punctuality, puts its ear
to the ribs of a cold radiator, detects sub-zero:
the afterlife has to start somewhere.
Correspondingly, the angelic curls
grow more blond, the skin gains its distant, lordly
white, while the bedding already coils
desperately in the basement laundry.

Joseph Brodsky, March 16, 2020

FIRST DEATH IN NOVA SCOTIA

In the cold, cold parlor
my mother laid out Arthur
beneath the chromographs:
Edward, Prince of Wales,
with Princess Alexandra,
and King George with Queen Mary.
Below them on the table
stood a stuffed loon
shot and stuffed by Uncle
Arthur, Arthur's father.

Since Uncle Arthur fired
a bullet into him,
he hadn't said a word.
He kept his own counsel
on his white, frozen lake,
the marble-topped table.
His breast was deep and white,
cold and caressable;
his eyes were red glass,
much to be desired.

"Come," said my mother,
"Come and say good-bye
to your little cousin Arthur."
I was lifted up and given
one lily of the valley
to put in Arthur's hand.
Arthur's coffin was
a little frosted cake,
and the red-eyed loon eyed it
from his white, frozen lake.

Arthur was very small.
He was all white, like a doll
that hadn't been painted yet.
Jack Frost had started to paint him
the way he always painted
the Maple Leaf (Forever).
He had just begun on his hair,
a few red strokes, and then
Jack Frost had dropped the brush
and left him white, forever.

The gracious royal couples
were warm in red and ermine;
their feet were well wrapped up
in the ladies' ermine trains.
They invited Arthur to be
the smallest page at court.
But how could Arthur go,
clutching his tiny lily,
with his eyes shut up so tight
and the roads deep in snow?

Elizabeth Bishop, March 13, 2020

THE BALL POEM

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball.
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over – there it is in the water!
No use to say 'O there are other balls':

An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him,
A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take balls,
Balls will be lost always, little boy,
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.
He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up
And gradually light returns to the street,
A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight.
Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
Floor of the harbour . . . I am everywhere,
I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
With all that move me, under the water
Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

John Berryman, March 9, 2020

THERE WILL BE NO PEACE

Though mild clear weather
Smile again on the shore of your esteem
And its colours come back, the storm has changed you:
You will not forget, ever,
The darkness blotting out hope, the gale
Prophecying your downfall.

You must live with your knowledge.
Way back, beyond, outside of you are others,
In moonless absences you never heard of,
Who have certainly heard of you,
Beings of unknown number and gender:
And they do not like you.

What have you done to them?
Nothing? Nothing is not an answer:
You will come to believe – how can you help it? –
That you did, you did do something;

You will find yourself wishing you could make them laugh,
You will long for their friendship.

There will be no peace.
Fight back, then, with such courage as you have
And every unchivalrous dodge you know of,
Clear on your conscience on this:
Their cause, if they had one, is nothing to them now;
They hate for hate's sake.

Wystan Hugh Auden, March 6, 2020

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My friend attacks my friend!
Oh Battle picturesque!
Then I turn Soldier too,
And he turns Satirist!
How martial is this place!
Had I a mighty gun
I think I'd shoot the human race
And then to glory run!

Emily Dickinson, March 2, 2020

THINGS SHOULDN'T BE SO HARD

A life should leave
deep tracks:
ruts where she
went out and back
to get the mail
or move the hose
around the yard;
where she used to
stand before the sink,
a worn-out place;
beneath her hand
the china knobs
rubbed down to
white pastilles;

the switch she
used to feel for
in the dark
almost erased.
Her things should
keep her marks.
The passage
of a life should show;
it should abrade.
And when life stops,
a certain space –
however small –
should be left scarred
by the grand and
damaging parade.
Things shouldn't
be so hard.

Kay Ryan, February 28, 2020

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AT AN AIR-STATION

Delay, well, travellers must expect
Delay. For how long? No one seems to know.
With all the luggage weighed, the tickets checked,
It can't be long... We amble too and fro,
Sit in steel chairs, buy cigarettes and sweets
And tea, unfold the papers. Ought we to smile,
Perhaps make friends? No: in the race for seats
You're best alone. Friendship is not worth while.

Six hours pass: if I'd gone by boat last night
I'd be there now. Well, it's too late for that.
The kiosk girl is yawning. I fell stale,
Stupified, by inaction – and, as light
Begins to ebb outside, by fear, I set
So much on this Assumption. Now it's failed.

Philip Larkin, February 24, 2020

AVE CAESAR

No bitterness: our ancestors did it.
They were only ignorant and hopeful, they wanted freedom but wealth too.
Their children will learn to hope for a Caesar.
Or rather – for we are not aquiline Romans but soft mixed colonists –
Some kindly Sicilian tyrant who'll keep
Poverty and Carthage off until the Romans arrive,
We are easy to manage, a gregarious people,
Full of sentiment, clever at mechanics, and we love our luxuries.

Robinson Jeffers, February 21, 2020

CROW'S THEOLOGY

Crow realized God loved him
Otherwise, he would have dropped dead.
So that was proved.
Crow reclined, marvelling, on his heart-beat.

And he realized that God spoke Crow –
Just existing was His revelation.

But what Loved the stones and spoke stone?
They seemed to exist too.
And what spoke that strange silence
After his clamour of caws faded?

And what loved the shot-pellets
That dribbled from those strung-up
mummifying crows?
What spoke the silence of lead?

Crow realized there were two Gods –
One of them much bigger than the other
Loving his enemies
And having all the weapons.

Ted Hughes, February 17, 2020

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

*The Sun's in its orbit,
yet I feel morbid.*

Act 1

Prologue

Ladies and gentlemen and the day!
All ye made of sweet human clay!
Let me tell you: you are o'okay.

Our show is to start without much delay.
So let me inform you right away:
this is not a play but the end of the play

that has been on for some eighty years.
It received its boos and received its cheers.
It won't last for long, one fears.

Men and machines lie to rest or rust.
Nothing arrives as quick as the Past.
What we'll show you presently is the cast

of characters who have ceased to act.
Each of these lives has become a fact
from which you presumably can subtract

but to which you blissfully cannot add.
The consequences of that could be bad
for your looks or your blood.

For they are the cause, you are the effect.
because they lie flat, you are still erect.
Citizens! Don't neglect

history! History holds the clue
to your taxes and to your flu,
to what comes out of the blue.

We'll show you battlefields, bedrooms, labs,
sinking ships and escaping subs,
cradles, weddings, divorces, slabs.

Folks! The curtain's about to rise!

What you'll see won't look like a Paradise.
Still, the Past may moisten a pair of eyes,

for its prices were lower than our sales,
for it was ruining cities: not blood cells;
for on the horizon it's not taut sails

but the wind that fails.

Joseph Brodsky, February 14, 2020

EDWARD LIR

Left by his friend to breakfast alone on the white
Italian shore, his Terrible Demon arose
Over his shoulder; he wept to himself in the night,
A dirty landscape-painter who hated his nose.

The legions of cruel inquisitive They
Were so many and big like dogs: he was upset
By Germans and boats; affection was miles away:
But guided by tears he successfully reached his Regret.
How prodigious the welcome was. Flowers took his hat

And bore him off to introduce him to the tongs;
The demon's false nose made the table laugh; a cat
Soon had him waltzing madly, let him squeeze her hand;
Words pushed him to the piano to sing comic songs;

And children swarmed to him like settlers. He became a land.

Wystan Hugh Auden, February 10, 2020

ALONE

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing

And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Maya Angelou, February 7, 2020

IN THE STUDY

He enters, and mute on the edge of a chair
Sits a thin-faced lady, a stranger there,
A type of decayed gentility;

And by some small signs he well can guess
That she comes to him almost breakfastless.
"I have called – I hope I do not err –
I am looking for a purchaser
Of some score volumes of the works
Of eminent divines I own, –
Left by my father – though it irks
My patience to offer them." And she smiles
As if necessity were unknown;
"But the truth of it is that oftenwhiles
I have wished, as I am fond of art,
To make my rooms a little smart,
And these old books are so in the way."
And lightly still she laughs to him,
As if to sell were a mere gay whim,
And that, to be frank, Life were indeed
To her not vinegar and gall,
But fresh and honey-like; and Need
No household skeleton at all.

Thomas Hardy, February 3, 2020

MARY'S SONG

The Sunday lamb cracks in its fat.
The fat
Sacrifices its opacity....

A window, holy gold.
The fire makes it precious,
The same fire

Melting the tallow heretics,
Ousting the Jews.
Their thick palls float

Over the cicatrix of Poland, burnt-out
Germany.
They do not die.

Grey birds obsess my heart,
Mouth-ash, ash of eye.
They settle. On the high

Precipice
That emptied one man into space
The ovens glowed like heavens, incandescent.

It is a heart,
This holocaust I walk in,
O golden child the world will kill and eat.

Sylvia Plath, January 31, 2020

THE PAST IS THE PRESENT

If external action is effete
and rhyme is outmoded,
I shall revert to you,
Habakkuk, as when in a Bible class
the teacher was speaking of unrhymed verse.
He said – and I think I repeat his exact words –
"Hebrew poetry is prose
with a sort of heightened consciousness." Ecstasy affords
the occasion and expediency determines the form.

Marianne Moor, January 27, 2020

SEPTEMBER 1, 1939

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now

That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
"I will be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work,"
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same

Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Wystan Hugh Auden, January 24, 2020

SESTINA

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother
sits in the kitchen with the child
beside the Little Marvel Stove,
reading the jokes from the almanac,
laughing and talking to hide her tears.

She thinks that her equinoctial tears
and the rain that beats on the roof of the house
were both foretold by the almanac,
but only known to a grandmother.
The iron kettle sings on the stove.
She cuts some bread and says to the child,

It's time for tea now; but the child
is watching the teakettle's small hard tears
dance like mad on the hot black stove,
the way the rain must dance on the house.
Tidying up, the old grandmother
hangs up the clever almanac

on its string. Birdlike, the almanac
hovers half open above the child,
hovers above the old grandmother
and her teacup full of dark brown tears.
She shivers and says she thinks the house
feels chilly, and puts more wood in the stove.

It was to be, says the Marvel Stove.
I know what I know, says the almanac.
With crayons the child draws a rigid house
and a winding pathway. Then the child
puts in a man with buttons like tears
and shows it proudly to the grandmother.

But secretly, while the grandmother

busies herself about the stove,
the little moons fall down like tears
from between the pages of the almanac
into the flower bed the child
has carefully placed in the front of the house.

Time to plant tears, says the almanac.
The grandmother sings to the marvelous stove
and the child draws another inscrutable house.

Elizabeth Bishop, January 20, 2020

HOWL

III

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland
where you're madder than I am
I'm with you in Rockland
where you must feel very strange
I'm with you in Rockland
where you imitate the shade of my mother
I'm with you in Rockland
where you've murdered your twelve secretaries
I'm with you in Rockland
where you laugh at this invisible humor
I'm with you in Rockland
where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter
I'm with you in Rockland
where your condition has become serious and
is reported on the radio
I'm with you in Rockland
where the faculties of the skull no longer admit
the worms of the senses
I'm with you in Rockland
where you drink the tea of the breasts of the
spinsters of Utica
I'm with you in Rockland
where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the
harpies of the Bronx
I'm with you in Rockland
where you scream in a straightjacket that you're
losing the game of the actual pingpong of the abyss

I'm with you in Rockland
where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul
is innocent and immortal it should never die
ungodly in an armed madhouse
I'm with you in Rockland
where fifty more shocks will never return your
soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a
cross in the void
I'm with you in Rockland
where you accuse your doctors of insanity and
plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the
fascist national Golgotha
I'm with you in Rockland
where you will split the heavens of Long Island
and resurrect your living human Jesus from the
superhuman tomb
I'm with you in Rockland
where there are twenty-five-thousand mad com-
rades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale
I'm with you in Rockland
where we hug and kiss the United States under
our bedsheets the United States that coughs all
night and won't let us sleep
I'm with you in Rockland
where we wake up electrified out of the coma
by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the
roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the
hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls col-
lapse O skinny legions run outside O starry
spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is
here O victory forget your underwear we're free
I'm with you in Rockland
in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-
journey on the highway across America in tears
to the door of my cottage in the Western night

Allen Ginsberg, January 17, 2020

POEM IN THREE PARTS

1

Oh, on an early morning I think I shall live forever!
I am wrapped in my joyful flesh,
As the grass is wrapped in its clouds of green.

2

Rising from a bed, where I dreamt
Of long rides past castles and hot coals,
The sun lies happily on my knees;
I have suffered and survived the night,
Bathed in dark water, like any blade of grass.

3

The strong leaves of the box-elder tree,
Plunging in the wind, call us to disappear
Into the wilds of the universe,
Where we shall sit at the foot of a plant,
And live forever, like the dust.

Robert Bly, January 13, 2020

NO THINGS

This love for the petty things,
part natural from the slow of childhood,
part a literary affectation,

this attention to the morning flower
and later in the day to a fly
strolling along the rim of a wineglass –

are we just avoiding the one true destiny,
when we do that? averting our eyes from
Philip Larkin who waits for us in an undertaker's coat?

The leafless branches against the sky
will not save anyone from the infinity of death,
nor will the sugar bowl or the sugar spoon on the table.

So why bother with the checkerboard lighthouse?
Why waste time on the sparrow,
or the wildflowers along the roadside

when we should all be alone in our rooms
throwing ourselves against the wall of life
and the opposite wall of death,

the door locked behind us
as we hurl ourselves at the question of meaning,
and the enigma of our origins?

What good is the firefly,
the droplet running along the green leaf,
or even the bar of soap spinning around the bathtub

when ultimately we are meant to be
banging away on the mystery
as hard as we can and to hell with the neighbors?

banging away on nothingness itself,
some with the foreheads,
others with the maul of sense, the raised jawbone of poetry.

Billy Collins, January 10, 2020

MY LAST DUCHESS

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – which I have not – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark” – and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse –
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning, January 7, 2020

DREAM SONG 149

The world is gradually becoming a place
where I do not care to be anymore. Can Delmore die?
I don't suppose
in all them years a day went ever by
without a loving thought for him. Welladay.

In the brightness of his promise,

unstained, I saw him thro' the mist of the actual
blazing with insight, warm with gossip
thro' all our Harvard years
when both of us were just becoming known
I got him out of a police-station once, in Washington, the world is tref
and grief too astray for tears.

I imagine you have heard the terrible news,
that Delmore Schwartz is dead, miserably & alone,
in New York: he sang me a song I am the Brooklyn poet Delmore Schwartz
Harms & the child I sing, two parents' torts'
when he was young & gift-strong.

John Berryman, January 3, 2020