

**Poem packet**

**IDC1001H Fall 2018**

**Prof. Kolb**

## **The City's Love**

CHARLES MCKAY

For one brief golden moment rare like wine,  
The gracious city swept across the line;  
Oblivious of the color of my skin,  
Forgetting that I was an alien guest,  
She bent to me, my hostile heart to win,  
Caught me in passion to her pillowy breast;  
The great, proud city, seized with a strange love,  
Bowed down for one flame hour my pride to prove.

Published in 1922. This poem is in the public domain.

## **On Broadway**

CHARLES MCKAY

About me young and careless feet  
Linger along the garish street;  
Above, a hundred shouting signs  
Shed down their bright fantastic glow  
Upon the merry crowd and lines  
Of moving carriages below.  
Oh wonderful is Broadway—only  
My heart, my heart is lonely.

Desire naked, linked with Passion,  
Goes strutting by in brazen fashion;  
From playhouse, cabaret and inn  
The rainbow lights of Broadway blaze  
All gay without, all glad within;  
As in a dream I stand and gaze  
At Broadway, shining Broadway—only  
My heart, my heart is lonely.

This poem is in the public domain.

## **Recuerdo**

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—  
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,  
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;  
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;  
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,  
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;  
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,  
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,  
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;  
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,  
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

Copyright 1931, 1958 by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Norma Millay Ellis.  
Source: *A Few Figs From Thistles* (1922)

## **A White City**

JAMES SCHUYLER

My thoughts turn south  
a white city  
we will wake in one another's arms.  
I wake  
and hear the steam pipe knock  
like a metal heart  
and find it has snowed.

*Poetry* magazine, March 1965

## February

JAMES SCHULYER

A chimney, breathing a little smoke.  
The sun, I can't see  
making a bit of pink  
I can't quite see in the blue.  
The pink of five tulips  
at five p.m. on the day before March first.  
The green of the tulip stems and leaves  
like something I can't remember,  
finding a jack-in-the-pulpit  
a long time ago and far away.  
Why it was December then  
and the sun was on the sea  
by the temples we'd gone to see.  
One green wave moved in the violet sea  
like the UN Building on big evenings,  
green and wet  
while the sky turns violet.  
A few almond trees  
had a few flowers, like a few snowflakes  
out of the blue looking pink in the light.  
A gray hush  
in which the boxy trucks roll up Second Avenue  
into the sky. They're just  
going over the hill.  
The green leaves of the tulips on my desk  
like grass light on flesh,  
and a green-copper steeple  
and streaks of cloud beginning to glow.  
I can't get over  
how it all works in together  
like a woman who just came to her window  
and stands there filling it  
jogging her baby in her arms.  
She's so far off. Is it the light  
that makes the baby pink?  
I can see the little fists  
and the rocking-horse motion of her breasts.  
It's getting grayer and gold and chilly.  
Two dog-size lions face each other  
at the corners of a roof.  
It's the yellow dust inside the tulips.  
It's the shape of a tulip.  
It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in.  
It's a day like any other.

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## Having a Coke with You

FRANK O'HARA

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne  
or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona  
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian  
partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt  
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches  
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary  
it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still  
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it  
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth  
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles  
and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint  
you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them

I look

at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world  
except possibly for the Polish Rider occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick  
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together for the first time  
and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism  
just as at home I never think of the Nude Descending a Staircase or  
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me  
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them  
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank  
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully  
as the horse

it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience  
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you about it

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## **Poem**

FRANK O'HARA

Lana Turner has collapsed!  
I was trotting along and suddenly  
it started raining and snowing  
and you said it was hailing  
but hailing hits you on the head  
hard so it was really snowing and  
raining and I was in such a hurry  
to meet you but the traffic  
was acting exactly like the sky  
and suddenly I see a headline  
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!  
there is no snow in Hollywood  
there is no rain in California  
I have been to lots of parties  
and acted perfectly disgraceful  
but I never actually collapsed  
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

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## **Harlem Hopscotch**

MAYA ANGELOU

One foot down, then hop! It's hot.  
    Good things for the ones that's got.  
Another jump, now to the left.  
    Everybody for hisself.

In the air, now both feet down.  
    Since you black, don't stick around.  
Food is gone, the rent is due,  
Curse and cry and then jump two.

All the people out of work,  
    Hold for three, then twist and jerk.  
Cross the line, they count you out.  
    That's what hopping's all about.

Both feet flat, the game is done.  
They think I lost. I think I won.

*From Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Diie: Poems by Maya Angelou.  
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## The Oak Tree Speaks

SARAH KAY

*Raising a baby in NYC... is like growing an oak tree in a thimble.*  
—Manhattan Mini Storage Billboard

Do you know how many ways there are to die in this city?

1. Speeding taxicab.
2. Open manhole cover.
3. The man breathing so heavy at the bus stop.

When I was a teenager, the boy I loved would pay a homeless guy ten bucks to buy him the cheapest bottle in the liquor store. My love sucked the glass 'til his teeth were marbles. Rolled himself down the subway stairs, hopped into the tracks. Waited.

4. Jealous wife.
5. Brooklyn Bridge.
6. Fire escape.

Only once, he let it get so close I screamed. I had never made that kind of sound before. He turned, his face a prayer wheel atop his neck, a smile so foreign I could not speak its language. Like water running in reverse, he spilled himself up to safety. When the train hurricaned past, the fist of air rattled my branches.

7. Rooftops, all of them.
8. The barroom brawl.
9. The West Side Highway.
10. The wrong street corner.

In New York, when a tree dies, nobody mourns that it was cut down in its prime. Nobody counts the rings, notifies the loved ones. There are other trees. We can always squeeze in one more. Mind the tourists. It's a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't wanna live there.

11. Disgruntled coworker.
12. Central Park after dark.
13. Backpack through the metal detector.
- 14.
- 15.
- 16.

For years, we wouldn't watch movies where they destroyed New York. The aliens never take Kansas, we joked. They go straight for the heart. Poor Kansas. All corn fields and skyworks. All apple pie. Nobody to notice if it's missing. Just all that open space to grow in.

From *Thrush* poetry journal, 2014.

## **body shop**

QURAYSH ALI LANSANA

i've heard tell of a hustle  
in brooklyn where clever folks  
throw themselves in front of cars  
lurching down eastern parkway

not the beat-up green mini-vans  
or duct tape toyotas of poets, not  
impalas bleeding chrome  
spinning disposable testosterone

but mid to high end machines  
of certain insurance booty, drivers  
in the 30 to 50 year range, same  
demographic as oprah's audience

i suppose there is a right and wrong  
approach to this science, the angles  
of minimal damage to consider, side  
to bumper, back to door, head up

unless her poodle is well groomed.  
few have retired, i would speculate  
but work less now that checks  
lack bounce and the mailman walks briskly

it must be the eyes, wide and clean  
that distinguish these impact alvin aileys  
from ordinary jaywalkers

at utica i marvel at the desperate genius  
the split-second calculus, the risks and gains  
of such occupation, before descent  
into the dark anonymity of the 4 train

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## **You Haven't Texted Since Saturday**

MICHAEL ROBBINS

You haven't texted  
since Saturday,  
when I read Keith Waldrop's  
translation of *Les Fleurs du mal*  
on a bench by whatever  
that tower is on the hill  
in Fort Greene Park  
until you walked up  
late as always and I do  
mean always  
in your dad's army jacket  
and said "Hi, buddy"  
in a tone that told me  
all I needed to know,  
although protocol dictated  
that you should sit next to me  
and spell it out  
and we should hold each other  
and cry and then pretend  
everything was fine, would  
be fine, was someday  
before the final  
trumpet, before heat death,  
zero point, big rip  
sure to be absolutely  
perfectly completely  
probably fine. And  
though it wasn't and  
wouldn't be,  
I walked you to the G  
then rode the C  
to Jay Street–MetroTech.  
Just now I took a break from  
this retrospect  
to smoke one of the Camels  
in the sky-blue box marked  
IL FUMO UCCIDE  
you brought me from Italy  
and page through a book  
on contemporary physics.  
"Something must be  
very wrong," it said,  
and I agreed,  
although it turned out  
the author meant that "no theory  
of physics should produce

infinities with impunity.”  
I’d point out that every theory  
of the heart  
produces infinities  
with impunity  
if I were the kind of jerk  
who uses *the heart*  
to mean the human  
tendency to make  
others suffer  
just because we  
hate to suffer  
alone. I’m sorry  
I brought a fitted sheet  
to the beach. I’m sorry  
I’m selfish and determined  
to make the worst  
of everything. I’m  
sorry language is a ship  
that goes down  
while you’re building it.  
The Hesychasts of Byzantium  
stripped their prayers  
of words. It’s been tried  
with poems too. But insofar  
as I am a disappointment  
to myself and others, it seems fitting  
to set up shop in almost  
and not quite and that’s not  
what I meant. I draw the line at *the heart*,  
though, with its  
infinities. And I have to say  
I am not a big fan  
of being sad. Some people  
can pull it off. When  
we hiked Overlook, you  
went on ahead to the summit  
while I sat on a rock  
reading Thomas Bernhard.  
I’d just made it to the ruins  
of the old hotel  
when you came jogging back down  
in your sports bra  
saying I had to come see the view.  
But my allergies were bad  
and I was thirsty,  
so we headed down the gravelly trail,  
pleased by the occasional  
advent of a jittery

chipmunk. You showed me pictures  
on your phone of the fire  
tower, the nineteenth-  
century graffiti carved  
into the rock, and the long  
unfolded valley  
of the Hudson. At the bottom,  
the Buddhists let us  
fill our water bottles  
from their drinking fountain.  
We called a cab and sat  
along the roadside  
watching prayer flags  
rush in the wind. I said the wind  
carried the prayers  
inscribed on the flags  
to the gods, but Wikipedia  
informs me now that  
the Tibetans believe the prayers and mantras will be blown by the wind to spread good will  
and compassion into all pervading space.  
So I was wrong, again,  
about the gods. Wherever  
you are, I hope you stand  
still now and then  
and let the prayers  
wash over you like the breakers  
at Fort Tilden that day  
the huge gray gothic  
clouds massed and threatened to drop  
a storm on our heads  
but didn't.

*From The Paris Review, ISSUE 220, SPRING 2017*

## **Past one o'clock**

MICHAEL ROBBINS

I'll quit smoking  
as soon as I  
get lung cancer.  
The young don't smoke  
anymore, they join gyms.  
I can't help thinking  
they've misunderstood  
something. The body's  
a temple ? The mind  
is a tempest. Somewhere  
along the line  
the alternating stresses fall.  
And if I quit smoking  
how would I signal you?  
The smoke alarm  
pings me awake  
to tell me it's dying.  
OK! I will get up  
to address again  
the not-fire and maybe  
all creation. I mean,  
as long as I'm up.

Down the small  
rain is the way  
of things, my umbrella's  
a dead spider,  
so I pop  
into the bodega and buy  
one for \$4  
which turns out  
to be impossible  
to close once opened  
which I mention  
to the bodega guy  
next time I pop in  
who says yeah  
that's why they're so cheap.  
So I walk through  
the rain's "pockmarked  
face" to the apartment  
where David Attenborough  
emotionally manipulates  
me re snow-leopard cub.

Everyone these days  
feels like Werner Herzog  
listening to  
Timothy Treadwell's cries.

Past one o'clock.  
I must have gone to bed.  
I must have spent Christmas morning  
reading the paper  
in a gas-station diner in Lamar,  
Colorado. Almost  
one whole barn  
beached by hay tides  
a century ago.  
It snows on crows.  
And other pretty  
observations. I said to Anthony,  
regarding an older poet,  
"He's always like,  
The moon  
has left her face  
in the well!" We both thought  
that was rich.

The material social  
order is a swindle,  
cops kill kids,  
and I'm writing  
bourgeois shit  
about prayer flags.  
If you bring forth  
what is within you,  
the Gospel of Thomas  
says, what you bring  
forth will save you.  
Within me, at last  
inventory: student debt,  
resentment, self-pity.  
So here, I bring it forth,  
you take it.

You must change your  
etc. I have wasted  
my etc. I dunno, maybe  
sometimes God  
intercedes by not  
interceding so you lose

your faith and it's the loss  
that saves you. Maybe  
when I finally burn  
the temple in the forest  
within me and trash  
the smoking effigy  
of an old god reputed  
to be strong  
in many medicines—  
maybe then I'll become  
an eye, one among many,  
borne by flatcars  
to be conveyed via crane  
and forklift to my destiny  
upon the deep. To be all  
eye and eye alone.

Yeah, well, good luck  
with that. An earnest  
young man with a clipboard  
asks if I have a moment  
for the environment. Uh,  
what's it done for me lately?  
I'm up, kid, I'm on my way  
to church, perhaps to pray  
that young people like you  
(except for the clipboard)  
might hear my message:  
if you don't smoke, start  
and don't stop. It's not  
a world to get so  
damn worked up  
about leaving.

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