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## GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

1844-1889

Gerard Manley Hopkins belonged to a generation of young English intellectuals in the mid-nineteenth century who were captivated by the ritual and dogma of Roman Catholicism. His conversion in 1866 was the central and determining event of his life. After years of study he became a Jesuit priest in 1877 and performed a series of pastoral and teaching duties, finally serving as a professor of classics at University College, Dublin. Having renounced poetry (as too sensuously attractive), he resumed his writing at the request of his superiors, but published no poems in his lifetime. When they finally appeared in 1918 (edited by his friend, the poet Robert Bridges) his poems made an enormous and lasting impact. Such diverse poets as W.H. Auden, David Jones, and Dylan Thomas clearly reflect his influence.

Hopkins is a poet of paradoxes. Despite daring technique and intense expression of earthly joy and despair, he subordinates his bold spirit to austere Christian humility and conservative religious faith. His poems repeatedly unite opposing attachments—to the permanent things of the spirit and to the passing beauties of the physical world. Each thing in the world, Hopkins believes, contains a similar union of spiritual and physical elements: the distinctive set of characteristics (derived from sense data) that gives each thing its own particularity is at the same time the special mark of its divine

origin in God. Hopkins calls this pattern of uniqueness "inscape"; inscape is present not only in people and things, but also in poems.

Hopkins's meter, which he calls "sprung rhythm," uses heavily stressed beats occurring at variable intervals imposed on a regular metrical base. Like Whitman (whom Hopkins resembles in some elements of disposition and outlook), he often allows lines of verse to stretch beyond conventional bounds. An elaborately woven texture of sound results from constant use of alliteration, assonance, internal rhymes and half-rhymes, onomatopoeia, and other echo effects. Devices borrowed from Anglo-Saxon poetry (the kenning-like "morning's minion, kingdom of daylight's dauphin," for example), both archaic and newly coined words, and a sometimes Germanic-sounding syntax further accentuate the distinctiveness of the style. (See, in "The Windhover," "dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding / Of the rolling level underneath him steady air"). Although the thought expressed is rarely difficult, the style can be intimidating. Reading the poems aloud immediately reveals their startling beauty and gives flashes of their sense. Further careful study makes their meanings plain without detracting from the pleasure that Hopkins's intricate art provides.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

"The Windhover"

Notice How -- Hopkins compares a small kestrel flying into the wind (that could easily break its wing to "Christ Our Lord") and vows to submit himself to a sacrificial life. At the time Hopkins had to choose between being a poet and leaving the priesthood as a Jesuit priest. His "sprung" rhythm shifting stresses where they would not naturally fall engages the reader. The imagery (within the form of an Italian sonnet) first summons "a chevalier," then a precarious ice skater; but with the shift after the first eight lines the imagery emphasizes sheer persistence in a lowly vocation (earth turned up by a plow shines and dying embers send off a cascade of light -- thus, Hopkins moves from a royal horseback rider to his renewed devotion to a life of self-sacrifice as a Jesuit priest.

## God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;<sup>1</sup>  
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil<sup>2</sup>  
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?<sup>3</sup>  
 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.<sup>4</sup>

1877

1895

<sup>1</sup> foil "I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel . . . Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and crossings and network of small cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too" (Hopkins, in a letter to Robert Bridges, January 4, 1883).

<sup>2</sup> oil from pressed olives  
<sup>3</sup> reck his rod heed his rule  
<sup>4</sup> ll. 13-14 a combination of Genesis 1:2 ("and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters") and the traditional representation of the Holy Ghost as a dove

The Windhover:<sup>1</sup>*To Christ our Lord*

I caught this morning morning's minion,<sup>2</sup> king-  
 dom of daylight's dauphin,<sup>3</sup> dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
 Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
 High there, how he rung<sup>4</sup> upon the rein of a wimpling<sup>5</sup> 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  
 10 Buckle!<sup>6</sup> AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
 Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!<sup>7</sup>

No wonder of it: sheer plód makes plough down sillion<sup>8</sup>  
 Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
 Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

1877

1918

<sup>1</sup> the kestrel, a small falcon that can hover facing the oncoming wind  
<sup>2</sup> minion darling, favorite of a king  
<sup>3</sup> dauphin eldest son of the king of France, hence, a princely figure, heir to something magnificent  
<sup>4</sup> rung circled  
<sup>5</sup> wimpling rippling

<sup>6</sup> Buckle This word incorporates a range of meanings from "join together" to "crumple." The latter sense might describe a sudden swoop of the hovering falcon.  
<sup>7</sup> chevalier a French knight or noble champion. Cf. "dauphin" in l. 2.  
<sup>8</sup> sillion archaic word meaning "furrow" or "ridge between furrows"

## Spring and Fall:

*to a young child*

Márgarét, áre you gríeving  
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
 Léaves, líke the things of man, you  
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
 Áh! ás the heart grows older:  
 It will come to such sights colder  
 By and by, nor spare a sigh:  
 Though worlds of wanwood<sup>1</sup> leafmeal<sup>2</sup> lie;  
 And yet you *will* weep and know why.  
 10 Now no matter, child, the name:  
 Sórrów's spríngs áre the same.  
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
 What heart heard of, ghost<sup>3</sup> guessed:  
 It fs the blight man was born for,  
 It is Márgaret you mourn for.

1880

1893

<sup>1</sup>wanwood worn-looking autumn trees, with  
 pale leaves (Hopkins's coinage)  
<sup>2</sup>leafmeal (also coined) probably an adverb

analogous to "piecemeal," from which it also  
 borrows some of its meaning  
<sup>3</sup>ghost soul

## Matthew Arnold 1822-1888

The most complex problem of Matthew Arnold's youth was living in the shadow of his celebrated father. Thomas Arnold had taken over the direction of Rugby School in 1828 and within a few years transformed it into a model educational institution.

From his sixth year Matthew lived with his parents at Rugby, in a home swarming with bright, ambitious boys from the school. No one needed to tell him of the high expectations his parents held for his success. While Arnold was always a loving and respectful son, perhaps unconsciously he felt the need to rebel. His own academic performance was uneven—at times brilliant, at times very bad. Nevertheless, he won a scholarship to Oxford in 1841.

There he found little challenge in his studies and ample time to turn himself into a young dandy, playing whist and billiards, carefully choosing outlandish waistcoats, addressing his friends as "my dear." As one older contemporary put it, "a very gentlemanly young man with a slight tinge of the fop that does no harm when blended with talents, good nature, and high spirits."

Arnold's father died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 1842. Matthew remained at Oxford, continuing to study philosophy there until 1846. It was a period of indecision. While many of his contemporaries embarked on professional careers, Arnold remained uncommitted. In 1847 he began to serve as private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, President of the Privy Council and head of the Council on Education. Arnold's duties were light and in his free time he wrote poetry. By 1849 he could publish his first volume, *The Strayed Reveller*. The mixed response to the book kept him unsure of his calling.

Arnold felt intensely the confusion of the modern world—"everything is against one," he wrote in 1849—and he dreamed of a poetry that might help, a poetry that would "not only . . . interest, but also . . . inspirit and rejoice the reader." This he strove for in his own work.



But in moments of depression he would insist, "my poems are fragments—i.e., . . . I am fragments . . . the whole effect of my poems is vague and indeterminate." Perhaps Arnold set too high a goal for his art. Certainly, in his best lyrical poems, though he may not inspirit and rejoice, he can deeply touch the reader.

Practical matters intervened. In 1850 he proposed to Frances Wightman, and to support himself and his wife he obtained, with the help of Lord Lansdowne, a job in the civil service. For the next thirty-five years Arnold worked as an inspector of private schools for poor children. It was an exhausting job, requiring constant travel. But it permitted Arnold direct involvement in some of the social problems of his day.

Writing poetry became progressively more difficult. In 1853 he told a close friend, "I am past thirty, and three parts iced over—and my pen, it seems to me is even stiffer and more cramped than my feeling." More and more, in what free time he could find, Arnold turned to prose. He began with essays on literature, and its ability to help humanity in the spiritual crises of modern life. As time passed, his range expanded into essays and books on education, political issues, and theology. Arnold became, much like his father before him, one of the leading intellectuals of his day.

Let us turn, for illustration, to Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*, a poem which, like many other poems of the later nineteenth century, sketches a bleak picture of the universe of modern man.

\* Our universe, Arnold argues, is one in which the old faith in a life securely and eternally guided by a benevolent God has begun to disappear, leaving many people with the feeling that they have nothing to depend on but the affection of beloved individuals.

MATTHEW ARNOLD *Dover Beach*

The sea is calm tonight.  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, 10  
At their return, up the high strand,

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery; we  
Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea. 20

✓ The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating to the breath  
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems 30  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain:  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

In this poem the effect of calm beauty in the opening picture of Dover Beach and the sea at night is soon submerged in the melancholy impression of the first stanza's closing lines. The sound of the waves reminds the speaker of the "eternal" recurrence of this impression, for there have always been men who lived near the sea and heard the same melancholy note—the great Greek writer of tragedy, Sophocles, for example. Having struck this philosophical note, the poem can then go on to the allegorical third stanza, which is not about geographical places or historical personalities but about an abstraction—a state of mind which has changed the meaning of life for most people.<sup>1</sup> And

\* <sup>1</sup>The "Sea of Faith" is a typically allegorical figure of speech. See pages 211-212 for a fuller discussion of allegory.

## THOMAS HARDY

1840-1928

The son of a builder and master mason, Hardy was an architectural apprentice for six years and worked for another eleven years as an ecclesiastical architect, first in London and then in his native Dorset, before turning entirely to writing. He specialized in church restoration, and his carefully structured fiction and verse exhibit qualities associated with that profession and with the region to which he was so attached: fascination with difficult materials, nostalgia for lost certainties of the past, and a deep sense of local memory and values.

Hardy is one of the two important modern poets who have also been powerful novelists. (The other is D.H. Lawrence.) His poems, which often present wry stories, scenes, or characterizations, remain, like his fiction, close to the world of Dorset (the "Wessex" of his books), where he spent most of his life. He explored that world with a persistent honesty and an ironic skepticism that kept his compassion for wrecked lives from dwindling into sentimentality. Intellectually, his work reflects the triumph in the modern mind of a rueful perception that impersonal, indifferent forces shape human fortunes. Yet his novels also take the personal destinies of their characters seriously; they are driven by ancient assumptions of the tragic, universal import of these characters' suffering and even by a kind of heroic vision of their struggles. Books like *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896) acutely represent Hardy's involved awareness. Against conventional idyllic, pastoral, or piously Christian views of English life they set sympathetic but realistic observation and the scientific perspectives, socially applied, of Darwinian thought.

These novels, especially *Jude the Obscure*, so shocked squeamish critics with their sexual frankness and unsentimental insights that

after 1896 Hardy gave up fiction and turned wholly to poetry. The result was the extraordinary emergence of a major poet, fifty-eight years old, in *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898), which included poems dating back to the mid-1880s when he had written most of his early verse. Later important volumes included *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), *Collected Poems* (1919), and *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922). Hardy also wrote *The Dynasts*, an allegorical drama, mostly in verse, about the Napoleonic wars; it appeared in three installments (1903, 1906, 1908).

His most striking group of poems appeared in the 1914 volume: the twenty-seven poem sequence called "Poems of 1912-13," represented here by "The Walk," "I Found Her Out There," "The Voice," "After a Journey," and "At Castle Boterel." This elegiac sequence concerns Hardy's first wife, Emma, who died in 1912, in the thirty-eighth year of a miserable, incompatible marriage. Written in varied verse-forms, the poems recount the estrangement and seek to undo it by imagining an understanding, loving colloquy. The wife's spirit lures the husband back to her native, beloved Cornwall, where they had first met and loved truly. In the bitterly beautiful "After a Journey" the colloquy reaches its most intense expression of desire to remake the past. The eight-line stanzas, with their tricky rhyming (ababddc) and complex pattern of meter and line-lengths, masterfully channel the poem's dramatic immediacy, visionary incantation, and tone of painful yearning. An almost pure verbal music arises from the pressures of remorse and desire against the resistance of irreversible time. "Poems of 1912-13" was the first of the great sequences that are major works of this century.

Thomas Hardy  
"Channel Firing" "The Five Students" "During Wind and Rain" These three poems encompass Hardy's response to WWI. In the first, the gunnery practice of British war ships make churchyard residents think it is judgement day until God reassures them, but notice how Hardy moves to his present day scenario back in time. In the second and third poems, time (first to the seasons and then through a vacated country house suggests the increasing bleak mood of thr British public dueing WWI.

### The Darkling Thrush<sup>1</sup>

I leant upon a coppice gate<sup>2</sup>  
When Frost was spectre-gray  
And Winter's dregs made desolate  
The weakening eye of day.  
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky  
Like strings of broken lyres,  
And all mankind that haunted nigh  
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be  
10 The Century's corpse outleant,  
His crypt the cloudy canopy,  
The wind his death-lament.  
The ancient pulse of germ and birth  
Was shrunken hard and dry,  
And every spirit upon earth  
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among  
The bleak twigs overhead  
In a full-hearted evensong  
20 Of joy illimited;  
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,  
In blast-beruffled plume,  
Had chosen thus to fling his soul  
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carolings  
Of such ecstatic sound  
Was written on terrestrial things  
Afar or nigh around,  
30 That I could think there trembled through  
His happy good-night air  
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew  
And I was unaware.

31 December 1900<sup>3</sup>

1902

<sup>1</sup> the thrush singing in the darkness—both literal darkness and the darkness of humanity at the end of the century

<sup>2</sup> coppice gate gate at the entrance to a small copse, or woods

<sup>3</sup> The poem was written somewhat earlier but dated December 31, 1900 to stress its character as a lament for the death of the nineteenth century and its optimistic hopes.

Channel Firing<sup>1</sup>

That night your great guns, unawares,  
Shook all our coffins as we lay,  
And broke the chancel window-squares,  
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome  
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:  
The mouse let fall the altar-crumbs,  
The worms drew back into the mounds,

10 The glebe cow<sup>2</sup> drooled. Till God called, "No;  
It's gunnery practice out at sea  
Just as before you went below;  
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make  
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters  
They do no more for Christ's<sup>3</sup> sake  
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

20 "That this is not the judgment-hour  
For some of them's a blessed thing,  
For if it were they'd have to scour  
Hell's floor for so much threatening. . . .

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when  
I blow the trumpet (if indeed  
I ever do; for you are men,  
And rest eternal sorely need)."

So down we lay again. "I wonder,  
Will the world ever saner be,"  
Said one, "than when He sent us under  
In our indifferent century!"

30 And many a skeleton shook his head.  
"Instead of preaching forty year,"  
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,  
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."

Again the guns disturbed the hour,  
Roaring their readiness to avenge,  
As far inland as Stourton Tower,<sup>4</sup>  
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.<sup>5</sup>

April 1914

1914

<sup>1</sup>gunnery practice by British warships in the English Channel on the eve of World War I

<sup>2</sup>glebe cow cow pastured on church grounds for the pastor's use

<sup>3</sup>Christ's Christ's (a medieval usage, appropriately archaic for the voice of God)

<sup>4</sup>Stourton Tower built in the eighteenth century to commemorate Alfred the Great's ninth-century victory over Danish invaders  
<sup>5</sup>Camelot . . . Stonehenge . . . supposed site of the legendary King Arthur's court; prehistoric monoliths on Salisbury Plain

THOMAS HARDY *The Five Students*

THE SPARROW dips in his wheel-rut bath,  
 The sun grows passionate-eyed,  
 And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock-path;  
 As strenuously we stride,—  
 Five of us; dark He, fair He, dark She, fair Shé, I,  
 All beating by.

The air is shaken, the high-road hot,  
 Shadowless swoons the day,

The greens are sobered and cattle at rest; but not  
 We on our urgent way,—  
 Four of us; fair She, dark She, fair He, I are there,  
 But one—elsewhere.

10

Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow,  
 And forward still we press  
 Through moors, briar-meshed plantations, clay-pits  
 yellow,  
 As in the spring hours—yes,  
 Three of us; fair He, fair She, I, as heretofore,  
 But—fallen one more.

The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in  
 At night-time noiselessly,  
 The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin,  
 And yet on the beat are we,—  
 Two of us; fair She, I. But no more left to go  
 The track we know.

20

Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,  
 The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,  
 The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked  
 heads,  
 Yet I still stalk the course—  
 One of us. . . . Dark and fair He, dark and fair She,  
 gone.  
 The rest—anon.

30

## During Wind and Rain

0009

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!

10 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!

20 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.

## D.H. LAWRENCE

1885-1930

Lawrence's father was an uneducated miner, and his mother—the stronger force in his development—had been a schoolteacher. He could not afford a university education and studied instead in a teacher-training college. He then taught school for a number of years. Ford Madox Ford, the novelist who edited *The English Review*, recognized his talent and began publishing his poems in 1909. In 1912 he eloped with the German Baroness Frieda von Richthofen, who left her husband and three children. They were finally able to marry in 1914. Tuberculosis kept Lawrence out of World War I, to which he was opposed in any case, but life in Britain became increasingly uncongenial and in 1919 they left the country for good, living in Australia, Mexico, Sicily, Sardinia, Italy, and finally the United States, until Lawrence died of tuberculosis at age forty-four.

The confidential directness of Lawrence's writing introduced a new tone into English poetry. Lyric verse had always been charged with personal feeling, but Lawrence's poems

suggest that he is speaking with his closest friend, explaining the exact quality of an experience—and only incidentally hinting at some further meaning. In many ways his work is close to Wordsworth's confessions in *The Prelude* and to Whitman's and Dickinson's most revealing passages, but he is more open about the sources of his emotional confidences. In his unpretentious "Brooding Grief" the poet has been walking on a city street in the rain, concentrating on the memory of his mother as she lay dying. A yellow autumn leaf, blown in the wind, wrenches his attention to the literal scene around him and he wonders why he has been so startled by the sight. The images—the spectre-like apparition of the "quick leaf" and the "rainy swill" on the lamp-lit street—have reinforced the death-vision in his head. In "Piano," a romantically glamorous moment is suddenly swept away by the memory of another singing woman in a humbler childhood scene that moves him far more powerfully.

The emphasis on psychic moments is

central even in Lawrence's longer pieces such as "Hymn to Priapus" and "Snake," where he feels compelled to add a more general insight. And in poems that are ambiguous and symbolic, he usually suggests a psychological state that cannot be anchored in a single, boldly outlined experience. Mystically sexual in spirit, "The Song of a Man Who Has Come Through" delicately invokes a preparation by the self for the possibly dangerous opening of a world of wonders. It can be seen as addressed to the two sides of one's nature and also to a fearful lover, and its language is appropriate to the love-experience of both sexes. "Bavarian Gentians" invokes another kind of preparing—this time for death—but with a comparable sexual mysticism.

Lawrence's critical and psychological writings, including *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922) and *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), together with such

ground-breaking novels as *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and his poems and shorter fiction, had a crucial impact on literary modernism. He helped introduce a new sexual candor and a myth-making vision that saw enormous meanings in ordinary life. At odds with genteelly hypocritical and overly intellectual attitudes, he stressed a physicality and an instinctual awareness inseparable from the primal psychic forces he felt were streaming through the cosmos. Lawrence's apparent obsession with sex was an aspect of this insistent vitalism. He believed that modern women were still deeply life-responsive, whereas modern men, in their subservience to dehumanized logicity, technology, and abstract economic and social structures, were becoming mere automatons. The poem "Swan" effectively embodies his way of thinking about these matters.

D.H. Lawrence

"The Song of a Man Who Has Come Through" "Snake" "

These apparently different poems dramatize the same dilemma: the desire to open oneself to revelations coupled with a fear of the unknown. In the first, the instinctive response is to fend off something strange but wonderful, In the second, standing aside to let a snake sip water that the man wants kneels to his cowardice in chasing a creature the guidebooks say might be dangerous. Much of Lawrence's writing plays off this conflict between overly civilized restraints and the lure of fulfillment.

## The Song of a Man Who Has Come Through<sup>1</sup>

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!  
 A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.  
 If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!  
 If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!  
 If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed  
 By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of the world  
 Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;  
 If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge  
 Driven by invisible blows,

10 The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find the Hesperides

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,  
 I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,  
 Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

What is the knocking?  
 What is the knocking at the door in the night?  
 It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.<sup>3</sup>  
 Admit them, admit them.

1917

<sup>1</sup>The "man" of the title has learned to open himself to the possibilities of mystical revelation and to lay aside fear of the unknown. The emphasis, however, is less religious than experiential and sexual.

<sup>2</sup>the Hesperides nymphs guarding the golden apples of Hera, queen of the gods; also the name

of the garden where the apples grew, a place of joy and fulfillment

<sup>3</sup>three strange angels benevolent spirits who should be welcomed, not feared—symbolic of the miraculous rewards of being open and receptive. (They recall the three angels to whom Abraham gives hospitality in Genesis 18.)

## Snake

A snake came to my water-trough  
 On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
 To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree  
 I came down the steps with my pitcher  
 And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom  
 And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of  
 the stone trough  
 And rested his throat upon the stone bottom.

10 And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,

He sipped with his straight mouth,  
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,  
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,  
And I, like a second comer, waiting.

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,  
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,  
And stooped and drank a little more,  
20 Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth  
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed,  
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man  
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,  
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-  
trough  
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,  
30 Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?  
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?  
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?  
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:  
*If you were not afraid, you would kill him!*

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,  
But even so, honoured still more  
That he should seek my hospitality  
40 From out the dark door of the secret earth.

He drank enough  
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,  
And flickered his tongue like a forked light on the air, so black;  
Seeming to lick his lips,  
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,  
And slowly turned his head,  
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,  
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round  
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

50 And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,  
 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered farther,  
 A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that horrid  
 black hole,  
 Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after,  
 Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,  
 I picked up a clumsy log  
 And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,  
 But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified  
 haste,  
 60 Writhed like lightning, and was gone  
 Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,  
 At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.  
 I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!  
 I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

And I thought of the albatross,<sup>1</sup>  
 And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,  
 Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,  
 70 Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords  
 Of life.  
 And I have something to expiate;  
 A pettiness.

*Taormina*

1923

<sup>1</sup> the albatross See Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (p. 533 above), ll. 63-142, 288-291.

### T.S. ELIOT

1888-1965

T.S. Eliot was the son of a successful St. Louis, Missouri, businessman and the grandson of a distinguished clergyman: William Greenleaf Eliot, who founded the first Unitarian church in Missouri and helped found Washington University. An outstanding philosophy student at Harvard, Eliot took his B.A. and M.A. degrees in 1909 and 1910 and completed his doctoral dissertation in 1916. But having married and settled in London in 1915 and launched a literary career there, he did not return to Harvard for his doctoral examination. He taught school, worked as a clerk for Lloyd's Bank, and became associated, first as an editor and then as a director, with the publishing firm of Faber and Faber. In 1914 in London he had met Pound, who saw to it that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was published in *Poetry* magazine and worked unselfishly to advance Eliot's career. This effort culminated in Pound's invaluable suggestions for revising the early draft of *The Waste Land*. (See the "Facsimile" edition of the poem, edited in 1971 by Valerie Eliot, the poet's second wife.)

Eliot's first wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood, was a talented young woman whose psychological problems led to hospitalization and to the couple's separation. Despite a difficult marriage, Eliot managed during their early years to advance his reputation as a poet and critic. His first book was *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917). Assistant editor of the *Egoist* from 1917 to 1919, he was also reviewing for the *New Statesman* and other publications. In 1919 he began writing for the *Times Literary Supplement* as well, and in 1920 his first book of criticism, *The Sacred Wood*, appeared. By 1927, when he became a British subject and joined the Church of England, he was the dominant figure in Anglo-American poetry. In 1935 his first play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, was produced, marking the start of his career as a successful playwright. In 1948

he received the Nobel Prize for Literature—the only one ever awarded to a poet born in the United States.

When *The Waste Land* appeared in 1922, it immediately established Eliot as the foremost writer of a new kind of poetry in English. His methods had been anticipated by such French poets as Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Mallarmé, whose work he knew, and to some extent by his friend Ezra Pound. Rather than telling stories, dramatizing situations, or philosophizing, the new poetry worked more like music, moving from one image or highly suggestive phrase to the next and accumulating a set of related or echoing states of feeling. An entire poem could also consist of just one brief, concentrated effect, as in a typical Imagist piece.

A year before *The Waste Land* appeared, Eliot described this process in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems." "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art," he wrote, "is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that, when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." His main point was that poetry cannot convey an emotion or any other inner state just by mentioning it or trying to describe it. There must be something about the phrasing that transmits it directly, as a nerve-stimulus might. Note, for instance, the succession of images ("objects") in the first verse-unit of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." The heavily inert "evening spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table," the "half-deserted streets," the "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels," the "sawdust restaurants"—and all the other suggestions of a fearful, furtive, overwhelmingly sordid kind of existence—create a precise emotional atmosphere. No generally

descriptive language (such as the adjectives we have just used) could have the same impact.

T. S. Eliot

"The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" We see the same dilemma in this poem but Eliot startlingly new technique brings us inside Prufrock's mind as he fitfully wrestles with the desire to declare his love, but doesn't because of the fear that he will be rejected and never can be a taken for granted confidant in this role. Eliot's innovations are to create seemingly unpoetic images (of a patient etherised on a table) and only gradually did he realize that we are within Prufrock's mind. The other innovation is to create a pastiche of literary references of the type that the over intellectualized Prufrock would know (someone in Dante's Hell speaking to someone who is unable to leave, a bit player in Hamlet). Also, Eliot uses

ellipses not to suggest omitted lines but to express Prufrock's retreat to a subconscious limbo. This stream of consciousness technique arose at the same time in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Only at the end in the final triplet will Prufrock glimpse the realm he will never allow himself to enter.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock<sup>1</sup>

*S'io credessi che mia risposta fosse  
a persona che mai tornasse al mondo,  
questa fiamma staria senza più scosse.  
Ma per ciò che giammai di questo fondo  
non tornò vivo alcun, s'i' odo il vero,  
senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.<sup>2</sup>*

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent

10 To lead you to an overwhelming question.  
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,  
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
20 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street  
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;  
There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
30 That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Eliot. The title, linking the idea of a "love song" with the stuffy, businesslike "J. Alfred Prufrock," is ironic. The name suggests puns: the sturdy "proof-rock," as though the lover were an insurance company; or the prissy "Prue-frock."

<sup>2</sup> a speech from Dante's *Inferno*, XXVII.61-66, by Guido da Montefeltro, burning-in-hell-Literally:

If I thought that my reply would be

to anyone who might go back to the world; this flame would cease any longer to tremble. But since never from this deep place did anyone return alive, if I hear truth, without fear of infamy I respond to you.

This is an ironic epigraph, since Prufrock's misery at believing himself utterly unheroic and lacking-in-virility, though pitiful, is hardly-sinful or sensationally dramatic.

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
 And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
 Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go  
 Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time  
 To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
 Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
 40 With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—  
 (They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")  
 My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
 My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—  
 (They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")  
 Do I dare  
 Disturb the universe?  
 In a minute there is time  
 For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all—  
 50 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
 Beneath the music from a farther room.  
 So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—  
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
 And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
 When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
 Then how should I begin  
 60 To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
 And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—  
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
 (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)  
 Is it perfume from a dress  
 That makes me so digress?  
 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.  
 And should I then presume?  
 And how should I begin?

70 Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
 And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
 Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

I should have been a pair of ragged claws  
 Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!  
 Smoothed by long fingers,  
 Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,  
 Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.  
 Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,  
 80 Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?  
 But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,  
 Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,<sup>3</sup>  
 I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;  
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
 And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
 And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,  
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
 90 Would it have been worth while,  
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question,  
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,<sup>4</sup>  
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—  
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
 Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.  
 That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,  
 100 Would it have been worth while,  
 After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,  
 After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—  
 And this, and so much more?—  
 It is impossible to say just what I mean!  
 But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:  
 Would it have been worth while  
 If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,  
 And turning toward the window, should say:  
 "That is not it at all,  
 110 That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
 Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
 Deferential, glad to be of use,  
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

<sup>3</sup>L. 82 John the Baptist, the prophet who was the forerunner of Jesus and baptized him, was beheaded at Herod's command.

<sup>4</sup>L. 94 One of Jesus' miracles was to raise Laz-

arus from the dead. Prufrock feels like one of the living dead; by daring to tell the woman he desired how he felt, he might have raised himself from that condition.

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—  
Almost, at times, the Fool.<sup>5</sup>

120 I grow old . . . I grow old . . .  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.  
  
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
  
I do not think that they will sing to me.  
  
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
130 By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.<sup>6</sup>

1911

1917

<sup>5</sup>ll. 112-20 Prufrock notes rather bitterly that he hardly has the romantic stature of a Hamlet; the character in Shakespeare's play he most resembles is Polonius.

<sup>6</sup>ll. 125-31 These closing lines offer a purely lyrical song that expresses the dreaming pathos of the whole poem without any reference to the implied "story." Eliot's superb control of rhyme

creates different tonalities throughout the poem. These tonalities—of the poem's complex sense of high dreams and low self-esteem, of rich traditions that torment us into self-deprecation—are embodied in the poem's lyric close and are far more essential than the implied "story" and "speaker."

## WILFRED OWEN

1893-1918

Born into a devout, relatively poor family, Owen studied in a technical school, began university work but could not afford to continue, and then made a brief stab at preparing himself for a church career. Having decided he had insufficient faith, he spent several years tutoring in France and perfecting his French. In 1915 he returned to England and enlisted in the army. After training, Owen was commissioned and sent to France in January 1917. The bitter winter, a concussion from a bad fall, and the stress of war experience sent him to a military hospital in Edinburgh. There he met the poet Siegfried Sassoon, who became his mentor. In the thirteen or so months after August 1917, Owen came into his own as a powerful war poet. He returned to action in August 1918 and was killed just a week before the armistice. His volume *Poems*, collected and edited by Sassoon, appeared posthumously in 1920.

The selections included here show the range of Owen's best work. The allegorical "Strange Meeting" recounts a dream-vision of an encounter in hell with an enemy killed in battle, a man whose life was the mirror-

image of the speaker's own. Uneven in quality, with obvious echoes of Keats, Tennyson, and other poets, the poem is nevertheless compelling in its surge of remorseful compassion and in its emphatic, off-rhyming couplets. These point up the harsh discrepancies between romantic vision and the shock of war's sheer waste of individual lives and of civilization itself. The tenderly bitter "Arms and the Boy" is almost a perfect antiwar poem in its balance of the gentle, the fierce, and the sardonic. The elegiac sonnet "Anthem for Doomed Youth" moves beautifully from its opening notes of sad indignation, to its deeply tragic center ("Bugles calling for them from sad shires"), to its final quiet concentration of painful, helpless recognition. "Dulce et Decorum Est" details a gas-attack and its ineradicable psychological after-effects, and expresses straightforward scorn for those who manipulate patriotism to lead innocents to their deaths. Owen's characterization of his work—"The Poetry is in the pity"—in his draft of a preface for his first book reveals the source of the pain and toughness of his poems.

Wilfred Owen

"Arms and the Boy" "Dulce et Decorum est" "Strange Meeting"

The horribly devastating effects of WWI are displayed in these poems. The first casualty seen in the first two poems are the illusions young soldiers (like Owen) had about combat. He contrasts the vaunted classical rhetoric in Virgil and Horace with reality: young soldiers are sought out like predatory munitions and cliched sentiment are extinguished as soldiers fumble for the gas masks. The third poem is extraordinary, composed three hours before Owen died: a slain combatant meets his counterpart and both lament their unlived lives so strikingly similar. The subtle off-rhymes ("groined . . . groaned") capture the similar yet different experiences of English and German soldiers. It is only at the end we realize that the speaker has met the one who bayoneted him.

Arms and the Boy<sup>1</sup>

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade  
 How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;  
 Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;  
 And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads  
 Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,  
 Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth,  
 Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.  
 10 There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;  
 And God will grow no talons at his heels,  
 Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

1917-18

1920

<sup>1</sup>an ironic echo of the beginning of the Latin poet Virgil's *Aeneid* ("Arma virumque cano": "Arms and the man I sing"); the word "boy"

stresses war's victimization of young soldiers, rather than the heroic glamor of a warrior-hero.

Dulce et Decorum Est<sup>1</sup>

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
 Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
 Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs  
 And towards our distant rest began to trudge.  
 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
 But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
 Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
 Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,  
 10 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .  
 Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,  
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

<sup>1</sup>an ironic quotation from the Latin poet Horace's serious expression of antique patriotism in a famous line in his *Odes* (given in full in ll. 27-28): "It is sweet and fitting to die for

one's country". See, for comparison, Ezra Pound, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley IV* (and note 1), p. 858 above.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
 20 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
 Pro patria mori.

1917-18

1920

### Strange Meeting

It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
 Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
 Through granites which titanic wars had groined.  
 Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
 Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
 Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
 Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.  
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,  
 By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.  
 10 With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;  
 Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,

And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.  
 "Strange friend," I said, "Here is no cause to mourn."  
 "None," said that other, "save the undone years,  
 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
 Was my life also; I went hunting wild  
 After the wildest beauty in the world,  
 Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
 20 But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.  
 For of my glee might many men have laughed,  
 And of my weeping something had been left,  
 Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,  
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
 Now men will go content with what we spoiled,  
 Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.  
 They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.  
 None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.  
 30 Courage was mine, and I had mystery,  
 Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:  
 To miss the march of this retreating world  
 Into vain citadels that are not walled.  
 Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,  
 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,  
 Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
 I would have poured my spirit without stint  
 But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.  
 Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  
 40 I am the enemy you killed, my friend.  
 I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned  
 Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.  
 I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.  
 Let us sleep now. . . ."

1917-18

1920

## W.H. AUDEN

1907-1973

The son of a physician and professor of public health at the University of Birmingham, Auden specialized in biology at school and won a natural sciences scholarship to Oxford University, intending to become a mining engineer. Instead, he discovered his poetic vocation and became part of the brilliant young group of university poets that included Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and C. Day Lewis. During the 1930s he began traveling widely—to Germany, Iceland, China, and finally the United States, where he took up residence in 1939 and became a naturalized citizen in 1946. He also went to Spain in support of the Loyalist government during the civil war, although he took no part in the military struggle. His sympathies with the victims of the Nazis led the homosexual Auden to marry Erika Mann, Thomas Mann's daughter, in 1935 so that she could get a passport and flee Germany. Deeply interested in opera, he composed libretti for Stravinsky and others. Over the years he shifted from his youthful Communist sympathies and D.H. Lawrence-like psychic mysticism to more conservative and even traditionally Christian positions.

Almost from the start Auden was admired by other poets of his own generation and older. Among the group of writers who came of age at the end of the 1920s, he was outstanding for his ability to catch the new moods produced by worldwide economic and political crisis. His first book was privately printed by Spender, in 1928; and the next two were accepted by T.S. Eliot for Faber and Faber and appeared in 1930 and 1933. (All three were simply called *Poems*; although the 1933 volume was printed as a "second edition," they are not identical.) Thereafter he was generally held to be the foremost British poet born in this century.

Auden's versatility shows the influence of many strains of English verse, and his work is notable for the pure melodic line that is intrinsic to the English lyric tradition. He uses the melodic element so flexibly that

it serves ambiguous, ironic, and intellectually complex functions to an unusual degree. "The Decoys," written in 1931, is both a lovely, elegiac song and something of a riddle; while it does not explain its compelling symbols, its tone and imagery suggest the deceptiveness of apparent innocence and goodness in a mad, violent world. Three poems written in 1936 illustrate Auden's range. "O What Is That Sound" echoes old folk ballads like "Edward" and "Lord Randal" in its question-and-answer method of building horror, but its versification is far more complex, and, like "The Decoys," it presents a riddle—an undefined state of gathering political and personal disaster. The poem that was eventually to become the tenth in the "Sonnets from China" sequence reveals, half-humorously and with an ingenious play of images and manipulation of the sonnet form, the poet's preoccupation with Freudian insights and with a dark primitivism under the surface of civilization. "On This Island," perhaps Auden's purest lyrical poem, describes a "view" with sensuous precision, meanwhile unfolding the inner process by which art achieves empathy with the world outside ourselves.

Auden's more mature poetry combines humane, tender feeling with a sophistication that, in "Lullaby," borders on cynicism. In "Musée des Beaux Arts" and "The Shield of Achilles" (his most grimly poignant poem), the overriding irony gives the humane feeling an unsentimental, depressive power. Sometimes his ironic sense forces Auden into a variety of wit or rhetoric that undercuts the depressive power and weakens an otherwise bitterly effective poem. This is true of his famous elegy "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" and the brilliant but only half-successful "September 1, 1939," which remains unforgettable even though he excluded it from his collected work. The less flamboyant "Prime" brims over with magical reverie, punctuated by reminders of hard realities that the waking soul must

confront. With this poem, written in 1949, and "The Shield of Achilles," written in 1952, Auden achieves exquisite lyrical mastery, while coping directly with worldly awareness and unease. The monumental

task of editing Auden's often-revised and chronologically scrambled text was performed by Edward Mendelson in preparing the posthumous *Collected Poems* (1978).

### The Decoys<sup>1</sup>

There are some birds in these valleys  
Who flutter round the careless  
With intimate appeal,  
By seeming kindness trained to snaring,  
They feel no falseness.

Under the spell completely  
They circle can serenely,  
And in the tricky light  
The masked hill has a purer greenness.  
10 Their flight looks fleeter.

But fowlers, O, like foxes,  
Lie ambushed in the rushes.  
Along the harmless tracks  
The madman keeper crawls through brushwood,  
Axe under oxter.<sup>2</sup>

Alas, the signal given,  
Fingers on trigger tighten.  
The real unlucky dove  
Must smarting fall away from brightness  
20 Its love from living.

May 1931

1932

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Auden. One implication of the title is that good people such as devoted teachers and clergymen may, with innocent good will, mislead those they seem to

help the most; they may, unconsciously, be serving the interests of a destructive system ("the madman keeper").

<sup>2</sup> oxter armpit

### O What Is That Sound<sup>1</sup>

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear  
Down in the valley drumming, drumming?  
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,  
The soldiers coming.

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Auden. This is one of several poems in which Auden adapts charac-

teristics of the folk ballad to modern circumstance or sensibility.

O what is that light I see flashing so clear  
 Over the distance brightly, brightly?  
 Only the sun on their weapons; dear,  
 As they step lightly.

10 O what are they doing with all that gear,  
 What are they doing this morning, this morning?  
 Only their usual manoeuvres, dear,  
 Or perhaps a warning.

O why have they left the road down there,  
 Why are they suddenly wheeling, wheeling?  
 Perhaps a change in their orders, dear,  
 Why are you kneeling?

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care,  
 Haven't they reined their horses, their horses?  
 20 Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,  
 None of these forces.

O is it the parson they want, with white hair,  
 Is it the parson, is it, is it?  
 No, they are passing his gateway, dear,  
 Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer who lives so near.  
 It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?  
 They have passed the farmyard already, dear,  
 And now they are running.

30 O where are you going? Stay with me here!  
 Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?  
 No, I promised to love you, dear,  
 But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,  
 O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;  
 Their boots are heavy on the floor  
 And their eyes are burning.

W.H. Auden

"The Decoys" "O What is that Sound" "The Unknown Citizen"  
"Musee des Beaux Arts" "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"

With Auden we enter the treacherous landscape of the 1930s. In the first, gullible followers are killed while those they followed go on to lure new followers. In the second, expressed in old-fashioned ballad form, a trusting girl is deserted by her faithless protector. The third is a mock eulogy for a perfect citizen from the state's point of view who fulfills every obligation that was expected of him; ironically, what was important to this person never really matters hence the ("unknown") in the title. The 4th employs the relative perspective of people going on with their everyday lives oblivious and indifferent to extraordinary events.

The last poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" brings together many of the techniques we have seen: parts 1 and 2 uses the contrast between the center and periphery in "Musee des Beaux Arts" to describe Yeats's expiration while the world goes on. Part 3 emulates Yeats's own "Under Ben Bulbin" joined to the contrast between poetry (which "makes nothing happen" but transfigures the mad events of history).

## THE UNKNOWN CITIZEN

(To JS/07/M/378  
*This Marble Monument  
 Is Erected by the State*)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be  
 One against whom there was no official complaint,  
 And all the reports on his conduct agree  
 That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,  
 For in everything he did he served the Greater Community. 5  
 Except for the War till the day he retired  
 He worked in a factory and never got fired,  
 But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.  
 Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,<sup>1</sup>  
 For his Union reports that he paid his dues, 10  
 (Our report on his Union shows it was sound)  
 And our Social Psychology workers found  
 That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.  
 The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day  
 And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way. 15

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,  
 And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.  
 Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare  
 He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan  
 And had everything necessary to the Modern Man, 20  
 A phonograph, radio, a car and a frigidaire.  
 Our researchers into Public Opinion are content  
 That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;  
 When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he  
 went.  
 He was married and added five children to the population, 25  
 Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his  
 generation,<sup>2</sup>  
 And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.  
 Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:  
 Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

*Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. Why is it significant that no official complaint was ever brought against the unknown citizen? What kind of society did he inhabit?
2. How does Auden parody the language of bureaucracy to satirize the social and political tenets of the government? What aspects of this society does he assail?
3. How might the word "unknown" in the title be interpreted? What is the significance of the question "was he free? was he happy?" in line 29? What evidence, if any, does the poem give as an answer?

Musée des Beaux Arts<sup>1</sup>

About suffering they were never wrong,  
 The Old Masters:<sup>2</sup> how well they understood  
 Its human position; how it takes place  
 While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking  
 dully along;

How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
 For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
 Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
 On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
 They never forgot

10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
 Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
 Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
 Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's *Icarus*,<sup>3</sup> for instance; how everything turns away  
 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
 Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
 But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
 As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
 Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
 20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
 Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

December 1938

1940

<sup>1</sup> (French) Museum of Fine Arts

<sup>2</sup> *The Old Masters* the great European painters before 1700

<sup>3</sup> *Breughel's Icarus* *The Fall of Icarus*, a painting by Flemish artist Pieter Breughel (1522?-1565). In Greek mythology the master craftsman

Daedalus fashioned wings of wax and feathers for his son Icarus and himself in order to escape from the Cretan labyrinth. Icarus flew too near the sun, the wax melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned.

In Memory of W.B. Yeats<sup>1</sup>

(D. JAN. 1939)

## 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;  
 10 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,  
 20 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 of noise of to-morrow  
 When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse,<sup>2</sup>  
 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.  
 30 What instruments we have agree  
 The day of his death was a dark cold day.

## II

You were silly like us;<sup>3</sup> your gift survived it all:  
 The parish of rich women, physical decay,  
 Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.<sup>4</sup>  
 Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,

<sup>1</sup>William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), felt by younger contemporaries to have been the quintessential modern poet, because of his genius and his combined tragic sense of the age and artistic integrity

<sup>2</sup>the Bourse the French stock exchange, in Paris

<sup>3</sup>You were silly like us Yeats had human foibles.

<sup>4</sup>ll. 33-34 parish of rich women a reference to Lady Augusta Gregory's patronage of Yeats; possibly also to Mrs. Annie Horniman's support of Dublin's Abbey Theatre. These lines allude to the parochialism and political fanaticism attributed to Ireland in Yeats's poems.

40 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<sup>s</sup>

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;

50 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;

60 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.

February 1939

1940

Dylan Thomas

"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" Thomas wrote this poem when his father was gravely ill. The form is an intricate villanelle (where the restriction means words carry a double meaning -- "that good night" means both

farewell and death. Thomas advises his father to approach death as an enemy and not to acquiesce. He shows four kinds of reactions: wise men who live their lives by reason are not exempt, "good men" are not saved by "frail deeds" "wild men" who exalt nature, and "brave men" who ignored the joys of life -- all realize that their thought to be fulfilling lives would have made them ready to accept death realized what they have missed.

--Notice how the last two lines are a plea ("fierce tears, I pray") contrast with the exhortation Thomas explores. So, ironically, his request of his dying father to "curse" and "bless" him requests a patriarch's blessing as a wish to truly live and not retreat into conventional roles or categories.

# DYLAN THOMAS

1914-1953

0045

Thomas was born in Swansea, Wales, where his father was a schoolteacher. He had his only formal education in Swansea Grammar School and then, from 1931 on, devoted himself to writing. After his first book, *Eighteen Poems* (1934), appeared, he went

to live in London and soon was broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Corporation and writing scripts and short stories. In 1937 he married Caitlin Macnamara in London. They had three children, and, to help support the family, he made a number of prolonged

tours—so popular that they ushered in a new era of public readings—in the United States after the war. Thomas wrote vividly subjective short stories and two interesting autobiographical books, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) and *Adventures in the Skin Trade* (posthumously published in 1955). Shortly before his death he completed his witty, touching, and earthy radio script *Under Milk Wood*. His acute alcoholism (unfortunately a factor in the popular interest he aroused) precipitated his early death.

Thomas's poetry burst on the British scene in the mid-1930s. Though its rhapsodic intensity could not be ignored, it was regarded with a good deal of distrust because the Auden school of lyrical but often coolly ironic poetry was in the ascendancy. Following World War II there was also in Britain a reaction against any emotionalism that might recall the tensions and near-hysteria of the war period. Thomas found American readers and listeners far more receptive to his style of writing.

Thomas's poems all have an incantatory quality; they are self-hypnotized by their obsession with the onrush of death from the moment of conception. "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower" (published when he was nineteen) begins with the stricken realization that the very life-force that explodes organisms into being destroys them in another phase, and it ends

with an image that compares the devouring worm after death to the male organ that generates life. On a different level, the wartime elegy "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" rejects discontinuity between life and death; the poem is a celebration of the organic oneness of the physical world, but its cumulative phrasing has more force than its surface assertions. "Fern Hill," despite its lulling whimsy and children's fairy-tale tone of wonder, becomes a song of irreversible doom. "In My Craft or Sullen Art," published in 1945 (like "A Refusal to Mourn" and "Fern Hill," in 1945 (like . . . Hill)), connects the poet's driven labor with the impersonal force of the "raging moon" and the heedless lovers who "lie abed" and embody the whole of fatality. The villanelle "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," written in 1941 as Thomas's father was dying, is the poet's simplest expression of this constant preoccupation of his work. The emotional intensity in all these poems is very high; the verse-forms, often fairly elaborate, almost always include uniform stanzas, refrain-like repetition, and richly emphatic sound-echoing. Anyone who has heard Thomas read, whether in person or in a recording, will realize the importance of the patterned sound for the escalation of feeling in his verse.

## The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower<sup>1</sup>

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees  
Is my destroyer.  
And I am dumb to tell<sup>2</sup> the crooked rose  
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

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

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Thomas.

<sup>2</sup> ll. 4, 9, 14, 19, 21 dumb to tell [mouth] have no way of explaining to

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

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;  
 Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood  
 Shall calm her sores.<sup>3</sup>  
 And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind,  
 20 How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.<sup>4</sup>  
 And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb  
 How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

1934

<sup>3</sup>ll. 16-18 a cosmic sexual image of the mortal world's recurrent impregnation by the "fountain head" (God? an eternal life-force?).

<sup>4</sup>l. 20 Mortals have created ("ticked") the idea of timeless heaven out of the very pressures of time itself.

### A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London<sup>1</sup>

Never until the mankind making  
 Bird beast and flower  
 Fathering and all humbling darkness  
 Tells with silence the last light breaking  
 And the still hour  
 Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round  
 Zion of the water bead  
 And the synagogue of the ear of corn<sup>2</sup>  
 10 Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound  
 Or sow my salt seed  
 In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death  
 I shall not murder  
 The mankind of her going with a grave truth  
 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath  
 With any further  
 Elegy of innocence and youth.

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Thomas.

<sup>2</sup>ll. 7-9 These lines present the whole material cosmos, organic and inorganic, as a holy communion. Zion = heaven or the heavenly city;

synagogue = place of communal worship (the Hebrew connotations reflect the importance of the Old Testament in Welsh Low Church religious observance)

20 Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,  
 Robed in the long friends,  
 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,<sup>3</sup>  
 Secret by the unmourning water  
 Of the riding Thames.  
 After the first death, there is no other.<sup>4</sup>

1946

<sup>3</sup>ll. 19-21 See preceding note. The earth's strata, seen as belonging to the same mystical communion as the water bead and the ear of corn (ll. 8-9), are personified as a protective maternal body.

<sup>4</sup>l. 24 This delphic utterance combines tones of

consolation, mystification, and stubborn denial of the continuing power of death; it suggests that the "first dead" (l. 19) established an organic link between humanity and the rest of creation, making all subsequent death meaningless.

### Fern Hill<sup>1</sup>

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs  
 About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,  
 The night above the dingle starry,  
 Time let me hail and climb  
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns  
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves  
 Trail with daisies and barley  
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.

10 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns  
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,  
 In the sun that is young once only,  
 Time let me play and be  
 Golden in the mercy of his means,  
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves  
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,  
 And the sabbath rang slowly  
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.

20 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay  
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air  
 And playing, lovely and watery  
 And fire green as grass.  
 And nightly under the simple stars  
 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,  
 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars  
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses  
 Flashing into the dark.

<sup>1</sup> a country house in Wales belonging to an aunt of Dylan Thomas. See comment in headnote on Thomas.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white  
 With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all  
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,  
 The sky gathered again  
 And the sun grew round that very day.  
 So it must have been after the birth of the simple light  
 In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm  
 Out of the whinnying green stable  
 On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house  
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,  
 In the sun-born over and over,  
 40 I ran my heedless ways,  
 My wishes raced through the house high hay  
 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows  
 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs  
 Before the children green and golden  
 Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me  
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,  
 In the moon that is always rising,  
 Nor that riding to sleep,  
 50 I should hear him fly with the high fields  
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.  
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,  
 Time held me green and dying  
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

1946

### In My Craft or Sullen Art

In my craft or sullen art  
 Exercised in the still night  
 When only the moon rages  
 And the lovers lie abed  
 With all their griefs in their arms,  
 I labour by singing light  
 Not for ambition or bread  
 Or the strut and trade of charms  
 On the ivory stages  
 10 But for the common wages  
 Of their most secret heart.

Not for the proud man apart  
 From the raging moon I write  
 On these spindrift pages

Nor for the towering dead  
 With their nightingales and psalms  
 But for the lovers, their arms  
 Round the griefs of the ages,  
 Who pay no praise or wages  
 20 Nor heed my craft or art.

1946

Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night<sup>1</sup>

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.

10 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.

1952

<sup>1</sup> See comment in headnote on Thomas. Compare, also, Thomas's use of the villanelle form with

William Empson's in "Villanelle" (p. 965; see also note) and in "Missing Dates" (p. 966).

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 TWENTY-FOUR YEARS
 

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Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes.  
 (Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour.)  
 In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor  
 Sewing a shroud for a journey  
 By the light of the meat-eating sun.  
 Dressed to die, the sensual strut begun,  
 With my red veins full of money,  
 In the final direction of the elementary town  
 I advance for as long as forever is. (1939)

## STEVIE SMITH

1902-1971

0050

Stevie Smith was born Florence Margaret Smith but, because of her extraordinary smallness, was called Stevie by her family—after the English jockey Steve Donaghue. Her father, a shipping agent, deserted the family when she was three, and for the rest of her life she lived with an aunt in London. From 1923 to 1953 she worked as a freelance broadcaster for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Though she published her first novel (*Novel on Yellow Paper; or, Work It Out for Yourself*) in 1936, and her first book of poems (*A Good Time Was Had by All*) in 1937, it was not until her *Selected Poems* appeared in 1962 that she became well known in England.

Smith is an eccentric poet, remotely similar to Emily Dickinson in the gnomic quality of her writing, and to Edward Lear in

the cultivated naiveté of her style. She combines childlike vision, mature intelligence, and disconcerting humor. Her poems, often adaptations of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, or hymns, appear playful and sometimes zany—an impression supported by the drawings or doodlings that illustrate her books—but their surface facetiousness usually masks a sense of blank loneliness and a terrifying isolation as in "Scorpion," where the poet uses the biblical quotation "This night shall thy soul be required of thee" to pray for death. Smith offers a cold appraisal of the world, particularly of the decaying English gentility that was her childhood milieu. Her strongest tone is elegiac: she uses wry humor to explore an enduring obsession with death and its attendant agonies.

### Not Waving But Drowning

Nobody heard him, the dead man,  
But still he lay moaning;  
I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking  
And now he's dead  
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,  
They said.

10 Oh, no no no, it was too cold always  
(Still the dead one lay moaning)  
I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.

1957

*"The Galloping Cat" from  
Selected Poems (1962) combines a childlike vision with wry humor to achieve what  
the poet Robert Lowell called a "unique and cheerfully gruesome voice."*

0051

## THE GALLOPING CAT

Oh I am a cat that likes to  
Gallop about doing good  
So

One day when I was  
Galloping about doing good, I saw  
A Figure in the path; I said: 5  
Get off! (Be-

cause

I am a cat that likes to  
Gallop about doing good) 10

But he did not move, instead  
He raised his hand as if  
To land me a cuff

So I made to dodge so as to  
Prevent him bringing it off, 15

Un-for-tune-ately I slid  
On a banana skin

Some Ass had left instead  
Of putting it in the bin. So

His hand caught me on the cheek 20  
I tried

To lay his arm open from wrist to elbow  
With my sharp teeth

Because I am  
A cat that likes to gallop about doing good. 25  
Would you believe it?

He wasn't there  
My teeth met nothing but air,

But a Voice said: Poor cat,  
(Meaning me) and a soft stroke 30  
Came on me head

Since when  
I have been bald

I regard myself as  
A martyr to doing good. 35

Also I heard a swoosh  
As of wings, and saw

A halo shining at the height of  
Mrs Gubbins's backyard fence,

So I thought: What's the good  
Of galloping about doing good 40  
When angels stand in the path

And do not do as they should

Such as having an arm to be bitten off  
All the same I 45

Intend to go on being  
A cat that likes to

Gallop about doing good

So  
 Now with my bald head I go,  
 Chopping the untidy flowers down, to and fro, 50  
 An' scooping up the grass to show  
 Underneath  
 The cinder path of wrath  
 Ha ha ha ha, ho. 55  
 Angels aren't the only ones who do not know  
 What's what and that  
 Galloping about doing good  
 Is a full-time job  
 That needs 60  
 An experienced eye of earthly  
 Sharpness, worth I dare say  
 (If you'll forgive a personal note)  
 A good deal more  
 Than all that skyeey stuff 65  
 Of angels that make so bold as  
 To pity a cat like me that  
 Gallops about doing good.

*Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. How would you characterize the speaker and the situation in this poem?
2. What is significant about the "galloping cat's" reaction to the angel's intervention?
3. What qualifications from the "galloping cat's" perspective make it better suited than the angels to gallop about doing good? Who do you think is better suited to this task, and why?

Stevie Smith

"The Galloping Cat" In this poem, an ordinary cat imbued with a sense of self-satisfaction encounters a supernatural being (akin to Saul of Tarsus meeting God and becoming Paul in the New Testament). Although resentful after his encounter the cat still persists in "doing good" but takes a more judgmental path against angels and others who block him in his desire to "gallop about doing good."

## PHILIP LARKIN

1922-1985

Born in Warwickshire, Larkin was educated at Oxford during World War II, and his experiences there provided the basis for *Jill* (1946), the first of his two novels. He later worked as a librarian, mostly at the University of Hull, and was also jazz-feature writer for the *London Daily Telegraph* from 1961 to 1971.

In his early work Larkin was associated with a group of poets at Oxford called "The Movement," whose anthology *New Lines* (editor Robert Conquest, 1956) was offered to counter the poetics of modernism. Rejecting the rhetorical style of Dylan Thomas and the metaphysical portentousness of T.S. Eliot, the group sought a conversational idiom for poetry, candid and faithful to ordinary experience. Larkin openly expressed his contempt for modernism (because, he claimed, it offers obscurity without profundity), preferring the forthright virtues of Thomas Hardy, whom he acknowledged

as his most important influence.

Larkin's poetry, conventional in formal technique, is tough-minded, skeptical, and reserved, recording human foibles with wit and a certain affection. He adapts his traditional style to modern subjects, particularly the spiritually blank ordinary lives of provincial or suburban people. He has a novelist's power of characterization and can create a complete personality in a poem as brief as "Mr. Bleaney," in which the minimal life of a lonely man is movingly portrayed. His viewpoint is often that of a solitary, cautious bachelor, aware of his limitations, of something "toad-like" squatting on his soul that ties him to habit and to a fear of change. Larkin's pervasive melancholic tone is perhaps redeemed by his wry stoicism—that of a reluctant agnostic, confronting change, diminution, and death with sardonic resignation.

## DRY-POINT

Endlessly, time-honoured irritant,  
A bubble is restively forming at your tip.  
Burst it as fast as we can—  
[It will grow again, until we begin dying.]

Silently it inflates, till we're enclosed  
And forced to start the struggle to get out:  
Bestial, intent, real.  
The wet spark comes, the bright blown walls collapse,

But what sad scapes we cannot turn from then:  
What ashen hills! what salted, shrunken lakes!  
How leaden the ring looks,  
Birmingham magic all discredited,

And how remote that bare and sunscrubbed room,  
Intensely far, that padlocked cube of light  
We neither define nor prove,  
Where you, we dream, obtain no right of entry. (1955)

*In "A Study of Reading Habits" (1964) Larkin creates an unusual portrait by showing how the speaker's attitude toward reading changes as he himself changes.*

### A STUDY OF READING HABITS

When getting my nose in a book  
Cured most things short of school,  
It was worth ruining my eyes  
To know I could still keep cool,  
And deal out the old right hook 5  
To dirty dogs twice my size.

Later, with inch-thick specs,  
Evil was just my lark:  
Me and my cloak and fangs  
Had ripping times in the dark 10  
The women I clubbed with sex!  
I broke them up like meringues.

Don't read much now: the dude  
Who lets the girl down before  
The hero arrives, the chap 15  
Who's yellow and keeps the store,  
Seem far too familiar. Get stewed:  
Books are a load of crap.

#### *Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. What is significant about the speaker's reading habits as a schoolboy in lines 1 through 6 and as an adolescent in lines 7 through 12? Through what stages does he move?
2. How do the last six lines provide insight into why the speaker, now that he is an adult, has lost interest in reading?
3. What subtle means does Larkin use to characterize the speaker in ways that suggest that Larkin does not wish to be identified with the speaker he has created?

Philip Larkin

In "Dry-Point" Larkin explores the way ever-expanding hopeful desires collapse (using the all too real landscape of Birmingham, a blighted industrial region). The imagery mimes the awakening of desire (sexual, imaginative in language reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's "Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock").

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## TOM WAYMAN

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Tom Wayman (b.1945) was born in Hawkesbury, Ontario, Canada. In 1959 his family moved to Vancouver, where he graduated from the University of British Columbia in 1966. He also received an M. F. A. in English from the University of California at Irvine. He has been a writer in residence at many universities, including University of Toronto, and currently teaches in Nelson, British Columbia. The following poem first appeared in *Did I Miss Anything?* Selected Poems (1973–1993). His latest work is *My Father's Cup* (2002).

### *Did I Miss Anything?*

Question frequently asked by  
students after missing a class

Nothing. When we realized you weren't here  
we sat with our hands folded on our desks  
in silence, for the full two hours

Everything. I gave an exam worth  
40 per cent of the grade for this term  
and assigned some reading due today  
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz  
worth 50 per cent

Nothing. None of the content of this course  
has value or meaning  
Take as many days off as you like:  
any activities we undertake as a class  
I assure you will not matter either to you or me  
and are without purpose

Everything. A few minutes after we began last time  
a shaft of light descended and an angel  
or other heavenly being appeared  
and revealed to us what each woman or man must do  
to attain divine wisdom in this life and  
the hereafter  
This is the last time the class will meet  
before we disperse to bring this good news to all people  
on earth

Nothing. When you are not present  
how could something significant occur?

Everything. Contained in this classroom  
is a microcosm of human existence  
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder  
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been  
gathered

but it was one place

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And you weren't here

### *Questions for Discussion and Writing*

1. What point is Wayman making and in what sense could both answers ("Nothing" or "Everything") be true?
2. How does the form of the poem underscore an ongoing debate in education? How does Wayman's use of sarcasm and exaggeration enhance the effect of the poem?

## TED HUGHES

b. 1930

Ted Hughes, a Yorkshire man, worked as a ground radio mechanic in the Royal Air Force and later earned B.A. and M.A. degrees at Cambridge University. At Cambridge he met and married the American Sylvia Plath in 1956; they had two children. They separated in 1963, some months before her suicide. His early volumes, *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), established him as England's foremost younger poet, and his *Crow* (1970) made the most sensational impact of any book by a member of his poetic generation.

In a radio broadcast, Hughes described his early passion for ornithology as his primary route to poetry. His childhood interest in collecting specimens was somehow converted, later, to a hunt for poetic symbols from the animal world. His favorite symbols, perhaps, are birds, both as victims and predators. Hughes sees animal violence primarily as an irrepressible, anarchic form of energy that leads him to an understanding of deep-seated predatory human instincts. In the savagery-obsessed poem "Pike," for example, the violence of the dark psyche surfaces to confront the poet in the image of a vast, unseen pike. Hughes pursues raw sensation and cruelty with a harsh, sardonic honesty.

His *Crow* sequence, deeply rooted in myth and fable, creates a figure, "Crow," at the center of a cosmogony and myth-like history that both echoes and parodies the Bible.

Through this figure, at once grotesque, hideous, and pathetic, Hughes can project a fierce vision of the human predicament as all but hopeless. The sequence of sixty-six poems and songs begins with "Two Legends," recounting the hatching of "Crow" before human creation, and traces his fantastical, solitary journey as he observes the human story, an allegory of devastation and loss. Hughes varies his poetic styles, drawing from the rhythmic subtleties of song and nursery rhyme, and sounding a wide variety of tones. "Littleblood," which ends the sequence, is a model of his method.

As in a legend, he uses a poignant metonymy—the song to "Littleblood" records the human progress from a fearful innocence to a pained and brutalized wisdom. *Crow* offers a world torn by violence and entropy, a dualist vision of a universe caught in a battle between good and evil, where the Serpent is coeval with God, and the negatives of creation—hatred, pain, greed, lust, fear, death itself—are the more powerful forces. Sheer survival, in the knowledge of guilt and the damnation of civilization, is the only possible egress from these poems. While Hughes's vision is dark, brutal, and elemental, he is one of the few poets actually recording the violence and barbarity hidden beneath the veneer of our civilization, and his poems echo a pain and desolation that have been earned by personal experience.

Ted Hughes  
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Modern British Poetry

"Hawk Roosting" (1957) -

In this poem, we hear a satisfied predator whose thoughts are direct and express, after a day of successful hunting, a complete non-intellectual mastery of its inborn nature. It is beyond rationalistic equivocations and its control ("my eye has permitted no change") simply desires a continuance of the status quo.

*Ted Hughes*  
(1930- )

HAWK ROOSTING

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, no falsifying dream  
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!  
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—  
I kill where I please because it is all mine.  
There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads—

The allotment of death.  
For the one path of my flight is direct  
Through the bones of the living.  
No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.  
Nothing has changed since I began.  
My eye has permitted no change.  
[I am going to keep things like this.] (1957)

"An Otter" (1960) -

In section one, we are submerged looking out at the world as an otter might see it. Hughes values (in language reminiscent of Dylan Thomas's poetry, e.g. "Fern Hill") as an estranged but kinglike creature. The otter's outsider status even resides in the pelt of a pursued captured an otter "over the back of a chair."

## AN OTTER

1

Underwater eyes, an eel's  
Oil of water body, neither fish nor beast is the otter:  
Four-legged yet water-gifted, to outfish fish;  
With webbed feet and long ruddering tail  
And a round head like an old tomcat.

Brings the legend of himself  
From before wars or burials, in spite of hounds and verminpoles;  
Does not take root like the badger. Wanders, cries;  
Gallops along land he no longer belongs to;  
Re-enters the water by melting.

Of neither water nor land. Seeking  
Some world lost when first he dived, that he cannot come at since,  
Takes his changed body into the holes of lakes;  
As if blind, cleaves the stream's push till he licks  
The pebbles of the source; from sea

To sea crosses in three nights  
Like a king in hiding. Crying to the old shape of the starlit land,  
Over sunken farms where the bats go round,  
Without answer. Till light and birdsong come  
Walloping up roads with the milk wagon.

2

The hunt's lost him. Pads on mud,  
Among sedges, nostrils a surface bead,  
The otter remains, hours. The air,  
Circling the globe, tainted and necessary,

Mingling tobacco-smoke, hounds and parsley,  
Comes carefully to the sunk lungs.  
So the self under the eye lies,  
Attendant and withdrawn. The otter belongs

In double robbery and concealment—  
From water that nourishes and drowns, and from land  
That gave him his length and the mouth of the hound.  
He keeps fat in the limpid integument

Reflections live on. The heart beats thick,  
Big trout muscle out of the dead cold;  
Blood is the belly of logic; he will lick  
The fishbone bare. And can take stolen hold

On a bitch otter in a field full  
Of nervous horses, but linger nowhere.  
Yanked above hounds, reverts to nothing at all,  
To this long pelt over the back of a chair. (1960)

"Lupercalia" (1960) -  
Here, we hear about a common cur, nothing special, whose  
urge to mate corresponds with the instincts of a childless  
female, but wishing for conception. Next, the scene shifts  
to a herd of black goats who embody regenerative force.  
Lastly, we are situated in the streets of Rome, with  
hopeful women who have not yet given birth to children  
being lashed with the blood of black goat saturated  
thongs, in hopes of becoming fertile. Then in section 3 we  
learn that the thongs carried through the streets of Rome  
(this ritual was held on 2/14 on the Palatine Hill) to  
lash the waiting women came from black goats in language  
that evokes Pan. In the 4th and last section, we review  
the oncoming runners from the women's perspective and  
share their prayer for new life.

## LUPERCALIA

1

The dog loved its churlish life,  
Scraps, thefts. Its declined blood  
An anarchy of mindless pride.  
Nobody's pet, but good enough

To double with a bitch as poor.  
It had bitten ears and little stone eyes,  
A mouth like an incinerator.  
It held man's reasonable ways.

Between its teeth. Received death  
Closed eyes and grinning mouth.

2

This woman's as from death's touch: a surviving  
Barrenness: she abides; perfect,  
But flung from the wheel of the living,  
The past killed in her, the future plucked out.

A sort of hair and bone wisdom,  
A worn witchcraft accoutrement

Of proverbs. Now the brute's quick  
Be tinder: Old spark of the blood-heat  
And not death's touch engross her bed,  
Though that has stripped her stark indeed.

"Cadenza" (1967) - In this poem, written years after Sylvia Plath (an American poet who Hughes married and with whom he had two children, Nicholas and Frieda) killed herself for which Hughes was blamed, undertakes a restorative role. He becomes a shamanic guide (imaged as a solo violinist concluding a virtuoso performance). A cadenza is a showy improvisational flourish bringing together previously heard tunes of music. The imagery conjures the soul of a deceased person who isn't accepted (as suicides were thought not to be). The swallows mentioned refer to the ancient custom of releasing flocks to ensure the deceased souls's easy passage. Unfortunately, the attempt fails, with a cataclysmic conclusion.

### CADENZA

The violinist's shadow vanishes.

The husk of a grasshopper  
Sucks a remote cyclone and rises.

The full, bared throat of a woman walking water,  
The loaded estuary of the dead.

And I am the cargo  
Of a coffin attended by swallows.

And I am the water  
Bearing the coffin that will not be silent.

The clouds are full of surgery and collisions  
But the coffin escapes—as a black diamond,

A ruby brimming blood,  
An emerald beating its shores,

The sea lifts swallow wings and flings  
A summer lake open,

Sips and bewilders its reflection,  
Till the whole sky dives shut like a burned land back to its spark—

A bat with a ghost in its mouth  
Struck at by lightnings of silence—

Blue with sweat, the violinist  
Crashes into the orchestra, which explodes. (1967)

3

Goats, black, not angels, but  
Bellies round as filled wine-skins  
Slung under carcase bones.  
Yet that's no brute light

And no merely mountain light—  
Their eyes' golden element.  
Rustle of their dry hooves, dry patter,  
Wind in the oak-leaves; and their bent

Horns, stamp, sudden reared stare  
Startle women. Spirit of the ivy,  
Stink of goat, of a rank thriving,  
O mountain listener.

4

Over sand that the sun's burned out  
Thudding feet of the powerful,  
Their oiled bodies brass-bright  
In a drift of dust. The earth's crammed full,

Its baked red bellying to the sky's  
Electric blue. Their attitudes—  
A theorem of flung effort, blades:  
Nothing mortal falters their poise

Though wet with blood: the dog has blessed  
Their fury. Fresh thongs of goat-skin  
In their hands they go bounding past,  
And deliberate welts have snatched her in

To the figure of racers. Maker of the world,  
Hurrying the lit ghost of man  
Age to age while the body hold,  
Touch this frozen one. (1960)

"Pike" (1960) - At first, we see a small 3 inch pike in a fish tank. Then, the perspective shifts to describe how

monstrous this same small creature would seem in its own habitat ("a hundred feet long"). We then see the shocking spectacle of a beached pike that has half swallowed another pike, after which we revert back to several small pike in a fish tank who carnivorously become one gorged but grinning pike. At the end, the speaker is fishing on a lake adjacent to an ancient monastery and is terrified by the possibility of a surfacing monstrous pike. A more stark presentation of ineffectual human reason against primeval forces can hardly be imagined.

### Pike

Pike, three inches long, perfect  
Pike in all parts, green tigering the gold,  
Killers from the egg: the malevolent aged grin.  
They dance on the surface among the flies.

Or move, stunned by their own grandeur  
Over a bed of emerald, silhouette  
Of submarine delicacy and horror.  
A hundred feet long in their world.

In ponds, under the heat-struck lily pads—  
10 Gloom of their stillness:  
Logged on last year's black leaves, watching upwards.  
Or hung in an amber cavern of weeds

The jaws' hooked clamp and fangs  
Not to be changed at this date;  
A life subdued to its instrument;  
The gills kneading quietly, and the pectorals.

Three we kept behind glass,  
Jungled in weed: three inches, four,  
And four and a half: fed fry to them—  
20 Suddenly there were two. Finally one.

With a sag belly and the grin it was born with.  
And indeed they spare nobody.  
Two, six pounds each, over two feet long,  
High and dry and dead in the willow-herb—  
One jammed past its gills down the other's gullet:  
The outside eye stared: as a vice locks—  
The same iron in this eye  
Though its film shrank in death:  
A pond I fished, fifty yards across,  
30 Whose lilies and muscular tench  
Had outlasted every visible stone  
Of the monastery that planted them—  
Stilled legendary depth:  
It was as deep as England. It held  
Pike too immense to stir, so immense and old  
That past nightfall I dared not cast  
But silently cast and fished  
With the hair frozen on my head  
For what might move, for what eye might move.  
40 The still splashes on the dark pond,

Owls hushing the floating woods  
Frail on my ear against the dream  
Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed,  
That rose slowly towards me, watching.

"Second Glance at a Jaguar" (19  
 In this poem, we are positioned in front of a jaguar's cage at a zoo (for a brief time Hughes worked as a zoo keeper for his national service). It is the 2nd of two poems he wrote about the jaguar and we notice that he first compares it to a cat slinking away from being pelted by stones and then shifts to the mythic role of jaguars in Aztec culture. The jaguar's incessant pacing becomes a self imposed way of purifying its nature. The scene then morphs to stress the half cough half growling sound the jaguar makes as if it were from ritual murderous prayer designed to expunge its distinctive spots, described as "cain-brands" and lessons its jaguar nature. The shift in imagery correponds to the pivoting turns the jaguar makes as it reaches the limits of its cage.

## *Second Glance at a Jaguar*

Skinfull of bowls, he bowls them,  
 The hip going in and out of joint, dropping the spine  
 With the urgency of his hurry  
 Like a cat going along under thrown stones, under cover,  
 Glancing sideways, running  
 Under his spine. A terrible, stump-legged waddle  
 Like a thick Aztec disemboweller,  
 Club-swinging, trying to grind some square  
 Socket between his hind legs round,  
 Carrying his head like a brazier of spilling embers,  
 And the black bit of his mouth, he takes it  
 Between his back teeth, he has to wear his skin out,  
 He swipes a lap at the water-trough as he turns,  
 Swivelling the ball of his heel on the polished spot,  
 Showing his belly like a butterfly,  
 [At every stride he has to turn a corner  
 In himself and correct it.] His head  
 Is like the worn down stump of another whole jaguar,  
 His body is just the engine shoving it forward,  
 Lifting the air up and shoving on under,  
 The weight of his fangs hanging the mouth open,  
 Bottom jaw combing the ground. A gorged look,  
 Gangster, club-tail lumped along behind gracelessly,  
 He's wearing himself to heavy ovals,  
 Muttering some mantrah, some drum-song of murder  
 To keep his rage brightening, making his skin  
 Intolerable, spurred by the rosettes, the cain-brands,  
 Wearing the spots off from the inside,  
 Rounding some revenge. Going like a prayer-wheel,  
 The head dragging forward, the body keeping up,  
 The hind legs lagging. He coils, he flourishes  
 The blackjack tail as if looking for a target,  
 Hurrying through the underworld, soundless.

"Wodwo" In this poem Hughes takes leave of his early preference for powerful predators (hawk, pike) to create this introspective tableau of an imaginary creature (alluded to in folktales). It's uncertain as to its place in relation to other creatures and the world around it. It is missing a sense of connection, but enjoys its pure play of expanding perception. Actually, this poem is a less theatrical, muted, but very accessible reformulation of the situation we have just seen in the above poem and marks the end of Hughes's early poetry.

## Wodwo

What am I? Nosing here, turning leaves over  
Following a faint stain on the air to the river's edge  
I enter water. What am I to split  
The glassy grain of water looking upward I see the bed  
Of the river above me upside down very clear  
What am I doing here in mid-air? Why do I find  
this frog so interesting as I inspect its most secret  
interior and make it my own? Do these weeds  
know me and name me to each other have they  
seen me before, do I fit in their world? I seem  
separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped  
out of nothing casually I've no threads  
fastening me to anything I can go anywhere  
I seem to have been given the freedom  
of this place what am I then? And picking  
bits of bark off this rotten stump gives me  
no pleasure and it's no use so why do I do it  
me and doing that have coincided very queerly  
But what shall I be called am I the first  
have I an owner what shape am I what  
shape am I am I huge if I go  
to the end on this way past these trees and past, these trees  
till I get tired that's touching one wall of me  
for the moment if I sit still how everything  
stops to watch me I suppose I am the exact centre  
but there's all this what is it roots  
roots roots roots and here's the water  
again very queer but I'll go on looking

CROW: From the Life and Songs of the Crow (1971)  
Crow is a main character with human characteristics modelled on the raven in American Indian mythology. The pattern we have seen in the last animal poems of an inquisitive creature exploring the conditions of its existence is replayed on an epic scale in a cycle of poems Hughes wrote after a period of a couple of years in which he wrote no poetry. His first wife, the American poet, Sylvia Plath has taken her own life and the woman Assia Weevil with whom Hughes had a daughter Shura had also committed suicide with their daughter in the same fashion as Plath (although Plath spared their two children, Nicholas and Frieda).

Examination at the Womb-Door  
Notice how this inquisition of a would-be living creature

highlights its noticeable deficiency, the interrogation changes to a trial of an accused about to be disposed of defendant. The "womb-door" is drawn from Tibetan mythology (using which Hughes had studied and planned to write an oratorio. The interrogation quickens as "death" becomes more persistent but unexpectedly Crow (like life itself, or a prisoner awaiting a verdict or a soldier wanting a temporary pass) is allowed to continue. The images are stark (everything we are is loaned to us and are not really owned by us and at death must be returned)-- yet Crow gets to keep permanently.

## Examination at the Womb-Door

Who owns these scrawny little feet?      *Death.*  
Who owns this bristly scorched-looking face?      *Death.*  
Who owns these still-working lungs?      *Death.*  
Who owns this utility coat of muscles?      *Death.*  
Who owns these unspeakable guts?      *Death.*  
Who owns these questionable brains?      *Death.*  
All this messy blood?      *Death.*  
These minimum-efficiency eyes?      *Death.*  
This wicked little tongue?      *Death.*  
This occasional wakefulness?      *Death.*

Given, stolen, or held pending trial?  
*Held.*

Who owns the whole rainy, stony earth?      *Death.*  
Who owns all of space?      *Death.*

Who is stronger than hope?      *Death.*  
Who is stronger than the will?      *Death.*  
Stronger than love?      *Death.*  
Stronger than life?      *Death.*

But who is stronger than death?  
*Me, evidently.*

Pass, Crow.

Crow's Fall -- although we cannot look at more than a few of the 66 poems (and Hughes wrote additional Crow poems that were not included) Crow's Fall occurs midpoint in the cycle and dramatizes the moment when Crow apprehends his limits (much as had the Jaguar and the Wodwo). Hughes studied mythology and in this poem draws on the legend that the Crow who was originally white informs Apollo (who is supposedly all-knowing) that Princess Koronis has betrayed him and is "charred black" for his troubles. Crow rationalizes his obvious defeat and is a turning point in the Crow cycle (like the jaguar reaching the limits of his cage).

## **Crow's Fall**

When Crow was white he decided the sun was too white.  
He decided it glared much too whitely.  
He decided to attack it and defeat it.

He got his strength flush and in full glitter.  
He clawed and fluffed his rage up.  
He aimed his beak direct at the sun's centre.

He laughed himself to the centre of himself

And attacked.

At his battle cry trees grew suddenly old,  
Shadows flattened.

But the sun brightened—  
It brightened, and Crow returned charred black.

He opened his mouth but what came out was charred black.

"Up there," he managed,  
"Where white is black and black is white, I won."

Lovesong -- notice how Hughes in this post-apocalyptic scenario draws on a defining aspect of Crow's nature (his all consuming voraciousness) and projects it onto a couple who must hold back nothing and ultimately become each other) "in the morning they wore each other's face." Some years later, Hughes was named Poet Laureate and after his death was entered in Canterbury Cathedral along with Chaucer, and other notable poets.

## Lovesong

He loved her and she loved him  
His kisses sucked out her whole past and future or tried to  
He had no other appetite  
She bit him she gnawed him she sucked  
She wanted him complete inside her  
Safe and sure forever and ever  
Their little cries fluttered into the curtains

Her eyes wanted nothing to get away  
Her looks nailed down his hands his wrists his elbows  
He gripped her hard so that life  
Should not drag her from that moment  
He wanted all future to cease  
He wanted to topple with his arms round her  
Off that moment's brink and into nothing  
Or everlasting or whatever there was  
Her embrace was an immense press  
To print him into her bones  
His smiles were the garrets of a fairy palace  
Where the real world would never come  
Her smiles were spider bites  
So he would lie still till she felt hungry  
His words were occupying armies  
Her laughs were an assassin's attempts  
His looks were bullets daggers of revenge  
Her glances were ghosts in the corner with horrible secrets  
His whispers were whips and jackboots  
Her kisses were lawyers steadily writing  
His caresses were the last hooks of a castaway  
Her love-tricks were the grinding of locks  
And their deep cries crawled over the floors  
Like an animal dragging a great trap

His promises were the surgeon's gag  
Her promises took the top off his skull  
She would get a brooch made of it  
His vows pulled out all her sinews  
He showed her how to make a love-knot  
Her vows put his eyes in formalin  
At the back of her secret drawer  
Their screams stuck in the wall

Their heads fell apart into sleep like the two halves  
Of a lopped melon, but love is hard to stop

In their entwined sleep they exchanged arms and legs  
In their dreams their brains took each other hostage

In the morning they wore each other's face