

OLD

I'm afraid of needles.
I'm tired of rubber sheets and tubes.
I'm tired of faces that I don't know
and now I think that death is starting.
Death starts like a dream,
full of objects and my sister's laughter.
We are young and we are walking
and picking wild blueberries.
all the way to Damariscotta.
Oh Susan, she cried.
you've stained your new waist.
Sweet taste —
my mouth so full
and the sweet blue running out
all the way to Damariscotta.
What are you doing? Leave me alone!
Can't you see I'm dreaming?
In a dream you are never eighty.

Anne Sexton, December 31, 2023

THE POEM UNWRITTEN

For weeks the poem of your body,
of my hands upon your body
stroking, sweeping, in the rite of
worship, going
their way of wonder down
from neck-pulse to breast-hair to level
belly to cock —
for weeks that poem, that prayer
unwritten.
That poem unwritten, the act
left to the mind, undone. The years
a forest of giant stones, of fossil stumps,
blocking the altar.

Denise Levertov, December 29, 2023

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
 And Mourners to and fro
 Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
 That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum –
 Kept beating – beating – till I thought
 My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
 And creak across my Soul
 With those same Boots of Lead, again,
 Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
 And Being, but an Ear,
 And I, and Silence, some strange Race
 Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
 And I dropped down, and down –
 And hit a World, at every plunge,
 And Finished knowing – then –

Emily Dickinson, December 25, 2023

HELL

“Circles of Dante – and in that dirt-roofed cave,
 each family had marked off its yard of space;
 no light except their coal fires laid in buckets,
 no draft of air except their smoke, no water,
 no hole to hide the excrement. I walked on,
 afraid of stumbling on the helpless bodies,
 afraid of circling. I soon forgot the Fascist
 or German deserters I was hunting—
 screaming children, old men, old women, coughing and groaning.
 Then hit my head on the low dirt, and reached out
 to keep from falling or hurting anyone;
 and what I touched was not the filthy floor:

a woman's hand returning my quick grasp,
her finger tracing the lifeline on my palm."

Robert Lowell, December 22, 2023

CONVERSATION

The tumult in the heart
keeps asking questions.
And then it stops and undertakes to answer
in the same tone of voice.
No one could tell the difference.

Uninnocent, these conversations start,
and then engage the senses,
only half-meaning to.
And then there is no choice,
and then there is no sense;

until a name
and all its connotation are the same.

Elizabeth Bishop, December 18, 2023

SMALL WIRE

My faith
is a great weight
hung on a small wire,
as doth the spider
hang her baby on a thin web,
as doth the vine,
twiggy and wooden,
hold up grapes
like eyeballs,
as many angels
dance on the head of a pin.

God does not need
too much wire to keep Him there,
just a thin vein,

with blood pushing back and forth in it,
and some love.
As it has been said:
Love and a cough
cannot be concealed.
Even a small cough.
Even a small love.
So if you have only a thin wire,
God does not mind.
He will enter your hands
as easily as ten cents used to
bring forth a Coke.

Anne Sexton, December 15, 2023

THE RAINWALKERS

An old man whose black face
shines golden-brown as wet pebbles
under the streetlamp, is walking two mongrel dogs of dis-
proportionate size, in the rain,
in the relaxed early-evening avenue.

The small sleek one wants to stop,
docile to the imploring soul of the trashbasket,
but the young tall curly one
wants to walk on; the glistening sidewalkentices
him to arcane happenings.

Increasing rain. The old bareheaded man
smiles and grumbles to himself.
The lights change: the avenue's
endless nave echoes notes of
liturgical red. He drifts

between his dogs' desires.
The three of them are enveloped -
turning now to go crosstown - in their
sense of each other, of pleasure,
of weather, of corners,
of leisurely tensions between them
and private silence.

Denise Levertov, December 11, 2023

SVARTA VYKORT

I

Almanackan fullskriven, framtid okänd.
Kabeln nynnär folkvisan utan hemland.
Snöfall i det blystillå havet. Skuggor
brottas på kajen.

II

Mitt i livet händer att döden kommer
och tar mått på människan. Det besöket
glöms och livet fortsätter. Men kostymen
sys i det tysta.

Tomas Tranströmer, December 8, 2023

CHEMINE DE FER

Alone on the railroad track
I walked with pounding heart.
The ties were too close together
or maybe too far apart.

The scenery was impoverished:
scrub-pine and oak; beyond
its mingled gray-green foliage
I saw the little pond

where the dirty old hermit lives,
lie like an old tear
holding onto its injuries
lucidly year after year.

The hermit shot off his shot-gun
and the tree by his cabin shook.
Over the pond went a ripple
The pet hen went chook-chook.

"Love should be put into action!"
screamed the old hermit.
Across the pond an echo
tried and tried to confirm it.

Elizabeth Bishop, December 4, 2023

BLACKBERRYING

Nobody in the lane, and nothing, nothing but blackberries,
Blackberries on either side, though on the right mainly,
A blackberry alley, going down in hooks, and a sea
Somewhere at the end of it, heaving. Blackberries
Big as the ball of my thumb, and dumb as eyes
Ebon in the hedges, fat
With blue-red juices. These they squander on my fingers.
I had not asked for such a blood sisterhood; they must love me.
They accommodate themselves to my milkbottle, flattening their sides.

Overhead go the choughs in black, cacophonous flocks —
Bits of burnt paper wheeling in a blown sky.
Theirs is the only voice, protesting, protesting.
I do not think the sea will appear at all.
The high, green meadows are glowing, as if lit from within.
I come to one bush of berries so ripe it is a bush of flies,
Hanging their bluegreen bellies and their wing panes in a Chinese screen.
The honey-feast of the berries has stunned them; they believe in heaven.
One more hook, and the berries and bushes end.

The only thing to come now is the sea.
From between two hills a sudden wind funnels at me,
Slapping its phantom laundry in my face.
These hills are too green and sweet to have tasted salt.
I follow the sheep path between them. A last hook brings me
To the hills' northern face, and the face is orange rock
That looks out on nothing, nothing but a great space
Of white and pewter lights, and a din like silversmiths
Beating and beating at an intractable metal.

Sylvia Plath, December 1, 2023

PEOPLE AT NIGHT

A night that cuts between you and you
and you and you and you
and me : jostles us apart, a man elbowing
through a crowd. We won't

look for each other, either-
wander off, each alone, not looking
in the slow crowd. Among sideshows
under movie signs,
pictures made of a million lights,
giants that move and again move
again, above a cloud of thick smells,
franks, roasted nutmeats-

Or going up to some apartment, yours
or yours, finding
someone sitting in the dark:
who is it really? So you switch the
light on to see: you know the name but
who is it?

But you won't see.

The fluorescent light flickers sullenly, a
pause. But you command. It grabs
each face and holds it up
by the hair for you, mask after mask.

You and you and I repeat
gestures that make do when speech
has failed and talk
and talk, laughing, saying
'I', and 'I',
meaning 'Anybody'.
No one.

Denise Levertov, November 27, 2023

WORDS

Be careful of words,
even the miraculous ones.
For the miraculous we do our best,

sometimes they swarm like insects
and leave not a sting but a kiss.
They can be as good as fingers.
They can be as trusty as the rock
you stick your bottom on.
But they can be both daisies and bruises.
Yet I am in love with words.
They are doves falling out of the ceiling.
They are six holy oranges sitting in my lap.
They are the trees, the legs of summer,
and the sun, its passionate face.
Yet often they fail me.
I have so much I want to say,
so many stories, images, proverbs, etc.
But the words aren't good enough,
the wrong ones kiss me.
Sometimes I fly like an eagle
but with the wings of a wren.
But I try to take care
and be gentle to them.
Words and eggs must be handled with care.
Once broken they are impossible
things to repair.

Anne Sexton, November 24, 2023

VULTURE

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside
Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture wheeling high up
in heaven,
And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit narrowing, I
understood then
That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the flight-feathers
Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer.
I could see the naked red head between the great wings
Bear downward staring. I said, "My dear bird, we are wasting time here.
These old bones will still work; they are not for you."
But how beautiful he looked, gliding down
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering
away in the sea-light over the precipice. I tell you solemnly
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten
by that beak and become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes—

What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment;
What a life after death.

Robinson Jeffers, November 20, 2023

I AM VERTICAL

But I would rather be horizontal.
I am not a tree with my root in the soil
Sucking up minerals and motherly love
So that each March I may gleam into leaf,
Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed
Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
Unknowing I must soon unpetal.
Compared with me, a tree is immortal
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,
The trees and the flowers have been strewing their cool odors.
I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.
Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping
I must most perfectly resemble them --
Thoughts gone dim.
It is more natural to me, lying down.
Then the sky and I are in open conversation,
And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:
Then the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me.

Sylvia Plath, November 17, 2023

HER KIND

I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night;
dreaming evil, I have done my hitch
over the plain houses, light by light:
lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.
I have been her kind.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,
closets, silks, innumerable goods;
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:
whining, rearranging the disaligned.
A woman like that is misunderstood.
I have been her kind.

I have ridden in your cart, driver,
waved my nude arms at villages going by,
learning the last bright routes, survivor
where your flames still bite my thigh
and my ribs crack where your wheels wind.
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
I have been her kind.

Anne Sexton, November 13, 2023

MIDDLE AGE

Now the midwinter grind
is on me, New York
drills through my nerves,
as I walk
the chewed-up streets.

At forty-five,
what next, what next?
At every corner,
I meet my Father,
my age, still alive.

Father, forgive me
my injuries,
as I forgive
those I
have injured!

You never climbed
Mount Sion, yet left
dinosaur
death-steps on the crust,
where I must walk.

Robert Lowell, November 10, 2023

LETTER TO N. Y.

For Louise Crane

In your next letter I wish you'd say
where you are going and what you are doing;
how are the plays and after the plays
what other pleasures you're pursuing:

taking cabs in the middle of the night,
driving as if to save your soul
where the road goes round and round the park
and the meter glares like a moral owl,

and the trees look so queer and green
standing alone in big black caves
and suddenly you're in a different place
where everything seems to happen in waves,

and most of the jokes you just can't catch,
like dirty words rubbed off a slate,
and the songs are loud but somehow dim
and it gets so terribly late,

and coming out of the brownstone house
to the gray sidewalk, the watered street,
one side of the buildings rises with the sun
like a glistening field of wheat.

— Wheat, not oats, dear. I'm afraid
if it's wheat it's none of your sowing,
nevertheless I'd like to know
what you are doing and where you are going.

Elizabeth Bishop, November 6, 2023

SOILED DOVE

Let us be honest; the lady was not a harlot until she married a corporation lawyer who picked her from a Ziegfeld chorus.

Before then she never took anybody's money and paid for her silk stockings out of what she earned singing and dancing.

She loved one man and he loved six women and the game was changing her looks, calling for more and more massage money and high coin for the beauty doctors.

Now she drives a long, underslung motor car all by herself, reads in the day's papers what her husband is doing to the inter-state commerce commission, requires a larger corsage from year to year, and wonders sometimes how one man is coming along with six women.

Carl Sandburg, November 3, 2023

WHAT WERE THEY LIKE?

Did the people of Viet Nam
use lanterns of stone?

Did they hold ceremonies
to reverence the opening of buds?

Were they inclined to quiet laughter?

Did they use bone and ivory,
jade and silver, for ornament?

Had they an epic poem?

Did they distinguish between speech and singing?

Sir, their light hearts turned to stone.

It is not remembered whether in gardens
stone gardens illumined pleasant ways.

Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom,
but after their children were killed
there were no more buds.

Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.

A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy.

All the bones were charred.

it is not remembered. Remember,
most were peasants; their life
was in rice and bamboo.

When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies
and the water buffalo stepped surely along terraces,
maybe fathers told their sons old tales.
When bombs smashed those mirrors
there was time only to scream.
There is an echo yet
of their speech which was like a song.
It was reported their singing resembled
the flight of moths in moonlight.
Who can say? It is silent now.

Denise Levertov, October 30, 2023

JESUS AND ME BEFORE THE TOWN ROOSTER

His call is no longer very important.
The beating of his wings not any more.
A high chimney through the roof pierced
by its scream wakes us long before.

Lo how his wings are cropped away,
and his spurs blunt, quite blunt now.
Dawns of the siren-woken day
to him are all unknown anyhow.

His voice used to have the pride of a prince,
Daybreak used to shiver on crops the dew.
It gave armies at midnight the creeps
Before the battle, signaling his wrath true.

And now, with this urban soot
he tends to grow blacker every day.
In a little while no one will know
Whether he's a rooster or a crow.

Therefore let him for once grow
wings for a journey distant and high,
let him flock with swallows swift
and to a kind of south with them fly.

*Nikola Šop (Translated by Zvonimir Radeljković, Omer Hadžiselimović and
Keith Doubt), October 27, 2023*

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Unit, like Death, for Whom?
True, like the Tomb,
Who tells no secret
Told to Him —
The Grave is strict —
Tickets admit
Just two — the Bearer —
And the Borne —
And seat — just One —
The Living — tell —
The Dying — but a Syllable —
The Coy Dead — None —
No Chatter — here — no tea —
So Babbler, and Bohea — stay there —
But Gravity — and Expectation — and Fear —
A tremor just, that All's not sure.

Emily Dickinson, October 23, 2023

SONNET 60

Like as the waves make towards the pebb'l'd shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

William Shakespeare, October 20, 2023

THE EVIL SEEKERS

We are born with luck
which is to say with gold in our mouth.
As new and smooth as a grape,
as pure as a pond in Alaska,
as good as the stem of a green bean —
we are born and that ought to be enough,
we ought to be able to carry on from that
but one must learn about evil,
learn what is subhuman,
learn how the blood pops out like a scream,
one must see the night
before one can realize the day,
one must listen hard to the animal within,
one must walk like a sleepwalker
on the edge of a roof,
one must throw some part of her body
into the devil's mouth.
Odd stuff, you'd say.
But I'd say
you must die a little,
have a book of matches go off in your hand,
see your best friend copying your exam,
visit an Indian reservation and see
their plastic feathers,
the dead dream.
One must be a prisoner just once to hear
the lock twist into his gut.
After all that
one is free to grasp at the trees, the stones,
the sky, the birds that make sense out of air.
But even in a telephone booth
evil can seep out of the receiver
and we must cover it with a mattress,
and then tear it from its roots
and bury it,
bury it.

Anne Sexton, October 16, 2023

LILIES

In both field and mountain the white lilies have bloomed

So in field and mountain the lily seems to speak
In mount and dale every lily
Seems to blaze

And when so pensive among the blooming flowers
You silently
Pass

Maybe like me you think of those
Who passed silently by here
Before you

Among the blooming white flowers

Wondering just as you do
What are these white
Lilies

Are they someone's rejoicings
Or
Wailings

The signs of those who once passed
In these pathless regions and
Hopelessly
Trode

In search of white flowers

Mak Dizdar (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), October 13, 2023

CLIMBING THE HILL WITHIN THE DEAFENING WIND

Climbing the hill within the deafening wind
The blood unfurled itself, was proudly borne
High over meadows where white horses stood;
Up the steep woods it echoed like a horn
Till at the summit under shining trees
It cried: Submission is the only good;
Let me become an instrument sharply stringed

For all things to strike music as they please.
How to recall such music, when the street
Darkens? Among the rain and stone places
I find only an ancient sadness falling,
Only hurrying and troubled faces,
The walking of girls' vulnerable feet,
The heart in its own endless silence kneeling.

Philip Larkin, October 9, 2023

FÄNGELSE

Pojken dricker mjölk
och somnar trygg i sin cell,
en moder av sten.

Tomas Tranströmer, October 6, 2023

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1914

1914. Nineteen-fourteen! Oh, nineteen-fourteen!
Ah, some years shouldn't be let out of quarantine!
Well, this is one of them. Things get raw:
In Paris, the editor of Figaro
is shot dead by the wife of the French finance
minister, for printing this lady's - sans
merci, should we add? - steamy letters to
- ah, who cares!.. And apparently it's c'est tout
also for a socialist and pacifist
of all times, Jean Jaures. He who shook his fist
at the Parliament urging hot heads to cool it,
dies, as he dines, by some bigot's bullet
in a cafe. Ah, those early, single
shots of Nineteen-fourteen! ah, the index finger
of an assassin! ah, white puffs in the blue acrylic!..
There is something pastoral, nay! idyllic
about these murders. About that Irish enema
the Brits suffer in Dublin again. And about Panama
Canal's grand opening. Or about that doc
and his open heart surgery on his dog...
Well, to make these things disappear forever,

the Archduke is arriving at Sarajevo;
and there is in the crowd that unshaven, timid
youth, with his handgun.... (*To be continued*).

Joseph Brodsky, October 2, 2023

DEMON

*A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand
over the demon's mouth sometimes... – D. H. Lawrence*

I mentioned my demon to a friend
and the friend swam in oil and came forth to me
greasy and cryptic
and said,
"I'm thinking of taking him out of hock.
I pawned him years ago."

Who would buy?
The pawned demon,
Yellowing with forgetfulness
and hand at his throat?
Take him out of hock, my friend,
but beware of the grief
that will fly into your mouth like a bird.

My demon,
too often undressed,
too often a crucifix I bring forth,
too often a dead daisy I give water to
too often the child I give birth to
and then abort, nameless, nameless...
earthless.

Oh demon within,
I am afraid and seldom put my hand up
to my mouth and stitch it up
covering you, smothering you
from the public voyeury eyes
of my typewriter keys.
If I should pawn you,
what bullion would they give for you,
what pennies, swimming in their copper kisses

what bird on its way to perishing?

No.

No.

I accept you,
you come with the dead who people my dreams,
who walk all over my desk
(as in Mother, cancer blossoming on her
Best & Co. tits--
waltzing with her tissue paper ghost)
the dead, who give sweets to the diabetic in me,
who give bolts to the seizure of roses
that sometimes fly in and out of me.

Yes.

Yes.

I accept you, demon.
I will not cover your mouth.
If it be man I love, apple laden and foul
or if it be woman I love, sick unto her blood
and its sugary gasses and tumbling branches.

Demon come forth,
even if it be God I call forth
standing like a carrion,
wanting to eat me,
starting at the lips and tongue.
And me wanting to glide into His spoils,
I take bread and wine,
and the demon farts and giggles,
at my letting God out of my mouth
anonymous woman
at the anonymous altar.

Anne Sexton, September 29, 2023

DIVINE CIRCUS

Today I ache for harlequins
and sad and dumb clowns.
on my wounded heart, Jesus,
apply please some cotton balms.

Today I would like to be very ugly,
to hear throbbing taunts of the mob,
to be hunch-backed and limpy,
to have a long nose, very long.

The ache of clowns and harlequins,
my Jesus, afflicts me so.
With the monkey, who calmly preens
in sight of everybody, to them let us go.

Let us go also with the bear in pants
dancing with the stick cleverly,
and later, his old cap offering
humbly asking for donations paltry.

Let us also follow the drum, whose grey skin
is so holy and so dear.
Since the drum is a dead donkey,
its implacable beat we still hear.

Thus let us go to clowns and harlequins.
My Jesus holy, on this very day.
We shall for them of severe pain die,
And they for us of laughter pass away.

Nikola Šop (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 25, 2023

EMINE

Last night, returning from the warm hamam,
I passed by the garden of the old imam,
And lo, in the garden, in the shade of a jasmine,
There with a pitcher in her hand stood Emina.

What beauty! By my Muslim faith I could swear,
She wouldn't be ashamed if she were at the sultan's!
And the way she walks and her shoulders move...
– Not even a hodja's amulet could help me!

I offered her salaam, but by my faith,
Beautiful Emina wouldn't even hear it.
Instead, scooping water in her silver pitcher,

Around the garden she went to water the roses.

A wind blew from the branches down her lovely shoulders
Unraveling those thick braids of hers.
Her hair gave off a scent of blue hyacinths,
Making me giddy and confused!

I nearly stumbled, I swear by my faith,
But beautiful Emina didn't come to me.
She only gave me a frowning look,
Not caring, the naughty one, that I'm crazy for her!

Aleksa Šantić (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 22, 2023

IN MEMORY OF SIGMUND FREUD

When there are so many we shall have to mourn,
when grief has been made so public, and exposed
to the critique of a whole epoch
the frailty of our conscience and anguish,

of whom shall we speak? For every day they die
among us, those who were doing us some good,
who knew it was never enough but
hoped to improve a little by living.

Such was this doctor: still at eighty he wished
to think of our life from whose unruliness
so many plausible young futures
with threats or flattery ask obedience,

but his wish was denied him: he closed his eyes
upon that last picture, common to us all,
of problems like relatives gathered
puzzled and jealous about our dying.

For about him till the very end were still
those he had studied, the fauna of the night,
and shades that still waited to enter
the bright circle of his recognition

turned elsewhere with their disappointment as he

was taken away from his life interest
to go back to the earth in London,
an important Jew who died in exile.

Only Hate was happy, hoping to augment
his practice now, and his dingy clientele
who think they can be cured by killing
and covering the garden with ashes.

They are still alive, but in a world he changed
simply by looking back with no false regrets;
all he did was to remember
like the old and be honest like children.

He wasn't clever at all: he merely told
the unhappy Present to recite the Past
like a poetry lesson till sooner
or later it faltered at the line where

long ago the accusations had begun,
and suddenly knew by whom it had been judged,
how rich life had been and how silly,
and was life-forgiven and more humble,

able to approach the Future as a friend
without a wardrobe of excuses, without
a set mask of rectitude or an
embarrassing over-familiar gesture.

No wonder the ancient cultures of conceit
in his technique of unsettlement foresaw
the fall of princes, the collapse of
their lucrative patterns of frustration:

if he succeeded, why, the Generalised Life
would become impossible, the monolith
of State be broken and prevented
the co-operation of avengers.

Of course they called on God, but he went his way
down among the lost people like Dante, down
to the stinking fosse where the injured
lead the ugly life of the rejected,

and showed us what evil is, not, as we thought,

deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,
our dishonest mood of denial,
the concupiscence of the oppressor.

If some traces of the autocratic pose,
the paternal strictness he distrusted,
still clung to his utterance and features,
it was a protective coloration

for one who'd lived among enemies so long:
if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,
to us he is no more a person
now but a whole climate of opinion

under whom we conduct our different lives:
Like weather he can only hinder or help,
the proud can still be proud but find it
a little harder, the tyrant tries to

make do with him but doesn't care for him much:
he quietly surrounds all our habits of growth
and extends, till the tired in even
the remotest miserable duchy

have felt the change in their bones and are cheered
till the child, unlucky in his little State,
some hearth where freedom is excluded,
a hive whose honey is fear and worry,

feels calmer now and somehow assured of escape,
while, as they lie in the grass of our neglect,
so many long-forgotten objects
revealed by his undiscouraged shining

are returned to us and made precious again;
games we had thought we must drop as we grew up,
little noises we dared not laugh at,
faces we made when no one was looking.

But he wishes us more than this. To be free
is often to be lonely. He would unite
the unequal moieties fractured
by our own well-meaning sense of justice,

would restore to the larger the wit and will

the smaller possesses but can only use
for arid disputes, would give back to
the son the mother's richness of feeling:

but he would have us remember most of all
to be enthusiastic over the night,
not only for the sense of wonder
it alone has to offer, but also

because it needs our love. With large sad eyes
its delectable creatures look up and beg
us dumbly to ask them to follow:
they are exiles who long for the future

that lives in our power, they too would rejoice
if allowed to serve enlightenment like him,
even to bear our cry of 'Judas',
as he did and all must bear who serve it.

One rational voice is dumb. Over his grave
the household of Impulse mourns one dearly loved:
sad is Eros, builder of cities,
and weeping anarchic Aphrodite.

Wystan Hugh Auden, September 18, 2023

XLI

När det flyger fåglar i luften
får himlens ögon vila

Dagarna blir längre
repets trådar kortare

Jag går dit mitt huvud bär mig

Pentti Saarikoski, September 15, 2023

THE BEAUTY OF THINGS

To feel and speak the astonishing beauty of things — earth, stone and
water,

Beast, man and woman, sun, moon and stars —
The blood-shot beauty of human nature, its thoughts, frenzies and
passions,
And unhuman nature its towering reality —
For man's half dream; man, you might say, is nature dreaming, but rock
And water and sky are constant — to feel
Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the natural
Beauty, is the sole business of poetry.
The rest's diversion: those holy or noble sentiments, the intricate ideas,
The love, lust, longing: reasons, but not the reason.

Robinson Jeffers, September 11, 2023

GHOST

“Good afternoon!”

“Good afternoon!” she responded curtly. She was our next-door neighbor. Literally, next door. The only neighbor in our building with whom one could always exchange greetings and make small talk. The rest were the kind of neighbors who might greet you, but also might not. She moved in a year ago. Retired, always pleasant and kind.

Today we came across each other in front of the entrance to our building. We walked to the elevator together and stand in front of it silently. I thought: Something is not right! She kept frowning. Only when we entered the elevator did she look at me.

“Which floor?”

“Four,” I managed to utter, dumbfounded.

We left the elevator.

“Goodbye,” she said, unlocked her door and disappeared inside. I couldn't believe my eyes – like we've never met!

“You wouldn't believe what just happened,” I told my wife everything as soon as I entered our apartment, concluding:

“She's lost it!”

“No,” said my wife calmly and confidently.

“What happened then?”

“It wasn’t our neighbor!”

“No!? What was it I saw, a ghost?”

“A ghost, really!”

“So who was it?”

“Her twin sister.”

“Oh, and I thought...”

“...that there was a problem there!” she finished the sentence for me. “You only see the problems and miracles everywhere.”

Adin Ljuca (Translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), September 8, 2023

SUMMER OF 1993

Dedicated to Marko Vešović

For years I've been thinking about the temptation of memories - about you, no one's bird in the besieged city, your willingness to share the suffering, and my own choice of exile. I remembered the place at last: a wintry olive grove in the Žanjic resort, a small café under a grapevine, where words chatter like glasses on trays and where one's soul is indiscernible in the arrangement of crickets. I'd like us to go there sometime, perhaps getting off the same boat at the appointed time, sizing each other up with squinting eyes. There I wish we'd recognize each other at last, at a secret table.

Like you, a bird belonging to no one in the besieged day, I also am alone in my city, lowered from somewhere in space into an anthill of squares like into a postage stamp. Under the watchful eyes of mannequins in shop windows I walk the world - I kiss little children. But even such as we are we serve the universal darkness. And it doesn't matter where you go or where you stay - I see no escape

for anyone. Like grains in an hourglass, we pour ourselves
from one madness into the next.

In Sweden, summer of 1997

Milorad Pejić (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 4, 2023

DARLING, YOUR FACE IS TURNING WHITE

Darling, your face is turning white
becoming featureless an untracked field of snow
Your eyes which once burned like blue sky
are flattening out memory fails us both
I curse my failing memory try to catch it
it disappears around a bend another another
The exact timbre of your voice the gesture
that moved me so the way your laughter began
deep in your chest in your chest
three pieces of shrapnel were buried
three years ago

Adrian Oktenerg (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), September 1, 2023

SBÍRAL JSEM Z TRÁVY PDAVČATA

Ivaně Motýlové

Sbíral jsem z trávy padavčata, hledal ve strouze ořechy, rozdělal u silnice
ohýnek a hřál si nad ním dlaně, pak mě kus cesty svezly cikáni, a kdybych
se nezdržel s člověkem, který ztratil čepici, a potom ještě s někým, kdo
chtěl vědět, jak se hraje na tahací harmoniku, přišel bych do školy právě
včas.

Z píšťaly tryskala pára, loď se právě utrhla od břehu. Ještě jsem stačil
vyběhnout na palubu a zeptate se kapitána, zda již je obsazeno místo
černého pasažéra. Zaujmi své místo, řekl, ani se na mne nepodíval.

Ivan Wernisch, August 28, 2023

WHERE I WOULD TAKE JESUS

Gentle Jesus, at a late hour, when
your poor ones are still wide awake,
I'll take you to a humble tailor
To make a plain suit for you.

Then to a lowly cobbler, too, who all
night hammers sharp nails into a hard sole,
While shoe Factories hum crankily.
A million pairs they put together in an hour.

Then on to the man who makes hats,
with rims sunk low, to conceal the pain.
One will snuggle onto your head.
Roomy enough to receive your aureole.

We'll then go to the inn near town,
Resembling an old, beached ship.
Where brothers at table, in deep sorrow
Throw glasses and hats on the floor.

The first crow of the rooster will be a sharp arrow
from which your heart will bleed.
The second will be the gloom of your brow.
You will recognize neither people nor things.

And when the roosters crow the third time,
oh Jesus, you will stagger with pain.
Your hat will fall from your head.
Your hat and your aureole.

Nikola Šop (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), August 25, 2023

BEFORE DEATH

The agony is like golden dust aswirled,
Above me a yellow flower's aflutter.
Never before was there such fragrance
In my little room — my great world.

My weak hand reached for the yellow flower,
Trying to grasp it, so yellow and so sweet,

But in vain was my effort, the flower kept fleeing,
And fell at last upon my chest and suit.

And drunk so with its scent —
The figure of Virgin Mary from
The golden dust I saw appear...

Musa Ćazim Ćatić (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), August 21, 2023

PRAYER IN MILANO

Make me die
This moment, God.
Only leave
My eyes
Behind.
So they can watch
— on Piazza Duomo —
the women going by.

*Abdulah Sidra (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović and Ann C. Bigelow),
August 18, 2023*

AVGUST

— And do not be indiscreet or unconventional. Play it safe. —

Listen here. I've never played it safe
in spite of what the critics say.
Ask my imaginary brother, that waif,
that childhood best friend who comes to play
dress-up and stick-up and jacks and Pick-Up-Sticks,
bike downtown, stick out tongues at the Catholics.

Or form a Piss Club where we all go
in the bushes and peek at each other's sex.
Pop-gunning the street lights like crows.
Not knowing what to do with funny Kotex
so wearing it in our school shoes. Friend, friend,
spooking my lonely hours you were there, but pretend.

Anne Sexton, August 14, 2023

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1913

1913. Peace is wearing thin
in the Balkans. Great powers try their pristine
routine of talks, but only soil white gloves:
Turkey and the whole bunch of Slavs
slash one another as if there is no tomorrow.
The States think there is; and being thorough
introduce the federal income tax.
Still, what really spells the Pax
Americana is the assembly line
Ford installs in Michigan. Some decline
of capitalism! No libertine or Marxist
could foresee this development in the darkest
possible dream. Speaking of such a dream,
California hears the first natal scream
of Richard Nixon. However, the most
loaded sounds are those uttered by Robert Frost
whose *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston*
are printed in England and nearly lost on
his compatriots eyeing in sentimental
rapture the newly-built Grand Central
Station where they later would
act as though hired by Hollywood.
In the meantime, M.Proust lets his stylus saunter
the *Swann's Way*, H.Geyger designs his counter;
probing nothing perilous or perdu,
Stravinsky produces *Le Sacre du*
Printemps, a ballet, in Paris, France.
But the fox-trot is what people really dance.
And as Schweitzer cures lepers and subs dive deeper,
the hottest news is the modest zipper.
Think of the preliminaries it skips
timing your lips with you fingertips!

The man of the year is, I fear, Niels Bohr.
He comes from the same place as danishes.
He builds what one feels like when one can't score
or what one looks like when one vanishes.

(Niels Bohr)

Atoms are small. Atoms are nice. Until you split one, of course.
Then they get large enough to play dice with your whole universe.
A model of an atom is what I've built! Something both small and big!
Inside, it resembles the sense of guilt. Outside, the lunar dig.

Joseph Brodsky, August 11, 2023

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Your thighs are appletrees
whose blossoms [touch](#) the [sky](#).
Which sky? The sky
where Watteau hung a [lady's](#)
slipper. Your knees
are a southern breeze-or
a gust of [snow](#). Agh! what
sort of man was Fragonard?
-as if that answered
anything. Ah, yes-below
the knees, since the tune
drops that way, it is
one of those [white summer](#) days,
the tall [grass](#) of your ankles
flickers upon the [shore](#)-
Which shore?-
the sand clings to my lips-
Which shore?
Agh, petals maybe. How
should I know?
Which shore? Which shore?
I said petals from an appletree.

William Carlos Williams, August 7, 2023

WINTER NOCTURNE

Mantled in grey, the dusk steals slowly in,
Crossing the dead, dull fields with footsteps cold.
The rain drips drearily; night's fingers spin
A web of drifting mist o'er wood and wold,

As quiet as death. The sky is silent too,
Hard as granite and as fixed as fate.
The pale pond stands; ringed round with rushes few
And draped with leaning trees, it seems to wait
But for the coming of the winter night
Of deep December; blowing o'er the graves
Of faded summers, swift the wind in flight
Ripples its silent face with lapping waves.
The rain falls still: bowing, the woods bemoan;
Dark night creeps in, and leaves the world alone.

Philip Larkin, August 4, 2023

DOORS, DOORS, DOORS

Old Man

Old man, it's four flights up and for what?
Your room is hardly bigger than your bed.
Puffing as you climb, you are a brown woodcut
stooped over the thin tail and the wornout tread.

The room will do. All that's left of the old life
is jampacked on shelves from floor to ceiling
like a supermarket: your books, your dead wife
generously fat in her polished frame, the congealing
bowl of cornflakes sagging in their instant milk,
your hot plate and your one luxury, a telephone.
You leave your door open, lounging in maroon silk
and smiling at the other roomers who live alone.
Well, almost alone. Through the old-fashioned wall
the fellow next door has a girl who comes to call.

Twice a week at noon during their lunch hour
they pause by your door to peer into your world.
They speak sadly as if the wine they carry would sour
or as if the mattress would not keep them curled
together, extravagantly young in their tight lock.
Old man, you are their father holding court
in the dingy hall until their alarm clock
rings and unwinds them. You unstopper the quart
of brandy you've saved, examining the small print
in the telephone book. The phone in your lap is all

that's left of your family name. Like a Romanoff prince
you stay the same in your small alcove off the hall.
Castaway, your time is a flat sea that doesn't stop,
with no new land to make for and no new stories to swap.

Anne Sexton, July 31, 2023

XLII

Man kommer och säger åt mig
hur en dikt borde vara
till mig som till och med kan konsten
att smida en hästsko åt kons klöv

Pentti Saarikoski, July 28, 2023

HUNGERFIELD

If time is only another dimension, then all that dies
Remains alive; not annulled, but removed
Out of our sight. Una is still alive.
A few years back we are making love, greedy as hawks,
A boy and a married girl. A few years back
We are still young, strong-shouldered, joyfully laboring
To make our house. Then she, in the wide sea-window,
Endlessly enduring but not very patient,
Teaches our sons to read. She is still there,
Her beautiful pale face, heavy hair, great eyes
Bent to the book. And a few years back
We sit with our grown sons in the pitching motor-boat
Off Horn Head in Donegal, watching the sea-parrots
Tumble like clowns along the thousand-foot cliff, and the gannets like
falling stars
Hawk at the sea: her great blue eyes are brimmed
With the wild beauty. Or we walk in Orkney,
Under the mystery of huge stones that stand there,
Raised high in the world's dawn by unknown men to forgotten gods,
And see dimly through the deep northern dusk
A great skein of wild swans drop from the cloud
To the gray lake. She weeps a little for joy of beauty. Only the
home-coming

To our loved rock over the gray and ageless Pacific
Makes her such joy.

It is possible that all these conditions of us
Are fixed points on the returning orbit of time and exist eternally , , ,
It is no good. Una has died, and I
Am left waiting for death, like a leafless tree
Waiting for the roots to rot and the trunk to fall.

I never thought you would leave me, dear love,
I knew you would die sometime, I should die first —
But you have died. It is quite natural:
Because you loved life you must die first, and I
Who never cared much live on. Life is cheap, these days;
We have to compete with Asia, we are cheap as dust,
And death is cheap, but not hers. It is a common thing:
We die, we cease to exist, and our dear lovers
Fulfill themselves with sorrow and drunkenness, the quart at midnight
And the cups in the morning — or they go seeking
A second love: but you and I are at least
Not ridiculous.

September again. The gray grass, the gray sea,
The ink-black trees with white-bellied night-herons in them,
Brawling on the boughs at dusk, barking like dogs —
And the awful loss. It is a year. She has died: and I
Have lived for a long year on soft rotten emotions,
Vain longing and drunken pity, grief and gray ashes —
Oh child of God!

It is not that I am lonely for you. I am lonely:
I am mutilated, for you were part of me:
But men endure that. I am growing old and my love is gone:
No doubt I can live without you, bitterly and well.
That's not the cry. My torment is memory.
My grief to have seen the banner and beauty of your brave life
Dragged in the dust down the dim road to death. To have seen you
defeated,
You who never despaired, passing through weakness
And pain —
to nothing. It is usual I believe. I stood by; I believe
I never failed you. The contemptible thought, —
Whether I failed or not! I am not the one.
I was not dying. Is death bitter my dearest? It is nothing.
It is a silence. But dying can be bitter.

In this black year
I have thought often of Hungerfield, the man at Horse Creek,
Who fought with Death — bodily, said the witnesses, throat for throat,
Fury against fury in the dark —
And conquered him. If I had had the courage and the hope —
Or the pure rage —
I should be now Death's captive no doubt, not conqueror.
I should be with my dearest, in the hollow darkness
Where nothing hurts.

I should not remember
Your silver-backed hand-mirror you asked me for,
And sat up in bed to gaze in it, to see your face
A little changed. You were still beautiful,
But not — as you'd been — a falcon. You said nothing; you sighed and laid
down the glass; and I
Made a dog smile over a tearing heart,
Saying that you looked well.

The lies — the faithless hopeless unbelieved
lies
While you lay dying.
For these reasons
I wish to make verses again, to drug memory,
To make it sleep for a moment. Never fear: I shall not forget
You —
Until I am with you. The dead indeed forget all things.
And when I speak to you it is only play-acting
And self-indulgence you cannot hear me, you do not exist,
Dearest . . .

- - -

Here is the poem, dearest; you will never read it
nor hear it. You were more beautiful
Than a hawk flying; you were faithful and a lion heart [. . .]
But the ashes have fallen
And the flame has gone up; nothing human remains. You are
earth and air; you are in the beauty of the ocean
And the great streaming triumphs of sundown; you are alive
and well in the tender young grass rejoicing
When soft rain falls all night, and little rosy-fleeced clouds float
on the dawn. — I shall be with you presently.

Robinson Jeffers, July 24, 2023

SVATEBNÍ STROJ

Jako zběsilí letěli koně. Ječení a pískot hudebního parastroje sílily. Vzdálenost mezi Klotyldou a jejími pronásledovateli se zkracovala. Zachvácená hrůzou odhodila dívka bičík i těžkou bambitku a oběma rukama se nyní držela hřívý svého zvířete.

Mně neunikneš, jsi moje! křičel Theopidus a již již vztahoval ruku, aby Klotyldu strhl ze sedla.

Je moje! zvolal Habernatus. Uхни, Theopide!

Ne, ne a ne! vřeštěl Pišišvili, Neboj se, Klotyldo, já tě ochráním před těmi šašky! Jsme na území Spokojených států amerických, ti dva zde nad tebou nemají moci!

Teď se probudím někde daleko odtud, pomyslela si Klotylda a zavřela oči. Mám pevnou vůli, pevnou vůli, mám pevnou vůli. To, co se nyní stane, zachrání můj život i moji čest. Raz, dva, tři, teď!

Hudební stroj v tu ránu ztichl. Rozsvítily se červené, zelené a modré žárovky. Tři divocí jezdci ochabli v sedlech a svésili hlavy. Kolotoč se zastavil.

Kolotoč? Klotylda seskočila s koně, spatřila bambitku a bičík ležící u svých nohou a rozesmála se. Kolotoč? A já myslela, že je to svatební stroj!

Náhle pozbyla vědomí a probudila se daleko, daleko odtud.

Ivan Wernisch, July 21, 2023

OBCHOD VE FRANKFURTU

Ataka beznaděje ji zkroutila v obchodním centru.

Musela se celou vahou zapřít o regál,
ruce zabořit do špaget,
začaly se vějířovitě sypat do všech světových stran.

Setrvala,
aniž to dávalo smysl.

Tělo přestalo zapírat
úplnou opuštěnost.

Náhrdelník se prověsil v prázdné nádheře.

Vylezly roky,
jako žebra,
v dokonalém obchodním nasvícení,
které nevrhá stín.
Zřízenec přicházel doplnit humry.
Stála vysoká,
nedobytná,
pod sebou divokou hvězdu
rozsypaných špaget.

Petr Hruška, July 17, 2023

FUNERAL BLUES

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

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

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

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

Wystan Hugh Auden, July 14, 2023

AN INVITATION TO DEAR JESUS

I'd be so happy if, oh Jesus,
you would enter my dwelling deign.

Where things quite common hang on the walls.
Where day drops off early on the window pane.

I would tell you of lighting
A dim lamp to lengthen the short day.
Of my very small life, serving
rancorously with my brothers away.

I would tell you of the house of men.
Of panes which are sometimes blue.
Of doors you have to stoop to enter.
Of locks shutting tightly and true.

I would tell you, while smoking
a common cigarette, of all men and of their names.
Some old clothes always wearing,
Others wearing new ones all the same.

And how there are seven days full of worry
Oh Jesus, and each one as the one before.
And when your wound starts being sore
you pull your hat down more and more.

I would tell you things for a long time, till we hear
dew dropping down the window pane.
Then quite dumbly I would say to you:
You are tired, Jesus, you should dream again.

Oh lie down and sleep on this bed
which man redeems every day.
I will bind with solace your sad forehead
Sleep, and on the bench I'll stay.

*Nikola Šop (Translated by Zvonimir Radeljković, Omer Hadžiselimović and
Keith Doubt), July 10, 2023*

IN SARAJEVO I WAS HAPPY

In Sarajevo I was happy there
cafés theater nightlife twenty minutes to the mountains
three hours to the sea
a good job a cosmopolitan life
but when the war started I felt unsafe

so I came to Belgrade to live among my own
I thought a better life no shelling here
there is water electricity that works
neighbors are not suspicious except in the usual ways
but Belgrade is flat flat neither mountains nor sea
life is flat cut off from friends
you cannot even telephone Sarajevo from here
the train no longer runs
and the people brother and sister Serbs
treat us like strangers
as if we are riffraff scum

Adrian Oktenerg, July 7, 2023

HIŽA OF MILE

Hiža of our fathers was founded here to fix virtue more strongly in the
hearts of men
May it ever be open wide for welcome visitors and for the great of heart
For guests for elders and other believers
For all good people for all good Bosnians
For all warriors in the war that is waged against war
And various other small and mighty harms and evils
For all who flee from their flaming homes
For those fleeing the blazing circle of pyres and fleeing the hangman's
noose
For all who are burnt for ever aspiring to the sun far and great
For all who have uttered the right word in the right hour
Who had their hands cut off for a single word on the bloody path seeking an
outcome
For the word that bread is bread that wine is wine and that water is water
For those whose living flesh was burned and cheeks marked with a burning
brand
By those who ever appeal to the laws of God's mercy and to canon law
For those whose tongues were torn from their throat for not betraying the
word they gave
For those condemned to die on horses' tails
between two horsemen
May the hiža of our fathers be open wide
For those damned by the heaviest curse
From the consecrated altars of Provence, Lombardy, Zara, Arcady, and
Rascia
In the stupor of incense in the militant press of crosses and swords in that

bitter choir

For those thrice damned for they were not yet
Butchered and slaughtered on their own doorstep before women and
children

May the great hiža of our fathers be always open wide
For those who pay no heed to ancient and new tzars
For true kings and false for bans and barons for boyars
For their ample treasure, for many ducats, gold dinars, for that evil money
For men who never miss paying taxes but never bribe the collectors
blaming and cursing them

openly

May the doors of the house of our fathers be open wide
For those who in meetings speak words mild and pure not only to their kin
and kind

For those who live without envy yet life always beats them, only mocks and
laughs at them

May it be open for the unknown comrade for the unknown brother
For all that pine in the darkness of their body's confinement
Yearning that that word be for all men that they become brothers with that
word

May the hiža of our fathers be open wide all night and always
For the one who left long ago and now treads in darkness toiling from afar
But knows that he will arrive awake where someone awaits him

May the house of our fathers be open wide

But if someone in love of himself shuts that door of virtue

May the house of our fathers crumble to its foundations in my soul
Into a heap may it be crushed may it turn into bare soot and black ashes

May hot scorpions and snakes breed in it as in the den of Satan
(Forgive you who are condemned and cursed in this slander of the
slanderer

But the house of our fathers without the welcome traveler and the dear
guest

The house of our fathers it is not)

Mak Dizdar (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), July 3, 2023

INFINITIVE

To Ulf Linde

Dear savages, though I've never mastered your tongue, free of pronouns
and gerunds, I've learned to bake mackerel wrapped in palm leaves and
favor raw turtle legs, with their flavor of slowness. Gastronomically, I must

admit, these years since I was washed ashore here have been a non-stop journey, and in the end I don't know where I am. After all, one keeps carving notches only so long as nobody apes one. While you started aping me even before I spotted you. Look what you've done to the trees! Though it's flattering to be regarded even by you as a god, I, in turn, aped you somewhat, especially with your maidens — in part to obscure the past, with its ill-fated ship, but also to cloud the future, devoid of a pregnant sail. Islands are cruel enemies of tenses, except for the present one. And shipwrecks are but flights from grammar into pure causality. Look what life without mirrors does to pronouns, not to mention one's features! Perhaps your ancestors also ended up on this wonderful beach in a fashion similar to mine. Hence, your attitude toward me. In your eyes, I am at the very least an island within an island. And anyhow, watching my every step, you know that I am not longing for the past participle or the past continuous — well, not any more than for that future perfect of yours deep in some humid cave, decked out in dry kelp and feathers. I write this with my index finger on the wet, glassy sand at sunset, being inspired perhaps by the view of the palm-tree tops splayed against the platinum sky like some Chinese characters. Though I've never studied the language. Besides, the breeze tumbles them all too fast for one to make out the message.

Joseph Brodsky, June 30, 2023

XXV

Jag spanar långväga
ser Eurpas ytterkant
vidare mot världens synrand
Jag hade nog en vacker slant
men ser ingen avliden
under vars tunga jag kunde lägga den

Pentti Saarikoski, June 26, 2023

LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY, ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR. JULY 13, 1798

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs

With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone. These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things. If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!
And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.—And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured

Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

William Wordsworth, June 23, 2023

THE DARKLING THRUSH

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Thomas Hardy, June 19, 2023

NO NEED

to balance one's accounts, friend, for every grain in
the hourglass falls in its place anyhow. What used to hurt
is now foreign: it had gone by like a movie on the screen while
we, munching on pumpkin seeds, sat comfortably reclined in our
dreams. But when the lights came back on after the show, a heavy
feeling would remain: days empty like hulls, and jumbled together.
We never needed anything beyond what we'd frittered away while
holding on to our higher principles. Today there exists only what
we've rejected; everything else we don't have.

Adin Ljuca (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović), June 16, 2023

596

When I was small, a Woman died—
Today—her Only Boy
Went up from the Potomac—
His face all Victory

To look at her—How slowly
The Seasons must have turned
Till Bullets clipt an Angle
And He passed quickly round—

If pride shall be in Paradise—
Ourself cannot decide—
Of their imperial Conduct—
No person testified—

But, proud in Apparition—
That Woman and her Boy
Pass back and forth, before my Brain
As even in the sky—

I'm confident that Bravoos—
Perpetual break abroad
For Braveries, remote as this
In Scarlet Maryland—

Emily Dickinson, June 12, 2023

LET HISTORY BE MY JUDGE

We made all possible preparations,
Drew up a list of firms,
Constantly revised our calculations
And allotted the farms,

Issued all the orders expedient
In this kind of case:
Most, as was expected, were obedient,
Though there were murmurs, of course;

Chiefly against our exercising
Our old right to abuse:
Even some sort of attempt at rising,
But these were mere boys.

For never serious misgiving
Occurred to anyone,
Since there could be no question of living

If we did not win.

The generally accepted view teaches
That there was no excuse,
Though in the light of recent researches
Many would find the cause

In a not uncommon form of terror;
Others, still more astute,
Point to possibilities of error
At the very start.

As for ourselves there is left remaining
Our honour at least,
And a reasonable chance of retaining
Our faculties to the last.

Wystan Hugh Auden, June 9, 2023

THE CARD-PLAYERS

Jan van Hogspeuw staggers to the door
And pisses at the dark. Outside, the rain
Courses in cart-ruts down the deep mud lane.
Inside, Dirk Dogstoerd pours himself some more,
And holds a cinder to his clay with tongs,
Belching out smoke. Old Prijck snores with the gale,
His skull face firelit; someone behind drinks ale,
And opens mussels, and croaks scraps of songs
Towards the ham-hung rafters about love.
Dirk deals the cards. Wet century-wide trees
Clash in surrounding starlessness above
This lamplit cave, where Jan turns back and farts,
Gobs at the grate, and hits the queen of hearts.

Rain, wind and fire! The secret, bestial peace!

Philip Larkin, June 5, 2023

LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE

Like everything else our language is particular to us
Outsiders cannot learn it it's gibberish to them
Yesterday I heard a woman say "This war has destroyed my life"
Why do we always say "this war"?
To acknowledge the wars that came before?
To remember future wars?
To say this war is to acknowledge that one
the last one and the one yet to come
When we say "this war" we already envision another
But which war is the last war? Will there ever be one?
That woman who spoke she was a Serb caught outside Banja Luka
in a Croatian artillery barrage her ten-year-old killed
she and her nineteen-year-old seriously wounded
Severed arteries in her leg and arm If she recovers
what will she recover for? This war
begets another and another
an old testament book
The new testament
love and charity and forgiveness the lilies of the fields
that one hasn't been written

Adrian Oktenberg, June 2, 2023

DESPAIR

Who is he?
A railroad track toward hell?
Breaking like a stick of furniture?
The hope that suddenly overflows the cesspool?
The love that goes down the drain like spit?
The love that said forever, forever
and then runs you over like a truck?
Are you a prayer that floats into a radio advertisement?
Despair,
I don't like you very well.
You don't suit my clothes or my cigarettes.
Why do you locate here
as large as a tank,
aiming at one half of a lifetime?
Couldn't you just go float into a tree
instead of locating here at my roots,
forcing me out of the life I've led
when it's been my belly so long?

All right!
I'll take you along on the trip
where for so many years
my arms have been speechless.

Anne Sexton, May 29, 2023

I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth, May 26, 2023

SPELA UPP TILL DANS

III

Ni trodde att mina hus
var av guld och silver

de är av sten och trä

så som min kropp är av ben och kött

Pentti Saarikoski, May 22, 2023

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE TWAIN

(Lines on the loss of the "Titanic")

I

In a solitude of the sea
Deep from human vanity,
And the Pride of Life that planned her, stilly couches she.

II

Steel chambers, late the pyres
Of her salamandrine fires,
Cold currents thrid, and turn to rhythmic tidal lyres.

III

Over the mirrors meant
To glass the opulent
The sea-worm crawls — grotesque, slimed, dumb, indifferent.

IV

Jewels in joy designed
To ravish the sensuous mind
Lie lightless, all their sparkles bleared and black and blind.

V

Dim moon-eyed fishes near
Gaze at the gilded gear
And query: "What does this vaingloriousness down here?" ...

VI

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,

The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

VII

Prepared a sinister mate
For her — so gaily great —
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate.

VIII

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

IX

Alien they seemed to be;
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

X

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

XI

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

Thomas Hardy, May 19, 2023

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1912

1912. Captain Robert Scott reaches the South Pole also. Except he got there later than Amundsen. He stares at ice, thinks of his family, prays, and dies. Ice, however, is not through yet. S.S. Titanic hits an iceberg at full speed and goes down. The bell grimly tolls at Lloyd's in London. Fifteen hundred souls are lost, if not more. Therefore, let's turn to Romania where Eugene Ionesco's born or to Turkey and her Balkan neighbors: each one of them feels an itch to reach

for the gun; on reflection, though, they abandon
the idea. It's peace everywhere. In London
by now there are five hundred movie theaters
which makes an issue of baby-sitters.
At home, after having less done than said;
Woodrow Wilson becomes the Prez. Dead-set
to pocket the dizzy with flipping coin
New Mexico and Arizona join
the Union. For all its steel mills and farms
the Union keeps currently under arms
only one hundred thousand men. That's barmy
considering five million in the Russian Army,
or four million in Germany, or the French
who, too, have as many to fill a trench.
This sounds to some like a lack of caution.
But then there is the Atlantic Ocean
between the Continent and the U.S.,
and it's only 1912, God bless,
and the hemispheres luckily seem unable
to play the now popular Cain and Abel.

The man of the year is both short and tall.
He's nameless, and well he should
stay nameless: for spoiling for us free fall
by using a parachute.

(Captain Albert Berry)

"Leaving home with umbrella? Take a parachute!
When it rains from below, that is when they shoot
down a plane and its pilot objects to die,
when you want to grab Holland or drop a spy
behind enemy lines, you need parachutes.
O, they'll be more popular than a pair of shoes.
In their soft descent they suggest a dove.
Aye! it's not only love that comes from above!"

Joseph Brodsky, May 15, 2023

TIME OF DISTURBANCE

The best is, in war or faction or ordinary vindictive
life, not to take sides.

Leave it for children, and the emotional rabble of the streets, to back their horse or support a brawler.

But if you are forced into it: remember that good and evil are as common as air, and like air shared
By the panting belligerents; the moral indignation that hoarsens orators is mostly a fool.

Hold your nose and compromise; keep a cold mind. Fight, if needs must; hate no one. Do as God does,
Or the tragic poets: they crush their man without hating him, their Lear or Hitler, and often save without love.

As for these quarrels, they are like the moon, recurrent and fantastic. They have their beauty but night's is better. It is better to be silent than make a noise. It is better to strike dead than strike often. It is better not to strike.

Robinson Jeffers, May 12, 2023

VEDEMA

Ever since doubt has invaded the cities, there is no place to park on the weekends at either the south or the north entrance to the primeval Vedema forest. A great many sunglasses flutter before the map board unable to decide between the blue, yellow or green. I don't see any difference, but we won't meet them again as you and I always take the red-dotted path. It's a demanding terrain for walking, filled with both risk and disappointment, but on a long summer day you're rewarded with giant anthills (billions of believers yet no religion), skinny dipping in the *Naked Lake*, blackthorn buckshots...

On the red trail that everyone avoids, only a park officer may show up: a fairy in white, who, wearing a crown on his head like a customs cap, reconciles lists at intersections, or a student intern, carrying a can of paint in one hand, slapping the brushwood and stamping the trunks with the brush in the other.

I, too, want a job in the forest: to, like an oak tree or a pine, claim and wear a bloody dot on my chest, like a medal. And to emerge from twilight in front of wandering hikers who, on blue, yellow or green, have lost all hope. Or, if I don't see the difference, not to emerge at all. Perish, world!

Milorad Pejić (translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), May 8, 2023

THE LISTENERS

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
'Is there anybody there?' he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:

Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Walter de la Mare, May 5, 2023

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Villiam Wordsworth, May 1, 2023

DRKOTÁ VŮZ PO KAMENÍ

Minula noc, mine sen
Objeví se za úsvitu
Dávné sídlo v dávné mlze
Drkotá vůz po kamení
Za křovím se leskne řeka
Strom do vody strásá listí
Luňák letí za kořistí

Ivan Wernisch, April 28, 2023

DANSGOLVET PÅ BERGET

XXVI

S:t Stefans dag
sitter jag i människornas kök
dricker öl och lyssnar till språket
som består av deras ärenden, deras minnen
och jag blir hjälplös, sägen något
men det ramlar
ur min mun och ner på golvet som en hästsko

Pentti Saarikoski, April 24, 2023

KIOSK

“Any news about Elvir?” Refka asked me as I entered the kiosk.
I shook my head. I could not bring myself to squeeze out such a brief word as “No!”.

Refka sells all kinds of small items, anything she can get a hold of that can sell in these times of war. I sat next to her quietly. Didn't feel like talking. I came here just so I wouldn't be alone. She didn't know what to say either, so she too kept silent. Then a passerby showed up and stuck his head through the little window.

“Wanna buy a cigarette?” he asked Refka.

“How much?”

“Two marks.”

“No.”

The smuggler walked away. Refka looked at me, thought for a moment, then yelled through the window.

“Hey! Come back.”

When the guy returned, she bought two cigarettes for four marks.

The marks were German. The cigarettes were Croatian. The kiosk belonged to Refka. Elvir is my younger brother. He is nineteen. He is in a concentration camp.

We sat silently in the kiosk, smoking.

Adin Ljuca (translated by Esmā Hadžiselimović), April 21, 2023

THE SHIP OF DEATH

I

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.

The apples falling like great drops of dew
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

And it is time to go, to bid farewell
to one's own self, and find an exit
from the fallen self.

II

Have you built your ship of death, O have you?
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.

The grim frost is at hand, when the apples will fall
thick, almost thundrous, on the hardened earth.

And death is on the air like a smell of ashes!
Ah! can't you smell it?

And in the bruised body, the frightened soul
finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold
that blows upon it through the orifices.

III

And can a man his own quietus make
with a bare bodkin?

With daggers, bodkins, bullets, man can make
a bruise or break of exit for his life;
but is that a quietus, O tell me, is it quietus?

Surely not so! for how could murder, even self-murder
ever a quietus make?

IV

O let us talk of quiet that we know,
that we can know, the deep and lovely quiet

of a strong heart at peace!

How can we this, our own quietus, make?

V

Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.

And die the death, the long and painful death
that lies between the old self and the new.

Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly bruised,
already our souls are oozing through the exit
of the cruel bruise.

Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
is washing in through the breaches of our wounds,
already the flood is upon us.

Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine
for the dark flight down oblivion.

VI

Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul
has her footing washed away, as the dark flood rises.

We are dying, we are dying, we are all of us dying
and nothing will stay the death-flood rising within us
and soon it will rise on the world, on the outside world.

We are dying, we are dying, piecemeal our bodies are dying
and our strength leaves us,
and our soul cowers naked in the dark rain over the flood,
cowering in the last branches of the tree of our life.

VII

We are dying, we are dying, so all we can do
is now to be willing to die, and to build the ship
of death to carry the soul on the longest journey.

A little ship, with oars and food

and little dishes, and all accoutrements
fitting and ready for the departing soul.

Now launch the small ship, now as the body dies
and life departs, launch out, the fragile soul
in the fragile ship of courage, the ark of faith
with its store of food and little cooking pans
and change of clothes,
upon the flood's black waste
upon the waters of the end
upon the sea of death, where still we sail
darkly, for we cannot steer, and have no port.

There is no port, there is nowhere to go
only the deepening black darkening still
blacker upon the soundless, ungurgling flood
darkness at one with darkness, up and down
and sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more
and the little ship is there; yet she is gone.
She is not seen, for there is nothing to see her by.
She is gone! gone! and yet
somewhere she is there.
Nowhere!

VIII

And everything is gone, the body is gone
completely under, gone, entirely gone.
The upper darkness is heavy as the lower,
between them the little ship
is gone
she is gone.

It is the end, it is oblivion.

IX

And yet out of eternity a thread
separates itself on the blackness,
a horizontal thread
that fumes a little with pallor upon the dark.

Is it illusion? or does the pallor fume
A little higher?
Ah wait, wait, for there's the dawn,

the cruel dawn of coming back to life
out of oblivion.

Wait, wait, the little ship
drifting, beneath the deathly ashy grey
of a flood-dawn.

Wait, wait! even so, a flush of yellow
and strangely, O chilled wan soul, a flush of rose.

A flush of rose, and the whole thing starts again.

X

The flood subsides, and the body, like a worn sea-shell
emerges strange and lovely.
And the little ship wings home, faltering and lapsing
on the pink flood,
and the frail soul steps out, into the house again
filling the heart with peace.

Swings the heart renewed with peace
even of oblivion.

Oh build your ship of death, oh build it!
for you will need it.
For the voyage of oblivion awaits you.

David Herbert Lawrence, April 17, 2023

YOUR LAST DRIVE

Here by the moorway you returned,
And saw the borough lights ahead
That lit your face – all undiscerned
To be in a week the face of the dead,
And you told of the charm of that haloed view
That never again would beam on you.

And on your left you passed the spot
Where eight days later you were to lie,
And be spoken of as one who was not;
Beholding it with a heedless eye

As alien from you, though under its tree
You soon would halt everlastingly.

I drove not with you... Yet had I sat
At your side that eve I should not have seen
That the countenance I was glancing at
Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
Nor have read the writing upon your face,
"I go hence soon to my resting-place;

"You may miss me then. But I shall not know
How many times you visit me there,
Or what your thoughts are, or if you go
There never at all. And I shall not care.
Should you censure me I shall take no heed
And even your praises no more shall need."

True: never you'll know. And you will not mind.
But shall I then slight you because of such?
Dear ghost, in the past did you ever find
The thought "What profit", move me much?
Yet abides the fact, indeed, the same, –
You are past love, praise, indifference, blame.

Thomas Hardy, April 14, 2023

LINES INSCRIBED UPON A CUP FORMED FROM A SKULL

Start not–nor deem my spirit fled:
In me behold the only skull
From which, unlike a living head,
Whatever flows is never dull.

I lived, I loved, I quaffed like thee;
I died: let earth my bones resign:
Fill up–thou canst not injure me;
The worm hath fouler lips than thine.

Better to hold the sparkling grape
Than nurse the earthworm's slimy brood,
And circle in the goblet's shape
The drink of gods than reptile's food.

Where once my wit, perchance, hath shone,
In aid of others' let me shine;
And when, alas! our brains are gone,
What nobler substitute than wine?

Quaff while thou canst; another race,
When thou and thine like me are sped,
May rescue thee from earth's embrace,
And rhyme and revel with the dead.

Why not--since through life's little day
Our heads such sad effects produce?
Redeemed from worms and wasting clay,
This chance is theirs to be of use.

George Gordon, Lord Byron, April 10, 2023

ROSE AYLMER

Ah what avails the sceptred race,
Ah what the form divine!
What every virtue, every grace!
Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep, but never see,
A night of memories and of sighs
I consecrate to thee.

Walter Savage Landor, April 7, 2023

THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;

So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.

William Blake, April 3, 2023

LONDON, 1802

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,

Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,

So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Villiam Wordsworth, March 31, 2023

AUGUST 1968

The Ogre does what ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech:
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain,

The Ogre stalks with hands on hips,
While drivel gushes from his lips.

Wystan Hugh Auden, March 27, 2023

TAKE ONE HOME FOR KIDDIES

On shallow straw, in shadeless glass,
Huddled by empty bowls, they sleep:
No dark, no dam, no earth, no grass -
Mam, get us one of them to keep.

Living toys are something novel,
But it soon wears off somehow.
Fetch the shoebox, fetch the shovel -
Mam, we're playing funerals now.

Philip Larkin, March 24, 2023

CIGARETTES AND WHISKEY AND WILD, WILD WOMEN

Perhaps I was born kneeling,
born coughing on the long winter,
born expecting the kiss of mercy,
born with a passion for quickness
and yet, as things progressed,
I learned early about the stockade
or taken out, the fume of the enema.
By two or three I learned not to kneel,
not to expect, to plant my fires underground
where none but the dolls, perfect and awful,
could be whispered to or laid down to die.

Now that I have written many words,
and let out so many loves, for so many,
and been altogether what I always was –
a woman of excess, of zeal and greed,
I find the effort useless.
Do I not look in the mirror,
these days,
and see a drunken rat avert her eyes?

Do I not feel the hunger so acutely
that I would rather die than look
into its face?
I kneel once more,
in case mercy should come
in the nick of time.

Anne Sexton, March 20, 2023

THE BERLIN WALL TUNE

for Peter Viereck

This is the house destroyed by Jack.
This is the spot where the rumpled buck
stops, and where Hans gets killed.
This is the wall that Ivan built.

This is the wall that Ivan built.
Yet trying to quell his sense of guilt,
he built it with modest light-gray concrete,
and the booby-traps look discreet.

Under this wall that a) bores, b) scares
barbed wire meshes lie flat like skeins
of your granny's darnings (her chair still rocks!)
But the voltage's too high for socks.

Beyond this wall throbs a local flag
against whose yellow, red, and black
Compass and Hammer proclaim the true
masonic dream came through.

The Vopos patiently in their nest
through binoculars scan the West
and the East; and they like both views
apparently devoid of Jews.

Those who are seen here, thought of, felt,
were driven away by the sense of Geld
or by a stronger Marxist urge.
The wall won't let them merge.

Come to this wall if you hate your place
and face a sample of cosmic space
where no life-forms can exist at all
and objects only fall.

Come to this scornful of peace and war
petrified version of either/or
meandering through these bleak parts which act
like a mirror that's cracked.

Sad is the day here. In the night
searchlights illuminate the blight
making sure that if someone screams,
it's not due to bad dreams.

For dreams here aren't bad: just wet with blood
of one of your likes who left his pad
to ramble here; and in his head
dreams are replaced by lead.

Given that, it's only Time
who has guts enough to commit the crime
of passing this place back and forth on foot:
at pendulums they don't shoot.

That's why this site will see many moons
while couples lie in their beds like spoons,
while the rich are wondering what they wish
and single girls eat fish.

Come to this wall that beats other walls:
Roman, Chinese, whose worn-down, false
molars envy steel fangs that flash
scrubbed of thy neighbor's flesh.

A bird may twitter a better song.
But should you consider abortion wrong
(or that the quacks ask too high a fee),
Come to this wall, and see.

Joseph Brodsky, March 17, 2023

HEMÁT

Ett telefonsamtal rann ut i natten och glittrade
på landsbygden och i förstäderna.
Efteråt sov jag oroligt i hotellsängen.
Jag liknade nålen i en kompas
som orienteringslöparen ber
genom skogen med bultande hjärta.

Tomas Tranströmer, March 13, 2023

GORČIN

Here lieth
Gorčin the soldier
In his own land
On an alien
Patrimony

I lived
But I summoned death
Night and day

I never hurt a fly
I went off
To be a soldier

I've been
In five and five campaigns
Without shield or armor
So that at last
These throes
Might cease

I perished of a strange pain

Not pierced by a spear
Not shot by an arrow
Not cut down
By a saber

I perished of a pain
That has no cure

I loved
My beloved was seized
In bondage

If you meet Kosara
On the paths
Of the Lord
I beseech you
To speak unto her
Of my
Truth

Mak Dizdar (Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović, Anne Pennington, and Stephen P. Meyer), March 10, 2023

IN MEMORIAM M.K.H., 1911-1984

When all the others were away at Mass
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.
They broke the silence, let fall one by one
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:
Cold comforts set between us, things to share
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying
And some were responding and some crying
I remembered her head bent towards my head,
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives –
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

Seamus Heaney, March 6, 2023

KING OF CHINA'S DAUGHTER

The King of China's daughter
She never would love me,
Though I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.

For oranges and lemons
The stars in bright blue air
(I stole them long ago, my dear)
Were dangling there.

The moon, she gave me silver pence ;
The sun did give me gold :
And both together softly blew
And made my porridge cold.

But the King of China's daughter
Pretended not to see,
When I hung my cap and bells upon
Her nutmeg tree.

Dame Edith Sitwell, March 3, 2023

HERMAN MELVILLE

Towards the end he sailed into an extraordinary mildness,
And anchored in his home and reached his wife
And rode within the harbour of her hand,
And went across each morning to an office
As though his occupation were another island.

Goodness existed: that was the new knowledge
His terror had to blow itself quite out
To let him see it; but it was the gale had blown him
Past the Cape Horn of sensible success
Which cries: 'This rock is Eden. Shipwreck here.'

But deafened him with thunder and confused with lightning:
– The maniac hero hunting like a jewel
The rare ambiguous monster that had maimed his sex,
Hatred for hatred ending in a scream,
The unexplained survivor breaking off the nightmare –
All that was intricate and false; the truth was simple.

Evil is unspectacular and always human,
And shares our bed and eats at our own table,
And we are introduced to Goodness every day,
Even in drawing-rooms among a crowd of faults;

He has a name like Billy and is almost perfect
But wears a stammer like a decoration:
And every time they meet the same thing has to happen;
It is the Evil that is helpless like a lover
And has to pick a quarrel and succeeds,
And both are openly destroyed before our eyes.

For now he was awake and knew
No one is ever spared except in dreams;
But there was something else the nightmare had distorted –
Even the punishment was human and a form of love:
The howling storm had been his father's presence
And all the time he had been carried on his father's breast.

Who now had set him gently down and left him.
He stood upon the narrow balcony and listened:
And all the stars above him sang as in his childhood
'All, all is vanity,' but it was not the same;
For now the words descended like the calm of mountains –
– Nathaniel had been shy because his love was selfish –
But now he cried in exultation and surrender
'The Godhead is broken like bread. We are the pieces.'

And sat down at his desk and wrote a story.

Wystan Hugh Auden, February 27, 2023

MARKED WITH D

When the chilled dough of his flesh went in an oven
not unlike those he fuelled all his life,
I thought of his cataracts ablaze with Heaven
and radiant with the sight of his dead wife,
light streaming from his mouth to shape her name,
'not Florence and not Flo but always Florrie.'
I thought how his cold tongue burst into flame
but only literally, which makes me sorry,
sorry for his sake there's no Heaven to reach.
I get it all from Earth my daily bread
but he hungered for release from mortal speech
that kept him down, the tongue that weighed like lead.
The baker's man that no one will see rise
and England made to feel like some dull oaf

is smoke, enough to sting one person's eyes
and ash (not unlike flour) for one small loaf.

Tony Harrison, February 24, 2023

ON AN INVITATION TO THE UNITED STATES

I

My ardours for emprise nigh lost
Since Life has bared its bones to me,
I shrink to seek a modern coast
Whose riper times have yet to be;
Where the new regions claim them free
From that long drip of human tears
Which peoples old in tragedy
Have left upon the centuried years.

II

For, winning in these ancient lands,
Enchased and lettered as a tomb,
And scored with prints of perished hands,
And chronicled with dates of doom,
Though my own Being bear no bloom
I trace the lives such scenes enshrine,
Give past exemplars present room,
And their experience count as mine.

Thomas Hardy, February 20, 2023

DREAM SONG 125: BARDS FREEZING

Bards freezing, naked, up to the neck in water,
wholly in dark, time limited, different from
initiations now:
the class in writing, clothed & dry & light,
unlimited time, till Poetry takes some,
nobody reads them though,

no trumpets, no solemn instauration, no change;

no commissions, ladies high in soulful praise
(pal) none,
costumes as usual, turtleneck sweaters, loafers,
in & among the busy Many who brays
art is if anything fun.

I say the subject was given as of old,
prescribed the technical treatment, tests really tests
were set by the masters & graded.
I say the paralyzed fear lest one's not one
is back with us forever, worsts & bests
spring for the public, faded.

John Berryman, February 17, 2023

ARACHNE

What is that bundle hanging from the ceiling
Unresting even now with constant slight
Drift in the breeze that breathes through rooms at night?
Can it be something, then, that once had feeling,
A girl, perhaps, whose skill and pride and hope
Strangle against each other in the rope?

I think it is a tangle of despair
As shapeless as a bit of woven nest,
Blackened and matted, quivering without rest
At the mercy of the movements of the air
Where half-lodged, half-fallen from the hedge
It hangs tormented at a season's edge.

What an exact artificer she had been!
Her daintiness and firmness are reduced
To lumpy shadow that the dark has noosed.
Something is changing, though. Movements begin
Obscurely as the court of night adjourns,
A tiny busyness at the center turns.

So she spins who was monarch of the loom,
Reduced indeed, but she lets out a fine
And delicate yet tough and tensile line
That catches full day in the little room,
Then sways minutely, suddenly out of sight,

And then again the thread invents the light.

Thom Gunn, February 13, 2023

CLEARANCES IV

Fear of affectation made her affect
Inadequacy whenever it came to
Pronouncing words 'beyond her'. *Bertold Brek*.
She'd manage something hampered and askew
Every time, as if she might betray
The hampered and inadequate by too
Well-adjusted a vocabulary.
With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, 'You
Know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
In front of her, a genuinely well-
Adjusted adequate betrayal
Of what I knew better. I'd *naw* and *aye*
And decently relapse into the wrong
Grammar which kept us allied and at bay.

Seamus Heaney, February 10, 2023

THE STOLEN CHILD

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water-rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses

The dim grey sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,.
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To to waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For to world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For be comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
from a world more full of weeping than you.

William Butler Yeats, February 6, 2023

LIBERTY

When liberty is headlong girl
And runs her roads and wends her ways
Liberty will shriek and whirl
Her showery torch to see it blaze.

When liberty is wedded wife
And keeps the barn and counts the byre
Liberty amends her life.
She drowns her torch for fear of fire.

Archibald MacLeish, February 3, 2023

FIRST FROST

The time of the year for the mystics.
October sky and the Cloud of Unknowing.
The routes of eternity beckoning.
Sign and enigma in the humblest of things.

Master cobbler Jakob Boehme
Sat in our kitchen all morning.
He sipped tea and warned of the quiet
To which the wise must school themselves.

The young woman paid no attention.
Hair fallen over her eyes,
Breasts loose and damp in her robe,
Stubbornly scrubbing a difficult stain.

Then the dog's bark brought us all outdoors.
And that wasn't just geese honking
But Dame Julian of Norwich herself discoursing
On the marvelous courtesy and homeliness of the Maker.

Charles Simic, January 30, 2023

BLOOD ORANGE

It looks so dark the end of the world may be near.
I believe it's going to rain.
The birds in the park are silent.
Nothing is what it seems to be,
Nor are we.

There's a tree on our street so big
We can all hide in its leaves.
We won't need any clothes either.
I feel as old as a cockroach, you said.
In my head, I'm a passenger on a ghost ship.

Not even a sigh outdoors now.
If a child was left on our doorstep,
It must be asleep.
Everything is teetering on the edge of everything
With a polite smile.

It's because there are things in this world
That just can't be helped, you said.
Right then, I heard the blood orange
Roll off the table with a thud
And lie cracked open on the floor.

Charles Simic, January 27, 2023

SUNDAY PAPERS

The butchery of innocents
Never stops. That is about all
We can ever be sure of, love,
Even more sure than of this roast
You are bringing out from the oven.

It's Sunday. The congregation
Files slowly out of the church
Across the street. A good many
Carry bibles in their hands.
It's the vague desire for truth
And the mighty fear of it

That makes them turn up
Despite the glorious spring weather.

In the hallway, the old mutt
Just now had the honesty
To growl at his own image in the mirror,
Before lumbering off to the kitchen
Where the lamb roast sat
In your outstretched hands
Smelling of garlic and rosemary.

Charles Simic, January 23, 2023

PSALM

You've been a long time making up your mind,
O Lord, about these madmen
Running the world. Their reach is long
And their claws must have frightened you.

One of them found me with his shadow.
The day turned chill. I dangled
Between terror and valor
In the darkest corner of my son's bedroom.

I sought with my eyes, You in whom I do not believe.
You've been busy making the flowers pretty,
The lambs run after their mother,
Or perhaps you haven't been doing even that?

It was spring. The killers were full of sport
And merriment, and your divines
Were right at their side, to make sure
Our final goodbyes were said properly.

Charles Simic, January 20, 2023

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORROR

Nobody reads it but the insomniacs.
How strange to find a child,

Slapped by his mother only this morning,
And the mad homeless woman
Who squatted to urinate in the street.

Perhaps they've missed something?
That smoke-shrouded city after a bombing raid,
The corpses like cigarette butts
In a dinner plate overflowing with ashes.
But no, everyone is here.

O were you to come, invisible tribunal,
There'd be too many images to thumb through,
Too many stories to listen to,
Like the one about guards playing cards
After they were done beating their prisoner.

Charles Simic, January 16, 2023

BEGOTTEN OF THE SPLEEN

The Virgin Mother walked barefoot
Among the land mines.
She carried an old man in her arms
Like a howling babe.

The earth was an old people's home.
Judas was the night nurse,
Emptying bedpans into the river Jordan,
Tying people on a dog chain.

The old man had two stumps for legs.
St. Peter came pushing a cart
Loaded with flying carpets.
They were not flying carpets.

They were piles of blood diapers.
The Magi stood around
Cleaning their nails with bayonets.
The old man gave little Mary Magdalene

A broke piece of a mirror.
She hid in the church outhouse.
When she got thirsty she licked

the steam off the glass.

That leaves Joseph. Poor Joseph,
Standing naked in the snow.
He only had a rat
To load his suitcases on.

The rat wouldn't run into its hold.
Even when the lights came on--
And the lights came on:
The floodlights in the guard towers.

Charles Simic, January 13, 2023

KRUHOVÝ OBJEZD V IOWĚ

veprostřed zarostlý
vzpřímeným plevelem tak prostopášným
že jsme jej v rozechvění
dvakrát objeli
na své nevyhnutelné cestě
k Velkým pláním

Petr Hruška, January 9, 2023

1047

The Opening and the Close
Of Being, are alike
Or differ, if they do,
As Bloom upon a Stalk.

That from an equal Seed
Unto an equal Bud
Go parallel, perfected
In that they have decayed.

Emily Dickinson, January 6, 2023

HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1911

1911 is wholly given
to looking balanced albeit uneven.
In Hamburg, stirring his nation's helm
the German Kaiser (for you, Wilhelm
the Second) demands what sounds weird for some:
"A Place for Germany in the Sun".
If you were French, you would say *C'est tout*.
Yet Hitler is barely twenty-two
and things in the sun aren't so hot besides.
The activity of the sun excites
the Chinese to abolish pigtails and then
proclaim a republic with Sun Yat-Sen
their first President. (Although how three hundred
twenty-five millions can be handled
by a Parliament, frankly, beats
me. That is, how many seats
would they have had in that grand pavilion?
And even if it's just one guy per million
what would a minority of, say, ten percent
add up to? This is like counting sand!
For this democracy has no lexicon!)
Along the same latitude, the Mexican
Civil War is over, and saintly, hesitant
Francisco Madero becomes the President.
Italy finding the Turks too coarse
to deal with, resorts to the air force
for the first time in history, while da Vinci's
Mona Lisa gets stolen from the Louver - which is
why the cops in Paris grab Monsieur Guillaume
Apollinaire who though born in Rome,
writes in French, and has other energies.
Rilke prints his Duinese Elegies
and in London, suffragettes poke their black
umbrellas at Whitehall and cry Alack!

Man of the year is a great Norwegian.
The crucial word in their tongue is "Skol".
They are born wearing turtlenecks in that region.
When they go South, they hit the Pole.

(Roald Amundsen)

"I am Roald Amundsen. I like ice.

The world is my oyster for it's capped twice
with ice: first, Arctical, then Antartical.
Human life in those parts is a missing article.
O! when the temperature falls subzero
the eyes grow blue, the heart sincere.
There are neither doubts nor a question mark:
it's the tails of your huskies which pull and bark".

Joseph Brodsky, January 2, 2023