

CENTER FOR LEARNING AND LIVING
Fall, 2024

Poetry for Pleasure Tuesdays 8 sessions with Barry Wallenstein and invited guests.

September 10th

“Like a piece of ice on a hot stove, a poem must ride on its own melting.” – Robert Frost

Old Age: What a strange thing to happen to a little boy. -- George Oppen (in conversation with Paul Auster)

Don't relive desperate situations or anticipate others. If you follow that rule, half of life's problems will disappear.-- Marianne Moore,

In the end we will remember not the words of our enemy, but the silence of our friends. -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

The greatest problem in communication ... is the illusion that it has been accomplished. G.B. Shaw

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TO THE GREAT SPIRIT

Lakota Prayer

Grandfather Great Spirit,

all over the world the faces of living ones are alike.

With tenderness they have come up out of the ground.

Look upon your children that they may

face the winds and walk the good road to the

Day of Quiet.

#

Cherokee Prayer Blessing

May the Warm Winds of Heaven

Blow softly upon your house.

May the Great Spirit

Bless all who enter there.

May your Mocassins

Make happy tracks

in many snows,

and may the Rainbow

Always touch your shoulder.

David's Psalm 40:11-13

“Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness always protect me. For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me. Be pleased to save me, Lord – come quickly to help me.”

Sonnet 54 by Shakespeare D. 1616

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
Injurious distance should not stop my way;
For then despite of space I would be brought,
From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.
No matter then although my foot did stand
Upon the farthest earth removed from thee;
For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
As soon as think the place where he would be.
But ah! thought kills me that I am not thought,
To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
I must attend time's leisure with my moan,
 Receiving nought by elements so slow
 But heavy tears, badges of either's woe..

Sonnet 55 by Shakespeare

The other two, slight air and purging fire,
Are both with thee, wherever I abide;
The first my thought, the other my desire,
These present-absent with swift motion slide.
For when these quicker elements are gone
In tender embassy of love to thee,
My life, being made of four, with two alone
Sinks down to death, oppressed with melancholy;
Until life's composition be recured
By those swift messengers return'd from thee,
Who even but now come back again, assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me:
 This told, I joy; but then no longer glad,
 I send them back again and straight grow sad.

The Nymph's Reply To The Shepherd by Sir Walter Raleigh 1552 - 1618

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every Shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move,
To live with thee, and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When Rivers rage and Rocks grow cold,
And *Philomel* becometh dumb,
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields,
To wayward winter reckoning yields,
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Piping down the valleys wild, by William Blake 1757-1827

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again."
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer."
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read."
So he vanished from my sight,
And I plucked a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

Mad Song by Blake
The wild winds weep
And the night is a-cold;
Come hither, Sleep,
And my griefs infold:
But lo! the morning peeps
Over the eastern steeps,
And the rustling birds of dawn
The earth do scorn.

Lo! to the vault
Of paved heaven,
With sorrow fraught
My notes are driven:
They strike the ear of night,
Make weep the eyes of day;
They make mad the roaring winds,
And with tempests play.

Like a fiend in a cloud,
With howling woe,
After night I do crowd,
And with night will go;
I turn my back to the east,
From whence comforts have increas'd;
For light doth seize my brain
With frantic pain.

This living hand by John Keats 1795-1821

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.

#

The Human Seasons by John Keats

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminare, and by such dreaming high
Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furlth close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness—to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

The Day (204) by Emily Dickinson 1830-1886

I'll tell you how the Sun rose –
A Ribbon at a time –
The Steeples swam in Amethyst –
The news, like Squirrels, ran –
The Hills untied their Bonnets –
The Bobolinks – begun –
Then I said softly to myself –
“That must have been the Sun”!
But how he set – I know not –
There seemed a purple stile
That little Yellow boys and girls
Were climbing all the while –
Till when they reached the other side –
A Dominic in Gray –
Put gently up the evening Bars –
And led the flock away –

The Soul has Bandaged moments (360) by Emily Dickinson

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 (1755)

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

The city of such women, I am mad to be with them! I will return after death to be with them!

The city of such young men, I swear I cannot live happy, without I often go talk, walk, eat, drink, sleep, with them!

My Last Duchess by Robert Browning 1812-1889

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master’s known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

1914 I: Peace by Rupert Brooke 1887-1915

Now, God be thanked Who has watched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

When You Are Old by W. B. Yeats 1865-1939

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.

Macavity: The Mystery Cat, from —T. S. Eliot 1888-1965
from Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats

Beginning:

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw -
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime – Macavity's not there!

End:

And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

The Rum Tum Tugger is a Curious Cat:

If you offer him pheasant he would rather have grouse.
If you put him in a house he would much prefer a flat,
If you put him in a flat then he'd rather have a house.
If you set him on a mouse then he only wants a rat,
If you set him on a rat then he'd rather chase a mouse.

The Lonely Street by William Carlos Williams 1883-1863

School is over. It is too hot
to walk at ease. At ease
in light frocks they walk the streets
to while the time away.
They have grown tall. They hold
pink flames in their right hands.
In white from head to foot,
with sidelong, idle look—
in yellow, floating stuff,
black sash and stockings—
touching their avid mouths
with pink sugar on a stick—
like a carnation each holds in her hand—
they mount the lonely street.

Song by Edith Sitwell 1887-1964

We are the darkness in the heat of the day,
The rootless flowers in the air, the coolness : we are the water
Lying upon the leaves before Death, our sun,
And its vast heat has drunken us ... Beauty's daughter
The heart of the rose and we are one.

We are the summer's children, the breath of evening, the days
When all may hope for,-we are the unreturning
Smile of the lost one, seen through the summer leaves –
That sun and its false light scorning.

Something Told The Wild Geese Poem by Rachel Field 1894-1942

Something told the wild geese
It was time to go.
Though the fields lay golden
Something whispered, '-Snow.'

Leaves were green and stirring,
Berries, luster-glossed,
But beneath warm feathers
Something cautioned, '-Frost.'

All the sagging orchards
Steamed with amber spice,
But each wild breast stiffened
At remembered ice.

Something told the wild geese
It was time to fly,
Summer sun was on their wings,
Winter in their cry.

The Listeners by Walter de la Mare 1876-1956

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

What Lips My Lips Have Kissed... by Edna St. Vincent Millay 1892-1950

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

Poetry by Marianne Moore 1887 –1972

I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers that there is in it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful; when they become so derivative as to become unintelligible, the same thing may be said for all of us—that we

do not admire what
we cannot understand. The bat,
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under a tree, the immovable critic twinkling his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base—

ball fan, the statistician—case after case
could be cited did
one wish it; nor is it valid
to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry, nor till the autocrats among us can be

“literalists of
the imagination”—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand, in defiance of their opinion—

the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness, and
that which is on the other hand,
genuine, then you are interested in poetry.

From *Others for 1919: An Anthology of the New Verse* (Nicholas L. Brown, 1920), edited by Alfred Kreyborg. This poem is in the public domain.

In 1967, Moore reduced "Poetry" to just three lines:

I, too, dislike it.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it, after all, a place for the genuine.

From “The Windy City” by Carl Sandburg 1878-1967

Winds of the Windy City, come out of the prairie,
all the way from Medicine Hat.
Come-out of the inland sea-blue water, come where they
nickname a city for you.

Corn wind in the fall, come off the black lands,
come off the whisper of the silk hangers,
the lap of the flat spear leaves.

Blue-water wind in summer, come off the blue miles
of lake, carry your inland sea-blue fingers,
carry us cool, carry your blue to our homes.

White spring winds, come off the bag-wool clouds,
come off the running melted snow, come white
as the arms of snow-born children.

Gray fighting winter winds, come along on the tearing
blizzard tails, the snouts of the hungry
hunting storms, come fighting gray in winter.

Winds of the Windy City,
Winds of corn and sea blue,
Spring wind white and fighting winter gray,
Come home here—they nickname a city for you.

The wind of the lake shore waits and wanders.
The heave of the shore wind hunches the sand piles.
The winkers of the morning stars count out cities
And forget the numbers.

The Altar by Archibald MacLeish 1892-1982

I built an unnamed altar in my heart,
And sculptured sacred garlands for a frieze
From delicately petalled memories,—
The fragrance of a word, the fragile art
Of ash-gold hair, dim visioned things that start
With radiant wings from mist of reveries,
And vanish at the telling as a breeze
Blurs mirrored stars in dark pools set apart.

But, as I worshiped reverently there
The symbols of the beautiful, there came
A light aslant the shadows of my prayer
That silenced mine uplifted lips with shame.
The garlands coldly carven in that fair
Unmeaning tracery enscrolled—thy name.

Anecdote by Dorothy Parker 1893-1967

So silent I when Love was by
He yawned, and turned away;
But Sorrow clings to my apron-strings,
I have so much to say.

#

A Pig's-Eye View Of Literature

The Lives and Times of John Keats,
Percy Bysshe Shelley, and
George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron
Byron and Shelley and Keats

Were a trio of Lyrical treats.
The forehead of Shelley was cluttered with curls,
And Keats never was a descendant of earls,
And Byron walked out with a number of girls,
But it didn't impair the poetical feats
Of Byron and Shelley,
Of Byron and Shelley,
Of Byron and Shelley and Keats.

#

A Portrait

Because my love is quick to come and go-
A little here, and then a little there-
What use are any words of mine to swear
My heart is stubborn, and my spirit slow
Of weathering the drip and drive of woe?
What is my oath, when you have but to bare
My little, easy loves; and I can dare
Only to shrug, and answer, "They are so"?

You do not know how heavy a heart it is
That hangs about my neck- a clumsy stone
Cut with a birth, a death, a bridal-day.
Each time I love, I find it still my own,
Who take it, now to that lad, now to this,
Seeking to give the wretched thing away.

After Apple-Picking by Robert Frost 1874-1963

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

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

The Silken Tent by Robert Frost (1939)

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To every thing on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut,
In the capriciousness of summer air,
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

Clown in the Moon by Dylan Thomas 1914-1953

My tears are like the quiet drift
Of petals from some magic rose;
And all my grief flows from the rift
Of unremembered skies and snows.

I think, that if I touched the earth,
It would crumble;
It is so sad and beautiful,
So tremulously like a dream.
#

In My Craft or Sullen Art by Dylan Thomas

In my craft or sullen art
Exercised in the still night
When only the moon rages
And the lovers lie abed
With all their griefs in their arms
I labour by singing light
Not for ambition or bread
Or the strut and trade of charms
On the ivory stages
But for the common wages
Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart
From the raging moon I write
On these spindrift pages
Nor for the towering dead
With their nightingales and psalms
But for the lovers, their arms
Round the griefs of the ages,
Who pay no praise or wages
Nor heed my craft or art

Ode to Things by Pablo Neruda 1904-1973
- translated by Maria Jacketti and Dennis Maloney

I love things with a wild passion,
extravagantly.

I cherish tongs,
and scissors:

I adore
cups,
hoops,
soup tureens,
not to mention
of course--the hat.

I love
all things,
not only the
grand,
but also the infinite-
ly

small:
the thimble,
spurs,
dishes,
vases.

Oh, my soul,
the planet
is radiant,
teeming with
pipes
in hand,
conductors
of smoke;
with keys,
saltshakers, and
well,
things crafted
by the human hand, everything--
the curves of a shoe,
fabric,
the new bloodless
birth

of gold,
the eyeglasses,
nails,
brooms,
watches, compasses,
coins, the silken
plushness of chairs.
Oh
humans
have constructed
a multitude of pure things:
objects of wood,
crystal,
cord,
wondrous
tables,
ships, staircases.
I love
all
things,
not because they
might be warm
or fragrant,
but rather because--
I don't know why,
because
this ocean is yours,
and mine:
the buttons,
the wheels,
the little
forgotten
treasures,
the fans
of feathery
love spreading
orange blossoms,
the cups, the knives,
the shears,
everything rests

in the handle, the contour,
the traces
of fingers,
of a remote hand
lost
in the most forgotten regions of the ordinary obscured.
I pass through houses,
streets,
elevators,
touching things;
I glimpse objects
and secretly desire
something because it chimes,
and something else because
because it is as yielding
as gentle hips,
something else I adore for its deepwater hue,
something else for its velvety depths.
Oh irrevocable
river
of things.
People will not
say that only
loved fish
or plants of the rainforest or meadow,
that I only
loved
things that leap, rise, sigh, and survive.
It is not true:
many things gave me completeness.
They did not only touch me.
My hand did not merely touch them,
but rather,
the befriended
my existence
in such a way
that with me, they indeed existed,
and they were for me so full of life,
that they lived with me half-alive,
and they will die with me half-dead.

Evening Song by Kenneth Fearing 1904-1973

Sleep, McKade.

Fold up the day. It was a bright scarf.

Put it away.

Take yourself to pieces like a house of cards.

It is time to be a grey mouse under a tall building.

Go there. Go there now.

Look at the huge nails. Run behind the pipes.

Scamper in the walls.

Crawl towards the beckoning girl, her breasts are warm.

But here is a dead man. A murderer?

Kill him with your pistol. Creep past him to the girl.

Sleep, McKade.

Throw one arm across the bed. Wind your watch.

You are a gentleman, and important.

Yawn. Go to sleep.

The continent turning from the sun is quiet.

Your ticker waits for tomorrow morning

And you are alive now.

It will be a long time before they put McKade under the sod.

Sometime, but not now.

Sometime, though. Sometime, for certain.

Take apart your brain,

Close the mouths in it that have been hungry,

They are fed for a while.

Go to sleep, you are a gentleman. McKade, alive and sane.

A gentleman of position.

Tip your hat to the lady.

Speak to the mayor.

You are a personal friend of the mayor's, are you not?

True. A friend of the mayor's.

And you met the Queen of Roumania. True.

Then go to sleep.

Be a dog sleeping in the old sun.

Be a poodle drowsing in the old sun, by the Appian Way.

Be a dog lying the meadow watching soldiers pass on the road.

Chase after the woman who beckons.

Run from the policeman with the dagger. It will split your bones.

Be terrified.

Curl up and drowse on the pavement of Fifth Avenue in the old sun.

Sleep, McKade.

Yawn.

Go to sleep.

Poem (I lived in the first century of world wars) by Muriel Rukeyser 1913-1980

I lived in the first century of world wars.

Most mornings I would be more or less insane,
The newspapers would arrive with their careless stories,
The news would pour out of various devices
Interrupted by attempts to sell products to the unseen.
I would call my friends on other devices;
They would be more or less mad for similar reasons.
Slowly I would get to pen and paper,
Make my poems for others unseen and unborn.
In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,
Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,
Considering a nameless way of living, of almost unimagined values.
As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,
We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,
To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile
Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,
Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means
To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,
To let go the means, to wake.

I lived in the first century of these wars.

The Speaking Tree by Muriel Rukeyser
for Robert Payne

Great Alexander sailing was from his true course turned
By a young wind from a cloud in Asia moving
Like a most recognizable most silvery woman;
Tall Alexander to the island came.
The small breeze blew behind his turning head.
He walked the foam of ripples into this scene.

The trunk of the speaking tree looks like a tree-trunk
Until you look again. Then people and animals
Are ripening on the branches; the broad leaves
Are leaves; pale horses, sharp fine foxes
Blossom; the red rabbit falls
Ready and running. The trunk coils, turns,
Snakes, fishes. Now the ripe people fall and run,
Three of them in their shore-dance, flames that stand
Where reeds are creatures and the foam is flame.

Stiff Alexander stands. He cannot turn.
But he is free to turn : this is the speaking tree,
It calls your name. It tells us what we mean.

Henry by Night by John Berryman 1914-1972

Henry's nocturnal habits were the terror of his women.
First it appears he snored, lying on his back.
Then he thrashed and tossed,
changing position like a task fleet. Then, inhuman,
he woke every hour or so—they couldn't keep track
of mobile Henry, lost

at 3 a.m., off for more drugs or a cigarette,
reading old mail, writing new letters, scribbling
excessive Songs;
back then to bed, to the old tune or get set
for a stercoraceous cough, without quibbling
death-like. His women's wrongs

they hoarded and forgave, mysterious, sweet;
but you'll admit it was no way to live
or even keep alive.
I won't mention the dreams I won't repeat
sweating and shaking: something's gotta give:
up for good at five.

A New Wind a Blowin' by Langston Hughes 1901-1967

There's a brand new wind a-blowin' down that Lincoln road.
There's a brand new hope a-growin' down where freedom's seeds are sowed.
There's a new truth we'll be knowin' that will lift our heavy load,

When we find out what free men can really do.

There's a brand new day a-comin' for the land called U.S.A.
New tunes we'll be a-strummin' in our hearts by night and day.
As we march on we'll be hummin', how our troubles' gone away,

'Cause we've found out what free men can really do.

And if you feel like dancin' then, why come on folks, and dance!
And if you feel like prancin' then, why come on folks, and prance!
'Cause I really ain't romancin' when I say we've got our chance

To show 'em what free men can really do.

There's a brand new wind a-blowin' thru a land that's proud and free.
Ev'rywhere there's folks a-wakin' to a truth that's bound to be.
So let's all pull together for that day of victory,

And we'll show 'em what free men can really do!

Poem [Lana Turner has collapsed!] by Frank O'Hara 1926-1966

Lana Turner has collapsed!
I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing
but hailing hits you on the head
hard so it was really snowing and
raining and I was in such a hurry
to meet you but the traffic
was acting exactly like the sky
and suddenly I see a headline
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
there is no snow in Hollywood
there is no rain in California
I have been to lots of parties
and acted perfectly disgraceful
but I never actually collapsed
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

From *Lunch Poems* by Frank O'Hara. Copyright © 1964 by Frank O'Hara.
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Insomnia by Elizabeth Bishop 1911-1979

The moon in the bureau mirror
looks out a million miles
(and perhaps with pride, at herself,
but she never, never smiles)
far and away beyond sleep, or
perhaps she's a daytime sleeper.

By the Universe deserted,
she'd tell it to go to hell,
and she'd find a body of water,
or a mirror, on which to dwell.
So wrap up care in a cobweb
and drop it down the well

into that world inverted
where left is always right,
where the shadows are really the body,
where we stay awake all night,
where the heavens are shallow as the sea
is now deep, and you love me.

The Bean Eaters by Gwendolyn Brooks (1917 – 2000)

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.
Dinner is a casual affair.
Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,
Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good.
Two who have lived their day,
But keep on putting on their clothes
And putting things away.

And remembering . . .
Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,
As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that
is full of beads and receipts and dolls and cloths,
tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.

In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr. Poem by June Jordan 1939-1902

I
honey people murder mercy U.S.A.
the milkland turn to monsters teach
to kill to violate pull down destroy
the weakly freedom growing fruit
from being born

America

tomorrow yesterday rip rape
exacerbate despoil disfigure
crazy running threat the
deadly thrall
appall belief dispel
the wildlife burn the breast
the onward tongue
the outward hand
deform the normal rainy
riot sunshine shelter wreck
of darkness derogate
delimit blank
explode deprive
assassinate and batten up
like bullets fatten up
the raving greed
reactivate a springtime
terrorizing

death by men by more
than you or I can

STOP

II

They sleep who know a regulated place
or pulse or tide or changing sky
according to some universal
stage direction obvious
like shorewashed shells

we share an afternoon of mourning
in between no next predictable
except for wild reversal hearse rehearsal
bleach the blacklong lunging
ritual of fright insanity and more
deplorable abortion
more and
more

The Music of Time by Philip Levine 1928-2015

The young woman sewing by the window
hums a song I don't know; I hear only
a few bars, and when the trucks barrel down
the broken walkway between our buildings
the music is lost. Before the darkness
leaks from the shadows of the great cathedral
I think I see her at work and later hear
in the sudden silence of nightfall wordless
music rising from her room. I put aside
my papers, wash, and dress to go out.
I have a small dinner at one of the cafes
along the great avenues near the port
where the homeless sleep. Later I walk
for hours in the Barrio Chino passing
the open doors of tiny bars and caves
from which the voices of old men
bark out the stale anthems
of love's defeat. "This is the world,"
I think, "this is what I came
in search of years ago." Now I can go
back to my single room, I can lie
awake in the dark and rehearse
all the trivial events of the day ahead,
a day that begins when the sun clears
the dark spires of someone's God, and I
waken in a flood of dust rising
from nowhere and from nowhere comes
the actual voice of someone else.

Deadly James (For All the Victims of Police Brutality) by James Emanuel 1921-2013

The killer-cops, the San Diego three,
what made them think you deadly, James?

I take their guilty heads into my arms;
I cradle them,
my tendons hush their eyes,
illumine them to see the years roll back:
your little window, James, unsealed,
your palomino rocking horse,
his glassy eyes unquiet
when the sudden blood that splashed his ivory mane
told you the table knife you sucked on
was different, could also spit upon the tawny rug
breathtaking tracks—
deadly, James.

I embrace their heads more tightly;
their veins bulge to understand you, James,
you, hardly old enough to run,
dancing solitary in the Brooklyn rain
your older playmates dashed from,
your arms and lips and laughter reaching up
for all the sky could pour
upon the rivers capering inside you—
deadly rivers, James?

I hug their heads
with strength I had saved for you, James:
their eyeballs darken as they strain with me
to find you practicing your saxophone,
lying in the quilted heaps your bed poked up
around your stocking feet—the littered outpost
of that farther wilderness you made your room,
“NO ENTRY” blazed across the door
to guard your heartbeats
when your golden horn *believed* its one-man note—
that wild, sweet loneliness you cried—
beguiling neighbors into forgiveness
before you fumbled scales beginners know.
You began at the top, James,
deadly.

I clasp their heads more fiercely,
empowered by the memory of you
stranded
where they bled you down
into your smallest drop,
gunhammers cocked and nightsticks sinewed—
all three bewildered to find beauty
defiantly beyond them,
a tiny, dark-brown flower: the grain of you, James,
erect,
watered back to momentary life
by your manful tears.

In my iron arms their heads turn dry,
drop hollow to the ground. . . .
If your new, unearthly wisdom bids you,
raise them.
But whenever you feel blood again,
or rain, or music,
pray your innocence be deadlier, James,
much
deadlier.

Let Evening Come by Jane Kenyon 1947-1995

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Somali Shopping for Organic Figs by James Tate 1943-1915

I was walking out of the health food store
and into the parking lot when something powerful
and strange stopped me dead in my tracks. A woman
dressed from head to toe in a black veil, a bui-bui,
I believe it's called in Arabic, stood stock-still,
alone, tall, only her eyes showing, but oh what eyes,
like bits of onyx set in virgin snow. A panther would
have been less shocking than this woman. Everyone
who saw her just stopped and stared. Normal manners
didn't seem to apply to this situation. She was
the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, and yet,
I saw nothing but those eyes. Perhaps she was stricken
in terror. Children walked right up to her and stood
staring in awe. It felt like some tremendous mistake.
But maybe she was only dreaming, and we were dreaming
along with her. It was a cruel dream, the kind that
changes you forever, and waking from it was strictly
forbidden. Her bui-bui was made in Heaven, the blackest
corner of it.

#

A Shipwrecked Person by James Tate

When I woke from my afternoon nap, I wanted
to hold onto my dream, but in a matter of seconds
it had drifted away like a fine mist. Nothing
remained; oh, perhaps a green corner of cloth
pinched between my fingers, signifying what?
Everything about the house seemed alien to me.
The scissors yawned. The plants glowed. The
mirror was full of pain and stories that made no
sense to me. I moved like a ghost through the rooms.
Stacks of books with secret formulas and ancient
hieroglyphic predictions. And lamps, like stern
remonstrances. The silverware is surely more
guilty than I. The doorknobs don't even believe
in tomorrow. The green cloth is burning-up. I
toss it into the freezer with a sigh of relief.

He Foretells His Passing by F. D. Reeve 1928-2013

I can imagine, years from now, your coming back
to this high, old, white house. "Home" I shouldn't say
because we can't predict who'll live here with a different
name.

How tall the birches will be then. Will you look up
from the road past the ash for light in the study windows
upstairs and down? Go climb the black maple as first
in new sneakers you walked forty feet in air
and saw the life to come. Don't forget the cats.

Because you grow away from a house, no matter how much you
come back,
if the people you love are elsewhere, or if the reason is,
say,
nostalgia, don't worry about small changes or lost names.
Sit down for a minute under the tallest birch. Look up
at the clouds reflected in the red barn's twisted window.
Lean on the wall. Hear our voices as at first
they shook the plaster, laughed, then burned in the dry air
like a wooden house. I imagine you won't forget the cats.

Paradise Motel by Charles Simic 1938 - 2023

Millions were dead; everybody was innocent.
I stayed in my room. The President
Spoke of war as of a magic love potion.
My eyes were opened in astonishment.
In a mirror my face appeared to me
Like a twice-canceled postage stamp.

I lived well, but life was awful.
there were so many soldiers that day,
So many refugees crowding the roads.
Naturally, they all vanished
With a touch of the hand.
History licked the corners of its bloody mouth.

On the pay channel, a man and a woman
Were trading hungry kisses and tearing off
Each other's clothes while I looked on
With the sound off and the room dark
Except for the screen where the color
Had too much red in it, too much pink.

The Book Of The Dead Man (Peacetime) by Marvin Bell 1937-2020

Live as if you were already dead.
—Zen admonition

1. About the Dead Man in Peacetime, If and When

If and when the war is over, the dead man's days will seem longer.
When the ammo is spent, the funds discharged, when the fields have shut
down
 and the flares fallen, an hour will take an hour.
Time for the dead man lengthens when the shooting stops.
The waiting for the next war to begin can seem endless, though it take but a
week,
 a month or a year.
The low intensity conflicts, the raids and assassinations, the deployments and
withdrawals, the coups and revolutions, the precursors and aftermaths—
 it's a lifetime of keeping track.
It's as if the sun fell and fizzled—somewhere.
Then the black, white and gray propaganda, the documents planted on
corpses,
 the reading of tea leaves and bones ...
The dead man takes stock in the darkness of peacetime.
The Judas goats stand waiting in the corrals.
We are the sheep that gambol through dreamless nights.
A quietude hangs in the air, an expectancy, the shimmer that some believe
 presages alien life forms.
The calm before the stampede.
It was wartime when love arrived, yes, love.
It was wartime when the virtuosi performed, standing on their heads, as it
were,
 for peace time is our upside-down time.

2. More About the Dead Man In Peacetime, If and When

On a field of armed conflict, in the midst of rushing water, at the lip of a canyon,
by the border of a fire-torched desert, in the overdark of a where else was there ever but here?
Do you think poetry is for the pretty?
Look up and down, then, avoiding the hillocks that hold the remains.
The dead man, too, sees the puffy good nature of the clouds.
He welcomes, too, the spring blooming that even the grass salutes.
The dead man has made peace with temporary residence and the eternal Diaspora.
Oh, to live in between, off the target, blipless on the radar, silent on the sonar.
To keep one's head down when the satellites swoop over.
Not even to know when the last war is reincarnated and the next one conceived.
The dead man sings of a romantic evening in the eerie flickering of the last candle.
He whistles, he dances, he writes on the air as the music passes.
It was in wartime that the dead man conceived sons.
The dead man lifts a glass to the beauties of ruin.
The dead man is rapt, he is enveloped, he is keen to be held.

—*from* **Rattle #34, Winter 2010**

Marvin Bell: “It’s true that, no matter what, the literary world is full of insult. When you put yourself out to the public, you’re going to get some negative stuff. But writing just feels wonderful. I mean, I love the discovery aspect of writing. I love that. I love saying what I didn’t know I knew, not knowing where I’m headed, abandoning myself to the materials to figure out where I’m going. Of course your personality is going to come out of it, of course your obsessions are going to make themselves known, of course if you have a philosophic mind a matrix of philosophy will be behind things; everyone has a stance, an attitude, a vision, a viewpoint. All that will come out. But in the meantime, you’re just dog-paddling like mad. And that’s fun. That’s what I always liked about every art.”

—from “Testimony” by Yusef Komunyakka 1947-

He hopped boxcars to Chitown
late fall, just a few steps
ahead of the hawk. After
sleepwalking to the 65 Club,
he begged Goon for a chance
to sit in with a borrowed sax.
He'd paid his dues for years
blowing ravenous after-hours
'til secrets filled with blues
rooted in Mississippi mud;
he confessed to Budd Johnson
that as a boy playing stickball,
sometimes he'd spy in a window
as they rehearsed back in K. C.

It was Goon who took him home,
gave him clothes & a clarinet.
Maybe that's when he first
played laughter & crying
at the same time. Nights
sucked the day's marrow
'til the hibernating moon grew
fat with lies & chords. Weeks
later, with the horn hocked,
he was on a slow Greyhound
headed for the Big Apple,
& “Honeysuckle Rose”
blossomed into body language,
driven by a sunset on the Hudson.

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.

Crime in the Conservatory Garden by Grace Schulman

Alone, afraid in Central Park that year,
the local crime rate climbing like a fever,
I stepped from gray-green trees to a living Oz,

my sandals emerald slippers in a garden
planted with bosomy balloonflowers
and flirty narcissi. High on lilacs,

I angled though a vacant walkway.
Loud steps followed, scuffing the pavement,
tense now, looking urgently at asters

bordering the path, waiting to hear,
*Give me your wallet, and answer yes,
but not my life, please.* I turned back

and saw him stare at my stare, and point:
*They call these creepy things wisteria.
Nice, but go to the garden in the Bronx,*

*botanical, they call it, large enough
to fit six of these inside.* Letting go
of a tree trunk, I raised my hand

to give him a mint leaf I'd snipped, illegally.
He offered me a fern. Partners we were
in the only misdemeanor there that day.

Fall Of Varia by D. Nurkse

The tanks from the Past rolled in this morning.
Our neighbors crowded the curbs to cheer
though only yesterday, they were snitching:
A has prior tendencies, B has backward dreams.

Already the defunct flag flies over the armory,
the cathedral, the courthouse, Mercy,
Parliament, Beaux Arts, a kindergarten.

Already we tell ourselves, “Yesterday rules,
but if we hold our breath we’ll emerge
safe in the present, vindicated, knowing
we’re steadfast, we passed the test of our lives.”

Troops file by, numberless as ears of wheat,
gray with ash, so tired they give off light,
eyes locked, *forward, forward*, never a glance
for our linden-shaded side streets; and we watch,
we force ourselves to peek, or not peek,
we part the curtain a hand’s breadth, a thumbnail.

At nightfall, gunshots in a distant suburb,
dry, faint, adamant as a cat’s cough.
For every twelve firing squad volunteers,
rumor claims, one is issued blank ammo:
so even in the Past, there must be shame.

Nothing happens fast. Rain of decrees.
But you can still get salt and whiskey
if you pay with a necklace, a deed, or boots.

Butter is rationed, then shoelaces, then spoons.

Lice return, roaches and rats: raccoons.
rummage unchecked in a brimming dumpster.
We tell ourselves, “vermin: this story is familiar.”

When the snow falls in its own silence,
spilling forwards, like blood in bath water,
and there is no heating oil, we think “childhood.”

(stanza break)

(Fall Of Varia, page two)

Alone in the privacy of our triple-bolted room
we open our fingers and peek: yes, yes, the soldiers,
still advancing, bowlegged mountain boys
bearing the insignia of the Interior, tranced in cadence:
sometimes one stumbles, careens, topples forward,
but the boots march over him, the drum never pauses.
When the knock comes, it will be long ago.

Journey To Matinicus Island by D. Nurkse

Another child may skip, skip,
chanting to a thousand thousand.

Another old man will nod and mumble
over his half-erased book.

Matinicus: harbor you might reach
by a chuffing skiff, fog
that tastes of milk, nets
drying in the pines.

Let someone else be the ocean.
Let someone else be Arcturus.
Let someone else be the self.

TACHYCARDIA (AGAIN) by Alicia Ostriker

Either I forgot
my pills last night or
mother is knocking
from the other world
desperate to get
inside me again
the way she used to
when she was alive
and I would let her
twist around my heart
and keep on talking

possibly the moment has come
to open the shutters
and let the woman in
with her swanlike honking
her mad cow
possessiveness and her
high hopes
for her daughter

(so many times observing
the laptop screen afire
with my guilty love
I have said
this is the last poem
I will write
about my mother)

PHOTO OF A YOUNG WOMAN by Alicia Ostriker

A young woman in a chair
pressing herself
into her son
I was that young woman

who adores that baby
whose breasts sing
hymns to that baby
about whom she is utterly ignorant

and when we were lovers
pressing into each other
mouth to mouth
like God and Moses

didn't our young bodies press
and
sing very much like that

Do I not bleed? Do I not commute?
Like your parents, my many selves travel
by car or subway or bus. (I could tell
You something about the bus to oblivion
You'll soon be boarding yourselves but I'm not
A sadist! Masochist, alas.
Secular Saint Sebastian, I'm shot

Through with arrows of inattention
That craze my coated four-color case,
Menace my binding of stitches and glue.
Yes, hurl me into the dark oubliettes,
Your lockers . . . Good segue to *The Gothic*,
A term that was broadened to mean Teutonic . . .)

I'm either crammed like an antique toy-chest
Or sprawling like civilization's garage sale,
With a two-bit sliver of Achilles'
Shield, clockwork Pope, and gaudy Shakespeare—
Is this a dagger . . . thou marshall'st me
To a panoply littering bridge tables.

But my jeremiad, a work that foretells
A people's destruction, ends in the index,
When the divine afflatus fails.
So as I repeat to each year's freshmen,
Learn to ignore my implicit appeals
And focus on my scope and sequence.

What Do We Learn by Falling? by Philip Fried

Epiphany: Ptolemy's right, it's not *you* falling,
But the ground colliding upward, now the ice-
Jagged pavement itself is juddering under
Your motionless body, bloodying your nose,

Splitting your lip, at last it stops, and you're palm
To wincing palm with the boy who skinned his knee,
Yourself, but that odd impelled gliding of self —
No, world — is filed away as a secret history,

While you climb back to the life of geometry,
Healing and gain, which is *your* life. Rising again
Unsteady on the quiet ground. But a wobbly
Toddler inside you yearns for the outstretched arms

of beginning and end, while do-si-do-ing a stumbling
elder. *Nothing, little, a lot — all together.*
The two turn face to face and clasping hands,
Jig across every ruled line in the universe.

The Comforters admonish, Don't be suckered
By playing fields cantilevered over the Milky
Way. Old Ptolemy made frequent corrections
And watched where he stepped. Black ice is treacherous

Political Action by Bob Hicok

Every time it snows, she walks twelve blocks
and makes a snow angel in front of the Supreme Court
for her son who was shot and killed
two blocks away seven years ago by a boy
who was shot and killed three weeks later.

Does anyone know for sure if vulture shadows
are prettier than the real thing?

Thanks to the telephone, she can cry together
in different cemeteries with her sister
for different sons.

There are so many options. Wear blue socks
to the Rapture or no socks or a different pair
of blue socks or no socks. Visit everyone
she's not listened to fully and ask,
Will you say that again? meaning everything.
Turn the shade of redwoods into a perfume
and spread it over DC from a plane.

Do you think she could do that?
I think she could do that, but she's very busy
being clawed to death from the inside out.

The heart is a mouth with an appetite
for itself and winter is coming.

By that I mean, winter is always here.

—*from* **Rattle #84, Summer 2024**

Bob Hicok: “I like starting poems. After I start a poem, I like getting to the middle, and after the middle, an end seems a good thing to reach. When the end is reached, I like doing everything that isn’t writing poems, until the next day, when my desk is exactly where I left it, though I am a slightly different person than the last time we met.”

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod by Eugene Field 1850 – 1895

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe,—
Sailed on a river of crystal light
Into a sea of dew.
"Where are you going, and what do you wish?"
The old moon asked the three.
"We have come to fish for the herring-fish
That live in this beautiful sea;
Nets of silver and gold have we,"
Said Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

The old moon laughed and sang a song,
As they rocked in the wooden shoe;
And the wind that sped them all night long
Ruffled the waves of dew;
The little stars were the herring-fish
That lived in the beautiful sea.
"Now cast your nets wherever you wish,—
Never afraid are we!"
So cried the stars to the fishermen three,
Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

All night long their nets they threw
To the stars in the twinkling foam,—
Then down from the skies came the wooden shoe,
Bringing the fishermen home:
'Twas all so pretty a sail, it seemed
As if it could not be;
And some folk thought 'twas a dream they'd dreamed
Of sailing that beautiful sea;
But I shall name you the fishermen three:
Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

Wynken and Blynken are two little eyes,
And Nod is a little head,
And the wooden shoe that sailed the skies
Is a wee one's trundle-bed;
So shut your eyes while Mother sings
Of wonderful sights that be,
And you shall see the beautiful things
As you rock in the misty sea
Where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three:—
Wynken,
Blynken,
And Nod.

I Am the First by Paul Celan 1920 - 1970

I am the first to drink of the blue that still looks for its eye.
I drink from your footprint and see:
you roll through my fingers, pearl, and you grow!
You grow, as do all the forgotten.
You roll: the black hailstone of sadness
is caught by a kerchief turned white with waving goodbye.
—*translated from the German by Michael Hamburger*

Where There's Ice by Paul Celan 1920 - 1970

translated from the German by Pierre Joris

Where there's ice, it's cool for two.
For two: so I let you come.
A breath as of fire was around you—
You came from where the rose is.

I asked: what did they call you back there?
You told it to me, that name:
a glare as of ashes coated it—
From where the rose is you came.

Where there's ice, it's cool for two:
I gave you the double name.
You opened your eye beneath it—
A luster lay over the hole in the ice.

Now I close, is what I said, my own—:
Take this word—my eye spoke it to yours!
Take it, repeat it after me,
repeat it after me, say it slowly,
say it slowly, draw it out,
and your eye—keep it open the while!

WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND by Abby Habtehans (age 15)

My father drank salt water mixed with air
And sacrificed his legs and calloused hands at the altar of the sea,
So that it may split in half to give me the life he had only dreamed of.

Immigrant was the first name he was called.
He would say he is a man of faith first,
And I would say he is first a man of good heart

He wraps his baby boys in American flags but dreams in tigrinya
and his heart beats blood in hues of saffron and golden threads

I wonder if he remembers the smell of his sisters,
The plushness of his bed
Or the vastness of those fields
If he misses even the sewers ...

*Don't call me an immigrant
Call me a blossom bearing tree,
robed in petals of pink and white*

*Call me sunny butterfly
With swallowtail*
He still smells of boat rocks

The raw beating of an immigrant's son
made news this morning.

Maybe if love was purer,
like it was before the bombs and the bullets,
when the smallest bugs whispered those great nothings of romance,
then we could all find what we're looking for

son, look before you step:
the globe's ill—

*brother, the great dove's ready
to fly without perch'ng!*

the world's ill—
son, a live goat
shall be eaten up by a dead rat

An immigrant's son was beaten the other day.
My father's immigrant son, beaten the same way.

—*from* [2024 Rattle Young Poets Anthology](#)

Abby Habtehans: “I like to write poetry because it allows me to learn so much about myself and puts shape to the thoughts in my head.”

Bitter Strawberries by Sylvia Plath 1932-1963

All morning in the strawberry field

They talked about the Russians.

Squatted down between the rows

We listened.

We heard the head woman say,

'Bomb them off the map.'

Horseflies buzzed, paused and stung.

And the taste of strawberries

Turned thick and sour.

Mary said slowly, 'I've got a fella

Old enough to go.

If anything should happen...'

The sky was high and blue.

Two children laughed at tag

In the tall grass,

Leaping awkward and long-legged

Across the rutted road.

The fields were full of bronzed young men

Hoeing lettuce, weeding celery.

'The draft is passed,' the woman said.

'We ought to have bombed them long ago.'

'Don't,' pleaded the little girl

With blond braids.

Her blue eyes swam with vague terror.

She added petishly, 'I can't see why

You're always talking this way...'

'Oh, stop worrying, Nelda,'

Snapped the woman sharply.

She stood up, a thin commanding figure

In faded dungarees.

Businesslike she asked us, 'How many quarts?'

She recorded the total in her notebook,

And we all turned back to picking.

Kneeling over the rows,

We reached among the leaves

With quick practiced hands,

Cupping the berry protectively before

Snapping off the stem

Between thumb and forefinger.

Crow's Fall by Ted Hughes 1930-1998

When Crow was white he decided the sun was too white.
He decided it glared much too whitely.
He decided to attack it and defeat it.

He got his strength up flush and in full glitter.
He clawed and fluffed his rage up.
He aimed his beak direct at the sun's centre.

He laughed himself to the centre of himself

And attacked.

At his battle cry trees grew suddenly old,
Shadows flattened.

But the sun brightened—
It brightened, and Crow returned charred black.

He opened his mouth but what came out was charred black.

"Up there," he managed,
"Where white is black and black is white, I won."

from "A Stormy Night" section viii
by Rilke:

On nights like this my little sister grows,
who was born and died before me, very small.
There have been many such nights, gone long ago:
she must be lovely now. Soon the suitors will call.
#

Across the Way by Rita Satz

When we first moved to the apartment
Everything I wanted was in
Across the room
Across the table
Across the bed

But sometimes i stopped to look at them
In the building across the street
Two men of middle years
Shadowing from window to window
Holding books
Holding plates
Holding each other

I look out more now
Down at the streets
Across at the windows
Smile when i see the two old men

I worry if I see only one
Stop and stare at the shadow
And wait for the other

My Daughter Brought Me an Orchid by Rita Satz

My daughter brought me an orchid plant
We were both pleased
Set it on a low table
Stood back to admire it
But I'm leery of orchids
Everyone says they last for months
Mine don't
The blossoms droop
The buds they say will open
Won't
My daughter says "You give them too much care.
Leave them alone.
Don't feed them.
A little water every few weeks
Only when they get dry and say they need it.
They'll tell you if they want help"

I said, "I understand"
I do