The Literature Faculty
(with a lot of help from its friends*)
presents
Pleasures of Poetry
IAP 2015
Room: 14E-304
M-F 1:00-2:00pm

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<td><strong>Kevin McLellan</strong>*</td>
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<td>James Schuyler: “February”, “This Wiry Winter”, “This Dark Apartment”</td>
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<td><strong>Jan 6</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Zachary Bos</strong>*</td>
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<td>Mohammad Reza Shafiei-Kadkani: “Migration of Violets”, “In These Nights”</td>
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<td><strong>Jan 7</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Howard Eiland</strong></td>
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<td>Marianne Moore: “The Fish”</td>
<td>Elizabeth Bishop: “The Fish”</td>
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<td><strong>David Thorburn</strong></td>
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<td>John Crowe Ransom: “Captain Carpenter”</td>
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<td><strong>Anne Kazlauskas</strong>*</td>
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<td><strong>Jan 12</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Helen Lee</strong>*</td>
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<td>Judy Grahn: “The Common Women Poems”</td>
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<td><strong>Rosemary Booth</strong>*</td>
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<td>Elizabeth Bishop: “The Moose”</td>
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<td><strong>David Thorburn</strong></td>
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<td>Ellen Bryant Voigt: “The Last Class,” “Short Story”</td>
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<td><strong>Kevin Pilkington</strong>*</td>
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<td>Richard Hugo: “Degrees of Grey in Philipsburg”</td>
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<td><strong>Anne Hudson</strong>*</td>
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<td>Heather McHugh: “What He Thought”</td>
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<td><strong>Susan Wiedner</strong>*</td>
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<td>Dylan Thomas: “In My Craft or Sullen Art”, “When all my five...”, “The force that through the green fuse...”</td>
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<td><strong>Joel Sloman</strong>*</td>
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<td>Homer: <em>Iliad</em>, 11.101-121</td>
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<td><strong>Jan 22</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Shermaine Jones</strong></td>
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<td>Nikki Giovani: “For Saundra”</td>
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<td><strong>Rosa Martinez</strong></td>
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<td>Edgar Allan Poe: “The Conqueror Worm”, “Annabel Lee”</td>
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<td><strong>James Buzard</strong></td>
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<td>Tennyson: “Ulysses”, “Tithonus”</td>
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<td><strong>Stephanie Frampton</strong></td>
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<td>Ovid: <em>Tristia</em>, 1.1., 3.1, 3.14</td>
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<td>Literature mobile reading marathon: <em>Arabian Nights</em></td>
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<td><strong>Wyn Kelley</strong></td>
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<td>Emily Dickinson: “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun”</td>
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<td>John Greenleaf Whittier: “A Sabbath Scene”</td>
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<td><strong>Stephen Pepper</strong>*</td>
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<td>Mark Doty: “Source”, “At the Gym”, “Flit”</td>
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Packets of our poems are available from the Literature HQ Office or online at [http://lit.mit.edu](http://lit.mit.edu).
MODERATORS

**Rosemary Booth**, spouse of a retired MIT staff member, is a writer who has participated in Pleasures of Poetry sessions since 2009.

**Zachary Bos** studied poetry in the graduate creative program at Boston University. He directs the non-profit Boston Poetry Union, as well as the publishing activities of its imprint, the Pen & Anvil Press.

**James Buzard**, professor and former head of Literature at MIT, is a specialist in Victorian literature and culture.

**Howard Eiland**, long-time teacher of modern literature at MIT, is the co-author of an acclaimed biography of Walter Benjamin. He’s been participating in Pleasures of Poetry since its inception.

**Stephanie Frampton**, who joined MIT’s Literature faculty in 2012, has recently returned from a fellowship year at the American Academy in Rome. Her specialty is ancient Greek and Roman literature.

**Anne Hudson** has participated in Pleasures of Poetry since 2002, when she attended a session in the wake of 9/11 on Auden’s “September 1, 1939.” Her own poetry has appeared in print and online, including in the MIT Faculty Newsletter. From 2000 to 2006 she published the online literary magazine, *Facets*.

**Shermaine Jones**, a 2014–2015 SHASS Diversity Dissertation Fellow in Literature, is based in the English Department at the University of Virginia.

**Anne Kazlauskas**, singer & gardener, was a member of the MIT Libraries staff, 1982–2010. Since 2002 engaged in independent Scottish studies.

**Wyn Kelley** is a senior lecturer in Literature and works primarily in studies of nineteenth-century American authors, digital archives, and new-media pedagogies.

**Helen Lee** has published novels, *The Serpent's Gift* and *Water Marked*, and short stories, the most recent of which, “Lesser Crimes” will appear this year in the *Boston Review*. She’s a professor in MIT’s program in Comparative Media Studies/Writing.

**Rosa Martinez**, a Ph.D. Candidate in English at the University of California, Berkeley, is in residence at MIT as a pre-doctoral fellow in Literature.

**Kevin McLellan** worked as a much-beloved administrative staffer in the Literature Section for six years and now holds the same position in Global Studies and Languages. His first full-length collection of poems, *Tributary*, will be published this year by Barrow Street.
Stephen Pepper has worked at MIT since 2000, first at Sloan and now in Undergraduate Education. He has loved hearing, reading, writing, and analyzing poetry for as long as he can remember.

Kevin Pilkington is a member of the writing faculty at Sarah Lawrence College and the author of six books of poetry. His new collection, *Where You Want To Be*, will be published this year.

Joel Sloman is the author four books of poems, including *Cuban Journal* (2000). His most recent publication is a chapbook, *Off the Beaten Trakl* (2009). He lives in Medford MA.

David Thorburn has taught Literature at MIT since 1976. He is the founder of Pleasures of Poetry.

Susan Wiedner, an administrative assistant in Literature, has a MFA in creative writing. Her work has been published in *Southword, Poetry International, Census 3*, and *Web del Sol*. 
February

A chimney, breathing a little smoke.
The sun, I can't see
making a bit of pink
I can't quite see in the blue.
The pink of five tulips
at five P.M. on the day before March first.
The green of the tulip stems and leaves
like something I can't remember,
finding a jack-in-the-pulpit
a long time ago and far away.
Why it was December then
and the sun was on the sea
by the temples we'd gone to see.
One green wave moved in the violet sea
like the UN building on big evenings,
green and wet
while the sky turns violet.
A few almond trees
had a few flowers, like a few snowflakes
out of the blue looking pink in the light.
A gray hush
in which the boxy trucks roll up Second Avenue
into the sky. They're just
going over the hill.
The green leaves of the tulips on my desk
like grass light on flesh,
and a green-copper steeple
and streaks of cloud beginning to glow.
I can't get over
how it all works in together

like a woman who just came to her window
and stands there filling it
jogging her baby in her arms.
She's so far off. Is it the light
that makes the baby pink?
I can see the little fists
and the rocking-horse motion of her breasts.
It's getting grayer and gold and chilly.
Two dog-size lions face each other
at the corners of a roof.
It's the yellow dust inside the tulips.
It's the shape of a tulip.
It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in.
It's a day like any other.
In Wiry Winter

The shadow of a bird upon the yard upon a house; it's gone. Through a pane a beam like a warm hand laid upon an arm. A thin shell, transparent, blue: the atmosphere in which to swim. Brr. A cold plunge. The bird is back. All the same, to swim, plunging upward, arms as wings, into calm cold. Warm within the act, treading air, a shadow on the yard. Or floating, gliding, a shadow on the roofs and drives, in action warm, the shadow cold but brief. To swim in air. No. Not in this wiry winter air. A beam comes in the glass, a hand to warm an arm. A hand upon the glass finds it a kind of ice. The shadow of a bird less cold. Window, miraculous contrivance; sun-

hot wires in meshed cold. The bird goes quick as a wish to swim up and cast, like it, a shadow on the years.
This Dark Apartment

Coming from the deli
a block away today I
saw the UN building
shine and in all the
months and years I've
lived in this apartment
I took so you and I
would have a place to
meet" I never noticed
that it was in my view.

I remember very well
the morning I walked in
and found you in bed
with X. He dressed
and left. You dressed
too. I said, "Stay
five minutes." You
did. You said, "That's
the way it is." It
was not much of a surprise.

Then X got on speed
and ripped off an
antique chest and an
air conditioner, etc.
After he was gone and
you had changed the
Segal lock, I asked
you on the phone, "Can't
you be content with
your wife and me?" "I'm
not built that way," you said. No surprise.

Now, without saying
why, you've let me go.
You don't return my
calls, who used to call
me almost every evening
when I lived in the coun-
try. "Hasn't he told you
why?" "No; and I doubt he
ever will." Goodbye. It's
mysterious and frustrating.

How I wish you would come
back! I could tell
you how, when I lived
on East 49th, first
with Frank and then with John,
we had a lovely view of
the UN building and the
Beekman Towers. They were
not my lovers, though.
You were. You said so.
Migration of Violets

In winter's last days in March, 
the migration of nomadic violets 
is lovely.

On bright middays in March 
when they move the violets from cold shadows, 
into spring's satin scent, 
in small wooden boxes, 
with roots and soil —their movable homeland—
to the side of the street:

A stream of thousand murmurs 
boils within me:

I only wish 
I only wish that one day 
man could carry his country with him, 
like the violets (in boxes of soil) 
wherever he be pleased, 
in bright rain, 
in pure sunlight.

In These Nights

In these nights, 
when flower fears leaf, and leaf fears wind and 
wind fears cloud; 
in these nights 
when mirror and reflection are strangers 
and each stream hides its songs and secrets, 
it is only you who sings, 
so awake and ocean-like.

It is only you who sings 
the requiem for murdered masses and the 
trampled blood of martyrs; 
it is only you who knows 
the language and the secrets to the songs of the hopeless.

Sit upon that high branch, 
O tune maker of leafless gardens, 
so tiny sprouts that still sleep in soil 
can hear the spirit of your song;

so bright fields of mirrors, 
of stream-side flowers, 
can learn of all the curses and the hatred of 
these times of looting, 
from your song.

You conduct the saddest anthem of regret in 
these times.

You are the rainiest cloud 
that weeps 
on the garden of Mazdak and Zoroaster.

You are the most defiant anger that boils 
from the cup of Khayyam. 
In these nights, 
when flower fears leaf and 
leaf fears wind and 
wind fears itself, 
and each stream hides its songs and secrets; 
on this horizon of tyranny 
it is only you who sings, 
so awake and ocean-like.
The Fish (1946)
*By Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979)*

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn’t fight.
He hadn’t fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.
The Fish (1918)
By Marianne Moore (1887-1972)

wade
through black jade.
   Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one keeps
   adjusting the ash-heaps;
   opening and shutting itself like

an
injured fan.
   The barnacles which encrust the side
   of the wave, cannot hide
   there for the submerged shafts of the

sun,
split like spun
   glass, move themselves with spotlight swiftness
   into the crevices—
   in and out, illuminating

the
turquoise sea
   of bodies. The water drives a wedge
   of iron through the iron edge
   of the cliff; whereupon the stars,

pink
rice-grains, ink-
   bespattered jelly fish, crabs like green
   lilies, and submarine
   toadstools, slide each on the other.

All
external
   marks of abuse are present on this
   defiant edifice—
   all the physical features of

ac-
cident—lack
   of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns, and
   hatchet strokes, these things stand
   out on it; the chasm-side is

dead.
Repeated
   evidence has proved that it can live
   on what can not revive
   its youth. The sea grows old in it.
Captain Carpenter

By John Crowe Ransom (1888 – 1974)

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime
Put on his pistols and went riding out
But had got wellnigh nowhere at that time
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.

It was a pretty lady and all her train
That played with him so sweetly but before
An hour she'd taken a sword with all her main
And twined him of his nose for evermore.

Captain Carpenter mounted up one day
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue
That looked unchristian but be that as may
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.

But drew upon him out of his great heart
The other swung against him with a club
And cracked his two legs at the shinny part
And let him roll and stick like any tub.

Captain Carpenter rode many a time
From male and female took he sundry harms
He met the wife of Satan crying "I'm
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more
arms.

Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind
I wish he had delivered half his blows
But where she should have made off like a hind
The bitch bit off his arms at the elbows.

And Captain Carpenter parted with his ears
To a black devil that used him in this wise
O Jesus ere his threescore and ten years
Another had plucked out his sweet blue eyes.

Captain Carpenter got up on his roan
And sallied from the gate in hell's despite
I heard him asking in the grimmest tone
If any enemy yet there was to fight?

"To any adversary it is fame
If he risk to be wounded by my tongue
Or burnt in two beneath my red heart's flame
Such are the perils he is cast among.

"But if he can he has a pretty choice
From an anatomy with little to lose
Whether he cut my tongue and take my voice
Or whether it be my round red heart he choose."

It was the neatest knave that ever was seen
Stepping in perfume from his lady's bower
Who at this word put in his merry mien
And fell on Captain Carpenter like a tower.

I would not knock old fellows in the dust
But there lay Captain Carpenter on his back
His weapons were the old heart in his bust
And a blade shook between rotten teeth alack.

The rogue in scarlet and grey soon knew his mind.
He wished to get his trophy and depart
With gentle apology and touch refined
He pierced him and produced the Captain's heart.

God's mercy rest on Captain Carpenter now
I thought him Sirs an honest gentleman
Citizen husband soldier and scholar enow
Let jangling kites eat of him if they can.

But God's deep curses follow after those
That shore him of his goodly nose and ears
His legs and strong arms at the two elbows
And eyes that had not watered seventy years.

The curse of hell upon the sleek upstart
That got the Captain finally on his back
And took the red red vitals of his heart
And made the kites to whet their beaks clack clack.
Two Scots Songs of Comradeship, 1788 & 1948

Auld Lang Syne

*By Robert Burns (1759-1796)*

Auld lang syne.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!

Chorus
For auld lang syne my jo,
For auld lang syne,
We’ll tak a *cup o’ kindness yet*
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye’ll be your pint stowp!
And surely – I’ll be mine!
And we’ll tak a cup o’ kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pou’d the gowans fine;
But we’ve wander’d mony a weary fitt
Sin auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidlet in the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar’d,
Sin auld lang syne.

And there’s a hand, my trusty fiere!
And gie’s a hand o’ thine.
And we’ll tak a right gude-willie-waught,
For auld lang syne.

* Some Sing, Kiss, in place of Cup.

As printed in “Scots Musical Museum”,
v.5. 1796, no.413
Printed by James Johnson, Edinburgh.


Each of these printings also included “For auld, & c.” or “For auld & c.----“ after each verse

Moderator: Anne Kazlauskas

January 9, 2015
The John Maclean March

By Hamish Henderson (1919-2002)

Hey, Mac, did ye see him as ye cam’ doon by Gorgie,
   Awa ower the Lammerlaw or north o’ the Tay?
Yon man is comin’ and the haill toon is turnin’ oot:
   We’re a’ shair he’ll win back tae Glasgie the day.
The jiners and the hauders-on are mairchin’ frae Clydebank;
   Come on noo an’ hear him, he’ll be ower thrang tae bide.
Turn oot, Jock and Jimmie: leave your crans and your muckle gantries,
   Great John Maclean’s comin’ back tae the Clyde!
   Great John Maclean’s comin’ back tae the Clyde!

Argyle Street and London Road’s the route that we’re mairchin’ –
   The lads frae the Broomielaw are here – tae a man!
Hi, Neil, whaur’s your hadarums, ye big Hielan teuchter?
   Get your pipes, mate, an’ march at the heid o’ the clan.
Hullo Pat Malone, sure I knew ye’d be here son:
   The red and the green, lad, we’ll wear side by side.
Gorbals is his the day, an’ Glasgie belongs tae him:
   Ay, great John Maclean’s comin’ hame tae the Clyde.
   Great John Maclean’s comin’ hame tae the Clyde.

Forward tae Glasgie Green we’ll march in good order:
   Wull grips his banner weel (that boy isnae blate).
Ay there, man, that’s Johnnie noo – that’s him there, the bonnie fechter,
   Lenin’s his fier, lad, and Liebknecht’s his mate.
Tak’ tent when he’s speakin’, for they’ll mind what he said here
   In Glasgie, oor city – and the haill warld beside.
Och hey, lad, the scarlet’s bonnie: here’s tae ye, Hielan Shonny!
   Oor John Maclean has come hame tae the Clyde!
   Oor John Maclean has come hame tae the Clyde.

Aweel, noo it’s feenished I’m awa back tae Springburn,
   (Come hame tae your tea, John, we’ll sune hae ye fed).
It’s hard work the speakin’: och, I’m shair he’ll be tired the nicht,
   I’ll sleep on the flair, Mac, and gie John the bed.
The haill city’s quiet noo: it kens that he’s restin’
   At hame wi’ his Glasgie freens, their fame and their pride!
The red will be worn, my lads, an’ Scotland will march again
   Noo great John Maclean has come hame tae the Clyde,
   Noo great John Maclean has come hame tae the Clyde.

The Common Women Poems
By Judy Grahn (1940-)

I. HELEN, AT 9 A.M., AT NOON, AT 5:15

Her ambition is to be more shiny and metallic, black and purple as a thief at midday; trying to make it in a male form, she's become as stiff as possible. Wearing trim suits and spike heels, she says "bust" instead of breast; somewhere underneath she misses love and trust, but she feels that spite and malice are the prices of success. She doesn't realize yet, that she's missed success, also, so her smile is sometimes still genuine. After a while she'll be a real killer, bitter and more wily, better at pitting the men against each other and getting the other women fired. She constantly conspires. Her grief expresses itself in fits of fury over details, details take the place of meaning, money takes the place of life. She believes that people are lice who eat her, so she bites first; her thirst increases year by year and by the time the sheen has disappeared from her black hair, and tension makes her features unmistakably ugly, she'll go mad. No one in particular will care. As anyone who's had her for a boss will know the common woman is as common as the common crow.

II. ELLA, IN A SQUARE APRON, ALONG HIGHWAY 80

She's a copperheaded waitress, tired and sharp-worded, she hides her bad brown tooth behind a wicked smile, and flicks her ass out of habit, to fend off the pass that passes for affection. She keeps her mind the way men keep a knife—keen to strip the game down to her size. She has a thin spine, swallows her eggs cold, and tells lies. She slaps a wet rag at the truck drivers if they should complain. She understands the necessity for pain, turns away the smaller tips, out of pride, and keeps a flask under the counter. Once, she shot a lover who misused her child. Before she got out of jail, the courts had pounced and given the child away. Like some isolated lake, her flat blue eyes take care of their own stark bottoms. Her hands are nervous, curled, ready to scrape. The common woman is as common as a rattlesnake.

III. NADINE, RESTING ON HER NEIGHBOR'S STOOP

She holds things together, collects bail, makes the landlord patch the largest holes. At the Sunday social she would spike every drink, and offer you half of what she knows, which is plenty. She pokes at the ruins of the city like an armored tank; but she thinks of herself as a ripsaw cutting through knots in wood. Her sentences come out like thick pine shanks and her big hands fill the air like smoke. She's a mud-chinked cabin in the slums, sitting on the doorstep counting rats and raising 15 children, half of them her own. The neighborhood would burn itself out without her; one of these days she'll strike the spark herself. She's made of grease and metal, with a hard head that makes the men around her seem frail. The common woman is as common as a nail.

IV: CAROL, IN THE PARK, CHEWING ON STRAWS

She has taken a woman lover whatever shall we do she has taken a woman lover how lucky it wasn't you And all the day through she smiles and lies and grits her teeth and pretends to be shy, or weak, or busy. Then she goes home and pounds her own nails, makes her own bets, and fixes her own car, with her friend. She goes as far as women can go without protection from men. On weekends, she dreams of becoming a tree; a tree that dreams it is ground up and sent to the paper factory, where it lies helpless in sheets, until it dreams

Moderator: Helen Lee  January 12, 2015
of becoming a paper airplane, and rises
on its own current; where it turns into a
bird, a great coasting bird that dreams of
becoming
more free, even, than that -- a feather, finally, or
a piece of air with lightning in it.
she has taken a woman lover
whatever can we say
She walks around all day
quietly, but underneath it
she's electric;
angry energy inside a passive form.
The common woman is as common
as a thunderstorm.

V. DETROIT ANNIE, HITCHIKING

Her words pour out as if her throat were a broken
artery and her mind were cut-glass, carelessly
handled.
You imagine her in a huge velvet hat with a great
dangling black feather,
but she shaves her head instead
and goes for three-day midnight walks.
Sometimes she goes down to the dock and dances
off the end of it, simply to prove her belief
that people who cannot walk on water
are phonies, or dead.
When she is cruel, she is very, very
cool and when she is kind she is lavish.
Fishermen think perhaps she's a fish, but they're all
fools. She figured out that the only way
to keep from being frozen was to
stay in motion, and long ago converted
most of her flesh into liquid. Now when she
smells danger, she spills herself all over,
like gasoline, and lights it.
She leaves the taste of salt and iron
under your tongue, but you don't mind
The common woman is as common
as the reddest wine.

VI. MARGARET, SEEN THROUGH A
PICTURE WINDOW

After she finished her first abortion
she stood for hours and watched it spinning in the
toilet, like a pale stool.
Some distortion of the rubber
doctor with their simple tubes and
complicated prices
still makes her feel guilty.
White and yeasty.
All her broken bubbles push her down
into a shifting tide, where her own face
floats above her like the while globe.
She lets her life go off and on
in a slow stroe.
At her last job she was fired for making
strikes, and talking out of turn;
now she stays home, a little blue around the
edges.
Counting calories and staring at the empty
magazine pages, she hates her shape
and calls herself overweight.
Her husband calls her a big baboon.
Lusting for changes, she laughs through her
teeth, and wanders from room to room.
The common woman is as solemn as a monkey
or a new moon.

VII. VERA, FROM MY CHILDHOOD

Solemnly swearing, to swear as an oath to you
who have somehow gotten to be a pale old
woman;
swearing, as if an oath could be wrapped around
your shoulders
like a new coat:
For your 28 dollars a week and the bastard boss
you never let yourself hate;
and the work, all the work you did at home
where you never got paid;
For your mouth that got thinner and thinner
until it disappeared as if you had choked on it,
watching the hard liquor break your fine husband
down
into a dead joke.
For the strange mole, like a third eye
right in the middle of your forehead;
for your religion which insisted that people
are beautiful golden birds and must be preserved;
for your persistent nerve
and plain white talk --
the common woman is as common
as good bread
as common as when you couldn't go on
but did.
For all the world we didn't know we held in
common
all along
the common woman is as common as the best of
bread
and will rise
and will become strong -- I swear it to you
I swear it to you on my own head
I swear it to you on my common
woman's
head
The Moose

by Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)

For Grace Bulmer Bowers

From narrow provinces
of fish and bread and tea,
home of the long tides
where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day and takes
the herrings long rides,

where if the river
enters or retreats
in a wall of brown foam
depends on if it meets
the bay coming in,
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea,
and others, veins the flats’
lavender, rich mud
in burning rivulets;

on red, gravelly roads,
down rows of sugar maples,
past clapboard farmhouses
and neat, clapboard churches,
bleached, ridged as clamshells,
past twin silver birches,

through late afternoon
a bus journeys west,
the windshield flashing pink,
pink glancing off of metal,
brushing the dented flank
of blue, beat-up enamel;

down hollows, up rises,
and waits, patient, while
a lone traveller gives
kisses and embraces
to seven relatives
and a collie supervises.

Goodbye to the elms,
to the farm, to the dog.
The bus starts. The light
grows richer; the fog,
shifting, salty, thin,
comes closing in.

Its cold, round crystals
form and slide and settle
in the white hens’ feathers,
in gray glazed cabbages,
on the cabbage roses
and lupins like apostles;

the sweet peas cling
to their wet white string
on the whitewashed fences;
bumblebees creep
inside the foxgloves,
and evening commences.

One stop at Bass River.
Then the Economies—
Lower, Middle, Upper;
Five Islands, Five Houses,
where a woman shakes a tablecloth
out after supper.

A pale flickering. Gone.
The Tantramar marshes
and the smell of salt hay.
An iron bridge trembles
and a loose plank rattles
but doesn't give way.

On the left, a red light
swims through the dark:
a ship’s port lantern.
Two rubber boots show,
illuminated, solemn.
A dog gives one bark.

A woman climbs in
with two market bags,
brisk, freckled, elderly.
“A grand night. Yes, sir,
all the way to Boston.”
She regards us amicably.

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods,
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist
caught in them like lamb’s wool
on bushes in a pasture.

The passengers lie back.
Snores. Some long sighs.
A dreamy divagation
begins in the night,
a gentle, auditory,
slow hallucination....

In the creakings and noises,
an old conversation
—not concerning us,
but recognizable, somewhere,
back in the bus:
Grandparents’ voices

 uninterrupted
talking, in Eternity:
names being mentioned,
things cleared up finally;
what he said, what she said,
who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;
the year he remarried;
the year (something) happened.
She died in childbirth.
That was the son lost
when the schooners founndered.

He took to drink. Yes.
She went to the bad.
When Amos began to pray
even in the store and
finally the family had
to put him away.
“Yes...” that peculiar affirmative. “Yes...”
A sharp, indrawn breath,
half groan, half acceptance,
that means, “Life’s like that.
We know it (also death).”

Talking the way they talked
in the old featherbed,
peacefully, on and on,
dim lamplight in the hall,
down in the kitchen, the dog
tucked in her shawl.

Now, it’s all right now
even to fall asleep
just as on all those nights.
—Suddenly the bus
driver stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches, it sniffs at
the bus’s hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or, safe as houses).
A man’s voice assures us
“Perfectly harmless...”

Some of the passengers
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, softly,
“Sure are big creatures.”
“It’s awfully plain.”
“Look! It’s a she!”

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(we all feel) this sweet
sensation of joy?

“Curious creatures,”
says our quiet driver,
rolling his r’s.
“Look at that, would you.”
Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there’s a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.
The Last Class

Put this in your notebooks:
All verse is occasional verse.
In March, trying to get home, distracted
and impatient at Gate 5 in the Greyhound station,
I saw a drunk man bothering a woman.
A poem depends on its detail
but the woman had her back to me,
and the man was just another drunk,
black in this case, familiar, dirty.
I moved past them both, got on the bus.

There is no further action to report.
The man is not a symbol. If what he said to her
touches us, we are touched by a narrative
we supply. What he said was, “I’m sorry,
I’m sorry,” over and over, “I’m sorry,”
but you must understand he frightened the woman,
he meant to rob her of those few quiet
solitary moments sitting down,
waiting for the bus, before she headed home
and probably got supper for her family,
perhaps in a room in Framingham,
perhaps her child was sick.

My bus pulled out, made its usual turns
and parted the formal gardens from the Common,
both of them camouflaged by snow.
And as it threaded its way to open road,
leaving the city, leaving our sullen classroom,
I postponed my satchel of your poems
and wondered who I am to teach the young,
having come so far from honest love of the world;
I tried to recall how it felt
to live without grief; and then I wrote down
a few tentative lines about the drunk,
because of an old compulsion to record,
or sudden resolve not to be self-absorbed and
full of dread—

I wanted to salvage
something from my life, to fix
some truth beyond all change, the way
photographers of war, miles from the front,
lift print after print into the light,
each one further cropped and amplified,
pruning whatever baffles or obscures,
until the small figures are restored
as young men sleeping.
Short Story

My grandfather killed a mule with a hammer, or maybe with a plank, or a stick, maybe it was a horse—the story varied in the telling. If he was planting corn when it happened, it was a mule, and he was plowing the upper slope, west of the house, his overalls stiff to the knees with red dirt, the lines draped behind his neck.

He must have been glad to rest when the mule first stopped mid-furrow; looked back at where he'd come, then down to the brush along the creek he meant to clear. No doubt he noticed the hawk's great leisure over the field, the crows lumped in the biggest elm on the opposite hill. After he'd wiped his hatbrim with his sleeve, he called to the mule as he slapped the line along its rump, clicked and whistled.

My grandfather was a slight, quiet man, smaller than most women, smaller than his wife. Had she been in the yard, seen him heading toward the pump now, she'd pump for him a dipper of cold water. Walking back to the field, past the corncrib, he took an ear of corn to start the mule, but the mule was planted. He never cursed or shouted, only whipped it, the mule rippling its backside each time the switch fell, and when that didn't work whipped it low on its side, where it's tender, then cross-hatched the welts he'd made already. The mule went down on one knee, and that was when he reached for the blown limb, or walked to the pile of seasoning lumber; or else, unhooked the plow and took his own time to the shed to get the hammer.

By the time I was born, he couldn't even lift a stick. He lived another fifteen years in a chair, but now he's dead, and so is his son, who never meant to speak a word against him, and whom I never asked what his father was planting and in which field, and whether it happened before he married, before his children came in quick succession, before his wife died of the last one. And only a few of us are left who ever heard that story.
Degrees of Grey in Philipsburg
By Richard Hugo (1923 – 1982)

You might come here Sunday on a whim.
Say your life broke down. The last good kiss
you had was years ago. You walk these streets
laid out by the insane, past hotels
that didn’t last, bats that did, the tortured try
of local drivers to accelerate their lives.
Only churches are kept up. The jail
turned 70 this year. The only prisoner
is always in, not knowing what he’s done.

The principal supporting business now
is rage. Hatred of the various grays
the mountain sends, hatred of the mill,
The Silver Bill repeal, the best liked girls
who leave each year for Butte. One good
restaurant and bars can’t wipe the boredom out.
The 1907 boom, eight going silver mines,
a dance floor built on springs—
all memory resolves itself in gaze,
in panoramic green you know the cattle eat
or two stacks high above the town,
two dead kilns, the huge mill in collapse
for fifty years that won’t fall finally down.

Isn’t this your life? That ancient kiss
still burning out your eyes? Isn’t this defeat
so accurate, the church bell simply seems
a pure announcement: ring and no one comes?
Don’t empty houses ring? Are magnesium
and scorn sufficient to support a town,
not just Philipsburg, but towns
of towering blondes, good jazz and booze
the world will never let you have
until the town you came from dies inside?

Say no to yourself. The old man, twenty
when the jail was built, still laughs
although his lips collapse. Someday soon,
he says, I’ll go to sleep and not wake up.
You tell him no. You’re talking to yourself.
The car that brought you here still runs.
The money you buy lunch with,
no matter where it’s mined, is silver
and the girl who serves your food
is slender and her red hair lights the wall.
What He Thought

*By Heather McHugh (1948-)*

*for Fabbio Doplicher*

We were supposed to do a job in Italy
and, full of our feeling for
ourselves (our sense of being
Poets from America) we went
from Rome to Fano, met
the mayor, mulled
a couple matters over (what's
a cheap date, they asked us; what's
flat drink). Among Italian literati

we could recognize our counterparts:
the academic, the apologist,
the arrogant, the amorous,
the brazen and the glib—and there was one

administrator (the conservative), in suit
of regulation gray, who like a good tour guide
with measured pace and uninflected tone narrated
sights and histories the hired van hauled us past.
Of all, he was the most politic and least poetic,
so it seemed. Our last few days in Rome
(when all but three of the New World Bards had flown)
I found a book of poems this
unprepossessing one had written: it was there
in the *pensione* room (a room he'd recommended)
where it must have been abandoned by
the German visitor (was there a bus of *them*?)
to whom he had inscribed and dated it a month before.
I couldn't read Italian, either, so I put the book
back into the wardrobe's dark. We last Americans

were due to leave tomorrow. For our parting evening then
our host chose something in a family restaurant, and there
we sat and chatted, sat and chewed,
till, sensible it was our last
big chance to be poetic, make
our mark, one of us asked

"What's poetry?"

Is it the fruits and vegetables and
marketplace of Campo dei Fiori, or
the statue there?" Because I was
the glib one, I identified the answer
instantly, I didn't have to think—"The truth
is both, it's both," I blurted out. But that
was easy. That was easiest to say. What followed
taught me something about difficulty,
for our underestimated host spoke out,
all of a sudden, with a rising passion, and he said:

The statue represents Giordano Bruno,
brought to be burned in the public square
because of his offense against
authority, which is to say
the Church. His crime was his belief
the universe does not revolve around
the human being: God is no
fixed point or central government, but rather is
poured in waves through all things. All things
move. "If God is not the soul itself, He is
the soul of the soul of the world." Such was
his heresy. The day they brought him
forth to die, they feared he might
incite the crowd (the man was famous
for his eloquence). And so his captors
placed upon his face
an iron mask, in which

he could not speak. That's
how they burned him. That is how
he died: without a word, in front
of everyone.

And poetry—

(we'd all
put down our forks by now, to listen to
the man in gray; he went on
softly)—

poetry is what

he thought, but did not say.

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 labor 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.

When all my five and country senses see

When all my five and country senses see,
The fingers will forget green thumbs and mark
How, through the halfmoon’s vegetable eye,
Husk of young stars and handful zodiac,
Love in the frost is pared and wintered by,
The whispering ears will watch love drummed away
Down breeze and shell to a discordant beach,
And, lashed to syllables, the lynx tongue cry
That her fond wounds are mended bitterly.
My nostrils see her breath burn like a bush.

My one and noble heart has witnesses
In all love’s countries, that will grope awake;
And when blind sleep drops on the spying senses,
The heart is sensual, through five eyes break.
The force that through the green fuse drives the flower

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman’s lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.
And I am dumb to tell a weather’s wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover’s tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.
Then he went on to kill and strip Isos and Antiphos,
two sons of Priam, bastard one and one lawful, both riding
in a single chariot. The bastard, Isos, was charioteer
and renowned Antiphos rode beside him. Before this Achilleus
had caught these two at the knees of Ida, and bound them in pliant
willows as they watched by their sheep, and released them for ransom.
This time the son of Atreus, wide-powerful Agamemnon,
struck Isos with the thrown spear in the chest above the nipple
and hit Antiphos by the ear with the sword and hurled him from his horses,
and in eager haste he stripped off from these their glorious armour
which he knew; he had seen these two before by the fast ships
when Achilleus of the swift feet had brought them in from Ida.

And as a lion seizes the innocent young of the running
deer, and easily crunches and breaks them caught in the strong teeth
when he has invaded their lair, and rips out the soft heart from them,
and even if the doe be very near, still she has no strength
to help, the ghastly shivers of fear are upon her also
and suddenly she dashes away through the glades and the timber
sweating in her speed away from the pounce of the strong beast;
so there was no one of the Trojans who could save these two
from death, but they themselves were running in fear from the Argives.
Alexander Pope (1688-1744), 1720

Two sons of Priam next to battle move,
The product one of marriage, one of love;
In the same car the brother-warriors ride,
This took the charge to combat, that to guide:
Far other task, than when they wont to keep,
On Ida's tops, their father's fleecy sheep!
These on the mountains once Achilles found,
And captive led, with pliant osiers bound;
Then to their sire for ample sums restored;
But now to perish by Atrides' sword:
Pierced in the breast, the base-born Isus bleeds;
Cleft through the head, his brother's fate succeeds.
Swift to the spoil the hasty victor falls,
And stripped, their features to his mind recalls.
The Trojans see the youths untimely die,
But helpless tremble for themselves, and fly.

So when a lion, ranging o'er the lawns,
Finds, on some grassy lair, the couching fawns,
Their bones he cracks, their reeking vitals draws,
And grinds the quivering flesh with bloody jaws;
The frightened hind beholds, and dares not stay,
But swift through rustling thickets bursts her way;
All drowned in sweat the panting mother flies,
And the big tears roll trickling from her eyes.
George Chapman (1559 - 1634), 1611

There left he them, and presently he other objects found,
Isus and Antiphus, two sonnes king Priam did beget,
One lawfull, th' other wantonly. Both in one chariot met
Their royall foe: the baser borne, Isus, was charioterere
And famous Antiphus did fight; both which king Peleus' heire
(Whilome in Ida keeping flocks) did deprehend and bind
With pliant Osiers and for prize them to their Sire resign'd.
Atrides with his well-aim'd lance smote Isus on the brest
Above the nipple, and his sword a mortall wound imprest
Beneath the eare of Antiphus: downe from their horse they fell.
The king had scene the youths before and now did know them well,
Rememb'ren them the prisoners of swift Æacides,
Who brought them to the sable fleet from Ida's foodie leas.

And as a Lion having found the furrow of a Hind
Where she hath calv'd two little twins, at will and ease doth grind
Their joynts snatcht in his solide jawes and crusheth into mist
Their tender lives, their dam (though neare) not able to resist
But shooke with vehement feare her selfe, flies through the Oaken chace
From that fell savage, drown'd in sweat, and seekes some covert place:
So, when with most unmatched strength the Grecian Generall bent
Gainst these two Princes, none durst ayd their native king's descent
But fled themselves before the Greeks.
from *Memorial* (2012) by Alice Oswald (1966 - )

Like wolves always wanting something
Thin shapes always working the hills
When a shepherd lets his flocks wander
And the weaklings bleat their fear
Within seconds wolves will appear

Like wolves always wanting something
Thin shapes always working the hills
When a shepherd lets his flocks wander
And the weaklings bleat their fear
Within seconds wolves will appear

Two more metal ornaments
Knocked down anonymous in their helmets
And when those iron heads opened
Everyone whispered listen
That was ISOS and ANTIPHOS
They used to be shepherds they were hill people
Working out of reach of the world
Those were the two boys Achilles kidnapped
Among the wolves and buzzards of Mount Ida
They said it was wonderful to be tied in creepers
And taken to the other side by that gypsy
They said his mother was a seal or mermaid
And he introduced them to Agamemnon
The great king of Mycenae poor fools
Who came home as proud as astronauts
And didn't want to farm any more
And went riding out to be killed by Agamemnon

Like a boat
Going into the foaming mouth of a wave
In the body of the wind
Everything vanishes
And the sailors stare at mid-air

Like a boat
Going into the foaming mouth of a wave
In the body of the wind
Everything vanishes
And the sailors stare at mid-air
For Saundra
By Nikki Giovanni (1943-)

i wanted to write
a poem
that rhymes
but revolution doesn't lend
itself to be-bopping

then my neighbor
who thinks i hate
asked – do you ever write
tree poems – i like trees
so i thought
i'll write a beautiful green tree poem
peeked from my window
to check the image
noticed that the school yard was covered
with asphalt
no green – no trees grow
in manhattan

then, well, i thought the sky
i'll do a big blue sky poem
but all the clouds have winged
low since no-Dick was elected

so i thought again
and it occurred to me
maybe i shouldn't write
at all
but clean my gun
and check my kerosene supply

perhaps these are not poetic
times
at all
The Conqueror Worm

Lo! 't is a gala night
Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
The music of the spheres.

Mimes, in the form of God on high,
Mutter and mumble low,
And hither and thither fly—
Mere puppets they, who come and go
At bidding of vast formless things
That shift the scenery to and fro,
Flapping from out their Condor wings
Invisible Wo!

That motley drama—oh, be sure
It shall not be forgot!
With its Phantom chased for evermore
By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
To the self-same spot,
And much of Madness, and more of Sin,
And Horror the soul of the plot.

But see, amid the mimic rout,
A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
The scenic solitude!
It writhes!—it writhes!—with mortal pangs
The mimes become its food,
And seraphs sob at vermin fangs
In human gore imbued.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, “Man,”
And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

Source: The Complete Poems and Stories of Edgar Allan Poe (1946)

Annabel Lee

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in Heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I me te and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
We're all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centre'd in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
Tithonus

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consume: I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world,
A white-hair'd shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

Alas! for this gray shadow, once a man—
So glorious in his beauty and thy choice,
Who madest him thy chosen, that he seem'd
To his great heart none other than a God!
I ask'd thee, 'Give me immortality.'
Then didst thou grant mine asking with a smile,
Like wealthy men, who care not how they give.
But thy strong Hours indignant work'd their wills,
And beat me down and marr'd and wasted me,
And tho' they could not end me, left me maim'd
To dwell in presence of immortal youth,
Immortal age beside immortal youth,
And all I was, in ashes. Can thy love,
Thy beauty, make amends, tho' even now,
Close over us, the silver star, thy guide,
Shines in those tremulous eyes that fill with tears
To hear me? Let me go: take back thy gift:
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all?

A soft air fans the cloud apart; there comes
A glimpse of that dark world where I was born.
Once more the old mysterious glimmer steals
From thy pure brows, and from thy shoulders pure,
And bosom beating with a heart renew'd.
Thy cheek begins to redden thro' the gloom,
Thy sweet eyes brighten slowly close to mine,
Ere yet they blind the stars, and the wild team
Which love thee, yearning for thy yoke, arise,
And shake the darkness from their loosen'd manes,
And beat the twilight into flakes of fire.

Lo! ever thus thou growest beautiful
In silence, then before thine answer given
Departest, and thy tears are on my cheek.

Why wilt thou ever scare me with thy tears,
And make me tremble lest a saying learnt,
In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?
'The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts.'

Ay me! ay me! with what another heart
In days far-off, and with what other eyes
I used to watch—if I be he that watch'd—
The lucid outline forming round thee; saw
The dim curls kindle into sunny rings;
Changed with thy mystic change, and felt my blood
Glow with the glow that slowly crimson'd all
Thy presence and thy portals, while I lay,
Mouth, forehead, eyelids, growing dewy-warm
With kisses balmier than half-opening buds
Of April, and could hear the lips that kiss'd
Whispering I knew not what of wild and sweet,
Like that strange song I heard Apollo sing,
While Ilion like a mist rose into towers.

Yet hold me not for ever in thine East:
How can my nature longer mix with thine?
Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet
Upon thy glimmering thresholds, when the steam
Floats up from those dim fields about the homes
Of happy men that have the power to die,
And grassy barrows of the happier dead.
Release me, and restore me to the ground;
Thou seëst all things, thou wilt see my grave:
Thou wilt renew thy beauty morn by morn;
I earth in earth forget these empty courts,
And thee returning on thy silver wheels.
Little book, go without me – I don’t begrudge it – to the city.

Ah, alas, that your master’s not allowed to go!

Go, but without ornament, as is fitting for an exile’s:

sad one, wear the clothing of these times.

You’ll not be cloaked, dyed with hyacinthine purple –

that’s no fitting colour to go mourning –

no vermilion title, no cedar-oiled paper,

no white bosses, ‘horns’ to your dark ‘brow’.

Happier books are decorated with these things:

you instead should keep my fate in mind.

No brittle pumice to polish your two edges,

so you’re seen ragged, with straggling hair.

No shame at your blots: he who sees them

will know they were caused by my tears.

Go, book, greet the dear places, with my words:

I’ll walk among them on what ‘feet’ I can.

If, in the crowd, there’s one who’s not forgot me,

if there’s one, perhaps, who asks how I am,

say I’m alive, but deny that I am well:

that I’m even alive is a gift from a god.

Otherwise, be silent – let him who wants more read –

beware of saying by chance what isn’t needed!

The reader, prompted, will soon recall my guilt,

the crowd’s voice make me a common criminal.

Beware of defending me, despite the biting words:
a poor case will prove too much for advocacy.

Find someone who sighs about my exile,
and reads your verses with wet eyes,
and silently wishes, unheard by enemies,
my punishment lightened by a gentler Caesar.

For myself, I wish whomever it is no ill,
who asks the gods to be kind to suffering:
what he wishes, let that be: the Leader’s anger done,
grant me the right to die in my native country.

Though you obey, book, you may still be blamed,
and called inferior to the flower of my genius.

The judge’s duty is to search out time
and circumstance. You’re safe regarding time.

Fine-spun verses come from a tranquil mind:
my days are clouded by sudden miseries.

Verse asks for a writer with leisure and privacy:
I’m tossed by winter gales, the storms, the sea.

Every fear harms verse: I’m lost and always
afraid of a sword slicing at my throat.

Even what I’ve created, will amaze just critics:
they’ll read it, whatever it is, with indulgence.

Set Homer, the Maeonian, in such danger,
his genius would fail among such troubles.

Go then, book, untroubled by fame,
don’t be ashamed to displease the reader.

Fortune’s not so kind to me now
for you to take account of any praise.

Secure, I was touched by desire for fame,
and I burned with ardour to win a name.

Enough now if I don’t hate those studies, verses
that hurt me, so that wit brought me exile.

You go for me, you, who can, gaze at Rome.

If the gods could grant now that I were my book!

And because you’re a foreigner in a mighty city
don’t think you come as a stranger to the crowd.

Though you lack a title, they’ll know the style:
though wishing to deceive, it’s clear you’re mine.

But enter quietly so my verse won’t hurt you,
it’s not as popular as once it was.

If anyone thinks you shouldn’t be read
because you’re mine, and thrusts you away,
say: ‘Look at the title: I’m not love’s master:
that work’s already got what it deserved.’

Book TI.I:70-128 The Poet to His Book: His Works

Perhaps you’re wondering if I’ll send you
to the high Palatine, to climb to Caesar’s house.

That august place and that place’s gods forgive me!

A lightning bolt from that summit fell on my head.

I know there are merciful powers on those heights
but I still fear the gods who bring us harm.

Hawks, the smallest sound of wings brings terror
to the doves your talons wounded.

Nor does the lamb dare stray far from the fold
once torn from the jaws of a hungry wolf.

If Phaethon lived he’d avoid the sky, refuse
to touch the horses he chose, foolishly.
I too confess, I fear what I felt, Jove’s weapon:
I think the hostile lightning seeks me when it thunders.
Every Greek who escaped the Capherean rocks
always turned away from Euboean waters:
and my vessel, shattered by a mighty storm,
dreads to near the place where it was wrecked.
So beware, book, look around with timid mind,
be content to be read by the middle orders.
Seeking too great a height on fragile wings
Icarus gave his name to the salt waters.
It’s hard to say from here, though, whether to use
oars or breeze: take advice from the time and place.
If you can be handed in when he’s at leisure, if
you see all’s calm, if his anger’s lost its bite,
if, while you’re hesitating, scared to go near,
someone will hand you in, with a brief word, go.
On a good day and with better luck than your master
may you land there and ease my distress.
Either no one can help, or in Achilles’s fashion,
only that man can help who wounded me.
Only see you don’t do harm, while you’ve power to help –
since my hope is less than my fear –
beware, while that angry emotion’s quiet don’t rouse it,
don’t you be a second cause for punishment!
Yet when you’re admitted to my inner sanctum,
and reach your own house, the curved bookcase,
you’ll see your brothers there ranged in order,
all, whom the same careful study crafted.
The rest of the crowd will show their titles openly, carrying their names on their exposed faces: but you’ll see three hide far off in dark places – and still, as all know, they teach how to love. Avoid them, or if you’ve the nerve, call them parricides, like Oedipus, and Telegonus. I warn you, if you’ve any care for your father, don’t love any of those three, though it taught you.

There are also fifteen books on changing forms, songs saved just now from my funeral rites. Tell them the face of my own fortunes can be reckoned among those Metamorphoses. Now that face is suddenly altered from before, a cause of weeping now, though, once, of joy. I’ve more orders for you if you ask me, but I fear to be any reason for delay:
and, book, if you carried everything I think of, you’d be a heavy burden to the bearer. Quick, it’s a long way! I’ll be alive here at the end of the earth, in a land that’s far away from my land.
Book TIII.I:1-46 His Book Arrives in Rome

‘I come in fear, an exile’s book, sent to this city:
kind reader, give me a gentle hand, in my weariness:
don’t shun me in fear, in case I bring you shame:
not a line of this paper teaches about love.
Such is my author’s fate he shouldn’t try,
the wretch, to hide it with any kind of wit.
Even that unlucky work that amused him
in his youth, too late alas, he condemns and hates!
See what I bring: you’ll find nothing here
but sadness, poetry fitting circumstance.
If the crippled couplets limp in alternate lines,
it’s the elegiac metre, the long journey:
If I’m not golden with cedar-oil, smoothed with pumice,
I’d blush to be better turned out than my author:
if the writing’s streaked with blotted erasures,
the poet marred his own work with his tears.
If any phrase might not seem good Latin,
it was a land of barbarians he wrote in.
If it’s no trouble, readers, tell me what place,
what house to seek, a book strange to this city.’
Speaking like this, covertly, with anxious speech,
I found one, eventually, to show me the way.
‘May the gods grant, what they denied our poet,
to be able to live in peace in your native land.
Lead on! I’ll follow now, though, weary, I come
by land and sea from a distant world.’
He obeyed, and guiding me, said: ‘This is Caesar’s
Forum, this is the Sacred Way named from the rites, here’s Vesta’s temple, guarding the Palladium and the fire, here was old Numa’s tiny palace.’ Then, turning right, here’s the gate to the Palatine, here’s Jupiter Stator, Rome was first founded here. Gazing around, I saw prominent doorposts hung with gleaming weapons, and a house fit for a god. ‘And is this Jove’s house?’ I said, a wreath of oak prompting that thought in my mind. When I learnt its owner, ‘No error there,’ I said, this is truly the house of mighty Jove.’ But why do laurels veil the door in front, their dark leaves circling the august ones? Is it because this house earned unending triumph, or because it’s loved by Apollo of Actium forever? Is it because it’s joyful, and makes all things joyful? Is it a mark of the peace it’s given the world? Does it possess everlasting glory, as the laurel is evergreen, without a single withered leaf to gather?

**Book TIII.I:47-82 His Books Are Banned**

The writing gives the reason for the coronal wreath: it says that by his efforts citizens were saved. Best of fathers, add one more citizen to them, driven away, and hidden at the world’s end, the cause of whose punishment, which he confesses he deserved, lay in nothing that he did, but in an error. Ah me! I dread the place, I dread the man of power, and my writing wavers with the tremor of fear.
Can you see the paper’s colour, bloodless pale?
Can you see each other footstep tremble?
I pray, that, some day, your house makes peace with him
who authored me, and, under the same masters, greets him!
Then I was led up the high stairway’s even steps,
to the sublime, shining temple of unshorn Apollo,
where statues alternate with exotic pillars,
Danaids, and their savage father with naked sword:
and all that men of old and new times thought,
with learned minds, is open to inspection by the reader.
I searched for my brothers, except those indeed
their author wishes he had never written.
As I looked in vain, the guard, from that house
that commands the holy place, ordered me to go.
I tried another temple, joined to a nearby theatre:
that too couldn’t be entered by these feet.
Nor did Liberty allow me in her temple,
the first that was open to learned books.
Our wretched author’s fate engulfs his children,
and from birth we suffer the exile he endures.
Perhaps one day Caesar, aware of the long years,
will be less harsh to him and to us.
I pray, gods, or rather – since I shouldn’t address
the crowd – Caesar, greatest of them, hear my prayer!
Meanwhile, since the public forum’s closed to me,
let me lie hidden in some private place.
You too, ordinary hands, if it’s allowed, take up
my poetry, dismayed by the shame of its rejection.
Book TIII.XIV:1-52 To the Keeper of Books

Keeper and revered supporter of learned men,
what are you doing, to befriend my wit at all?
Just as you used to celebrate me when I was ‘safe’,
do you still see to it, that I’m not wholly absent?
Do you still protect my verse, excepting that poem
about the ‘Art’, that did such harm to the artist?
I beg, in so far as you can, connoisseur of new poets,
do so, and keep my ‘body’ of work in the city.
Exile was decreed for me, not for my books:
they didn’t deserve their author’s sentence.
Often a father’s exiled to a foreign shore,
but his children are still allowed to live in the city.
My poems were born of me, in the manner of Pallas,
without a mother: these are my blood-line, my children.
I commend them to you, they who’ll be a greater burden
to you their guardian the longer they lack a father.
Three of my offspring have caught my infection:
let the rest of the flock be publicly in your care.
There are also fifteen books of transmuted forms,
verses snatched from their author’s funeral rites.
That work might have gained more certain fame
from a final polish, if I’d not perished first,
now it has reached peoples’ lips un-revised,
if anything of mine is on their lips.
Add this something to my books, as well,
this, that comes to you from a distant world.
Whoever reads it - if anyone shall - let him first
remember the time and place that it was made.
He’ll be fair to writing that he knows
was done in a time of exile, a barbarous place;
and he’ll be amazed I managed to persevere
at verse at all, with sorrow’s hand, in such adversity.
My ills have weakened my talent, whose flow
was scant before, and whose stream was meagre.
But whatever it was, it has shrunk without nurture,
and is lost, dried up, by a long neglect.
I’ve no great supply of books here, to tempt
and feed me: bows and armour rattle here instead.
If I recite my verse, there’s no one about,
to ensure I receive an intelligent hearing:
there’s no secluded place. The guards on the wall,
and closed gates keep out the hostile Getae.
I often search for a word, a name, a location,
and there’s no one I can ask, to be more certain.
Often in trying to say something – shameful confession! –
words fail me, and I’ve forgotten how to speak.
Thracian and Scythian tongues sound round me,
and I think I could almost write in Getic metres.
Believe me, I’m afraid lest you read the words
of Pontus, in my writings, mixed with the Latin.
So, whatever this book may be, think it worth your
favour and pardon, given the nature of my fate.
My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun
By Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -
In Corners - till a Day
The Owner passed - identified -
And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods -
And now We hunt the Doe -
And every time I speak for Him
The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow -
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through -

And when at Night - Our good Day done -
I guard My Master's Head -
'Tis better than the Eider Duck's
Deep Pillow - to have shared -

To foe of His - I'm deadly foe -
None stir the second time -
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye -
Or an emphatic Thumb -

Though I than He - may longer live
He longer must - than I -
For I have but the power to kill,
Without - the power to die -
(c. 1863)

A Sabbath Scene
By John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

SCARCE had the solemn Sabbath-bell
Ceased quivering in the steeple,
Scarce had the parson to his desk
Walked stately through his people,

When down the summer-shaded street
A wasted female figure,
With dusky brow and naked feet,
Came rushing wild and eager.

She saw the white spire through the trees,
She heard the sweet hymn swelling:
O pitying Christ! a refuge give
The poor one in Thy dwelling!

Like a scared fawn before the hounds,
Right up the aisle she glided,
While close behind her, whip in hand,
A lank-haired hunter strided.

She raised a keen and bitter cry,
To Heaven, and Earth appealing;
Were manhood's generous pulses dead?
Had woman's heart no feeling?

A score of stout hands rose between
The hunter and the flying:
Age clenched his staff, and maiden eyes
Flashed tearful, yet defying.

"Who dares profane this house and day?"
Cried out the angry pastor.
"Why, bless your soul, the wench's a slave,
And I'm her lord and master!

"I've law and gospel on my side,
And who shall dare refuse me?"
Down came the parson, bowing low,
"My good sir, pray excuse me!

"Of course I know your right divine
To own and work and whip her;
Quick, deacon, throw that Polyglott
Before the wench, and trip her!"

Plump dropped the holy tome, and o'er
Its sacred pages stumbling,
Bound hand and foot, a slave once more,
The hapless wretch lay trembling.

I saw the parson tie the knots,
The while his flock addressing,
The Scriptural claims of slavery
With text on text impressing.

"Although," said he, "on Sabbath day
All secular occupations
Are deadly sins, we must fulfil
Our moral obligations:

"And this commends itself as one
To every conscience tender;
As Paul sent back Onesimus,
My Christian friends, we send her!"
Shriek rose on shriek, -- the Sabbath air
Her wild cries tore asunder;
I listened, with hushed breath, to hear
God answering with his thunder!

All still! the very altar's cloth
Had smothered down her shrieking,
And, dumb, she turned from face to face,
For human pity seeking!

I saw her dragged along the aisle,
Her shackles harshly clanking;
I heard the parson, over all,
The Lord devoutly thanking!

My brain took fire: "Is this," I cried,
"The end of prayer and preaching?
Then down with pulpit, down with priest,
And give us Nature's teaching!

"Foul shame and scorn be on ye all
Who turn the good to evil,
And steal the Bible from the Lord,
To give it to the Devil!

"Than garbled text or parchment law
I own a statute higher;
And God is true, though every book
And every man's a liar!"

Just then I felt the deacon's hand
In wrath my coat-tail seize on;
I heard the priest cry, "Infidel!"
The lawyer mutter, "Treason!"

I started up, -- where now were church,
Slave, master, priest, and people?
I only heard the supper-bell,
Instead of clanging steeple.

But, on the open window's sill,
O'er which the white blooms drifted,
The pages of a good old Book
The wind of summer lifted,

And flower and vine, like angel wings
Around the Holy Mother,
Waved softly there, as if God's truth
And Mercy kissed each other.

And freely from the cherry-bough
Above the casement swinging,
With golden bosom to the sun,
The oriole was singing.

As bird and flower made plain of old
The lesson of the Teacher,
So now I heard the written Word
Interpreted by Nature!

For to my ear methought the breeze
Bore Freedom's blessed word on;
Thus saith the Lord: Break every yoke,
Undo the heavy burden!

1850.
I'd been traveling all day, driving north
—smaller and smaller roads, clapboard houses
startled awake by the new green around them—

when I saw three horses in a fenced field
by the narrow highway's edge: white horses,
two uniformly snowy, the other speckled
as though he'd been rolling in flakes of rust.
They were of graduated sizes—small, medium,
large—and two stood to watch while the smallest
waded up to his knees in a shallow pond,
tossing his head and taking
—it seemed unmistakable—
delight in the cool water
around his hooves and ankles.
I kept on driving, I went into town
to visit the bookstores and the coffee bar
and looked at the new novels
and the volumes of poetry, but all the time
it was horses I was thinking of,
and when I drove back to find them,
the three companions left off
whatever it was they were playing at
and came nearer the wire fence—

I'd pulled over onto the grassy shoulder
of the highway—to see what I'd brought them.

Experience is an intact fruit,
core and flesh and rind of it; once cut open,
entered, it can't be the same, can it?

Though that is the dream of the poem:
as if we could look out
through that moment's blushed skin.
They wandered toward the fence.
The tallest turned toward me;

I was moved by the verticality of her face,
elongated reach from the tips of her ears
down to white eyelids and lashes,
the pink articulation
of nostrils, wind stirring the strands

of her mane a little to frame the gaze
in which she fixed me. She was the bold one;

the others stood at a slight distance
while she held me in her attention.
Put your tongue to the green-flecked peel
of it, reader, and taste it
from the inside: would you believe me
if I said that beneath them a clear channel
ran from the three horses to the place
they'd come from, the cool womb

of nothing, cave at the heart
of the world, deep and resilient and firmly set
at the core of things? Not emptiness,
not negation, but a generous, cold nothing:
the breathing space out of which new shoots
are propelled to the grazing mouths,
out of which the horses themselves are tendered
into the new light. The poem wants the
impossible;

the poem wants a name for the kind nothing
at the core of time, out of which the foals
come tumbling: curled, fetal, dreaming,
and into which the old crumple, fetlock
and skull breaking like waves of foaming milk....

Cold, bracing nothing that mothers forth
mud and mint, hoof and clover, root hair
and horsehair and the accordion bones
of the rust-spotted little one unfolding itself
into the afternoon. You too: you flare

and fall back into the necessary
open space. What could be better than that?

It was the beginning of May,
the black earth nearly steaming,
and a scatter of petals decked the mud
like pearls, everything warm with setting out, and you could see beneath their hooves the path they’d traveled up, the horse road on which they trot into the world, eager for pleasure and sunlight, and down which they descend, in good time, into the source of spring.

[published in Source, 2001]

**Flit**

--dart--an idea arcs the cold, then a clutch of related thoughts; slim branches don't even flicker with the weight of what's landed; animate alphabet whizzing past our faces, a black and white hurry, as if a form of notation accompanied our walk, a little ahead of us and a bit behind. If we could see their trajectory, if their trace remained in the winter air, what a tunnel they'd figure: skein of quick vectors above our heads, a fierce braid, improvised, their decisions --the way one makes poetry from syntax—unpredictable, resolving to wild regularity (thought has to flit to describe it, speech

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has to try that hurry).
A scaffolding,

a kind of argument
about being numerous.

Thread and rethread—alight.
Study. We might be carrying
crumbs. We're not. I wish.
Their small heads cock,

they lift (no visible effort,
as if flight were the work
of the will only), light,
a bit further along,

and though they're silent
it seems you could hear

the minute repeating registers
of their attention,

*________*, *________*, the here you are
yes here you yes.

Pronoun reference unclear.
Who looks at us

--an aerial association
of a dozen subjectivities,
or a singular self
wearing, this snowy afternoon,

twelve pair of wings?
Collectivity sparks,

sparking collectivity? Say live
resides not inside feathers or skin

but in the whizzing medium.
No third person.

Sharp, clear globe of January,
and we—the fourteen of us--

the thinking taking place.
We is instances of alertness,

[published in *School of the Arts*, 2005]