

CL&L

Winter Term – 01/09 – 2/27 ‘24

Barry Wallenstein

*Man that is born of woman
Is of few days and full of trouble.
He cometh like a flower
And is cut down.
He fleeth also as a shadow
And continuith not. -- The Book of Job, 14 1-2*

*My dearest dream is for an internationality of poems and poets binding the lands
of the earth closer than all treaties and diplomacy. Walt Whitman*

*Let everything happen to you
Beauty and Terror
Just keep going
No feeling is final – Rainer Maria Rilke*

All gladness, dear Nelly, all light!” Paul Celan to Nelly Sachs

Senegalese proverb – I am because/ we are

*It is vanity to think that one can influence the course of history by writing poetry. It
is not the barometer that changes the weather. -- Zbigniew Herbert*

*The best way to forget oneself is to look at the world with attention and love.” —
Red Auerbach*

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Psalm 139

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*.
2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
thou understandest my thought afar off.
3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted *with* all my ways.
4 For *there* is not a word in my tongue,
but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
5 Thou hast beset me behind and before,
and laid thine hand upon me.
6 *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it.
7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there:
if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*.
9 *If* I take the wings of the morning,
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
10 Even there shall thy hand lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me;
even the night shall be light about me.
12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee;
but the night shineth as the day:
the darkness and the light *are* both alike to *thee*.
13 For thou hast possessed my reins:
thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.
14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made:
marvellous *are* thy works;
and *that* my soul knoweth right well.
15 My substance was not hid from thee,
when I was made in secret,
and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect;
and in thy book all *my members* were written,
which in continuance were fashioned,
when *as yet there was* none of them.
17 How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!

18 *If* I should count them, they are more in number than the sand:
when I awake, I am still with thee.

19 Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God:
depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.

20 For they speak against thee wickedly,
and thine enemies take *thy name* in vain.

21 Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?
And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?

22 I hate them with perfect hatred:
I count them mine enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart:
try me, and know my thoughts:

24 And see if *there be any* wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Native American Prayer by Sioux Chief *Yellow Hawk*

Oh Great Spirit,
whose voice I hear in the winds,
and whose breath gives life to all the world
– hear me – I come before you,
one of your children. I am small and weak.
I need your strength and wisdom.
Let me walk in beauty
and make my eyes ever behold
the red and purple sunset.
Make my hands respect the things
you have made, my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise, so that I may know the things
you have taught my People,
the lesson you have hidden in every leaf and rock.
I seek strength not to be superior to my brothers,
but to be able to fight my greatest enemy, myself.
Make me ever ready to come to you, with clean hands
and straight eyes,
so when life fades as a fading sunset,
my spirit may come to you without shame.

From Under Milk Wood by Dylan Thomas 1914 - 1953

Every morning when I wake,
Dear Lord, a little prayer I make,
O please do keep Thy lovely eye
On all poor creatures born to die

And every evening at sun-down
I ask a blessing on the town,
For whether we last the night or no
I'm sure is always touch-and-go.

We are not wholly bad or good
Who live our lives under Milk Wood,
And Thou, I know, wilt be the first
To see our best side, not our worst.

O let us see another day!
Bless us all this night, I pray,
And to the sun we all will bow
And say, good-bye – but just for now!

Sonnet 97 by William Shakespeare 1564 - 1616

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere!
And yet this time remov'd was summer's time,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Sonnet 64

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-ras'd
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,
That Time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

Sonnet by John Keats 1795 - 1821

Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite

The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—

No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

Love's Secret by William Blake 1757 - 1827

Never seek to tell thy love,
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind does move
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart;
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears,
Ah! she did depart!

Soon as she was gone from me,
A traveler came by,
Silently, invisibly
He took her with a sigh.

Home-Thoughts, from Abroad by Robert Browning 1812 - 1889

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

The Snow-Storm by Ralph Waldo Emerson 1803 - 1882

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and, at the gate,
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

Spellbound by Emily Brontë 1818 - 1848

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot, cannot go.
The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow.
And the storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.
Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.

The Darkling Thrush by Thomas Hardy 1840 - 1928

I leant upon a coppice gate

 When Frost was spectre-gray,

And Winter's dregs made desolate

 The weakening eye of day.

The tangled bine-stems scored the sky

 Like strings of broken lyres,

And all mankind that haunted night

 Had sought their household fires.

A Winter Bluejay by Sara Teasdale 1884 - 1933

Crisply the bright snow whispered,
Crunching beneath our feet;
Behind us as we walked along the parkway,
Our shadows danced,
Fantastic shapes in vivid blue.
Across the lake the skaters
Flew to and fro,
With sharp turns weaving
A frail invisible net.
In ecstasy the earth
Drank the silver sunlight;
In ecstasy the skaters
Drank the wine of speed;
In ecstasy we laughed
Drinking the wine of love.
Had not the music of our joy
Sounded its highest note?
But no,
For suddenly, with lifted eyes you said,
“Oh look!”
There, on the black bough of a snow flecked maple,
Fearless and gay as our love,
A bluejay cocked his crest!
Oh who can tell the range of joy
Or set the bounds of beauty?

Musee des Beaux Arts by W. H. Auden 1907 - 1973

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 ploughman 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.



Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by William Carlos Williams 1883-1963

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

From *Collected Poems: 1939-1962, Volume II* by William Carlos Williams

After Someone's Death by Tomas Transtromer 1931-2015

Once there was a shock
that left behind a long, pale, shimmering comet's tail.
It shelters us. It makes the TV images fuzzy.
It settles in cold droplets on the power lines.

You can still shuffle along on skis in the winter sun
through groves where last year's leaves hang on.
Like pages torn from old telephone books—
all of the names swallowed up by the cold.

It's still pleasant to feel the heart beating.
But the shadow often seems more real than the body.
The samurai looks insignificant
beside his armor of black dragon scales.

Translated from the Swedish by Patty Crane

Walls Trembling Like Horses, by Dmitry Blizniuk

The sounds grow;
they are the teeth of a vehemently rotating circular saw.
And the bomber
folds the sky like a book,
cuts the sky in two,
and you, seized with terror,
shrivel up into “I,” into “We,”
like into a lifeboat sent by God,
but you are too big to squeeze in.
Quickly and rudely, you cover your mom with your body.
Your stunned guardian angel
blindly thumps its wings against the linoleum,
like an albatross on the deck.
Where are you? Are you still here?
Still alive?
My dear people.
The sky bursts with explosions.
The sky gets filled with pink manganese solution.
The oblong eyes of the beast of the horizon.
It’s the trepanation of the despairing city
with pneumatic picks.
The walls of your house tremble like horses
that caught the smell of a wolf.

translated from Russian by Sergey Gerasimov

—from Poets Respond
May 10, 2022

Dmitry Blizniuk: “I am in Kharkov, which has been bombed and shelled by Russian troops for 67 days in a row. Here I try to survive and write poetry.” (web)

The Song of the Drunkard by Rainer Maria Rilke [1875-1926]

It wasn't in me. it went in and out.
I wanted to hold it. it held, with the wine.
(I no longer know what it was.)
then wine held this and that for me
till I could never leave him completely.
I am a fool.

now I play in his game and he shakes me out,
looking at me disdainfully and perhaps today
he will lose me to death – that brute!
if he wins me, the dirtiest card in the pack,
he'll use me to scratch his scabs
and throw me away into the muck.

#

Childhood

It would be good to give much thought, before
you try to find words for something so lost,
for those long childhood afternoons you knew
that vanished so completely —and why?

We're still reminded—: sometimes by a rain,
but we can no longer say what it means;
life was never again so filled with meeting,
with reunion and with passing on

as back then, when nothing happened to us
except what happens to things and creatures:
we lived their world as something human,
and became filled to the brim with figures.

And became as lonely as a sheperd
and as overburdened by vast distances,
and summoned and stirred as from far away,
and slowly, like a long new thread,
introduced into that picture-sequence
where now having to go on bewilders us.

Cool Tombs by Carl Sandburg 1878 - 1967

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs, he forgot the copperheads and the assassin ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street, cash and collateral turned ashes ... in the dust, in the cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she remember? ... in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries, cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin horns ... tell me if the lovers are losers ... tell me if any get more than the lovers ... in the dust ... in the cool tombs.

Good Night by Carl Sandburg

Many ways to spell good night.

Fireworks at a pier on the Fourth of July
spell it with red wheels and yellow spokes.
They fizz in the air, touch the water and quit.
Rockets make a trajectory of gold-and-blue
and then go out.

Railroad trains at night spell with a smokestack
mushrooming a white pillar.

Steamboats turn a curve in the Mississippi crying
in a baritone that crosses lowland cottonfields
to a razorback hill.

It is easy to spell good night.

Many ways to spell good night.

The Farmer's Bride by Charlotte Mew 1869 – 1928

Three summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe—but more's to do
At harvest-time than bide and woo.

When us was wed she turned afraid
Of love and me and all things human;
Like the shut of a winter's day
Her smile went out, and 'twadn't a woman—
More like a little frightened fay.

One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

“Out 'mong the sheep, her be,” they said,
'Should properly have been abed;
But sure enough she wadn't there
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.

So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down
We chased her, flying like a hare
Before our lanterns. To Church-Town
All in a shiver and a scare
We caught her, fetched her home at last
And turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the house
As well as most, but like a mouse:
Happy enough to chat and play
With birds and rabbits and such as they,
So long as men-folk keep away.

“Not near, not near!” her eyes beseech
When one of us comes within reach.

The women say that beasts in stall
Look round like children at her call.
I've hardly heard her speak at all.

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,
To her wild self. But what to me?

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,
The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,
A magpie's spotted feathers lie
On the black earth spread white with rime,
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.
What's Christmas-time without there be
Some other in the house than we!

She sleeps up in the attic there
Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,
The soft young down of her, the brown,
The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!

The Soul has Bandaged moments (360) by Emily Dickinson 1830 –1886

The Soul has Bandaged moments –
When too appalled to stir –
She feels some ghastly Fright come up
And stop to look at her –

Salute her, with long fingers –
Caress her freezing hair –
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
The Lover – hovered – o'er –
Unworthy, that a thought so mean
Accost a Theme – so – fair –

The soul has moments of escape –
When bursting all the doors –
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
And swings upon the Hours,

As do the Bee – delirious borne –
Long Dungeoned from his Rose –
Touch Liberty – then know no more,
But Noon, and Paradise –

The Soul's retaken moments –
When, Felon led along,
With shackles on the plumed feet,
And staples, in the song,

The Horror welcomes her, again,
These, are not brayed of Tongue –

#

To Make a Prairie by Emily Dickinson

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And reverie.
The reverie alone will do,
If bees are few.

Fairy-Land by E. A. Poe 1809-1849

Dim vales—and shadowy floods—
And cloudy-looking woods,
Whose forms we can't discover
For the tears that drip all over:
Huge moons there wax and wane—
Again—again—again—
Every moment of the night—
Forever changing places—
And they put out the star-light
With the breath from their pale faces.
About twelve by the moon-dial,
One more filmy than the rest
(A kind which, upon trial,
They have found to be the best)
Comes down—still down—and down
With its centre on the crown
Of a mountain's eminence,
While its wide circumference
In easy drapery falls
Over hamlets, over halls,
Wherever they may be—
O'er the strange woods—o'er the sea—
Over spirits on the wing—
Over every drowsy thing—
And buries them up quite
In a labyrinth of light—
And then, how, deep! —O, deep,
Is the passion of their sleep.
In the morning they arise,
And their moony covering
Is soaring in the skies,
With the tempests as they toss,
Like—almost any thing—
Or a yellow Albatross.
They use that moon no more
For the same end as before,
Videlicet, a tent—

Which I think extravagant:
Its atomies, however,
Into a shower dissever,
Of which those butterflies
Of Earth, who seek the skies,
And so come down again
(Never-contented things!)
Have brought a specimen
Upon their quivering wings.

The Pylons by Stephen Spender 1909-1995

The secret of these hills was stone, and cottages
Of that stone made,
And crumbling roads
That turned on sudden hidden villages

Now over these small hills, they have built the concrete
That trails black wire
Pylons, those pillars
Bare like nude giant girls that have no secret.

The valley with its gilt and evening look
And the green chestnut
Of customary root,
Are mocked dry like the parched bed of a brook.

But far above and far as sight endures
Like whips of anger
With lightning's danger
There runs the quick perspective of the future.

This dwarfs our emerald country by its trek
So tall with prophecy
Dreaming of cities
Where often clouds shall lean their swan-white neck.

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.

And Death Shall Have No Dominion by Dylan Thomas

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead man naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;

When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,

Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea

They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.
And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.

The Snow Fairy by Claude Mckay 1890 - 1948

I

Throughout the afternoon I watched them there,
Snow-fairies falling, falling from the sky,
Whirling fantastic in the misty air,
Contending fierce for space supremacy.
And they flew down a mightier force at night,
As though in heaven there was revolt and riot,
And they, frail things had taken panic flight
Down to the calm earth seeking peace and quiet.
I went to bed and rose at early dawn
To see them huddled together in a heap,
Each merged into the other upon the lawn,
Worn out by the sharp struggle, fast asleep.
The sun shone brightly on them half the day,
By night they stealthily had stol'n away.

II

And suddenly my thoughts then turned to you
Who came to me upon a winter's night,
When snow-sprites round my attic window flew,
Your hair disheveled, eyes aglow with light.
My heart was like the weather when you came,
The wanton winds were blowing loud and long;
But you, with joy and passion all aflame,
You danced and sang a lilting summer song.
I made room for you in my little bed,
Took covers from the closet fresh and warm,
A downful pillow for your scented head,
And lay down with you resting in my arm.
You went with Dawn. You left me ere the day,
The lonely actor of a dreamy play.

If We Must Die by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Behind Stowe by Elizabeth Bishop 1911 –1979

I heard an elf go whistling by,
A whistle sleek as moonlit grass,
That drew me like a silver string
To where the dusty, pale moths fly,
And make a magic as they pass;
And there I heard a cricket sing.

His singing echoed through and through
The dark under a windy tree
Where glinted little insects' wings.
His singing split the sky in two.
The halves fell either side of me,
And I stood straight, bright with moon-rings.

Arrival at Santos by Elizabeth Bishop

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery;
impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension?

Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag.
So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
I somehow never thought of there *being* a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen.
And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,

descending into the midst of twenty-six freighters
waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans.
Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook!
Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's

skirt! There! Miss Breen is about seventy,
a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall

s, New York. There. We are settled.
The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,

but they seldom seem to care what impression they make,
or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,
the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps—
wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter

do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,
either because the glue here is very inferior
or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
we are driving to the interior.

January 1952

I Remember Galileo by Gerald Stern 1925-2022

I remember Galileo describing the mind
as a piece of paper blown around by the wind,
and I loved the sight of it sticking to a tree,
or jumping into the backseat of a car,
and for years I watched paper leap through my cities;
but yesterday I saw the mind was a squirrel caught crossing
Route 80 between the wheels of a giant truck,
dancing back and forth like a thin leaf,
or a frightened string, for only two seconds living
on the white concrete before he got away,
his life shortened by all that terror, his head
jerking, his yellow teeth ground down to dust.

It was the speed of the squirrel and his lowness to the ground,
his great purpose and the alertness of his dancing,
that showed me the difference between him and paper.
Paper will do in theory, when there is time
to sit back in a metal chair and study shadows;
but for this life I need a squirrel,
his clawed feet spread, his whole soul quivering,
the loud noise shaking him from head to tail.
O philosophical mind, O mind of paper, I need a squirrel
finishing his wild dash across the highway,
rushing up his green ungoverned hillside.

Shibboleth by Paul Celan 1920 – 1970

along with my stones
the big cry
behind the bars
they dragged me
in the middle of the market
there,
where the flag rolls up, I
swore no oath.

Flute,
Double Flute of the Night:
think of the dark
twin blush
in Vienna and Madrid.

Lower your flag to half-mast
memory.
At half mast
for today and always.

Heart:

make yourself known here too
here, in the middle of the market.
Call out the shibboleth
away from home:
February. No pasaran.

Unicorn:

you know about the stones
you know about the water
come,
i'm taking you away
to the voices
from Estremadura.

This Evening Also by Paul Celan

more fully,
since snow fell even on this
sun-drifted, sun-drenched sea,
blossoms the ice in those baskets
you carry into town.

sand
you demand in return,
for the last
rose back at home
this evening also wants to be fed
out of the trickling hour.

O the Chimneys by Nelly Sachs 1891 - 1970

O the chimneys
On the carefully planned dwellings of death
When Israel's body rose dissolved in smoke
Through the air –
To be welcomed by a chimney sweep star
Turned black
Or was it a ray of the sun?
O the chimneys!
Paths of freedom for the dust of Jeremiah and Job –
Who dreamed you up and built stone upon stone
The path of smoke for their flight?
O dwellings of death
Set out so enticingly
For the host of the house, who used to be the guest –
O you fingers
Laying the stone of the threshold
Like a knife between life and death –
O you chimneys
O you fingers
And Israel's body dissolves in smoke through the air!

Job by Nelly Sachs

O you wind rose of torment!
Torn by primeval storms
In ever changing directions of the tempests;
Yet your south is loneliness,
Where you stand is the navel of pain.

Your eyes are sunk deep into your skull
Like cave-dwelling doves in the night
Brought out blind by the huntsman,
Your voice is silenced
From asking too many whys,

To the worms and the fishes your voice has gone.
Job, you have wept through all the watches of the night
But some day the star sign of your blood will
Outshine all the rising suns.

Bell Bottom Trousers, by Diane Wakoski

*bell bottom trousers, coat of navy blue,
she loves a sailor and he loves her too.
—Guy Lombardo WWII song lyric*

Mine were brown velvet,
lush as sable. '70s wide and swinging,
swirling outward from my calves,
vaquero rhythmed, and very expensive,
the cost of a '40s war savings-bond. Driving across
America, alone in Green Greed
—or was it the Fox-brown Audi?—
I laid them flat across the backseat, like hero's flags,
covered them with a Mexican serape,
keeping them intact, uncrushed, ready for The Visit.
The Evening. The Expanse-of-Pacific-wrapped-around-me-Event,
where I would wear them.

When the night collapsed into next day,
and I fell—alone—into my motel room king-sized bed,
like a duffle bag thrown into a locker,
sleeping the salty sleep of a girl who dreams of oceans and the man
coracled upon it, I flung
the bell bottoms onto the foot
of the bed, where the tossed heavy-textured spread covered them
during my flailing night, thus
causing their
loss,
I leaving them, not unlike my sailor-father
leaving me.
The bell bottoms
next morning, forgotten,
abandoned,
in my haste to travel on.

That's what I am thinking about
forty years later,
I left them behind, and
just to fill you in on my concern, I who hate telephones,
did call the next day,
but they said no one had found them. That's
what they said.
Unlike my bookkeeper mother,
I don't keep a list
of items left behind, yet these
brown-as-my-father's-eyes trousers swirl
into history. They seem memorable like a
lost ring, topaz or sardonyx carved into a cameo.
They've conjured images of my father's sea duty
to the Aleutians—bears hibernating—
or Pearl Harbor—yellow hibiscus worn behind an ear.
They floated, a topaz,
fallen brown-faceted and envious
out
of its setting,
my missing sailor pants,
worn in the days when I used to dance—
short breaths like the exhale of cigarette smoke,
animating the free swing of bell bottoms. A
small mishap in one
of many journeys, just a memory,
like the folded flag,
I can't let go of.

—from **Rattle #33, Summer 2010**

Summer in the Ordinary by William Logan

Eppur si muove

The iris wavers as the fox trots by,
mornings in paradise, or what pretends
by any other name to smell of meat.
What were we then that we did not become?
The water touched the image of the beast;
old factories of iron muted the plain.
They were of no consequence, those sun-dark days
before the word fell hard upon the ear.
The Indian corn, I mean the poppy fields,
carpets of color sown and yet not sown,
ideas that rose to metal and to brick.
That too was passion. Naked, in need of need,
we had heard of passion. We knew ourselves
that first first morning when we woke, and died.

Ancient Music by Ezra Pound 1885 - 1972

Winter is icummen in,
Lhude sing Goddamm.
Raineth drop and staineth slop,
And how the wind doth ramm!
Sing: Goddamm.

Skiddeth bus and sloppeth us,
An ague hath my ham.
Freezeth river, turneth liver,
Damn you, sing: Goddamm.
Goddamm, Goddamm, 'tis why I am, Goddamm,
So 'gainst the winter's balm.
Sing goddamm, damm, sing Goddamm.
Sing goddamm, sing goddamm, DAMM.

A parody of the Anglo—Saxon poem, Cuckoo Song

The Cuckoo Song

Sing, cuccu, nu. Sing, cuccu.
Sing, cuccu. Sing, cuccu, nu.

Sumer is i-cumen in –
Lhude sing, cuccu!
Groweth sed and bloweth med
And springth the wude nu.
Sing, cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu,
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth –
Murie sing, cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu.
Wel singes thu, cuccu.
Ne swik thu naver nu!

Snow-Flakes by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 1807 - 1882

Out of the bosom of the Air,
Out of the cloud-folds of her garments shaken,
Over the woodlands brown and bare,
Over the harvest-fields forsaken
Silent, and soft, and slow
Descends the snow.

Even as our cloudy fancies take
Suddenly shape in some divine expression,
Even as the troubled heart doth make
In the white countenance confession,
The troubled sky reveals
The grief it feels.

This is the poem of the air,
Slowly in silent syllables recorded;
This is the secret of despair,
Long in its cloudy bosom hoarded,
Now whispered and revealed
To wood and field.

Buffalo Bill 's Defunct by ee cummings 1894 - 1962

Buffalo Bill 's
defunct

who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

stallion

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what i want to know is

how do you like your blue-eyed boy

Mister Death

#

All in green went my love riding by e.e. cummings

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the merry deer ran before.

Fleeter be they than dappled dreams
the swift sweet deer
the red rare deer.

Four red roebuck at a white water
the cruel bugle sang before.

Horn at hip went my love riding
riding the echo down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the level meadows ran before.

Softer be they than slippered sleep
the lean lithe deer
the fleet flown deer.

Four fleet does at a gold valley
the famished arrow sang before.

Bow at belt went my love riding
riding the mountain down
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
the sheer peaks ran before.

Paler be they than daunting death
the sleek slim deer
the tall tense deer.

Four tall stags at a green mountain
the lucky hunter sang before.

All in green went my love riding
on a great horse of gold
into the silver dawn.

four lean hounds crouched low and smiling
my heart fell dead before.

Sonnet III: "Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring" by Edna St. Vincent Millay
1892 – 1950

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring,
 And all the flowers that in the springtime grow,
 And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
 And all the nests that the bared branches show,
 And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.

You go no more on your exultant feet
 Up paths that only mist and morning knew,
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
 Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—
But you were something more than young and sweet
 And fair,—and the long year remembers you.

From *Renascence, and other poems* (Harper, 1917) by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Paul Robeson by Gwendolyn Brooks 1917 –2000

That time
we all heard it,
cool and clear,
cutting across the hot grit of the day.
The major Voice.
The adult Voice
forgoing Rolling River,
forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge
and other symptoms of an old despond.
Warning, in music-words
devout and large,
that we are each other's
harvest:
we are each other's
business:
we are each other's
magnitude and bond.

#

The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Exiles by Marilyn Hacker

Her brown falcon perches above the sink
as steaming water forks over my hands.
Below the wrists they shrivel and turn pink.
I am in exile in my own land.

Her half-grown cats scuffle across the floor
trailing a slime of blood from where they fed.
I lock the door. They claw under the door.
I am an exile in my own bed.

Her spotted mongrel, bristling with red mange,
sleeps on the threshold of the Third Street bar
where I drink brandy as the couples change.
I am in exile where my neighbors are.

On the pavement, cans of ashes burn.
Her green lizard scuttles from the light
around torn cardboard charred to glowing fern.
I am in exile in my own sight.

Her blond child sits on the stoop when I come
back at night. Cold hands, blue lids; we both
need sleep. She tells me she is going to die.
I am in exile in my own youth.

Lady of distances, this fire, this water,
this earth makes sanctuary where I stand.
Call of your animals and your blond daughter,
I am in exile in my own hands.

Ballade of a Great Weariness by Dorothy Parker 1893 - 1967

There's little to have but the things I had,
 There's little to bear but the things I bore.
There's nothing to carry and naught to add,
 And glory to Heaven, I paid the score.
There's little to do but I did before,
 There's little to learn but the things I know;
And this is the sum of a lasting lore:
 Scratch a lover, and find a foe.

And couldn't it be I was young and mad
 If ever my heart on my sleeve I wore?
There's many to claw at a heart unclad,
 And little the wonder it ripped and tore.
There's one that'll join in their push and roar,
 With stories to jabber, and stones to throw;
He'll fetch you a lesson that costs you sore—
 Scratch a lover, and find a foe.

So little I'll offer to you, my lad;
 It's little in loving I set my store.
There's many a maid would be flushed and glad,
 And better you'll knock at a kindlier door.
I'll dig at my lettuce, and sweep my floor—
 Forever, forever I'm done with woe—
And happen I'll whistle about my chore,
 “Scratch a lover, and find a foe.”

L'ENVOI:

Oh, beggar or prince, no more, no more!
 Be off and away with your strut and show.
The sweeter the apple, the blacker the core—
 Scratch a lover, and find a foe!

From *Enough Rope* (Boni & Liveright, 1926) by Dorothy Parker. This poem is in the public domain.

Common Cold by Ogden Nash 1902-1971

Go hang yourself, you old M.D.!
You shall not sneer at me.
Pick up your hat and stethoscope,
Go wash your mouth with laundry soap;
I contemplate a joy exquisite
I'm not paying you for your visit.
I did not call you to be told
My malady is a common cold.

By pounding brow and swollen lip;
By fever's hot and scaly grip;
By those two red redundant eyes
That weep like woeful April skies;
By racking snuffle, snort, and sniff;
By handkerchief after handkerchief;
This cold you wave away as naught
Is the damnedest cold man ever caught!

Give ear, you scientific fossil!
Here is the genuine Cold Colossal;
The Cold of which researchers dream,
The Perfect Cold, the Cold Supreme.
This honored system humbly holds
The Super-cold to end all colds;
The Cold Crusading for Democracy;
The Führer of the Streptococcracy.

Bacilli swarm within my portals
Such as were ne'er conceived by mortals,
But bred by scientists wise and hoary
In some Olympic laboratory;
Bacteria as large as mice,

With feet of fire and heads of ice
Who never interrupt for slumber
Their stamping elephantine rumba.

A common cold, gadzooks, forsooth!
Ah, yes. And Lincoln was jostled by Booth;
Don Juan was a budding gallant,
And Shakespeare's plays show signs of talent;
The Arctic winter is fairly coolish,
And your diagnosis is fairly foolish.
Oh what a derision history holds
For the man who belittled the Cold of Colds!

The Crocodile by Lewis Carroll 1832 – 1898

How doth the little crocodile
 Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
 On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
 How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
 With gently smiling jaws!
#

The Mock Turtle's Song

“Will you walk a little faster?”
said a whiting to a snail.
“There’s a porpoise close behind us,
and he’s treading on my tail.
See how eagerly the lobsters and
the turtles all advance!
They are waiting on the shingle—
will you come and join the dance?
Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you,
will you join the dance?
Will you, won’t you, will you, won’t you,
won’t you join the dance?”

THE BELLBIRD by Isabella Slattery-Shannon (age 11)

The full moon, glowing at dusk,
and the audacious bellbird is calling out from his tree,
so small yet so loud.
He calls, repeats, waits, and calls again.
It makes me wonder how loud our songs are heard,
and how far they spread beyond our knowing.

—*from* 2023 Rattle Young Poets Anthology

Why do you like to write poetry?

Isabella Slattery-Shannon: “I enjoy poetry because it opens a whole new world for my brain.”

THAATHAA by Divya Venkat Sridhar (age 15)

My papa's papa used to run after the wooden cart of prasadam each dawn for food

Young feet bleeding over the rough road. I like to imagine his eyes:

bright like a brown beetle, fresh like monsoon soil,

his chest burning like metal on metal as he gulps dusty air.

He's wearing sandbag shorts, mottled with flecks of dirt.

He's hurdling red rock and plastic bottles, blooming like a wild indigo,

Stomach roaring in his lame body.

His small hands are cupped and trembling, so empty they could hold

a Ganges of riches, a Yamuna of flooding wealth—

only a thin paper cup of rice lands in his fingers.

I like to imagine the summer when we go to Hyderabad now:

he holds my hair, and I feel the lines in his palms

like parted sediment along a freshwater river.

He likes to laugh until his beetle eyes fly off into the clouds

and his face goes wrinkly like pottery on an unmanned wheel.

And when he cooks, he lays out food and food and colours

rushing around the big table to fill our hearts

with cardamom and cinnamon and cloves—his love language,

grown from a tongue once parched in poverty.

I like to imagine he's waited for this his whole life, and this pride

takes root in me like the eternal warmth of a sunlit sky.

His feet carry me over rough road, rock and rubble,

until river, liquid gold breaks out from under his toes

like a lullaby.

—*from* **2023 Rattle Young Poets Anthology**

Why do you like to write poetry?

Divya Venkat Sridhar: “Poetry helps me believe in myself. It is the best feeling in the world—to know that I can create something honest, using words in a way that nobody has done before, and speak my truth.”

Out, Out by Robert Frost 1874 –1963

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them "Supper." At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap—
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—
He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off—
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

A Line-storm Song by Robert Frost 1874 –1963

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift,
The road is forlorn all day,
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,
And the hoof-prints vanish away.
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,
Expend their bloom in vain.
Come over the hills and far with me,
And be my love in the rain.

The birds have less to say for themselves
In the wood-world's torn despair
Than now these numberless years the elves,
Although they are no less there:
All song of the woods is crushed like some
Wild, easily shattered rose.
Come, be my love in the wet woods; come,
Where the boughs rain when it blows.

There is the gale to urge behind
And bruit our singing down,
And the shallow waters aflutter with wind
From which to gather your gown.
What matter if we go clear to the west,
And come not through dry-shod?
For wilding brooch shall wet your breast
The rain-fresh goldenrod.

Oh, never this whelming east wind swells
But it seems like the sea's return
To the ancient lands where it left the shells
Before the age of the fern;
And it seems like the time when after doubt
Our love came back amain.
Oh, come forth into the storm and rout
And be my love in the rain.

The Waking by Theodore Roethke 1908 - 1963

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Snow Man by Wallace Stevens 1879 - 1955

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;
And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,
Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place
For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

I Sing What You Loved Gabriela Mistral 1889 –1957

translated from the Spanish by Ursula K. Le Guin

Life of my life, what you loved I sing.
If you're near, if you're listening,
remembering earth, in the evening,
my life, my shadow, hear me sing.

Life of my life, I can't be still.
What is a story we never tell?
How can you find me unless I call?

Life of my life, I haven't changed,
not turned aside and not estranged.
Come to me as the shadows grow long,
come, life of my life, if you know the song
you used to know, if you know my name.
I and the song are still the same.

Beyond time or place I keep the faith.
Follow a path or follow no path,
don't fear the night or the rainy wind.
call me to come to you, now at the end,
and come to me, soul of my soul, my friend.

In Every Direction by Silvina Ocampo 1903-1993

We go leaving ourselves in every direction,
in beds, in rooms, in fields, in seas, in cities,
and each one of those fragments
that has ceased to be us, continues being
as always us, making us
jealous and hostile.
"What will it do that I would like to do?"
we think. "Who will it see that I would like to see?"
We often receive chance news
of that creature . . .
We enter its dreams
when it dreams of us,
loving it
like those whom we love most;
we knock at its doors
with burning hands,
we think it will return in the illusion of belonging to us
mistaken as before
but it will keep being treacherous and unreachable.
As with our rivals we would kill it. We will only be able
to glimpse it in photographs. It must survive us.

Epitaph for an Aroma by Silvina Ocampo

When the dew descended yesterday,
amid future stamens and corollas,
I perished in a garden that presented
shadows in the shapes of trees, and water.
Two ribbons bound me, here they are:
longer than my petals they endured,
pale, like the ribbons of the dead.
The same implicit partnership of flowers,
the similar hands, the care,
the season and the blood of evening,
will not be able to repeat exactly
the dark tunnels of my aroma:
infinite will be in memory
the intricate paths of the perfume;
infinite, too, the deceptive
reappearance of every moment.
And though the days may want to bring them back,
and though many circumstances join together- -
repetition of phrases or of people,
the same inclination of a head- -
neither does that person anymore exist
for whom I was in secret destined.

AN AUTOCORRECT POEM by Fae Merritt (age 9)

Cats are coming
Dogs are not very friendly
Monkeys created a new life
Koalas have a lot of explaining to do
Pandas need help from your parents
Foxes have been doing the wrong thing
And bats are in the same house as you
BATS ARE IN THE SAME HOUSE AS YOU

—from 2023 Rattle Young Poets Anthology

Why do you like to write poetry?

Fae Merritt: “I like writing because it’s fun to make up stories and write about your ideas. It can be not real in the world but it becomes real when you write it.”

Perhaps the World Ends Here by Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

From *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* (W. W. Norton, 1994) by Joy Harjo.
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Atlanta by Philip Fried

It all began, they say, with a lazy fly
ball lofting out of the stadium into the deep
Southern afternoon that had gone unbroken
—and still goes—since that tousled raptor Sherman
visited northern wrath on this drawing city.

My father, meeker, in a greater, foreign
war, was waiting out the worldwide slaughter
as a Damn Yankee Jew on Cherry Street
—a whisper behind the stadium's ritual yells—
where the ball nearly bombarded the barbecue.

Aside from the looping fly, the afternoons I
was born into were ladled out of the gravy-
boat of days and spiced with magnolia shadow
and with many living things that had no names
for northerners. But rebounding radio waves

were agitating for DiMaggio
and crooning us into the cradle of postwar lives
where the absent dying would return to its reason.
I was absent living, a knobbly root
upripped and laid in the cupped palms of the air.

What bowed to me then, down to the fontanelle,
inhaling me with everything was nothing
that I could ever locate with a name,
not War fathering bastards, not mother, not father,
not Earth, not sky, not universe. Better to lie:

“It all began, they say, with a lazy fly . . .”

More Things, Horatio! by Philip Fried

—”There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio . . .”

Shakespeare,*Hamlet*

Dream, philosophy, of the little
Hudson Valley town of Cold
Spring (there’s an unexpected place)
Where I spent a boyhood vacation running
Wild and riding a horse around
A ring, but I didn’t know
That the incarnation of Ralph Waldo
Emerson was teaching in the high
School all the while, in the form
Of a bearded man who rhapsodized
To his students about radio waves.
River breezes whipped the pennons
Along the top of the school and
The river was a sentient being.
After I left and the place left all
But my deepest mind, the level where
My blond hair still hasn’t faded into
Brown, there was a local baby boom
Like an extrabig volley from West Point
And the town built more and more schools
(That now are empty) and a girl named Ruth
Was shot into the mid-1950’s
As if from a circus cannon, hating
Her name, but reconciled later,
And she became a clarinetist
In the high school band, knees furiously
Pumping while atop her hat
She wore a great white plume. Dream,
Philosophy, of that! And she
Knew how to blow bubbles and chewing
Aggressively crack the wad of gum
Against her molars. She didn’t spit
Or master refinements of spitting through
The teeth because that was for boys. Oh
The crispness of some things, beyond
Philosophy’s dreams!

Boundary Conditions by Sneha Madhavan-Reese

*who but men blame the angels for the wild
exceptionalism of men?*

—Sam Sax, “Anti-Zionist Abecedarian”

Along the border of any governed region, there exists a value which must satisfy its laws. This is a rule I learned for solving differential equations.

Math seems like it doesn't exist, my newly graduated kindergartner declares. *It's just rules that someone made up*. She's brilliant beyond her years.

On the surface of the ocean exist propagating dynamic disturbances; in other words, waves. In other words, the boundary between air and water,

between the requirements for life, between dark and light, wrong and right, between what can be held and what can only be imagined, between dreams

and the realities that shatter them, the things that keep us awake at night, at every boundary there are laws, and sometimes these laws make no sense.

Of course it's made up, but that doesn't mean it's not real. *There is math in the air we breathe*, I tell her. People die for made up reasons every day.

There is math in the shuddering earth. Find equations that govern its motion, whether by earthquake or explosion. Try and fail, try again and fail, to solve.

—*from [Poets Respond](#)*
November 7, 2023

Sneha Madhavan-Reese: “Nothing I can say [about current events](#) seems sufficient.”

The Dim Tenements by D. Nurkse

What, I asked my father, is behind a wall?
When you see a lit window through the rain
down a dark street, who lives there?

When a car swishes past after midnight,
sudden and decisive, where is it going?

The voices in the alley, laughing and sobbing,
what are they talking about?

My father sighed and rolled his eyes
while blinking furtively—it was an expression
he had perfected during the fall of Narva—
and cracked his knuckles, a hollow sound.

He explained: behind the wall is another wall.
The rain doesn't know itself. The car is fleeing.
The voices have no idea what they are saying.

When you come to the lit window at the end of life
I will be waiting for you. But the room will be empty.

Return From Flint by D. Nurkse

After my father died, the other children
were kind and took great delight
in giving me secret gifts—a jujube
hermetically sealed in cellophane,
a goose feather with a bent tip,
a box of Ohio Blue Tip matches.

They allowed me to win at stoop soccer,
whistleball, all their impenetrable games
whose rules are like the Law,
decipherable only when broken.

The girls invited me to walk with them
under tall sticky pines
pulsing with the trance of crickets.
Cindy kissed me. A girl with no name
touched my earlobe experimentally.

Teacher let me pass the Pyramid Test
though I answered at random,
just a whirl of zeroes.

Even the blue dog followed me home.
Our cat brought me a sparrow
still flying gravely in its mouth.

I was confused: were they bribing me?
If they loved me, it was strange
as swallowing a moth.

My mother made my birthday meal,
large meatballs mixed with small,
Swedish and Italian, though even I
understood she moved like a puppet
on strings of supernatural fatigue.

That night I had my favorite dream:
my father lifting me in strong arms
out of Monday into Friday,
out of August into November,
out of childhood into old age.

This Again by Bob Hicok

The recommendation from some website quoted on the news is to rape, cut the throats of, and throw female Jews off a cliff. But how far are the cliffs of Ithaca from Cornell, where the raping and throat slashing is supposed to occur? And if you don't have a car, are you supposed to borrow one or can you Uber a body to a cliff and ask the driver to wait while you chuck it off? And what if you're afraid of heights? It's time we address the shocking lack of detail in antisemitism. It's one thing to hate Jews but another to ask me to hate Jews without telling me how to hate Jews or why I should hate anyone when loving everyone is an option. A difficult one, I admit, impossible even, but in a process sense, it requires no knives or cars or evil and can be conveyed in a simple phrase: See someone, love someone. Or, Love thy neighbor as thou loves apple pie. Or, love thy stranger as thou loves starlight for touching us without knowing our names. Have you ever felt as brittle as kindling shattering to pieces just under the shower curtain of your skin? It's a rhetorical question because I know you have and will, as I have and do right now. So screw every cult of hate. Every bullet and knife and bomb and shitty thing said under the breath or with the full conviction of the lungs. If you see a Jew, be a Jew. If you see a Muslim, be a Muslim. If you see a human, be a human. The lend an ear or a hand kind. The "how's it going" kind. The kind kind. No one chooses who or where or when to be. We just sort of collectively are. So hating you for being you makes no more sense than you hating me for being me. And I don't want to be raped or have my throat slashed or get thrown off a cliff, hard as that is to believe. I want to see the cliffs of Ithaca in moonlight. The Kaaba in Mecca circled by a crowd pulsing with faith. The Ice Hotel in a snow storm. I want a really good pizza with an egg on it.

To kiss my wife on top of the Eiffel Tower.
All the parts of her that are Jewish
and all the parts that are human
and all the parts that make her sigh and moan.
Being human means understanding that being human
is the hardest thing you'll ever do.
That we're all partisans in this struggle,
fellow teamsters in not knowing
what the hell is going on, brothers and sisters
stuffing our befuddlement every morning
into pants and dresses we hope
don't make us look fat and stupid and lost.
Everyone I know feels lost. The trick is
to feel lost together. Maybe you have a map
and I have a canteen. Certainly someone
has a pogo stick or cyclotron. We need food
and light and harmonicas and theremins
and stories about monsters
who decide not to eat the child
or stomp the village or fly over the night
with death on their wings. Lost together,
our nowhere becomes our somewhere. Lost together,
the dream of home never dies.

—*from* **Poets Respond**

Bob Hicok: “Don’t know what to say [about this](#), other than what the poem does.”

From Spoon River by Edgar Lee Masters 1868 - 1950

Ollie McGee

HAVE you seen walking through the village
A man with downcast eyes and haggard face?
That is my husband who, by secret cruelty
never to be told, robbed me of my youth and my beauty;
Till at last, wrinkled and with yellow teeth,
And with broken pride and shameful humility,
I sank into the grave.
But what think you gnaws at my husband's heart?
The face of what I was, the face of what he made me!
These are driving him to the place where I lie.
In death, therefore, I am avenged.



Fletcher McGee

SHE took my strength by minutes,
She took my life by hours,
She drained me like a fevered moon
That saps the spinning world.
The days went by like shadows,
The minutes wheeled like stars.
She took pity from my heart,
And made it into smiles.
She was a hunk of sculptor's clay,
My secret thoughts were fingers:
They flew behind her pensive brow
And lined it deep with pain.
They set the lips, and sagged the cheeks,
And drooped the eyes with sorrow.
My soul had entered in the clay,
Fighting like seven devils.
It was not mine, it was not hers;
She held it, but its struggles
Modeled a face she hated,
And a face I feared to see.
I beat the windows, shook the bolts.
I hid me in a corner--
And then she died and haunted me,
And hunted me for life.

1994 by Lucille Clifton 1936 - 2010

i was leaving my fifty-eighth year
when a thumb of ice
stamped itself hard near my heart

you have your own story
you know about the fears the tears
the scar of disbelief

you know that the saddest lies
are the ones we tell ourselves
you know how dangerous it is

to be born with breasts
you know how dangerous it is
to wear dark skin

i was leaving my fifty-eighth year
when i woke into the winter
of a cold and mortal body

thin icicles hanging off
the one mad nipple weeping

have we not been good children
did we not inherit the earth

but you must know all about this
from your own shivering life

From “Sleeping with Bashō” by David Trinidad

AT THE YAM FESTIVAL

What a delicious life!
When I cut a sweet
potato in half, I get
the harvest moon.

STRIPPED BRANCHES

What’s left after the wind
blows every blossom
off the dog cherry—
a tree of wagging tails.

SURRENDER TO THE BEAUTY OF FLOWERS

Be sure to wear
your flowered robe
when you come out
to view the blossoms.

FAMILY HISTORY

The bamboo sprout
cares nothing
about the stalk
that produced him.

WAGGING TONGUES

Every red leaf
rustling
with gossip.

LIGHTS OUT

Unhappily,
the new moon
has been sent upstairs
before her bedtime.

SAYŌNARA

Like wild geese,
we'll only be separated
by clouds, my dear,
dear friend.

HOUSE CALL

How come the rich merchant
never sends a horse
to fetch the village poet?

SEEING IS BELIEVING

I found god
in plum blossoms,
not the great blank sky
beyond them.

Almost by Mark Jarman

Almost grasped what Grandmother Grace knew
Last Sunday sitting in church, almost knew
What Alexander Campbell grasped when, confronted
With the desolate orphan, he told her, “You
Are a child of God. Go claim your inheritance.”
Almost got it. There it was in the sunlight,
Squared in the clear glass windows, on the durable leaves
Of the magnolia outside. Almost grasped the weather
That turns clear and crystallized in Hans Küng’s brain.
Almost held it in the ellipses and measure
Of my almost understanding. I see the moment
There in my notebook, then the next day’s anxiety
Spilling like something wet across the ink.
I almost put in my hand a vast acceptance
And almost blessed myself, then it slipped away.
All that colossal animal vivacity—smoke
Of the distant horizon, most of it, haze.
But to have known in any place or time
What they knew is worth a record, a few notes.
Almost knew what they knew. Almost got it.

—from **Rattle #25, Summer 2006**

Mark Jarman: “It took me years to figure out that one of the biggest influences on me as a writer had been the fact that I lived in a house with someone who had to write something every week, get up in front of bunch of people, and basically perform it. It was my father writing sermons.” ([web](#))

In the Grove: The Poet at Ten by Jane Kenyon 1947 - 1995

She lay on her back in the timothy
and gazed past the doddering
auburn heads of sumac.

A cloud—huge, calm,
and dignified—covered the sun
but did not, could not, put it out.

The light surged back again.

Nothing could rouse her then
from that joy so violent
it was hard to distinguish from pain.

Displaced by Mosab Abu Toha

In memory of Edward Said

I am neither in nor out.
I am in between.
I am not part of anything.
I am a shadow of something.
At best,
I am a thing that
does not really
exist.
I am weightless,
a speck of time
in Gaza.
But I will remain
where I am.

Pilgrims of the Mound by Conal Abatangelo

after Genbakukuyōtō

By the riverbank, where the herons
no longer fed, for lack of food
and lack of herons, they pulled bodies
from the water until the days began
to drop low in the horizon. If the sky
cleared, the cloud remained, and near
to the ground, the sun bloomed
dimmer than all the summers
before. There came a rain like night
which swallowed all colors, painting
in ash where ash had not been. Exhumed,
exhausted, returned to the land. The workers,
even as they buried, began too to drop
dead. In the coming weeks, the months,
the long years, a whole people became
a vault, a chapel, then the mound.
The line of ghosts unburying itself
each time a bomb speaks, even if no one will
listen for it.

Comment from the series editor, Megan O'Reilly: "I found the poet's use of language so unexpected as to be mesmerizing—I kept rereading phrases to savor them, and to marvel at how artfully and accurately they capture aspects of Arthur Lawrence's 'Shadowland.' The rich but muted hues of the image are reflected in the phrase 'a rain like night / which swallowed all the colors,' and I was moved by the description 'a line of ghosts unburying itself' in relation to the crowd of figures in 'Shadowland.' I think the phrase 'a bomb speaks' is the one which will haunt me most—the idea of a bomb having a voice and something to say is an unsettling truth. Truth is something neither poem nor image shy away from, and I think that's why they create such a resonant harmony."

Because by Grace Schulman

Because, in a universe of charred bodies,
the grass still glistens, the first daffodil
shoots up near snow-melt, and a red-tailed hawk

perches rudely on a church spire; because
children toss a fire-red ball in the yard
where a schoolhouse facade was scarred by vandals,

and joggers still circle a dry reservoir;
because a rainbow flaunts its painted ribbons
and slips them underneath a blood-drenched earth;

because in a smoky bar the trombone blares
louder than street sirens, because those
who can no longer speak of pain are singing;

because on this wide meadow in the park
a full moon still outshines the city lights,
and when returning home, below the North Star,

I see a tower rise where the Towers fell,
and fill a vacant sky with yellow glass;
and I remember my love's calloused hand

soften in my hand while crab-apple blossoms
showered our laps, and a yellow rose
opened with its satellites of orange buds,

because I cannot lose the injured world
without losing the world, I'll have to praise it.

Scallop Shell by Grace Schulman

See them at low tide,
scallop shells glittering on
a scallop-edged shore,

whittled by water
into curvy rows the shape
of waves that kiss the sand

only to erode it. Today
I walked that shoreline, humming,

Camino Santiago,
the road to St. James's tomb,
where pilgrims traveled,

scallop badges on their capes,
and chanted prayers
for a miracle to cure

disease. And so I,
stirred by their purpose,

hunted for scallop shells
shaped like pleated fans,
with mouths that open and close

to steer them from predators.
I scooped up a fan
and blew off sand grains, thinking,

for that one moment,
of how Saint James' body

rose from sea decked with scallops,
and of this empty beach
in another austere time.

Let this unholy pilgrim,

implore the scallop shell,

silvery half-moon, save us.

After Reading That Merriam-Webster's 2023 Word of the Year is
Authenticity by Dante Di Stefano

I wonder about the future poems
I will read, generated by AI,
the imperceptibly pixelated
tulips pushing through the rich soil in them,

the deepfake MFA bios attached
to them like deflated orange balloons,
the shining metaphors crowing from them
as I open the App of my eyelids

and scroll lithely from stanza to stanza.
I wonder if I'll be able to notice
in their red wheelbarrows full of roses,
how a chatbot has damasked every stem.

I found the poem I'm writing now, tucked
in the galley of a tiny schooner
circumnavigating the four chambers
of my heart. It was wedged under a cask

of lime juice. It was written in the scrawl
of a mad captain hellbent on shipwreck
or treasure or unspecified glory.
It was found, it was wedged, it was written

to explain a flower growing in me,
a blue bonnet sprouting from my boot print,
gently stretching skyward to touch the stars,
but like all poems we humans fashion

from want and need and yes and must and what,
it ended up saying something else beyond
the arc of unsaying, something fevered
and cut, rizzed up against the scurvy dark.

—*from Poets Respond*

Dante Di Stefano: “Often lately, I have been teaching and reading and thinking about generative AI. Despite all I’ve read about Sam Altman, ChatGPT, etc., it’s hard for me to imagine how this technology will transform our world. Reading the article about Meriam-Webster’s **word of the year** further confirmed how enmeshed we are in this transformation already. Authenticity is a fraught term in poetry anyway, so I think this poem wandered into some of the fraughtness and complexity that comes with the terrain of lyric saying. For me this is less a poem about AI than it is a poem about the ancient technology of poetic utterance in all its mystery. The word rizz that I use at the end of the poem is an internet neologism added to Meriam-Webster this year, meaning ‘romantic charm or appeal.’” (**web**)

Beauty (A Drop of Dopamine) by Alicia Ostriker

Just now
while I was at the sink
drying dishes
they caught my eye
those orange
Peruvian
lilies on
the table with the old
Iranian tablecloth
at other times it is
his aging sculpted face
or his hands
at rest on a book
while he naps

TIME by Alicia Ostriker

Time goes by
day trailing day
it passes me by
and somehow fades
like a stealthy black cat
like an old scar
like a recently cleaned
express subway car
lit up boldly inside there it goes
loudly clacking
gradually passing
the local subway car
covered with graffiti
in which I sit sighing
watching golden-windowed Time slide by
both trains move
one moves faster
wait up
no

Circe's Power by Louise Glück 1943 - 2023

I never turned anyone into a pig.
Some people are pigs; I make them
Look like pigs.

I'm sick of your world
That lets the outside disguise the inside. Your men weren't bad men;
Undisciplined life
Did that to them. As pigs,

Under the care of
Me and my ladies, they
Sweetened right up.

Then I reversed the spell, showing you my goodness
As well as my power. I saw

We could be happy here,
As men and women are
When their needs are simple. In the same breath,

I foresaw your departure,
Your men with my help braving
The crying and pounding sea. You think

A few tears upset me? My friend,
Every sorceress is
A pragmatist at heart; nobody sees essence who can't
Face limitation. If I wanted only to hold you

I could hold you prisoner.

Celestial Music by Louise Glück

I have a friend who still believes in heaven.
Not a stupid person, yet with all she knows, she literally talks to God.
She thinks someone listens in heaven.
On earth she's unusually competent.
Brave too, able to face unpleasantness.

We found a caterpillar dying in the dirt, greedy ants crawling over it.
I'm always moved by disaster, always eager to oppose vitality
But timid also, quick to shut my eyes.
Whereas my friend was able to watch, to let events play out
According to nature. For my sake she intervened
Brushing a few ants off the torn thing, and set it down
Across the road.

My friend says I shut my eyes to God, that nothing else explains
My aversion to reality. She says I'm like the child who
Buries her head in the pillow
So as not to see, the child who tells herself
That light causes sadness-
My friend is like the mother. Patient, urging me
To wake up an adult like herself, a courageous person-

In my dreams, my friend reproaches me. We're walking
On the same road, except it's winter now;
She's telling me that when you love the world you hear celestial music:
Look up, she says. When I look up, nothing.
Only clouds, snow, a white business in the trees
Like brides leaping to a great height-
Then I'm afraid for her; I see her
Caught in a net deliberately cast over the earth-

In reality, we sit by the side of the road, watching the sun set;
From time to time, the silence pierced by a birdcall.
It's this moment we're trying to explain, the fact
That we're at ease with death, with solitude.
My friend draws a circle in the dirt; inside, the caterpillar doesn't move.
She's always trying to make something whole, something beautiful, an image
Capable of life apart from her.
We're very quiet. It's peaceful sitting here, not speaking, The composition
Fixed, the road turning suddenly dark, the air
Going cool, here and there the rocks shining and glittering-
It's this stillness we both love.
The love of form is a love of endings.

The Peace of Wild Things By Wendell Berry 1934

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world and am free.

Letter from Paul Celan by Grace Schulman
All gladness, dear Nelly, all light!

Paris to Stockholm. My dear Nelly.
After that which happened, the no-longer,
your father's hand gripped through barbed wire

then let slip away, your lines still glow
cool as white roses in rain. Fellow survivor,
brother, remember the sudden flash

when we two first met, dazzling the lake?
You, a disbeliever, looked for cause;
I knew it was divine, and prayed

for that gold to come back, as a sign
that we may breathe again in smokeless air.
The fires you saw burn on in my mind;

not to have been there magnifies the flame.
For you, though, all that remains of horror
is language washed of horror. In your lines,

white stones, frost, doves, icelight, snowlight,
the lightbringers, star that listens to light
And your letter, whose lesson is indelible:

after great loss, language is survival --
the fizz of dark waves that crash white
against dull rocks, the secret source of light,

the sun through fog, our not unjoyful days,