

### **The Embankment**

*(The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night.)*

Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,  
In the flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.  
Now see I  
That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.  
Oh, God, make small  
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,  
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

**T. E. Hulme, 1912**

### **Erat Hora**

'Thank you, whatever comes.' And then she turned  
And, as the ray of sun on hanging flowers  
Fades when the wind hath lifted them aside,  
Went swiftly from me. Nay, whatever comes  
One hour was sunlit and the most high gods  
May not make boast of any better thing  
Than to have watched that hour as it passed.

**Ezra Pound, 1911**

### **In Memoriam**

The flowers left thick at nightfall in the wood  
This Eastertide call into mind the men,  
Now far from home, who, with their sweethearts, should  
Have gathered them and will do never again.

**Edward Thomas, 1915**

**Bach and the Sentry**

Watching the dark my spirit rose in flood  
On that most dearest Prelude of my delight.  
The low-lying mist lifted its hood,  
The October stars showed nobly in clear night.

When I return, and to real music-making,  
And play that Prelude, how will it happen then?  
Shall I feel as I felt, a sentry hardly waking,  
With a dull sense of No Man's Land again?

**Ivor Gurney 1917**

These, in the day when heaven was falling,  
The hour when earth's foundations fled,  
Followed their mercenary calling  
And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;  
They stood, and earth's foundations stay;  
What God abandoned, these defended,  
And saved the sum of things for pay.

**A. E. Housman, 1922**

so much depends  
upon  
a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water  
beside the white  
chickens.

**William Carlos  
Williams, 1923**

**Buffalo Bill**

Buffalo Bill's  
defunct  
    who used to  
    ride a watersmooth-silver  
        stallion  
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons justlikethat  
                                Jesus  
he was a handsome man  
    and what I want to know is  
how do you like your blue-eyed boy  
Mister Death

**e e cummings, 1923**

**Fire and Ice**

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

**Robert Frost, 1923**

**Resumé**

Razors pain you;  
Rivers are damp;  
Acids stain you;  
And drugs cause cramp.  
Guns aren't lawful;  
Nooses give;  
Gas smells awful;  
You might as well live.

**Dorothy Parker, 1926**

## The Panther

The panther is like a leopard,  
 Except it hasn't been peppered.  
 Should you behold a panther crouch,  
 Prepare to say Ouch.  
 Better yet, if called by a panther,  
 Don't anther.

Ogden Nash, 1931

## Poetry

I too, dislike it.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.

Marianne Moore, 1935

Longer version (1921):

I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in it after all, a place for the genuine.

Hands that can grasp, eyes  
 that can dilate, hair that can rise  
 if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible, the same thing may be said for all of us, that we

do not admire what  
 we cannot understand: the bat  
 holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base-

ball fan, the statistician—  
 nor is it valid  
 to discriminate against “business documents and

school-books”; all these phenomena are important. One must make a distinction  
 however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry,  
 nor till the poets among us can be  
 “literalists of  
 the imagination”—above  
 insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,” shall we have  
 it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,  
 the raw material of poetry in  
 all its rawness and  
 that which is on the other hand  
 genuine, you are interested in poetry.

### **Epitaph on a Tyrant**

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,  
 And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;  
 He knew human folly like the back of his hand,  
 And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;  
 When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,  
 And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

**W. H. Auden, 1940**

### **Note to my Neighbor**

We might as well give up the fiction  
 That we can argue any view.  
 For what in me is pure Conviction  
 Is simple Prejudice in you.

**Phyllis McGinley, 1952**

### Days

What are days for?  
Days are where we live.  
They come, they wake us  
Time and time over.  
They are to be happy in:  
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question  
Brings the priest and the doctor  
In their long coats  
Running over the fields.

**Philip Larkin, 1955**

### Nickles' Song

I heard upon his dry dung heap  
That man cry out who cannot sleep:  
“If God is God He is not good,  
If God is good He is not God;  
Take the even, take the odd,  
I would not sleep here if I could  
Except for the little green leaves in the wood  
And the wind on the water.”

**Archibald MacLeish, 1958**

**We real cool**

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.

**Gwendolyn Brooks, 1960**

Why speak of the use  
of poetry? Poetry  
is what uses us.

**Hayden Carruth, 1970**

**Casting**

The waters deep, the waters dark,  
Reflect the seekers, hide the sought,  
Whether in water or in air to drown.  
Between them curls the silver spark,  
Barbed, baited, waiting, of a thought--  
Which in the world is upside down,  
The fish hook or the question mark?

**Howard Nemerov, 1975**

I wonder if you've ever seen a  
*Willow* sheltering a *hyena*  
 Nowhere in nature can be found.  
 An opposition more profound  
 A sad tree weeping inconsolably  
 A wild beast laughing uncontrollably.

**Richard Wilbur, 1991**

### JVC

He concentrated, as he ought,  
 On fitting language to his thought  
 And getting all the rhymes correct,  
 Thus exercising intellect  
 In such a space, in such a fashion,  
 He concentrated into passion.

**Thom Gunn, 1992**

### b o d y

Look closely at the letters. Can you see,  
 entering (stage right), then floating full,  
 then heading off — so soon —  
 how like a little kohl-rimmed moon  
*o* plots her course from *b* to *d*

—as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?  
 Looked at too long, words fail,  
 phase out. Ask, now that *body* shines  
 no longer, by what light you learn these lines  
 and what the *b* and *d* stood for.

**James Merrill, 1995**