

To A Young Girl

by William Butler Yeats

MY dear, my dear, I know
More than another
What makes your heart beat so;
Not even your own mother
Can know it as I know,
Who broke my heart for her
When the wild thought,
That she denies
And has forgot,
Set all her blood astir
And glittered in her eyes.

Wild Geese

by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapers,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Falls, Leaves, Fall

By Emily Brontë

Fall, leaves, fall: die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me,
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

When We Two Parted

By George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron. 1788–1824

WHEN we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold, 5
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow— 10
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame:
I hear thy name spoken, 15
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me—
Why wert thou so dear? 20
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well:
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met— 25
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years, 30
How should I greet thee?
With silence and tears.

First Fig

by Edna St. Vincent Millay

MY CANDLE burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
 But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends--
It gives a lovely light!

**My life closed twice before its close
by Emily Dickinson**

My life closed twice before its close --
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me

So huge, so hopeless to conceive
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.

Old Men Playing Basketball **by B. H. Fairchild**

The heavy bodies lunge, the broken language
of fake and drive, glamorous jump shot
slowed to a stutter. Their gestures, in love
again with the pure geometry of curves,

rise toward the ball, falter, and fall away.
On the boards their hands and fingertips
tremble in tense little prayers of reach
and balance. Then, the grind of bone

and socket, the caught breath, the sigh,
the grunt of the body laboring to give
birth to itself. In their toiling and grand
sweeps, I wonder, do they still make love

to their wives, kissing the undersides
of their wrists, dancing the old soft-shoe
of desire? And on the long walk home
from the VFW, do they still sing

to the drunken moon? Stands full, clock
moving, the one in army fatigues
and houseshoes says to himself, pick and roll,
and the phrase sounds musical as ever,

radio crooning songs of love after the game,
the girl leaning back in the Chevy's front seat
as her raven hair flames in the shuddering
light of the outdoor movie, and now he drives,

gliding toward the net. A glass wand
of autumn light breaks over the backboard.
Boys rise up in old men, wings begin to sprout
at their backs. The ball turns in the darkening air.

What the Living Do by Marie Howe

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days, some utensil
probably fell down there.
And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous, and the crusty
dishes have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is the everyday we
spoke of.

It's winter again: the sky's a deep headstrong blue, and the sunlight
pours through

the open living room windows because the heat's on too high in here,
and I can't turn it off.

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in the street
the bag breaking,

I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And yesterday, hurrying
along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my coffee down my
wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a hairbrush:
This is it.

Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold. What you called
that yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come and the winter
to pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss -- we want more and more
and then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a glimpse of myself in
the window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm gripped by a
cherishing so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned coat that I'm
speechless:

I am living, I remember you.

Child Development **by Billy Collins**

As sure as prehistoric fish grew legs
and sauntered off the beaches into forests
working up some irregular verbs for their
first conversation, so three-year-old children
enter the phase of name-calling.

Every day a new one arrives and is added
to the repertoire. You Dumb Goopyhead,
You Big Sewerface, You Poop-on-the-Floor
(a kind of Navaho ring to that one)
they yell from knee level, their little mugs
flushed with challenge.

Nothing Samuel Johnson would bother tossing out
in a pub, but then the toddlers are not trying
to devastate some fatuous Enlightenment hack.

They are just tormenting their fellow squirts
or going after the attention of the giants
way up there with their cocktails and bad breath
talking baritone nonsense to other giants,
waiting to call them names after thanking
them for the lovely party and hearing the door close.

The mature save their hothead invective
for things: an errant hammer, tire chains,
or receding trains missed by seconds,
though they know in their adult hearts,
even as they threaten to banish Timmy to bed
for his appalling behavior,
that their bosses are Big Fatty Stupids,
their wives are Dopey Dopeheads
and that they themselves are Mr. Sillypants.

Nothing Gold Can Stay
By Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day
Nothing gold can stay.

Child **by Sylvia Plath**

Your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing.
I want to fill it with color and ducks,
The zoo of the new

Whose name you meditate --
April snowdrop, Indian pipe,
Little

Stalk without wrinkle,
Pool in which images
Should be grand and classical

Not this troublous
Wringing of hands, this dark
Ceiling without a star.

This World of Dew
By Issa (1763-1827)

This world of dew
is only a world of dew
--And yet...

Translated from the Japanese by Liz Rosenberg

“Lilacs”

Excerpt from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot

Now that lilacs are in bloom
She has a bowl of lilacs in her room
And twists one in his fingers while she talks.
“Ah, my friend, you do not know, you do not know
What life is, you who hold it in your hands”;
(Slowly twisting the lilac stalks)
“You let it flow from you, you let it flow,
And youth is cruel, and has no remorse
And smiles at situations which it cannot see.”
I smile, of course,
And go on drinking tea.
“Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall
My buried life, and Paris in the Spring,
I feel immeasurably at peace, and find the world
To be wonderful and youthful, after all.”

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

WE wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

Watermelons

by Charles Simic

Green Buddhas
On the fruit stand.
We eat the smile
And spit out the teeth.

From Return to a Place Lit By a Glass of Milk, by Charles Simic. Published by George Braziller. Copyright © 1974. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer by Walt Whitman

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

Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond by e.e. cummings [1931]

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look will easily uncloze me 5
though i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and 10
my life will shut very beautifully ,suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;
nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
compels me with the color of its countries, 15
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens;only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands 20

Barbie's Little Sister

By Ellie Schoenfeld

Barbie's little sister
Aurora
got sent away to reform school
when she was thirteen.
Mattel brought her back complete
with wheat germ, a VW love bus
and a recipe for sesame dream bars.
But she never caught on.
Didn't go for the vanity
table or the bubble head.
Thought Barbie was repressed
and Ken was a nerd
so she hit the road
with his cousin Jeremy.
They went to demonstrations
wore love beads
and got matching tattoos.
Finally Mattel stopped marketing her,
didn't think she'd make
a good role model.

The Summer I Was Sixteen

By Geraldine Connolly

The turquoise pool rose up to meet us,
its slide a silver afterthought down which
we plunged, screaming, into a mirage of bubbles.
We did not exist beyond the gaze of a boy.

Shaking water off our limbs, we lifted
up from ladder rungs across the fern-cool
lip of rim. Afternoon. Oiled and sated,
we sunbathed, rose and paraded the concrete,

danced to the low beat of "Duke of Earl".
Past cherry colas, hot-dogs, Dreamsicles,
we came to the counter where bees staggered
into root beer cups and drowned. We gobbled

cotton candy torches, sweet as furtive kisses,
shared on benches beneath summer shadows.
Cherry. Elm. Sycamore. We spread our chenille
blankets across grass, pressed radios to our ears,

mouthed the old words, then loosened
thin bikini straps and rubbed baby oil with iodine
across sunburned shoulders, tossing a glance
through the chain link at an improbable world.

from *Province of Fire*, 1998
Iris Press, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

The Red Wheelbarrow

William Carlos Williams

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

The Bat

By Theodore Roethke

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is amiss or out of place
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

from Collected poems of Theodore Roethke
My Doubleday, 1938

She Walks in Beauty

by Lord George Gordon Byron

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:
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,
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,
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!

The Mystery of Pain

by Emily Dickinson

Pain has an element of blank;
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,
Its infinite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.

The World Is a Beautiful Place

By Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then
just when everything is fine
because even in heaven
they don't sing
all the time

The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind some people dying
all the time
or maybe only starving
some of the time
which isn't half bad
if it isn't you

Oh the world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't much mind
a few dead minds
in the higher places
or a bomb or two
now and then
in your upturned faces
or such other improprieties
as our Name Brand society
is prey to
with its men of distinction
and its men of extinction
and its priests
and other patrolmen

and its various segregations
and congressional investigations

and other constipations
that our fool flesh
is heir to

Yes the world is the best place of all
for a lot of such things as
making the fun scene
and making the love scene
and making the sad scene
and singing low songs and having inspirations
and walking around
looking at everything
and smelling flowers
and goosing statues
and even thinking
and kissing people and
making babies and wearing pants
and waving hats and
dancing
and going swimming in rivers
on picnics
in the middle of the summer
and just generally
'living it up'
Yes
but then right in the middle of it
comes the smiling

mortician

from Song of Myself (52)

by Walt Whitman

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the word.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadowed wilds.
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love.
If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.
You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

The Flower

By Lord Alfred Tennyson

Once in a golden hour
 I cast to earth a seed.
Up there came a flower,
 The people said, a weed.

To and fro they went
 Thro' my garden bower,
And muttering discontent
 Cursed me and my flower.

Then it grew so tall
 It wore a crown of light,
But thieves from o'er the wall
 Stole the seed by night.

Sow'd it far and wide
 By every town and tower,
Till all the people cried,
 "Splendid is the flower!"

Read my little fable:
 He that runs may read.
Most can raise the flowers now,
 For all have got the seed.

And some are pretty enough,
 And some are poor indeed;
And now again the people
 Call it but a weed.

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

WE wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

Are You Drinking?

By Charles Bukowski

Washed-up, on shore, the old yellow notebook
out again
I write from the bed
as I did last
year.
will see the doctor,
Monday.
"yes, doctor, weak legs, vertigo, head-
aches and my back
hurts."
"are you drinking?" he will ask.
"are you getting your
exercise, your
vitamins?"
I think that I am just ill
with life, the same stale yet
fluctuating
factors.
even at the track
I watch the horses run by
and it seems
meaningless.
I leave early after buying tickets on the
remaining races.
"taking off?" asks the motel
clerk.
"yes, it's boring,"
I tell him.
"If you think it's boring
out there," he tells me, "you oughta be
back here."
so here I am
propped up against my pillows
again
just an old guy
just an old writer
with a yellow
notebook.

something is
walking across the
floor
toward
me.
oh, it's just
my cat
this
time.

Kidnap Poem

By Nikki Giovanni

Ever been kidnapped
by a poet
if i were a poet
i'd kidnap you
put you in my phrases and meter

You to jones beach
or maybe coney island
or maybe just to my house
lyric you in lilacs
dash you in the rain
blend into the beach
to complement my see

Play the lyre for you
ode you with my love song
anything to win you
wrap you in the red Black green
show you off to mama
yeah if i were a poet i'd kid
nap you

Recuerdo

by Edna St. Vincent Millay

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came
soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-
covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us
read;
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and
pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

The Coming of Light

by Mark Strand

Even this late it happens:
the coming of love, the coming of light.
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,
sending up warm bouquets of air.
Even this late the bones of the body shine
and tomorrow's dust flares into breath.

The Portrait

by Stanley Kunitz

My mother never forgave my father
for killing himself,
especially at such an awkward time
and in a public park,
that spring
when I was waiting to be born.
She locked his name
in her deepest cabinet
and would not let him out,
though I could hear him thumping.
When I came down from the attic
with the pastel portrait in my hand
of a long-lipped stranger
with a brave moustache
and deep brown level eyes,
she ripped it into shreds
without a single word
and slapped me hard.
In my sixty-fourth year
I can feel my cheek
still burning.

Do not go gentle into that good night

by Dylan Thomas

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.

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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.
I love thee to the level of every day'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.

Father's Song

by Gregory Orr

Yesterday, against admonishment,
my daughter balanced on the couch back,
fell and cut her mouth.

Because I saw it happen I knew
she was not hurt, and yet
a child's blood so red
it stops a father's heart.

My daughter cried her tears;
I held some ice
against her lip.
That was the end of it.

Round and round: bow and kiss.
I try to teach her caution;
she tried to teach me risk.

Balances

By Nikki Giovanni

in life
one is always
balancing

like we juggle our mothers
against our fathers

or one teacher
against another
(only to balance our grade average)

3 grains of salt
to one ounce truth

our sweet black essence
or the funky honkies down the street

and lately i've begun wondering
if you're trying to tell me something

we used to talk all night
and do things alone together

and i've begun

(as a reaction to a feeling)
to balance
the pleasure of loneliness
against the pain
of loving you

"Bright Star! would I were steadfast as thou art"

By John Keats

BRIGHT Star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite,

The moving waters at their priestlike task 5
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors:—

No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable, 10
Pillow'd upon my fair Love's ripening breast
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest;

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever,—or else swoon to death.

Sonnet 2:

Time Does Not Bring Relief; You All Have Lied by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide

There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him!

Be Kind

By Charles Bukowski

we are always asked
to understand the other person's
viewpoint
no matter how
out-dated
foolish or
obnoxious.

one is asked
to view
their total error
their life-waste
with
kindliness,
especially if they are
aged.

but age is the total of
our doing.
they have aged
badly
because they have
lived
out of focus,
they have refused to
see.

not their fault?

whose fault?
mine?

I am asked to hide
my viewpoint
from them
for fear of their
fear.

age is no crime

but the shame
of a deliberately
wasted
life

among so many
deliberately
wasted
lives

is.

Dharma

by Billy Collins

The way the dog trots out the front door
every morning
without a hat or an umbrella,
without any money
or the keys to her doghouse
never fails to fill the saucer of my heart
with milky admiration.

Who provides a finer example
of a life without encumbrance—
Thoreau in his curtainless hut
with a single plate, a single spoon?
Gandhi with his staff and his holy diapers?

Off she goes into the material world
with nothing but her brown coat
and her modest blue collar,
following only her wet nose,
the twin portals of her steady breathing,
followed only by the plume of her tail.

If only she did not shove the cat aside
every morning
and eat all his food
what a model of self-containment she
would be,
what a paragon of earthly detachment.
If only she were not so eager
for a rub behind the ears,
so acrobatic in her welcomes,
if only I were not her god.

Bohemia by Dorothy Parker

Authors and actors and artists and such
Never know nothing, and never know much.
Sculptors and singers and those of their kidney
Tell their affairs from Seattle to Sydney.
Playwrights and poets and such horses' necks
Start off from anywhere, end up at sex.
Diarists, critics, and similar roe
Never say nothing, and never say no.
People Who Do Things exceed my endurance;
God, for a man that solicits insurance!

On Being a Woman by Dorothy Parker

Why is it, when I am in Rome,
I'd give an eye to be at home,
But when on native earth I be,
My soul is sick for Italy?

And why with you, my love, my lord,
Am I spectacularly bored,
Yet do you up and leave me- then
I scream to have you back again?

Phenomenal Woman

By Maya Angelou

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them
They say they still can't see.
I say,

It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

Keeping Things Whole

By Mark Strand

In a field
I am the absence
of field.
This is
always the case.
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

We all have reasons
for moving.
I move
to keep things whole.

The Book of Questions, III
by Pablo Neruda

translated by William O'Daly

III.

Tell me, is the rose naked
or is that her only dress?

Why do trees conceal
the splendor of their roots?

Who hears the regrets
of the thieving automobile?

Is there anything in the world sadder
than a train standing in the rain?

The Damage We Do

By W.D. Ehrhart

I don't know why I fell asleep
when I was eight at the top of the stairs
listening to my parents argue. Maybe I
thought they'd find me asleep and feel
so bad they'd learn how to get along.
I don't know why I put my fist
through the kitchen storm door glass
storming out of the house when I was ten,
but my mother had to wrap my hand
in a towel and call the doctor.
An accident, she said.
I don't know why I ran from the house
in my bare feet in February,
my father swearing, me in tears
and no clear thought but getting as far
away as a thirteen-year-old could get,
which wasn't far in a small town
where your dad's a minister, everyone
thinks he's a saint, and you're a disgrace
to be acting up the way you always do.
I don't remember a time when the house
I grew up in wasn't crackling with rage.
I don't know why. I think my father
was really a mess, but he didn't
discuss that with me, and my mother
just put up with him year after year.
You get so wired, you learn to think
that's the way life's supposed to be.
And you learn to be angry all the time.
You run away to California.
You join the Marines at seventeen.
You quit every job you don't get fired from.
After awhile you don't get hired,
and people avoid you; they think you're
out of control, and you probably are,
but it takes you most of a lifetime just
to begin to make the connections.
By then you've got a child of your own
who's angry all the time. I'd like to say
I don't know why, but I do.
I'd like to explain that it's not her fault,
but what's she supposed to do with that?
I'd like to undo the damage I've done,
but I don't know how.