

EcoGrief: Poetry Workshop with Tess Taylor

September 6, 2024

Xavier University, NEXUS Community Garden

Laments

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these men and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah, ²⁷and at Riblah, in the territory of Hamath, the king of Babylon had them put to death. Thus Judah was deported from its country.

²⁸The number of people deported by Nebuchadnezzar was as follows. In the seventh year: three thousand and twenty-three Judaeans; ²⁹in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, eight hundred and thirty-two persons were deported from Jerusalem; ³⁰in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan commander of the guard deported seven hundred and forty-five Judaeans. In all: four thousand six hundred persons.

³¹But in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the year he came to the throne, pardoned Jehoiachin king of Judah and released him from prison.

³²He treated him kindly and allotted him a seat above those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ³³So Jehoiachin laid aside his prisoner's garb and for the rest of his life always ate at the king's table. ³⁴And his upkeep was permanently ensured by the king, day after day, for the rest of his life until the day he died.

LAMENTATIONS

These five laments were written soon after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Shining through their sorrow is a ray of unconquerable trust in Yahweh and whole-hearted repentance. The first four are alphabetical poems, their

verses beginning with all the letters of the Hebr. alphabet in series. Their attribution to Jeremiah merely shows the influence of that great prophet in later Judaism.

LAMENTATIONS

FIRST LAMENTATION

1 *Aleph* How deserted she sits,
the city once thronged with people!
Once the greatest of nations,
she is now like a widow.
Once the princess of states,
she is now put to forced labour.

Bet ²All night long she is weeping,
tears running down her cheeks.
Not one of all her lovers
remains to comfort her.
Her friends have all betrayed her
and become her enemies.

- Gimel* ³Judah has gone into exile
after much pain and toil.
Living among the nations
she finds no respite;
her persecutors all overtake her
where there is no way out.
- Dalet* ⁴The roads to Zion are in mourning;
no one comes to her festivals now.
Her gateways are all deserted;
her priests groan;
her young girls are grief-stricken;
she suffers bitterly.
- He* ⁵Her foes now have the upper hand,
her enemies prosper,
for Yahweh has made her suffer
for her many, many crimes;
her children have gone away into captivity
driven in front of the oppressor.
- Waw* ⁶And from the daughter of Zion
all her splendour has departed.
Her princes were like stags
which could find no pasture,
exhausted, as they flee
before the hunter.
- Zain* ⁷Jerusalem remembers
her days of misery and distress;
when her people fell into the enemy's clutches
there was no one to help her.
Her enemies looked on
and laughed at her downfall.
- Het* ⁸Jerusalem has sinned so gravely
that she has become a thing unclean.
All who used to honour her despise her,
having seen her nakedness;
she herself groans aloud
and turns her face away.
- Tet* ⁹Her filth befouls her skirts—
she never thought to end like this,
and hence her astonishing fall
with no one to comfort her.
Yahweh, look at my misery,
for the enemy is triumphant!
- Yod* ¹⁰The enemy stretched out his hand
for everything she treasured;
she saw the heathen
enter her sanctuary,
whom you had forbidden
to enter your Assembly.
- Kaph* ¹¹All her people are groaning,
looking for something to eat;
they have bartered their treasures for food,
to keep themselves alive.

- Look, Yahweh, and consider
how despised I am!
- Lamed* ¹²All you who pass this way,
look and see:
is any sorrow like the sorrow
inflicted on me,
with which Yahweh struck me
on the day of his burning anger?
- Mem* ¹³He sent fire from on high
deep into my bones;
he stretched a net for my feet,
he pulled me back;
he left me shattered,
sick all day long.
- Nun* ¹⁴He has watched out for my offences,
with his hand he enmeshes me,
his yoke is on my neck,
he has deprived me of strength.
The Lord has put me into clutches
which I am helpless to resist.
- Samek* ¹⁵The Lord has rejected
all my warriors within my walls,
he has summoned a host against me
to crush my young men;
in the winepress the Lord trampled
the young daughter of Judah.
- Ain* ¹⁶And that is why I weep;
my eyes stream with water,
since a comforter who could revive me
is far away.
My children are shattered,
for the enemy has proved too strong.
- Pe* ¹⁷Zion stretches out her hands,
with no one to comfort her.
Yahweh has commanded Jacob's enemies
to surround him;
they treat Jerusalem
as though she were unclean.
- Zade* ¹⁸Yahweh is in the right,
for I rebelled against his command.
Listen, all you peoples,
and see my sorrow.
My young girls and my young men
have gone into captivity.
- Qoph* ¹⁹I called to my lovers;
they failed me.
My priests and my elders
expired in the city,
as they searched for food
to keep themselves alive.
- Resh* ²⁰Look, Yahweh. I am in distress!
My inmost being is in ferment;

my heart turns over inside me—
how rebellious I have been!
Outside, the sword bereaves;
inside it is like death.

Shin ²¹Listen, for I am groaning,
with no one to comfort me.
All my enemies have heard of my disaster,
they are glad about what you have done.
Bring the Day you once foretold,
so that they may be like me!

Taw ²²Let all their wickedness come before you,
and treat them
as you have treated me
for all my crimes;
numberless are my groans,
and I am sick at heart.

SECOND LAMENTATION

2 *Aleph* In his anger, with what darkness
has the Lord enveloped the daughter of Zion!
He has flung the beauty of Israel
from heaven to the ground,
without regard for his footstool
on the day of his anger.

Bet ²The Lord pitilessly engulfed
all the homes of Jacob;
in his fury he tore down
the fortresses of the daughter of Judah;
he threw to the ground, he desecrated
the kingdom and its princes.

Gimel ³In his burning anger
he broke all the might of Israel,
withdrew his protecting right hand
at the coming of the enemy,
and blazed against Jacob like a fire
that burns up everything near it.

Dalet ⁴Like an enemy he bent his bow,
and his right hand held firm;
like a foe he slaughtered
all those who were a delight to see;
on the tent of the daughter of Zion
he poured out his fury like fire.

He ⁵The Lord behaved like an enemy;
he engulfed Israel,
he engulfed all its citadels,
he destroyed its fortresses
and for the daughter of Judah
multiplied weeping on wailing.

- Waw* ⁶He wrecked his domain like a garden,
destroyed his assembly-points,
Yahweh erased the memory
of festivals and Sabbaths in Zion;
in the heat of his anger he treated
king and priest with contempt.
- Zain* ⁷The Lord has rejected his altar,
he has come to loathe his sanctuary
and has given her palace walls
into the clutches of the enemy;
from the uproar they made in Yahweh's temple
it might have been a festival day!
- Het* ⁸Yahweh has resolved to destroy
the walls of the daughter of Zion,
stretching out the line, not staying his hand
until he has engulfed everything,
thus bringing mourning on wall and rampart;
alike they crumbled.
- Tet* ⁹Her gates have sunk into the ground;
he has broken and shattered their bars.
Her king and her princes are among the gentiles,
there is no instruction,
furthermore her prophets cannot find
any vision from Yahweh.
- Yod* ¹⁰Mute, they sit on the ground,
the elders of the daughter of Zion;
they have put dust on their heads
and wrapped themselves in sackcloth.
The young girls of Jerusalem bow their heads
to the ground.
- Kaph* ¹¹My eyes are worn out with weeping,
my inmost being is in ferment,
my heart plummets
at the destruction of my young people,
as the children and babies grow faint
in the streets of the city.
- Lamed* ¹²They keep saying to their mothers,
'Where is some food?'
as they faint like wounded men
in the streets of the city,
as they breathe their last
on their mothers' breasts.
- Mem* ¹³To what can I compare or liken you,
daughter of Jerusalem?
Who can rescue and comfort you,
young daughter of Zion?
For huge as the sea is your ruin:
who can heal you?
- Nun* ¹⁴The visions your prophets had for you
were deceptive whitewash;
they did not lay bare your guilt
so as to change your fortunes:

the visions they told you
were deceptive.

- Samek* ¹⁵All who pass your way
clap their hands at the sight;
they whistle and shake their heads
over the daughter of Jerusalem,
'Is this the city they call Perfection of Beauty,
the joy of the whole world?'
- Pe* ¹⁶Your enemies open their mouths
in chorus against you;
they whistle and grind their teeth;
they say, 'We have swallowed her up.
This is the day we were waiting for;
at last we have seen it!'
- Ain* ¹⁷Yahweh has done what he planned,
has carried out his threat,
as he ordained long ago:
he has destroyed without pity,
increasing the might of your foes—
and letting your foes get the credit.
- Zade* ¹⁸Cry then to the Lord,
rampart of the daughter of Zion;
let your tears flow like a torrent,
day and night;
allow yourself no respite,
give your eyes no rest!
- Qoph* ¹⁹Up, cry out in the night-time
as each watch begins!
Pour your heart out like water
in Yahweh's presence!
Raise your hands to him
for the lives of your children
(who faint with hunger
at the end of every street)!
- Resh* ²⁰Look, Yahweh, and consider:
whom have you ever treated like this?
Should women eat their little ones,
the children they have nursed?
Should priest and prophet be slaughtered
in the Lord's sanctuary?
- Shin* ²¹Children and old people are lying
on the ground in the streets;
my young men and young girls
have fallen by the sword;
you have killed them, on the day of your anger,
you have slaughtered them pitilessly.
- Taw* ²²As though to a festival you called together
terrors from all sides,
so that, on the day of Yahweh's anger,
none escaped and none survived.
Those whom I had nursed and reared,
my enemy has annihilated them all.

PSALMS
CHAPTER 137

- 1** By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
- 2** We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
- 3** For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one of* the songs of Zion.
- 4** How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?
- 5** If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*.
- 6** If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
- 7** Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, *Rase it, rase it, even* to the foundation thereof.
- 8** O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy *shall he be*, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
- 9** Happy *shall he be*, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

UBI SUNT POEMS 9th c- 16th c

Beowulf

Anglo-Saxon, this passage – from lines 92–96 of the poem – reads as follows:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom mappumgyfa?
Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?
[...]Hu seo þrag gewat,
genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære.

One modern English translation of this passage is given below:

Where is the horse gone? Where the rider? Where the giver of treasure?
Where are the seats at the feast? Where are the revels in the hall?
[...]How that time has passed away,
grown dark under cover of night, as if it had never been.^[6]

Middle English

The 13th century poem "Ubi Sunt Qui Ante Nos Fuerunt" (*Where are those who were before us?*) is a Middle English example following the medieval tradition:^[7]

Uere beþ þey biforen vs weren,
Houndes ladden and hauekes beren
And hadden feld and wode?
Þe riche leuedies in hoere bour,
Þat wereden gold in hoere tressour
Wiþ hoere brijtte rode; ...^[8]

Which roughly translates to:

Where are those who were before us,
who led hounds and bore hawks,
And owned field and wood?
The rich ladies in their chambers,
Who wore gold in their hair,
With their bright faces; ...

When Hamlet finds skulls in the Graveyard (V. 1), these rhetorical questions appear:

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorr'd in my imagination it is! my gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kiss'd I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning – quite chap-fall'n. Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come; make her laugh at that.^[9]



When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd

BY WALT WHITMAN

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,

Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on,)
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I know not what kept me from sleep,)
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning.

And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

*Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.*

*Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.*

*Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.*

*Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.*

*From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.*

Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his dear sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.



'No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief.'

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief
Woe, wórd-sorrow; on an áge-old anvil wince and sing —
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Source: *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985)

W.E.B. DU BOIS

A Litany at Atlanta

O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery hath left our ears an-hungered in these fearful days—

Hear us, good Lord!

Listen to us, Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a mockery in Thy Sanctuary. With uplifted hands we front Thy Heaven, O God, crying:

We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!

We are not better than our fellows, Lord; we are but weak and human men. When our devils do deviltry, curse Thou the doer and the deed,—curse them as we curse them, do to them all and more than ever they have done to innocence and weakness, to womanhood and home.

Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!

And yet, whose is the deeper guilt? Who made these devils? Who nursed them in crime and fed them on injustice? Who ravished and debauched their mothers and their grandmothers? Who bought and sold their crime and waxed fat and rich on public iniquity?

Thou knowest, good God!

Is this Thy Justice, O Father, that guile be easier than innocence and the innocent be crucified for the guilt of the untouched guilty?

Justice, O Judge of men!

Wherefore do we pray? Is not the God of the Fathers dead? Have not seers seen in Heaven's halls Thine hearsed and lifeless form stark amidst the black and rolling smoke of sin, where all along bow bitter forms of endless dead?

Awake, Thou that sleepest!

Thou art not dead, but flown afar, up hills of endless light, through blazing corridors of suns, where worlds do swing of good and gentle men, of women strong and free—far from the cozenage, black hypocrisy, and chaste prostitution of this shameful speck of dust!

Turn again, O Lord; leave us not to perish in our sin!
From lust of body and lust of blood,—
Great God, deliver us!

From lust of power and lust of gold,—
Great God, deliver us!

From the leagued lying of despot and of brute,—
Great God, deliver us!

A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate. Red was the midnight; clang, crack, and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars where church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance!

Bend us Thine ear, O Lord!

In the pale, still morning we looked upon the deed. We stopped our ears and held our leaping hands, but they—did they not wag their heads and leer and cry with bloody jaws: *Cease from Crime!* The word was mockery, for thus they train a hundred crimes while we do cure one.

Turn again our captivity, O Lord!

Behold this maimed and broken thing, dear God; it was an humble black man, who toiled and sweat to save a bit from the pittance paid him. They told him: *Work and Rise!* He worked. Did this man sin? Nay, but someone told how someone said another did—one whom he had never seen nor known. Yet for that man's crime this man lieth maimed and murdered, his wife naked to shame, his children to poverty and evil.

Hear us, O heavenly Father!

Doth not this justice of hell stink in Thy nostrils, O God? How long shall the mounting flood of innocent blood roar in Thine ears and pound in our hearts for vengeance? Pile the pale frenzy of blood-crazed brutes, who do such deeds, high on Thine Altar, Jehovah Jireh, and burn it in hell forever and forever!

Forgive us, good Lord; we know not what we say!

Bewildered we are and passion-tossed, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the armposts of Thy throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge Thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the

tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy crucified Christ: What meaneth this? Tell us the plan; give us the sign!

Keep not Thou silent, O God!

Sit not longer blind, Lord God, deaf to our prayer and dumb to our dumb suffering. Surely Thou, too, art not white, O Lord, a pale, bloodless, heartless thing!

Ah! Christ of all the Pities!

Forgive the thought! Forgive these wild, blasphemous words! Thou art still the God of our black fathers and in Thy Soul's Soul sit some soft darkenings of the evening, some shadowings of the velvet night.

But whisper—speak—call, great God, for Thy silence is white terror to our hearts! The way, O God, show us the way and point us the path!

Whither? North is greed and South is blood; within, the coward, and without, the liar. Whither? To death?

Amen! Welcome, dark sleep!

Whither? To life? But not this life, dear God, not this. Let the cup pass from us, tempt us not beyond our strength, for there is that clamoring and clawing within, to whose voice we would not listen, yet shudder lest we must,—and it is red. Ah! God! It is a red and awful shape.

Selah!

In yonder East trembles a star.

Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord!

Ice Storm
by Robert Hayden

Unable to sleep, or pray, I stand
by the window looking out
at moonstruck trees a December storm
has bowed with ice.

Maple and mountain ash bend
under its glassy weight,
their cracked branches falling upon
the frozen snow.

The trees themselves, as in winters past,
will survive their burdening,
broken thrive. And am I less to You,
my God, than they?

FRANK BIDART

TO THE DEAD

What I hope (when I hope) is that we'll
see each other again,--

. . . and again reach the VEIN

in which we loved each other . .
It existed. *It existed.*

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,--

. . . for, like the detectives (the Ritz Brothers)
in *The Gorilla*,

once we'd been battered by the gorilla

we searched the walls, the intricately carved
impenetrable paneling

for a button, lever, latch

that unlocks a secret door that
reveals at last the secret chambers,

CORRIDORS within WALLS,

(the disenthraling, necessary, dreamed structure
beneath the structure we see,)

that is the HOUSE within the HOUSE . . .

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,--

. . . there were (for example) months when I seemed only
to displease, frustrate,

disappoint you--; then, something triggered

a drunk lasting for days, and as you
slowly and shakily sobered up,

sick, throbbing with remorse and self-loathing,

insight like ashes: clung
to; useless; hated . . .

This was the viewing of the power of the waters

while the waters were asleep:--
secrets, histories of loves, betrayals, double-binds

not fit (you thought) for the light of day . . .

There is a NIGHT within the NIGHT,--

. . . for, there at times at night, still we
inhabit the secret place together . . .

Is this wisdom, or self-pity?--

The love I've known is the love of
two people staring

not at each other, but in the same direction.

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Back

LAMENT FOR THE MAKERS

- Robert Pinsky

What if I told you the truth? What if I could?
The nuptial trek of the bower apes in May:
At night in the mountain meadow their clucking cries,

The reeking sulphur springs called Smoking Water,
Their skimpy ramparts of branches, pebbles and vines—
So slightly better than life, that snarl of weeds,

The small-town bank by comparison is Rome,
With its four-faced bronze clock that chimes the hours,
The six great pillars surmounted by a frieze

Of Cronus eating his children—or trying to,
But one child bests him because we crave to live,
And if that too means dying then to die

Like Arthur when ladies take him in his barge
Across the misty water: better than life,
Or better than truly dying. In the movies

Smoking and driving are better, a city walk.
Grit on the sidewalk after a thaw, mild air.
I took the steps along the old stone trestle

Above the station, to the part of town
I never knew, old houses flush to the street
Curving uphill. Patches of ice in the shade.

What if I found an enormous secret there
And told you? We would still feel something next
Or even at the same time. Just as now. In Brooklyn,

Among the diamond cutters at their benches
Under high Palladian windows full of a storm,
One wearing headphones listens to the Talmud.

What if he happens to feel some saw or maxim
Inwardly? Then the young girl in her helmet,
An allegorical figure called The Present,

Would mime for us the action of coming to life:
A crease of shadow across her face, a cross,
And through the window, washing stumps of brick,

Exuberant streaks and flashes—literal lightning
Spilling out into a cheery violent rain.
Worship is tautological, with its Blessed

Art thou O Lord who consecrates the Sabbath
Unto us that we may praise it in thy name
Who blesses us with this thy holy day

That we may hallow it unto thy holy blessings. . . .
And then the sudden curt command or truth:
God told him, Thou shalt cut thy foreskin off.

Then Abraham was better than life. The monster
Is better when he startles us. Hurt is vivid,
Sincerity visible in the self-inflicted wound.

Paws bleeding from their terrible climb, they weave
Garlands of mountain creeper for their bed.
The circle of desire, that aches to play

Or sings to hear the song passing. We sense
How much we might yet make things change, renewed
As when the lovers rise from their bed of play

And dress for supper and from a lewd embrace
Undress again. Weeds mottle the fissured pavement
Of the playground in a net of tufted lines

As sunset drenches a cinematic honey
Over the stucco terraces, copper and blue,
And the lone player cocks wrist and ball behind

His ear and studies the rusty rim again.
The half-ruined city around him throbs and glows
With pangs of allure that flash like the names of bars

Along San Pablo Avenue: Tee Tee's Lounge,
The Mallard Club, Quick's Little Alaska, Ruthie's,
Chiquita's, and inside the sweet still air

Of tobacco, malt and lime, and in some music
But in others only voices or even quiet,
And the player's arm pauses and pumps again.

Mark Doty, Bethlehem in Broad Daylight (Boston: David R. Godine, 1991)

Tiara

Peter died in a paper tiara
cut from a book of princess paper dolls;
he loved royalty, sashes

and jewels. *I don't know,*
he said, when he woke in the hospice,
I was watching the Bette Davis film festival

on Channel 57 and then—
At the wake, the tension broke
when someone guessed

the casket closed because
he was *in there in a big wig*
and heels, and someone said,

You know he's always late,
he probably isn't here yet—
he's still fixing his makeup.

And someone said he asked for it.
Asked for it—
when all he did was go down

into the salt tide
of wanting as much as he wanted,
giving himself over so drunk

or stoned it almost didn't matter who,
though they were beautiful,
stamped into him in the simple,

ravishing music of their hurry.
I think heaven is perfect stasis
poised over the realms of desire,

where dreaming and waking men lie
on the grass while wet horses
roam among them, huge fragments

of the music we die into
in the body's paradise.
Sometimes we wake not knowing

how we came to lie here,
or who has crowned us with these temporary,
precious stones. And given

the world's perfectly turned shoulders,
the deep hollows blued by longing,
given the irreplaceable silk

of horses rippling in orchards,
fruit thundering and chiming down,
given the ordinary marvels of form

and gravity, what could he do,
what could any of us ever do
but ask for it?

From Gentle Now,
Don't Add to Heartache

- Juliana Spahr 2004

IV

It was not all long lines of connection and utopia.

It was a brackish stream and it went through the field
beside our house.

But we let into our hearts the brackish parts of it also.

Some of it knowingly.

We let in soda cans and we let in cigarette butts and we
let in pink tampon applicators and we let in six pack of
beer connectors and we let in various other pieces of
plastic that would travel through the stream.

And some of it unknowingly.

We let the run off from agriculture, surface mines,
forestry, home wastewater treatment systems, construc-
tion sites, urban yards, and roadways into our hearts.

We let chloride, magnesium, sulfate, manganese, iron,
nitrite/nitrate, aluminum, suspended solids, zinc,
phosphorus, fertilizers, animal wastes, oil, grease,
dioxins, heavy metals and lead go through our skin and
into our tissues.

We were born at the beginning of these things, at the
time of chemicals combining, at the time of stream run
off.

These things were a part of us and would become more
a part of us but we did not know it yet.
Still we noticed enough to sing' a lament.

To sing in lament for whoever lost her elephant ear lost
her mountain madtom and whoever lost her butterfly
lost her harelip sucker and whoever lost her white
catspaw lost her rabbitsfoot and whoever lost her
monkeyface lost her speckled chub and whoever lost her
wartback lost her ebonyshell and whoever lost her
pirate perch lost her ohio pigtoe lost her clubshell.

V

What I did not know as I sang the lament of what was becoming lost and what was already lost was how this loss would happen.

I did not know that I would turn from the stream to each other.

I did not know I would turn to each other.

That I would turn to each other to admire the softness of each other's breast, the folds of each other's elbows, the brightness of each other's eyes, the smoothness of each other's hair, the evenness of each other's teeth, the firm blush of each other's lips, the firm softness of each other's breasts, the fuzz of each other's calves, thighs, the rich, ripe pungency of each other's smell, all of it, each other's cheeks, legs, neck, roof of mouth, webbing between the fingers, tips of nails and also cuticles, hair on toes, whorls on fingers, skin discolorations.

I turned to each other.

Ensnared, bewildered, I turned to each other and from the stream.

I turned to each other and I began to work for the chemical factory and I began to work for the paper mill

and I began to work for the atomic waste disposal plant
and I began to work at keeping men in jail.

I turned to each other.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain
madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw,
rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback,
ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I replaced what I knew of the stream with Lifestream
Total Cholesterol Test Packets, with Snuggle Emerald
Stream Fabric Softener Dryer Sheets, with Tisserand
Aromatherapy Aroma-Stream Cartridges, with Filter
Stream Dust Tamer, and Streamzap PC Remote Con-
trol, Acid Stream Launcher, and Viral Data Stream.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain
madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw,
rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback,
ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I put a Streamline Tilt Mirror in my shower and I kept
a crystal Serenity Sphere with a Winter Stream view on
my dresser.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain
madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw,
rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback,
ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I bought a Gulf Stream Blue Polyester Boat Cover for
my fourteen to sixteen foot V-Hull Fishing boats with
beam widths up to sixty-eight feet and I talked about
value stream management with men in suits over a desk.

I didn't even say goodbye elephant ear, mountain
madtorn, butterfly, harelip sucker, white catspaw,
rabbitsfoot, monkeyface, speckled chub, wartyback,
ebonyshell, pirate perch, ohio pigtoe, clubshell.

I just turned to each other and the body parts of the
other suddenly glowed with the beauty and detail that I
had found in the stream.

I put my head together on a narrow pillow and talked
with each other all night long.

And I did not sing.

I did not sing otototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.

I did not sing groaning wounds.

I did not sing otototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.

I did not sing groaning wounds.

I did not sing o wo, wo, wo!

I did not sing I see, I see.

I did not sing wo, wo!

Hum
ANN LAUTERBACH

The days are beautiful.
The days are beautiful.

I know what days are.
The other is weather.

I know what weather is.
The days are beautiful.

Things are incidental.
Someone is weeping.

I weep for the incidental.
The days are beautiful.

Where is tomorrow?
Everyone will weep.

Tomorrow was yesterday.
The days are beautiful.

Tomorrow was yesterday.
Today is weather.

The sound of the weather
Is everyone weeping.

Everyone is incidental.
Everyone weeps.

The tears of today
Will put out tomorrow.

The rain is ashes.
The days are beautiful.

The rain falls down.
The sound is falling.

The sky is a cloud.
The days are beautiful.

The sky is dust.
The weather is yesterday.

The weather is yesterday.
The sound is weeping.

What is this dust?
The weather is nothing.

The days are beautiful.
The towers are yesterday.

The towers are incidental.
What are these ashes?

Here is the hate
That does not travel.

Here is the robe
That smells of the night

Here are the words
Retired to their books

Here are the stones
Loosed from their settings

Here is the bridge
Over the water

Here is the place
Where the sun came up

Here is a season
Dry in the fireplace.

Here are the ashes.
The days are beautiful.

TO THE REPUBLIC

I dreamt I saw a caravan of the dead
start out again from Gettysburg.

Close-packed upright in rows on railcar flat-
beds in the sun, they soon will stink.

Victor and vanquished shoved together, dirt
had bleached the blue and gray one color.

Risen again from Gettysburg, as if
the state were shelter crawled to through

blood, risen disconsolate that we
now ruin the great work of time,

they roll in outrage across America.

You betray us is blazoned across each chest.
To each eye as they pass: *You betray us.*

Assaulted by the impotent dead, I say it's
their misfortune and none of my own.

I dreamt I saw a caravan of the dead
move on wheels touching rails without sound.

To each eye as they pass: *You betray us.*

—Frank Bidart

RICKEY LAURENTIIS

One Country

I want to be released from it.
I want its impulses stunned to lead.
This body. Its breath.
Let it. Let the whole pageant
end. If my body had a river in it
I would drain it. If by the river
was a city, let a storm shock and drown it.
If in the city was a boy made sick
from his body, the freak passions of it,
let him come out—his brown skin
lifting as a shell. Let it. Let all
his limbs pop and unhinge. First
his penis, its quick flight, as if a comet.
The eight fingers next, then thumbs,
then tongue, till every star is on the floor,
dismissed, each pointing in its own
direction, each another door
to the one country where his body is
loved and made for.

KHADIJAH QUEEN

*I want to not have to write another word
about who the cops keep killing*

So at first I wanted to make another video and I thought I could do it on the weekend or after work but motherhood and overtime and then I got to image-hunting and name-searching and each name led to another name and another name and the people and I wept Again and then I got angry Again and I got my fancy microphone to read June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights" and played with filters in Garage Band and thought about going for a walk in the almost dark and having my teenager film me in a flowered dress and sun hat walking barefoot by the creek and grazing summer sunflowers with my fingertips like in a wistful movie intro or tampon commercial but then I get up and I hurt everywhere my body aches I feel heavy and as the sun goes down I realize I don't have time to make the kind of video I want to make because I have to get up at 5:30am to start work and I want to not feel this pain everywhere and I want to not be so tired I can't move but fibromyalgia exists and even though it reminds me of grief what does any of this whining have to do with Michael Brown when my beautiful brown boy is laughing in the room down the hall eating caramel gelato and not cleaning his room and I want to not think about my dead brother every time the police kill another of us and then get to pose in front of flags and lie to the cameras like the truth don't keep in blood and keep their guns and keep their public salaries and keep killing the people we love and when I think that I cry Again because I want to not cry because I actually hate crying because none of my tears can offer resurrection none of my poems can offer resurrection none of my image searches can offer resurrection and I want us to stay alive



Dancing

BY ROBERT HASS

The radio clicks on—it's poor swollen America,
Up already and busy selling the exhausting obligation
Of happiness while intermittently debating whether or not
A man who kills fifty people in five minutes
With an automatic weapon he has bought for the purpose
Is mentally ill. Or a terrorist. Or if terrorists
Are mentally ill. Because if killing large numbers of people
With sophisticated weapons is a sign of sickness—
You might want to begin with fire, our early ancestors
Drawn to the warmth of it—from lightning,
Must have been, the great booming flashes of it
From the sky, the tree shriveled and sizzling,
Must have been, an awful power, the odor
Of ozone a god's breath; or grass fires,
The wind whipping them, the animals stampeding,
Furious, driving hard on their haunches from the terror
Of it, so that to fashion some campfire of burning wood,
Old logs, must have felt like feeding on the crumbs
Of the god's power and they would tell the story
Of Prometheus the thief, and the eagle that feasted
On his liver, told it around a campfire, must have been,
And then—centuries, millennia—some tribe
Of meticulous gatherers, some medicine woman,
Or craftsman of metal discovered some sands that,
Tossed into the fire, burned blue or flared green,
So simple the children could do it, must have been,
Or some soft stone rubbed to a powder that tossed
Into the fire gave off a white phosphorescent glow.
The word for *chemistry* from a Greek—some say Arabic—
Stem associated with metal work. But it was in China
Two thousand years ago that fireworks were invented—
Fire and mineral in a confined space to produce power—
They knew already about the power of fire and water

Invented the new policy of "aerial policing," which amounted,
Sources say, to bombing civilians and then pacifying them
With ground troops. Which led to the tactic of terrorizing
civilian

Populations in World War II. Total casualties in that war,
Worldwide: soldiers, 21 million; civilians, 27 million.

They were throwing sand into the fire. The ancestor who stole
Lightning from the sky had his guts eaten by an eagle.
Spread-eagled on a rock, the great bird feasting.

They are wondering if he is a terrorist or mentally ill.

London, Dresden. Berlin. Hiroshima, Nagasaki.

The casualties difficult to estimate. Hiroshima:

66,000 dead, 70,000 injured. In a minute. Nagasaki:

39,000 dead, 25,000 injured. There were more people killed,

100,000, in more terrifying fashion in the firebombing

Of Tokyo. Two arms races after the ashes settled.

The other industrial countries couldn't get there

Fast enough. Contain, burn. One scramble was

For the rocket that delivers the explosion that burns humans

By the tens of thousands and poisons the earth in the process.

They were wondering if the terrorist was crazy. If he was

A terrorist, maybe he was just unhappy. The other

Challenge afterwards was how to construct machine guns

A man or a boy could carry: lightweight, compact, easy to
assemble.

First a Russian sergeant, a Kalashnikov, clever with guns

Built one on a German model. Now the heavy machine gun.

The weapon of European imperialism through which

A few men trained in gunnery could slaughter native armies

In Africa and India and the mountains of Afghanistan,

Became "a portable weapon a child can operate."

The equalizer. So the undergunned Vietnamese insurgents

Fought off the greatest army in the world. So the Afghans

Fought off the Soviet army using Kalashnikovs the CIA

Provided to them. They were throwing powders in the fire

And dancing. Children's armies in Africa toting AK-47s

That fire thirty rounds a minute. A round is a bullet.

An estimated 500 million firearms on the earth.

100 million of them are Kalashnikov-style semi-automatics.

They were dancing in Orlando, in a club. Spring night.

Gay Pride. The relation of the total casualties to the history

Of the weapon that sent exploded metal into their bodies—

Transcription of a Keen

It couldn't have been easy getting it to lie flat on paper.
That's obvious from the asterisks.

Above the notes on the stave are some bizarre annotations:
Sobbing. Hand clapping. A kind of shake.

It's impossible to guess how they might fit into the music.
I can't read it well enough to get any real feel for the tune —

just enough to recognise the stranger movements.
There are parts where it breaks down to only two notes

going up and down and up from quaver to semiquaver.
A part in the middle accelerates to the point of nonsense

and I'm wondering as I look at it if this is just noise.
I'm almost certain it's unsingable.

In small letters along the bottom someone has written
och, och, och in embarrassed cursive script.

A final note in Italian says how loud the piece should be.

Lament-Heaven

What hazed around the branches
late in March was white at first,
as if a young tree's ghost
were blazing in the woods,
a fluttering around the limbs
like shredded sleeves. A week later,
green fountaining,
frothing champagne;
against the dark of evergreen,
that skyrocket shimmer. I think
this is how our deaths would look,
seen from a great distance,
if we could stand that far
from ourselves: the way birch leaves
signal and flash, candling
into green then winking out.
You've seen lights along the shore
move forward and recede,
not knowing if any single one were house
or buoy, lamp or reflection:
all one fabric. If death's like that,
if we are continuous,
rippling from nothing into being,
then why can't we let ourselves go,

into the world's shimmering story?
Who can become lost in a narrative,
if all he can think of is the end?

Only lights in a lapping harbor—
nothing to fear—rising again,
going out. No,

faster than that

•

like the carnival we saw one night,
late, off the freeway on the south shore,
countless circuits of light bulbs

hazing through thickening spring fog,
the Ferris wheel's phosphorescent roulette
fog-haloed, blazing.

Then letters blinking on—
G-H-O-S-T—
and the linked cursive of *train*:

a funhouse locomotive of spirits,
passengers on the white air?
Our guiding spirit,

spelling out his name and intention
through the Ouija's rainbowed alphabet,
isn't much help. Though death's

his single subject,
he insists there is none,
or rather that what awaits us is "home,"

something he'll say little about.
What does he mean—
the cloudy parlors of heaven

or the insubstantial stuff of earth:
an amusement park alien in its glitter,
the mud-fragrant woods, soaked,

tonight, in spring rain,
warm and unlikely?
He won't answer.

He says death is peace.
I don't believe a word he spells;
I don't believe the lamenting

stops at the borders of this world
or any other. Why give a ghost letters
and the twin poles of yes and no;

isn't everything so shadowed
by its own brevity
we can barely tell the thing

from its elegy? Strip something
of its mortality, and how do you know
what's left to see?

•

In Sing Sing, on a chapel bulletin board,
I read a sign someone spent hours lettering,
the careful tattoo-on-paper

of a man with all the time
in the world to make his point,
text ringed around a Maltese cross:

God's not dead, I can "feel" him
all over me. In those miles of corridors
men move from lock

to lock like canal water,
each segment of hallway filling
until the sluice gates open

and they pour into the next hall,
so much black-and-blue water
hurrying towards the shabby visitors' trailer.

My friend there says
it's hard for him to write
because so many men narrate

day and night the endless
distracting monologues that keep them
real: *I am here,*

doing this. I don't know
how you could feel anything
on your skin in there—

blows maybe, but not divinity.
It's quiet here, I'm free to walk
anywhere I want and nothing's touching me

that I'm certain I'd call endless,
though I'd like to tell whoever inked
that sign the truth, how last week

I felt this—godliness?—
around me, in the enormous church
in Copley Square, under the gold-ribbed vault

pierced by figured windows.

A girl, twelve maybe, was playing the violin,
rapturously, though I suppose for her

it was not trance but discipline
that made the music gather and then tumble
like water collecting in a fountain,

all hesitation and sudden release.
The organist who accompanied
would stop her, from time to time,

and together they'd repeat a phrase,
and then the music would again seem to fall forward,
tumbling snow-melt breaking loose

from the hidden place
where it had been contained.
She was a black girl,

with large round glasses which she pushed
closer to her eyes, each time she paused.
I would have lived in that music,

or rather it was as if I had been once
the cautious and splendid cascade from the violin.
It was the sound that movement

through experience would make,
if we could stand far enough away
to hear it: lovely, and inconsoling,

each phrase played out
into a dense thicket of variations,
into its web of meanings, lifted

and reconsidered, articulated
into exhaustion, hurried and then stilled,
a crowd of wings. I can't remember

even the melody, which doesn't matter;
there's nothing to hold
but the memory of the sensation

of such moments, canceling out
the whine of the self
that doesn't want to be ground down,

answering the little human cry
at the heart of the elegy,
Oh why aren't I what I wanted to be,

exempt from history?
The music mounts up,
assembles its architecture

larger than any of us
and doesn't need you to continue.
Do you understand me?

I heard it, the music
that could not exist without us,
and I was inconsolable.

The End of Poetry

by Ada Limón

Enough of osseous and chickadee and sunflower
and snowshoes, maple and seeds, samara and shoot,
enough chiaroscuro, enough of thus and prophecy
and the stoic farmer and faith and our father and tis
of thee, enough of bosom and bud, skin and god
not forgetting and star bodies and frozen birds,
enough of the will to go on and not go on or how
a certain light does a certain thing, enough
of the kneeling and the rising and the looking
inward and the looking up, enough of the gun,
the drama, and the acquaintance's suicide, the long-lost
letter on the dresser, enough of the longing and
the ego and the obliteration of ego, enough
of the mother and the child and the father and the child
and enough of the pointing to the world, weary
and desperate, enough of the brutal and the border,
enough of can you see me, can you hear me, enough
I am human, enough I am alone and I am desperate,
enough of the animal saving me, enough of the high
water, enough sorrow, enough of the air and its ease,
I am asking you to touch me.

Ada Limón, "The End of Poetry." Published in the *New Yorker*. May 4,
2020.



Listen

with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water looking out
in different directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you
looking up from tables we are saying thank you
in a culture up to its chin in shame
living in the stench it has chosen we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the back door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks that use us we are saying thank you
with the crooks in office with the rich and fashionable
unchanged we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us
our lost feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us like the earth
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying thank you and waving
dark though it is

W. S. MERWIN