

Introduction to Poetry

Course Packet: Supplementary Poems

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The Kid

Ai

My sister rubs the doll's face in mud,
then climbs through the truck window.
She ignores me as I walk around it,
hitting the flat tires with an iron rod.
The old man yells for me to help hitch the team,
but I keep walking around the truck, hitting harder,
until my mother calls.
I pick up a rock and throw it at the kitchen window,
but it falls short.
The old man's voice bounces off the air like a ball
I can't lift my leg over.

I stand beside him, waiting, but he doesn't look up
and I squeeze the rod, raise it, his skull splits open.
Mother runs toward us. I stand still,
get her across the spine as she bends over him.
I drop the rod and take the rifle from the house.
Roses are red, violets are blue,
one bullet for the black horse, two for the brown.
They're down quick. I spit, my tongue's bloody;
I've bitten it. I laugh, remember the one out back.
I catch her climbing from the truck, shoot.
The doll lands on the ground with her.
I pick it up, rock it in my arms.
Yeah. I'm Jack, Hogarth's son.
I'm nimble, I'm quick.
In the house, I put on the old man's best suit
and his patent leather shoes.
I pack my mother's satin nightgown
and my sister's doll in the suitcase.
Then I go outside and cross the fields to the highway.
I'm fourteen. I'm a wind from nowhere.
I can break your heart.

Casabianca
Elizabeth Bishop

Love's the boy stood on the burning deck
trying to recite "The boy stood on
the burning deck." Love's the son
 stood stammering elocution
 while the poor ship in flames went down.

Love's the obstinate boy, the ship,
even the swimming sailors, who
would like a schoolroom platform, too
 or an excuse to stay
 on deck. And love's the burning boy.

The Lamb

William Blake

Little Lamb, who make thee
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee;
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb
He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

Mimnermos: The Brainsex Paintings

Anne Carson

fr. 1

What Is Life Without Aphrodite?

He seems an irrepressible hedonist as he asks his leading question.

Up to your honeybasket hilts in her ore—or else
 Death? for yes
 how gentle it is to go swimming inside her the secret
 swimming
 Of men and women but (no) then
 the night hide toughens over it (no) then bandages
 Crusted with old man smell (no) then
 bowl gone black nor bud nor boys nor women nor sun no
 Spores (no) at (no) all when
 God nor hardstrut nothingness close
 its fist on you.

fr. 2

All We as Leaves

He (following Homer) compares man's life with the leaves.

All we as leaves in the shock of it:
 spring—
 one dull gold bounce and you're there.
 You see the sun?—I built that.
 As a lad. The Fates lashing their tails in a corner.
 But (let me think) wasn't it a hotel in Chicago
 where I had the first of those—*my body walking out of the
 room*
bent on some deadly errand
and me up on the ceiling just sort of fading out—
 brainsex paintings I used to call them?
 In the days when I (so to speak) painted.
 Remember
 that oddly wonderful chocolate we got in East
 (as it was then) Berlin?

fr. 3

However Fair He May Once Have Been

In the offing he sees old age.

Yes lovely one it's today forever now what's that shadow
unzipping
your every childfingered wherefrom?

fr. 4

To Tithonos (God's Gift)

For poor Tithonos.

They (on the one hand) made his chilly tears immortal
neglecting to tell him
his eyes were not.

fr. 5

A Sudden Unspeakable Sweat Floweth Down My Skin

He gazes, perhaps he blames.

Sweat. It's just sweat. But I do like to look at them.
Youth is a dream where I go every night
and wake with just this little jumping bunch of arteries
in my hand.
Hard, darling, to be sent behind their borders.
Carrying a stone in each eye.

fr. 6

Betwixt Thee and Me Let There Be Truth

*Despite his professed cult of youth and pleasure,
he knows moral worry.*

At the border crossing all I could hear was your pulse
and the wind combing along my earbone
like antimatter.

fr. 8

For the Sun's Portion Is Toil All His Days

He looks to myth.

Look: up every bone every sky every day every you—
 He goes working His
 way up blue earlobes from ocean goes
 thrown by rosesudden someone's
 already tomorrow goes riding His bed of daysided gold goes
 skimming
 sleep countries from west to east until sudden
 rosestopped someone's
 already earliness opens the back of the clock: He
 steps in.

fr. 11

Would That Death Might Overtake Me

He sings of birthdays.

No disease no dreamflat famine fields just a knock on the
 door
 at the age of threescore: done.

fr. 12

When Mountains Dove Sideways

He tells of Kolophon colonized from the mainland.

. . . When mountains dove sideways from Pylos
 we came to Asia in ships
 to Kolophon chiseled our way
 sat down like hard knots
 then from there
 made a slit in the red river dusk and
 took Smyrna
 for God.

fr. 13(a)

So They from the King's Side

He sees the warriors move.

So they from the king's side when they got the order
went rushing—in their own hollow shields socketed.

fr. 14

None Such as Him

He looks to memory.

None such:
amid the butting bulls none such on the death flanks of
Hermos.
None.
Those elders who saw him saw the source points.
It stung God.
They say his spinal cord ran straight out of the sun.

fr. 15

He is troubled by words.

. . . in public words formed a clump in him.

fr. 16

Troubled.

. . . always the hard word box they wanted.

fr. 22

Half Moon

He awakens early.

Half moon through the pines at dawn
sharp as a girl's ribcage.

fr. 23

Why does motion sadden him?

. . . a lame man knows the sex act best . . .

I Know a Man

Robert Creeley

As I sd to my
friend, because I am
always talking, — John, I

sd, which was not his
name, the darkness sur-
rounds us, what

can we do against
it, or else, shall we &
why not, buy a goddamn big car,

drive, he sd, for
christ's sake, look
out where yr going

The Movie Run Backward

Robert Creeley

The words will one day come
back to you, birds returning,
the movie run backward.

Nothing so strange in its talk,
just words. The people
who wrote them are the dead ones.

This here paper talks like anything
but is only one thing,
"birds returning."

You can "run the movie
backward" but "the movie run
backward." The movie run backward.

My Sad Captains

Thom Gunn

One by one they appear in
the darkness: a few friends, and
a few with historical
names. How late they start to shine!
but before they fade they stand
perfectly embodied, all

the past lapping them like a
cloak of chaos. They were men
who, I thought, lived only to
renew the wasteful force they
spent with each hot convulsion.
They remind me, distant now.

True, they are not at rest yet,
but now they are indeed
apart, winnowed from failures,
they withdraw to an orbit
and turn with disinterested
hard energy, like the stars.

Indelible Pencil

Alfred Starr Hamilton

I think this is identical

I think this is identifying itself

I think this is in keeping with the indelible pencil

I think this is inscribed on the barracks bag

I am identifying these numbers 32596299

I think this is a soldier

I think this is lost in the wilds

I think this is coming to grips with the angels

“Mystery Boy’ Looks for Kin in Nashville”

Robert Hayden

Puzzle faces in the dying elms
promise him treats if he will stay.
Sometimes they hiss and spit at him
like varmints caught
in a thicket of butterflies.

A black doll,
one disremembered time,
came floating down to him
through mimosa’s fancy work leaves and blooms
to be his hidden bride.

From the road beyond the creepered walls
they call to him now and then,
and he’ll take off in spite of the angry trees,
hearing like the loudening of his heart
the name he never can he never can repeat.

And when he gets to where the voices were—
Don’t cry, his dollbaby wife implores;
I know where they are, don’t cry.
We’ll go and find them, we’ll go
and ask them for your name again.

Bavarian Gentians

D. H. Lawrence

Not every man has gentians in his house
in soft September, at slow, sad Michaelmas.

Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark
darkening the daytime, torch-like, with the smoking blueness of Pluto's gloom,
ribbed and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day
torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness, Pluto's dark-blue daze,
black lamps from the halls of Dis, burning dark blue,
giving off darkness, blue darkness, as Demeter's pale lamps give off light,
lead me then, lead the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness
even where Persephone goes, just now, from the frosted September
to the sightless realm where darkness is awake upon the dark
and Persephone herself is but a voice
or a darkness invisible enfolded in the deeper dark
of the arms Plutonic, and pierced with the passion of dense gloom,
among the splendor of torches of darkness, shedding darkness on the lost bride and
her groom.

Like Boys Next Door

Timothy Liu

channel surfing from baseball scores to late night news for images
of ourselves in vain no faggots here in uniform only shirts that say
repent or perish as closets open wide their flaming doors just try on
the face of a christ that took a lifetime of our suffering to achieve
last-pick sissies striking our foreheads marked with ash as tongues
begin to slide like eels in public parks tempting boys who'd flock
to sport some jockstraps stuffed down throats where teeth had been
knocked-out a pack of trading-cards some drag from base to base

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks.
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies;
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs;
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning;
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

Sir Walter Raleigh

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold,
And Philomel becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields;
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten –
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Poppies in October

Sylvia Plath

Even the sun-clouds this morning cannot manage such skirts.
Nor the woman in the ambulance
Whose red heart blooms through her coat so astoundingly—

A gift, a love gift
Utterly unasked for
By a sky

Palely and flamily
Igniting its carbon monoxides, by eyes
Dulled to a halt under bowlers.

O my God, what am I
That these late mouths should cry open
In a forest of frost, in a dawn of cornflowers.

Words

Sylvia Plath

Axes

After whose stroke the wood rings,
And the echoes!
Echoes traveling
Off from the center like horses.

The sap

Wells like tears, like the
Water striving
To re-establish its mirror
Over the rock

That drops and turns,

A white skull,
Eaten by weedy greens.
Years later I
Encounter them on the road—

Words dry and riderless,

The indefatigable hoof-taps.
While
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars
Govern a life.

The Motive for Metaphor

Wallace Stevens

You like it under the trees in autumn,
Because everything is half dead.
The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
And repeats words without meaning.

In the same way, you were happy in spring,
With the half colors of quarter-things,
The slightly brighter sky, the melting clouds,
The single bird, the obscure moon—

The obscure moon lighting an obscure world
Of things that would never be quite expressed,
Where you yourself were not quite yourself,
And did not want nor have to be,

Desiring the exhilarations of changes:
The motive for metaphor, shrinking from
The weight of primary noon,
The A B C of being,

The ruddy temper, the hammer
Of red and blue, the hard sound—
Steel against intimation--the sharp flash,
The vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X.

The Snow Man

Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

November Cotton Flower

Jean Toomer

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;
Drought fighting soil had caused the soil to take
All water from the streams; dead birds were found
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed
Significance. Superstition saw
Something it had never seen before:
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.

To Elsie

William Carlos Williams

The pure products of America
go crazy—
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of
Jersey
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves
old names
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken
to railroading
out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed
in filth
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night
with gauds
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them
character
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without
emotion
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry
or viburnum—
which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage
perhaps
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate
so hemmed round
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an
agent—
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie—
voluptuous water
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—
her great
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap
jewelry
and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains
after deer
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September
Somehow
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

The Cap and Bells

William Butler Yeats

The jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls began to call:
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night-gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

'I have cap and bells,' he pondered,
'I will send them to her and die';
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love-song
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
And the heart and the soul came through,
To her right hand came the red one,
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love in her feet.