

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](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.