

**It's one thing to want one's life to be fulfilling,
another to want it to be very long**

A sun and a glacier sit
in folding chairs turned backwards,
the lumbar support like armor
protecting vitals in the chest. They wave
their arms as they speak. Glacier says
to Sun, "Saw a sparrow trying to crack
open the husk of a cicada on a driveway.
Never thought to use a driveway as a tool
like that." Sun says, "I know how the story
ends. The sparrow finds the husk
filled with air. Stops using tools."
Neither pays attention to the fallout
of their proximity, the melting
of one, the dousing of the other.
They take separate taxis home.
The brilliance of the sparrow
remains to be unleashed. I wake
knowing this. I eat a very small portion
of last night's supper as my breakfast.
You greet me as if it were any other
day, which it is, so you say,
Hey, how are you? I say, Well,
hiding the hole, the bucket, the rope,
wondering how thirsty you are.

[MATT MAUCH](#)

Acquainted with the Night

BY [ROBERT FROST](#)

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

The Second Coming

BY [WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS](#)

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre 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 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?

Dreams

by [Langston Hughes](#)

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

When You are Old

by [W. B. Yeats](#)

When you are old and grey 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 upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

A Drop fell on the Apple Tree (794)

by [Emily Dickinson](#)

A Drop fell on the Apple Tree -

Another - on the Roof -

A Half a Dozen kissed the Eaves -

And made the Gables laugh -

A few went out to help the Brook

That went to help the Sea -

Myself Conjectured were they Pearls -

What Necklaces could be -

The Dust replaced, in Hoisted Roads -

The Birds jocosely sung -

The Sunshine threw his Hat away -

The Bushes - spangles flung -

The Breezes brought dejected Lutes -

And bathed them in the Glee -

The Orient showed a single Flag,

And signed the fête away -

Casey at the Bat
by Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest
Clung to the hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a whack at that—
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat."

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
And the former was a hoodoo, while the latter was a cake;
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;

Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun sphere flew;
But Casey still ignored it and the umpire said, "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate,
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out.

White Apples

by [Donald Hall](#)

when my father had been dead a week
I woke
with his voice in my ear
I sat up in bed
and held my breath
and stared at the pale closed door

white apples and the taste of stone

if he called again
I would put on my coat and galoshes

Three Haiku by Kobayashi Issa

The world of dew
Is the world of dew
And yet, and yet--

In this world
we walk on the roof of hell,
gazing at flowers.

Summer night--
even the stars
are whispering to each other.

Taken Up

by [Charles Martin](#)

Tired of earth, they dwindled on their hill,
Watching and waiting in the moonlight until
The aspens' leaves quite suddenly grew still,

No longer quaking as the disc descended,
That glowing wheel of lights whose coming ended
All waiting and watching. When it landed

The ones within it one by one came forth,
Stalking out awkwardly upon the earth,
And those who watched them were confirmed in faith:

Mysterious voyagers from outer space,
Attenuated, golden—shreds of lace
Spun into seeds of the sunflower's spinning face—

Light was their speech, spanning mind to mind:
*We come here not believing what we find—
Can it be your desire to leave behind*

*The earth, which even those called angels bless,
Exchanging amplitude for emptiness?*
And in a single voice they answered Yes,

Discord of human melodies all blent
To the unearthly harmony of their assent.
Come then, the Strangers said, and those who were taken, went.

Duck/Rabbit

BY [CHANA BLOCH](#)

*We remember the rabbit when we
see
the duck, but we cannot
experience*

both at the same time

—E.H.

Gombrich, Art and Illusion

*WHAT do you remember? When I looked at
his streaky glasses, I wanted
to leave him. And before that? He stole those
cherries for me at midnight. We were walking
in the rain and I loved him.*

*And before that? I saw him coming
toward me that time at the picnic,
edgy, foreign.*

*But you loved him? He sat in his room with
the shades drawn, brooding. But you*

*loved him? He gave me
a photo of himself at sixteen, diving
from the pier. It was summer. His arms
outstretched. And before that?
His mother was combing his soft curls
with her fingers and crying. Crying.*

*Is that what he said? He put on the straw hat
and raced me to the barn. What did he
tell you? Here's the dried rose, brown
as tobacco. Here's the letter that I tore
and pasted. The book of blank pages
with the velvet cover. But do you still*

*love him? When I rub the nap
backwards, the colors lift,
bristle. What do you mean?
Sometimes, when I'm all alone,
I find myself stroking it.*

To the One Who is Reading Me

BY [JORGE LUIS BORGES](#)

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH BY TONY BARNSTONE [Read the translator's notes](#)

You are invulnerable. Didn't they deliver
(those forces that control your destiny)
the certainty of dust? Couldn't it be
your irreversible time is that river
in whose bright mirror Heraclitus read
his brevity? A marble slab is saved
for you, one you won't read, already graved
with city, epitaph, dates of the dead.
And other men are also dreams of time,
not hardened bronze, purified gold. They're dust
like you; the universe is Proteus.
Shadow, you'll travel to what waits ahead,
the fatal shadow waiting at the rim.
Know this: in some way you're already dead.

When I am dead, my dearest

BY [CHRISTINA ROSSETTI](#)

When I am dead, my dearest,

Sing no sad songs for me;

Plant thou no roses at my head,

Nor shady cypress tree:

Be the green grass above me

With showers and dewdrops wet;

And if thou wilt, remember,

And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,

I shall not feel the rain;

I shall not hear the nightingale

Sing on, as if in pain:

And dreaming through the twilight

That doth not rise nor set,

Haply I may remember,

And haply may forget.

Last Dream

BY [GIOVANNI PASCOLI](#)

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY GEOFFREY BROCK [Read the translator's notes](#)

Out of a motionless infernal
shudder and clang of steel on steel
as wagons moved toward the eternal,
a sudden silence: I was healed.

The stormcloud of my sickness fled
on a breath. A flickering of eyes,
and I saw my mother by my bed
and gazed at her without surprise.

Free! Helpless, yes, to move the hands
clasped on my chest—but I had no
desire to move. The rustling sounds
(like cypress trees, like streams that flow

across vast prairies seeking seas
that don't exist) were thin, insistent:
I followed after those vain sighs,
ever the same, ever more distant.

By the Way

You are right to point out that the agapanthus is not a lily, especially to one who so loves precision, but the agapanthus is also called "Lily of the Nile," which surely could be seen as justification for calling it a lily.

I am sure Cleopatra herself never called this plant agapanthus. And, well, wouldn't one want to be more like Cleopatra than like Theophrastus? The Queen of the Nile would have likely called it a lily, no?

Yes, yes, words have meaning and have power and all of that stuff. Yes, yes, I of all people understand the importance of naming. But if Cleopatra would have called it a lily . . . Okay, I will stop. You look great, by the way.

But I just want to point out that the agapanthus is such an odd plant that even botanists cannot agree on the number of species in the genus, some saying six, others as many as ten. Okay, I swear I'll stop. Seriously. Promise.

The windy night air is cold, and the wings bound along my spine sweaty and bruised, the long bandages chafing my armpits. Words have power, my love. You call this winged thing an angel, but that is not the word I would use for it.

[C. DALE YOUNG](#)

Emerging *by Pablo Neruda*

A man says yes without knowing
how to decide even what the question is,
and is caught up, and then is carried along
and never again escapes from his own cocoon;
and that's how we are, forever falling
into the deep well of other beings;
and one thread wraps itself around our necks,
another entwines a foot, and then it is impossible,
impossible to move except in the well –
nobody can rescue us from other people.
It seems as if we don't know how to speak;
it seems as if there are words which escape,
which are missing, which have gone away and left us
to ourselves, tangled up in snares and threads.
And all at once, that's it; we no longer know
what it's all about, but we are deep inside it,
and now we will never see with the same eyes
as once we did when we were children playing.
Now these eyes are closed to us,
Now our hands emerge from different arms.
And therefore when you sleep, you are alone in your dreaming,
and running freely through the corridors
of one dream only, which belongs to you.
Oh never let them come to steal our dreams,
never let them entwine us in our bed.
Let us hold on to the shadows
to see if, from our own obscurity,
we emerge and grope along the walls,
lie in wait for the light, to capture it,
till, once and for all time,
it becomes our own, the sun of every day.

Easter Wings

BY [GEORGE HERBERT](#)

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,

Though foolishly he lost the same,

Decaying more and more,

Till he became

Most poore:

With thee

O let me rise

As larks, harmoniously,

And sing this day thy victories:

Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne

And still with sicknesses and shame.

Thou didst so punish sinne,

That I became

Most thinne.

With thee

Let me combine,

And feel thy victorie:

For, if I imp my wing on thine,

Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

Meaning

by Carl Dennis

If a life needn't be useful to be meaningful,
Then maybe a life of sunbathing on a beach
Can be thought of as meaningful for at least a few,
The few, say, who view the sun as a god
And consider basking a form of worship.

As for those devoted to partnership with a surfboard
Or a pair of ice skates or a bag of golf clubs,
Though I can't argue their lives are useful,
I'd be reluctant to claim they have no meaning
Even if no one observes their display of mastery.

No one is listening to the librarian
I can call to mind as she practices, after work,
In her flat on Hoover Street, the viola da gamba
In the one hour of day that for her is golden.
So what if she'll never be good enough
To give a concert people will pay to hear?

When I need to think of her with an audience,
I can imagine the ghosts of composers dead for centuries,
Pleased to hear her doing her best with their music.

And isn't it pleasing, as we walk at dusk to our cars
Parked on Hoover Street, after a meeting
On saving a shuttered hotel from the wrecking ball,
To catch the sound of someone filling a room
We won't be visiting with a haunting solo?

And then the gifts we receive by imagining
How down at the beach today surfers made sure
The big waves we weren't there to appreciate
Didn't go begging for attention.
And think of the sunlight we failed to welcome,
How others stepped forward to take it in.

I'm Alive, I Believe in Everything

Self. Brotherhood. God. Zeus. Communism.
Capitalism. Buddha. Vinyl records.
Baseball. Ink. Trees. Cures for disease.
Saltwater. Literature. Walking. Waking.
Arguments. Decisions. Ambiguity. Absolutes.
Presence. Absence. Positive and Negative.
Empathy. Apathy. Sympathy and entropy.
Verbs are necessary. So are nouns.
Empty skies. Dark vacuums of night.
Visions. Revisions. Innocence.
I've seen All the empty spaces yet to be filled.
I've heard All of the sounds that will collect
at the end of the world.
And the silence that follows.
I'm alive, I believe in everything
I'm alive, I believe in it all.
Waves lapping on the shore.
Skies on fire at sunset.
Old men dancing on the streets.
Paradox and possibility.
Sense and sensibility.
Cold logic and half truth.
Final steps and first impressions.
Fools and fine intelligence.
Chaos and clean horizons.
Vague notions and concrete certainty.
Optimism in the face of adversity.
I'm alive, I believe in everything
I'm alive, I believe in it all.
--Lesley Choyce

Sail

Molly Bendall

The trick is the flow. Little fish with storms on their
minds.

Stones don't reveal
what they covet today, but I know them.

I gather scraps and throw them back,
throw them back to the waves

even as they climb toward my room.

So where to go when my pockets are
light?

Night-shy, evening shells--
all eyelids and ears.

The glinting blades and their kindred---do they ever say,

no one ever, clean start, and

clean, stark, smoothed galleries within galleries

I want
emptied of desire, but geled with color and domes of sea-
sweets.

Look at the lapses in between stars,
vertebrae washed up at my feet.

The Fist

by [Derek Walcott](#)

The fist clenched round my heart
loosens a little, and I gasp
brightness; but it tightens
again. When have I ever not loved
the pain of love? But this has moved

past love to mania. This has the strong
clench of the madman, this is
gripping the ledge of unreason, before
plunging howling into the abyss.

Hold hard then, heart. This way at least you live.

Compulsively Allergic to the Truth

by Jeffrey McDaniel

I'm sorry I was late.
I was pulled over by a cop
for driving blindfolded
with a raspberry-scented candle
flickering in my mouth.
I'm sorry I was late.
I was on my way
when I felt a plot
thickening in my arm.
I have a fear of heights.
Luckily the Earth
is on the second floor
of the universe.
I am not the egg man.
I am the owl
who just witnessed
another tree fall over
in the forest of your life.
I am your father
shaking his head
at the thought of you.
I am his words dissolving
in your mind like footprints
in a rainstorm.
I am a long-legged martini.
I am feeding olives
to the bull inside you.
I am decorating
your labyrinth,
tacking up snapshots
of all the people
who've gotten lost
in your corridors.

Making a Fist

by [Naomi Shihab Nye](#)

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,
I felt the life sliding out of me,
a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.
I was seven, I lay in the car
watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.
My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

"How do you know if you are going to die?"
I begged my mother.
We had been traveling for days.
With strange confidence she answered,
"When you can no longer make a fist."

Years later I smile to think of that journey,
the borders we must cross separately,
stamped with our unanswerable woes.
I who did not die, who am still living,
still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,
clenching and opening one small hand.

The Layers

BY [STANLEY KUNITZ](#)

I have walked through many lives,
 some of them my own,
 and I am not who I was,
 though some principle of being
 abides, from which I struggle
 not to stray.

When I look behind,
 as I am compelled to look
 before I can gather strength
 to proceed on my journey,
 I see the milestones dwindling
 toward the horizon
 and the slow fires trailing
 from the abandoned camp-sites,
 over which scavenger angels
 wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
 out of my true affections,
 and my tribe is scattered!
 How shall the heart be reconciled
 to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
 the manic dust of my friends,
 those who fell along the way,
 bitterly stings my face.
 Yet I turn, I turn,
 exulting somewhat,
 with my will intact to go
 wherever I need to go,
 and every stone on the road
 precious to me.
 In my darkest night,
 when the moon was covered
 and I roamed through wreckage,
 a nimbus-clouded voice
 directed me:
 "Live in the layers,
 not on the litter."
 Though I lack the art
 to decipher it,
 no doubt the next chapter
 in my book of transformations
 is already written.
 I am not done with my changes.

There Are Birds Here

BY [JAMAAL MAY](#)

For Detroit

There are birds here,
 so many birds here
 is what I was trying to say
 when they said those birds were metaphors
 for what is trapped
 between buildings
 and buildings. No.
 The birds are here
 to root around for bread
 the girl's hands tear
 and toss like confetti. No,
 I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
 I said confetti, and no
 not the confetti

a tank can make of a building.
 I mean the confetti
 a boy can't stop smiling about
 and no his smile isn't much
 like a skeleton at all. And no
 his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
 I am trying to say
 his neighborhood
 is as tattered and feathered
 as anything else,
 as shadow pierced by sun
 and light parted
 by shadow-dance as anything else,
 but they won't stop saying
 how lovely the ruins,
 how ruined the lovely
 children must be in that birdless city.

Bless Their Hearts

BY [RICHARD NEWMAN](#)

At Steak ‘n Shake I learned that if you add
 “Bless their hearts” after their names, you can
 say
 whatever you want about them and it’s OK.
My son, bless his heart, is an idiot,
 she said. *He rents storage space for his kids’*
toys—they’re only one and three years old!
 I said, *my father, bless his heart, has turned*
into a sentimental old fool. He gets
weepy when he hears my daughter’s greeting
on our voice mail. Before our Steakburgers
 came
 someone else blessed her office mate’s heart,

then, as an afterthought, the jealous hearts
 of the entire anthropology department.

We bestowed blessings on many a heart
 that day. I even blessed my ex-wife’s heart.

Our waiter, bless his heart, would not be
 getting

much tip, for which, no doubt, he’d bless our
 hearts.

In a week it would be Thanksgiving,
 and we would each sit with our respective
 families, counting our blessings and blessing
 the hearts of family members as only family
 does best. Oh, bless us all, yes, bless us, please
 bless us and bless our crummy little hearts.

Whethering

BY [A. E. STALLINGS](#)

The rain is haunted;

I had forgotten.

My children are two hours abed

And yet I rise

Hearing behind the typing of the rain,

Its abacus and digits,

A voice calling me again,

Softer, clearer.

The kids lie buried under duvets, sound

Asleep. It isn't them I hear, it's

Something formless that fidgets

Beyond the window's benighted mirror,

Where a negative develops, where reflection

Holds up a glass of spirits.

White noise

Precipitates.

Rain is a kind of recollection.

Much has been shed,

Hissing indignantly into the ground.

It is the listening

Belates,

Haunted by these fingertaps and sighs

Behind the beaded-curtain glistening,

As though by choices that we didn't make and
never wanted,

As though by the dead and misbegotten.

The Two-Headed Calf

Tomorrow, when the farm boys find this
freak of nature, they will wrap his body
in newspaper and carry him to the museum.

But tonight he is alive and in the north
field with his mother. It is a perfect
summer evening: the moon rising over
the orchard, the wind in the grass.

And as he stares into the sky, there
are twice as many stars as usual.

--Laura Gilpin

Fame is the one that does not stay — (1507)

BY [EMILY DICKINSON](#)

Fame is the one that does not stay —

It's occupant must die

Or out of sight of estimate

Ascend incessantly —

Or be that most insolvent thing

A Lightning in the Germ —

Electrical the embryo

But we demand the Flame

Do not go gentle into that good night

by [Dylan Thomas](#)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

A Poison Tree

BY [WILLIAM BLAKE](#)

I was angry with my friend;

I told my wrath, my wrath did end.

I was angry with my foe:

I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I waterd it in fears,

Night & morning with my tears:

And I sunned it with smiles,

And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night.

Till it bore an apple bright.

And my foe beheld it shine,

And he knew that it was mine.

And into my garden stole,

When the night had veild the pole;

In the morning glad I see;

My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

A Student's Prayer

BY [ANONYMOUS](#)

Now I lay me down to rest,

I pray I pass tomorrow's test.

If I should die before I wake,

That's one less test I'll have to take.

If in AmericaBY [ED BOK LEE](#)*Hmong Hunter Charged with 6 Murders**Is Said to Be a Shaman* —NEW YORK TIMES

If a tree falls in a forest,
does it make a sound?

If a rifle fires a shot in the woods,
whose body first hits the ground?

If a group of angry hunters
surrounds, curses at, and accosts you
for wandering onto their land

If you apologize for being lost,
inform you saw no posted signs, swallow
their chinks this and gooks taking over that;
are walking away over mud and fallen leaves
when a loud
crack far behind you kicks up black earth

If your father was conscripted to fight
on the side of the United States
for the CIA during the war in Vietnam

If he, your mother, you—the oldest son—
and all your younger siblings were later
abandoned
in the hills of Laos as targets for genocide by
the Viet Cong

If after five years in a Thai refugee camp,
you come to this land as a teen, a casualty
of history and time, then receive three years
of training to become a sharpshooter
in the U.S. military

If you spent your adolescence watching
blacks,
Asians, Latinos, and whites watching one
another watch each other for weakness and
flaws

If, after this first blast, you wheel
around in a bright orange vest; glimpse
in that split second an angry, possibly
inebriated man lowering *or* resighting his rifle

If, in that icy moment, you recall
the Native friend you used to collect cans
with;
once watched his three-hundred-pound
father
unload himself from a Chevy Impala and
chase
the boy down University with a ball-peen
hammer

If, of your own children, your quietest
son lately lacks the wherewithal at school

to defend himself; and your oldest daughter
has always been for some inexplicable reason
ashamed of you

If hunting for you is not just a sport;
never a time to drink beers
with friends in a cabin, but rather
is a factor in considering your family's winter
protein consumption

If you believe in God, but not the good in
everyone

If you hate to think about this shit, because
why the fuck is it always on you
to preprove your loyalty and innocence?

If—frightened for your life and
the livelihood of your immediate and
extended
family—in that split second, you reel
and train your own gun back at the far face
of that vapory barrel now aiming at your own

If, yes, you are sometimes angry and so look
forward
to escaping your truck driver's life on certain
designated dates, on certain designated
lands, not always clearly demarcated, but
always clearly stolen
from the ancestors of fat drunk red men
so confused they chase their own firey songs
in the form of their sons

Stolen from generations of skewed black
backs,
hunched your whole life on street corners
laughing
and picking their bones

Stolen from the paychecks of your brown
coworker
social security ghosts

Stolen like your own people
from mountains in one land
only to be resettled and resented here
in projects and tenements

If you barely finished high school, but you
know
from all you've ever seen of this system
Might Makes Right,
and excuses, treaties, and cover-ups
appear the only true code inscribed on most
white men's souls

If, after such slurs, pushes, and threats in
these woods
it is now also on you to assess
if that far rifle still locked on your face
just issued a mistake, a warning

shot, or murderous attempt—
and the answer is:
your military muscle fibers
act

If you then spot three four five six seven?
other
hunters now scattering for their ATVs
and, of course—if a gook,
don't be a dumb one—
scattering now also for their weapons

If you are alone in this land,
on foot, in miles of coming snow, wind, and
branches
and don't even know
in which direction you'd run

If from birth you've seen
what men with guns, knives,
and bombs are capable of doing
for reasons you never wanted to understand

If in this very same county's court of all-white
witnesses, counsel, judge, and jurors
it will forever be your word against theirs
because there was no forensic testimony
over who shot first

If, yes, sometimes you can hear voices,
not because you're insane, but
in your culture
you are a shaman, a spiritual healer,
though in this very different land
of goods and fears, your only true worth
seems to be as a delivery man and soldier

If, upon that first fateful exchange in these
woods,
your instinct, pushing pin to
balloon, were to tell you it's now
either you and your fatherless family of
fourteen,
or *all* of them

Would *you* set your rifle down;
hope the right, the decent,
the fair thing on this buried American soil
will happen?

Or would you stay low,
one knee cold, and do
precisely as your whole life
and history have trained?

And if you did,
would anyone even care
what really happened

that afternoon
eight bodies plummeted
to earth like deer?

Every Day We Are Dancers

BY [MITCH ROBERSON](#)

It begins with the lewd macarena
 each of us performs in the shower,
 then the modified twist we are hip to
 with that ever-absorbent partner, the towel,

and on to the funky chicken of stepping into
 underwear,
 the shimmy of stretching into hose.
 There is no music, none that anyone
 can hear, yet no one can escape the boogie.

Outside beneath the disco ball of the Sun
 no one is a wallflower, not even the two lugs
 in the crosswalk lugging a huge mirror,

one at either end pressing his cheek
 into the cheek of his own reflection, arm
 extended, hand clasping his own hand in a tango
 more about control than passion, one couple
 leading himself forward, the other slide-stepping

backwards across the intersection made double
 by the infinite burden they shoulder together.
 At the entrances of buildings even those afflicted
 with two left feet find grace with a stranger

in a revolving door, where, regardless of gender,
 we share a pause and glance to communicate
 who will lead, who will follow,
 close to each other but never quite touching.

Conceit

BY [MICHAEL SCHMIDT](#)

She spun a line. She knew he was listening to her.

She spun it and he took the fraying ends.

Whatever she was saying, it was cotton,

Then as he rolled the thread between

Forefinger and thumb it turned to silk,

And as he took the needle up to thread it

The line she spun became thin finest gold.

He knew not to believe her but he took it

Because she kept on spinning like the truth

Was ravelling from her lips; he watched her lips.

Cotton, silk and gold, she wanted him

To take the line and sew the wound right up

Although she held the blade still in her hand

Behind her back, and it was dripping, steaming.

There under his left arm the gash lay open

Like a mouth in disbelief. And he believed her.

The Debt

BY [PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR](#)

This is the debt I pay

Just for one riotous day,

Years of regret and grief,

Sorrow without relief.

Pay it I will to the end —

Until the grave, my friend,

Gives me a true release —

Gives me the clasp of peace.

Slight was the thing I bought,

Small was the debt I thought,

Poor was the loan at best —

God! but the interest!

Did Not Come Back

by [Lucie Brock-Broido](#)

In the roan hour between then & then again, the now, in the Babel
Of a sorrel ship gone horizontal to a prow of night, the breach of owls

Abducted by broad light, but blind, in the crime, the titanesque of rare
Assault--we who have come back--petitioning, from the chair

Electric with bad news, from the stunning, from the narrows
Of an evening gall, from the mooring of an hour slanted on the follow

Bow, she rose from a bed of Ireland like a flyted trout, a shiny
Marvel on the sailor's deck, an apologia--divining--

As once, as at a salted empire port, he washed
Her fleeted body & they lied, the best of them, the cream & crush

Of this, the madrigal & sacrifice of that, the best of them,
The slowest velvet suffocation of their kind, did not come

Whittled back by autumn, at an hour between thorn & chaff,
Not come riddled with oblivion, the crossing & a shepherd's staff,

The moment between Have & Shall Not Want, we who have salt
Always know, that we who have--the best of us--did not come back.

Childhood is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies

by [Edna St. Vincent Millay](#)

Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.

Nobody that matters, that is. Distant relatives of course
Die, whom one never has seen or has seen for an hour,
And they gave one candy in a pink-and-green striped bag, or a jack-knife,
And went away, and cannot really be said to have lived at all.

And cats die. They lie on the floor and lash their tails,
And their reticent fur is suddenly all in motion
With fleas that one never knew were there,
Polished and brown, knowing all there is to know,
Trekking off into the living world.
You fetch a shoe-box, but it's much too small, because she won't curl up now:
So you find a bigger box, and bury her in the yard, and weep.
But you do not wake up a month from then, two months
A year from then, two years, in the middle of the night
And weep, with your knuckles in your mouth, and say Oh, God! Oh, God!
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies that matters,
—mothers and fathers don't die.

And if you have said, "For heaven's sake, must you always be kissing a person?"
Or, "I do wish to gracious you'd stop tapping on the window with your thimble!"
Tomorrow, or even the day after tomorrow if you're busy having fun,
Is plenty of time to say, "I'm sorry, mother."

To be grown up is to sit at the table with people who have died,
who neither listen nor speak;
Who do not drink their tea, though they always said
Tea was such a comfort.

Run down into the cellar and bring up the last jar of raspberries;
they are not tempted.
Flatter them, ask them what was it they said exactly
That time, to the bishop, or to the overseer, or to Mrs. Mason;
They are not taken in.
Shout at them, get red in the face, rise,
Drag them up out of their chairs by their stiff shoulders and shake
them and yell at them;
They are not startled, they are not even embarrassed; they slide
back into their chairs.

Your tea is cold now.
You drink it standing up,
And leave the house.

Possum Crossing

by [Nikki Giovanni](#)

Backing out the driveway
the car lights cast an eerie glow
in the morning fog centering
on movement in the rain slick street

Hitting brakes I anticipate a squirrel or a cat or sometimes
a little raccoon
I once braked for a blind little mole who try though he did
could not escape the cat toying with his life
Mother-to-be possum occasionally lopes home . . . being
naturally . . . slow her condition makes her even more ginger

We need a sign POSSUM CROSSING to warn coffee-gurgling neighbors:
we share the streets with more than trucks and vans and
railroad crossings

All birds being the living kin of dinosaurs
think themselves invincible and pay no heed
to the rolling wheels while they dine
on an unlucky rabbit

I hit brakes for the flutter of the lights hoping it's not a deer
or a skunk or a groundhog
coffee splashes over the cup which I quickly put away from me
and into the empty passenger seat
I look . . .
relieved and exasperated ...
to discover I have just missed a big wet leaf
struggling . . . to lift itself into the wind
and live

Wandering

By Arthur Rimbaud

I ran away, hands stuck in pockets that seemed
All holes; my jacket was a holey ghost as well.
I followed you, Muse! Beneath your spell,
Oh, la, la, what glorious love I dreamed!

I tore my shirt; I threw away my tie.
Dreamy Hop o' my Thumb, I made rhymes
As I ran. I slept out most of the time.
The stars above me rustled through the sky.

I heard them on the roadsides where I stopped
Those fine September nights, when dew dropped
On my face and I licked it to get drunk.

I made up rhymes in dark and scary places,
And like a lyre I plucked the tired laces
Of my worn-out shoes, one foot beneath my heart.

Life

by Joe Brainard

When I stop and think about what it's all about I do come up with some answers, but they don't help very much.

I think it is safe to say that life is pretty mysterious. And hard.

Life is short. I know that much. That life is short. And that it's important to keep reminding oneself of it. That life is short. Just because it is. I suspect that each of us is going to wake up some morning to suddenly find ourselves old men (or women) without knowing how we got that way. Wondering where it all went. Regretting all the things we didn't do. So I think that the sooner we realize that life is short the better off we are.

Now, to get down to the basics. There are 24 hours a day. There is you and there are other people. The idea is to fill these 24 hours as best one can. With love and fun. Or things that are interesting. Or what have you. Other people are most important. Art is rewarding. Books and movies are good fillers, and the most reliable.

Now you know that life is not so simple as I am making it sound. We are all a bit fucked up, and here lies the problem. To try and get rid of the fucked up parts, so we can just relax and be ourselves. For what time we have left.

Deer Hit

by Jon Loomis

You're seventeen and tunnel-vision drunk,
swerving your father's Fairlane wagon home

at 3:00 a.m. Two-lane road, all curves
and dips—dark woods, a stream, a patchy acre

of teazle and grass. You don't see the deer
till they turn their heads—road full of eyeballs,

small moons glowing. You crank the wheel,
stamp both feet on the brake, skid and jolt

into the ditch. Glitter and crunch of broken glass
in your lap, deer hair drifting like dust. Your chin

and shirt are soaked—one eye half-obscurd
by the cocked bridge of your nose. The car

still running, its lights angled up at the trees.
You get out. The deer lies on its side.

A doe, spinning itself around
in a frantic circle, front legs scrambling,

back legs paralyzed, dead. Making a sound—
again and again this terrible bleat.

You watch for a while. It tires, lies still.
And here's what you do: pick the deer up

like a bride. Wrestle it into the back of the car—
the seat folded down. Somehow, you steer

the wagon out of the ditch and head home,
night rushing in through the broken window,

headlight dangling, side-mirror gone.
Your nose throbs, something stabs

in your side. The deer breathing behind you,
shallow and fast. A stoplight, you're almost home

and the deer scrambles to life, its long head
appears like a ghost in the rearview mirror

and bites you, its teeth clamp down on your
shoulder
and maybe you scream, you struggle and flail

till the deer, exhausted, lets go and lies down.

2

Your father's waiting up, watching tv.
He's had a few drinks and he's angry.

Christ, he says, when you let yourself in.
It's Night of the Living Dead. You tell him

some of what happened: the dark road,
the deer you couldn't avoid. Outside, he circles

the car. *Jesus*, he says. A long silence.
Son of a bitch, looking in. He opens the tailgate,

drags the quivering deer out by a leg.
What can you tell him—you weren't thinking,

you'd injured your head? You wanted to fix
what you'd broken—restore the beautiful body,

color of wet straw, color of oak leaves in winter?
The deer shudders and bleats in the driveway.

Your father walks to the toolshed,
comes back lugging a concrete block.

Some things stay with you. Dumping the body
deep in the woods, like a gangster. The dent

in your nose. All your life, the trail of ruin you
leave.

The Happy Place

by Rawdon Tomlinson

(Geronimo to Barrett about Noche-ay-del-Klinne, Fort Sill, I.T., 1905)

With sand-wind flapping
the wickiup's canvas, San Carlos,
he told me how he'd died
on the battlefield and seen
the Happy Place: that narrow
cañon opening on a day
glowing without sun that those
near death returned
claim and hold as touch.

He told me how he subdued,
by simply showing no fear,
rattlers, grizzlies, and lions
until he reached the green
valley—and found the game
more plentiful than before
White Eyes, and his beloved,
more radiant than in life,
sang only round songs.

Many believed him, and I can't
say that he didn't tell
the truth—but he'd never held
a dead son, felt the body's
stone doll, its eyes opening
a cave in the chest that won't
close with age or steps.
I told him I couldn't recall
what I'd seen while knocked cold
on the battlefield, but perhaps
it's well we're not certain.

Neither blade holds an edge.

Night in Day

BY [JOSEPH STROUD](#)

The night never wants to end, to give itself over
to light. So it traps itself in things: obsidian, crows.
Even on summer solstice, the day of light's great
triumph, where fields of sunflowers guzzle in the sun—
we break open the watermelon and spit out
black seeds, bits of night glistening on the grass.

The School Where I Studied

BY [YEHUDA AMICHAJ](#)

TRANSLATED BY [CHANA BLOCH](#) AND [CHANA KRONFELD](#)

I passed by the school where I studied as a boy
and said in my heart: here I learned certain things
and didn't learn others. All my life I have loved in vain
the things I didn't learn. I am filled with knowledge,
I know all about the flowering of the tree of knowledge,
the shape of its leaves, the function of its root system, its pests and parasites.
I'm an expert on the botany of good and evil,
I'm still studying it, I'll go on studying till the day I die.
I stood near the school building and looked in. This is the room
where we sat and learned. The windows of a classroom always open
to the future, but in our innocence we thought it was only landscape
we were seeing from the window.
The schoolyard was narrow, paved with large stones.
I remember the brief tumult of the two of us
near the rickety steps, the tumult
that was the beginning of a first great love.
Now it outlives us, as if in a museum,
like everything else in Jerusalem.

River

from Eiko & Koma

Taut current, throughstricken
with night, starbit,

and both of them
facing off. En-
igma tipped to
distortion— *

She floats on swirled
obsidian current. Their
sightlines swim across
each other. Stars
don't look away
from the unfolding,

the going alluvial,
she against his
tenderness.

**cutaway:*

to the blanks in her face-slots

[FORREST GANDER](#)

A Boy and His Dad

Edgar Guest

A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—
 There is a glorious fellowship!
 Father and son and the open sky
 And the white clouds lazily drifting by,
 And the laughing stream as it runs along
 With the clicking reel like a martial song,
 And the father teaching the youngster gay
 How to land a fish in the sportsman's way.
 I fancy I hear them talking there
 In an open boat, and the speech is fair.
 And the boy is learning the ways of men
 From the finest man in his youthful ken.
 Kings, to the youngster, cannot compare
 With the gentle father who's with him there.
 And the greatest mind of the human race
 Not for one minute could take his place.
 Which is happier, man or boy?
 The soul of the father is steeped in joy,
 For he's finding out, to his heart's delight,
 That his son is fit for the future fight.
 He is learning the glorious depths of him,

And the thoughts he thinks and his every whim;
 And he shall discover, when night comes on,
 How close he has grown to his little son.
 A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—
 Builders of life's companionship!
 Oh, I envy them, as I see them there
 Under the sky in the open air,
 For out of the old, old long-ago
 Come the summer days that I used to know,
 When I learned life's truths from my father's lips
 As I shared the joy of his fishing-trips.

Invictus

BY [WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY](#)

Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance

My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years

Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul.

One Art

BY [ELIZABETH BISHOP](#)

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.

Family Dinner

BY PRISCILLA LEE

My mother the hard boned
 Chinese woman 23 years
 in this country
 without bothering to learn
 its language
 buys lean pork ribs
 special order
 at the Hop Sang in Chinatown
 and cooks dinner
 for an extended family
 of twenty-five during holidays.

Seated loosely around
 the dining table
 trying to eat quietly
 I am scrubbed down
 to skin and bone,
 her oldest daughter—
 spineless, a headless snake
 a woman grandfather says
 who should have her tendons
 lifted out slowly
 by the steel point
 of a darning needle
 until she writhes.

To my mother
 I'm useless
 but dangerous,
 capable of swallowing
 the family whole
 into my pelvis
 while I sit
 waiting for the boyfriend
 white and forbidden
 to touch our doorbell.

Family

BY [JOSEPHINE MILES](#)

When you swim in the surf off Seal Rocks, and your family

Sits in the sand

Eating potato salad, and the undertow

Comes which takes you out away down

To loss of breath loss of play and the power of play

Holler, say

Help, help, help. Hello, they will say,

Come back here for some potato salad.

It is then that a seventeen-year-old cub

Cruising in a helicopter from Antigua,

A jackstraw expert speaking only Swedish

And remote from this area as a camel, says

Look down there, there is somebody drowning.

And it is you. You say, yes, yes,

And he throws you a line.

This is what is called the brotherhood of man.

On Turning Ten

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light--
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I could shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

--Billy Collins

Beyond the Years

by [Paul Laurence Dunbar](#)

I

Beyond the years the answer lies,
Beyond where brood the grieving skies
And Night drops tears.
Where Faith rod-chastened smiles to rise
And doff its fears,
And carping Sorrow pines and dies—
Beyond the years.

II

Beyond the years the prayer for rest
Shall beat no more within the breast;
The darkness clears,
And Morn perched on the mountain's crest
Her form uprears—
The day that is to come is best,
Beyond the years.

III

Beyond the years the soul shall find
That endless peace for which it pined,
For light appears,
And to the eyes that still were blind
With blood and tears,
Their sight shall come all unconfined
Beyond the years.

Ode on Dictionaries

BY [BARBARA HAMBY](#)

A-bomb is how it begins with a big bang on page
 one, a calculator of sorts whose centrifuge
 begets bedouin, bamboozle, breakdance, and berserk,
 one of my mother's favorite words, hard knock
 clerk of clichés that she is, at the moment going ape
 the current rave in the fundamentalist landscape
 disguised as her brain, a rococo lexicon
 of Deuteronomy, Job, gossip, spritz, and neocon
 ephemera all wrapped up in a pop burrito
 of movie star shenanigans, like a stray Cheeto
 found in your pocket the day after you finish the bag,
 tastier than any oyster and champagne
 fueled fugue
 gastronomique you have been pursuing in France
 for the past four months. This 82-year-old's rants
 have taken their place with the dictionary I bought
 in the fourth grade, with so many gorgeous words I
 thought
 I'd never plumb its depths. Right the first time, little girl,
 yet here I am still at it, trolling for pearls,
 Japanese words vying with Bantu in a goulash
 I eat daily, sometimes gagging, sometimes with
 relish,
 kleptomaniac in the candy store of language,
 slipping words in my pockets like a non-smudge
 lipstick that smears with the first kiss. I'm the demented
 lady with sixteen cats. Sure, the house stinks, but
 those damned
 mice have skedaddled, though I kind of miss them, their
 cute
 little faces, the whiskers, those adorable gray suits.
 No, all beasts are welcome in my menagerie, ark

of inconsolable barks and meows, sharp-toothed
 shark,
 OED of the deep ocean, sweet compendium
 of candy bars—Butterfingers, Mounds, and
 M&Ms—
 packed next to the tripe and gizzards, trim and tackle
 of butchers and bakers, the painter's brush and
 spackle,
 quarks and black holes of physicists' theory. I'm building
 my own book as a mason makes a wall or a gelding
 runs round the track—brick by brick, step by step, word
 by word,
 jonquil by gerrymander, syllabub by greensward,
 swordplay by snapdragon, a never-ending parade
 with clowns and funambulists in my own mouth,
 homemade
 treasure chest of tongue and teeth, the brain's
 roustabout, rough
 unfurler of tents and trapezes, off-the-cuff
 unruly troublemaker in the high church museum
 of the world. O mouth—boondoggle, auditorium,
 viper, gulag, gumbo pot on a steamy August
 afternoon—what have you not given me? How I
 must
 wear on you, my Samuel Johnson in a frock coat,
 lexicographer of silly thoughts, billy goat,
 X-rated pornographic smut factory, scarfer
 of snacks, prissy smirker, late-night barfly,
 you are the megaphone by which I bewitch the world
 or don't as the case may be. O chattering squirrel,
 ziplock sandwich bag, sound off, shut up, gather your
 words
 into bouquets, folios, flocks of black and flaming
 birds.

The Bridge

Over the bridge across the river,
 the pilgrims prayed in lockstep,
 and the deafening coherence
 of the single voice they made
 was a fulfillment of the dream
 each voice, alone, inaudible,
 dreamt it could be as it prayed.

The gold dome of the holy shrine
 beyond the bridge was glistening
 like the paradise inside the prayer,
 which the prayer was promising
 to those who said the prayer
 the way it wanted to be said,
 which was the way they said it,

as if they were a people only
 of the prayer, a people
 spoken through by what
 they spoke together, who
 by being spoken through
 could almost think that they
 were there already—there

in the light of what they'd be
 the single voice of endlessly
 instead of merely people on a bridge,
 instead of more and still more

jammed hard together, pressed
 in and pushing in to inch
 in forward like a giant knot

they were all trying to untie
 by tying tighter under sun
 that smoldered a white
 hole in the dome's reflection
 in the dark fast river—till
 one by one all along the bridge
 they started spilling over

like small impurities the praying
 mass they were spit out
 as it surged through and past
 the screams that sank like duff
 down the smoldering hole
 the sun burned on the rippling
 dome within the water

that outside the prayer was in-
 escapable, uncrossable
 except as water flowing from
 and to within and over
 water—made from water
 out of heat forged from the
 coldest nothing that there is.

[ALAN SHAPIRO](#)

PLAY-IN (56):

My Papa's Waltz

BY [THEODORE ROETHKE](#)

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

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

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

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

PLAY-IN (56)

If you were coming in the fall,
I'd brush the summer by
With half a smile and half a spurn,
As housewives do a fly.

If I could see you in a year,
I'd wind the months in balls,
And put them each in separate drawers,
Until their time befalls.

If only centuries delayed,
I'd count them on my hand,
Subtracting till my fingers dropped
Into Van Diemens land.

If certain, when this life was out,
That yours and mine should be,
I'd toss it yonder like a rind,
And taste eternity.

But now, all ignorant of the length
Of time's uncertain wing,
It goads me, like the goblin bee,
That will not state its sting.

--Emily Dickinson

Play-in (56)

My Last Duchess

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

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

Play-in (56)

Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower

By Rainer Maria Rilke

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,
what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.
In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.
And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

Play-in (56)
"Where Everything Is Music"

by Jelaluddin Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

Don't worry about saving these songs!
And if one of our instruments breaks,
it doesn't matter.

We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp
should burn up, there will still be
hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint, and a spark.

This singing art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge
of driftwood along the beach, wanting!

They derive
from a slow and powerful root
that we can't see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
and let the spirits fly in and out.

Play-in (56)

Ode on a Grecian Urn

BY [JOHN KEATS](#)

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our
 rhyme:
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy
 shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
 What men or gods are these? What
 maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild
 ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play
 on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not
 leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou
 kiss,
 Though winning near the goal yet, do not
 grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy
 bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be
 fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring
 adieu;

And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and
 cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching
 tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands
 drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious
 morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er
 return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens
 overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of
 thought
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other
 woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou
 say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to
 know."