The Red Wheelbarrow
by
William Carlos Williams, 1923

so much depends upon
a red wheel barrow
glazed with rain water
beside the white chickens.

This is Just to Say
by
William Carlos Williams, 1934

I have eaten the plums that were in the icebox
and which you were probably saving for breakfast
Forgive me they were delicious so sweet and so cold

What Narcissism Means to Me
by
Tony Hoagland, 2003

There’s Socialism and Communism and Capitalism, said Neal, and there’s Feminism and Hedonism, and there’s Catholicism and Bipedalism and Consumerism,

but I think Narcissism is the system that means the most to me;

and Sylvia said that in Neal’s case narcissism represented a heroic achievement in positive thinking.
And Ann,
who calls everybody Sweetie pie
whether she cares for them or not,

Ann lit a cigarette and said, Only miserable people will tell you
that love has to be deserved,

and when I heard that, a distant chime went off for me,

remembering a time when I believed
that I could simply live without it.

Neal had grilled the corn and sliced the onions
into thick white disks,

and piled the wet green pickles
up in stacks like coins
and his chef’s cap was leaning sideways like a mushroom cloud.

Then Ethan said that in his opinion,
if you’re going to mess around with self-love
you shouldn’t just rush into a relationship,

and Sylvia was weeping softly now, looking down
into her wine cooler and potato chips,

and then the hamburgers were done, just as
the sunset in the background started
cutting through the charcoal clouds

exposing their insides – black,
streaked dark red,
like a slab of scorched, rare steak,

delicious but unhealthy,
or, depending on your perspective,
unhealthy but delicious,

-- the way that, deep inside the misery
of daily life,
love lies bleeding.

They Say
by
Laura Kasischke, 2010

one-twelfth of our lives is wasted
standing in a line.

The sacred path of that.
Ahead of me, a man in black, his broad back.
Behind me, a woman like me
unwinding her white veils.

And beyond us all, the ticket-taker, or the old
lady with our change, or

the officials with our food, our stamps, our unsigned papers, our
gas masks, our inoculations.

It hasn’t happened yet.
It hasn’t begun or ended.
It hasn’t granted us its bliss
or exploded in our faces.
The baby watches the ceiling from its cradle.
The cat stare at the crack in the foundation.
The grandfather flies the sick child’s kite higher
and higher. I set

my husband’s silverware on the table.

I place a napkin beside
my son’s plate.

Soon enough,
but not tonight.
Ahead of us, that man’s black back.
Behind us, her white veils.

Ahead of us, the nakedness, the gate.

Behind us, the serene errand-boy, the cigarette, the wink-and-nod, the waiting.

Beyond that, too late.

A Child Said, What Is the Grass?
by
Walt Whitman, 1860

A child said, What is the grass? fetching it to me with full
hands;
How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it
is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful
green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropped,
Bearing the owner’s name someway in the corners, that we
may see and remark, and say Whose?

Or I guess the grass is itself a child. . . .the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic, 
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones, 
Growing among black folks as among white, 
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass, 
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men, 
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them; 
It may be you are from old people and from women, and from offspring taken soon out of their mother's laps, 
And here you are the mother's laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers, 
Darker than the colorless beards of old men, 
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues! 
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women, 
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men? 
What do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere; 
The smallest sprouts show there is really no death, 
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it, 
And ceased the moment life appeared.

All goes onward and outward. . . .and nothing collapses, 
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.
A Supermarket in California
by
Allen Ginsberg, 1955

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for
I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache
self-conscious looking at the full moon.

   In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went
into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!
   What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families
shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the
avocados, babies in the tomatoes!—and you, Garcia Lorca, what
were you doing down by the watermelons?

   I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery
boys.
   I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the
pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?
   I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans
following you, and followed in my imagination by the store
detective.
   We strode down the open corridors together in our
solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen
delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

   Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in
an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?
   (I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the
supermarket and feel absurd.)
   Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The
trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be
lonely.

   Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?
   Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher,
what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and
you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat
disappear on the black waters of Lethe?