

## **Poems for “A Primer for Poetry”**

### **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

-- Robert Frost

### **The Forge**

All I know is a door into the dark.  
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;  
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,  
The unpredictable fantail of sparks  
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.  
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,  
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,  
Set there immovable: an altar  
Where he expends himself in shape and music.  
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,  
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter  
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;  
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick  
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

-- Seamus Heaney

## **When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer**

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

### **I like a look of agony**

I like a look of agony,  
Because I know it's true;  
Men do not sham convulsion,  
Nor simulate a throe.

The eyes glaze once, and that is death.  
Impossible to feign  
The beads upon the forehead  
By homely anguish strung.

-- Emily Dickinson

### **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. (*ctd.*)

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.

-- John Keats

### **The World Is Too Much With Us**

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

-- William Wordsworth

## **Come In**

As I came to the edge of the woods,  
Thrush music — hark!  
Now if it was dusk outside,  
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird  
By sleight of wing  
To better its perch for the night,  
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun  
That had died in the west  
Still lived for one song more  
In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark  
Thrush music went —  
Almost like a call to come in  
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars;  
I would not come in.  
I meant not even if asked;  
And I hadn't been.

-- Robert Frost

## **There's a certain Slant of light**

There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons —  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes —

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us —  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference —  
Where the Meanings, are —

None may teach it — Any —  
'Tis the seal Despair —  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air —

When it comes, the Landscape listens —  
Shadows — hold their breath —  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death —

-- Emily Dickinson

### **Sonnet 29**

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.

-- William Shakespeare

### **Sonnet 73**

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

-- William Shakespeare

## **Sonnet 19**

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.”

-- John Milton

## **My South: On the Porch**

There used to be a way the sunlight caught  
The cocoons of caterpillars in the pecans.  
A boy's shadow would lengthen to a man's  
Across the yard then, slowly. And if you thought  
Some sleepy god had dreamed it all up -- well,  
There was my grandfather, Lincoln-tall and solemn,  
Tapping his pipe out on a white-flaked column,  
Carefully, carefully, as though it were his job.  
And we would watch the pipe-stars as they fell.  
As for the quiet, the same train always broke it.  
Then the great silver watch rose from his pocket  
For us to check the hour, the dark fob  
Dangling the watch between us like a moon.  
It would be evening soon then, very soon.

-- Donald Justice

## You Can Have It

My brother comes home from work  
and climbs the stairs to our room.  
I can hear the bed groan and his shoes drop  
one by one. You can have it, he says.

The moonlight streams in the window  
and his unshaven face is whitened  
like the face of the moon. He will sleep  
long after noon and waken to find me gone.

Thirty years will pass before I remember  
that moment when suddenly I knew each man  
has one brother who dies when he sleeps  
and sleeps when he rises to face this life,

and that together they are only one man  
sharing a heart that always labors, hands  
yellowed and cracked, a mouth that gasps  
for breath and asks, Am I gonna make it?

All night at the ice plant he had fed  
the chute its silvery blocks, and then I  
stacked cases of orange soda for the children  
of Kentucky, one gray boxcar at a time

with always two more waiting. We were twenty  
for such a short time and always in  
the wrong clothes, crusted with dirt  
and sweat. I think now we were never twenty

In 1948 in the city of Detroit, founded  
by de la Mothe Cadillac for the distant purposes  
of Henry Ford, no one wakened or died,  
no one walked the streets or stoked a furnace,

for there was no such year, and now  
that year has fallen off all the old newspapers,  
calendars, doctors' appointments, bonds,  
wedding certificates, driver's licenses.

The city slept. The snow turned to ice.  
The ice to standing pools or rivers  
racing in the gutters. Then bright grass rose  
between the thousands of cracked squares,

and that grass died. I give you back 1948.  
I give you all the years from then  
to the coming one. Give me back the moon  
with its frail light falling across a face. (*ctd.*)

Give me back my young brother, hard  
and furious, with wide shoulders and a curse  
for God and burning eyes that look upon  
all creation and say, You can have it.

-- Philip Levine

### **Among Women**

What women wander?  
Not many. All. A few.  
Most would, now & then,  
& no wonder.  
Some, and I'm one,  
Wander sitting still.  
My small grandmother  
Bought from every peddler  
Less for the ribbons and lace  
Than for their scent  
Of sleep where you will,  
Walk out when you want, choose  
Your bread and your company.

She warned me, "Have nothing to lose."

She looked fragile but had  
High blood, runner's ankles,  
Could endure, endure.  
She loved her rooted garden, her  
Grand children, her once  
Wild once young man.  
Women wander  
As best they can.

-- Marie Ponsot

## This Is Just To Say

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

-- William Carlos Williams

## 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. (*ctd.*)

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!

-- Alfred, Lord Tennyson

## In Memory of W. B. Yeats

I

He disappeared in the dead of winter:  
The brooks were frozen, the airports almost  
deserted,  
And snow disfigured the public statues;  
The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.  
What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

Far from his illness  
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,  
The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable  
quays;  
By mourning tongues  
The death of the poet was kept from his poems.

But for him it was his last afternoon as himself,  
An afternoon of nurses and rumours;  
The provinces of his body revolted,  
The squares of his mind were empty,  
Silence invaded the suburbs,  
The current of his feeling failed; he became his  
admirers.

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities  
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,  
To find his happiness in another kind of wood  
And be punished under a foreign code of  
conscience.  
The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living.

But in the importance and noise of to-morrow  
When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the  
floor of the bourse,  
And the poor have the sufferings to which they are  
fairly accustomed  
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced  
of his freedom  
A few thousand will think of this day  
As one thinks of a day when one did something  
slightly unusual.

What instruments we have agree  
The day of his death was a dark cold day.

II

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:  
The parish of rich women, physical decay,  
Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.  
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,  
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
In the valley of its making where executives  
Would never want to tamper, flows on south  
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
A way of happening, a mouth.

III

Earth, receive an honoured guest:  
William Yeats is laid to rest.  
Let the Irish vessel lie  
Emptied of its poetry.

In the nightmare of the dark  
All the dogs of Europe bark,  
And the living nations wait,  
Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace  
Stares from every human face,  
And the seas of pity lie  
Locked and frozen in each eye.

Follow, poet, follow right  
To the bottom of the night,  
With your unconstraining voice  
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse  
Make a vineyard of the curse,  
Sing of human unsuccess  
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

-- W. H. Auden

## **Funeral Blues**

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public  
doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

-- W.H. Auden

## **Do not go gentle into that good night**

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

-- Dylan Thomas

## **During Wind and Rain**

They sing their dearest songs—  
He, she, all of them—yea,  
Treble and tenor and bass,  
And one to play;  
With the candles mooning each face. . . .  
Ah, no; the years O!  
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss—  
Elders and juniors—aye,  
Making the pathways neat  
And the garden gay;  
And they build a shady seat. . . .  
Ah, no; the years, the years,  
See, the white storm-birds wing across.

They are blithely breakfasting all—  
Men and maidens—yea,  
Under the summer tree,  
With a glimpse of the bay,  
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .  
Ah, no; the years O!  
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,  
He, she, all of them—aye,  
Clocks and carpets and chairs  
On the lawn all day,  
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .  
Ah, no; the years, the years;  
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

-- Thomas Hardy

## Aubade

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.  
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.  
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.  
Till then I see what's really always there:  
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,  
Making all thought impossible but how  
And where and when I shall myself die.  
Arid interrogation: yet the dread  
Of dying, and being dead,  
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse  
—The good not done, the love not given, time  
Torn off unused—nor wretchedly because  
An only life can take so long to climb  
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;  
But at the total emptiness for ever,  
The sure extinction that we travel to  
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,  
Not to be anywhere,  
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid  
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,  
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade  
Created to pretend we never die,  
And specious stuff that says No rational being  
Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing  
That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,  
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,  
Nothing to love or link with,  
The anaesthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,  
A small unfocused blur, a standing chill  
That slows each impulse down to indecision.  
Most things may never happen: this one will,  
And realisation of it rages out  
In furnace-fear when we are caught without  
People or drink. Courage is no good:  
It means not scaring others. Being brave  
Lets no one off the grave.  
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.  
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,  
Have always known, know that we can't escape,  
Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.  
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring  
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring  
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.  
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.  
Work has to be done.  
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

-- Philip Larkin

## A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.

-- John Donne

## The Emperor of Ice-Cream

Call the roller of big cigars,  
The muscular one, and bid him whip  
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.  
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress  
As they are used to wear, and let the boys  
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.  
Let be be finale of seem.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,  
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet  
On which she embroidered fantails once  
And spread it so as to cover her face.  
If her horny feet protrude, they come  
To show how cold she is, and dumb.  
Let the lamp affix its beam.  
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

-- Wallace Stevens

## A Postcard from the Volcano

Children picking up our bones  
Will never know that these were once  
As quick as foxes on the hill;

And that in autumn, when the grapes  
Made sharp air sharper by their smell  
These had a being, breathing frost;

And least will guess that with our bones  
We left much more, left what still is  
The look of things, left what we felt

At what we saw. The spring clouds blow  
Above the shuttered mansion-house,  
Beyond our gate and the windy sky

Cries out a literate despair.  
We knew for long the mansion's look  
And what we said of it became

A part of what it is ... Children,  
Still weaving budded aureoles,  
Will speak our speech and never know,

Will say of the mansion that it seems  
As if he that lived there left behind  
A spirit storming in blank walls,

A dirty house in a gutted world,  
A tatter of shadows peaked to white,  
Smeared with the gold of the opulent sun.

## Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that  
swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and  
plough;  
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

-- Gerard Manley Hopkins

## Transformations

Portion of this yew  
Is a man my grandsire knew,  
Bosomed here at its foot:  
This branch may be his wife,  
A ruddy human life  
Now turned to a green shoot.

These grasses must be made  
Of her who often prayed,  
Last century, for repose;  
And the fair girl long ago  
Whom I often tried to know  
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,  
But as nerves and veins abound  
In the growths of upper air,  
And they feel the sun and rain,  
And the energy again  
That made them what they were!

-- Thomas Hardy

## One Art

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

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

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

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

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

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

-- Elizabeth Bishop