

Robert Frost:

ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-by;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

Ted Hughes:

CROW BLACKER THAN EVER

When God, disgusted with man,
Turned towards heaven.
And man, disgusted with God,
Turned towards Eve,
Things looked like falling apart.

But Crow Crow
Crow nailed them together, Nailing Heaven and earth together—

So man cried, but with God's voice.
And God bled, but with man's blood.

Then heaven and earth creaked at the joint
Which became gangrenous and stank— A horror beyond redemption.

The agony did not diminish.

Man could not be man nor God God.

The agony

Grew.

Crow

Grinned

Crying: "This is my Creation,"

Flying the black flag of himself.

Joseph Brodsky:

ELEGY

About a year has passed. I've returned to the place of the battle,
to its birds that have learned their unfolding of wings
from a subtle
lift of a surprised eyebrow, or perhaps from a razor blade
- wings, now the shade of early twilight, now of state
bad blood.

Now the place is abuzz with trading
in your ankles's remnants, bronzes
of sunburnt breastplates, dying laughter, bruises,
rumors of fresh reserves, memories of high treason,
laundered banners with imprints of the many
who since have risen.

All's overgrown with people. A ruin's a rather stubborn
architectural style. And the hearts's distinction
from a pitch-black cavern
isn't that great; not great enough to fear
that we may collide again like blind eggs somewhere.

At sunrise, when nobody stares at one's face, I often,
set out on foot to a monument cast in molten
lengthy bad dreams. And it says on the plinth "commander
in chief." But it reads "in grief," or "in brief,"
or "in going under."

1985, translated by the author.

Joseph Brodsky:

BELFAST TUNE

Here's *a* girl from a dangerous town
 She crops her dark hair short
so that less of her has to frown
 when someone gets hurt.

She folds her memories like a parachute.
 Dropped, she collects the peat
and cooks her veggies at home: they shoot
 here where they eat.

Ah, there's more sky in these parts than, say,
 ground. Hence her voice's pitch,
and her stare stains your retina like a gray
 bulb when you switch

hemispheres, and her knee-length quilt
 skirt's cut to catch the squall,
I dream of her either loved or killed
 because the town's too small.

translated by the author

Joseph Brodsky:

BOSNIA TUNE

As you pour yourself a scotch,
crush a roach, or check your watch,
as your hand adjusts your tie,
people die.

In the towns with funny names,
hit by bullets, caught in flames,
by and large not knowing why, people die.

In small places you don't know
of, yet big for having no
chance to scream or say good-bye, people die.

People die as you elect
new apostles *of* neglect,
self-restraint, etc. - whereby
people die.

Too far off to practice love
for thy neighbor/brother Slav,
where your cherubs dread to fly, people die.

While the statues disagree,
Cain's version, history
for its fuel tends to buy
those who die.

As you watch the athletes score,
check your latest statement, or
sing your child a lullaby,
people die.

Time, whose sharp blood-thirsty quill
parts the killed from those who kill, will pronounce the latter tribe
as your tribe.

1995?

Alexander Pushkin:

I HAVE OUTLASTED ALL DESIRE

I have outlasted all desire,
My dreams and I have grown apart;
My grief alone is left entire,
The gleanings of an empty heart.
The storms of ruthless dispensation
Have struck my flowery garland numb-
I live in lonely desolation
And wonder when my end will come.
Thus on a naked tree-limb, blasted
By tardy winter's whistling chill,
A single leaf which has outlasted
Its season will be trembling still.

1821

Alexander Pushkin:

THE PROPHET

Parched with the spirit's thirst, I crossed
An endless desert sunk in gloom,
And a six-winged seraph came
Where the tracks met and I stood lost.
Fingers light as dream he laid
Upon my lids; I opened wide
My eagle eyes, and gazed around.
He laid his fingers on my ears
And they were filled with roaring sound:
I heard the music of the spheres,
The flight of angels through the skies,
The beasts that crept beneath the sea,
The heady uprush of the vine;
And, like a lover kissing me,
He rooted out this tongue of mine
Fluent in lies and vanity;
He tore my fainting lips apart
And, with his right hand steeped in blood,
He armed me, with a serpent's dart;
With his bright sword he split my breast;
My heart leapt to him with a bound;
A glowing livid coal he pressed
Into the hollow of the wound.
There in the desert I lay dead,
And God called out to me and said:
'Rise, prophet, rise, and hear, and see,
And let my works be seen and heard
By all who turn aside from me,
And burn them with my fiery word. '

Richard Eberhart:

THE GROUNDHOG

In June, amid the golden fields,
I saw a groundhog lying dead.
Dead lay he; my senses shook,
And mind out-shot our naked frailty.
There lowly in the vigorous summer
His form began its senseless change,
And made my senses waver dim
Seeing nature ferocious in him.
Inspecting close his maggots ' might
And seething cauldron of his being,
Half with loathing, half with a strange love,
I poke'd him with an angry stick.
The fever rose, became a flame
And Vigour circumscribed the skies,
Immense energy in the sun,
And through my frame a sunless trembling.
My stick had done nor good nor harm.
Then stood I silent in the day
Watching the object, as before;
And kept my reverence for knowledge
Trying for control, to be still,
To quell the passion of the blood:
Until I had bent down on my knees
Praying for joy in the sight of decay.
And so I left; and I returned
In Autumn strict of eve, to see
The sap gone out of the groundhog,
But the bony sodden hulk remained.
But the year had lost its meaning,
And in intellectual chains
I lost both love and loathing,
Mured up in the wall of wisdom.
Another summer took the fields again
Massive and burning, full of life,
But when I chanced upon the spot
There was only a little hair left,
And bones bleaching in the sunlight
Beautiful as architecture;
I watched them like a geometer,
And cut a walking stick from a birch.
It has been three years, now.
There is no sign of the groundhog.
I stood there in the whirling summer,
My hand capped a withered heart,
And thought of China and of Greece,
Of Alexander in his tent;
Of Montaigne in his tower,
Of Saint Theresa in her wild lament.

Arthur Rimbaud:

WANDERING

I ran away, hands stuck in pockets that seemed
All holes; my jacket was a holey ghost as well.
I followed you, Muse! Beneath your spell,
Oh, la, la, what glorious loves I dreamed!

I tore my shirt; I threw away my tie.
Dreamy Hop o' my Thumb, I made rhymes
As I ran. I slept out most of the time.
The stars above me rustled through the sky.

I heard them on the roadsides where I stopped
Those fine September nights, when the dew dropped
On my face and I licked it to get drunk.

I made up rhymes in dark and scary places,
And like a lyre I plucked the tired laces
Of my worn-out shoes, one foot beneath my heart.

Arthur Rimbaud:

THE TEASE

In the dark brown dining room, whose heavy air
Had a comfortable smell of fruit and varnish,
I got a plate full of some local Belgian dish
Or other, and stretched out long in my lazy chair.

Content and still, I ate and listened to the clock.
Just then the kitchen door flew open wide
And the servant-girl came in, I don't know why-
The top of her dress undone, her hair pulled back.

And while she put a finger to her cheek,
All rosy-white and velvet, like a peach,
And made a face just like a five-year-old,

To make things easier she shifted the dishes;
And then she said-and I knew she wanted kisses ! -
Real low: "Feel *that*: my cheek has got so cold . . ."

Leonard Cohen:

SAINT CATHERINE STREET

Towering black nuns frighten us
as they come lumbering down the tramway aisle
amulets and talismans caught in careful fingers
promising plagues for an imprudent glance
So we bow our places away
the price of an indulgence

How may we be saints and live in golden coffins
Who will leave on our stone shelves
pathetic notes for intervention
How may we be calm marble gods at ocean altars
Who will murder us for some high reason

There are no ordeals
Fire and water have passed from the wizards' hands
We cannot torture or be tortured
Our eyes are worthless to an inquisitor's heel
No prince will waste hot lead
or build a spiked casket for us

Once with a flaming belly she danced upon a green road
Move your hand slowly through a cobweb
and make drifting strings for puppets
Now the tambourines are dull
at her lifted skirt boys study cigarette stubs
no one is jealous of her body

We would bathe in a free river
but the lepers in some spiteful gesture
have suicided in the water
and all the swollen quiet bodies crowd the other
prey for a fearless thief or beggar

How can we love and pray
when at our lovers' arms
we hear the damp bells of them
who once took bitter alms
but now float quietly away

Will no one carve from our bodies a while cross
for a wind-torn mountain
or was that forsaken man's pain
enough to end all passion

Are those dry faces and hands we see
all the flesh there is of nuns
Are they really clever non-excreting tapestries
prepared by skillful eunuchs
for our trembling friends

Dylan Thomas: hear: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15377>

DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT

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

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

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

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

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

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

Joseph Brodsky:

TORNFALLET

There is a meadow in Sweden
where I lie smitten,
eyes stained with clouds'
white ins and outs.

And about that meadow
roams my widow
plaiting a clover
wreath for her lover.

I took her in marriage
in a granite parish.
The snow lent her whiteness,
a pine was a witness.

She'd swim in the oval
lake whose opal
mirror, framed by bracken,
felt happy, broken.

And at night the stubborn
sun of her auburn
hair shone from my pillow
at post and pillar.

Now in the distance
I hear her descant.
She sings "Blue Swallow,"
but I can't follow.

The evening shadow
robs the meadow
of width and color.
It's getting colder.

As I lie dying
here, I'm eyeing stars.
Here's Venus;
no one between us.

1994

Joseph Brodsky:

GALATEA ENCORE

As though the mercury's under its tongue, it won't
talk. As though with the mercury in its sphincter,
immobile, by a leaf-coated pond
a statue stands white like a blight of winter.
After such snow, there is nothing indeed: the ins
and outs of centuries, pestered heather.
That's what coming full circle means -
when your countenance starts to resemble weather,
when Pygmalion's vanished. And you are free
to cloud your folds, to bare the navel.
Future at last! That is, bleached debris
of a glacier amid the five-lettered "never."
Hence the routine of a goddess, nee
alabaster, that lets roving pupils gorge on
the heart of color and the temperature of the knee.
That's what it looks like inside a virgin.

1983, translated by the author.

Michael Ondaatje:

THE CINNAMON PEELER

If I were a cinnamon peeler
I would ride your bed
and leave the yellow bark dust
on your pillow.

Your breasts and shoulders would reek
you could never walk through markets
without the profession of my fingers
floating over you. The blind would
stumble certain of whom they approached
though you might bathe
under rain gutters, monsoon.

Here on the upper thigh
at this smooth pasture
neighbor to your hair
or the crease
that cuts your back. This ankle.
You will be known among strangers
as the cinnamon peeler's wife.

I could hardly glance at you
before marriage
never touch you
-- your keen nosed mother, your rough brothers.
I buried my hands
in saffron, disguised them
over smoking tar,
helped the honey gatherers...

When we swam once
I touched you in water
and our bodies remained free,
you could hold me and be blind of smell.
You climbed the bank and said

 this is how you touch other women
the grasscutter's wife, the lime burner's daughter.
And you searched your arms
for the missing perfume.

 and knew
 what good is it
to be the lime burner's daughter
left with no trace
as if not spoken to in an act of love
as if wounded without the pleasure of scar.

You touched
your belly to my hands
in the dry air and said
I am the cinnamon
peeler's wife. Smell me.

W. B. Yeats:

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

WHEN you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

1865-1939

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892).

THE LADY OF SHALOTT

PART I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
 To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
 The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
 The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
 Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
 The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
>From the river winding clearly,
 Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
 Lady of Shalott."

PART II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
 To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
 The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
 Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
 Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
 Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
 The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
 And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
 The Lady of Shalott.

PART III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
 Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
 Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
 As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
 Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,

As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
>From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
>From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

PART IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance--
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right--
The leaves upon her falling light--
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
 Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
 Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
 The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
 All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
 The Lady of Shalott."

Sylvia Plath

ON THE DECLINE OF ORACLES (1957)

My father kept a vaulted conch
By two bronze bookends of ships in sail,
And as I listened its cold teeth seethed
With voices of that ambiguous sea
Old Böcklin missed, who held a shell
To hear the sea he could not hear.
What the seashell spoke to his inner ear
He knew, but no peasants know.

My father died, and when he died
He willed his books and shell away.
The books burned up, sea took the shell,
But I, I keep the voices he
Set in my ear, and in my eye
The sight of those blue, unseen waves
For which the ghost of Böcklin grieves.
The peasants feast and multiply.

Eclipsing the spitted ox I see
Neither brazen swan nor burning star,
Heraldry of a starker age,
But three men entering the yard,
And those men coming up the stair.
Profitless, their gossiping images
Invade the cloistral eye like pages
From a gross comic strip, and toward

The happening of this happening
The earth turns now. In half an hour
I shall go down the shabby stair and meet,
Coming up, those three. Worth
Less than present, past---this future.
Worthless such vision to eyes gone dull
That once descried Troy's towers fall,
Saw evil break out of the north.

Michael Ondaatje:

SWEET LIKE A CROW

Your voice sounds like a scorpion being pushed
through a glass tube
like someone has just trod on a peacock
like wind howling in a coconut
like a rusty bible, like someone pulling barbed wire
across a stone courtyard, like a pig drowning,
a vattacka being fried
a bone shaking hands
a frog singing at Carnegie Hall.
Like a crow swimming in milk,
like a nose being hit by a mango
like the crowd at the Royal-Thornian match,
a womb full of twins, a pariah dog
with a magpie in its mouth
like the midnight jet from Casablanca
like Air Pakistan curry,
a typewriter on fire, like a spirit in the gas
which cooks your dinner, like a hundred
pappadans being crunched, like someone
uselessly trying to light 3 Roses matches in a dark room,
the clicking sound of a reef when you put your head into the sea,
a dolphin reciting epic poetry to a sleepy audience,
the sound of a fan when someone throws brinjals at it,
like pineapples being sliced in the Pettah market
like betel juice hitting a butterfly in mid-air
like a whole village running naked onto the street
and tearing their sarongs, like an angry family
pushing a jeep out of the mud, like dirt on the needle,
like 8 sharks being carried on the back of a bicycle
like 3 old ladies locked in the lavatory
like the sound I heard when having an afternoon sleep
and someone walked through my room in ankle bracelets.

Deborah Ager:

ALONE

Over the fence, the dead settle in
for a journey. Nine o'clock.
You are alone for the first time
today. Boys asleep. Husband out.

A beer bottle sweats in your hand,
and sea lavender clogs the air
with perfume. Think of yourself.
Your arms rest with nothing to do

after weeks spent attending to others.
Your thoughts turn to whether
butter will last the week, how much
longer the car can run on its partial tank of gas.

Mark Strand:

(see also: http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/038386_strand.mov)

GIVING MYSELF UP

I give up my eyes which are glass eggs.

I give up my tongue.

I give up my mouth which is the constant dream of my tongue.

I give up my throat which is the sleeve of my voice.

I give up my heart which is a burning apple.

I give up my lungs which are trees that have never seen the moon.

I give up my smell which is that of a stone traveling through rain.

I give up my hands which are ten wishes.

I give up my arms which have wanted to leave me anyway.

I give up my legs which are lovers only at night.

I give up my buttocks which are the moons of childhood.

I give up my penis which whispers encouragement to my thighs.

I give up my clothes which are walls that blow in the wind

and I give up the ghost that lives in them.

I give up. I give up.

And you will have none of it because already I am beginning again without anything.

Acquainted With the Night Acquainted: 1. having personal knowledge as a result of study, experience, etc.; informed (usually followed by with) 2. brought into social contact; made familiar. Night symbolism: dark, lonely, sad, depressing He has personal knowledge, experienced and made familiar with sad, lonely times. I have been one acquainted with the night. I have been through bad times Reflecting back on a hard time in his life (past tense). I have walked out in rain " and back in rain. Robert Frost, "Acquainted with the Night" from The Poetry of Robert Frost, edited by Edward Connery Lathem. Copyright © 1964, 1970 by Leslie Frost Ballantine. Copyright 1936, 1942 © 1956 by Robert Frost. Copyright 1923, 1928, © 1969 by Henry Holt and Co. Reprinted with the permission of Henry Holt & Company, LLC. Acquainted with the Night. Robert Frost - 1874-1963. I have been one acquainted with the night. I have walked out in rain"and back in rain. I have outwalked the furthest city light. I have looked down the saddest city lane. I have passed by the watchman on his beat And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain. I have been one acquainted with the night. This poem is in the public domain. One of the most celebrated figures in American poetry, Robert Frost was the author of numerous poetry collections, including including New Hampshire (Henry Holt and Company, 1923).