

Wild Geese: Wendell Berry/Mary Oliver

The Wild Geese

Wendell Berry, 1934-

Horseback on Sunday morning,
harvest over, we taste persimmon
and wild grape, sharp sweet
of summer's end. In time's maze
over fall fields, we name names
that went west from here, names
that rest on graves. We open
a persimmon seed to find the tree
that stands in promise,
pale, in the seed's marrow.
Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear,
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye
clear. What we need is here.

Wild Geese

Mary Oliver, 1935-

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

About Wendell Berry: Poet, essayist, farmer, and novelist, Wendell Berry has written over 30 books of poetry, essays, and novels.

About his work: a reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote: "Berry's poems shine with the gentle wisdom of a craftsman who has thought deeply about the paradoxical strangeness and wonder life."

About Mary Oliver: Mary Oliver has written more than 30 books of poetry and prose.

About her work: Mary Oliver's poetry is an excellent antidote for the excesses of civilization," wrote one reviewer for the *Harvard Review*, "for too much flurry and inattention, and the baroque conventions of our social and professional lives. She is a poet of wisdom and generosity whose vision allows us to look intimately at a world not of our making."

Two Views of Grace: Wendell Berry/Kamilah Aisha Moon

The Peace of Wild Things

Wendell Berry, 1934-

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Mercy Beach

Kamilah Aisha Moon

Stony trails of jagged beauty rise
like stretch marks streaking sand-hips.
All the Earth has borne beguiles us
& battered bodies build our acres.

Babes that sleep in hewn rock cradles
learn to bear the hardness coming.
Tough grace forged in tender bones—
may this serve & bless them well.

They grow & break grief into islands
of sun-baked stone submerged in salt
kisses, worn down by the ocean's ardor
relentless as any strong loving.

May they find caresses that abolish pain.
Like Earth, they brandish wounds of gold!

About Kamilah Aisha Moon: Kamilah Aisha Moon is the author of "She Has a Name" (Four Way Books, 2013). She teaches at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York and lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

About this poem: Moon writes: "This poem was inspired by the shoreline in Madison, Conn. In Annie Finch's workshop with other poets at the Poetry by the Sea conference, we explored meter's relationships to nature. As I entered this meditation, I couldn't help but relate the physical landscape to the ongoing struggles of human nature embroiling our country and world. It is an acknowledgment of and call to transform adversity into greatness—a wish for relief, also known as mercy." — Kamilah Aisha Moon

Patience Taught by Nature: Elizabeth Barrett Browning/Robinson Jeffers

Patience Taught by Nature

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1806 - 1861

“O Dreary life!” we cry, “O dreary life!”
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven’s true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle. Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land: savannah-swards
Unweary sweep: hills watch, unworn; and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees,
To show, above, the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory. O thou God of old!
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to *these*;—
But so much patience, as a blade of grass
Grows by contented through the heat and cold.

Carmel Point

Robinson Jeffers, 1887 – 1962

The extraordinary patience of things!
This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses—
How beautiful when we first beheld it,
Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;
No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing,
Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the outcrop rockheads—
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all
Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
Lives in the very grain of the granite,
Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff.—As for us:
We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

About Elizabeth Barrett Browning: English Romantic poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote her first epic poem before the age of 10, and published numerous books of poetry and socially-conscience prose until her death in 1961.

About Robinson Jeffers: Robinson Jeffers was an intellectual prodigy who studied medicine, forestry, classical languages, as well as, European literature, history, and philosophy. Jeffers brought this great knowledge of literature, religion, philosophy, language, myth, and science to his poetry.

About Robinson Jeffers work:

Jeffers's verse, much of which is set in the Carmel/Big Sur region, celebrates the awesome beauty of coastal hills and ravines. His poetry often praises "the beauty of things" in this setting, but also emphasizes his belief that such splendor demands tragedy.

One of his favorite themes was the intense, rugged beauty of the landscape set in opposition to the degraded and introverted condition of modern man. Strongly influenced by Nietzsche's concepts of individualism, Jeffers believed that human beings had developed a self-centered view of the world, and felt passionately that they should learn to have greater respect for the rest of creation

Nothing Gold Can Stay: Robert Frost/Robert Penn Warren/Lloyd Schwartz

Nothing Gold Can Stay

Robert Frost, 1874 – 1963

Nature's first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf's a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.

Vision

Robert Penn Warren, 1905 - 1989

I shall build me a house where the larkspur blooms

 In a narrow glade in an alder wood,

Where the sunset shadows make violet glooms,

 And a whip-poor-will calls in eerie mood.

I shall lie on a bed of river sedge,

 And listen to the glassy dark,

With a guttered light on my window ledge,

 While an owl stares in at me white and stark.

I shall burn my house with the rising dawn,

 And leave but the ashes and smoke behind,

And again give the glade to the owl and the fawn,

 When the grey wood smoke drifts away with the wind.

Leaves

Lloyd Schwartz, 1941

1

Every October it becomes important, no, *necessary*
to see the leaves turning, to be surrounded
by leaves turning; it's not just the symbolism,
to confront in the death of the year your death,
one blazing farewell appearance, though the irony
isn't lost on you that nature is most seductive
when it's about to die, flaunting the dazzle of its
incipient exit, an ending that at least so far
the effects of human progress (pollution, acid rain)
have not yet frightened you enough to make you believe
is real; that is, you know this ending is a deception
because of course nature is always renewing itself—
the trees don't *die*, they just pretend,
go out in style, and return in style: a new style.

2

Is it deliberate how far they make you go
especially if you live in the city to get far
enough away from home to see not just trees
but only trees? The boring highways, roadsigns, high
speeds, 10-axle trucks passing you as if they were
in an even greater hurry than you to look at leaves:
so you drive in terror for literal hours and it looks
like rain, or *snow*, but it's probably just clouds
(too cloudy to see any color?) and you wonder,
given the poverty of your memory, which road had the
most color last year, but it doesn't matter since
you're probably too late anyway, or too early—
whichever road you take will be the wrong one
and you've probably come all this way for nothing.

You'll be driving along depressed when suddenly
a cloud will move and the sun will muscle through
and ignite the hills. It may not last. Probably
won't last. But for a moment the whole world
comes to. Wakes up. Proves it lives. It lives—
red, yellow, orange, brown, russet, ocher, vermilion,
gold. Flame and rust. Flame and rust, the permutations
of burning. You're on fire. Your eyes are on fire.
It won't last, you don't want it to last. You
can't stand any more. But you don't want it to stop.
It's what you've come for. It's what you'll
come back for. It won't stay with you, but you'll
remember that it felt like nothing else you've felt
or something you've felt that also didn't last.

About Lloyd Schwartz: Schwartz has taught at Boston State College, Queens College, and Harvard University, and is currently Frederick S. Troy Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. He is also the senior editor of classical music for *New York Arts* and a regular commentator on NPR's *Fresh Air*.

November Perspectives: William Cullen Bryant/Paul Laurence Dunbar

About William Cullen Bryant: William Cullen Bryant was an American nature poet and journalist. He wrote poems, essays, and articles that championed the rights of workers and immigrants. In 1829, Bryant became editor in chief of the *New York Evening Post*, a position he held until his death in 1878. His influence helped establish important New York civic institutions such as Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1884, New York City's Reservoir Square, at the intersection of 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue, was renamed Bryant Park in his honor.

About Paul Laurence Dunbar: Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of the first African American poets to gain national recognition. In his short lifetime, he wrote nine books of poetry and prose, and was famous for writing in both dialect and literary English. He self-published his first book of poetry while he was an elevator operator in Dayton, Ohio and sold it for \$1 to office workers who rode his elevator.

November

William Cullen Bryant, 1794 - 1878

Yet one smile more, departing, distant sun!
One mellow smile through the soft vapory air,
Ere, o'er the frozen earth, the loud winds run,
Or snows are sifted o'er the meadows bare.
One smile on the brown hills and naked trees,
And the dark rocks whose summer wreaths are cast,
And the blue gentian flower, that, in the breeze,
Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last.
Yet a few sunny days, in which the bee
Shall murmur by the hedge that skirts the way,
The cricket chirp upon the russet lea,
And man delight to linger in thy ray.
Yet one rich smile, and we will try to bear
The piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air.

Merry Autumn

Paul Laurence Dunbar, 1872 – 1906

It's all a farce,—these tales they tell
About the breezes sighing,
And moans astir o'er field and dell,
Because the year is dying.

Such principles are most absurd,—
I care not who first taught 'em;
There's nothing known to beast or bird
To make a solemn autumn.

In solemn times, when grief holds sway
With countenance distressing,
You'll note the more of black and gray
Will then be used in dressing.

Now purple tints are all around;
The sky is blue and mellow;
And e'en the grasses turn the ground
From modest green to yellow.

The seed burrs all with laughter crack
On featherweed and jimson;
And leaves that should be dressed in black
Are all decked out in crimson.

A butterfly goes winging by;
A singing bird comes after;
And Nature, all from earth to sky,
Is bubbling o'er with laughter.

The ripples wimple on the rills,
Like sparkling little lasses;
The sunlight runs along the hills,
And laughs among the grasses.

The earth is just so full of fun
It really can't contain it;
And streams of mirth so freely run
The heavens seem to rain it.

Don't talk to me of solemn days
In autumn's time of splendor,
Because the sun shows fewer rays,
And these grow slant and slender.

Why, it's the climax of the year,—
The highest time of living!—
Till naturally its bursting cheer
Just melts into thanksgiving.

Encounters with Animals: Sheila Black/Marianne Moore/Arthur Sze/Jane Hirschfield

Possums

Sheila Black,

A kind of thrill—to lie on a road
and flatten yourself,

white fur like a ball of winter,

like the March blossoms on the fruit trees,
each one folded in like

the fledgling that never made it
from the nest.

They do this when they feel threatened,
remain motionless

even when curious people come prod
them with sticks,

stiffening their pearly claws as a tree stiffens
its twigs for winter. What is it to be dead?

The possums know—that eternal watchfulness
by which the dead in their stately wisdom

watch us
who keep moving.

About Sheila Black: Children's book writer, disability activist, and poet, Sheila Black is the author of *Iron, Ardent* (Educe Press, 2017). She directs Gemini Ink, a literary arts center in San Antonio, Texas.

The Owl

Arthur Sze, 1950-

The path was purple in the dusk.
I saw an owl, perched,
on a branch.
And when the owl stirred, a fine dust
fell from its wings. I was
silent then. And felt
the owl quaver. And at dawn, waking,
the path was green in the
May light.

About Arthur Sze: Arthur Sze is a poet and translator educated at UC Berkeley. He was the first Poet Laureate of Santa Fe, New Mexico, and was the Chancellor of the American Academy of Poets from 2012-2017.

The Jellyfish

By Marianne Moore, 1887-1972

Visible, invisible,
A fluctuating charm,
An amber-colored amethyst
Inhabits it; your arm
Approaches, and
It opens and
It closes;
You have meant
To catch it,
And it shrivels;
You abandon
Your intent—
It opens, and it
Closes and you
Reach for it—
The blue
Surrounding it
Grows cloudy, and
It floats away
From you.

About Marianne Moore: Pulitzer prize-winning poet, Marianne Moore was particularly fond of animals, and much of her imagery is drawn from the natural world. She was also a great fan of professional baseball and an admirer of Muhammed Ali, for whom she wrote the liner notes to his record, *I Am the Greatest!*

Three Foxes by the Edge of the Field at Twilight

Jane Hirschfield, 1953-

One ran,
her nose to the ground,
a rusty shadow
neither hunting nor playing.

One stood; sat; lay down; stood again.

One never moved,
except to turn her head a little as we walked.

Finally we drew too close,
and they vanished.
The woods took them back as if they had never been.

I wish I had thought to put my face to the grass.

But we kept walking,
speaking as strangers do when becoming friends.

There is more and more I tell no one,
strangers nor loves.
This slips into the heart
without hurry, as if it had never been.

And yet, among the trees, something has changed.

Something looks back from the trees,
and knows me for who I am.

About Jane Hirschfield: Poet, editor, writer, and teacher, Jane Hirschfield studied at Princeton and the San Francisco Zen Center. Fellow-poet, Rosanna Warren wrote: "Hirschfield has elaborated a sensuously philosophical art that imposes a pause in our fast-forward habits of mind. Her poems appear simple, and are not. Her language, in its cleanliness and transparency, poses riddles of a quietly metaphysical nature...Clause by clause, image by image, in language at once mysterious and commonplace, Hirschfield's poems clear a space for reflection and change. They invite ethical awareness, and establish a delicate balance."