

Various Poems

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

Dover Beach *Matthew Arnold*

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; — on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.
The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Kenneth Rexroth (1905-1982)

Untitled

Yamabe no Akahito, trans. K. Rexroth

The mists rise over
The waters at Asuka;
Memory does not
Pass away so easily.
Asuka gawa
Kawa yodo sarazu
Tatsu kiri no
Omoi sugu beki
Koi ni aranuku ni

Autumn in California

Kenneth Rexroth

Autumn in California is a mild
And anonymous season, hills and valleys
Are colorless then, only the sooty green
Eucalyptus, the conifers and oaks sink deep
Into the haze; the fields are plowed, bare, waiting;
The steep pastures are tracked deep by the cattle;
There are no flowers, the herbage is brittle.
All night along the coast and the mountain crests
Birds go by, murmurous, high in the warm air.
Only in the mountain meadows the aspens
Glitter like goldfish moving up swift water;
Only in the desert villages the leaves
Of the cottonwoods descend in smoky air.
Once more I wander in the warm evening
Calling the heart to order and the stiff brain
To passion. I should be thinking of dreaming, loving, dying,
Beauty wasting through time like draining blood,
And me alone in all the world with pictures
Of pretty women and the constellations.
But I hear the clocks in Barcelona strike at dawn
And the whistles blowing for noon in Nanking.
I hear the drone, the snapping high in the air
Of planes fighting, the deep reverberant
Grunts of bombardment, the hasty clamor
Of anti-aircraft.

In Nanking at the first bomb,

A moon-faced, willowy young girl runs into the street,
 Leaves her rice bowl spilled and her children crying,
 And stands stiff, cursing quietly, her face raised to the sky.
 Suddenly she bursts like a bag of water,
 And then as the blossom of smoke and dust diffuses,
 The walls topple slowly over her.

I hear the voices

Young, fatigued and excited, of two comrades
 In a closed room in Madrid. They have been up
 All night, talking of trout in the Pyrenees,
 Spinoza, old nights full of riot and sherry,
 Women they might have had or almost had,
 Picasso, Velasquez, relativity.
 The candlelight reddens, blue bars appear
 In the cracks of the shutters, the bombardment
 Begins again as though it had never stopped,
 The morning wind is cold and dusty,
 Their furloughs are over. They are shock troopers,
 They may not meet again. The dead light holds
 In impersonal focus the patched uniforms,
 The dog-eared copy of Lenin's Imperialism,
 The heavy cartridge belt, holster and black revolver butt.
 The moon rises late over Mt. Diablo,
 Huge, gibbous, warm; the wind goes out,
 Brown fog spreads over the bay from the marshes,
 And overhead the cry of birds is suddenly
 Loud, wiry, and tremulous.

[1938]

August 22, 1939

Kenneth Rexroth

" . . . when you want to distract your mother from the discouraging soulness, I will tell you what I used to do. To take her for a long walk in the quiet country, gathering wildflowers here and there, resting under the shade of trees, between the harmony of the vivid stream and the tranquillity of the mother-nature, and I am sure she will enjoy this very much, as you surely will be happy for it. But remember always, Dante, in the play of happiness, don't use all for yourself only, but down yourself just one step, at your side and help the weak ones that cry for help, help the prosecuted and the victim; because they are your friends; they are the comrades that fight and fall as your father and Bartolo fought and fell yesterday, for the conquest of the joy of freedom for all and the poor workers. In this struggle of life you will find more love and you will be loved."

— Nicola Sacco to his son Dante, Aug. 18, 1927.

Angst und Gestalt und Gebet — Rilke

What is it all for, this poetry,

This bundle of accomplishment
 Put together with so much pain?
 Twenty years at hard labor,
 Lessons learned from Li Po and Dante,
 Indian chants and gestalt psychology;
 What words can it spell,
 This alphabet of one sensibility?
 The pure pattern of the stars in orderly progression,
 The thin air of fourteen-thousand-foot summits,
 Their Pisgah views into what secrets of the personality,
 The fire of poppies in eroded fields,
 The sleep of lynxes in the noonday forest,
 The curious anastomosis of the webs of thought,
 Life streaming ungovernably away,
 And the deep hope of man.
 The centuries have changed little in this art,
 The subjects are still the same.
 "For Christ's sake take off your clothes and get into bed,
 We are not going to live forever."
 "Petals fall from the rose,"
 We fall from life,
 Values fall from history like men from shellfire,
 Only a minimum survives,
 Only an unknown achievement.
 They can put it all on the headstones,
 In all the battlefields,
 "Poor guy, he never knew what it was all about."
 Spectacled men will come with shovels in a thousand years,
 Give lectures in universities on cultural advances, cultural lags.
 A little more garlic in the soup,
 A half-hour more in bed in the morning,
 Some of them got it, some of them didn't;
 The things they dropped in their hurry
 Are behind the glass cases of dusky museums.
 This year we made four major ascents,
 Camped for two weeks at timberline,
 Watched Mars swim close to the earth,
 Watched the black aurora of war
 Spread over the sky of a decayed civilization.
 These are the last terrible years of authority.
 The disease has reached its crisis,
 Ten thousand years of power,
 The struggle of two laws,
 The rule of iron and spilled blood,
 The abiding solidarity of living blood and brain.
 They are trapped, beleaguered, murderous,
 If they line their cellars with cork
 It is not to still the pistol shots,
 It is to insulate the last words of the condemned.
 "Liberty is the mother

Not the daughter of order."
 "Not the government of men
 But the administration of things."
 "From each according to his ability,
 Unto each according to his needs."
 We could still hear them,
 Cutting steps in the blue ice of hanging glaciers,
 Teetering along shattered artes.
 The cold and cruel apathy of mountains
 Has been subdued with a few strands of rope
 And some flimsy iceaxes,
 There are only a few peaks left.
 Twenty-five years have gone since my first sweetheart.
 Back from the mountains there is a letter waiting for me.
 "I read your poem in the New Republic.
 Do you remember the undertaker's on the corner,
 How we peeped in the basement window at a sheeted figure
 And ran away screaming? Do you remember?
 There is a filling station on the corner,
 A parking lot where your house used to be,
 Only ours and two other houses are left.
 We stick it out in the noise and carbon monoxide."
 It was a poem of homesickness and exile,
 Twenty-five years wandering around
 In a world of noise and poison.
 She stuck it out, I never went back,
 But there are domestic as well as imported
 Explosions and poison gases.
 Dante was homesick, the Chinese made an art of it,
 So was Ovid and many others,
 Pound and Eliot amongst them,
 Kropotkin dying of hunger,
 Berkman by his own hand,
 Fanny Baron biting her executioners,
 Mahkno in the odor of calumny,
 Trotsky, too, I suppose, passionately, after his fashion.
 Do you remember?
 What is it all for, this poetry,
 This bundle of accomplishment
 Put together with so much pain?
 Do you remember the corpse in the basement?
 What are we doing at the turn of our years,
 Writers and readers of the liberal weeklies?

[1939]

**From the Paris Commune to the Kronstadt
 Rebellion**

Kenneth Rexroth

Remember now there were others before this;

Now when the unwanted hours rise up,
 And the sun rises red in unknown quarters,
 And the constellations change places,
 And cloudless thunder erases the furrows,
 And moonlight stains and the stars grow hot.
 Though the air is fetid, conscripted fathers,
 With the black bloat of your dead faces;
 Though men wander idling out of factories
 Where turbine and hand are both freezing;
 And the air clears at last above the chimneys;
 Though mattresses curtain the windows;
 And every hour hears the snarl of explosion;
 Yet one shall rise up alone saying:
 "I am one out of many, I have heard
 Voices high in the air crying out commands;
 Seen men's bodies burst into torches;
 Seen faun and maiden die in the night air raids;
 Heard the watchwords exchanged in the alleys;
 Felt hate speed the blood stream and fear curl the nerves.
 I know too the last heavy maggot;
 And know the trapped vertigo of impotence.
 I have traveled prone and unwilling
 In the dense processions through the shaken streets.
 Shall we hang thus by taut navel strings
 To this corrupt placenta till we're flyblown;
 Till our skulls are cracked by crow and kite
 And our members become the business of ants,
 Our teeth the collection of magpies?"
 They shall rise up heroes, there will be many,
 None will prevail against them at last.
 They go saying each: "I am one of many";
 Their hands empty save for history.
 They die at bridges, bridge gates, and drawbridges.
 Remember now there were others before;
 The sepulchres are full at ford and bridgehead.
 There will be children with flowers there,
 And lambs and golden-eyed lions there,
 And people remembering in the future.

[1936]

Requiem for the Spanish Dead

Kenneth Rexroth

The great geometrical winter constellations
 Lift up over the Sierra Nevada,
 I walk under the stars, my feet on the known round earth.
 My eyes following the lights of an airplane,
 Red and green, growling deep into the Hyades.
 The note of the engine rises, shrill, faint,
 Finally inaudible, and the lights go out

In the southeast haze beneath the feet of Orion.
 As the sound departs I am chilled and grow sick
 With the thought that has come over me. I see Spain
 Under the black windy sky, the snow stirring faintly,
 Glittering and moving over the pallid upland,
 And men waiting, clutched with cold and huddled together,
 As an unknown plane goes over them. It flies southeast
 Into the haze above the lines of the enemy,
 Sparks appear near the horizon under it.
 After they have gone out the earth quivers
 And the sound comes faintly. The men relax for a moment
 And grow tense again as their own thoughts return to them.
 I see the unwritten books, the unrecorded experiments,
 The unpainted pictures, the interrupted lives,
 Lowered into the graves with the red flags over them.
 I see the quick gray brains broken and clotted with blood,
 Lowered each in its own darkness, useless in the earth.
 Alone on a hilltop in San Francisco suddenly
 I am caught in a nightmare, the dead flesh
 Mounting over half the world presses against me.
 Then quietly at first and then rich and full-bodied,
 I hear the voice of a young woman singing.
 The emigrants on the corner are holding
 A wake for their oldest child, a driverless truck
 Broke away on the steep hill and killed him,
 Voice after voice adds itself to the singing.
 Orion moves westward across the meridian,
 Rigel, Bellatrix, Betelgeuse, marching in order,
 The great nebula glimmering in his loins.

[1937]

On What Planet

Kenneth Rexroth

Uniformly over the whole countryside
 The warm air flows imperceptibly seaward;
 The autumn haze drifts in deep bands
 Over the pale water;
 White egrets stand in the blue marshes;
 Tamalpais, Diablo, St. Helena
 Float in the air.
 Climbing on the cliffs of Hunter's Hill
 We look out over fifty miles of sinuous
 Interpenetration of mountains and sea.
 Leading up a twisted chimney,
 Just as my eyes rise to the level
 Of a small cave, two white owls
 Fly out, silent, close to my face.
 They hover, confused in the sunlight,
 And disappear into the recesses of the cliff.

All day I have been watching a new climber,
 A young girl with ash blond hair
 And gentle confident eyes.
 She climbs slowly, precisely,
 With unwasted grace.
 While I am coiling the ropes,
 Watching the spectacular sunset,
 She turns to me and says, quietly,
 "It must be very beautiful, the sunset,
 On Saturn, with the rings and all the moons."

[1937?/1940]

Climbing Milestone Mountain August 22, 1937

Kenneth Rexroth

For a month now, wandering over the Sierras,
 A poem had been gathering in my mind,
 Details of significance and rhythm,
 The way poems do, but still lacking a focus.
 Last night I remembered the date and it all
 Began to grow together and take on purpose.

We sat up late while Deneb moved over the zenith
 And I told Marie all about Boston, how it looked
 That last terrible week, how hundreds stood weeping
 Impotent in the streets that last midnight.
 I told her how those hours changed the lives of thousands,
 How America was forever a different place
 Afterwards for many.

In the morning

We swam in the cold transparent lake, the blue
 Damsel flies on all the reeds like millions
 Of narrow metallic flowers, and I thought
 Of you behind the grille in Dedham, Vanzetti,
 Saying, "Who would ever have thought we would make this
 history?"

Crossing the brilliant mile-square meadow
 Illuminated with asters and cyclamen,
 The pollen of the lodgepole pines drifting
 With the shifting wind over it and the blue
 And sulphur butterflies drifting with the wind,
 I saw you in the sour prison light, saying,
 "Goodbye comrade."

In the basin under the crest

Where the pines end and the Sierra primrose begins,
 A party of lawyers was shooting at a whiskey bottle.
 The bottle stayed on its rock, nobody could hit it.
 Looking back over the peaks and canyons from the last lake,
 The pattern of human beings seemed simpler
 Than the diagonals of water and stone.
 Climbing the chute, up the melting snow and broken rock,

I remembered what you said about Sacco,
 How it slipped your mind and you demanded it be read into the
 record.
 Traversing below the ragged arte,
 One cheek pressed against the rock
 The wind slapping the other,
 I saw you both marching in an army
 You with the red and black flag, Sacco with the rattlesnake
 banner.
 I kicked steps up the last snow bank and came
 To the indescribably blue and fragrant
 Polemonium and the dead sky and the sterile
 Crystalline granite and final monolith of the summit.
 These are the things that will last a long time, Vanzetti,
 I am glad that once on your day I have stood among them.
 Some day mountains will be named after you and Sacco.
 They will be here and your name with them,
 "When these days are but a dim remembering of the time
 When man was wolf to man."
 I think men will be remembering you a long time
 Standing on the mountains
 Many men, a long time, comrade.

[1937]

Proust's Madeleine

Kenneth Rexroth

Somebody has given my
 Baby daughter a box of
 Old poker chips to play with.
 Today she hands me one while
 I am sitting with my tired
 Brain at my desk. It is red.
 On it is a picture of
 An elk's head and the letters
 B.P.O.E.?a chip from
 A small town Elks' Club. I flip
 It idly in the air and
 Catch it and do a coin trick
 To amuse my little girl.
 Suddenly everything slips aside.
 I see my father
 Doing the very same thing,
 Whistling "Beautiful Dreamer,"
 His breath smelling richly
 Of whiskey and cigars. I can
 Hear him coming home drunk
 From the Elks' Club in Elkhart
 Indiana, bumping the
 Chairs in the dark. I can see

Him dying of cirrhosis
Of the liver and stomach
Ulcers and pneumonia,
Or, as he said on his deathbed, of
Crooked cards and straight whiskey,
Slow horses and fast women.

Robert Frost

After Apple Picking

Robert Frost

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still.
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.
I cannot shake the shimmer from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the water-trough,
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and reappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
And I keep hearing from the cellar-bin
That rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking; I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall,
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised, or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Birches

Robert Frost

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
(Now am I free to be poetical?)
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Mending Wall

Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbort know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neigghours'.

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
 If I could put a notion in his head:
 'Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
 Where there are cows?
 But here there are no cows.
 Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
 What I was walling in or walling out,
 And to whom I was like to give offence.
 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
 But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
 He said it for himself. I see him there
 Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me —
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
 He will not go behind his father's saying,
 And he likes having thought of it so well
 He says again, Good fences make good neighbours.

On Looking Up by Chance at the Constellations

Robert Frost

You'll wait a long, long time for anything much
 To happen in heaven beyond the floats of cloud
 And the Northern Lights that run like tingling nerves.
 The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch,
 Nor strike out fire from each other nor crash out loud.
 The planets seem to interfere in their curves —
 But nothing ever happens, no harm is done.
 We may as well go patiently on with our life,
 And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun
 For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.
 It is true the longest drouth will end in rain,
 The longest peace in China will end in strife.
 Still it wouldn't reward the watcher to stay awake
 In hopes of seeing the calm of heaven break
 On his particular time and personal sight.
 That calm seems certainly safe to last to-night.

Stopping in the Woods on a Snowy Evening

Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know
 His house is in the village though;
 He will not see me stopping here
 To watch his woods fill up with snow.
 My little horse must think it queer
 To stop without a farmhouse near
 Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.
 He gives his harness bells a shake
 To ask if there is some mistake.
 The only other sound's the sweep
 Of easy wind and downy flake.
 The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
 But I have promises to keep,
 And miles to go before I sleep.
 And miles to go before I sleep.

A E Houseman (1859-1936)

On Wenlock Edge the Wood's in Trouble (a Shropshire Lad: XXXI)

A. E. Houseman

On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;
 His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;
 The gale, it plies the saplings double,
 And thick on Severn snow the leaves.
 'Tt would blow like this through holt and hanger
 When Uricon the city stood:
 'Tis the old wind in the old anger,
 But then it threshed another wood.
 Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman
 At yonder heaving hill would stare:
 The blood that warms an English yeoman,
 The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.
 There, like the wind through woods in riot,
 Through him the gale of life blew high;
 The tree of man was never quiet:
 Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.
 The gale, it plies the saplings double,
 It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:
 To-day the Roman and his trouble
 Are ashes under Uricon.

Here Dead We Lie

A. E. Housman

Here dead we lie
 Because we did not choose
 To live and shame the land
 From which we sprung.
 Life, to be sure,
 Is nothing much to lose,
 But young men think it is,
 And we were young.

John Masefield (1878-1967)

Sea Fever

John Masefield

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's
shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.
I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls
crying.
I must down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a
whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

Cargoes

John Masefield

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.
Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.
Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

W H Auden

Night Mail

W H Auden

This is the Night Mail crossing the border,
 Bringing the cheque and the postal order,
 Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,
 The shop at the corner and the girl next door.
 Pulling up Beattock, a steady climb:
 The gradient's against her, but she's on time.
 Past cotton-grass and moorland boulder
 Shovelling white steam over her shoulder,
 Snorting noisily as she passes
 Silent miles of wind-bent grasses.
 Birds turn their heads as she approaches,
 Stare from the bushes at her blank-faced coaches.
 Sheep-dogs cannot turn her course;
 They slumber on with paws across.
 In the farm she passes no one wakes,
 But a jug in the bedroom gently shakes.
 Dawn freshens, the climb is done.
 Down towards Glasgow she descends
 Towards the steam tugs yelping down the glade of cranes,
 Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces Set on the dark
 plain like gigantic chessmen. All Scotland waits for her: In the
 dark glens, beside the pale-green sea lochs Men long for news.
 Letters of thanks, letters from banks,
 Letters of joy from the girl and the boy,
 Receipted bills and invitations
 To inspect new stock or visit relations,
 And applications for situations
 And timid lovers' declarations
 And gossip, gossip from all the nations,
 News circumstantial, news financial,
 Letters with holiday snaps to enlarge in,
 Letters with faces scrawled in the margin,
 Letters from uncles, cousins, and aunts,
 Letters to Scotland from the South of France,
 Letters of condolence to Highlands and Lowlands
 Notes from overseas to Hebrides
 Written on paper of every hue,
 The pink, the violet, the white and the blue,
 The chatty, the catty, the boring, adoring,
 The cold and official and the heart's outpouring,
 Clever, stupid, short and long,
 The typed and the printed and the spelt all wrong.
 Thousands are still asleep
 Dreaming of terrifying monsters,
 Or of friendly tea beside the band at Cranston's or Crawford's:
 Asleep in working Glasgow, asleep in well-set Edinburgh,
 Asleep in granite Aberdeen, They continue their dreams, And
 shall wake soon and long for letters, And none will hear the
 postman's knock Without a quickening of the heart, For who
 can bear to feel himself forgotten?

Epitaph on a tyrant

W. H. Auden

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

Musee des Beaux Arts

W. H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's
horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the plowman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

September 1, 1939

W H Auden

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

Offends the September night.
Accurate scholarship can
unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.
Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.
Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.
Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
who have never been happy or good.
The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev

Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.
From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow,
“I will be true to the wife.
I’ll concentrate more on my work,”
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?
All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.
Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages;
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

Pablo Neruda

Morning XXVII

Pablo Neruda

Naked, you are simple as one of your hands,
smooth, earthy, small, transparent, round:
you have moon-lines, apple-pathways:

naked, you are slender as a naked grain of wheat.
Naked, you are blue as a night in Cuba;
you have vines and stars in your hair;
naked you are spacious and yellow
as summer in a golden church.
Naked, you are tiny as one of your nails —
curved, subtle, rosy, till the day is born
and you withdraw to the underground world,
as if down a long tunnel of clothing and of chores:
your clear light dims, gets dressed — drops its leaves —
and becomes a naked hand again.

Lithe girl, brown girl

Pablo Neruda, trans. Christopher Logue

Lithe girl, brown girl,
The sun that makes apples,
And stiffens the wheat,
And splits the thong weed,
Made your body with joy.
Your tongue like a red bird
Dancing on ivory,
Your lips with the smile of water.
You stretch your arms
And the sun grabs
At the loose black coils
Of your hair
As if water were falling.
Tantalize the sun, if you dare,
It will leave
Shadows that match you everywhere.
Lithe girl, brown girl,
Nothing draws me towards you,
And the heat within you
Beats me home
Like the sun at high noon.
Knowing these things,
Perhaps through knowing these things,
I seek you out,
Listening for your voice or the brush
Of your arms against wheat,
Or your step
Among poppies grown under water.

Clenched Soul

Pablo Neruda

We have lost even this twilight.
No one saw us this evening hand in hand
while the blue night dropped on the world.

I have seen from my window
the fiesta of sunset in the distant mountain tops.
Sometimes a piece of sun
burned like a coin in my hand.
I remembered you with my soul clenched
in that sadness of mine that you know.
Where were you then?
Who else was there?
Saying what?
Why will the whole of love come on me suddenly
when I am sad and feel you are far away?
The book fell that always closed at twilight
and my blue sweater rolled like a hurt dog at my feet.
Always, always you recede through the evenings
toward the twilight erasing statues.

Love Sonnet XI

Pablo Neruda

I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair.
Silent and starving, I prowl through the streets.
Bread does not nourish me, dawn disrupts me, all day
I hunt for the liquid measure of your steps.
I hunger for your sleek laugh,
your hands the color of a savage harvest,
hunger for the pale stones of your fingernails,
I want to eat your skin like a whole almond.
I want to eat the sunbeam flaring in your lovely body,
the sovereign nose of your arrogant face,
I want to eat the fleeting shade of your lashes,
and I pace around hungry, sniffing the twilight,
hunting for you, for your hot heart,
like a puma in the barrens of Quitratue.

W.B. Yeats

The Stare's Nest by My Window

W. B. Yeats

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned.
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:

Come build in the empty house of the stare.
A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war:
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.
("Meditations in Time of Civil War - VI", 1928)

A Prayer For My Daughter

W.B. Yeats

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.
I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;
Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.
May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,
Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.
Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.
In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned

By those that are not entirely beautiful;
 Yet many, that have played the fool
 For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
 And many a poor man that has roved,
 Loved and thought himself beloved,
 From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.
 May she become a flourishing hidden tree
 That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
 And have no business but dispensing round
 Their magnanimities of sound,
 Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
 Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
 O may she live like some green laurel
 Rooted in one dear perpetual place.
 My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
 The sort of beauty that I have approved,
 Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
 Yet knows that to be choked with hate
 May well be of all evil chances chief.
 If there's no hatred in a mind
 Assault and battery of the wind
 Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.
 An intellectual hatred is the worst,
 So let her think opinions are accursed.
 Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
 Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
 Because of her opinionated mind
 Barter that horn and every good
 By quiet natures understood
 For an old bellows full of angry wind?
 Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
 The soul recovers radical innocence
 And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
 Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
 And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
 She can, though every face should scowl
 And every windy quarter howl
 Or every bellows burst, be happy still.
 And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
 Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
 For arrogance and hatred are the wares
 Peddled in the thoroughfares.
 How but in custom and in ceremony
 Are innocence and beauty born?
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

The Second Coming
William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.
 Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand:
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Among School Children

W B Yeats

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
 A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
 The children learn to cipher and to sing,
 To study reading-books and histories,
 To cut and sew, be neat in everything
 In the best modern way - the children's eyes
 In momentary wonder stare upon
 A sixty-year-old smiling public man.
 I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
 Above a sinking fire. A tale that she
 Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
 That changed some childish day to tragedy -
 Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
 Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
 Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
 Into the yolk and white of the one shell.
 And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
 I look upon one child or t'other there
 And wonder if she stood so at that age -
 For even daughters of the swan can share
 Something of every paddler's heritage -
 And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
 And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
 She stands before me as a living child.

Her present image floats into the mind -
 Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
 Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
 And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
 And I though never of Ledaean kind
 Had pretty plumage once - enough of that,
 Better to smile on all that smile, and show
 There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.
 What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
 Honey of generation had betrayed,
 And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
 As recollection or the drug decide,
 Would think her Son, did she but see that shape
 With sixty or more winters on its head,
 A compensation for the pang of his birth,
 Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?
 Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
 Solider Aristotle played the taws
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
 Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
 What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.
 Both nuns and mothers worship images,
 But those the candles light are not as those
 That animate a mother's reveries,
 But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
 And yet they too break hearts - O presences
 That passion, piety or affection knows,
 And that all heavenly glory symbolise -
 O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;
 Labour is blossoming or dancing where
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
 O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The Wild Swans at Coole

W B Yeats

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
 The woodland paths are dry,
 Under the October twilight the water
 Mirrors a still sky;
 Upon the brimming water among the stones
 Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me
 Since I first made my count;
 I saw, before I had well finished,
 All suddenly mount
 And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
 Upon their clamorous wings.
 I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
 And now my heart is sore.
 All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
 The first time on this shore,
 The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
 Trod with a lighter tread.
 Unwearied still, lover by lover,
 They paddle in the cold,
 Companionable streams or climb the air;
 Their hearts have not grown old;
 Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
 Attend upon them still.
 But now they drift on the still water
 Mysterious, beautiful;
 Among what rushes will they build,
 By what lake's edge or pool
 Delight men's eyes, when I awake some day
 To find they have flown away?

When You Are Old

W B Yeats

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
 And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
 And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
 Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;
 How many loved your moments of glad grace,
 And loved your beauty with love false or true,
 But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
 And loved the sorrows of your changing face;
 And bending down beside the glowing bars,
 Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
 And paced among the mountains overhead
 And hid his face among a crowd of stars.

Sailing to Byzantium

W B Yeats

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

Caught in that sensual music all neglect
 Monuments of unaging intellect.
 An aged man is but a paltry thing,
 A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
 Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
 For every tatter in its mortal dress,
 Nor is there singing school but stuying
 Monuments of its own magnificence;
 And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
 To the holy city of Byzantium.
 O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.
 Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enameling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Easter, 1916

W B Yeats

I have met them at close of day
 Coming with vivid faces
 From counter or desk among grey
 Eighteenth-century houses.
 I have passed with a nod of the head
 Or polite meaningless words,
 Or have lingered awhile and said
 Polite meaningless words,
 And thought before I had done
 Of a mocking tale or a gibe
 To please a companion
 Around the fire at the club,
 Being certain that they and I
 But lived where motley is worn:
 All changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born.
 That woman's days were spent
 In ignorant good will,
 Her nights in argument
 Until her voice grew shrill.

What voice more sweet than hers
When young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our winged horse.
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.
The horse that comes from the road.
The rider, the birds that range
From cloud to tumbling cloud,
Minute by minute change;
A shadow of cloud on the stream
Changes minute by minute;
A horse-hoof slides on the brim,
And a horse plashes within it
Where long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call.
Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.
Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough

To know they dreamed and are dead.
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse –
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

The Song of Wandering Aengus

W B Yeats

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.
When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.
Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

W B Yeats

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping
slow
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket
sings;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evenings full of the linnet's wings.
I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear the lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

The Scholars

W B Yeats

Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines
That young men, tossing on their beds,
Rhymed out in love's despair
To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.
All shuffle there; all cough in ink;
All wear the carpet with their shoes;
All think what other people think;
All know the man their neighbour knows.
Lord, what would they say
Did their Catullus walk that way?

The Hero, the Girl, and the Fool

W B Yeats

The Girl. I rage at my own image in the glass,
That's so unlike myself that when you praise it
It is as though you praised another, or even
Mocked me with praise of my mere opposite;
And when I wake towards morn I dread myself
For the heart cries that what deception wins
Cruelty must keep; therefore be warned and go
If you have seen that image and not the woman.
The Hero. I have raged at my own strength because you have
loved it.
The Girl. If you are no more strength than I am beauty
I had better find a convent and turn nun;
A nun at least has all men's reverence
And needs no cruelty.
The Hero. I have heard one say
That men have reverence for their holiness
And not themselves.
The Girl. Say on and say
That only God has loved us for ourselves,
But what care I that long for a man's love?
The Fool by the Roadside. When my days that have
From cradle run to grave
From grave to cradle run instead;
When thoughts that a fool

Has wound upon a spool
Are but loose thread, are but loose thread;
When cradle and spool are past
And I mere shade at last
Coagulate of stuff
Transparent like the wind,
I think that I may find
A faithful love, a faithful love.

Leda and the Swan

W B Yeats

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

An Irish Airman Forsees His Death

W B Yeats

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

Love Song

W B Yeats

From the Gaelic
My love, we will go, we will go, I and you,
And away in the woods we will scatter the dew;
And the salmon behold, and the ousel too,
My love, we will hear, I and you, we will hear,
The calling afar of the doe and the deer.
And the bird in the branches will cry for us clear,
And the cuckoo unseen in his festival mood;
And death, oh my fair one, will never come near
In the bosom afar of the fragrant wood.

Among School Children

W B Yeats

I

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old nun in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To study reading - books and histories,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way - the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon
A sixty-year-old smiling public man.

II

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy -
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at that age -
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage -
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats into the mind -
Did Quattrocento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I though never of Ledaean kind
Had pretty plumage once - enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
 Honey of generation had betrayed,
 And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
 As recollection or the drug decide,
 Would think her Son, did she but see that shape
 With sixty or more winters on its head,
 A compensation for the pang of his birth,
 Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
 Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;
 Solider Aristotle played the taws
 Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
 World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
 Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
 What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
 Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
 But those the candles light are not as those
 That animate a mother's reveries,
 But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
 And yet they too break hearts - O presences
 That passion, piety or affection knows,
 And that all heavenly glory symbolise -
 O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
 O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

John Donne (1572-1631)

A Valediction Forbidden Mourning

John Donne

AS virtuous men pass mildly away,
 And whisper to their souls to go,
 Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
 "Now his breath goes," and some say, "No."
 So let us melt, and make no noise,
 No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;

'Twere profanation of our joys
 To tell the laity our love.
 Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears;
 Men reckon what it did, and meant;
 But trepidation of the spheres,
 Though greater far, is innocent.
 Dull sublunary lovers' love
 – Whose soul is sense – cannot admit
 Of absence, 'cause it doth remove
 The thing which elemented it.
 But we by a love so much refined,
 That ourselves know not what it is,
 Inter-assurd of the mind,
 Care less, eyes, lips and hands to miss.
 Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to aery thinness beat.
 If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses are two;
 Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.
 And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet, when the other far doth roam,
 It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.
 Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
 Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end where I begun.

The Good-Morrow

John Donne

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
 Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then,
 But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?
 Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
 'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
 If ever any beauty I did see,
 Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.
 And now good morrow to our waking souls,
 Which watch not one another out of fear;
 For love, all love of other sights controls,
 And makes one little room, an everywhere.
 Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
 Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
 Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.
 My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
 And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;

Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mix'd equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

Only Our Love

John Donne

Only our love hath no decay;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Sweetest Love, I do not go

John Donne

Sweetest love, I do not go
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter love for me;
But since that I
Must die at last, 'tis best
Thus to use myself in jest,
By feigned death to die.
Yesternight the sun went hence,
And yet is here to - day;
He hath no desire nor sense,
Nor half so short a way.
Then fear not me,
But believe that I shall make
Hastier journeys, since I take
More wings and spurs than he.
O how feeble is man's power,
That, if good fortune fall,
Cannot add another hour,
Nor a lost hour recall.
But come bad chance,
And we join to it our strength,
And we teach it art and length,
Itself o'er us t' advance.
When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st no wind,
But sigh'st my soul away;
When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,
My life's blood doth decay.
It cannot be
That thou lov'st me as thou say'st,
If in thine my life thou waste,
That art the best of me.
Let not thy divining heart

Forethink me any ill.
Destiny may take thy part
And may thy fears fulfil;
But think that we
Are but turned aside to sleep:
They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.

Loves' Infinitenesse

John Donne

If yet I have not all thy love,
Deare, I shall never have it all,
I cannot breath one other sigh, to move;
Nor can intreat one other teare to fall.
And all my treasure, which should purchase thee,
Sighs, teares and oathes, and letters I have spent,
Yet no more can be due to mee,
Then at the bargaine made was ment,
If then thy gift of love were partiall,
That some to mee, some should to others fall,
Deare, I shall never have Thee All.
Or if then thou gavest mee all,
All was but All, which thou hadst then,
But if in thy heart, since, there be or shall,
New love created bee, by other men,
Which have their stocks intire, and can in teares,
In sighs, in oathes, and letters outbid mee,
This new love may beget new feares,
For, this love was not vowed by thee,
And yet is was, thy gift being generall,
The ground, thy heart is mine, what ever shall
Grow there, deare, I should have it all.
Yet I would not have all yet,
Hee that hath all can have no more,
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store,
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it:
Loves riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stayes at home, and thou with losing savest it:
But wee will have a way more liberall,
Then changing hearts, to joyne them, so wee shall
Be one, and one anothers All.

The Extasie

John Donne

Where,like a pillow on a bed,
A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest

The violets reclining head,
 Sat we two, one anothers best;
 Our hands were firmly cimented
 With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
 Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
 Our eyes, upon one double string,
 So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all the meanes to make us one,
 And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation.
 As'twixt two equall Armies, Fate
 Suspends uncertaine victorie,
 Our soules, (which to advance their state,
 Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee.
 And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
 Wee like sepulchrall statues lay,
 All day, the same our postures were,
 And wee said nothing, all the day.
 If any, so by love refin'd,
 That he soules language understood,
 And by good love were growen all minde,
 Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knowes not which soule spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take,
 And part farre purer then he came.
 This Extasie doth unperplex
 (We said) and tell us what we love,
 Wee see by this, it was not sexe
 Wee see, we saw not what did move:
 But as all severall soules containe
 Mixture of things, they know not what,
 Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
 And makes both one, each this and that.
 A single violet transplant,
 The strength, the colour, and the size,
 (All which before was poore, and scant,)
 Redoubles still, and multiplies.
 When love, with one another so
 Interanimates two soules,
 That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
 Defects of lonelinessse controules.
 Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
 Of what we are compos'd, and made,
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
 Are soules, whom no change can invade.
 But O alas, so long, so farre
 Our bodies why doe wee forbear?
 They are ours, though not wee, Wee are
 The intelligences, they the spheares.

We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convay,
 Yeelded their senses force to us,
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
 On man heavens influence workes not so,
 But that it first imprints the ayre,
 For soule into the soule may flow,
 Though it to body first repaire.
 As our blood labours to beget
 Spirits, as like soules as it can,
 Because such fingers need to knit
 That subtile knot, which makes us man:
 So must pure lovers soules descend
 T'affections, and to faculties,
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,
 Else a great Prince in prison lies,
 To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
 But yet the body is his booke.
 And if some lover, such as wee,
 Have heard this dialogue of one,
 Let him still marke us, he shall see
 Small change, when we're to bodies gone.

Love's Deitie

John Donne

I long to talke with some old lovers ghost,
 Who dyed before the god of Love was borne:
 I cannot thinke that hee, who then lov'd most,
 Sunke so low, as to love one which did scorne.
 But since this god produc'd a destinie,
 And that vice-nature, custome, lets it be;
 I must love her, that loves not mee.
 Sure, they which made him god, meant not so much:
 Nor he, in his young godhead practis'd it.
 But when an even flame two hearts did touch,
 His office was indulgently to fit
 Actives to passives. Correspondencie
 Only his subject was; It cannot bee
 Love, till I love her, that loves mee.
 But every moderne god will now extend
 His vast prerogative, as far as Jove.
 To rage, to lust, to write to, to commend,
 All is the purluwe of the God of Love.
 Oh were wee wak'ned by this Tyrannie
 To ungod this child againe, it could not beo
 I should love her, who loves not mee.
 Rebell and Atheist too, why murmure I,

As though I felt the worst that love could doe?
Love may make me leave loving, or might trie
A deeper plague, to make her love mee too,
Which since she loves before, I'am loth to see;
Falshood is worse then hate; and that must bee,
If shee whom I love, should love mee.

Love's Alchemy

John Donne

Some that have deeper digg'd love's mine than I,
Say, where his centric happiness doth lie;
I have lov'd, and got, and told,
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
I should not find that hidden mystery.
Oh, 'tis imposture all!
And as no chemic yet th'elixir got,
But glorifies his pregnant pot
If by the way to him befall
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal,
So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,
But get a winter-seeming summer's night.
Our ease, our thrift, our honour, and our day,
Shall we for this vain bubble's shadow pay?
Ends love in this, that my man
Can be as happy'as I can, if he can
Endure the short scorn of a bridegroom's play?
That loving wretch that swears
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,
Which he in her angelic finds,
Would swear as justly that he hears,
In that day's rude hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres.
Hope not for mind in women; at their best
Sweetness and wit, they're but mummy, possess'd.

James Fenton

In Paris with You

James Fenton

Don't talk to me of love. I've had an earful
And I get tearful when I've downed a drink or two.
I'm one of your talking wounded.
I'm a hostage. I'm marooned.
But I'm in Paris with you.
Yes, I'm angry at the way I've been bamboozled
And resentful at the mess that I've been through.
I admit I'm on the rebound

And I don't care where are we bound.
 I'm in Paris with you.
 Do you mind if we do not go to the Louvre,
 If we say sod off to sodding Notre Dame
 If we skip the champs Elysees
 And remain here in this sleazy
 Old hotel room
 Doing this or that
 To what and whom
 Learning who you are,
 Learning what I am.
 Don't talk to me of love. Let's talk of Paris,
 The little bit of Paris in our view.
 There's that crack across the ceiling
 And the hotel walls are peeling
 And I'm in Paris with you.
 Don't talk to me of love. Let's talk of Paris.
 I'm in Paris with the slightest thing you do.
 I'm in Paris with your eyes, your mouth,
 I'm in Paris with . . . all points south.
 Am I embarrassing you?
 I'm in Paris with you.

Out of the East

James Fenton

Out of the South came Famine.
 Out of the West came Strife.
 Out of the North came a storm cone
 And out of the East came a warrior wind
 And it struck you like a knife.
 Out of the East there shone a sun
 As the blood rose on the day
 And it shone on the work of the warrior wind
 And it shone on the heart
 And it shone on the soul
 And they called the sun — Dismay.
 And it's a far cry from the jungle
 To the city of Phnom Penh
 And many try
 And many die
 Before they can see their homes again
 And it's a far cry from the paddy track
 To the palace of the king
 And many go
 Before they know
 It's a far cry.
 It's a war cry.
 Cry for the war that can do this thing.
 A foreign soldier came to me

And he gave me a gun
 And he predicted victory
 Before the year was done.
 He taught me how to kill a man.
 He taught me how to try.
 Be he forgot to say to me
 How an honest man should die.
 He taught me how to kill a man
 Who was my enemy
 But never how to kill a man
 Who'd been a friend to me.
 You fought the way a hero fights —
 You had no need to fear
 My friend, but you are wounded now
 And I'm not allowed to leave you here
 Alive.
 Out of the East came Anger
 And it walked a dusty road
 And it stopped when it came to a river bank
 And it pitched a camp
 And it gazed across
 To where the city stood
 When
 Out of the West came thunder
 But it came without a sound
 For it came at the speed of the warrior wind
 And it fell on the heart
 And it fell on the soul
 And it shook the battleground
 And it's a far cry from the cockpit
 To the foxhole in the clay
 And we were a
 Coordinate
 In a foreign land
 Far away
 And it's a far cry from the paddy track
 To the palace of the king
 And many try
 And they ask why
 It's a far cry.
 It's a war cry.
 Cry for the war that can do this thing.
 Next year the army came for me
 And I was sick and thin
 And they put a weapon in our hands
 And they told us we would win
 And they feasted us for seven days
 And they slaughtered a hundred cattle
 And we sang our songs of victory
 And the glory of the battle

And they sent us down the dusty roads
In the stillness of the night
And when the city heard from us
It burst in a flower of light.
The tracer bullets found us out.
The guns were never wrong
And the gunship said Regret Regret
The words of your victory song.
Out of the North came an army
And it was clad in black
And out of the South came a gun crew
With a hundred shells
And a howitzer
And we walked in black along the paddy track
When
Out of the West came napalm
And it tumbled from the blue
And it spread at the speed of the warrior wind
And it clung to the heart
And it clung to the soul
As napalm is designed to do
And it's a far cry from the fireside
To the fire that finds you there
In the foxhole
By the temple gate
The fire that finds you everywhere
And it's a far cry from the paddy track
To the palace of the king
And many try
And they ask why
It's a far cry.
It's a war cry.
Cry for the war that can do this thing.
My third year in the army
I was sixteen years old
And I had learnt enough, my friend,
To believe what I was told
And I was told that we would take
The city of Phnom Penh
And they slaughtered all the cows we had
And they feasted us again
And at last we were given river mines
And we blocked the great Mekong
And now we trained our rockets on
The landing-strip at Pochentong.
The city lay within our grasp.
We only had to wait.
We only had to hold the line
By the foxhole, by the temple gate
When

Out of the West came clusterbombs
 And they burst in a hundred shards
 And every shard was a new bomb
 And it burst again
 Upon our men
 As they gasped for breath in the temple yard.
 Out of the West came a new bomb
 And it sucked away the air
 And it sucked at the heart
 And it sucked at the soul
 And it found a lot of children there
 And it's a far cry from the temple yard
 To the map of the general staff
 From the grease pen to the gasping men
 To the wind that blows the soul like chaff
 And it's a far cry from the paddy track
 To the palace of the king
 And many go
 Before they know
 It's a far cry.
 It's a war cry.
 Cry for the war that has done this thing.
 A foreign soldier came to me
 And he gave me a gun
 And the liar spoke of victory
 Before the year was done.
 What would I want with victory
 In the city of Phnom Penh?
 Punish the city! Punish the people!
 What would I want but punishment?
 We have brought the king home to his palace.
 We shall leave him there to weep
 And we'll go back along the paddy track
 For we have promises to keep.
 For the promise made in the foxhole,
 For the oath in the temple yard,
 For the friend I killed on the battlefield
 I shall make that punishment hard.
 Out of the South came Famine.
 Out of the West came Strife.
 Out of the North came a storm cone
 And out of the East came a warrior wind
 And it struck you like a knife.
 Out of the East there shone a sun
 As the blood rose on the day
 And it shone on the work of the warrior wind
 And it shone on the heart
 And it shone on the soul
 And they called the sun Dismay, my friend,
 They called the sun — Dismay.

The Ballad of the Imam and the Shah

James Fenton

(An Old Persian Legend)

to C. E. H.

It started with a stabbing at a well
Below the minarets of Isfahan.
The widow took her son to see them kill
The officer who'd murdered her old man.
The child looked up and saw the hangman's work —
The man who'd killed his father swinging high,
The mother said: 'My child, now be at peace.
The wolf has had the fruits of all his crime.'

From felony to felony to crime

From robbery to robbery to loss

From calumny to calumny to spite

From rivalry to rivalry to zeal

All this was many centuries ago —

The kind of thing that couldn't happen now —

When Persia was the empire of the Shah

And many were the furrows on his brow.

The peacock the symbol of his throne

And many were the jewels and its eyes

And many were the prisons in the land

And many were the torturers and spies.

From tyranny to tyranny to war

From dynasty to dynasty to hate

From villainy to villainy to death

From policy to policy to grave

The child grew up a clever sort of chap

And he became a mullah, like his dad —

Spent many years in exile and disgrace

Because he told the world the Shah was bad.

'Believe in God,' he said, 'believe in me.

Believe me when I tell you who I am.

Now chop the arm of wickedness away.

Hear what I say, I am the great Imam.'

From heresy to heresy to fire

From clerisy to clerisy to fear

From litany to litany to sword

From fallacy to fallacy to wrong

And so the Shah was forced to flee abroad.

The Imam was the ruler in his place.

He started killing everyone he could

To make up for the years of his disgrace.

And when there were no enemies at home

He sent his men to Babylon to fight.
And when he'd lost an army in that way
He knew what God was telling him was right.

*From poverty to poverty to wrath
From agony to agony to doubt
From malady to malady to shame
From misery to misery to fight*
He sent the little children out to war.
They went out with his portrait in their hands.
The desert and the marshes filled with blood.
The mothers heard the news in Isfahan.
Now Babylon is buried under dirt.
Persepolis is peeping through the sand.
The child who saw his father's killer killed
Has slaughtered half the children in the land.

*From felony
to robbery
to calumny
to rivalry
to tyranny
to dynasty
to villainy
to policy
to heresy
to clerisy
to litany
to fallacy
to poverty
to agony
to malady
to misery —*
The song is yours. Arrange it as you will.
Remember where each word fits in the line
And every combination will be true
And every permutation will be fine:

*From policy to felony to fear
From litany to heresy to fire
From villainy to tyranny to war
From tyranny to dynasty to shame*

*From poverty to malady to grave
From malady to agony to spite
From agony to misery to hate
From misery to policy to fight!*

Out of Danger

James Fenton

Heart be kind and sign the release
As the trees their loss approve.
Learn as leaves must learn to fall
Out of danger, out of love.
What belongs to frost and thaw
Sullen winter will not harm.
What belongs to wind and rain
Is out of danger from the storm.
Jealous passion, cruel need
Betray the heart they feed upon.
But what belongs to earth and death
Is out of danger from the sun.
I was cruel, I was wrong —
Hard to say and hard to know.
You do not belong to me.
You are out of danger now —
Out of danger from the wind,
Out of danger from the wave,
Out of danger from the heart
Falling, falling out of love.

D H Lawrence

Snake

D H Lawrence

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.
In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob tree
I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the
trough before me.
He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over
the
edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small
clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.
Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second-comer, waiting.
He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,

And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
 And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a
 moment,
 And stooped and drank a little more,
 Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the
 earth
 On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.
 The voice of my education said to me
 He must be killed,
 For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are
 venomous.
 And voices in me said, If you were a man
 You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.
 But must I confess how I liked him,
 How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at
 my water-trough
 And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
 Into the burning bowels of this earth?
 Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
 Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
 Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
 I felt so honoured.
 And yet those voices:
 If you were not afraid, you would kill him!
 And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
 But even so, honoured still more
 That he should seek my hospitality
 From out the dark door of the secret earth.
 He drank enough
 And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
 And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
 Seeming to lick his lips,
 And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
 And slowly turned his head,
 And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,
 Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
 And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.
 And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and
 entered farther,
 A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into
 that horrid black hole,
 Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing
 himself after,
 Overcame me now his back was turned.
 I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
 I picked up a clumsy log
 And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.
 I think it did not hit him,
 But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in

undignified haste,
 Writhed like lightning, and was gone
 Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,
 At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.
 And immediately I regretted it.
 I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
 I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human
 education.
 And I thought of the albatross,
 And I wished he would come back, my snake.
 For he seemed to me again like a king,
 Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
 Now due to be crowned again.
 And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
 Of life.
 And I have something to expiate:
 A pettiness.

William Wordsworth

The World is Too Much With Us

William Wordsworth

The World is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
 Little we see in Nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
 The winds that will be howling at all hours
 And are up-gather'd now like sleeping flowers,
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not. –Great God! I'd rather be
 A pagan suckled in a creed outworn, –
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreath'd horn.

Others

Menelaus and Helen

Rupert Brooke

I
 Hot through Troy's ruin Menelaus broke
 To Priam's palace, sword in hand, to sate

On that adulterous whore a ten years' hate
And a king's honour. Through red death, and smoke,
And cries, and then by quieter ways he strode,
Till the still innermost chamber fronted him.
He swung his sword, and crashed into the dim
Luxurious bower, flaming like a god.
High sat white Helen, lonely and serene.
He had not remembered that she was so fair,
And that her neck curved down in such a way;
And he felt tired. He flung the sword away,
And kissed her feet, and knelt before her there,
The perfect Knight before the perfect Queen.

II

So far the poet. How should he behold
That journey home, the long connubial years?
He does not tell you how white Helen bears
Child on legitimate child, becomes a scold,
Haggard with virtue. Menelaus bold
Waxed garrulous, and sacked a hundred Troys
'Twixt noon and supper. And her golden voice
Got shrill as he grew deafer. And both were old.
Often he wonders why on earth he went
Troyward, or why poor Paris ever came.
Oft she weeps, gummy-eyed and impotent;
Her dry shanks twitch at Paris' mumbled name.
So Menelaus nagged; and Helen cried;
And Paris slept on by Scamander side.

Adam's Complaint

Denise Levertov

Some people,
no matter what you give them,
still want the moon.
The bread,
the salt,
white meat and dark,
still hungry.
The marriage bed
and the cradle,
still empty arms.
You give them land,
their own earth under their feet,
still they take to the roads.
And water: dig them the deepest well,
still it's not deep enough
to drink the moon from.

Named

Stephen Dunn

He'd spent his life trying to control the names people gave him;
oh the unfair and the accurate equally hurt.
Just recently he'd been a son-of-a-bitch and sweetheart in the
same day,
and once again knew what antonyms
love and control are, and how comforting it must be to have a
business card —
Manager, Specialist — and believe what it says.
Who, in fact, didn't want his most useful name to enter with
him,
when he entered a room, who didn't want to be
that kind of lie? A man who was a sweetheart and a
son-of-a-bitch
was also more or less every name
he'd ever been called, and when you die, he thought, that's
when it happens,
you're collected forever into a few small words.
But never to have been outrageous or exquisite, no grand
mistake
so utterly yours it causes whispers
in the peripheries of your presence — that was his fear.
“Reckless”; he wouldn't object to such a name
if it came from the right voice with the right amount of
reverence.
Someone nearby, of course, certain to add “fool.”

The Leaden-Eyed

Vachel Lindsay

Let not young souls be smothered out before
They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride.
It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull,
Its poor are ox-like, limp and leaden-eyed.
Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly;
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap;
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve;
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

The More you have to loose

David Lehman

Time lies, and a year can go by in a day
Look at your watch. Do your eyes say 2.45 or 9.15?
The more you have, the more you can give away.
You know the feeling, having no money, having to stay
With relatives when you travel, unable to say what you mean:
Time lies, and a year can go by in a day.
When my father turned into my son, like a play,

All the fun took place off-stage. What about the missing queen?
The more you have, the more you can give away.
The less you believe, the more you wish you could pray.
Like a clock without hands, the truth of a face remains unseen.
Time lies, and a year can go by in a day.
With an elbow on the counter, and no passions left to sway,
The all-night waitress smokes butt after butt, coughing
in-between:
The more you have, the more you can throw away.
Ocean, what is on the other side of all that blue and grey?
What does the grass know of yesterday's vanished green?
Time lies, and a year can go by in a day.
The more you have, the more you can give away.

Je souhaite dans ma maison

Apollinaire

Je souhaite dans ma maison
Une jeune fille ayant sa raison
Un chat passant parmi les livres
Des amis en tout saison
Sans lesquels je ne peux pas vivre

Black Rook in Rainy Weather

Sylvia Plath

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain-
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident
To set the sight on fire
In my eye, nor seek
Any more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall
Without ceremony, or portent.
Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Lean incandescent
Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then –
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent
By bestowing largesse, honor
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
Wary (for it could happen
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); sceptical

Yet politic, ignorant
 Of whatever angel any choose to flare
 Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
 Ordering its black feathers can so shine
 As to seize my senses, haul
 My eyelids up, and grant
 A brief respite from fear
 Of total neutrality. With luck,
 Trekking stubborn through this season
 Of fatigue, I shall
 Patch together a content
 Of sorts. Miracles occur.
 If you care to call those spasmodic
 Tricks of radiance
 Miracles. The wait's begun again,
 The long wait for the angel,
 For that rare, random descent.

Portrait of a Schoolmaster

Unknown

And I should wish to draw you, caught so
 head on one side, hand on the tea-table
 that nervous posture and those eyes able
 to relax in accuracy at a window,
 in a view of hills reclined distantly,
 olive coloured and tall, or like clear
 Latin speech, weighed and fine in the ear,
 designed by ice, or tortuous irony;
 or else exhaling aphorisms like brittle
 fire or a nineteenth century rocket,
 — by fascination seeming to forget
 what this lights up so briefly and so little:
 the mildewed landscape which no mind can cure,
 hypocrisy of the hearts incompetence,
 all the sad images of violence
 and decorous religions of failure.

Concerto for Double Bass

John Fuller

He is a drunk leaning companionably
 Around a lamp post or doing up
 With intermittent concentration
 Another drunk's coat.
 He is a polite but devoted Valentino,
 Cheek to cheek, forgetting the next step.
 He is feeling the pulse of the fat lady
 Or cutting her in half.
 But close your eyes and it is sunset

At the edge of the world. It is the language
Of dolphins, the growth of tree-roots,
The heart-beat slowing down.

Prayer

Carol Ann Duffy

Some days, although we cannot pray, a prayer
utters itself. So, a woman will lift
her head from the sieve of her hands and stare
at the minims sung by a tree, a sudden gift.
Some nights, although we are faithless, the truth
enters our hearts, that small familiar pain;
then a man will stand stock-still, hearing his youth
in the distant Latin chanting of a train.
Pray for us now. Grade 1 piano scales
console the lodger looking out across
a Midlands town. Then dusk, and someone calls
a child's name as though they named their loss.
Darkness outside. Inside, the radio's prayer —
Rockall. Malin. Dogger. Finisterre.

Epitaph for Francis Chartres (1669-1731)

Dr. Arbuthnot

(The London Magazine, 1732)

HERE continueth to rot
The body of FRANCIS CHARTRES
Who with an INFLEXIBLE CONSTANCY
and INIMITABLE UNIFORMITY of Life PERSISTED
In spite of AGE and INFIRMITIES,
In the practice of EVERY HUMAN VICE;
Excepting PRODIGIALITY and HYPOCRISY:
His insatiable AVARICE exempted him from the first,
His matchless IMPUDENCE from the second.

Nor was he more singular
In the undeviating *pravity* of his *Manners*,
Than successful
In *accumulating* wealth,
For without TRADE or PROFESSION,
Without TRUST of PUBLIC MONEY,
And without BRIBE-WORTHY Service,
He acquired, or more properly created,
A MINISTERIAL ESTATE.

He was the only Person of his Time,
Who could cheat without the Mask of HONESTY,
Retain his Primeval MEANNESS
When possess'd of TEN THOUSAND a Year,
And having daily deserved the Gibbet for what he *did*,
Was at last condemned to it for what he *could* not *do*.

Oh Indignant Reader!
Think not his life useless to Mankind!
Providence conniv'd at his execrable Designs,
To give to After-ages
A conspicuous PROOF and EXAMPLE,
Of how small Estimation is EXORBITANT WEALTH in the sight
of God,
By bestowing it on the most UNWORTHY of ALL MORTALS.

Untitled

Issa

What good luck!
Bitten by
This year's mosquitoes too.

Adlestrop

Edward Thomas

Yes, I remember Adlestrop –
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.
The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop – only the name
And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.
And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Bearhug

Michael Ondaatje

Griffin calls to come and kiss him goodnight
I yell ok. Finish something I'm doing,
then something else, walk slowly round
the corner to my son's room.
He is standing arms outstretched
waiting for a bearhug. Grinning.
Why do I give my emotion an animal's name,
give it that dark squeeze of death?
This is the hug which collects
all his small bones and his warm neck against me.
The thin tough body under the pyjamas
locks to me like a magnet of blood.

How long was he standing there
like that, before I came?

Strugnell's Sonnets (VI)

Wendy Cope

Let me not to the marriage of true swine
Admit impediments. With his big car
He's won your heart, and you have punctured mine.
I have no spare; henceforth I'll bear the scar.
Since women are not worth the booze you buy them
I dedicate myself to Higher Things.
If men deride and sneer, I shall defy them
And soar above Tulse Hill on poet's wings –
A brother to the thrush in Brockwell Park,
Whose song, though sometimes drowned by rock guitars,
Outlives their din. One day I'll make my mark,
Although I'm not from Ulster or from Mars,
And when I'm published in some classy mag
You'll rue the day you scarpered in his Jag.

Keith Chegwin as Fleance

Paul Farley

The next rung up from extra and dogsbody
and all the clichés are true — days waiting for
enough light, learning card games, penny-ante,
while fog rolls off the sea, a camera
gets moisture in its gate, and Roman Polanski
curses the day he chose Snowdonia.
He picked you for your hair to play this role:
a look had reached Bootle from Altamont
that year. You wouldn't say you sold your soul
but learned your line inside a beating tent
by candlelight, the shingle dark as coal
behind each wave, and its slight restatement.
“A tale told by an idiot...” “Not your turn,
but perhaps, with time and practice...”, the Pole starts.
Who's to say, behind the accent and that grin,
what designs you had on playing a greater part?
The crew get ready while the stars go in.
You speak the words you'd written on your heart
just as the long-awaited sunrise fires
the sky a blueish pink. Who could have seen
this future in the late schedules, where I
can't sleep, and watch your flight from the big screen;
on the other side of drink and wondering why,
the zany, household-name years in between?

They Flee From Me

Thomas Wyatt

They flee from me that sometime did me seek
With naked foot stalking in my chamber.
I have seen them gentle tame and meek
That now are wild and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.
Thanked be fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once in special,
In thin array after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small;
And therewithal sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, Dear heart, how like you this?
It was no dream, I lay broad waking.
But all is turned thorough my gentleness
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness
And she also to use newfangledness.
But since that I so kindly am served,
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

The South Country

Hilaire Belloc

When I am living in the Midlands
That are sodden and unkind,
I light my lamp in the evening:
My work is left behind;
And the great hills of the South Country
Come back into my mind.
The great hills of the South Country
They stand along the sea;
And it's there walking in the high woods
That I could wish to be,
And the men that were boys when I was a boy
Walking along with me.
The men that live in North England
I saw them for a day:
Their hearts are set upon the waste fells,
Their skies are fast and grey;
From their castle-walls a man may see
The mountains far away.
The men that live in West England
They see the Severn strong,
A-rolling on rough water brown
Light aspen leaves along.
They have the secret of the Rocks,

And the oldest kind of song.
But the men that live in the South Country
Are the kindest and most wise,
They get their laughter from the loud surf,
And the faith in their happy eyes
Comes surely from our Sister the Spring
When over the sea she flies;
The violets suddenly bloom at her feet,
She blesses us with surprise.
I never get between the pines
But I smell the Sussex air;
Nor I never come on a belt of sand
But my home is there.
And along the sky the line of the Downs
So noble and so bare.
A lost thing could I never find,
Nor a broken thing mend:
And I fear I shall be all alone
When I get towards the end.
Who will there be to comfort me
Or who will be my friend?
I will gather and carefully make my friends
Of the men of the Sussex Weald;
They watch the stars from silent folds,
They stiffly plough the field.
By them and the God of the South Country
My poor soul shall be healed.
If I ever become a rich man,
Or if ever I grow to be old,
I will build a house with deep thatch
To shelter me from the cold,
And there shall the Sussex songs be sung
And the story of Sussex told.
I will hold my house in the high wood
Within a walk of the sea,
And the men that were boys when I was a boy
Shall sit and drink with me.