

The myth-making of dragons, the familial teasing of the "ol' stragler" and "buggah-man," the deadpan, courtly enumeration of monsters: in all three examples, the inward energy of love finds expression in the outward energy of invention: eloquence as courtship. Such similarities among a variety of large differences suggest the way that "love poem" denotes a form, as well as a subject.

Anna Akhmatova

*translated by Jane Kenyon*

(1889-1966)



N.V.N.

There is a sacred, secret line in loving  
which attraction and even passion cannot cross,—  
even if lips draw near in awful silence  
and love tears at the heart.

Friendship is weak and useless here,  
and years of happiness, exalted and full of fire,  
because the soul is free and does not know  
the slow luxuries of sensual life.

Those who try to come near it are insane  
and those who reach it are shaken by grief.  
So now you know exactly why  
my heart bears no faster under your hand.

Christina Rossetti  
(1830-1894)

SONG

When I am dead, my dearest,  
Sing no sad songs for me;  
Plant thou no roses at my head,  
Nor shady cypress tree:  
Be the green grass above me  
With showers and dewdrops wet;  
And if thou wilt, remember,  
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,  
I shall not feel the rain;  
I shall not hear the nightingale  
Sing on as if in pain:  
And dreaming through the twilight  
That doth not rise nor set,  
Haply I may remember,  
And haply may forget.

UP-HILL

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.  
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?  
From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place?  
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.  
May not the darkness hide it from my face?  
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?  
Those who have gone before.  
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?  
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?  
Of labour you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?  
Yea, beds for all who come.

**Seamus Heaney**  
 "found" "poet"  
 "very loud" b  
 use of mimetic language  
 use of sounds and oral se  
 clear from the musical au  
 mited States  
 forming one's identity  
 "west side"  
 zone/rasuble

**THE SKUNK**

Up, black, striped and  
 At a funeral mass, the  
 Paraded the skunk. Nig  
 I expected her like a visitor.  
 The refrigerator whinnied into silence.  
 My desk light softened beyond the verandah.  
 Small oranges loomed in the orange tree.  
 I began to be tense as a voyeur.

After eleven years I was composing  
 Love-letters again, broaching the word "wife"  
 Like a stored cask, as if its slender vowel  
 Had mutated into the night earth and air  
 Of California. The beautiful, useless  
 Tang of eucalyptus spelt your absence.  
 The aftermath of a mouthful of wine  
 Was like inhaling you off a cold pillow.

And there she was, the intent and glamorous,  
 Ordinary, mysterious skunk,  
 Mythologized, demythologized,  
 Snuffing the boards five feet beyond me.

It all came back to me last night, stirred  
 By the sootfall of your things at bedtime,  
 Your head-down, tail-up hunt in a bottom drawer  
 For the black plunger-line netherdress

Robert Hayden  
 (1913-1980)

**THOSE WINTER SUNDAYS**

Sundays too my father got up early  
 and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
 then with cracked hands that ached  
 from labor in the weekday weather made  
 banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.  
 I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
 When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
 and slowly I would rise and dress,  
 fearing the chronic angers of that house,  
 Speaking indifferently to him,  
 who had driven out the cold  
 and polished my good shoes as well,  
 What did I know, what did I know  
 of love's austere and lonely offices?

The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
 Over the grass in the West garden;  
 They hurt me. I grow older.  
 If you are coming down through the narrows of the river  
 Kiang,  
 Please let me know beforehand,  
 And I will come out to meet you  
 As far as Chō-fu-Sa.

THE RIVER-MERCHANT'S WIFE: A LETTER



(1885-1972)

Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  
 I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  
 You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,

You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  
 And we went on living in the village of Chokan:  
 Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.  
 I never laughed, being bashful.

Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  
 Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,  
 I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  
 Forever and forever and forever.  
 Why should I climb the look out?

At sixteen you departed,  
 You went into far Ku-to-en, by the river of swirling eddies,  
 And you have been gone five months.  
 The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

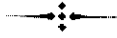
You dragged your feet when you went out.  
 By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,  
 Too deep to clear them away!  
 The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise  
 Twenty times better; but once, in special,  
 In thin array, after a pleasant guise,  
 When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,  
 And she me caught in her arms long and small,  
 Therewith all sweetly did me kiss,  
 And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

It was no dream: I lay broad waking,  
 But all is turned, through my gentleness,  
 Into a strange fashion of forsaking;  
 And I have leave to go of her goodness,  
 And she also to use newfangleness.  
 But since that I so kindly am served,  
 I would fain know what she hath deserved.

William Butler Yeats

(1865-1939)



HER TRIUMPH

I did the dragon's will until you came  
 Because I had fancied love a casual  
 Improvisation, or a settled game  
 That followed if I let the kerchief fall:  
 Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings  
 And heavenly music if they gave it wit;  
 And then you stood among the dragon-rings,  
 I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it  
 And broke the chain and set my ankles free,  
 Saint George or else a pagan Perseus;  
 And now we stare astonished at the sea,  
 And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.

CRAZY JANE GROWN OLD LOOKS  
 AT THE DANCERS

I found that ivory image there  
 Dancing with her chosen youth,  
 But when he wound her coal-black hair  
 As though to strangle her, no scream  
 Or bodily movement did I dare,  
 Eyes under eyelids did so gleam;  
*Love is like the lion's tooth.*

*The Cauldron suppled, what was grown too hard:  
The Thorns did quicken, what was grown too dull:  
All did but strive to mend, what you had marred.  
Wherefore be cheered, and praise him to the full  
Each day, each hour, each moment of the week,  
Who fain would have you be new, tender, quick.*

Robinson Jeffers

(1887-1962)

VULTURE

I had walked since dawn and lay down to rest on a bare hillside  
Above the ocean. I saw through half-shut eyelids a vulture  
wheeling high up in heaven,  
And presently it passed again, but lower and nearer, its orbit  
narrowing, I understood then  
That I was under inspection. I lay death-still and heard the  
flight-feathers  
Whistle above me and make their circle and come nearer.  
I could see the naked red head between the great wings  
Bear downward staring. I said, "My dear bird, we are wasting  
time here.  
These old bones will still work; they are not for you." But how  
beautiful he looked, gliding down  
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away in  
the sea-light over the precipice. I tell you solemnly  
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by that  
beak and become part of him, to share those wings and  
those eyes—  
What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a  
life after death.

Edgar Allan Poe

(1809-1849)

ALONE

From childhood's hour I have not been  
As others were—I have not seen  
As others saw—I could not bring  
My passions from a common spring—  
From the same source I have not taken  
My sorrow—I could not awaken  
My heart to joy at the same tone—  
And all I lov'd—I lov'd alone.  
*Then*—in my childhood—in the dawn  
Of a most stormy life—was drawn  
From ev'ry depth of good and ill  
The mystery which binds me still—  
From the torrent, or the fountain—  
From the red cliff of the mountain—  
From the sun that round me roll'd  
In its autumn tint of gold—  
From the lightning in the sky  
As it pass'd me flying by—  
From the thunder, and the storm—  
And the cloud that took the form  
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)  
Of a demon in my view.

John Crowe Ransom

(1888-1974)

CAPTAIN CARPENTER

Captain Carpenter rose up in his prime  
Put on his pistols and went riding out  
But had got wellnigh nowhere at that time  
Till he fell in with ladies in a rout.  
It was a pretty lady and all her train  
That played with him so sweetly but before  
An hour she'd taken a sword with all her main  
And twined him of his nose for evermore.  
Captain Carpenter mounted up one day  
And rode straightway into a stranger rogue  
That looked unchristian but be that as may  
The Captain did not wait upon prologue.  
But drew upon him out of his great heart  
The other swung against him with a club  
And cracked his two legs at the shiny part  
And let him roll and stick like any tub.  
Captain Carpenter rode many a time  
From male and female took he sundry harms  
He met the wife of Satan crying "I'm  
The she-wolf bids you shall bear no more arms."  
Their strokes and counters whistled in the wind  
I wish he had delivered half his blows

## Mark Strand

(b. 1934)

### OLD MAN LEAVES PARTY

It was clear when I left the party  
That though I was over eighty I still had  
A beautiful body. The moon shone down as it will  
On moments of deep introspection. The wind held its breath.  
And look, somebody left a mirror leaning against a tree.  
Making sure that I was alone, I took off my shirt.  
The flowers of bear grass nodded their moonwashed heads.  
I took off my pants and the magpies circled the redwoods.  
Down in the valley the creaking river was flowing once more.  
How strange that I should stand in the wilds alone with my  
body:  
I know what you are thinking. I was like you once. But now  
With so much before me, so many emerald trees, and  
Weed-whitened fields, mountains and lakes, how could I not  
Be only myself, this dream of flesh, from moment to moment?

## James Tate

(b. 1943)

### THE LOST PILOT

*for my father, 1922-1944*

Your face did not rot  
like the others—the co-pilot,  
for example, I saw him  
yesterday. His face is corn-  
mush: his wife and daughter,  
the poor ignorant people, stare  
as if he will compose soon.  
He was more wronged than Job.  
But your face did not rot

like the others—it grew dark,  
and hard like ebony;  
the features progressed in their  
distinction. If I could cajole  
you to come back for an evening,  
down from your compulsive

orbiting, I would touch you,  
read your face as Dallas,  
your hoodlum gunner, now,

with the blistered eyes, reads  
his braille editions. I would  
touch your face as Dallas,  
your hoodlum gunner, now,



# Charles Bukowski

(1920-1994)\*



## STARTLED INTO LIFE LIKE FIRE

in grievous delly my cat  
walks around  
he walks around and around  
with  
electric rail and  
push-burton  
eyes

he is  
alive and  
plush and  
final as a plum tree

neither of us understands  
cathedrals or  
the man outside  
watering his  
lawn

if I were all the man  
that he is  
cat—  
if there were men  
like this

\* See *You Don't Know What Love Is* on page 437.

the world could  
begin

he leaps up on the couch  
and walks through  
porticoes of my  
admiration.

Counlee Cullen

(1903-1946)



YET DO I MARVEL

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,  
And did he stoop to quibble could tell why  
The little buried mole continues blind,  
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die,  
Make plain the reason tortured Tantalus  
Is baited by the fickle fruit, declare  
If merely brute caprice dooms Sisyphus  
To struggle up a never-ending stair.  
Inscrutable His ways are, and immune  
To catechism by a mind too strewn  
With petty cares to slightly understand  
What awful brain compels His awful hand.  
Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:  
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

E. E. Cummings

(1894-1962)



BUFFALO BILLS

defunct

who used to

ride a watersmooth-silver

stallion

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what I want to know is

how do you like your blueyed boy

Mister Death

John Berryman  
(1914-1972)

DREAM SONG 14

Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.  
After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,  
we ourselves flash and yearn,  
and moreover my mother told me as a boy  
(repeatedly) "Ever to confess you're bored  
means you have no

Inner Resources." I conclude now I have no  
inner resources, because I am heavy bored.  
Peoples bore me,  
literature bores me, especially great literature,  
Henry bores me, with his plights & gripes

as bad as achilles,  
who loves people and valiant art, which bores me.  
And the tranquil hills, & gin, look like a drag  
and somehow a dog  
has taken itself & its tail considerably away  
into mountains or sea or sky, leaving  
behind: me, wag.

Erin Belieu  
(b. 1965)

ON BEING FIRED AGAIN

I've known the pleasures of being  
fired at least eleven times—

most notably by Larry who found my snood  
unsuitable, another time by Jack,  
whom I was sleeping with. Poor attitude,  
tardiness, a contagious lack  
of team spirit; I have been unmotivated

squinting perfume onto little cards,  
while stocking salad bars, when stripping  
covers from romance novels, their heroines  
slaving on the chain gang of obsessive love—  
and always the same hard candy  
of shame dissolving in my throat;

handing in my apron, returning the cash-  
register key. And yet, how fine it feels,  
the perversity of freedom which never signs  
a rent check or explains anything to one's family.  
I've arrived again, taking one more last  
walk through another door, thinking "I am  
what is wrong with America," while outside  
in the emptied, post-rushhour street,  
the sun slouches in a tulip tree and the sound  
of a neighborhood pool floats up on the hear.

Raymond Carver

(1938-1988)\*

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS

AN EVENING WITH CHARLES BUKOWSKI

You don't know what love is Bukowski said

I'm 51 years old look at me

I'm in love with this young broad

I got it bad but she's hung up too

so it's all right man that's the way it should be

I get in their blood and they can't get me out

They try everything to get away from me

but they all come back in the end

They all come back to me except

the one I planted

I cried over that one

but I cried easy in those days

Don't let me get onto the hard stuff man

I get mean then

I could sit here and drink beer

with you hippies all night

I could drink ten quarts of this beer

and nothing it's like water

But let me get onto the hard stuff

and I'll start throwing people out windows

I've done it

But you don't know what love is

You don't know because you've never

\* See *started into life like fire* on page 334.

Roy Campbell

(1901-1957)

ON SOME SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELISTS

You praise the firm restraint with which they write—

I'm with you there, of course:

They use the snaffle and the curb all right,

But where's the bloody horse?

been in love it's that simple  
 I got this young broad see she's beautiful  
 She calls me Bukowski  
 Bukowski she says in this little voice  
 and I say What

But you don't know what love is  
 I'm telling you what it is  
 but you aren't listening  
 There isn't one of you in this room  
 would recognize love if it stepped up  
 and buggered you in the ass

I used to think poetry readings were a copout  
 Look I'm 51 years old and I've been around  
 I *know* they're a copout  
 but I said to myself Bukowski

starving is even more of a copout  
 So there you are and nothing is like it should be  
 That fellow what's his name Galway Kinnell  
 I saw his picture in a magazine  
 He has a handsome mug on him  
 but he's a *teacher*

Christ can you imagine  
 But then you're teachers too  
 here I am insulting you already  
 No I haven't heard of him  
 or him either

They're all termites  
 Maybe it's ego I don't read much anymore  
 but these people who build  
 reputation on five or six books  
 Bukowski she says

Why do you listen to classical music all day  
 Can't you hear her saying that  
 Bukowski why do you listen to classical music all day  
 That surprises you doesn't it  
 You wouldn't think a crude bastard like me

would listen to classical music all day  
 Brahms Rachmaninoff Barok Telemann  
 Shit I couldn't write up here

Too quiet up here too many trees  
 I like the city that's the place for me  
 I put on my classical music each morning  
 and sit down in front of my typewriter  
 and I say Bukowski you're a lucky man  
 Bukowski you've gone through it all  
 and you're a lucky man

and the blue smoke drifts across the table  
 and I look out the window onto Delongpre Avenue  
 and I see people walking up and down the sidewalk  
 and I puff on the cigar like this  
 and then I lay the cigar in the ashtray like this  
 and take a deep breath  
 and I begin to write

Bukowski this is the life I say  
 it's good to be poor it's good to have hemorrhoids  
 it's good to be in love  
 But you don't know what it's like  
 You don't know what it's like to be in love  
 If you could see her you'd know what I mean  
 She thought I'd come up here and get laid

She just knew it  
 She told me she knew it  
 Shit I'm 51 years old and she's 25  
 and we're in love and she's jealous  
 Jesus it's beautiful  
 She said she'd claw my eyes out if I came up here and got laid  
 Now that's love for you  
 What do any of you know about it

Let me tell you something  
 I've met men in jail who had more style  
 than the people who hang around colleges  
 and go to poetry readings

They're bloodsuckers who come to see  
 if the poet's socks are dirty  
 or if he smells under the arms  
 Believe me I won't disappoint em  
 But I want you to remember this  
 there's only one poet in this room tonight  
 only one poet in this town tonight  
 maybe only one real poet in this country tonight  
 and that's me  
 What do any of you know about life  
 What do any of you know about anything  
 Which of you here has been fired from a job  
 or else has been beaten up by your broad  
 or else has been beaten up by your broad  
 I was fired from Sears and Roebuck five times  
 They'd fire me then hire me back again  
 I was a stockboy for them when I was 35  
 and then got canned for stealing cookies  
 I know what it's like I've been there  
 I'm 51 years old and I'm in love  
 This little broad she says  
 Bukowski  
 and I say What and she says  
 I think you're full of shit  
 and I say baby you understand me  
 She's the only broad in the world  
 man or woman  
 I'd take that from  
 But you don't know what love is  
 They all come back to me in the end too  
 everyone of em came back  
 except that one I told you about  
 the one I planted  
 We were together seven years  
 We used to drink a lot  
 I see a couple of typers in this room but  
 I don't see any poets

I'm not surprised  
 You have to have been in love to write poetry  
 and you don't know what it is to be in love  
 that's your trouble  
 Give me some of that stuff  
 That's right no ice good  
 That's good that's just fine  
 So let's get this show on the road  
 I know what I said but I'll have just one  
 That tastes good  
 Okay then let's go let's get this over with  
 only afterwards don't anyone stand close  
 to an open window