

Kochi Reading Group Poetry session on Jan 30, 2009

Attending: Indira, KumKum, Joe, Bobby, Thommo, Talitha

Absent: Jeena, Shobha, Amita

Off-base: Mohan

We started ten minutes late for the first reading session of the year. We missed several participants. The choice of the late John Updike's novel, *Rabbit is Rich*, stands, even though we have not been able to secure a paperback edition from any Indian distributor. But we have the e-text as a pdf file. It was suggested that two of the readers may go to the new bookstore in the Oberon Mall on the NH47 Bypass near Palarivattom. called 'Time Out', owned by Reliance. If they find a suitable book with a number of copies they may buy five or six right away and that will be the choice. KumKum & Talitha volunteered. This will get over our inability to ensure inexpensive paperback editions are available in India, after having spent weeks choosing the book and then following up with DC Books.

We'll read Updike some time in early March.

Joe had not read any poems of Elizabeth Bishop but he knew she was considered an important American poet of the latter half of the twentieth century, the post-modern era. He took the uncharted step of wading into her work after listening partially to the online course on Modern Poetry by Prof Langdon Hammer of Yale at their Open Yale Course site:

<http://oyc.yale.edu/english/modern-poetry>

There is Audio & Video, but they carefully mask the still-in-copyright portions of texts displayed on the screen.

Elizabeth Bishop Early Life She was deprived of a normal childhood when her father died before she was one, and her mother went mad soon after. She was taken by her maternal grandparents to Nova Scotia where she enjoyed her time; but later her better-off paternal grandparents intervened and thought to give her a fine education. That didn't work out and she went to school in various places in Massachusetts. This and her later life of lecturing at Harvard and returning toward the end of her life to buy a house in Cambridge at 60 Brattle Street, merits classifying her as a New England poet (goodness, nearly all the notable women poets in America have come from that small corner of USA!).

Vassar She went on to study at one of the Ivy League colleges for women, Vassar in Poughkeepsie, New York, and graduated in English. By that time she was writing verse and the novelist Mary McCarthy recalls her wit, in an early poem

Bishop had composed at Vassar when she lived next door to the bathroom in her dormitory:

*Ladies and Gents, Ladies and Gents,
flushing away your excrements.
I sit and hear beyond the wall
the sad continual waterfall....*

Marianne Moore Bishop came to know Marianne Moore in her last year of college and developed a strong relationship with her. Moore became mother-hen, critic and admired friend to Bishop. She generously gave of her time in fairly involved revisions of Bishop's manuscripts, and they exchanged a fair amount of correspondence. Bishop was apologetic on occasion for not conceding to all her revisions. A lovely bubbly poem in which she invites MM to come flying to New York city (*Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore*) was generously acknowledged by her. Come she tells the older poet –

*with a priceless set of vocabularies,
...
With dynasties of negative constructions
...
with grammar that suddenly turns and shines
like flocks of sandpipers flying,
...
Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,
come like a daytime comet
with a long unnebulous train of words*

Robert Lowell Her other strong relationship with a poet was a lifelong correspondence with Robert Lowell, by that time an established poet. They had the longest running and intricate letter-writing relationship ever (900 pages of correspondence) over three decades, during which they saw each other rarely. A recent book, *Words in Air*, (title taken from a poem of Bishop's) is a loving testament to the odd friendship – romance on one side (Lowell's) – that culminated in a lifelong friendship that continued even when Lowell went off his rocker toward the end of his life.

Their Friendship All poets, it seems, have streaks of depression, mania, and a feeling of apartness that makes it difficult for them to communicate with humans who are near. But the lovely thing is they come alive with the pen, and we must feel thankful that some writers, who loved and admired each other, remained apart, and therefore had to write in order to exchange thoughts; we are their beneficiaries. Lowell and Bishop looked to each other's letters for sustenance. When they were first introduced Bishop recalled, "It was the first time I had ever talked to someone

about how one writes poetry.” Bishop wrote once to Lowell, “When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived.” It was Bishop, in the end, who wrote Lowell’s poetic epitaph, the beautiful elegy “*North Haven*”.

Her afflictions Bishop suffered from allergies, and alcoholism at various stages of her life and was treated, but continued to relapse. Her time in Brazil during 15 years she spent there with her lover, Lota Soares, was a fertile one for her poetry and she returned only after Lota's death from suicide. Bishop had many lovers in her life. On October 6, 1979, just before she was to give a reading at Harvard's Sanders Theatre, Bishop died suddenly of a cerebral aneurysm. She was sixty-eight.

A Poet *sui generis* Bishop was never a poet in the mould of someone else. She does not fit into the lineage of any other modern poets, even though she had strong relationships with Moore and Lowell, and admired Gerard Hopkins & George Herbert.

Modern poetry is intellectual, rather than sensual, cryptic rather than explicit in meaning, prosaic rather than musical. It does not manage to combine intellectual verve with sensual imagery. Emotion is absent, that’s the thing modern poets dread most. They want to be as understated as possible. But they are sometimes playful, with high intent. Bishop does have these trappings of modern poetry, such as the pattern of lines on the page, the enjambment, etc, but she does it her own way.

Precision Bishop enjoyed in great measure the other modernist values. She has been called a “writer's writer's writer”, for the precision and particularity of her descriptions of things and natural phenomena. Perhaps the precision was an attempt to recover from the disorganization and ill-fortune that beset her life. She admired Vermeer’s painting for similar qualities; they were “precisely observed and rendered”, she said. “No poet ever saw the mysteries of the world more clearly”, says the poet and critic, Schwartz, who knew her over a period of years. She is very economical with her words. Bishop wrote, in an essay she never published, that the qualities she most admired in verse were *Accuracy, Spontaneity, and Mystery*.

She refused to be collected in women's anthologies, as she felt it took away from the totality of herself. Let's look at her poems now, a few of which I have chosen, fairly well-known ones which exemplify all the qualities she admired.

Notes on Bishop’s poems:

1. One Art (Bishop’s best known poem – A villanelle)

Loss and love are significantly enjambed in the first two lines of the last stanza. She presents the “art of losing” as a rejection on her part of the world’s desire to win. While master and disaster are rhymed alternately, disaster has the last word.

Losing is all we do, she seems to exclaim. We are powerless before loss but Bishop sees it as a condition of life you can overcome. I recall here an elegy by Pedro Homem Mello, the Portuguese poet, graven on the tomb of his friend:

*Viver
É ver morrer os outros?*

*To live
Isn't it to see the others die?*

2. Breakfast Song (A poem copied from her notebook & saved by a young admirer, Schwartz, when he visited her in hospital in Cambridge, Mass.) It was not published by her. 'I thought it was extraordinary, one of the best by her I had ever read', says Schwartz, who continues in an NPR (National Public Radio) interview 'Part love poem, part fear of death poem. Intimate but not very personal. You cannot read too much from her poetry. You do not know to whom it is addressed, and she gives away nothing. Except that she slept with someone, but you don't know who it is. It was written for a woman – Bishop was a lesbian. She was private as New Englanders are. The fact of her being lesbian would have added to that privacy, for it could be dangerous to let the public know about her sexual orientation. Here she raises the disturbing idea that someone might actually want to die. But being in love, she talks herself out of it. *Breakfast Song* reveals feelings, especially sexual feelings, which were probably too personal for Bishop to allow herself to make public.'

3. Sonnet

Elizabeth Bishop's 'Sonnet' is often taken to be her last poem. Here, Bishop finally confronts her death wish, though with characteristic indirectness; and also her desire for the freedom which death brings. Maybe because of that indirectness (the poem has no 'first person'), and the frank delight she took in her wit and images, she was especially pleased with this 'little' poem and couldn't wait to see it in print. It was published in *The New Yorker* on October 29, 1979, three weeks after she died. And it feels like a posthumous poem, with its images of release from illness, from emotional conflict, from being 'a creature divided.' In fact Bishop had written it more than a year earlier. *Sonnet* is the closest thing we have to her final poetic testament. It is, as Talitha, observed, not written in the formal sonnet form, and here the meaning we should understand is a 'little song'.

4. I Am in Need of Music It's a sonnet in the Italian rhyme scheme *abba abba abc abc*

Indira read a poem of Paul Celan, first in English, her own translation, which is different from the one you find on the Web in details (for instance, she uses the word ‘snakes’ not ‘vipers’ to translate ‘den Schlangen’. Paul Celan was born in what was then Romania to German speaking parents and German, not Romanian, was the language in which he wrote his literature:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Celan

The Nazi murder of Jews, Eastern Europeans, gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally feeble (all ‘Untermensch’ in their view of the world) was a central theme in his work as his parents died in Nazi concentration camps. That event is a bit remote from us in India, said Indira. During World War II he was subjected to forced labour under the Nazis. Later he fled to Vienna, and then to Paris where he settled finally and died (suicide) in 1970, by jumping into the river Seine.

Paul Celan resented he had to write in the language of the killers of his parents. Joe remarked it was strange Celan wrote in German since the Romanian students he knew in USA who had done their Master’s theses were all Romanian to the core, graduates of the Ceaușescu times, rather than the Nazi or the Soviet times.

Thommo remarked that the whole trouble in Sri Lanka stemmed from the original discrimination against the Tamils, who desired to have their own language and not be imposed upon by the Sinhalas. Language is the most powerful expression of suppressed nationalism. It is clear from the revival of all the languages forbidden by the Soviet masters in the far-flung republics they once governed (Uzbek in Uzbekistan, Ukrainian in Ukraine, and so on) that imposing the language of the ruling majority does not succeed in extinguishing the original languages.

The murder of the Jews during Nazi times has sparked a lot of interest since the publishing of the diaries of Joseph Goebbels, master propagandist of Nazi Germany. Their memory is kept alive by a very intense effort of Jews around the world. Such calamities might not be possible in a smaller world as we are now, thought Indira. But Joe cited the events in many parts of the world where civilians are killed systematically (Palestine, etc) as evidence the world only recognises what the major powers want to recognise, and ignores the rest.

Reference was made to a recent documentary of an Israeli soldier’s time fighting in Lebanon, where the horror of the Lebanon war of 2006 comes through.

Joe asked Indira as she read the poem first in English (translation by Felsteiner) and then in the original of Celan, what did the line mean:

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland.

The question was: is there a caesura between *den Tod* and *der Tod*. Apparently that is the way I read it. The person addressed is one of the Jews playing in a concentration camp orchestra, for the pleasure of the camp chief, who is personified as Death itself. Indira replied that her understanding and Kinnell's, is that the first part of the sentence is a command and with quotes it would be translated as:

"Play sweeter, Death's Music!". Death is a Master from Deutschland.

The German text and its translation, by Hamberger, are available as e-text at <http://econ161.berkeley.edu/TCEH/Todesfuge.html> , and is given below. Indira read another translation by Galway Kinnell, of which there is no access to the e-text, but here is a Youtube reading of that translation at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDpaNLaBt0I>

and a German recitation at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVwLqEHDCQE>

with an unmoving picture of Paul Celan.

KumKum “This evening I have chosen an excerpt from *Aurora Leigh*, a novel in verse, by British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She was born in 1806 in England and died in 1861 in Florence, Italy. Though physically unwell, a cripple all her adult life, she read and wrote extensively. All her works were published during her lifetime. Her poems were popular in Britain and USA, and remain so to this day, especially her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (‘Portuguese’ was the affectionate name her husband, the poet Robert Browning gave her).

Emily Dickinson two poems by whom I read last time was born 24 years later and lived to the same age of 55. Both Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning are considered distinguished poets of the Romantic era of the English Literature, who lived on two sides of the Atlantic. Dickinson admired Elizabeth Barrett’s poems and her achievement as a woman. Since Dickinson’s poems were only published posthumously, the older poet had no chance of reading the younger one’s work.

It is amazing to compare the life experiences of these two women poets. Dickinson lived the life of a recluse. Her views on social issues of the time find no place in her poems. Elizabeth, who suffered from chronic illness and a crippling disability all her life, was aware of everything that was happening around her in the world. Many issues of the time concerned her deeply, and she wrote about them.

Elizabeth published her first book of poems in 1844. Robert Browning admired the poems and began to correspond with her. The two fell in love. Two years later, after one of the most famous courtships in literature, they got married and eloped to Italy (1846) against her dominating father’s will (the movie *The Barretts of*

Wimpole Street concerns her life).

During their courtship she composed 44 sonnets demonstrating her feelings for her beloved. These sonnets are compiled in the book of poems *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). The name of the book was chosen by Browning. It seems he thought the use of the word 'Portuguese' would imply the poems were translations, and hence, it would deflect the readers' curiosity from their private undercurrent. This is considered Barrett Browning's best work. It is still very popular. *How do I love thee? Let me count the ways*

Elizabeth was a socially conscious person. Her interest in the Italian struggle for independence from Austria is evident in the poems of *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) and *Poems before Congress* (1860). She wrote against child labour in the mines and mills of England, and against the slave trade in America. She inveighed against the restrictions placed upon women in her time.

Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, a novel of 542 pages in verse, was published in 1857. The protagonist Aurora's Tuscan mother dies soon after her birth. Her English father raises her with much care. Unfortunately, he too dies when she is 13. After the father's death Aurora comes to live with her aunt in England. This aunt never approved of the marriage of Aurora's parents. She did not welcome their orphan child kindly. However, Aurora derived comfort from her father's books, and the company of her cousin Romney Leigh, and his artist friend Vincent Carrington.

Aurora is an educated, independent woman who wanted to be an author. She desired her suitor Romney Leigh to respect her literary ambitions, instead of his trying to make her compromise and give up her dreams. Thus she hoped they could make his dream of reform in society also come true. The story is quite intriguing with lots of twists and turns, heart-breaks, and sacrifices. In the end, Aurora and Romney are united, but on her terms.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems and other works are all available on line. ” Talitha corrected the misunderstanding that EBB might belong to the Romantics in English poetry. She does not, as that is an appellation reserved for poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, etc. EBB came after that era. Talitha mentions that Robert Browning is considered to be a masculine poet (whatever that means), whereas EBB is feminine. But you can see she was a tough-minded feminine creature from her taking up various causes for freedom, emancipation, etc and in resisting her impossible father.

Talitha read from Gerard Manley Hopkins, the pre-modern poet who lived from 1844-1889. He converted as a priest from the Anglican Communion to Catholicism and became a Jesuit. Thommo remarked that at the time there was a movement, the

Oxford Movement (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_Movement) in which several prominent Anglicans of whom Cardinal Newman was the famous example, crossed over. While Hopkins wrote many poems prior to his conversion, for some reason he burnt them all upon conversion. He was encouraged by his order (Jesuit) to continue his poetic impulses and the effect was to turn him into one of the most original poets: in his diction, his methods and his theory.

Resulting from that theory two words have entered the lexicon of poetics, (1) Sprung Rhythm and (2) Inscape. By the former term Hopkins indicated he was departing from regular English poetic rhythm, called 'running rhythm', which depended on regular stress – all the feet in a line consist of the same number of syllables. 'Sprung rhythm', by contrast had feet with a variable number of syllables in a single line. Perhaps there are other differences. You read Hopkins a while and get some idea of the strange effect his lines produce. They certainly don't flow, so much as make you sit up and take notice every few feet. It creates a novel effect and you can take to its charm.

As for 'Inscape', the word he coined to represent the essential inner nature or distinctive form of a person or thing, Talitha says the idea comes from a philosopher Duns Scotus. She used the word quiddity; I am sure this business of quiddity was old hat to philosophers in India. In any event, Hopkins made it his plan to capture the inscape of the things he wrote about in his poetry and to express it, the very particularity of this one bird he observed (for example in *The Windhover*) or of the several objects he describes in *Pied Beauty*, one of his most anthologised poems. Joe remarked that the poet Elizabeth Bishop whose poems he recited, did study Hopkins deeply and his influence is obvious in her own attempt at capturing the quiddity (here we go with that word again) of the individual subjects of her poems. The idea is 'at one point all the power comes out in a flash' said Hopkins.

The influence of Hopkins on modern poetry is substantial. You find some of his ideas of sprung rhythm in the poet Robinson Jeffers, who did not accept the idea that meter is a fundamental part of poetry, and, like Marianne Moore, claimed his verse was not composed in meter, but "rolling stresses". He believed meter was imposed on poetry by man, not a fundamental part of its nature.

Pied Beauty brings out the mythical five elements in nature – Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Aether according to Hinduism, Greeks, etc. They find their place in *Pied Beauty* but it adds Man as the fifth element, conforming to the Christian view of Man being created as the ultimate evolved being of nature. Joe mentioned, that symbolism apart, some of the lines in this poem have passed into the language: 'For rose moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;' and 'All things counter, original, spare, strange;' Beautiful lines these. There is a lot of word-play here,

and a pleasure in the use of Anglo-Saxon words that Joe noted and was confirmed by Talitha. You can read more about his personal life and his poetics at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerard_Manley_Hopkins

In *The Windhover* the fulcrum of the poem is the word 'Buckle!' And then follows a litany of attributes in the Hopkins fashion. Quite startling.

In the next poem the masthead quotation tells what is his inspirational thought: *quare via impiorum prosperatur?* It is also the beginning of the third line. Hopkins is contrasting his own service as 'Time's eunuch', and continuing the same image of barrenness, asks why he does 'not breed one work that wakes'. Certainly he was in despair, as many artists are after a life of toil at their craft. They still feel they have not achieved what they were searching for. But was it clinical depression?

Talitha sang the first two lines of the fifth poem she read, *Spring and Fall*. It sounds so caressing, like the simple songs of the English Tudor period. She pointed out a lot religious imagery: in the second last line 'It is the blight man was born for' refers to the Fall in Christian theology, and Margaret stands for pearl, which stands for the soul. The use of the American word 'Fall' instead of Autumn in English is deliberate, as a better word to signify the decay and falling of leaves, as one grows towards one's own death. An exegesis of the highly condensed thought in this poem may be found at:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/hopkins/section4.rhtml>

Hopkins essentially gave up writing poetry from about the time of his conversion until 1875, when he wrote *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, about the heroic sacrifice of a group of German nuns who were crossing the North Sea to England when their boat sank in a storm. This is a difficult experimental poem, not much understood; even Hopkins' friends didn't like it ("I wish those nuns had stayed at home", one wrote) and when Hopkins tried to submit it to a Jesuit magazine, it was rejected. But it got him writing again, and he went on to write some more accessible work. Further reading about Hopkins is at the site below from which the paragraph above has been lifted:

http://www.cs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum_html/Hopkins.html

Thommo read the lyrics of Jethro Tull's rock number of 1978 called *Heavy Horses*. It was released as a track on their album of the same name:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy_Horses

You may see the number performed at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ntI4TkOvEU>

and the lyrics of all the songs from that album may be found at:

<http://www.collecting-tull.com/Albums/Lyrics/HeavyHorses.html>

The lyrics were written by Ian Anderson, lead member of the band. The marvellous

feature of the recital was that Thommo responded to the readers' call by singing the entire lyrics, without the help of his guitar. And everyone clapped from admiration of the effort. It was the first time ever anyone in KRG has attempted song with poetry – but wasn't that how Anglo-Saxon poetry started, with minstrels? Thommo mentioned that in the early days you could not get the vinyl records of the band anywhere in India. Jethro Tull was the first band to bring the flute into rock music. The name 'Jethro Tull' is taken from an 18th century farmer. The lead person in the band, Ian Anderson, who wrote the lyrics, is a survivor of cerebral thrombosis. He has many interests, one of them being an enthusiasm for Leica cameras. Jethro Tull has been Thommo's favourite band since his youth. Ian Anderson plays with one leg folded up, and people thought he was one-legged. His eyes are big and they become really big when he plays the flute. Thommo remarked on a photographer called Ashok Koshy whom everyone knows here:

<http://www.hindu.com/mp/2008/06/09/stories/2008060950400500.htm>

He is also a musician who teamed up with a guy called Ladli Ali (sp?) and Thommo said they used to play Jethro Tull. In these times, sadly, the band is not considered cool.

Joe liked the imagery and the words of these lines;

*Let me find you a filly for your proud stallion seed
to keep the old line going.
And we'll stand you abreast at the back of the wood
behind the young trees growing*

Bobby said he'd make up for the long discussion of the many poems up to this point, by reading a short poem of nine lines. It was Wordsworth's well-known poem *My heart leaps up when I behold*, easy to read, but one line in it is poetically vague, and susceptible to many meanings: 'The child is father of the man'. This line is commonly set as the topic for essays in examinations in India.

Does it mean that the cycle of life returns each person to childhood once again in old age as Shakespeare set out in *As You Like It* (The Seven Ages of Man);

*... Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

Joe said he understood this line perfectly in a different way when his children started lecturing him some ten years ago – they had taken over the parenting function. It's quite interesting to see the contrast between the two modern poets discussed in this reading, and Wordsworth, acknowledged by some as the greatest

of the Romantic poets. ‘A rainbow in the sky’ goes all un-described; there’s no particularity about this rainbow he saw one day in London from Westminster Bridge. Nothing to evoke the immaculate sky after the rain had cleared the sooty air of London to reveal

*A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;*

... to quote from another of his famous poems titled *She was a Phantom of delight*. Neither is the ‘quiddity’ of rainbows captured (a la Hopkins), nor is the particularity of this one rainbow (a la Bishop). Mr Wordsworth, you are NOT a modern poet!

The Poems

Joe

ONE ART

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.
Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.
I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.
I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.
— Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster

Elizabeth Bishop

BREAKFAST SONG

My love, my saving grace,
your eyes are awfully blue.
I kiss your funny face,
your coffee-flavored mouth.
Last night I slept with you.
Today I love you so
how can I bear to go
(as soon I must, I know)
to bed with ugly death
in that cold, filthy place,
to sleep there without you,
without the easy breath
and nightlong, limblong warmth
I've grown accustomed to?
--Nobody wants to die;
tell me it is a lie!
But no, I know it's true.
It's just the common case;
there's nothing one can do.
My love, my saving grace,
your eyes are awfully blue
early and instant blue.

Elizabeth Bishop

SONNET

Caught -- the bubble
in the spirit level,
a creature divided;
and the compass needle
wobbling and wavering,
undecided.
Freed -- the broken
thermometer's mercury
running away;

and the rainbow-bird
from the narrow bevel
of the empty mirror,
flying wherever
it feels like, gay!

Elizabeth Bishop

I AM IN NEED OF MUSIC

I am in need of music that would flow
Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
A song to fall like water on my head,
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.

Elizabeth Bishop

Indira

TODESFUGE

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken
wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen die Sterne er pfeift seine Rüden
herbei
er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde
er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich

nachts

wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends

wir trinken und trinken

Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit dem Schlangen der schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Harr Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man
nicht eng Black Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern singet und
spielt

er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau
stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum Tanz auf
Schawrze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts

wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich abends

wir trinken und trinken

ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Harr Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen
Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts

wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken

der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau

er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau

ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete

er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenckt uns ein Grab in der Luft

er spielt mit den Schlangen un träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete

dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

Paul Celan

DEATH FUGUE (translation by Michael Hamberger)

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown

We drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night

We drink it and drink it

We dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined

A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents he writes

He writes when dusk falls to Germany your golden hair Margarete

He writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are flashing he whistles his pack
out
He whistles his Jews out in earth has them dig for a grave
He commands us strike up for the dance
milk of daybreak we drink you at night
We drink you in the morning at noon we drink you at sundown
We drink and we drink you
A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents he writes
He writes when dusk falls to Germany your golden hair Margarete
Your ashen hair Sulamith we dig a grave in the breezes there one lies unconfined
Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
We drink you at noon in the morning we drink you at sundown
We drink and we drink you
A man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete
Your ashen hair Sulamith he plays with the serpents
He calls out more sweetly play death death is a master from Germany
He calls out more darkly now stroke your strings then as smoke you will rise into
air
Then a grave you will have in the clouds there one lies unconfined
He calls out jab deeper into the earth you lot you others sing now and play
He grabs at the iron in his belt he waves it his eyes are blue
Jab deeper you lot with your spades you others play on for the dance
Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
We drink you at noon death is a master from Germany
We drink you at sundown and in the morning we drink and we drink you
Death is a master from Germany his eyes are blue
He strikes you with leaden bullets his aim is true
A man lives in the house your golden hair Margarete
He sets his pack on to us he grants us a grave in the air
He plays with the serpents and daydreams death is a master from Germany

Your golden hair Margarete

Your ashen hair Sulamith

Paul Celan

KumKum

AURORA LEIGH. First Book. Second Verse Elizabeth Barrett Browning

I write. My mother was a Florentine,
Whose rare blue eyes were shut from seeing me
When scarcely I was four years old; my life,
A poor spark snatched up from a failing lamp
Which went out therefore. She was weak and frail;
She could not bear the joy of giving life—
The mother's rapture slew her. If her kiss
Had left a longer weight upon my lips,
It might have steadied the uneasy breath,
And reconciled and fraternised my soul
With the new order. As it was, indeed,
I felt a mother-want about the world,
And still went seeking, like a bleating lamb
Left out at night, in shutting up the fold,—
As restless as a nest-deserted bird
Grown chill through something being away, though what
It knows not. I, Aurora Leigh, was born
To make my father sadder, and myself
Not overjoyous, truly. Women know
The way to rear up children, (to be just,)
They know a simple, merry, tender knack
Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes,
And stringing pretty words that make no sense,
And kissing full sense into empty words;
Which things are corals to cut life upon,
Although such trifles: children learn by such,
Love's holy earnest in a pretty play,
And get not over-early solemnised,—
But seeing, as in a rose-bush, Love's Divine,
Which burns and hurts not,—not a single bloom,—
Become aware and unafraid of Love.
Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well
—Mine did, I know,—but still with heavier brains,
And wills more consciously responsible,
And not as wisely, since less foolishly;
So mothers have God's licence to be missed.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Talitha

Pied Beauty

GLORY be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

THE WINDHOVER

To Christ our Lord

I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing, 5
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion 10
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

‘THOU ART INDEED JUST, LORD, IF I CONTEND’

*Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum: verumtamen justa loquar ad te:
Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c. (Jeremiah, xii 1)*

THOU art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners’ ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend, 5
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again 10
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time’s eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND

*To the happy memory of five Franciscan Nuns exiles by the Falk Laws drowned
between midnight and morning of Dec. 7th. 1875
(an excerpt)*

PART THE FIRST

1

THOU mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World’s strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
And after it almost unmade, what with dread

Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.
Gerard Manley Hopkins

SPRING AND FALL

(to a young child)

Márgarét, áre you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrrow's spríngs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Thommo

HEAVY HORSES

Iron-clad feather-feet pounding the dust,
An October's day, towards evening,
Sweat embossed veins standing proud to the plough,

Salt on a deep chest seasoning.
Last of the line at an honest day's toil,
Turning the deep sod under,
Flint at the fetlock, chasing the bone,
Flies at the nostrils plunder.

The Suffolk, the Clydesdale, the Percheron Vie
with the Shire on his feathers floating.
Hauling soft timber into the dusk
to bed on a warm straw coating.

Heavy Horses, move the land under me.
Behind the plough gliding slipping and sliding free.
Now you're down to the few
And there's no work to do:
The tractor's on its way.

Let me find you a filly for your proud stallion seed
to keep the old line going.
And we'll stand you abreast at the back of the wood
behind the young trees growing.
To hide you from eyes that mock at your girth,
and your eighteen hands at the shoulder.
And one day when the oil barons have all dripped dry
and the nights are seen to draw colder
they'll beg for your strength, your gentle power
your noble grace and your bearing.
And you'll strain once again to the sound of the gulls
in the wake of the deep plough, sharing.

Standing like tanks on the brow of the hill
Up into the cold wind facing
In stiff battle harness, chained to the world
Against the low sun racing.
Bring me a wheel of oaken wood
A rein of polished leather
A Heavy Horse and a tumbling sky
Brewing heavy weather.

Bring a song for the evening
Clean brass to flash the dawn
across these acres glistening
like dew on a carpet lawn.
In these dark towns folk lie sleeping
as the heavy horses thunder by
to wake the dying city
with the living horseman's cry.

At once the old hands quicken,

bring pick and wisp and curry comb,
thrill to the sound of all
the heavy horses coming home.

Ian Anderson

Bobby

MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die!
The child is father of the man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety

William Wordsworth