

[1] Refugee Blues*W.H. Auden (1907-1973)*

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear, yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can't do that, my dear, old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said,
"If you've got no passport you're officially dead":
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said;
"If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread":
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying, "They must die":
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors:
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

Jeder Mensch*Alma Mahler (died 1964)***[2] I. The Eternal Source**

"Today I know the eternal source of all strength. It is in nature, in the earth, in people who don't hesitate to cast away their existence for the sake of an idea. They are the ones who can love. I go on living with my face lifted high, but with my feet on the ground – where they belong."

[3] II. Today I Realized Something Very Strange

"Today I realized something very strange. – I am not happy – and not unhappy. It came to me suddenly that I am living what only appears to be a life. I hold so much inside of me, I am not free – I suffer – but I don't know why or what for. My ship is in the harbor, but it has sprung a leak."

[4] III. The Celebration of the Spirit

"Gustav Mahler – from the struggles of abstraction, Oskar Kokoschka, the genius, Walter Gropius, the improviser of cultures and wills – And Joseph Fraenkel, the genial improviser ... From Walter I want children – from Oskar, works – from Fraenkel, the celebration of the spirit that he never offered me. I wish that Fraenkel had moved into my house to live the rest of his life with me."

— from the Correspondence and Diaries of Alma Mahler

No Orpheus

Lloyd Schwartz (b. 1941, published with permission of the author)

[5] I. He Tells His Mother What He's Working On

I'm writing a poem about you.

You are? What's it about?

It's the story about your childhood, the horses in the river.

The ones that nearly drowned? . . . I saved them.

You told it to me just a few weeks ago.

I should dig up more of my memories.

I wish you would.

*Like when I lived on the farm and one of the girls fell
down the well?*

Yes.

I forget if it was Rose or Pauline—it was a deep well.

I remember that story.

Have you finished your poem?

I'm still working on it.

You mean you're correcting it, with commas and semi-colons?

Exactly.

When can I see it?

As soon as it's finished.

Is it an epic?

It's not that long.

*No, I mean all my thoughts, the flashes of what's going
through my life, the whole family history . . . living
through the woe, the river and the water.*

I know.

Will it be published?

I have to finish it first.

*It's better to write about real life, that's more important
than writing something fanciful.*

I try to write all my poems about real life.

You see, the apple never falls far from the tree.

I guess not.

You're my apple.

There's probably a worm crawling through that apple.

Then it's got something sweet to chew on.

Well, you're my tree.

Yes, I'm your tree—you're an apple, I'm a tree.

[6] II. No Orpheus

Lloyd Schwartz (b. 1941, published with permission of the author)

*When he sang of what had passed, the trees would lean
toward him, he could suspend the suffering of the
damned, he could bring back the dead.*

Don't look back! . . .

Hell is a spotless room
overlooking the ocean; she

wants out.

"I'm heading for nowhere, what do I have
to look forward to?"

She used to have
a future—

and a past. "I'm lost, I'm like
a stranger to myself."

"I'm an
unstationary pedestal."

"My marbles are slowly rolling away."

She's thrown out family
photos; no longer recalls

her husband, or her
maiden name. Still, she wants him

to lead her back.

"When am I going to see you?
Are we a long distance apart from one another?"

He wants her back.

He wants her back . . .

If it took only
not looking back

to lead her back, it would be easy
not to look, not to look

back; but if helping her look
back is the one way he knows to

help her back, then he has to help her
look back.

Where else could she look?

"I'll try not to remember
too many things. I'll just remember

what I can . . ."

Do we—don't we—have more
(he wishes he knew)

than what we can look back to?

[7] III. Her Waltz

"This is my dream. I'm dancing!
 (Do you know how to dance? Do you
 like to dance?) Waltzing—
 it's like electricity.

It hurts when I walk. So I pick up a chair,
 and I start to waltz.
 I look in the mirror and there I am,
 dancing with a chair!

I say to the mirror: 'I'm not so old.'
 But the mirror says: 'Yes you are.
 You're old. You're nearly
 ninety years old. What are you doing

waltzing around with a chair?'
 Now isn't that silly? An old lady.
 This is my dream: I see myself in the mirror,
 waltzing with a chair.

And that's the end of my dream.
 I once knew how to dance. I
 once knew how to waltz.
 And now I shall bid you goodnight."

All three Lloyd Schwartz poems published with permission (from Cairo Traffic, University of Chicago Press)

[8] German Romantic Song

Wayne Koestenbaum (b 1958, published with permission of the author)

Cryptic owl on my sill,
 olive branch in the gold-bowered cope,

when I was a child I didn't know
 what the word "colleague" meant: darkness?
 My father had many colleagues;
 I had none.

I told his assistant, twenty-one years ago,
 "I wonder which I love most,
 words or music."
 I can't remember her advice,
 though later she sued my father—
 a long story. Perhaps
 ecstasy can't be sought?
 Materialism is no longer my amour,
 I'm forever a bridegroom to bliss and its disguises.

Three Fragments of Ibn Khafajah

Original Arabic text in public domain, translated by Mohammed Fairouz (published with permission of the translator)

[9] I.

His praises rang in song akin to those of the doves
 that carried his qualities instead of necklaces

[10] II.

We saw him in the likeness of the image of Joseph
 We saw him in the likeness of the majesty of Solomon
 His cloak enshrouded him as a page of temptation
 Of which we read his face as its addressing line
 His love is my religion and his dwelling my temple
 Seeing him is my pilgrimage and remembering him my scripture

[11] III.

In a night's darkness which is a tender face
 And its breeze is a pleasant perfume
 So the moisture of its dew can be captured through sipping
 And the lightning of its lips can be almost kissed

[12] The Stolen Child*W.B. Yeats (1865–1939)*

Where dips the rocky highland
 Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
 There lies a leafy island
 Where flapping herons wake
 The drowsy water rats;
 There we've hid our faery vats,
 Full of berrys
 And of reddest stolen cherries.
 Come away, O human child!
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faery, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
 The dim gray sands with light,
 Far off by furthest Rosses
 We foot it all the night,
 Weaving olden dances
 Mingling hands and mingling glances
 Till the moon has taken flight;
 To and fro we leap
 And chase the frothy bubbles,
 While the world is full of troubles
 And anxious in its sleep.
 Come away, O human child!
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faery, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
 From the hills above Glen-Car,
 In pools among the rushes
 That scarce could bathe a star,
 We seek for slumbering trout
 And whispering in their ears
 Give them unquiet dreams;
 Leaning softly out
 From ferns that drop their tears
 Over the young streams.
 Come away, O human child!
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faery, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
 The solemn-eyed:
 He'll hear no more the lowing
 Of the calves on the warm hillside
 Or the kettle on the hob
 Sing peace into his breast,
 Or see the brown mice bob
 Round and round the oatmeal chest.
 For he comes, the human child,
 To the waters and the wild
 With a faery, hand in hand,
 For the world's more full of weeping than he can understand.

[13] After the Revels*Ibn Shuyayd (992-1034)*

Translated by Cola Franzen (b. 1923)

When the wine he drank
 put him to sleep and the eyes
 of the watchmen closed also

I approached him timidly
 like one who seeks to come close,
 but on the sly, pretending not to.

I crept toward him imperceptible
as a dream, moved myself close
to him, softly as a breath.

I kissed his throat, a white jewel,
drank the vivid red of his mouth
and so passed my night with him
deliciously, until darkness smiled,
showing the white teeth of dawn.

[14] We are Seven

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

A simple Child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
—Her beauty made me glad.

“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?”
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sun-set, Sir,
When it is light and fair,

I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

"The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

"So in the church-yard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

"And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side."

"How many are you, then," said I,
"If they two are in heaven?"
Quick was the little Maid's reply,
"O Master! we are seven."

"But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!"
'Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, "Nay, we are seven!"

[15] Annabel Lee

Edgar Allan Poe (1800-1849)

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in Heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.