The Literature Faculty (with a lot of help from its friends*) Presents

Pleasures of Poetry
Reading and discussion of memorable poems

Room 14E-304    M-F 1-2pm

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Packets of our poems are available from the Literature HQ Office or online at http://lit.mit.edu.
On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

by John Keats

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow’d Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
How many bards gild the lapses of time!

by John Keats

HOW many bards gild the lapses of time!
A few of them have ever been the food
Of my delighted fancy,—I could brood
Over their beauties, earthly, or sublime:
And often, when I sit me down to rhyme,
These will in throngs before my mind intrude:
But no confusion, no disturbance rude
Do they occasion; ’tis a pleasing chime.
So the unnumber’d sounds that evening store;
The songs of birds—the whisp’ring of the leaves—
The voice of waters—the great bell that heaves
With solemn sound,—and thousand others more,
That distance of recognizance bereaves,
Make pleasing music, and not wild uproar.

THE LAMB

by William Blake

Little lamb, who made thee?
Does thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o’er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little lamb, who made thee?
Does thou know who made thee?

Little lamb, I’ll tell thee;
Little lamb, I’ll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little lamb, God bless thee!
Little lamb, God bless thee!

William Blake [1757-1827]
[poems from Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794)—versions transcribed from Project Gutenberg]
Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And, when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?
LONDON

by William Blake

I wander through each chartered street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,
A mark in every face I meet,
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,
In every infant’s cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear:

How the chimney-sweeper’s cry
Every blackening church appals,
And the hapless soldier’s sigh
Runs in blood down palace-walls.

But most, through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful harlot’s curse
Blasts the new-born infant’s tear,
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.
THE GARDEN OF LOVE

by William Blake

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen;
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And ‘Thou shalt not’ writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.
Body and Soul

by B H Fairchild

Half-numb, guzzling bourbon and Coke from coffee mugs,
our fathers fall in love with their own stories, nuzzling
the facts but mauling the truth, and my friend’s father begins
to lay out with the slow ease of a blues ballad a story
about sandlot baseball in Commerce, Oklahoma decades ago.
These were men’s teams, grown men, some in their thirties
and forties who worked together in zinc mines or on oil rigs,
sweat and khaki and long beers after work, steel guitar music
whanging in their ears, little white rent houses to return to
where their wives complained about money and broken Kenmores
and then said the hell with it and sang Body and Soul
in the bathtub and later that evening with the kids asleep
lay in bed stroking their husband’s wrist tattoo and smoking
Chesterfields from a fresh pack until everything was O.K.
Well, you get the idea. Life goes on, the next day is Sunday,
another ball game, and the other team shows up one man short.

They say, we’re one man short, but can we use this boy,
he’s only fifteen years old, and at least he’ll make a game.
They take a look at the kid, muscular and kind of knowing
the way he holds his glove, with the shoulders loose,
the thick neck, but then with that boy’s face under
a clump of angelic blonde hair, and say, oh, hell, sure,
let’s play ball. So it all begins, the men loosening up,
joking about the fat catcher’s sex life, it’s so bad
last night he had to hump his wife, that sort of thing,
pairing off into little games of catch that heat up into
throwing matches, the smack of the fungo bat, lazy jogging
into right field, big smiles and arcs of tobacco juice,
and the talk that gives a cool, easy feeling to the air,
talk among men normally silent, normally brittle and a little
angry with the empty promise of their lives. But they chatter
and say rock and fire, babe, easy out, and go right ahead
and pitch to the boy, but nothing fancy, just hard fastballs
right around the belt, and the kid takes the first two
but on the third pops the bat around so quick and sure
that they pause a moment before turning around to watch
the ball still rising and finally dropping far beyond
the abandoned tractor that marks left field. Holy shit.
They’re pretty quiet watching him round the bases,
but then, what the hell, the kid knows how to hit a ball,
so what, let’s play some goddamned baseball here.
And so it goes. The next time up, the boy gets a look
at a very nifty low curve, then a slider, and the next one
is the curve again, and he sends it over the Allis Chalmers,
high and big and sweet. The left field just stands there, frozen. 
As if this isn’t enough, the next time up he bats left-handed. 
They can’t believe it, and the pitcher, a tall, mean-faced 
man from Okarche who just doesn’t give a shit anyway because his wife ran off two years ago leaving him with 
three little ones and a rusted-out Dodge with a cracked block, 
leans in hard, looking at the fat catcher like he was the sonofabitch who ran off with his wife, leans in and throws something 
out of the dark, green hell of forbidden fastballs, something that comes in at the knees and then leaps viciously towards the kid’s elbow. He swings exactly the way he did right-handed and they all turn like a chorus line toward deep right field where the ball loses itself in sagebrush and the sad burnt dust of dustbowl Oklahoma. It is something to see.

But why make a long story long: runs pile up on both sides, the boy comes around five times, and five times the pitcher is cursing both God and His mother as his chew of tobacco sours into something resembling horse piss, and a ragged and bruised Spalding baseball disappears into the far horizon. Goodnight, Irene. They have lost the game and some painful side bets and they have been suckered. And it means nothing to them though it should to you when they are told the boy’s name is Mickey Mantle. And that’s the story, and those are the facts. But the facts are not the truth. I think, though, as I scan the faces of these old men now lost in the innings of their youth, it lying there in the weeds behind that Allis Chalmers just waiting for the obvious question to be asked: why, oh why in hell didn’t they just throw around the kid, walk him, after he hit the third homer? Anybody would have, especially nine men with disappointed wives and dirty socks and diminishing expectations for whom winning at anything meant everything. Men who knew how to play the game, who had talent when the other team had nothing except this ringer who without a pitch to hit was meaningless, and they could go home with their little two-dollar side bets and stride into the house singing If You’ve Got the Money, Honey, I’ve Got the Time with a bottle of Southern Comfort under their arms and grab Dixie or May Ella up and dance across the gray linoleum as if it were V-Day all over again. But they did not. And they did not because they were men, and this was a boy. And they did not because sometimes after making love, after smoking their Chesterfields in the cool silence and listening to the big bands on the radio that sounded so glamorous, so distant, they glanced over at their wives and noticed the lines growing heavier around the eyes and mouth, felt what their wives felt: that Les Brown and Glenn Miller and all those dancing couples and in fact all possibility of human gaiety and light-heartedness were as far away and unreachable as Times Square or the Avalon ballroom. They did not because of the gray linoleum lying there
in the half-dark, the free calendar from the local mortuary that said one day was pretty much like another, the work gloves looped over the doorknob like dead squirrels. And they did not because they had gone through a depression and a war that had left them with the idea that being a man in the eyes of their fathers and everyone else had cost them just too goddamn much to lay it at the feet of a fifteen year-old-boy. And so they did not walk him, and lost, but at least had some ragged remnant of themselves to take back home. But there is one thing more, though it is not a fact. When I see my friend’s father staring hard into the bottomless well of home plate as Mantle’s fifth homer heads toward Arkansas, I know that this man with the half-orphaned children and worthless Dodge has also encountered for the first and possibly only time the vast gap between talent and genius, has seen as few have in the harsh light of an Oklahoma Sunday, the blonde and blue-eyed bringer of truth, who will not easily be forgiven.


Baseball and Writing

Marianne Moore, 1887 - 1972

(Suggested by post-game broadcasts)

Fanaticism? No. Writing is exciting
and baseball is like writing.
You can never tell with either
how it will go
or what you will do;
generating excitement—
a fever in the victim—
pitcher, catcher, fielder, batter.
Victim in what category?
Owlman watching from the press box?
To whom does it apply?
Who is excited? Might it be I?

It’s a pitcher’s battle all the way—a duel—
a catcher’s, as, with cruel
puma paw, Elston Howard lumbers lightly
back to plate. (His spring
de-winged a bat swing.)
They have that killer instinct;
yet Elston—whose catching
arm has hurt them all with the bat—
when questioned, says, unenviously,
“I’m very satisfied. We won.”
Shorn of the batting crown, says, “We”;
robbed by a technicality.

When three players on a side play three positions
and modify conditions,
the massive run need not be everything.
“Going, going . . .” Is
it? Roger Maris
has it, running fast. You will
never see a finer catch. Well . . .
“Mickey, leaping like the devil”—why
gild it, although deer sounds better—
snares what was speeding towards its treetop nest,
one-handing the souvenir-to-be
meant to be caught by you or me.

Assign Yogi Berra to Cape Canaveral;
he could handle any missile.
He is no feather. “Strike! . . . Strike two!”
Fouled back. A blur.
It’s gone. You would infer
that the bat had eyes.
He put the wood to that one.
Praised, Skowron says, “Thanks, Mel.
I think I helped a little bit.”
All business, each, and modesty.
Blanchard, Richardson, Kubek, Boyer.
In that galaxy of nine, say which
won the pennant? Each. It was he.

Those two magnificent saves from the knee-throws
by Boyer, finesses in twos—
like Whitey’s three kinds of pitch and pre-
diagnosis
with pick-off psychosis.
Pitching is a large subject.
Your arm, too true at first, can learn to
catch your corners—even trouble
Mickey Mantle. (“Grazed a Yankee!
My baby pitcher, Montejo!”
With some pedagogy,
you’ll be tough, premature prodigy.)

They crowd him and curve him and aim for the knees. Trying
indeed! The secret implying:
“I can stand here, bat held steady.”
One may suit him;
none has hit him.
Imponderables smite him.
Muscle kinks, infections, spike wounds
require food, rest, respite from ruffians. (Drat it!
Celebrity costs privacy!)
Cow’s milk, “tiger’s milk,” soy milk, carrot juice,
brewer's yeast (high-potency—
concentrates presage victory

sped by Luis Arroyo, Hector Lopez—
deadly in a pinch. And "Yes,
it's work; I want you to bear down,
but enjoy it
while you're doing it."
Mr. Houk and Mr. Sain,
if you have a rummage sale,
don't sell Roland Sheldon or Tom Tresh.
Studded with stars in belt and crown,
the Stadium is an adastrum.
O flashing Orion,
your stars are muscled like the lion.

For Which it Stands

By Gregory Pardlo

For a flag! I answered facetiously. A flag of tomorrow, fluent in fire, not just the whispers, lisps, not just the still there of powdered wigs, dry winds. Who wants a speckled drape that folds as easy over smirch as fallen soldier? This is rhetorical. Like, “What to the Negro is the fourth of July?” A flag should be stitched with a fuse.

Jefferson said for each generation a flag. Maybe he said Constitution. I once raised a high-top flag of my hair, a fist, a leather medallion of the motherland. I studied heraldry and maniples (which are not what you might guess), little sails and banners down to the vane of a feather. Because his kids were rebel cities my father loved like Sherman. Because I wanted history I could touch like the flank of a beast.

My wife’s people are from San Salvador. They sent us with a guard, his AK shouldered like a mandolin, among anil-tinted shawls and jerseys, across tiled and pocked concrete, and the gated stalls of El Centra. I felt sacred as a goat there, too, as I did below the Mason-Dixon where our only protection was the Fourteenth Amendment.

Afraid our Yankee plates would be read aggressive as a Jolly Roger we rented a compact in Atlanta. Charleston, Savannah, Montgomery, and after Birmingham we were broke. Skipped Selma. Slept at B&Bs where my dreams power-washed layers of footnotes and Februaries, revealing the surreal sheen of Apollo Creed’s trunks, the apocalyptic Americana of Jacko moonwalking around a tinfoil Buzz Aldrin planting the corporate ensign. Years passed. I grew youthless in my dad-pants, but still puffed at pinwheels and windsocks, launched glyphs of grillsmoke and one day it came to me, as if commissioned, Theaster Gates’s Flag from old fire hoses, a couple dozen, like vertical blinds, no, like cabin floorboards of canvas colored rusty, brick dust, some cheerless drab-and-custard, beside a medley of vespertine blues, hoses evoking landscapes of sackcloth and gunny, texture of violence and tongues inflamed by shine, holy ghost.

Ross, Duchamp, Johns, et al., are integrated here with officers of the peace, their dogs, and, in evidence, their pretend tumescence Gates has hung to cure like pelts or strips of jerky.

January 7, 2016
How did it feel to shield spirit with flesh? I mean, what did it do to the body, water furry as the arm of an arctic bear? What thirst did it ignite?

Gates’s salute is a torch song, a rhythm of hues marching over a pentimento of rhyme. I approve its message, its pledge to birth a nation of belonging and to teach that nation of the fire shut up in our bones.

Note: “Theaster Gates’s Flag”: an image can be found at the artist’s website, http://theastergates.com/artwork/2819971_Flag.html.
Double Dutch

By Gregory Pardlo

The girls turning double-dutch
bob & weave like boxers pulling
punches, shadowing each other,
sparring across the slack cord
casting parabolas in the air. They
whip quick as an infant’s pulse
and the jumper, before she
enters the winking, nods in time
as if she has a notion to share,
waiting her chance to speak. But she’s
anticipating the upbeat
like a bandleader counting off
the tune they are about to swing into.
The jumper stair-steps into mid-air
as if she’s jumping rope in low-gravity,
training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment
long enough to fit a second thought in,
she looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish
as she flutter-floats into motion
like a figure in a stack of time-lapse photos
thumbed alive. Once inside,
the bells tied to her shoestrings rouse the gods
who’ve lain in the dust since the Dutch
acquired Manhattan. How she dances
patterns like a dust-heavy bee retracing
its travels in scale before the hive. How
the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope
slaps and scoops like a paddle boat.
Her misted skin arranges the light
with each adjustment and flex. Now heather-
hued, now sheen, light listing on the fulcrum
of a wrist and the bare jutted joints of elbow
and knee, and the faceted surfaces of muscle,
surfaces fracturing and reforming
like a sun-tickled sleeve of running water.
She makes jewelry of herself and garlands
the ground with shadows.


Source: Totem (The American Poetry Review, 2007)
*  
It is snowing  
but is no longer snowing.  
When it started to snow  
I went to the window;  
I went missing.  
Sometime then,  
just before the snow started  
failing again, into great,  
ever slower flakes,  
it must also have  
stopped snowing.  
*  
This is the penalty:  
how nowhere I am.  
The wave which dived through me  
has filled my ears:  
'I cannot see a thing.  
Whatever I may do,  
nothing is added,  
nothing missed. Sometimes  
a board creaked in the floor;  
or a vine tendril brushed  
a stone in the wall  
surrounding the vineyard.
* 

When there is nothing left
to do it for,
to do it with,

it stops of its own accord.
The fingers leave their hand

and drop their hands. The feet
are free – bite the dust
one by one. Whatever still

lies there is suspended, word
by word. Only the wind

still blows, till
it runs out too,
wherever it will.

* 

Oblivion knows no time.

Water would not know time,
nor does the circle know time;
I do not wish to know time.

So, in the end, even Mohammed

is forever leaving the same tent:
moving towards his mountain
together with the shadow that
is becoming his peacock; hesitant,
almost hesitating – Just as

a mountain looks seaward

through its sieve,
to see its fall
before evening comes,

and does not care.
The Pond in the Lake

*  


The pond lies inside the lake  
and beckons. If I'm sitting in my room  
and I want to hear leaves,  
I have to think of poplars,  
or go hear poplars  
where they are.

Have I ever heard  
a chestnut-leaf fall in my head?  
Or did I ever fall there  
headlong into a pond?

*  

The chestnut is eating out of my palm;  
I sit with my face  
to the wall I'm bleeding from.  
If I so much as move a muscle  
I have to admit I'm  
a shellfish. I flutter  
my wings until they're dry,  
till they've evaporated. The feared  
draws near: the feigning begins.  
I have dismissed too little.
* 

Inside the palm-nut lies a fish which I am not. If I run back to the lake, giving it all I've got, I will have forgotten who and what I had to kill, to sacrifice in myself:

the first victim first, or first the second victim. By referring to my self I lose what I'd wanted to harbor.

* 

On the strength of what's no longer here I try my best to rake it back; never wish to tire of seeing, even now, your mouth which without your face serves no purpose any more.

Inside the lake

lies the pond, ready and waiting. Just because I was there when they were passing by, those hummingbirds are playing havoc in my head.
* 
So I start up anew as of old. Splendid black ice, I cried, you could skate here. Yet the same image was no longer a beginning. Still, even now,
you have only to wish it

and you can shake your hair so that the walls of the nameable come tumbling down and the open plains, beyond the sound-stream, are hacked

* 
down, till nothing remains of what you were dreaming of. How beautiful you are: almost coming from you, I became that once. I sit inside my pond

and ford the river which swears me to silence.

Some forms are fordable; others are not, or less so. A pound of lead equals a pound of feathers. It hardly ever helps
*  

if grief, as foreseen, comes to a dead end. In his house next to his house sits Spider; Son pays him a visit: they will never see each other again.

‘You going to think of this country a lot’ —

he stresses this, adjourning death —

‘You never going to forget it.’
The same little hollow vanishes as soon as I open my fist: I have never existed either.

*  

In one of those early evenings which are so rich in themselves, he became passed away. The yearning which had known itself within him till then, went out. She who was with him, roused him out of shrouding or worries about a text which I must leave unspoken here.

‘What did you say?’ he asked, as if insisting on repetition. She, however, repeated the message, at which he understood and died just like that.
PUNISHMENT

by Seamus Heaney

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring
to store
the memories of love.
Little adulteress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.
Represéntase la brevedad de lo que se vive y cuán nada parece lo que se vivió

by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (1580 – 1645)

“¡Ah de la vida!”... ¿Nadie me responde?
¡Aquí de los antaños que he vivido!
La Fortuna mis tiempos ha mordido;
las Horas mi locura las esconde.

¡Que sin poder saber cómo ni a dónde
la salud y la edad se hayan huido!
Falta la vida, asiste lo vivido,
y no hay calamidad que no me ronde.

Ayer se fue; mañana no ha llegado;
hoy se está yendo sin parar un punto:
soy un fue, y un será, y un es cansado.

En el hoy y mañana y ayer, junto
pañales y mortaja, y he quedado
presentes sucesiones de difunto.

Dramatizes the brevity of life in progress and the apparent nothingness of past life.

“Life, ahoy!” No one answers me? (2)Come back past years that I have lived! (3)Fortune has chewed away my time; (4)my madness hides the hours. (5)That without being able to know how or whither, (6)my health and lifetime have flown away! (7) Life is absent, my having lived is present, (8) and there is no calamity which does not beset me. (9) Yesterday has gone; tomorrow hasn’t arrived; (10) today is going away without stopping for one moment; (11) I am a “was” and a “will be” and an “is” tired. (12, 13) In my today and tomorrow and yesterday, I link together diapers and shroud, and I am merely (14) a present sequence of a dead man.

Amor constante más allá de la muerte

by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas (1580 – 1645)

Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera
sombra que me lleve el blanco día,
y podrá desatar esta alma mía
hora a su afán ansioso linsojera;

Mas no, de esotra parte, en la ribera,
dejará la memoria, en donde ardía:
nadar sabe mi llama la agua fría,
y perder el respeto a ley severa.

Alma a quien todo un dios prisión ha sido,
venas que humor a tanto fuego han dado,
medulas que han gloriosamente ardido:

su cuerpo dejará, no su cuidado;
serán ceniza, mas tendrán sentido.
Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado.

A love constant beyond death:

My eyes may be closed by the final (2) shadow which will take away from me the bright day, (3) and this soul of mine may be freed (4) by an hour indulgent to its anxious longing; (5) but it will not, on the further shore, (6) leave the memory in which it used to burn; (7) my flame is able to swim across the cold water (8) and disobey a harsh law. (9) A soul which has been imprisoned by no less than a god, (10) the veins which have supplied the moisture to so great a fire, (11) the marrow which has gloriously burned: (12) it will leave its body, not its [loving] anguish; (13) they will be ash, but it will have feelings; (14) they will be dust, but dust which is in love.

—Translated by Elias Rivers
A Mirror for Khalida

by Adonis

Wave
Khalida
is a sadness
that leaves the branches
around it,
Khalida
a journey that drowns the day
in the waters of eyes,
a wave that taught me
that the light of the stars
the faces of the clouds
and the moaning of dust
are a single flower.

Under Water
We slept in sheets woven
out of night shade—Night was oblivion
and our insides sang their blood
to the rhythm of castanets and cymbals
to suns shining under water.
Night became pregnant then.

Loss
Once, I was lost in your hands, and my lips
were a fortress longing for a strange conquest
in love with being besieged.
I moved forward
and your waist was a queen
and your hands were the army’s commanders
and your eyes were a shelter and a friend.
We welded to each other, got lost together, we entered
the forest of fire—I drew the first step to it
and your blazed a trail . . .

Fatigue
The old fatigue around the house
now has flowerpots and a balcony
where he sleeps. He disappears
and we worry about him in his travels, we run
circling the house
asking each blade of grass: we pray,
we catch a glimpse of it: We cry out: “What and where? All the winds
have blown
January 13, 2016                  Moderator: Zachary Bos
and every branch shook with them, but you did not come.”

Death
After these seconds the small time will return and the steps and the pathways that had been trod. Afterwards the houses will grow ancient the bed will put out the fire of its day and die and the pillow will die as well.

---

A Mirror for Khalida

by Adonis

1. The Wave
Khalida,
you are a branch in leaf—
a voyage that drowns each day
in the fountains of your eyes—
a wave that helps me see
how starlight,
clouds
and sands beneath a wind
are one.

2. Underwater
We sleep beneath a cloth
woven from the harvests
of the night.
O night of dust. . . .
Cymbals and alleluias
chorus
in our blood.
Underwater suns
glitter
the dark to dawn.

3. Lost
... once,
encircled by your arms,
I lost my way.
My lips were fortresses
succumbing to a conquest
they desired.
Nearer,
nearer you breathed,
your waist—a sultan,
your hands—the messengers
of armies in reserve,
your eyes—lovers
in hiding.
Joined,
lost together,
we dared a forest of fire,
me—risking the first step
toward it,
you—pointing the way.
4. Fatigue
Darling, an old fatigue
invades our hours.
It looms in every drawer
and balcony.
It waits until you sleep
before it vanishes.
How anxious I become
about its going and coming.
I scout the house,
interrogate the plants,
pray for a glimpse of it
and wonder how, why, where.
The winds,
the branches
come and go.
But you—never.

5. Death
After our seconds together
time turns back to time.
I hear footsteps
repeated
down a road.
The house is nothing
but a house.
The bed forgets the fire
of its past and dies.
Pillows are only pillows
now.

---

SONNET 121 (pub. 1609)
by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

‘Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being,
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed,
Not by our feeling but by others’ seeing.
For why should others’ false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own;
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel.
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
    Unless this general evil they maintain—
    All men are bad and in their badness reign.
Sound

By Billy Ramsell

To Norbert Valath

To render the ocean one needs a whole year
with Zoom in freezing fingers on a quarter-mile of coast.
Sound is the one true vocabulary of nature

and not the peacock-palette painters swear
he uses for his best stuff, for his daily disposable frescoes.
To render the ocean one needs a whole year

on the quayside tracking the tide’s increasing stature,
its drones and climaxes, the diminuendo when it shows
sound is the one true vocabulary of nature.

Nature plays bass clarinet in a Barcelona pop-up theatre.
In a polo neck he solos the ocean. He tongues, he blows
to render the ocean. One needs a whole year

or centuries to capture even its least-most feature:
like the boat-cove’s lapping, backwashed contraflows.
Sound is the one true vocabulary of Nature,

who’s lost in his MacBook, applying filter after filter
to this day-long rock-pool’s jazz, its stadium of echoes.
To render its ocean one needs a whole year:
sound is the one true vocabulary of nature.

Source: Poetry (September 2015).
Lament for Esbjörn Svensson

By Billy Ramsell

Play me something. Though you’re not really here
the rain tat-tattooing the kitchen window like a snare

and the wind, the wind, the weary wind
droning like the bass on Tuesday Wonderland,

the heating creaking in the key of A, the fridge voicing
the same two notes in perpetuity (I’m improvising

here for accompaniment; give me a break).
I’ll pour us both a finger of Knob Creek

And though you’re not really here play me something: a slow
progression on my flatmate’s beat-up Casio

then your hands jerking like mad crabs across the key-
board. Or don’t play. It’s up to you. But play.

For there’s no one but me here in the lamplight.
Or at least tell me what eternity is like:

if it’s a never-closing-club called The Hereafter,
dead greats in the rhythm section, you tinkling like the laughter

of sixteen-year-olds on a beach in late July, table-serviced boozing.
Or if dying translates us into the condition of music;

leaves us weightless, melodious, floating bars of thought
uploaded like data into the mind of God.

Okay fine. Let’s not talk of prematurity and jazz
but just listen to the silk rain fizz

upon the rain that waterfalls the steps, tests drains,
and strokes the beveled slope of River Lane

as we name the too-late, unmade albums
(Fractal Birds, Jessica’s Premises, E.S. Ah Um)

your fan-club now will only hear in overhearings or in dreams.
And I won’t bullshit you, in the scheme of things

your trio-intricacies, your carefully-sequenced records will endure
no longer than the muttering gap between main set and encore,

no longer than it took the final chords to flow,
like a receding wave, back into the piano

when you played late and cranky in the Opera House,
unsoundchecked, your sampler or whatever on the fritz.

January 15, 2016              Moderator: Stephen Pepper
That stubby bottle’s empty as your glass.
I wouldn’t bring this matter up unless.

Though you’re not really here it’s time to go.
It’s easing off, I think. I’m sorry. You know

I’m sorry but it’s time. That’s traffic and raw light
spills through the curtain-gaps. It’s easing. Thank you. And goodnight.
Still

‘And yet the possibility of leaving physicality behind, of transferring human minds to computers, to other storage devices, is simply too beguiling to be dismissed entirely’.
— Alberto Cenas, Transiciónblog

He: Anna, I would leave my hands here,
that jazz waltz, those zigzagging rabbits.
the silken reverse whisper of this wine,
if we could melt as one into that cloud
of merging intellects, if tomorrow we could join
that lava-lamp of consciousness, become pure minds.

She: Heat is sleeping on the butterfly path.
Exhausted, exerted, it drowses as evening arrives.

He: Say we can. Say we'll give it all up to live it all again
and again each vintage memory forever.
Say we'll step out of nature into vast machines,
their imaging so granular they capture our lives
and all our ardour’s premium days recapitulate,
in canons, rounds, in luscious orchestrated seasons.

She: Beyond our veranda rabbits sample sevenths, diminished;
worry butterflies, sniff the jazzy, reverberating air.

He: Just say we can escape these ailing prisons,
these shells of age and process, of meat and gasses,
and let our love reconfigure as melody.
Let us be floating tendrils of counterpoint,
rococo strands orbiting and blending
in that permanent digital heaven.

She: Comté. Compote. Already it is dusk or almost.
I brush your tannin-stained lips in entitlement.
He:  Let us leave the children here in physicality
to join with us, or not, when their time comes,
in servers free from all the reptile hind brain’s
rage brings forth, its spillages and its torture chambers.
Tomorrow we could enter that circus of selves.
Say we can. Anna, let’s leave all this here.

She:  Dust and butterflies.
The Curragh path in the cusp of evening:
its hedges cast on its surface
an elaborate fabric of shadow-work
as a Dutch couple saunter past the garden
toward the village in perplexed belatedness,
as if as if their guidebook had missed
the best part of summer somehow.
Though there’s still enough customers
to keep the takeaway open,
to keep its mane of fat statically galloping
in the fryer till closing time comes.
And there’s still the English ladies rounded vowels
stopping at the pottery shop,
still the hormone-tremoloed, early-teen banter
jostling on the old boat-cove platform;
sleek forgetfulness, bashful flab, gally affection.
But all plunge and replunge from the pier-edge,
daring head first eight barnacled feet
with augmented indifference each time.
And the sky still wears that particular blue;
a blue that’s stretched and indigo,
that’s glossy but declining. The blue of August.
Under which each evening anglers still scramble
to the lowest toes of the cliff-side,
sip cans in the heat’s slapless insipidity
or just watch the water’s mild serrations
sliding toward the shore,
while beyond the headland the mackerel are packed
in a crushed and throbbing cube,
from sun-tongued surface to untrawled floor.
They flit out of that blackness, reabsorb in flurries,
vibrate in tensile and suspended mass,
in acre after seething acre, waiting.
Let America Be America Again

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.
Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
to build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!

Credit:

Glass Ceiling

by T.R. Hummer

Because she wanted to teach me a lesson about the natural world, my grandmother raised Her .22 rifle—we were rabbit hunting, so the shotgun was at home under her blue chintz pillow—and brought A quail down on the covey rise. Impossible shot you may be thinking. True. I said “my grandmother” Because if I’d said “my mother” you wouldn’t believe a word of it, since a mother should be leading A research group, or running a software company, but a grandmother still can dress in buckskin And ride a fabulous palomino, doing handstands on the saddle, executing trick shots blindfold With a musket, reloading on the fly, while deep in the underbrush I gather the rabbits to me And we tremble together in the riptide of her passing.

[The New Yorker, June 19, 2015]
[On painting the vault of the Sistine Chapel]

by Michelangelo Buonarroti

I' ho già fatto un gozzo in questo stento, 
coma fa l'acqua a' gatti in Lombardia 
o ver d'altro paese che si sia, 
c'a forza 'l ventre appicca sotto 'l mento. 

La barba al cielo, e la memoria sento 
in sullo scrigno, e 'l petto fò d'arpia, 
e 'l pennel sopra 'l viso tuttavia 
me l fa, gocciando, un ricco pavimento. 

E' lombi entrati mi son nella peccia, 
e fo del cul per contrapeso groppa, 
e ' passi senza gli occhi muovo invano. 

Dinanzi mi s'allunga la corteccia, 
e per piegarsi adietro si ragroppa, 
e tendomi com'arco soríano. 

Però fallace e strano 
surge il iudizio che la mente porta, 
ché mal si tra' per cerbottana torta. 

La mia pittura morta 
difendi orma', Giovanni, e 'l mio onore, 
non sendo in loco bon, né io pittore.
On painting the vault of the Sistine Chapel

by Michelangelo Buonarroti

I’ve grown a goiter from this trap I’m in,
as cats do from foul water in Lombardy,
or some such place, wherever it may be.
My stomach’s almost up against my chin,

My beard points skyward, at my nape the store
of memory dangles, I’ve grown a harpy’s breast,
and from above, my dripping brush, for jest,
transforms my face into a mosaic floor.

And while my haunches press into my gut,
my ass serves as a steady counterweight.
My feet tread blindly somewhere down below.

In front I feel my skin stretched lengthwise, but
in back it crimps and folds. This is my state:
arched and indented like a Syrian bow.

Not to be trusted, though,
are the strange thoughts that through my mind now run,
for who can shoot straight through a crooked gun?

My painting’s dead. I’m done.
Giovanni, friend, remove my honor’s taint,
I’m not in a good place, I cannot paint.

—Translated by Joel Agee
[On painting the vault of the Sistine Chapel]

by Michelangelo Buonarroti

I’ve already grown a goiter from this torture, hunched up here like a cat in Lombardy (or anywhere else where the stagnant water’s poison). My stomach’s squashed under my chin, my beard’s pointing at heaven, my brain’s crushed in a casket, my breast twists like a harpy’s. My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!

My haunches are grinding into my guts, my poor ass strains to work as a counterweight, every gesture I make is blind and aimless. My skin hangs loose below me, my spine’s all knotted from folding over itself. I’m bent taut as a Syrian bow.

Because I’m stuck like this, my thoughts are crazy, perfidious tripe: anyone shoots badly through a crooked blowpipe.

My painting is dead. Defend it for me, Giovanni, protect my honor. I am not in the right place—I am not a painter

—Translated by Gail Mazur
Happily

By Lyn Hejinian

1

Constantly I write this happily
Hazards that hope may break open my lips
What I felt has taken place a large context a long yielding incessant chance, to doubt it would be a crime against it
Is happiness the name of our (involuntary) complicity with chance?
No straight line the riddle set is settled and I am tempted to say,
rough circles hazards lips that only things can differ
It's not not me I'm afraid saying this is thus
I'm ambivalent—the artistic will being weak as well as strong
about being seen heard understood
We got out of control with happiness—anything could happen
This is happening
I sense that in stating my 'reason'
It has existence in fact in that in context
Whatever we perceive we come to coming to us in history
Whether or not the future looks back to trigger a longing for
consonance is 'unfinished work' to remember to locate
something launched near us as a dilemma in time to come
Surely a terrible thing whistling at the end of the rope is a very poor way of laughing
The dull make no response
Whether or not a buzzard sees a battlefield as mere scratches in
context we reason in such a way as to make ourselves aware that it includes us
Imitation claims the cows, the hens, the pigs

2

Nothing for the magician is accidental
All that could possibly happen to the magical prop is intrinsic to it and knowing “all that” (could possibly happen) to the prop is what constitutes a magician’s knowledge
The event is the adventure of that moment
If I were a fictional character thinking back she might we weeping in a hundred bedrooms tonight wanting to be good long after this depiction of wanting to have been good
But what is it that Plontinus says—that ‘good’ will not be a guideline standing outside?
It’s the interior of the life that provokes compassion for it
It is there that one must sustain the belief that one’s existing is never to not-exist again
Then it is not part of some metonymic chain, some vernacular meant to bring us in, you know what I mean, and so on and so forth
Along comes something—launched in context

January 22, 2016

Moderator: Rosa Martinez
Along comes something—launched in context
How do we understand this boundary
Context is the fate that strangers among us whom we may name
ourselves find difficult to penetrate
The context is completely mundane and should be viewed with
cruelty and from this follows fear and then grief
Madame Cézanne offers herself to it in homage with its various
uses and does resemble an apple with her curve and blank
stare
And the most unexpected aspect of this activity dependent on
nothing external is that it consists of praise
Yet the context is completely mundane: coming by chance, viz.,
happiness, into the frame of the world
It is midday a sentence consists of history with a future
Someone speaks it within reason
The blue is sky at all high points and the shadow underfoot moves
at zero point that is at midpoint
In context to pass it the flow of humanity divides and on the other
side unites
Surely we don’t want a reason that plows to authority

Launched?
Flaubert said he wanted his sentences erect while running—almost
an impossibility
Nonetheless, though its punctuation is half hoping for failure, the
sentence makes an irrevocable address to life
And though the parrot spoke but said nothing this had the impact of
an aphorism
Are you there?
I’m here
Is that yes or no?
Perhaps happiness is what we volunteer
Without that nothing recurs
The thing arrives—tightly the hands of the clock turn but other
elements also must conduct logics of which we are
becoming conscious when we experience the sensation that
this is happening
Rowan Ricardo Phillips
from the collection *Ground*

“Music for When the Music is Over”

In the beginning: no beginning—
For once we were the void and nothing else.
There were no starfields but this one starfield
Where the first star fumed and ate its own heart.

We were that star until ourselves and then.
And then a marigold, a man in gold,
The sublimities art gives a throat to.
How even bitter, garroted Saturn

Half listens as he hangs in space, barely
Himself, his moons tending to him like flies
To a corpse. We live like the one sequin
In a sequined dress that thinks it’s the dress

Although it merely blurs from other lights
Ablaze and bending. Look up, love. Listen.
We are the world and what’s wrong with the world
Is what the birds grow tired of singing.
Rowan Ricardo Phillips
(from the collection *Heaven*; first published in *The New Yorker*)

“Measure for Measure”

Alone in Woody Creek, Colorado,
I fell asleep reading “Measure for Measure,”
Right at the part where the Duke delivers
His Old Testament decision of haste
Paying for haste, and leisure answering
Leisure, like quitting like, and (wait for it)
Measure for measure. I saw it performed
Once, in Stratford; I was maybe twenty.
I only remembered the “measure still
For measure” part, until now. It stuck
With me. But the rest of it was wiped clean
From my memory, all of Stratford, too.
Still, the way the actor leaned on that half
Line, “measure still for measure,” as though it
Were the measure of his self, measure still
For measure, all these years, I remembered
Being the heart of the play, its great gist;
But I forgot it was a death sentence.
Whether Angelo deserved such a fate,
Or Isabella’s ability to
Rise above the mire doesn’t matter:
Death, not beauty, woke me.

    My neck aches.
All of Shakespeare feels like lead on my chest,
Not for death, let’s face it, death awaits us,
Usually with less prescient language,
But death measures us with a noun’s contempt
For our imagination, being death
But not dying, making do, like when I
Turn from the Bard, look outside and behold
A herd of a hundred elk, surviving
The snow as they know how—being elk.
An hour ago they were in the hills,
But now they graze a mere five feet away,
Their world othered by these austere windows;
The massive seven-pointer, chin held high
To prevent his thick neck from crashing down,
Hoofs the snow and starts toward me, but then turns
To compass the valley between his horns.
On Kindness

by Aracelis Girmay

At the Detroit Metro Airport
with the turtle-hours to spare
between now & my flight, there is
such a thing as the kindness
of the conveyor belt who lends me
its slow, strange mollusk foot
as I stand quiet, exhausted, having been
alone in my bed for days now, sleeping
in hotels, having spent months, now,
without seeing the faces of my family, somehow
its slow & quiet carrying of the load
reminds me of the kindness of donkeys,
& this kindness returns me to myself.
It reminds me of the kindness of other things I love
like the kindness of sisters who send mail,
wherever you are, & speaking of mail, there is
the special kindness of the mail lady
who says, “Hi, baby” to everyone, at first
I thought it was just to me, but now I know
she says “Hi, baby” to everyone. That is kindness.
Too, there is the kindness of windows, & of dogs.
& then there was that extraordinary Sunday
back at the house, I heard a woman screaming
about how she was lonely & so lonely
she didn’t know what she’d do, maybe kill
herself, she said, over & over like a parrot
in a cage, a parrot whose human parent
only taught it that one sentence. I looked out
the window & saw her from behind, the way she flung
her arms like she was desperate & being killed
or eaten by an invisible predator, like a tiger or a lion, in the chest.
& her voice seemed fogged out with methadone, I don’t know,
something, & I walked away from the window
& sat, angry with her for screaming, & sad,
& not long after, I heard her saying,
*What’d you say? What’d you say to me?*
& a man’s voice, low, I could not tell if it was kind.
& she said, *I’ll kill myself, I’m so lonely.*
& did I tell you, yet, that it was Mother’s Day?
Flowers & mothers, flowers & mothers all day long.
& the woman saying, *I’m so lonely. I could kill myself.*
& then quiet. & the man’s voice saying, *it’s okay. It’s okay.*
& this made me get up, put my face, again, to the window
to see my landlord’s nephew outside, just hugging her so, as if
it were his mother, I mean, as if he belonged to her,
& then, again, quiet, I left the window but sat
in the silence of the house, hidden by shutters, & was amazed.
When the front door of the brownstone opened up
& let the tall nephew in with his sad & cougar eyes,
handsome & tall in his Carolina-Brooklyn swagger, I heard
him start to climb the stairs above me, & my own hand
opened up my own front door,
& though it was none of my business
I asked him, Do you know that woman out there?
& do you know what happened next?
He said, No. The nephew said no, he didn’t know
the woman out there. & he told me Happy Mother’s Day
as he climbed the rest of the stairs. & I can’t stop seeing them
hugging on the street, under trees, it was spring, but cold,
& sometimes in the memory his head is touching hers
& sometimes in the memory his eyes are closed,
& sometimes she is holding him
& singing to him I love you. It’s okay.
I mean to tell you that everywhere I go
I hear us singing to each other. This way. I mean to tell you
that I have witnessed such great kindnesses as this,
in this, my true life, you must believe me.
I mean, on a Sunday, when nobody was supposed to be
watching. Nobody at all. I saw this happen, the two
of them hugging, when nobody was supposed to be
watching, but not a secret either, public
as the street, not for glory & not for a joke,
the landlord’s nephew ready to stand there for the woman
like a brother or a sister or a husband or son,
or none of those at all, but a stranger,
a stranger who, like her, is an earthling.
Perhaps this thing I am calling kindness
is more simple than kindness, rather, recognition
of the neighbor & the blue, shared earth
& the common circumstance of being here:
what remains living of the last
two million, impossible years…
Anne Carson (b. 1950)

T.V. Men: Sappho

... avec ma main brûlée j’écris sur la nature du feu ...

I.

No one knows what the laws are. That there are laws we know, by the daily burnings if nothing else.
On the second day of shooting in the Place de la Concorde
I notice the leaves in the Jardin have changed overnight,

but mention this to no one for fear of continuity problems.
I had already invalidated 16 (otherwise good)
takes this morning by changing an earring.
You cannot erase.
Is this a law?

No, a talent. To step obliquely where stones are sharp.
Vice is also sharp.

There are laws against vice.
But the shock stays with you.
II.

la vie est brève
un peu d’amour
un peu de rêve
ainsi bonjour

The Talent has a talent
for the obvious.
See this rope?

Tie one end to me
and the other to Death:
overlit on all fours I shall
circle Him
at a consistent focal length.
Not too close not too far—

(“Home,” whispers the cameraman
as the gravestones in the background
spill slowly
out of the frame.)
Earth will be warmer than we thought,
after all this circling.

—from “T.V. Men,” in Glass, Irony & God (1992), pp. 71-72
NOTES FOR MEETING WITH THE ACTORS THE DAY THE DIRECTOR ASKED ME TO COME TO FIRST ‘ANTIGONICK’ READ-THROUGH

Saying who we all are to each other.
Pronounce the Greek names.
Do not put size into how you use the words simple and dry keep drying it out.
Chewing is good but dry.
No punctuation much gives alacrity.
Snappy but not too fast to have the thought.
What the chorus is for? no idea explore the underlying morbidity let it be a guy who’s seen it all before how it quiets him shakingly almost incantatory.
Fun language meat language the shift.
Get into the logic battle of K and A her reasons murkier her ready for action reasoning is an action.
Nightwithiningness.
Is it Hegel who disapproves.
Skip Hegel she does by putting her foot in the fire.
“There were things under and things inside things” (H.D. to Freud).
Quoting Hegel again is it a question.
How manipulative H is how terrified find the size of the language.
A wants the glory she is too much.
The bravura of the pastry sorry poetry (not logic).
If it’s past ten to three we don’t need to do the whole exodus do we.

Sappho (630-570 BCE?)

‘In all honesty, I want to die.’

Leaving for good after a good long cry,
She said: ‘We both have suffered terribly,
But, Sappho, it is hard to say goodbye.’

I said: ‘Go with my blessing if you go
Always remembering what we did. To me
You have meant everthing, as you well know.

‘Yet, let it slip your mind, I shall review
Everything we have shared—the good times, too:

‘You culled violets and roses, bloom and stem,
Often in spring and I looked on as you
Wove a bouquet into a diadem.

‘Time and again we plucked lush flowers, wed
Spray after spray in strands and fastened them
Around your soft neck; you perfumed your head

‘Of glossy curls with myrrh—lavish infusions
In queenly quantities—then on a bed
Prepared with fleecy sheets and yielding cushions,

‘Sated your craving...”

—Translated by Aaron Poochigian
One Art

By Elizabeth Bishop

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

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

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

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

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

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


MODERATORS

Joel Agee is a prize-winning writer and translator whose books include the memoirs *Twelve Years* and *In the House of My Fear*. His translation of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus* appeared this year.

Arthur Bahr is Associate Professor of Literature at MIT. He likes to read medieval manuscripts as if they were poems: that is, for how the interaction of their many disparate parts (texts in a book, like lines or stanzas in a poem) together create something more interesting, beautiful, or just stranger than if they were read in isolation.


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.

Christopher Capozzola is an associate professor of history at MIT. He likes watching baseball, but no longer plays it. He likes reading poems, but no longer writes them.

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.

Mary Fuller is Head of the Literature section. She teaches poetry in classes from the introductory to advanced levels, and her scholarship focuses on the unpoetic records of early modern exploration and travel.

Bronwen Heuer has been a member of the IS&T staff at MIT since 1997. Prior to MIT she was in Computing Services at SUNY Stony Brook and while there completed her dissertation in Hispanic Languages and Literatures, titled *The Discourse of the Ruffian in Quevedo’s Jácaras*.

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*.

Noel Jackson teaches literature at MIT. He is the author of a book and several essays on British Romantic literature and culture.

Rosa Martinez is not a poet though curated the Holloway Series in Poetry while completing her Ph.D. work at UC Berkeley. She is currently a SHASS Postdoctoral Fellow in Literature and began participating in Pleasures of Poetry last year.

Kevin McLellan a former administrative staffer in the Literature Section who now holds the same position in Global Studies and Languages, is the author of *Tributary* (Barrow Street) and the chapbook *Round Trip* (Seven Kitchens), a collaborative series with numerous women poets. The chapbook *Shoes on a wire* (Split Oak Press) and the book arts project [box] (Small Po[r]tions) are both forthcoming. He won the 2015 Third Coast Poetry Prize, and his poems appear widely.
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.

Daniel Evans Pritchard works in SHASS communications and development. A poet, translator, and critic, Daniel is the founding editor of The Critical Flame (criticalflame.org), a journal of literature and culture.

Stephen Tapscott teaches literature at MIT and congratulates David Thorburn on the happy anniversary of the Pleasures of Poetry sequence.

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 an MFA in creative writing. Her work has been published in Southword, Poetry International, Census 3, and Web del Sol.