Wendell Berry

How to Be a Poet
(to remind myself)

i

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.

ii

Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.
Communicate slowly. Live

a three-dimensioned 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.

iii

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.

Sabbath Poem V, 1980

Six days of work are spent
To make a Sunday quiet
That Sabbath may return.
It comes in unconcern;

We cannot earn or buy it.
Suppose rest is not sent
Or comes and goes unknown,
The light, unseen, unshown.
Suppose the day begins
In wrath at circumstance,
Or anger at one's friends
In vain self-innocence
False to the very light,
Breaking the sun in half,
Or anger at oneself
Whose controverting will
Would have the sun stand still.
The world is lost in loss
Of patience; the old curse
Returns, and is made worse
As newly justified.
In hopeless fret and fuss,
In rage at worldly plight
Creation is defied,
All order is unpropped,
All light and singing stopped.

G.K. Chesterton

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked

And figs grew upon thorn,

Some moment when the moon was blood

Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry

And ears like errant wings,

The devil's walking parody

On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,

Of ancient crooked will;

Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,

I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;

One far fierce hour and sweet:

There was a shout about my ears,

And palms before my feet.

The Convert

After one moment when I bowed my head

And the whole world turned over and came upright,

And I came out where the old road shone white.

I walked the ways and heard what all men said,

Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,

Being not unlovable but strange and light;

Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite

But softly, as men smile about the dead

The sages have a hundred maps to give

That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,

They rattle reason out through many a sieve

That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:

And all these things are less than dust to me

Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

For a War Memorial

(SUGGESTED INSCRIPTION PROBABLY NOT SUGGESTED BY THE COMMITTEE)

The hucksters haggle in the mart

The cars and carts go by;

Senates and schools go droning on;

For dead things cannot die.

A storm stooped on the place of tombs

With bolts to blast and rive;

But these be names of many men

The lightning found alive.

If usurers rule and rights decay

And visions view once more

Great Carthage like a golden shell

Gape hollow on the shore,

Still to the last of crumbling time

Upon this stone be read

How many men of England died

To prove they were not dead.

Excerpt from *The Ballad of the White Horse*

He took the great harp wearily,

Even Guthrum of the Danes,

With wide eyes bright as the one long day

On the long polar plains.

For he sang of a wheel returning,

And the mire trod back to mire,

And how red hells and golden heavens

Are castles in the fire.

"It is good to sit where the good tales go,

To sit as our fathers sat;

But the hour shall come after his youth,

When a man shall know not tales but truth,

And his heart fail thereat.

"When he shall read what is written

So plain in clouds and clods,

When he shall hunger without hope

Even for evil gods.

"For this is a heavy matter,

And the truth is cold to tell;

Do we not know, have we not heard,

The soul is like a lost bird,

The body a broken shell.

"And a man hopes, being ignorant,

Till in white woods apart

He finds at last the lost bird dead:

And a man may still lift up his head

But never more his heart.

"There comes no noise but weeping

Out of the ancient sky,

And a tear is in the tiniest flower

Because the gods must die.

"The little brooks are very sweet,

Like a girl's ribbons curled,

But the great sea is bitter

That washes all the world.

"Strong are the Roman roses,

Or the free flowers of the heath,

But every flower, like a flower of the sea,

Smelleth with the salt of death.

"And the heart of the locked battle

Is the happiest place for men;

When shrieking souls as shafts go by

And many have died and all may die;

Though this word be a mystery,

Death is most distant then.

"Death blazes bright above the cup,

And clear above the crown;

But in that dream of battle

We seem to tread it down.

"Wherefore I am a great king,

And waste the world in vain,

Because man hath not other power,

Save that in dealing death for dower,

He may forget it for an hour

To remember it again."

And slowly his hands and thoughtfully

Fell from the lifted lyre,

And the owls moaned from the mighty trees

Till Alfred caught it to his knees

And smote it as in ire.

He heaved the head of the harp on high

And swept the framework barred,

And his stroke had all the rattle and spark

Of horses flying hard.

"When God put man in a garden

He girt him with a sword,

And sent him forth a free knight

That might betray his lord;

"He brake Him and betrayed Him,

And fast and far he fell,

Till you and I may stretch our necks

And burn our beards in hell.

"But though I lie on the floor of the world,

With the seven sins for rods,

I would rather fall with Adam

Than rise with all your gods.

"What have the strong gods given?

Where have the glad gods led?

When Guthrum sits on a hero's throne

And asks if he is dead?

"Sirs, I am but a nameless man,

A rhymester without home,

Yet since I come of the Wessex clay

And carry the cross of Rome,

"I will even answer the mighty earl

That asked of Wessex men

Why they be meek and monkish folk,

And bow to the White Lord's broken yoke;

What sign have we save blood and smoke?

Here is my answer then.

"That on you is fallen the shadow,

And not upon the Name;

That though we scatter and though we fly,

And you hang over us like the sky,

You are more tired of victory,

Than we are tired of shame.

"That though you hunt the Christian man

Like a hare on the hill-side,

The hare has still more heart to run

Than you have heart to ride.

"That though all lances split on you,

All swords be heaved in vain,

We have more lust again to lose

Than you to win again.

"Your lord sits high in the saddle,

A broken-hearted king,

But our king Alfred, lost from fame,

Fallen among foes or bonds of shame,

In I know not what mean trade or name,

Has still some song to sing;

"Our monks go robed in rain and snow,

But the heart of flame therein,

But you go clothed in feasts and flames,

When all is ice within;

"Nor shall all iron dooms make dumb

Men wondering ceaselessly,

If it be not better to fast for joy

Than feast for misery.

"Nor monkish order only

Slides down, as field to fen,

All things achieved and chosen pass,

As the White Horse fades in the grass,

No work of Christian men.

"Ere the sad gods that made your gods

Saw their sad sunrise pass,

The White Horse of the White Horse Vale,

That you have left to darken and fail,

Was cut out of the grass.

"Therefore your end is on you,

Is on you and your kings,

Not for a fire in Ely fen,

Not that your gods are nine or ten,

But because it is only Christian men

Guard even heathen things.

"For our God hath blessed creation,

Calling it good. I know

What spirit with whom you blindly band

Hath blessed destruction with his hand;

Yet by God's death the stars shall stand

And the small apples grow."

And the King, with harp on shoulder,

Stood up and ceased his song;

And the owls moaned from the mighty trees,

And the Danes laughed loud and long.

Billy Collins

Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem

and hold it up to the light

like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem

and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room

and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski

across the surface of a poem

waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do

is tie the poem to a chair with rope

and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose

to find out what it really means.

To My Favorite 17-Year-Old High School Girl

Do you realize that if you had started
building the Parthenon on the day you were born,
you would be all done in only one more year?
Of course, you couldn't have done it alone,
so never mind, you're fine just as you are.
You're loved for just being yourself.

But did you know that at your age Judy Garland
was pulling down $150,000 a picture,
Joan of Arc was leading the French army to victory,
and Blaise Pascal had cleaned up his room?
No wait, I mean he had invented the calculator.

Of course, there will be time for all that later in your life,
after you come out of your room
and begin to blossom, or at least pick up all your socks.

For some reason, I keep remembering that Lady Jane Grey
was Queen of England when she was only fifteen,
but then she was beheaded, so never mind her as a role
model.

A few centuries later, when he was your age,
Franz Schubert was doing the dishes for his family

but that did not keep him from composing two symphonies,
four operas, and two complete Masses as a youngster.

But of course that was in Austria at the height
of romantic lyricism, not here in the suburbs of Cleveland.

Frankly, who cares if Annie Oakley was a crack shot at 15
or if Maria Callas debuted as Tosca at 17?

We think you are special just being you,
playing with your food and staring into space.
By the way, I lied about Schubert doing the dishes,
but that doesn't mean he never helped out around the house.

Bathtub Families

is not just a phrase I made up
though it would have given me pleasure
to have written those words in a notebook
then looked up at the sky wondering what they meant.

No, I saw Bathtub Families in a pharmacy
on the label of a clear plastic package
containing one cow and four calves,
a little family of animals meant to float in your tub.

I hesitated to buy it because I knew
I would then want the entire series of Bathtub Families,
which would leave no room in the tub
for the turtles, the pigs, the seals, the giraffes, and me.

It's enough just to have the words,
which alone make me even more grateful
that I was born in America
and English is my mother tongue.

I was lucky, too, that I waited
for the pharmacist to fill my prescription,
otherwise I might not have wandered
down the aisle with the Bathtub Families.

I think what I am really saying is that language
is better than reality, so it doesn't have
to be bath time for you to enjoy
all the Bathtub Families as they float in the air around your head.

On Turning Ten

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache

or the headaches I get from reading in bad light-
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,

time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I could shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

William Cowper

Light Shining out of Darkness

1

God moves in a mysterious way,

His wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea,

And rides upon the storm.

2

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,

He treasures up his bright designs,

And works his sov'reign will.

3

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,

The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy, and shall break

In blessings on your head.

4

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,

But trust him for his grace;

Behind a frowning providence

He hides a smiling face.

5

His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding ev'ry hour;

The bud may have a bitter taste,

But sweet will be the flow'r.

6

Blind unbelief is sure to err,

And scan his work in vain;

God is his own interpreter,

And he will make it plain.

Sonnet to William Wilberforce, Esq.

Thy country, Wilberforce, with just disdain,
Hears thee, by cruel men and impious, call'd
Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose th' enthrall'd
From exile, public sale, and slav'ry's chain.
Friend of the poor, the wrong'd, the fetter-gall'd,
Fear not lest labour such as thine be vain!
Thou hast achiev'd a part; hast gain'd the ear
Of Britain's senate to thy glorious cause;
Hope smiles, joy springs, and tho' cold caution pause
And weave delay, the better hour is near,
That shall remunerate thy toils severe
By peace for Afric, fenc'd with British laws.
Enjoy what thou hast won, esteem and love
From all the just on earth, and all the blest above!

Emily Dickinson

A narrow Fellow in the Grass (1096)

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides
You may have met him? Did you not

His notice instant is

The Grass divides as with a Comb,
A spotted Shaft is seen,
And then it closes at your Feet
And opens further on

He likes a Boggy Acre
A Floor too cool for Corn
But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled And was gone

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me
I feel for them a transport
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow
Attended or alone
Without a tighter Breathing
And Zero at the Bone.

Because I could not stop for Death (479)

Because I could not stop for Death
He kindly stopped for me
The Carriage held but just Ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess in the Ring
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain
We passed the Setting Sun

Or rather He passed us
The Dews drew quivering and chill
For only Gossamer, my Gown
My Tippet only Tulle

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground
The Roof was scarcely visible
The Cornice in the Ground

Since then ’tis Centuries and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity

John Donne

A Hymn to God the Father

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallow’d in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done;
I fear no more.

Holy Sonnets: Death, be not proud

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness

Since I am coming to that holy room,
        Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
        I tune the instrument here at the door,
        And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
        Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
        That this is my south-west discovery,
    Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;
        For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
        In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
        So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
        The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
        All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,
        Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
By these his thorns, give me his other crown;
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:
"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

Robert Frost

Mowing

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:

Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,

And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Birches

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm

I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile

And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Dana Gioia

The End of the World

"We're going," they said, "to the end of the world."
So they stopped the car where the river curled,
And we scrambled down beneath the bridge
On the gravel track of a narrow ridge.

We tramped for miles on a wooded walk
Where dog-hobble grew on its twisted stalk.
Then we stopped to rest on the pine-needle floor
While two ospreys watched from an oak by the shore.

We came to a bend, where the river grew wide
And green mountains rose on the opposite side.
My guides moved back. I stood alone,
As the current streaked over smooth flat stone.

Shelf by stone shelf the river fell.
The white water goosetailed with eddying swell.
Faster and louder the current dropped
Till it reached a cliff, and the trail stopped.

I stood at the edge where the mist ascended,
My journey done where the world ended.
I looked downstream. There was nothing but sky,
The sound of the water, and the water's reply.

Malcolm Guite

The Singing Bowl

Begin the song exactly where you are,
    Remain within the world of which you're made.
    Call nothing common in the earth or air,

Accept it all and let it be for good.
    Start with the very breath you breathe in now,
    This moment's pulse, this rhythm in your blood
And listen to it, ringing soft and low.
    Stay with the music, words will come in time.
    Slow down your breathing. Keep it deep and slow.
Become an open singing-bowl, whose chime
    Is richness rising out of emptiness,
    And timelessness resounding into time.
And when the heart is full of quietness
    Begin the song exactly where you are.

On being told my poetry was found in a broken photocopier

My poetry is jamming your machine
    It broke the photo-copier, I'm to blame,
    With pictures copied from a world unseen.
My poem is in the works -I'm on the scene
    We free my verse, and I confess my shame,
    My poetry is jamming your machine.
Though you berate me with what might have been,
    You stop to read the poem, just the same,
    And pictures, copied from a world unseen,
Subvert the icons on your mental screen
    And open windows with a whispered name;
    My poetry is jamming your machine.

For chosen words can change the things they mean
And set the once-familiar world aflame
With pictures copied from a world unseen.
The mental props give way, on which you lean
The world you see will never be the same,
My poetry is jamming your machine
With pictures copied from a world unseen.

George Herbert

The Collar

I struck the board, and cried, "No more;

I will abroad!
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.

Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need
Deserves his load."
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, Child!
And I replied My Lord.

Love (III)

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The Glance

When first thy sweet and gracious eye
Vouchsaf'd ev'n in the midst of youth and night

To look upon me, who before did lie
Weltring in sinne;
I felt a sugred strange delight,
Passing all cordials made by any art,
Bedew, embalme, and overrunne my heart,
And take it in.

Since that time many a bitter storm
My soul hath felt, ev'n able to destroy,
Had the malicious and ill-meaning harm
His swing and sway:
But will thy sweet originall joy,
Sprung from thine eye, did work within my soul,
And surging griefs, when they grew bold, controll,
And got the day.

If thy first glance so powerfull be,
A mirth but open'd and seal'd up again;
What wonders shall we feel, when we shall see
Thy full-ey'd love!
When thou shalt look us out of pain,
And one aspect of thine spend in delight
More then a thousand sunnes dispurse in light
In heav'n above.

The Pulley

When God at first made man,

Having a glass of blessings standing by,

“Let us,” said he, “pour on him all we can.

Let the world’s riches, which dispersèd lie,

Contract into a span.”

So strength first made a way;

Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.

When almost all was out, God made a stay,

Perceiving that, alone of all his treasure,

Rest in the bottom lay.

“For if I should,” said he,

“Bestow this jewel also on my creature,

He would adore my gifts instead of me,

And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;

So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,

But keep them with repining restlessness;

Let him be rich and weary, that at least,

If goodness lead him not, yet weariness

May toss him to my breast."

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Spring

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring

When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and
lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush

Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
  The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
  The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
  A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. Have, get, before it cloy,
  Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
  Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the
    winning.

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying Whát I dó is me: for that I came.

I say móre: the just man justices;

Keeps grace: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is
Chríst for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
    It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
    It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
    And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
    And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
    There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
    Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
    World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Spring and Fall

to a young child
Márgarét, áre you gríeving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you wíll weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrow's spríngs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It ís the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

The Windhover

To Christ our Lord
I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
    dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in
    his riding
    Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing

In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

John Keats

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 sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Ted Kooser

Christmas Mail

Cards in each mailbox,
angel, manger, star and lamb,
as the rural carrier,
driving the snowy roads,
hears from her bundles
the plaintive bleating of sheep,
the shuffle of sandals,
the clopping of camels.
At stop after stop,
she opens the little tin door
and places deep in the shadows
the shepherds and wise men,
the donkeys lank and weary,
the cow who chews and muses.
And from her Styrofoam cup,
white as a star and perched
on the dashboard, leading her
ever into the distance,

there is a hint of hazelnut,
and then a touch of myrrh.

A Letter in October

Dawn comes later and later now,
and I, who only a month ago
could sit with coffee every morning
watching the light walk down the hill
to the edge of the pond and place
a doe there, shyly drinking,

then see the light step out upon
the water, sowing reflections
to either side a garden
of trees that grew as if by magic
now see no more than my face,
mirrored by darkness, pale and odd,

startled by time. While I slept,
night in its thick winter jacket
bridled the doe with a twist
of wet leaves and led her away,
then brought its black horse with harness
that creaked like a cricket, and turned

the water garden under. I woke,
and at the waiting window found
the curtains open to my open face;
beyond me, darkness. And I,
who only wished to keep looking out,
must now keep looking in.

John Milton

Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent

When I consider how my light is spent,
  Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
  And that one Talent which is death to hide
  Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
  My true account, lest he returning chide;
  "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
  I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
  Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
  Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
  And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
  They also serve who only stand and wait."

Mary Oliver

Thirst

Another morning and I wake with thirst
for the goodness I do not have. I walk
out to the pond and all the way God has
given us such beautiful lessons. Oh Lord,
I was never a quick scholar but sulked
and hunched over my books past the hour
and the bell; grant me, in your mercy,
a little more time. Love for the earth
and love for you are having such a long
conversation in my heart. Who knows what
will finally happen or where I will be sent,
yet already I have given a great many things
away, expecting to be told to pack nothing,
except the prayers which, with this thirst,
I am slowly learning.

Invitation

Oh do you have time
        to linger
                for just a little while
                        out of your busy

and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles
for a musical battle,
to see who can sing
the highest note,
or the lowest,
or the most expressive of mirth,
or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks
drink the air
as they strive
melodiously
not for your sake
and not for mine
and not for the sake of winning
but for sheer delight and gratitude
believe us, they say,
it is a serious thing
just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in the broken world.
I beg of you,
do not walk by
without pausing

to attend to this
rather ridiculous performance.
It could mean something.
It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:
You must change your life.

What I Have Learned So Far

Meditation is old and honorable, so why should I
not sit, every morning of my life, on the hillside,
looking into the shining world? Because, properly
attended to, delight, as well as havoc, is suggestion.
Can one be passionate about the just, the
ideal, the sublime, and the holy, and yet commit
to no labor in its cause? I don't think so.

All summations have a beginning, all effect has a
story, all kindness begins with the sown seed.
Thought buds toward radiance. The gospel of
light is the crossroads of indolence, or action.

Be ignited, or be gone.

Christina Rossetti

Amor Mundi

"Oh where are you going with your love-locks flowing
  On the west wind blowing along this valley track?"
"The downhill path is easy, come with me an it please ye,
  We shall escape the uphill by never turning back."

So they two went together in glowing August weather,
  The honey-breathing heather lay to their left and right;
And dear she was to dote on, her swift feet seemed to float on
  The air like soft twin pigeons too sportive to alight.

"Oh what is that in heaven where gray cloud-flakes are seven,
  Where blackest clouds hang riven just at the rainy skirt?"
"Oh that's a meteor sent us, a message dumb, portentous,
  An undeciphered solemn signal of help or hurt."

"Oh what is that glides quickly where velvet flowers grow
    thickly,
  Their scent comes rich and sickly?" "A scaled and hooded
    worm."
"Oh what's that in the hollow, so pale I quake to follow?"
  "Oh that's a thin dead body which waits the eternal term."

"Turn again, O my sweetest, turn again, false and fleetest:
  This beaten way thou beatest I fear is hell's own track."
"Nay, too steep for hill-mounting; nay, too late for cost-
    counting:
  This downhill path is easy, but there's no turning back."

Up-Hill

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
  Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
  From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?
  A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
  You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
  Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
  They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
  Of labour you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

A Better Resurrection

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numb'd too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimm'd with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf:
O Jesus, quicken me.

My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk:
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see:
Yet rise it shall the sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me.

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul

Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perish'd thing;
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King:
O Jesus, drink of me.

William Shakespeare

Sonnet 15: When I consider everything that grows

When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay
To change your day of youth to sullied night;
And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

Sonnet 29: When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
    For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
    That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

From *The Merchant of Venice*: The quality of mercy is not strained

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'T is mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown:

His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Crossing the Bar

Sunset and evening star,
    And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
    When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

The Charge of the Light Brigade

I

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

II

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
  Someone had blundered.
  Theirs not to make reply,
  Theirs not to reason why,
  Theirs but to do and die.
  Into the valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
  Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of hell
  Rode the six hundred.

IV

Flashed all their sabres bare,
Flashed as they turned in air
Sabring the gunners there,

Charging an army, while
  All the world wondered.
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right through the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reeled from the sabre stroke
  Shattered and sundered.
Then they rode back, but not
  Not the six hundred.

V

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
  Volleyed and thundered;
Stormed at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell.
They that had fought so well
Came through the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of hell,
All that was left of them,
  Left of six hundred.

VI

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!

All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

From *Idylls of the King*: The Passing of Arthur

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
"My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die."

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words;
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.

But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,

Muttering and murmuring at his ear, "Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die."
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, "Place me in the barge."
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against a brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne were parch'd with dust
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.
(Recitation may begin with the following passage:)
Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere:
"Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?

For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole Round Table is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world,
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds."

And slowly answer'd Arthur from the barge:
"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst if indeed I go
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

William Wordsworth

Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels;
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;

Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

William Butler Yeats

To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing

Now all the truth is out,
Be secret and take defeat
From any brazen throat,
For how can you compete,
Being honor bred, with one
Who were it proved he lies
Were neither shamed in his own
Nor in his neighbors' eyes;
Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.