

The Manhunt

After the first phase,
 after passionate nights and intimate days,

 only then would he let me trace
 the frozen river which ran through his face,

 5 only then would he let me explore
 the blown hinge of his lower jaw,

 and handle and hold
 the damaged, porcelain collar-bone,

 and mind and attend
 10 the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade,

 and finger and thumb
 the parachute silk of his punctured lung.

 Only then could I bind the struts
 and climb the rungs of his broken ribs,

 15 and feel the hurt
 of his grazed heart.

 Skirting along,
 only then could I picture the scan,

 the foetus of metal beneath his chest
 20 where the bullet had finally come to rest.

 Then I widened the search,
 traced the scarring back to its source

 to a sweating, unexploded mine
 buried deep in his mind, around which

 25 every nerve in his body had tightened and closed.
 Then, and only then, did I come close.

SIMON ARMITAGE

Sonnet 43

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 ideal Grace.

5 I love thee to the level of every day's

Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

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

10 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

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

5 In every cry of every Man,
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
10 Every black'ning Church appalls;
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
15 Blasts the new born Infant's tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

WILLIAM BLAKE

The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is for ever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

5 A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,

Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,

A body of England's, breathing English air,

Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,

10 A pulse in the eternal mind, no less

Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,

In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

RUPERT BROOKE

She Walks in Beauty

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
5 Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
10 Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
15 The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

LORD BYRON

Living Space

There are just not enough
straight lines. That
is the problem.
Nothing is flat
5 or parallel. Beams
balance crookedly on supports
thrust off the vertical.
Nails clutch at open seams.
The whole structure leans dangerously
10 towards the miraculous.

Into this rough frame,
someone has squeezed
a living space

and even dared to place
15 these eggs in a wire basket,
fragile curves of white
hung out over the dark edge
of a slanted universe,
gathering the light
20 into themselves,
as if they were
the bright, thin walls of faith.

IMTIAZ DHARKER

As Imperceptibly as Grief

- As imperceptibly as Grief
The Summer lapsed away —
Too imperceptible at last
To seem like Perfidy —
5 A Quietness distilled
As Twilight long begun,
Or Nature spending with herself
Sequestered Afternoon —
The Dusk drew earlier in —
10 The Morning foreign shone —
A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,
As Guest, that would be gone —
And thus, without a Wing
Or service of a Keel
15 Our Summer made her light escape
Into the Beautiful.

EMILY DICKINSON

Cozy Apologia

—for Fred

- I could pick anything and think of you—
 This lamp, the wind-still rain, the glossy blue
 My pen exudes, drying matte, upon the page.
 I could choose any hero, any cause or age
 5 And, sure as shooting arrows to the heart,
 Astride a dappled mare, legs braced as far apart
 As standing in silver stirrups will allow—
 There you'll be, with furrowed brow
 And chain mail glinting, to set me free:
 10 One eye smiling, the other firm upon the enemy.
- This post-post-modern age is all business: compact disks
 And faxes, a do-it-now-and-take-no-risks
 Event. Today a hurricane is nudging up the coast,
 Oddly male: Big Bad Floyd, who brings a host
 15 Of daydreams: awkward reminiscences
 Of teenage crushes on worthless boys
 Whose only talent was to kiss you senseless.
 They all had sissy names—Marcel, Percy, Dewey;
 Were thin as licorice and as chewy,
 20 Sweet with a dark and hollow center. Floyd's
- Cussing up a storm. You're bunkered in your
 Aerie, I'm perched in mine
 (Twin desks, computers, hardwood floors):
 We're content, but fall short of the Divine.
 25 Still, it's embarrassing, this happiness—
 Who's satisfied simply with what's good for us,
 When has the ordinary ever been news?
 And yet, because nothing else will do
 To keep me from melancholy (call it blues),
 30 I fill this stolen time with you.

RITA DOVE

Valentine

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
5 like the careful undressing of love.

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
10 a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
15 possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Take it.
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding-ring,
20 if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

CAROL ANN DUFFY

A Wife in London

I – The Tragedy

She sits in the tawny vapour
 That the City lanes have uprolled,
 Behind whose webby fold on fold
 Like a waning taper
 5 The street-lamp glimmers cold.

A messenger's knock cracks smartly,
 Flashed news is in her hand
 Of meaning it dazes to understand
 Though shaped so shortly:
 10 He – has fallen – in the far South Land ...

II – The Irony

'Tis the morrow; the fog hangs thicker,
 The postman nears and goes:
 A letter is brought whose lines disclose
 By the firelight flicker
 15 His hand, whom the worm now knows:

Fresh – firm – penned in highest feather –
 Page-full of his hoped return,
 And of home-planned jaunts by brake and burn
 In the summer weather,
 20 And of new love that they would learn.

THOMAS HARDY

Death of a Naturalist

- All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
 Of the townland; green and heavy headed
 Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.
 Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.
- 5 Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles
 Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
 There were dragon-flies, spotted butterflies,
 But best of all was the warm thick slobber
 Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
- 10 In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring
 I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied
 Specks to range on window-sills at home,
 On shelves at school, and wait and watch until
 The fattening dots burst into nimble-
- 15 Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how
 The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
 And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
 Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
 Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too
- 20 For they were yellow in the sun and brown
 In rain.
- Then one hot day when fields were rank
 With cowdung in the grass and angry frogs
 Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
- 25 To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
 Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
 Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
 On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
 The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
- 30 Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
 I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
 Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
 That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

SEAMUS HEANEY

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.

5 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.
10 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.
15 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.
20 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.

TED HUGHES

To Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;

5 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

10 Until they think warm days will never cease,

For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

20 Steady thy laden head across a brook;

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, —

25 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river shallows, borne aloft

Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

JOHN KEATS

Afternoons

Summer is fading:
The leaves fall in ones and twos
From trees bordering
The new recreation ground.
5 In the hollows of afternoons
Young mothers assemble
At swing and sandpit
Setting free their children.

Behind them, at intervals,
10 Stand husbands in skilled trades,
An estateful of washing,
And the albums, lettered
Our Wedding, lying
Near the television:
15 Before them, the wind
Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places
(But the lovers are all in school),
And their children, so intent on
20 Finding more unripe acorns,
Expect to be taken home.
Their beauty has thickened.
Something is pushing them
To the side of their own lives.

PHILIP LARKIN

Dulce et Decorum Est

- 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.
- 5 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 gas shells dropping softly 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.
- 15 In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
- 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,
 20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
 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, –
 25 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.

WILFRED OWEN

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
10 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Mametz Wood

For years afterwards the farmers found them –
the wasted young, turning up under their plough blades
as they tended the land back into itself.

A chit of bone, the china plate of a shoulder blade,
5 the relic of a finger, the blown
and broken bird's egg of a skull,

all mimicked now in flint, breaking blue in white
across this field where they were told to walk, not run,
towards the wood and its nesting machine guns.

10 And even now the earth stands sentinel,
reaching back into itself for reminders of what happened
like a wound working a foreign body to the surface of the skin.

This morning, twenty men buried in one long grave,
a broken mosaic of bone linked arm in arm,
15 their skeletons paused mid dance-macabre

in boots that outlasted them,
their socketed heads tilted back at an angle
and their jaws, those that have them, dropped open.

As if the notes they had sung
20 have only now, with this unearthing,
slipped from their absent tongues.

OWEN SHEERS

Excerpt from The Prelude

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows through the twilight blaz'd,
I heeded not the summons: – happy time
5 It was, indeed, for all of us; to me
It was a time of rapture: clear and loud
The village clock toll'd six; I wheel'd about,
Proud and exulting, like an untir'd horse,
That cares not for his home. – All shod with steel,
10 We hiss'd along the polish'd ice, in games
Confederate, imitative of the chace
And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
The Pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
15 And not a voice was idle; with the din,
Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees, and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
20 Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH