

The Darkling Thrush

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seem'd to be
 The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
 Seem'd fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
 In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
 Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
 His happy good-night air
Some blessèd Hope, whereof he knew
 And I was unaware.

Thomas Hardy, December 31, 1900

Drummer Hodge

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
 Uncoffined – just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
 That breaks the veldt around;
And foreign constellations west
 Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew –
 Fresh from his Wessex home –
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
 The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
 Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain
 Will Hodge forever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
 Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
 His stars eternally.

Thomas Hardy, 1901

Beeny Cliff

THE opal and the sapphire of that wandering western sea,
And the woman riding high above with bright hair flapping free –
The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me.

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves seemed far away
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft in that clear-sunned March day.

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an irised rain,
And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull misfeatured stain,
And then the sun burst out again, and purples prinked the main.

– Still in all its chasmal beauty bulks old Beeny to the sky,
And shall she and I not go there once again now March is nigh,
And the sweet things said in that March say anew there by and by?

What if still in chasmal beauty looms that wild weird western shore,
The woman now is – elsewhere – whom the ambling pony bore,
And nor knows nor cares for Beeny, and will laugh there nevermore.

Thomas Hardy, 1913

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound, 1913

Sea Rose

Rose, harsh rose,
marred and with stint of petals,
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf,

more precious
than a wet rose
single on a stem—
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
you are flung on the sand,
you are lifted
in the crisp sand
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

Hilda Doolittle, 1916

The Listeners

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
Of the forest’s ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller’s head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,

Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

Walter de la Mare, 1912

from **Spoon River Anthology**

Minerva Jones

I am Minerva, the village poetess,
Hooted at, jeered at by the Yahoos of the street
For my heavy body, cock-eye, and rolling walk,
And all the more when "Butch" Weldy
Captured me after a brutal hunt.
He left me to my fate with Doctor Meyers;
And I sank into death, growing numb from the feet up,
Like one stepping deeper and deeper into a stream of ice.
Will some one go to the village newspaper,
And gather into a book the verses I wrote?
I thirsted so for love!
I hungered so for life!

Doctor Meyers

No other man, unless it was Doc Hill,
Did more for people in this town than I.
And all the weak, the halt, the improvident
And those who could not pay flocked to me.
I was good-hearted, easy Doctor Meyers.
I was healthy, happy, in comfortable fortune,
Blessed with a congenial mate, my children raised,
All wedded, doing well in the world.
And then one night, Minerva, the poetess,
Came to me in her trouble, crying.
I tried to help her out — she died —
They indicted me, the newspapers disgraced me,
My wife perished of a broken heart.
And pneumonia finished me.

Lucinda Matlock

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you
It takes life to love Life.

Davis Matlock

Suppose it is nothing but the hive:
That there are drones and workers
And queens, and nothing but storing honey
(Material things as well as culture and wisdom)
For the next generation, this generation never living,
Except as it swarms in the sun-light of youth,
Strengthening its wings on what has been gathered,
And tasting, on the way to the hive
From the clover field, the delicate spoil.
Suppose all this, and suppose the truth:
That the nature of man is greater
Than nature's need in the hive;
And you must bear the burden of life,
As well as the urge from your spirit's excess
Well, I say to live it out like a god
Sure of immortal life, though you are in doubt,
Is the way to live it.
If that doesn't make God proud of you,
Then God is nothing but gravitation,
Or sleep is the golden goal.

Edgar Lee Masters, 1915-19

The Shooting of Dan McGrew

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the
Malamute saloon;
The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a jag-
time tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous Dan
McGrew,
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the lady
that's known as Lou.

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into
the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-
dirty, and loaded for bear.
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave and
scarcely the strength of a louse,
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and he called for
drinks for the house.
There was none could place the stranger's face, though we
searched ourselves for a clue;
But we drank his health, and the last to drink was
Dangerous Dan McGrew.

There's men that somehow just grip your eyes, and hold
them hard like a spell;
And such was he, and he looked to me like a man who
had lived in hell;
With a face most hair, and the dreary stare of a dog
whose day is done,
As he watered the green stuff in his glass, and the drops
fell one by one.
Then I got to figgering who he was, and wondering
what he'd do,
And I turned my head – and there watching him was the
lady that's known as Lou.

His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he
seemed in a kind of daze,
Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his
wandering gaze.
The rag-time kid was having a drink; there was no one
else on the stool,
So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops
down there like a fool.
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and
I saw him sway;
Then he clutched the keys with his talon hands – my
God! but that man could play.

Were you ever out in the Great Alone, when the moon
was awful clear,
And the icy mountains hemmed you in with a silence
you most could *hear*;
With only the howl of a timber wolf, and you camped
there in the cold,
A half-dead thing in a stark, dead world, clean mad for
the muck called gold;
While high overhead, green, yellow and red, the North
Lights swept in bars? –
Then you've a hunch what the music meant . . . hunger
and night and the stars.

And hunger not of the belly kind, that's banished with
bacon and beans,
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home and
all that it means;
For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls and
a roof above;
But oh! so cramful of cosy joy, and crowned with a
woman's love –
A woman dearer than all the world, and true as Heaven
is true –
(God! how ghastly she looks through her rouge, – the
lady that's known as Lou).

Then on a sudden the music changed, so soft that you
scarce could hear;
But you felt that your life had been looted clean of all
that it once held dear;
That someone had stolen the woman you loved; that her
love was a devil's lie;
That your guts were gone, and the best for you was to
crawl away and die.
'Twas the crowning cry of a heart's despair, and it thrilled
you through and through –
"I guess I'll make it a spread misere", said Dangerous
Dan McGrew.

The music almost died away. . . then it burst like a pent-
up flood;
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay", and my eyes
were blind with blood.
The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it
stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill . . . then the music
stopped with a crash,
And the stranger turned, and his eyes they burned in a
most peculiar way;
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat, and
I saw him sway;
Then his lips went in in a kind of grin, and he spoke,
and his voice was calm,
And "Boys," says he, "you don't know me, and none of
you care a damn;
But I want to state, and my words are straight, and I'll
bet my poke they're true,
That one of you is a hound of hell . . . and that one is
Dan McGrew."

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and
two guns blazed in the dark,
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and
two men lay stiff and stark.
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was
Dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the
breast of the lady that's known as Lou.

These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess I
ought to know.
They say the stranger was crazed with "hooch", and I'm
not denying it's so.
I'm not so wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly between
us two –
The woman that kissed him and – pinched his poke –
was the lady that's known as Lou.

Robert Service, 1907

Adlestrop

Yes, I remember Adlestrop –
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop – only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Edward Thomas, 1915

After Apple Picking

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still.
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.
I cannot shake the shimmer from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass

I skimmed this morning from the water-trough,
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and reappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
And I keep hearing from the cellar-bin
That rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking; I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall,
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised, or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Robert Frost, 1914

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost, 1915

The Old Vicarage, Grantchester

(Cafe des Westens, Berlin, May 1912)

Just now the lilac is in bloom,
 All before my little room;
 And in my flower-beds, I think,
 Smile the carnation and the pink;
 And down the borders, well I know,
 The poppy and the pansy blow . . .
 Oh! there the chestnuts, summer through,
 Beside the river make for you
 A tunnel of green gloom, and sleep
 Deeply above; and green and deep
 The stream mysterious glides beneath,
 Green as a dream and deep as death.
 -- Oh, damn! I know it! and I know
 How the May fields all golden show,
 And when the day is young and sweet,
 Gild gloriously the bare feet
 That run to bathe . . .

Du lieber Gott!

Here am I, sweating, sick, and hot,
 And there the shadowed waters fresh
 Lean up to embrace the naked flesh.
Temperamentvoll German Jews
 Drink beer around; -- and *there* the dews
 Are soft beneath a morn of gold.
 Here tulips bloom as they are told;
 Unkempt about those hedges blows
 An English unofficial rose;
 And there the unregulated sun
 Slopes down to rest when day is done,
 And wakes a vague unpunctual star,
 A slippered Hesper; and there are
 Meads towards Haslingfield and Coton
 Where *das Betreten's* not *verboten*.

είθε γενοίμην. . . would I were
In Grantchester, in Grantchester! --
Some, it may be, can get in touch
With Nature there, or Earth, or such.
And clever modern men have seen
A Faun a-peeping through the green,
And felt the Classics were not dead,
To glimpse a Naiad's reedy head,
Or hear the Goat-foot piping low: . . .
But these are things I do not know.
I only know that you may lie
Day long and watch the Cambridge sky,
And, flower-lulled in sleepy grass,
Hear the cool lapse of hours pass,
Until the centuries blend and blur
In Grantchester, in Grantchester. . . .
Still in the dawnlit waters cool
His ghostly Lordship swims his pool,
And tries the strokes, essays the tricks,
Long learnt on Hellespont, or Styx.
Dan Chaucer hears his river still
Chatter beneath a phantom mill.
Tennyson notes, with studious eye,
How Cambridge waters hurry by . . .
And in that garden, black and white,
Creep whispers through the grass all night;
And spectral dance, before the dawn,
A hundred Vicars down the lawn;
Curates, long dust, will come and go
On lissom, clerical, printless toe;
And oft between the boughs is seen
The sly shade of a Rural Dean . . .
Till, at a shiver in the skies,
Vanishing with Satanic cries,
The prim ecclesiastic rout
Leaves but a startled sleeper-out,
Grey heavens, the first bird's drowsy calls,
The falling house that never falls.

God! I will pack, and take a train,
And get me to England once again!
For England's the one land, I know,
Where men with Splendid Hearts may go;
And Cambridgeshire, of all England,
The shire for Men who Understand;
And of *that* district I prefer
The lovely hamlet Grantchester.
For Cambridge people rarely smile,
Being urban, squat, and packed with guile;
And Royston men in the far South
Are black and fierce and strange of mouth;
At Over they fling oaths at one,
And worse than oaths at Trumpington,
And Ditton girls are mean and dirty,
And there's none in Harston under thirty,
And folks in Shelford and those parts
Have twisted lips and twisted hearts,
And Barton men make Cockney rhymes,
And Coton's full of nameless crimes,
And things are done you'd not believe
At Madingley on Christmas Eve.
Strong men have run for miles and miles,
When one from Cherry Hinton smiles;
Strong men have blanched, and shot their wives,
Rather than send them to St. Ives;
Strong men have cried like babes, bydam,
To hear what happened at Babraham.
But Grantchester! ah, Grantchester!
There's peace and holy quiet there,
Great clouds along pacific skies,
And men and women with straight eyes,
Lithe children lovelier than a dream,
A bosky wood, a slumbrous stream,
And little kindly winds that creep
Round twilight corners, half asleep.
In Grantchester their skins are white;
They bathe by day, they bathe by night;
The women there do all they ought;

The men observe the Rules of Thought.
They love the Good; they worship Truth;
They laugh uproariously in youth;
(And when they get to feeling old,
They up and shoot themselves, I'm told) . . .

Ah God! to see the branches stir
Across the moon at Grantchester!
To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten
Unforgettable, unforgotten
River-smell, and hear the breeze
Sobbing in the little trees.
Say, do the elm-clumps greatly stand
Still guardians of that holy land?
The chestnuts shade, in reverend dream,
The yet unacademic stream?
Is dawn a secret shy and cold
Anadyomene, silver-gold?
And sunset still a golden sea
From Haslingfield to Madingley?
And after, ere the night is born,
Do hares come out about the corn?
Oh, is the water sweet and cool,
Gentle and brown, above the pool?
And laughs the immortal river still
Under the mill, under the mill?
Say, is there Beauty yet to find?
And Certainty? and Quiet kind?
Deep meadows yet, for to forget
The lies, and truths, and pain? . . . oh! yet
Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
And is there honey still for tea?

Rupert Brooke, 1912