

Part One: Beginnings

1. From Whence Cometh Song?

From whence cometh song?
From the tear, far away,
From the hound giving tongue,
From the quarry's weak cry.

From whence, love?
From the dirt in the street,
From the bolt stuck in the groove,
From the cur at my feet.

Whence, death?
From dire hell's mouth,
From the ghost without breath,
From the wind shifting south.

Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)

2. The Open Road

Afoot and light-hearted, I take the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I
choose.
Henceforth I ask not good fortune—I myself am good
fortune.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

3. O Where Are You Going

from "Five Songs"

"O where are you going?" said reader to rider,
"That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,
Yonder's the midden whose odors will madden,
That gap is the grave where the tall return."

"O do you imagine," said fearer to farer,
"That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,
Your diligent looking discover the lacking,
Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?"

"O what was that bird," said horror to hearer,
"Did you see that shape in the twisted tree?
Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
The spot on your skin is a shocking disease."

"Out of this house"—said rider to reader,
"Yours never will"—said farer to fearer,
"They're looking for you"—said hearer to horror,
As he left them there, as he left them there.

W. H. Auden (1907-1973)

4. The Rainbow

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each in natural piety.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

5. How Do I Love Thee?

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and the Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

6. Life in a Love

Escape me?
Never—
Beloved.

While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear—
It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed—
But what if I fail of purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up to begin again,—
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound,
At me so deep in the dusk and dark,
No sooner the old hope drops to the ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me—
Ever
Removed!

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

7. **Their Lonely Bidders**

As I listened from a beach-chair in the shade
To all the noises that my garden made,
It seemed to me only proper that words
Should be withheld from vegetables and birds.

A robin with no Christian name ran through
The Robin-Anthem which was all it knew,
And rustling flowers for some third party waited
To say which pairs, if any, should get mated.

None of them was capable of lying,
There was not one which knew that it was dying!
Or could have with a rhythm or a rhyme
Assumed responsibility for time.

Let them leave language to their lonely bidders
Who count some days and long for certain letters;
We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep:
Words are for those with promises to keep.

W. H. Auden

8. **His Beauty Sparkles**

His beauty sparkles, his big eyes blaze
his moist teeth gleam, and his wide smile
turns up a lamp that was aglow,
his laughing-wrinkles crackle like a campfire,
the flush across his neck
is like the slowly burning ruby
I drowned in swimming for tomorrow
west into the blushing sun.

Paul Goodman (1911-1972)

9. **Boy with a Baseball Glove**

See now the beauty with the glove
and hands on's hips and head held high
arrests me, to be in love
when on an easy way was I.

In Eire would the same
be standing with a fish
and canvas clothes and legs astride upon the landing
and make the Irish poet pause.

Each time to pleasure had with ease
since won, I go without a care,
a Messenger from overseas appears
and arrests me there.

Paul Goodman

10. **A Glimpse**

One flitting glimpse, caught in an interstice,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room around
the stove late of a winter night, and I unremarked in a
corner,
Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently
approaching, and seating himself near, that he may hold
me by the hand,
A long while amid the noises of coming and going, of
drinking and oath and smutty jest;
That we two, content, happy in just being together,
speaking little, perhaps not a word.

Walt Whitman

11. **I Am He**

I am he that aches with love;
Does the earth gravitate? does not all matter, aching, attract
all matter?
So the body of me to all I meet or know.

Walt Whitman

12. **Love Cannot Fill**

Love cannot fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

13. **The More Loving One**

Looking up at the stars, I know quite well
That, for all they care, I can go to hell,
But on earth indifference is the least
We have to dread from man or beast.

How should we like it were stars to burn
With a passion for us we could not return?
If equal affection cannot be,
Let the more loving one be me.

Admirer as I think I am
Of stars that do not give a damn,
I cannot, now I see them, say
I missed one terribly all day.

Were all stars to disappear or die,
I should learn to look at an empty sky
And feel its total dark sublime
Though this might take me a little time.

W. H. Auden

14. Hymn for Morning

Wake my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay this morning sacrifice.

Redeem thy misspent moments past
And live this day as if the last;
Improve thy talent with due care;
For the great day thyself prepare.

Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the noon-day clear;
Think how all-seeing God thy ways
And all thy secret thoughts surveys.

Wake, and lift up thyself, my heart,
And with the angels bear thy part,
Who all night long unwearied sing
High praises to the eternal king.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

Part Two: Middles

15. I Saw a Mass *from Journal*

... I saw a mass of matter of a dull gloomy color... and was informed that this mass was human beings in as great misery as they could be, and live, and that I was mixed in with them, and henceforth I might not consider myself as a distinct or separate being.

John Woolman (1720-1772)

16. The Comfort of Friends

O the rapes, fires, murders, and rivers of blood that lie at the doors of professed Christians! If this be godly, what's devilish? If this be Christian, what's paganism? What's anti-Christian but to make God a party to their wickedness?

Time past is none of thine? 'Tis not what thou wast but what thou art. God will be daily looked into. Did'st thou eat yesterday? That feedeth thee not today.

They that love beyond the World, cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies. Nor can spirits ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle; the Root and Record of their Friendship.

This is the Comfort of Friends, that though they may be said to Die, yet their Friendship and Society are, in the best Sense, ever present, because Immortal.

William Penn (1644-1718)

17. A Dead Statesman

I could not dig; I dared not rob:
Therefore I lied to please the mob.
Now all my lies are proved untrue
And I must face the men I slew.
What tale shall serve me here among
Mine angry and defrauded young?

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

18. The Candid Man

Forth went the candid man
And spoke freely to the wind—
When he looked about him he was in a far strange country.

Forth went the candid man
and spoke freely to the stars—
Yellow light tore sight from his eyes.

“My good fool,” said a learned bystander,
“Your operations are mad.”

“You are too candid,” cried the candid man.
And when his stick left the head of the learned bystander
It was two sticks.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900)

19. Comment on War

Let us kill off youth
For the sake of truth.
We who are old know what truth is—
Truth is a bundle of vicious lies
Tied together and sterilized—
A war-maker's bait for unwise youth
To kill off each other
For the sake of
Truth.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

20. A Learned Man

A learned man came to me once.
He said, "I know the way—come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.

Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend:
But at last he cried, "I am lost."

Stephen Crane

22. Requiescat

Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.

Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.

21. Dear, Though the Night

Dear, though the night is gone
Its dream still haunts today,
That brought us to a room
Cavernous, lofty as
A railway terminus,
And crowded in that room
Were beds, and we in one
In a far corner lay.

Our whisper woke no clocks,
We kissed and I was glad
At everything you did,
Indifferent to those
Who sat with hostile eyes
In pairs on every bed,
Arms round each other's necks,
Inert and vaguely sad.

O but what worm of guilt
Or what malignant doubt
Am I the victim of,
That you then, unabashed,
Did what I never wished,
Confessed another love;
And I, submissive, felt
Unwanted and went out.

W. H. Auden

Coffin-board, heavy stone,
Lie on her breast,
I vex my heart alone
She is at rest.

Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet,
All of my life's buried here,
Heap earth upon it.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

23. **Is My Team Ploughing**

“Is my team ploughing
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?”

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

“Is my girl happy,
That I found hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?”

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies down not to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

“Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?”

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

A. E. Housman (1859-1936)

24. **As I Walked Out One Evening**

As I walked out one evening
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
“Love has no ending.

“I’ll love you, dear, I’ll love you
Till China and Africa meet.
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street.

“The years shall run like rabbits
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages
And the first love of the world.”

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
“O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

“In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or today.

“O plunge your hands in water
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare at the basin
And wonder what you’ve missed.

“The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the teacup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

“O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.”

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming
And the deep river ran on.

W. H. Auden

25. **The Sick Wife**

The sick wife stayed in the car
while he bought a few groceries.
Not yet fifty,
she had learned what it’s like
not to be able to button a button.

It was the middle of the day—
and so only mothers with small children
and retired couples
stepped through the muddy parking lot.

Dry cleaning swung and gleamed on hangers
in the cars of the prosperous.
How easily they moved—
with such freedom,
even the old and relatively infirm.

The windows began to steam up.
The cars on either side of her
pulled away so briskly
that it made her sick at heart.

Jane Kenyon (1947-1995)

26. Now Is the Dreadful Midnight

Now is the dreadful midnight you
have to do what you want to do

not by your will which is afraid
but by my hand upon you laid.

My hand withheld almost too long
moves by lust, its grip is strong

and callous, it has turned to fire
the arpeggios of a lyre

and we love carelessly
who gravely love Saint Harmony.

Resist not, nor can you resist, the cries
that in your bowels rise

while I to song shall modify
and neither of us will ever die.

Paul Goodman

27. Hymn for Evening

All praise to thee, my God, this night
For the blessings of the light:
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thine own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,
The ill that I have done;
That with the world, myself, and thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace must be.

May my soul on thee repose
And with sleep mine eyelids close;
Sleep shall me more vigorous make
To serve my God when I awake.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thomas Ken (1637-1711)

Part Three: Ends

28. He Thinks Upon His Death *from L'autre sommeil*

Pour la première fois, je pensais à ma mort comme à une chose réelle et certaine. L'air tiède agité par la brise, le soleil, l'ombre des feuilles sur mes mains, il me semblait que tout ne parlait que de cela, mais que jusqu' à cette minute je ne l'avais pas compris. Un jour viendrait où mon coeur battrait une fois encore, puis s'arrêterait de souffrir. Pour d'autres que moi le vent passerait murmurant dans les arbres, pour d'autres jeunes hommes au coeur lourd, mais j'écoutais aujourd'hui sans terreur ni regret cette voix inquiète de m'instruire et qui me prédisait dans la lumière d'un jour d'été la fin de toute vie.

For the first time I thought of my own death as a sure and real thing. The warm air moved by the breeze, the shadow of leaves on my hands, it seemed to me that all things spoke only of that, but until this moment I had not understood. A day would come when my heart would beat one last time, then would cease its suffering. For others the wind would pass murmuring through the trees, for other young men with heavy hearts; but today I listened with neither terror nor regret for this troubled voice to instruct me, and which foresaw in the light of a summer day the end of all life.

Julien Green (1900-1998)

29. On an Echoing Road *from L'Etoile vesper*

Sur une route sonore s'accorde, puis se désaccorde pour s'accorder encore, le trot de deux chevaux attelés en paire, guidés par la même main. Plume et aiguille, habitude de travail et sage envie d'y mettre fin lient amitié, se séparent, se réconcilient... Mes lents corsaires, tachez à aller de compagnie: je vois d'ici le bout de la route.

On an echoing road, trotting in unison, now out of step, now as one again, are two horses saddled together, guided by a single hand. The needle and the pen, the habit of work and the sly urge to quit the habit, make friends with each other, then separate, then reconcile again... O my slow steeds, pull now together; from here I can see the end of the road.

Colette (1873-1954)

30. A Terrible Disaster

A terrible disaster befell me
long ago, no newsy story,
I was in love, my love was not requited,
I missed the easy boat of happiness

since when many a thing is possible
to those who have been fortunate in love
has been impossible to me who lack
conviction the world is ordered for the best.

A disastrous and terrible simple fate
I share in common with many other folk
and maybe we had all been better off
if we had died then when our hearts were broken.

Paul Goodman

31. Come In

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

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

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

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

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

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

32. The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water

I heard the old, old men say,
“Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away.”
They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn-trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say,
“All that's beautiful drifts away,
Like the waters.”

W. B. Yeats (1865-1939)

33. End of the Day [La fin de la journée]

*Sous une lumière blafarde
Court, danse et se tord sans raison
La Vie, impudente et criarde.
Aussi, sitôt qu' à l'horizon
La nuit voluptueuse monte,
Apaisant tout, même la faim,
Effaçant tout, même la honte,
Le Poète se dit: Enfin!*

*Mon esprit, comme mes vertèbres,
Invoque ardemment le repos;
Le coeur plein de songes funèbres,
Je vais me coucher sur le dos
Et me rouler dans vos rideaux,
O rafraîchissantes ténèbres!*

In fading light
Life dances, twists, and crazily rushes,
impudent and shrill, while
Night rises,
appeasing all, even hunger,
hiding all, even shame,
The Poet whispers to himself:
Finally!

while body and soul
long desperately for rest,
my heart seethes with deathly dreams.
Let me lie on my back
and enshroud myself in your curtains,
O nourishing darkness!

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

34. Faith *from Atlantis*

“I’ve been having these
awful dreams, each a little different,
though the core’s the same—

we’re walking in a field,
Wally and Arden and I, a stretch of grass
with a highway running beside it,

or a path in the woods that opens
onto a road. Everything’s fine,
then the dog sprints ahead of us,

excited; we’re calling but
he’s racing down a scent and doesn’t hear us,
and that’s when he goes

onto the highway. I don’t want to describe it.
Sometimes it’s brutal and over,
and others he’s struck and takes off

so we don’t know where he is
or how bad. This wakes me
every night now, and I stay awake;

I’m afraid if I sleep I’ll go back
into the dream. It’s been six months
almost exactly, since the doctor wrote

not even a real word
but an acronym, a vacant
four-letter cypher

that draws meaning into itself,
reconstitutes the world.
We tried to say it was just

a word; we tried to admit
it had power and thus to nullify it
by means of our own acknowledgement.

I know the current wisdom:
bright hope, the power of wishing you’re well.
He’s just so tired, though nothing

shows in any tests. Nothing,
the doctor says, detectable;
the doctor doesn’t hear what I do,

that trickling, steadily rising nothing
that makes him sleep all day,
vanish into fever’s tranced afternoons,

and I swear sometimes
when I put my head to his chest
I can hear the virus humming

like a refrigerator.
Which is what makes me think
you can take your positive attitude

and go straight to hell.
We don’t have a future,
we have a dog. Who is he?

Soul without speech,
sheer, tireless faith,
he is that-which-goes-forward,

black muzzle, black paws
scouting what’s ahead;
he is where we’ll be hit first,

he’s the part of us
that’s going to get it.
I’m hardly awake on our morning walk

—always just me and Arden now—
and sometimes I am still
in the thrall of the dream,

which is why, when he took a step onto Commercial
before I’d looked both ways,
I screamed his name and grabbed his collar.

And there I was on my knees,
both arms around his neck
and nothing coming,

and when I looked into that bewildered face
I realized I didn’t know what it was I was shouting at,
I didn’t know who I was trying to protect.”

Mark Doty (b. 1953)

35. **Even Now**

...even now the night jasmine is pouring
its white delirium in the dark and I
will not have it if you can't I shut all
windows still it seeps in with the gaudy
oath of spring Oh help be somewhere near
so I can endure this drunk intrusion
of promise where is the walled place where we
can walk untouched or must I be content
with a wedding I almost didn't witness
the evidence all but lost no oath no ring
but the truth sealed to hold against the [fate of one}
... who fears his women
and men too full of laughter far brother
if you should pass beneath our cypresses
you who are a praying man your god can
go to hell but since you are so inclined
pray that my friend and I be still together
just like this at the Mount of Olives blessed
by the last of an ancient race who loved
youth and laughter and beautiful things so much
they couldn't stop singing and we were the song

Paul Monette (1945-1995)

36. **Evidence of Things not Seen**

... Faith lights us, even through the grave, being the
Evidence of Things not seen. And this is the Comfort of
the Good, that the Grave cannot hold them, and that they
live as soon as they die. For Death is no more than the
Turning of us over from Time to Eternity. Death then,
being the Way and Condition of Life, we cannot love to
live, if we cannot bear to die...

William Penn