

"the poets" by Alexis Kienlen

the poets

old man poets
stretch out their ink-stained fingers
exhale breath from nicotine-stained lungs,
and strain their eyes toward the young woman poets.
sitting across from them,
wide-eyed,
skin new
their hands have no callouses
free from ink smudges left on them from bad love,
broken poetic hearts.

The well By Denise Levertov

At sixteen I believed the moonlight
could change me if it would.

I moved my head
on the pillow, even moved my bed
as the moon slowly
crossed the open lattice.

I wanted beauty, a dangerous
gleam of steel, my body thinner,
my pale face paler.

I moonbathed
diligently, as others sunbathe.
But the moon's unsmiling stare
kept me awake. Mornings,
I was flushed and cross.
It was on dark nights of deep sleep
that I dreamed the most, sunk in the well,
and woke rested, and if not beautiful,
filled with some other power.

The Mother

by Gwendolyn Brooks

All.

Abortions will not let you forget.
You remember the children you got that you did not get,
The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
The singers and workers that never handled the air.
You will never neglect or beat
Them, or silence or buy with a sweet.
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.

I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children.

I have contracted. I have eased
My dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
I have said, Sweets, if I sinned, if I seized
Your luck
And your lives from your unfinished reach,
If I stole your births and your names,
Your straight baby tears and your games,
Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
and your deaths,
If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
Though why should I whine,
Whine that the crime was other than mine?--
Since anyhow you are dead.
Or rather, or instead,
You were never made.
But that too, I am afraid,
Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
You were born, you had body, you died.
It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.

Believe me, I loved you all.

Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and I loved, I loved you

William Carlos Williams -- The Raper from Passenack

The Raper from Passenack

was very kind. When she regained
her wits, he said, It's all right, kid,
I took care of you.

What a mess she was in. Then he added,
You'll never forget me now.
And drove her home.

Only a man who is sick, she said
would do a thing like that.
It must be so.

No one who is not diseased could be
so insanely cruel. He wants to give it
to someone else—

to justify himself. But if I get a
venereal infection out of this
I won't be treated.

I refuse. You'll find me dead in bed
first. Why not? That's
the way she spoke,

I wish I could shoot him. How would
you like to know a murderer?
I may do it.

I'll know by the end of this week.
I wouldn't scream. I bit him
several times

but he was too strong for me.
I can't yet understand it. I don't
faint so easily.

When I came to myself and realized
what had happened all I could do
was to curse

and call him every vile name I could
think of. I was so glad
to be taken home.

I suppose it's my mind—the fear of
infection. I'd rather a million times
have been got pregnant.

But it's the foulness of it can't
be cured. And hatred, hatred of all men
—and disgust.

Michael Ondaatje

GRIFFIN OF THE NIGHT

I'm holding my son in my arms
sweating after nightmares
small me
fingers in his mouth
his other fist clenched in my hair
small me
sweating after nightmares.

High School Senior (from The Wellspring) -- Sharon Olds

For seventeen years, her breath in the house
at night, puff, puff, like summer
cumulus above her bed,
and her scalp smelling of apricots
--this being who had formed within me,
squatted like a bright tree-frog in the dark,
like an eohippus she had come out of history
slowly, through me, into the daylight,
I had the daily sight of her,
like food or air she was there, like a mother.
I say "college," but I feel as if I cannot tell
the difference between her leaving for college
and our parting forever--I try to see
this house without her, without her pure
depth of feeling, without her creek-brown
hair, her daedal hands with their tapered
fingers, her pupils dark as the mourning cloak's
wing, but I can't. Seventeen years
ago, in this room, she moved inside me,
I looked at the river, I could not imagine
my life with her. I gazed across the street,
and saw, in the icy winter sun,
a column of steam rush up away from the earth.
There are creatures whose children float away
at birth, and those who throat-feed their young
for weeks and never see them again. My daughter
is free and she is in me--no, my love
of her is in me, moving in my heart,
changing chambers, like something poured
from hand to hand, to be weighed and then reweighed.

Sadie and Maud

by Gwendolyn Brooks

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine toothed comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chicks
In all the land.

Sadie bore two babies
Under her maiden name.
Maud and Ma and Papa
Nearly died of shame.

When Sadie said her last so-long
Her girls struck out from home.
(Sadie left as heritage
Her fine-toothed comb.)

Maud, who went to college,
Is a thin brown mouse.
She is living all alone
In this old house.

An Old Man

by Robert Pinsky

AN OLD MAN

AFTER CAVAFY

Back in a corner, alone in the clatter and babble
An old man sits with his head bent over a table
And his newspaper in front of him, in the café.

Sour with old age, he ponders a dreary truth—
How little he enjoyed the years when he had youth,
Good looks and strength and clever things to say.

He knows he's quite old now: he feels it, he sees it,
And yet the time when he was young seems—was it?
Yesterday. How quickly, how quickly it slipped away.

Now he sees how Discretion has betrayed him,
And how stupidly he let the liar persuade him
With phrases: *Tomorrow. There's plenty of time. Some day.*

He recalls the pull of impulses he suppressed,
The joy he sacrificed. Every chance he lost
Ridicules his brainless prudence a different way.

But all these thoughts and memories have made
The old man dizzy. He falls asleep, his head
Resting on the table in the noisy café.

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Daddy

You do not do, you do not do
 Any more, black shoe
 In which I have lived like a foot
 For thirty years, poor and white,
 Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.
 You died before I had time——
 Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
 Ghastly statue with one gray toe
 Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
 Where it pours bean green over blue
 In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
 I used to pray to recover you.
 Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
 Scraped flat by the roller
 Of wars, wars, wars.
 But the name of the town is common.
 My Polack friend

1962

Says there are a dozen or two.
 So I never could tell where you
 Put your foot, your root,
 I never could talk to you.
 The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.
 Ich, ich, ich, ich,
 I could hardly speak.
 I thought every German was you.
 And the language obscene

An engine, an engine
 Chuffing me off like a Jew.
 A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
 I began to talk like a Jew.
 I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
 Are not very pure or true.
 With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
 And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
 I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of *you*,
 With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
 And your neat mustache
 And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
 Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through.
 Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
 In the picture I have of you,
 A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
 But no less a devil for that, no not
 Any less the black man who

1962

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.
And I said I do, I do.
So daddy, I'm finally through.
The black telephone's off at the root,
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

12 October 1962

Seamus Heaney -- Digging

Digging

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked,
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, going down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

If.... by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream -- and not make dreams your master;
If you can think -- and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same:
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss:
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings -- nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And which is more ; you'll be a Man, my son!

Tian Kang's Dragon

by Steve Noyes

TIAN KANG'S DRAGON

I wish I had not been born a woman,
what a terrible fate, to be a woman,

Tian Kang said, and stepped from the walkway
of *shan-shui* paintings, lakes and ladies.

That's what the village girl said before she was drowned,
said she would tell the dragon in the waters;

after we had rehearsed her interviews for hours,
after she got three jobs, she was so merry,

I want very much a baby boy,
but I know I will die in childbirth.

Her father called and said Come home,
come home, get married, right away,

I do not think I will be a good wife
I do not think I will try, hee hee, so hard;

hugging herself, surreptitious,
as if off to do some bidding.

There are many things you don't understand
about China, good luck, good luck, good luck,

and Tian Kang's dreams elapsed,
she'll pretend she didn't have them, perhaps

she is a daughter, she listens and obeys.
I am a son, I listen, nothing happens.

We Real Cool

by Gwendolyn Brooks

THE POOL PLAYERS.
SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

SONGS

I Fought In A War

(by Belle And Sebastian)

I fought in a war and I left my friends behind me
To go looking for the enemy, and it wasn't very long
Before I would stand with another boy in front of me
And a corpse that just fell into me, with the bullets flying round

And I reminded myself of the words you said when we were getting on
And I bet you're making shells back home for a steady boy to wear
Round his neck, well it won't hurt to think of you as if you're waiting for
This letter to arrive because I'll be here quite a while

I fought in a war and I left my friends behind me
To go looking for the enemy, and it wasn't very long
Before I found out that the sickness there ahead of me
Went beyond the bedsit infamy of the decade gone before

And I reminded myself of the words you said when we were getting on
And I bet you're making shells back home for a steady man to wear
Round his neck, well it won't hurt to think of you as if you're waiting for
This letter to arrive because I'll be here quite a while

I fought in a war, and I didn't know where it would end
It stretched before me infinitely, I couldn't really think
Of the day beyond now, keep your head down pal
There's trouble plenty in this hour, this day
I can see hope I can see light

And I reminded myself of the looks you gave when we were getting on
And I bet you're making shells back home for a steady man to wear
Round his neck, well it won't hurt to think of you as if you're waiting for
This letter to arrive because I'll be here quite a while

Strange Fruit
as sung by Billie Holiday

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Little Boxes

by Malvina Reynolds

1. Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky-tacky,
Little boxes, little boxes,
Little boxes, all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky
And they all look just the same.

2. And the people in the houses
All go to the university,
And they all get put in boxes,
Little boxes, all the same.
And there's doctors and there's lawyers
And business executives,
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky
And they all look just the same.

3. And they all play on the golf-course,
And drink their Martini dry,
And they all have pretty children,
And the children go to school.
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university,
And they all get put in boxes
And they all come out the same.

4. And the boys go into business,
And marry, and raise a family,
And they all get put in boxes,
Little boxes, all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one
And they're all made out of ticky-tacky
And they all look just the same.

RESPECT

sung by Aretha Franklin

(ooh) What you want
(ooh) Baby, I got
(ooh) What you need
(ooh) Do you know I got it?
(ooh) All I'm askin'
(ooh) Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit)
Hey baby (just a little bit) when you get home
(just a little bit) mister (just a little bit)

I ain't gonna do you wrong while you're gone
Ain't gonna do you wrong (oho) 'cause I don't wanna (ooh)
All I'm askin' (ooh)
Is for a little respect when you come home (just a little bit)
Baby (just a little bit) when you get home (just a little bit)
Yeah (just a little bit)

I'm about to give you all of my money
And all I'm askin' in return, honey
Is to give me my profits
When you get home (just a, just a, just a, just a)
Yeah baby (just a, just a, just a, just a)
When you get home (just a little bit)
Yeah (just a little bit)

----- instrumental break -----

Oooh, your kisses (ooh)
Sweeter than honey (ooh)
And guess what? (ooh)
So is my money (ooh)
All I want you to do (ooh) for me
Is give it to me when you get home (re, re, re ,re)
Yeah baby (re, re, re ,re)
Whip it to me (respect, just a little bit)
When you get home, now (just a little bit)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Find out what it means to me
R-E-S-P-E-C-T
Take care, TCB

Oh (sock it to me, sock it to me,
sock it to me, sock it to me)
A little respect (sock it to me, sock it to me,
sock it to me, sock it to me)
Whoa, babe (just a little bit)
A little respect (just a little bit)
I get tired (just a little bit)
Keep on tryin' (just a little bit)
You're runnin' out of foolin' (just a little bit)
And I ain't lyin' (just a little bit)
(re, re, re, re) 'spect
When you come home (re, re, re ,re)
Or you might walk in (respect, just a little bit)
And find out I'm gone (just a little bit)
I got to have (just a little bit)
A little respect (just a little bit)

Which Will

by Nick Drake

Which will you go for
Which will you love
Which will you choose from
From the stars above
Which will you answer
Which will you call
Which will you take for
For your one and all
And tell me now
Which will you love the best?

Which do you dance for
Which makes you shine
Which will you choose now
If you won't choose mine
Which will you hope for
Which can it be
Which will you take now
If you won't take me
And tell me now
Which will you love the best?

From the Morning

by Nick Drake

A day once dawned, and it was beautiful
A day once dawned from the ground
Then the night she fell
And the air was beautiful
The night she fell all around.

So look see the days
The endless coloured ways
And go play the game that you learnt
From the morning.

And now we rise
And we are everywhere
And now we rise from the ground
And see she flies
And she is everywhere
See she flies all around

So look see the sights
The endless summer nights
And go play the game that you learnt
From the morning.