



YEAR TWO OF
SATURDAY
POEMS



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3 August 2019

Another Birth

The whole of my being is a dark verse of Scripture
which in its repeated recitations will take you away
to the dawn of eternal buddings and bloomings.

In this verse I sighed for you, sighed,
ah, in reciting this verse I grafted you
to tree and water and fire.

Perhaps life is a long avenue
which a woman crosses each day
with a basket. Perhaps life is

a rope with which a man
hangs himself from a tree,
perhaps life is a child coming home from school.

Perhaps life is the lighting of a cigarette
in the languorous interval between
two intimate embraces in bed,

or the absent-minded passing of a passer-by
who raises his hat and with a meaningless smile
wishes another passer-by good morning.

Perhaps life is that moment, enclosed
within itself, when my gaze is laid waste
within the black center of your eye,

and in this feeling that I will compound
with attaining to the moon,
with grasping the night's obscurity.

In a room the size of loneliness, my heart,
the size of a passionate love, regards
the simple subterfuges of its own good fortune:

the beautiful fading of flowers in their vase,
the sapling you planted in our garden,
and the singing of canaries whose song
is the size of a window.

Oh, my lot is this, my lot
is this: my lot is a sky
taken from me by a descending curtain, my lot

is descending an abandoned stairway
and being united with something down there
in the decay, in the exile. My lot

is strolling grief-stricken through the garden
of memories and perishing in the sorrow
of the voice that says to me,

"I love your hands!"

I plant my hands in the garden; I will become
green and lush, I know,
I know, I know . . .

And the swallows will lay their eggs
in the hollows of my ink-stained fingers.

From each ear I hang an earring
made from a twinned red cherry,
and attach dahlia-petals to my fingernails.

There is an alleyway where the boys
that adored me, with their tousled hair
and slender necks and skinny legs,

still think of a young girl's innocent smile,
that smile which the wind one night
bore away.

There is an alleyway which my heart
has stolen from the streets of my childhood.

The journey of a solid body along the line of time,
and, through a solid body, impregnating
the dry and lifeless line of time -
a body become aware
of the image of a mirror returning from a party.

And it is in this way
that someone dies
and someone stays behind.

No fisherman will ever catch a pearl
in some meager stream
that drains out into a ditch.

Me, I know
a little grief-stricken fairy who dwells in the ocean
and plays her heart through a wooden flute,
softly, softly,

a grief-stricken fairy who dies
at night through a kiss and in the morning
will come into the world

through a kiss.

— Forugh Farrokhzad (1934-1967)

Translation from the Farsi
By Neal Koga



10 August 2019

The Tent

When did hordes of sentences start beginning with So?
As if everything were always pending,
leaning on what came before.
What can you expect?
Loneliness everywhere, entertained or kept in storage.
So you felt anxious to be alone.
Easier to hear, explore a city, room,
mound of hours, no one walking beside you.
Talking to self endlessly, but mostly listening.
This would not be strange.
It would be the tent you slept in.

Waking calmly inside whatever
you had to do would be freedom.
It would be your country.
The men in front of me had whole acres
in their eyes. I could feel them cross, recross each day.
Memory, stitched. History, soothed.
What we do or might prefer to do. Have done.
How we got here. Telling ourselves a story
till it's compact enough to bear.
Passing the walls, wearing the sky,
the slight bow and rising of trees.
Everything ceaselessly holding us close.
So we are accompanied.

Never cast out without a line of language to reel us back.
That is what happened, how I got here.
So maybe. One way anyway.
A story was sewn, seed sown,
this was what patriotism meant to me—
to be at home inside my own head long enough
to accept its infinite freedom
and move forward anywhere, to mysteries coming.
Even at night in a desert, temperatures plummet,
billowing tent flaps murmur to one other.

— Naomi Shihab Nye



17 August 2019

COMPLETION

Seen from afterward the time appears to have been
all of a piece which of course it was but how seldom
it seemed that way when it was still happening and was
the air through which I saw it as I went on thinking
of somewhere else in some other time whether gone
or never to arrive and so it was divided
however long I was living it and I was where
it kept coming together and where it kept moving apart
while home was a knowledge that did not suit every occasion
but remained familiar and foreign as the entitled days
and what I know better than to expect followed me
into the garden and I would stand with friends among
the summer oaks and be a city in a different
age and the dread news arrived on the morning when the
plum trees
opened into silent flower and I could not let go
of what I longed to be gone from and it would be that way
without end I thought unfinished and divided

by nature and then a voice would call from the field
in the evening or the fox would bark in the cold night
and that instant with each of its stars just where it was
in its unreturning course would appear even then
entire and itself the way it all looks from afterward

— W.S. Merwin (1927-2019)



24 August 2019

For Absence

May you know that absence is alive within hidden presence, that nothing is ever lost or forgotten.

May the absences in your life grow full of eternal echo.

May you sense around you the secret Elsewhere where the presences that have left you dwell.

May you be generous in your embrace of loss.

May the sore well of grief turn into a seamless flow of presence.

May your compassion reach out to the ones we never hear from.

May you have the courage to speak for the excluded ones.

May you become the gracious and passionate subject of your own life.

May you not disrespect your mystery through brittle words or false belonging.

May you be embraced by God in whom dawn and twilight are one.

May your longing inhabit its dreams within the Great Belonging.

— John O'Donohue (1956-2008)



31 August 2019

With Great Difficulty

With great difficulty, advancing by millimeters
each year,
I carve a road out of the rock.
For millennia my teeth have wasted and my
nails broken
to get there, to the other side,
to the light and the open air.
And now that my hands bleed and my teeth
tremble,
unsure, in a cavity cracked by thirst and dust,
I pause and contemplate my work:
I have spent the second part of my life
breaking the stones, drilling the walls, smashing
the doors,
removing obstacles I placed between the
light and myself
in the first part of my life.

— Octavio Paz (1914-1998)
(from collection *Eagle or Sun?*)

7 September 2019

A Litany of Survival

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours;

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads
learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

— Audre Lorde (1934-1992)



14 September 2019

The Swan

This labouring of ours with all that remains undone,
as if still bound to it,
is like the lumbering gait of the swan.

And then our dying—releasing ourselves
from the very ground on which we stood—
is like the way he hesitantly lowers himself

into the water. It gently receives him,
and, gladly yielding, flows back beneath him,
as wave follows wave,
while he, now wholly serene and sure,
with regal composure,
allows himself to glide.

— Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)



21 September 2019

To Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

— John Keats (1795-1821)

28 September 2019



On Friendship

And a youth said, Speak to us of Friendship.

And he answered, saying:

Your friend is your needs answered.

He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving.

And he is your board and your fireside.

For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace.

When your friend speaks his mind you fear not the “nay” in your own mind,
nor do you withhold the “ay.”

And when he is silent your heart ceases not to listen to his heart;
For without words, in friendship, all thoughts, all desires,
all expectations are born and shared with joy that is unclaimed.

When you part from your friend, you grieve not;
For that which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence,
as the mountain to the climber is clearer from the plain.

And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit.
For love that seeks aught but the disclosure of its own mystery is not
love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught.

And let your best be for your friend.

If he must know the ebb of your tide, let him know its flood also.

For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours to kill?
Seek him always with hours to live.

For it is his to fill your need but not your emptiness.

And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter,
and sharing of pleasures.

For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.

— Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)



5 October 2019

Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this is if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

— W.H. Davies (1871-1940)



12 October 2019

The Storm

In the country, the trees bend
Under the weight of the rain
That is falling in huge drops, under the name cheater,
For it brings a second night.
The sky clears, illuminating the earth for a second,
And then frightens the sleeping birds
With a great clap of thunder, and like bitter tears
The drops of rain become noisily mixed with those already fallen.
Nature, frightened, hides under the rustling leaves,
The flowers close under this brutal dew
And the soaked earth boasts of bearing this squall alone.
The birds, flapping their wings, lift themselves up
And murmur softly, "The Storm."

On the sea, the holy anger becomes rage,
The waves beat furiously,
Sharing the sky's fury.
The gloomy wind blows and beats the sails with a clamor,
While the ocean, in a supreme effort,
Hesitating and becoming one great wave,
A new voice conjuring,
In its sad and plaintive timbre,
A new force among the other cries,

And while the terrified seabirds seek a hiding place
In the depths of the few rocks along the coast,
The seamen in their crumbling boats
Shake their heads, saying, "Here is The Storm."

And God contemplates His work,
A smile appearing in his white beard,
Seeing the fear,
In his black columns, becoming white,
And while the weather continues shuddering,
God says to Himself softly,
"Poor Man! He cannot see
Anything in my greatness.
Blind, undisciplined! Poor Man!

It's a storm!"

— Anaïs Nin (1903-1977)

19 October 2019

Water Lily

My whole life is mine, but whoever says so
will deprive me, for it is infinite.
The ripple of water, the shade of the sky
are mine; it is still the same, my life.

No desire opens me: I am full,
I never close myself with refusal-
in the rhythm of my daily soul
I do not desire-I am moved;

by being moved I exert my empire,
making the dreams of night real:
into my body at the bottom of the water
I attract the beyonds of mirrors...

— Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)





26 October 2019

Postcards from God 1

Yes, I do feel like a visitor,
a tourist in this world
that I once made.
I rarely talk,
except to ask the way,
distrusting my interpreters,
tired out by the babble
of what they do not say.
I walk around through battered streets,
distinctly lost,
looking for landmarks
from another, promised past.

Here, in this strange place,
in a disjointed time,
I am nothing but a space
that sometimes has to fill.
Images invade me.
Picture postcards overlap my empty face
demanding to be stamped and sent.

‘Dear . . .’
Who am I speaking to?
I think I may have misplaced the address,
but still, I feel the need
to write to you;
not so much for your sake
as for mine,

to raise these barricades
against my fear:
Postcards from god.
Proof that I was here.

— Imtiaz Dharkar

2 November 2019



HOW TO BE A POET
(to remind myself)

Make a place to sit down.
Sit down.
Be quiet.
You must depend upon
affection, reading, knowledge,
skill — more of each
than you have — inspiration,
work, growing older, patience,
for patience joins time
to eternity. Any readers
who like your poems,
doubt their judgment.

Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.
Communicate slowly. Live
a three-dimensional life;
stay away from screens.
Stay away from anything
that obscures the place it is in.
There are no unsacred places;
there are only sacred places
and desecrated places.

Accept what comes from silence.
Make the best you can of it.
Of the little words that come
out of the silence, like prayers
prayed back to the one who prays,
make a poem that does not disturb
the silence from which it came.

— Wendell Berry



9 November 2019

DREAMS

Trying to recall the plot
And characters we dreamed,
 What life was like
Before the morning came,
We are seldom satisfied,
 And even then
There is no way of knowing
If what we know is true.
 Something nameless
Hums us into sleep,
Withdraws, and leaves us in
 A place that seems
Always vaguely familiar.
Perhaps it is because
 We take the props
And fixtures of our days
With us into the dark,
 Assuring ourselves
We are still alive. And yet

Nothing here is certain;
 Landscapes merge
With one another, houses
Are never where they should be,
 Doors and windows
Sometimes open out
To other doors and windows,
 Even the person
Who seems most like ourselves
Cannot be counted on,
 For there have been
Too many times when he,
Like everything else, has done
 The unexpected.
And as the night wears on,
The dim allegory of ourselves
 Unfolds, and we
Feel dreamed by someone else,

A sleeping counterpart,
 Who gathers in
The darkness of his person
Shades of the real world.
 Nothing is clear;
We are not ever sure
If the life we live there
 Belongs to us.
Each night it is the same;
Just when we're on the verge
 Of catching on,
A sense of our remoteness
Closes in, and the world
 So lately seen
Gradually fades from sight.
We wake to find the sleeper
 Is ourselves
And the dreamt-of is someone who did
Something we can't quite put
 Our finger on,
But which involved a life
We are always, we feel,
 About to discover.

— Mark Strand (1934-2014)



16 November 2019

All the Hemispheres

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out

Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadows and shores and hills.

Open up to the Roof.
Make a new water-mark on your excitement
And love.

Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.

Change rooms in your mind for a day.

All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.

Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms
As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.

All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting

While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.

— **Hafez (c. 1320-1389)**
(Translated by Daniel Ladinsky)

23 November 2019

On the Term of Exile

No need to drive a nail into the wall
To hang your hat on;
When you come in, just drop it on the chair
No guest has sat on.

Don't worry about watering the flowers—
In fact, don't plant them.
You will have gone back home before they bloom,
And who will want them?

If mastering the language is too hard,
Only be patient;
The telegram imploring your return
Won't need translation.

Remember, when the ceiling sheds itself
In flakes of plaster,
The wall that keeps you out is crumbling too,
As fast or faster.

— **Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)**

(Translated from the German by Adam Kirsch)



30 November 2019

Perhaps the World Ends Here

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Joy Harjo

7 December 2019

A Last Look

Even the words are going somewhere urban
where they hope to find friends
waiting for them

some of the friends will think of trees as pleasant in a minor
way
much alike after all
to us

some of the friends will never be aware of a single tree
they will live in a world without a leaf
where the rain is misfortune

— W.S. Merwin (1927-2019)



14 December 2019

The Walrus and the Carpenter

"The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might:
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright —
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily,
Because she thought the sun
Had got no business to be there
After the day was done —
"It's very rude of him," she said,
"To come and spoil the fun."

The sea was wet as wet could be,
The sands were dry as dry.
You could not see a cloud, because
No cloud was in the sky:
No birds were flying overhead —
There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Were walking close at hand;
They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand:
If this were only cleared away,'
They said, it *would* be grand!"

If seven maids with seven mops
Swept it for half a year,
Do you suppose,' the Walrus said,
That they could get it clear?'
I doubt it,' said the Carpenter,
And shed a bitter tear.

O Oysters, come and walk with us!"
The Walrus did beseech.
A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach:
We cannot do with more than four,
To give a hand to each.!"

The eldest Oyster looked at him,
But never a word he said:
The eldest Oyster winked his eye,
And shook his heavy head —
Meaning to say he did not choose
To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up,
All eager for the treat:
Their coats were brushed, their faces washed,
Their shoes were clean and neat —
And this was odd, because, you know,
They hadn't any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them,
And yet another four;
And thick and fast they came at last,
And more, and more, and more —
All hopping through the frothy waves,
And scrambling to the shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter
Walked on a mile or so,
And then they rested on a rock
Conveniently low:
And all the little Oysters stood
And waited in a row.

The time has come,' the Walrus said,
To talk of many things:
Of shoes — and ships — and sealing-wax —
Of cabbages — and kings —
And why the sea is boiling hot —
And whether pigs have wings.'

But wait a bit,' the Oysters cried,
Before we have our chat;
For some of us are out of breath,
And all of us are fat!
No hurry!' said the Carpenter.
They thanked him much for that.

A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said,
Is what we chiefly need:
Pepper and vinegar besides
Are very good indeed —
Now if you're ready, Oysters dear,
We can begin to feed.'

But not on us!' the Oysters cried,
Turning a little blue.
After such kindness, that would be
A dismal thing to do!
The night is fine,' the Walrus said.
Do you admire the view?

It was so kind of you to come!
And you are very nice!
The Carpenter said nothing but
Cut us another slice:
I wish you were not quite so deaf —
I've had to ask you twice!

It seems a shame,' the Walrus said,
To play them such a trick,
After we've brought them out so far,
And made them trot so quick!
The Carpenter said nothing but
The butter's spread too thick!

I weep for you,' the Walrus said:
I deeply sympathize.'
With sobs and tears he sorted out
Those of the largest size,
Holding his pocket-handkerchief
Before his streaming eyes.

O Oysters,' said the Carpenter,
You've had a pleasant run!
Shall we be trotting home again?
But answer came there none —
And this was scarcely odd, because
They'd eaten every one."

— Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)



21 December 2019

For Loneliness

When the light lessens,
Causing colors to lose their courage,
And your eyes fix on the empty distance
That can open on either side
Of the surest line
To make all that is
Familiar and near
Seem suddenly foreign,
When the music of talk
Breaks apart into noise
And you hear your heart louden
While the voices around you
Slow down to leaden echos
Turning silence
Into something stony and cold,
When the old ghosts come back
To feed on everywhere you felt sure,
Do not strengthen their hunger
By choosing fear;
Rather, decide to call on your heart
That it may grow clear and free
To welcome home your emptiness
That it may cleanse you
Like the clearest air
You could ever breathe.

Allow your loneliness time
To dissolve the shell of dross
That had closed around you;
Choose in this severe silence
To hear the one true voice
Your rushed life fears;
Cradle yourself like a child
Learning to trust what emerges,
So that gradually
You may come to know
That deep in that black hole
You will find the blue flower
That holds the mystical light
Which will illuminate in you
The glimmer of springtime.

— John O'Donohue (1956-2008)



28 December 2019

The Year

What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That's not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our brides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of the year.

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919)

2020



4 January 2020

Where the Sidewalk Ends

There is a place where the sidewalk ends
And before the street begins,
And there the grass grows soft and white,
And there the sun burns crimson bright,
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black
And the dark street winds and bends.
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know
The place where the sidewalk ends.

— Shel Silverstein (1930-1999)



11 January 2020

Habit

Last night when my work was done,
And my estranged hands
Were becoming mutually interested
In such forgotten things as pulses,
I looked out of a window
Into a glittering night sky.

And instantly
I began to feather-stitch a ring around the moon.

— Hazel Hall (1886 - 1924)



18 January 2020

Water

Everything on the earth bristled, the bramble
pricked and the green thread
nibbled away, the petal fell, falling
until the only flower was the falling itself.
Water is another matter,
has no direction but its own bright grace,
runs through all imaginable colors,
takes limpid lessons
from stone,
and in those functionings plays out
the unrealized ambitions of the foam.

— Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)



25 January 2020

What Kind of Times Are These

There's a place between two stands of trees where the grass grows uphill
and the old revolutionary road breaks off into shadows
near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted
who disappeared into those shadows.

I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of dread, but don't be
fooled
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere else but here,
our country moving closer to its own truth and dread,
its own ways of making people disappear.

I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh of the woods
meeting the unmarked strip of light —
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:
I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear.

And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you
anything? Because you still listen, because in times like these
to have you listen at all, it's necessary
to talk about trees.

— Adrienne Rich (1929-2012)



1 February 2020

Optimism

More and more I have come to admire resilience.
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,
mitochondria, figs — all this resinous, unretractable earth.

— Jane Hirshfield

8 February 2020

Action and Non-Action

The non-action of the wise man is not inaction.
It is not studied. It is not shaken by anything.
The sage is quiet because he is not moved,
Not because he *wills* to be quiet.
Still water is like glass.
You can look in it and see the bristles on your chin.
It is a perfect level;
A carpenter could use it.
If water is so clear, so level,
How much more the spirit of man?
The heart of the wise man is tranquil.
It is the mirror of heaven and earth
The glass of everything.
Emptiness, stillness, tranquillity, tastelessness,
Silence, non-action: this is the level of heaven and earth.
This is perfect Tao. Wise men find here
Their resting place.
Resting, they are empty.

From emptiness comes the unconditioned.
From this, the conditioned, the individual things.
So from the sage's emptiness, stillness arises:
From stillness, action. From action, attainment.
From their stillness comes their non-action, which is also action
And is, therefore, their attainment.
For stillness is joy. Joy is free from care
Fruitful in long years.
Joy does all things without concern:
For emptiness, stillness, tranquillity, tastelessness,
Silence, and non-action
Are the root of all things.

— **Chuang Tzu (369-286BC)**

Translated by Thomas Merton (1915-1968)



15 February 2020

Sometimes

Sometimes, when a bird calls,
Or a wind moves through the brush,
Or a dog barks in a distant farmyard,
I must listen a long time, and hush.

My soul flies back to where,
Before a thousand forgotten years begin,
The bird and the waving wind
Were like me, and were my kin.

My soul becomes a tree, an animal,
A cloud woven across the sky.
Changed and unfamiliar it turns back,
And questions me. How shall I reply?

— Herman Hesse (1877-1962)

The original German

Manchmal

Manchmal, wenn ein Vogel ruft,
oder ein Wind geht in den Zweigen
oder ein Hund bellt im fernsten Gehöft,
dann muß ich lange lauschen und schweigen.

Meine Seele flieht zurück,
bis wo vor tausend vergessenen Jahren
der Vogel und der wehende Wind
mir ähnlich und meine Brüder waren.

Meine Seele wird Baum
und ein Tier und ein Wolkenweben.
Verwandelt und fremd kehrt sie zurück
Und fragt mich. Wie soll ich Antwort geben?

— Herman Hesse (1877-1962)



22 February 2020

The Weighing

The heart's reasons
seen clearly,
even the hardest
will carry
its whip-marks and sadness
and must be forgiven.

As the drought-starved
eland forgives
the drought-starved lion
who finally takes her,
enters willingly then
the life she cannot refuse,
and is lion, is fed,
and does not remember the other.

So few grains of happiness
measured against all the dark
and still the scales balance.

The world asks of us
only the strength we have and we give it.
Then it asks more, and we give it.

— Jane Hirshfield



29 February 2020

Ode I. 11

Leucon, no one's allowed to know his fate,
Not you, not me: don't ask, don't hunt for answers
In tea leaves or palms. Be patient with whatever comes.
This could be our last winter, it could be many
More, pounding the Tuscan Sea on these rocks:
Do what you must, be wise, cut your vines
And forget about hope. Time goes running, even
As we talk. Take the present, the future's no one's affair.

— Horace (65BC-8BC)
(translated by Burton Raffel)

7 March 2020

Poem for South African Women

Our own shadows disappear as the feet of thousands
by the tens of thousands pound the fallow land
into new dust that
rising like a marvelous pollen will be
fertile
even as the first woman whispering
imagination to the trees around her made
for righteous fruit
from such deliberate defense of life
as no other still
will claim inferior to any other safety
in the world

The whispers too they
intimate to the inmost ear of every spirit
now aroused they
carousing in ferocious affirmation
of all peaceable and loving amplitude
sound a certainly unbounded heat
from a baptismal smoke where yes
there will be fire

And the babies cease alarm as mothers
raising arms
and heart high as the stars so far unseen
nevertheless hurl into the universe
a moving force
irreversible as light years
traveling to the open
eye

And who will join this standing up
and the ones who stood without sweet company
will sing and sing
back into the mountains and
if necessary
even under the sea

we are the ones we have been waiting for

— June Jordan (1936-2002)

14 March 2020

In Passing

How swiftly the strained honey
of afternoon light
flows into darkness
and the closed bud shrugs off
its special mystery
in order to break into blossom:
as if what exists, exists
so that it can be lost
and become precious.

—Lisel Mueller (1924-2020)



21 March 2020

Immortality

In Sleeping Beauty's castle
the clock strikes one hundred years
and the girl in the tower returns to the world.
So do the servants in the kitchen,
who don't even rub their eyes.
The cook's right hand, lifted
an exact century ago,
completes its downward arc
to the kitchen boy's left ear;
the boy's tensed vocal cords
finally let go
the trapped, enduring whimper,
and the fly, arrested mid-plunge
above the strawberry pie,
fulfils its abiding mission
and dives into the sweet, red glaze.

As a child I had a book
with a picture of that scene.
I was too young to notice
how fear persists, and how
the anger that causes fear persists,
that its trajectory can't be changed
or broken, only interrupted.
My attention was on the fly;
that this slight body
with its transparent wings
and lifespan of one human day
still craved its particular share
of sweetness, a century later.

— Lisel Mueller (1924-2020)



28 March 2020

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

— Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

4 April 2020

Spring Morning

O day—if I could cup my hands and drink of you,
And make this shining wonder be
A part of me!
O day! O day!
You lift and sway your colors on the sky
Till I am crushed with beauty. Why is there
More of reeling sunlit air
Than I can breathe? Why is there sound
In silence? Why is a singing wound
About each hour?
And perfume when there is no flower?
O day! O Day! How may I press
Nearer to loveliness?

— Marion Strobel (1895-1967)



11 April 2020

Hope

Hope is with you when you believe
The earth is not a dream but living flesh,
That sight, touch, and hearing do not lie,
That all things you have ever seen here
Are like a garden looked at from a gate.

You cannot enter. But you're sure it's there.
Could we but look more clearly and wisely
We might discover somewhere in the garden
A strange new flower and an unnamed star.

Some people say we should not trust our eyes,
That there is nothing, just a seeming,
These are the ones who have no hope.
They think that the moment we turn away,
The world, behind our backs, ceases to exist,
As if snatched up by the hands of thieves.

— Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004)



18 April 2020

The Everyday Enchantment of Music

A rough sound was polished until it became a smoother sound, which was polished until it became music. Then the music was polished until it became the memory of a night in Venice when tears of the sea fell from the Bridge of Sighs, which in turn was polished until it ceased to be and in its place stood the empty home of a heart in trouble. Then suddenly there was sun and the music came back and traffic was moving and off in the distance, at the edge of the city, a long line of clouds appeared, and there was thunder, which, however menacing, would become music, and the memory of what happened after Venice would begin, and what happened after the home of the troubled heart broke in two would also begin.

— Mark Strand (1934-2004)

25 April 2020

blessing the boats

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

— Lucille Clifton (1936-2010)



2 May 2020

WAIT

Wait, for now.
Distrust everything, if you have to.
But trust the hours. Haven't they
carried you everywhere, up to now?
Personal events will become interesting again.
Hair will become interesting.
Pain will become interesting.
Buds that open out of season will become lovely again.
Second-hand gloves will become lovely again,
their memories are what give them
the need for other hands. And the desolation
of lovers is the same: that enormous emptiness
carved out of such tiny beings as we are
asks to be filled; the need
for the new love is faithfulness to the old.

Wait.
Don't go too early.
You're tired. But everyone's tired.
But no one is tired enough.
Only wait a while and listen.
Music of hair,
Music of pain,
music of looms weaving all our loves again.
Be there to hear it, it will be the only time,
most of all to hear,
the flute of your whole existence,
rehearsed by the sorrows, play itself into total exhaustion.

– Galway Kinnell (1927–2014)



9 May 2020

Time Knows Time

Time flows
Like the perennial river
Time rides the crest
Of a wave in the sea
Time's space
Its fourth dimension
Time's elastic
Keeps on bouncing
Time's a sponge
Absorbs all spills
Time sleeps
Time wakes up
Time walks
Time runs
Time races
Time stands still
Time flies fast
Time has past
Time has future
Time never stays in the present
Time creeps
Time ticks
Time tricks
Sometimes good
Sometimes bad
Time's night
Time's day
Time's dark

Time's bright
Time's heavy
Time's light
Time's easy
Time's hard
Time blinks like eye
Time beats like heart
Time makes
Yoktosecond large
Time turns
Exasecond too small
Time lets one fall
Time makes one rise
Time's magic
Time brings one to life
From nowhere
Time makes one vanish
In an instant
Time's all
That we know
Time's everything else
That we don't.

– Tirupathi Chandrupatla

16 May 2020

Shaking Hands

27ú lá Meitheamh, 2012

Because what's the alternative?
Because of courage.
Because of loved ones lost.
Because no more.
Because it's a small thing; shaking hands; it happens every day.
Because I heard of one man whose hands haven't stopped shaking since a market day in Omagh.
Because it takes a second to say hate, but it takes longer, much longer, to be a great leader.
Much, much longer.

Because shared space without human touching doesn't amount to much.
Because it's easier to speak to your own than to hold the hand of someone whose side has been previously described, proscribed, denied.
Because it is tough.
Because it is tough.
Because it is meant to be tough, and this is the stuff of memory, the stuff of hope, the stuff of gesture, and meaning and leading.
Because it has taken so, so long.
Because it has taken land and money and languages and barrels and barrels of blood.

Because lives have been lost.
Because lives have been taken.

Because to be bereaved is to be troubled by grief.
Because more than two troubled peoples live here.
Because I know a woman whose hand hasn't been shaken since she was a man.
Because shaking a hand is only a part of the start.
Because I know a woman whose touch calmed a man whose heart was breaking.
Because privilege is not to be taken lightly.

Because this just might be good.
Because who said that this would be easy?
Because some people love what you stand for, and for some, if *you* can, *they* can.
Because solidarity means a common hand.
Because a hand is only a hand; so hang onto it.

So join your much discussed hands.
We need this; for one small second.
So touch.
So lead.

— Pádraig Ó Tuama



23 May 2020

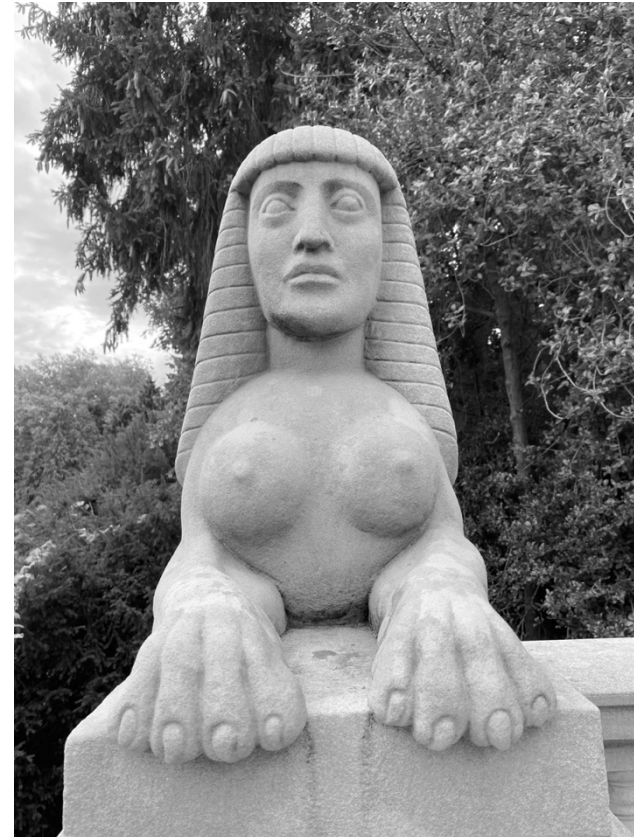
Three Dimensions

Several small houses
Discreetly separated by foliage
And the night—
Maintaining their several identities
By light

Which fills the inside of each—
Not as masses they stand
But as walls
Enclosing and excluding
Like shawls

About little old women—
What mystery hides within
What curiosity lurks without
One the other
Knows nothing about.

— Man Ray (1890-1976)



30 May 2020

This is the time to be slow

This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.

Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.

If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.

— John O'Donohue (1956-2008)

(from *Bless the Space Between Us* | *Benedictus*)

6 June 2020

“A Song for Many Movements”

Nobody wants to die on the way
and caught between ghosts of whiteness
and the real water
none of us wanted to leave
our bones
on the way to salvation
three planets to the left
a century of light years ago
our spices are separate and particular
but our skins sing in complimentary keys
at a quarter to eight mean time
we were telling the same stories
over and over and over.

Broken down gods survive
in the crevasses and mudpots
of every beleaguered city
where it is obvious
there are too many bodies
to cart to the ovens
or gallows
and our uses have become

more important than our silence
after the fall
too many empty cases
of blood to bury or burn
there will be no body left
to listen
and our labor
has become more important
than our silence

Our labor has become
more important than our silence.

— Audre Lorde (1934-1992)



13 June 2020

“Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower”

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

— Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)
(Sonnets to Orpheus II, 29)

20 June 2020

Book of Genesis

Suppose there was a book full only of the word,
let – from whose clipped sound all things began: fir
and firmament, feather, the first whale — and suppose
we could scroll through its pages every day
to find and pronounce a *Let* meant only for us —
we would stumble through the streets with open books,
eyes crossed from too much reading; we would speak
in auto-rhyme, the world would echo itself — and still
we'd continue in rounds, saying *let* and *let* and *let*
until even silent dreams had been allowed.

— Kei Miller





27 June 2020

Now I become myself

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
"Hurry, you will be dead before—"
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted by love.

Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I live
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

— May Sarton (1912-1995)

4 July 2020

For Malcolm X

All you violated ones with gentle hearts;
You violent dreamers whose cries shout heartbreak;
Whose voices echo clamors of our cool capers,
And whose black faces have hollowed pits for eyes.
All you gambling sons and hooked children and bowery bums
Hating white devils and black bourgeoisie,
Thumbing your noses at your burning red suns,
Gather round this coffin and mourn your dying swan.

Snow-white moslem head-dress around a dead black face!
Beautiful were your sand-papering words against our skins!
Our blood and water pour from your flowing wounds.
You have cut open our breasts and dug scalpels in our brains.
When and Where will another come to take your holy place?
Old man mumbling in his dotage, crying child, unborn?

— Margaret Walker (1915-1998)



11 July 2020

An African Elegy

We are the miracles that God made
To taste the bitter fruit of Time.
We are precious.
And one day our suffering
Will turn into the wonders of the earth.

There are things that burn me now
Which turn golden when I am happy.
Do you see the mystery of our pain?
That we bear poverty
And are able to sing and dream sweet things

And that we never curse the air when it is warm
Or the fruit when it tastes so good
Or the lights that bounce gently on the waters?
We bless things even in our pain.
We bless them in silence.

That is why our music is so sweet.
It makes the air remember.
There are secret miracles at work
That only Time will bring forth.
I too have heard the dead singing.

And they tell me that
This life is good
They tell me to live it gently
With fire, and always with hope.
There is wonder here

And there is surprise
In everything the unseen moves.
The ocean is full of songs.
The sky is not an enemy.
Destiny is our friend.

— Ben Okri



18 July 2020

My Favourite Things

Rain drops on roses and whiskers on kittens,
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens,
Brown paper packages tied up with strings...
These are a few of my favorite things.

Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudles,
Door bells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles,
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings...
These are a few of my favorite things.

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes,
Silver white winters that melt into springs
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the dog bites
When the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad...
I simply remember my favorite things
And then I don't feel so bad
Huuuu

...

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes,
Silver white winters that melt into springs
These are a few of my favorite things.
When the dog bites
When the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad...
I simply remember my favorite things
And then I don't feel so bad
So bad
So bad

— Oscar Hammerstein II / Richard Rodgers



25 July 2020

Ursa Major

Slung between the homely poplars at the end
of the familiar avenue, the Great
Bear in its lighted hammock swings,
like a neglected gate that neither bars admission nor invites,
hangs on the sagging pole its seven-pointed shape.

Drawn with the precision of an unknown problem
solved in the topmost classroom of the empty sky,
it demonstrates upon the inky blackboard of the night's
immeasurable finity the focal point of light.
For though the pointers seem to indicate the pole,
each star looks through us into outer space
from where the sun that burns behind and past us
animates immediately each barren, crystal face
with ravaged brilliance, that our eyes
must lean out into time to catch, and die in seeing.

— James Falconer Kirkup (1918–2009)



Stay safe! -
Stay amazed!