

Elegy For My Father's Father

By: James K Baxter

He knew in the hour he died
 That his heart had never spoken
 In eighty years of days.
 O for the tall tower broken
 Memorial is denied:
 And the unchanging cairn
 That pipes could set ablaze
 An aaronsrod and blossom.
 They stood by the graveside
 From his bitter veins born
 And mourned him in their fashion.
 A chain of sods in a day
 He could slice and build
 High as the head of a man
 And a flowering cherry tree
 On his walking shoulder held
 Under the lion sun.
 When he was old and blind
 He sat in a curved chair
 All day by the kitchen fire.
 Many nights he had seen
 The stars in their drunken dancing
 Through the burning-glass of his mind
 And sober knew the green
 Boughs of heaven folding
 The winter world in their hand.
 The pride of his heart was dumb.
 He knew in the hour he died
 That his heart had never spoken
 In song or bridal bed.
 And the naked thought fell back
 To a house by the waterside
 And the leaves the wind had shaken
 Then for a child's sake:
 To waves all night awake
 With the dark mouths of the dead.
 The tongues of water spoke
 And his heart was unafraid.

cairn - a pile of stones, raised as a monument

aaronsrod - flowering shrub

burning-glass - magnifying-glass

The Trees are Down

By: Charlotte Mew

- and he cried with a loud voice:

Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees - (Revelation)

They are cutting down the great plane-trees at the end of the gardens.
 For days there has been the grate of the saw, the swish of the
 branches as they fall,
 The crash of the trunks, the rustle of trodden leaves,
 With the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas,' the
 loud common talk, the loud common laughs of the men, above it all.

I remember one evening of a long past Spring
 Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding a large
 dead rat in the mud of the drive.
 I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a god-forsaken thing,
 But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive.

The week's work here is as good as done. There is just one bough
 On the roped bole, in the fine grey rain,
 Green and high
 And lonely against the sky.
 (Down now! -)
 And but for that,
 If an old dead rat
 Did once, for a moment, unmake the Spring, I might never have
 thought of him again.

It is not for a moment the Spring is unmade to-day;
 These were great trees, it was in them from root to stem:
 When the men with the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas' have carted
 the whole of the whispering loveliness away
 Half the Spring, for me, will have gone with them.

It is going now, and my heart has been struck with the hearts of
 the planes;
 Half my life it has beat with these, in the sun, in the rains,
 In the March wind, the May breeze,
 In the great gales that came over to them across the roofs from
 the great seas.
 There was only a quiet rain when they were dying;
 They must have heard the sparrows flying,
 And the small creeping creatures in the earth where they were lying—
 But I, all day, I heard an angel crying:
 'Hurt not the trees.'

The Trees

By: Philip Larkin

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too,
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In fullgrown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

rings of grain - i.e. the yearly patterns within a log's cross-section

Country School

By: Allen Curnow

You know the school; you call it old –
Scrub-worn floors and paint all peeled
On barge-board, weatherboard and gibbet belfry

Pinus betrays, with rank tufts topping
The roof-ridge, scattering bravely
Nor'west gale as a reef its waves
While the small girls squeal at skipping
And Magpies hoot from the eaves.

For scantling Pinus stands-mature
In less than the life of a man;
The rusty saplings, the school, and you
Together your lives began.

O sweet antiquity! Look, the stone
That skinned your knees. How small
Are the terrible doors, how sad the dunny
And the things you drew on the wall.

gibbet - gallows

belfry - bell-tower

pinus - (Latin) the botanical name for the pine-tree

rank - thickly growing

scantling - calibrating, measuring

dunny - (slang) toilet

Cambodia

By: James Fenton

One man shall smile one day and say goodbye.
Two shall be left, two shall be left to die.
One man shall give his best advice.
Three man shall pay the price.

One man shall live, live to regret.
Four men shall meet the debt.

One man shall wake from the terror to his bed.
Five men shall be dead.

One man to five. A million men to one.
And still they die. And still the war goes on.

Attack

By: Siegfried Sassoon

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and dun
In the wild purple of the glow'ring sun,
Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that shroud
The menacing scarred slope; and, one by one,
Tanks creep and topple forward to the wire.
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear,
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,
They leave their trenches, going over the top,
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!

Reservist

By: Boey Kim Cheng

Time again for the annual joust, the regular fanfare,
 a call to arms, the imperative letters stern
 as clarion notes, the king's command, upon
 the pain of court-martial, to tilt
 at the old windmills. With creaking bones
 and suppressed grunts, we battle-weary knights
 creep to attention, ransack the wardrobes
 for our rusty armour, tuck the pot bellies
 with great finesse into the shrinking gear,
 and with helmets shutting off half our world,
 report for service. We are again united
 with sleek weapons we were betrothed to
 in our active cavalier days.

We will keep charging up the same hills, plod
 through the same forests, till we are too old,
 too ill-fitted for life's other territories.
 The same trails will find us time and again,
 and we quick to obey, like children placed
 on carousels they cannot get off from, borne
 along through somebody's expensive fantasyland,
 with an oncoming rush of tedious rituals, masked threats
 and monsters armed with the same roar.

reservist - a soldier serving within an auxiliary force as an emergency reserve

clarion - a war trumpet

tilt - joust with, charge on horseback towards (Cervantes's Don Quixote - deludedly attacked windmills, thinking them enemy knights)

cavalier - knightly, breezy, youthful

carousels - merry-go-rounds

Sisyphus - in Greek myth, the man condemned to push a boulder up a mountain, for ever

You Cannot Do This

By: Gwendolyn MacEwen

You cannot do this to them, these are my people;
 I am not speaking of poetry, I am not speaking of art.
 you cannot do this to them, these are my people.
 you cannot hack away the horizon in front of their eyes.

The tomb, articulate, will record your doing;
 I will record it also, this is not art.
 this is a kind of science, a kind of hobby,
 a kind of personal vice like coin collecting.

It has something to do with horses
 and signet rings and school trophies;
 it has something to do with pride of the loins;
 it has something to do with good food and music,
 and something to do with power, and dancing.
 you cannot do this to them, these are my people.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

By: Wilfred Owen

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
 Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
 Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
 Can patter out their hasty orisons.
 No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
 The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
 What candles may be held to speed them all?
 Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
 Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
 And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

passing-bells - funeral bells rung in churches

orisons - prayers

shires - counties

pall - the cloth draped over a coffin

My Dreams Are Of A Field Afar

By: A. E. Housman

My dreams are of a field afar
 And blood and smoke and shot
 There in their graves my comrades are,
 In my grave I am not.

I too was taught the trade of man
 And spelt the lesson plain
 But they, when I forgot and ran,
 Remembered and remain.

A Man I Am

By: Stevie Smith

I was consumed by so much hate
 I did not feel that I could wait
 I could not wait for long at any rate
 I ran into the forest wild
 I seized a little new born child
 I tore his throat, I licked my fang
 Just like a wolf, A wolf I am.
 I ran wild for centuries
 Beneath the immemorial trees,
 Sometimes I thought my heart would freeze
 And never know a moments ease,
 But presently the spring broke in
 Upon the Pastures of my sin,
 My poor heart bled like anything,
 The drops fell down, I knew remorse,
 I tasted that primordial curse,
 And falling ill, I soon grew worse.
 Until at last I cried on Him,
 Before who angel faces dim,
 To take the burden of my sin
 And break my head beneath his wing.
 Upon the silt of death I swam
 And as I wept my joy began
 Just like a man. A man I am.

A Dream

By: William Allingham (1824–89)

I HEARD the dogs howl in the moonlight night;
 I went to the window to see the sight;
 All the Dead that ever I knew
 Going one by one and two by two.

On they pass'd, and on they pass'd;
 Townsfellows all, from first to last;
 Born in the moonlight of the lane,
 Quench'd in the heavy shadow again.

Schoolmates, marching as when we play'd
 At soldiers once—but now more staid;
 Those were the strangest sight to me
 Who were drown'd, I knew, in the awful sea.

Straight and handsome folk; bent and weak, too;
 Some that I lov'd, and gasp'd to speak to;
 Some but a day in their churchyard bed;
 Some that I had not known were dead.

A long, long crowd—where each seem'd lonely,
 Yet of them all there was one, one only,
 Raised a head or look'd my way:
 She linger'd a moment,—she might not stay.

How long since I saw that fair pale face!
 Ah! Mother dear! might I only place
 My head on thy breast, a moment to rest,
 While thy hand on my tearful cheek were prest!

On, on a moving bridge they made
 Across the moon-stream, from shade to shade,
 Young and old, women and men;
 Many long-forgot, but remember'd then.

And first there came a bitter laughter;
 A sound of tears the moment after:
 And then a music so lofty and gay,
 That every morning, day by day,
 I strive to recall it if I may.

Time's Fool

By: Ruth Pitter

Time's fool, but not heaven's: yet hope not for any return.
 The rabbit-eaten dry branch and the halfpenny candle
 Are lost with the other treasure: the sooty kettle
 Thrown away, become redbreast's home in the hedge, where the nettle
 Shoots up, and bad bindweed wreathes rust-fretted handle.
 Under that broken thing no more shall the dry branch burn.

Poor comfort all comfort: once what the mouse had spared
 Was enough, was delight, there where the heart was at home:
 The hard cankered apple holed by the wasp and the bird,
 The damp bed, with the beetle's tap in the headboard heard,
 The dim bit of mirror, three inches of comb:
 Dear enough, when with youth and with fancy shared.

I knew that the roots were creeping under the floor,
 That the toad was safe in his hole, the poor cat by the fire,
 The starling snug in the roof, each slept in his place:
 The lily in splendour, the vine in her grace,
 The fox in the forest, all had their desire,
 As then I had mine, in the place that was happy and poor.

*redbreast - robin (bird)**bindweed - a weed common in hedges and fields***A Quoi Bon Dire**

By: Charlotte Mew

Seventeen years ago you said
 Something that sounded like Good-bye:
 And everybody thinks you are dead
 But I.

So I as I grow stiff and cold
 To this and that say Good-bye too;
 And everybody sees that I am old
 But you.

And one fine morning in a sunny lane
 Some boy and girl will meet and kiss and swear
 That nobody can love their way again
 While over there
 You will have smiled, and I shall have tossed your hair.

A Quoi Bon Dire - (French) what's the good/what's the point

Cold In The Earth

By: Emily Brontë

Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee!
 Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
 Have I forgot, my Only Love, to love thee,
 Severed at last by Time's all-wearing wave?

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
 Over the mountains on Angora's shore;
 Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
 That noble heart for ever, ever more?

Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild Decembers
 From those brown hills have melted into spring--
 Faithful indeed is the spirit that remembers
 After such years of change and suffering!

Sweet Love of youth, forgive if I forget thee
 While the World's tide is bearing me along:
 Sterner desires and darker hopes beset me,
 Hopes which obscure but cannot do thee wrong.

No other Sun has lightened up my heaven;
 No other Star has ever shone for me:
 All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given
 All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But when the days of golden dreams had perished
 And even Despair was powerless to destroy,
 Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
 Strengthened and fed without the aid of joy;

Then did I check the tears of useless passion,
 Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
 Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
 Down to that tomb already more than mine!

And even yet, I dare not let it languish,
 Dare not indulge in Memory's rapturous pain;
 Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
 How could I seek the empty world again?

all-wearing - i.e. which wears everything away

Because I Could Not Stop For Death

by Emily Dickinson

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed us –
The Dews drew quivering and chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

Tippet - narrow scarf

Tulle - finely spun silk gauze

Cornice - decorative ceiling ornament

Song: Tears, Idle Tears

By: Lord Alfred Tennyson

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

pipe - song

casement - window

My Parents

By: Stephen Spender

My parents kept me from children who were rough
and who threw words like stones and who wore torn clothes.
Their thighs showed through rags. They ran in the street
And climbed cliffs and stripped by the country streams.

I feared more than tigers their muscles like iron
And their jerking hands and their knees tight on my arms.
I feared the salt coarse pointing of those boys
Who copied my lisp behind me on the road.

They were lithe, they sprang out behind hedges
Like dogs to bark at our world. They threw mud
And I looked another way, pretending to smile,
I longed to forgive them, yet they never smiled.

One Art

ELIZABETH BISHOP

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.

For Heidi with Blue Hair

By: Fleur Adcock

When you dyed your hair blue
 (or, at least ultramarine
 for the clipped sides, with a crest
 of jet-black spikes on top)
 you were sent home from school

because, as the headmistress put it,
 although dyed hair was not
 specifically forbidden, yours
 was, apart from anything else,
 not done in the school colours.

Tears in the kitchen, telephone-calls
 to school from your freedom-loving father:
 'She's not a punk in her behaviour;
 it's just a style.' (You wiped your eyes,
 also not in a school colour.)

'She discussed it with me first -
 we checked the rules.' 'And anyway, Dad,
 it cost twenty-five dollars.
 Tel them it won't wash out -
 not even if I wanted to try.

It would have been unfair to mention
 your mother's death, but that
 shimmered behind the arguments.
 The school had nothing else against you;
 the teachers twittered and gave in.

Next day your black friend had hers done
 in grey, white and flaxen yellow -
 the school colours precisely:
 an act of solidarity, a witty
 tease. The battle was already won.

Punk - a teenage fashion and music style of the 1970s

Praise Song for My Mother

By: Grace Nichols

You were
 water to me
 deep and bold and fathoming

You were
 moon's eye to me
 pull and grained and mantling

You were
 sunrise to me
 rise and warm and streaming

You were
 the fishes red gill to me
 the flame tree's spread to me
 the crab's leg/the fried plantain smell
 replenishing replenishing

Go to your wide futures, you said

*Fathoming - (1) measuring a depth; (2) understanding
 Grained - seeded
 Mantling - enveloping, cushioning, surrounding*

From The Triumph of Time

A.C. SWINBURNE

Before our lives divide for ever,
 While time is with us and hands are free,
 (Time, swift to fasten and swift to sever
 Hand from hand, as we stand by the sea)
 I will say no word that a man might say
 Whose whole life's love goes down in a day;
 For this could never have been; and never,
 Though the gods and the years relent, shall be.

Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,
 To think of things that are well outworn?
 Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,
 The dream foregone and the deed forborne?
 Though joy be done with and grief be vain,
 Time shall not sever us wholly in twain;
 Earth is not spoilt for a single shower;
 But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn.

It will grow not again, this fruit of my heart,
 Smitten with sunbeams, ruined with rain.
 The singing seasons divide and depart,
 Winter and summer depart in twain.
 It will grow not again, it is ruined at root,
 The bloodlike blossom, the dull red fruit;
 Though the heart yet sickens, the lips yet smart,
 With sullen savour of poisonous pain.

I have given no man of my fruit to eat;
 I trod the grapes, I have drunken the wine.
 Had you eaten and drunken and found it sweet,
 This wild new growth of the corn and vine,
 This wine and bread without lees or leaven,
 We had grown as gods, as the gods in heaven,
 Souls fair to look upon, goodly to greet,
 One splendid spirit, your soul and mine.

In the change of years, in the coil of things,
 In the clamour and rumour of life to be,
 We, drinking love at the furthest springs,
 Covered with love as a covering tree,
 We had grown as gods, as the gods above,
 Filled from the heart to the lips with love,
 Held fast in his hands, clothed warm with his wings,
 O love, my love, had you loved but me!

We had stood as the sure stars stand, and moved
 As the moon moves, loving the world; and seen
 Grief collapse as a thing disproved,
 Death consume as a thing unclean.
 Twain halves of a perfect heart, made fast
 Soul to soul while the years fell past;
 Had you loved me once, as you have not loved;
 Had the chance been with us that has not been.

*twain - two
 sullen savour - sour taste
 lees] sediment in wine
 leaven - yeast
 coil - turmoil*

Meeting At Night

ROBERT BROWNING

The grey sea and the long black land;
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;
 And the startled little waves that leap
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
 And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.
 Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
 And blue spurt of a lighted match,
 And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
 Than the two hearts beating each to each!

prowl - the front part of a boat

Because I Liked You Better

A.E. HOUSMAN

Because I liked you better
 Than suits a man to say,
 It irked you, and I promised
 To throw the thought away.

To put the world between us
 We parted, stiff and dry;
 'Good-bye', said you, 'forget me.'
 'I will, no fear', said I.

If here, where clover whitens
 The dead man's knoll, you pass,
 And no tall flower to meet you
 Starts in the trefoiled grass,

Halt by the headstone naming
 The heart no longer stirred,
 And say the lad that loved you
 Was one that kept his word.

knoll - hillock, mound
trefoiled grass - i.e. clover

From The Ballad of Reading Gaol

OSCAR WILDE

He did not wear his scarlet coat,
 For blood and wine are red,
 And blood and wine were on his hands
 When they found him with the dead,
 The poor dead woman whom he loved,
 And murdered in her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial Men
 In a suit of shabby grey;
 A cricket cap was on his head,
 And his step seemed light and gay;
 But I never saw a man who looked
 So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked
 With such a wistful eye
 Upon that little tent of blue
 Which prisoners call the sky,
 And at every drifting cloud that went
 With sails of silver by.

I walked, with other souls in pain,
 Within another ring,
 And was wondering if the man had done
 A great or little thing,
 When a voice behind me whispered low,
 '*That fellow's got to swing.*'

Dear Christ! the very prison walls
 Suddenly seemed to reel,
 And the sky above my head became
 Like a casque of scorching steel;
 And, though I was a soul in pain,
 My pain I could not feel.

I only knew what hunted thought
 Quickened his step, and why
 He looked upon the garish day
 With such a wistful eye;
 The man had killed the thing he loved,
 And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
 By each let this be heard,
 Some do it with a bitter look,
 Some with a flattering word,
 The coward does it with a kiss,
 The brave man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
 And some when they are old;
 Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
 Some with the hands of Gold:
 The kindest use a knife, because
 The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long,
 Some sell, and others buy;
 Some do the deed with many tears,
 And some without a sigh:
 For each man kills the thing he loves.
 Yet each man does not die.

He does not die a death of shame
 On a day of dark disgrace,
 Nor have a noose about his neck,
 Nor a cloth upon his face,
 Nor drop feet foremost through the floor
 Into an empty space.

scarlet coat - soldier's tunic
trial men - i.e. those in the courtroom
swing - hang
casque - helmet