

## Discipline

By Ursula Bethell

I said: I will go into the garden and consider roses;  
 I will observe the deployment of their petals,  
 And compare one variety with another.  
 But I was made to sit down and scrape potatoes.  
 The morning's rosebuds passed by unattended,  
 While I sat bound to monotonous kitchen industry.  
 Howbeit the heart of my consort was exhilarated,  
 And for virtuous renunciation I received praise.  
 The taste of the potatoes was satisfactory  
 With a sprig of fresh mint, dairy butter, and very young  
 green peas.

## A Supermarket in California

By Allen Ginsberg

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?

Berkeley, 1955

## Ramadan

By Kazim Ali

You wanted to be so hungry, you would break into  
 branches,  
 and have to choose between the starving month's

nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-third evenings.  
 The liturgy begins to echo itself and why does it matter?

If the ground-water is too scarce one can stretch nets  
 into the air and harvest the fog.

Hunger opens you to illiteracy,  
 thirst makes clear the starving pattern,

the thick night is so quiet, the spinning spider pauses,  
 the angel stops whispering for a moment—

The secret night could already be over,  
 you will have to listen very carefully—

You are never going to know which night's mouth is  
 sacredly reciting  
 and which night's recitation is secretly mere wind—

### Fried Beauty

By R. S. Gwynn

Glory be to God for breaded things—

Catfish, steak finger, pork chop, chicken thigh,  
Sliced green tomatoes, pots full to the brim  
With french fries, fritters, life-float onion rings,  
Hushpuppies, okra golden to the eye,  
That in all oils, corn or canola, swim

Toward mastication's maw (O molared mouth!);  
Whatever browns, is dumped to drain and dry  
On paper towels' sleek translucent scrim,  
These greasy, battered bounties of the South:  
Eat them.

### Pied Beauty

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

### Persimmons

By Li-Young Lee

In sixth grade Mrs. Walker  
slapped the back of my head  
and made me stand in the corner  
for not knowing the difference  
between *persimmon* and *precision*.  
How to choose

persimmons. This is precision.  
Ripe ones are soft and brown-spotted.  
Sniff the bottoms. The sweet one  
will be fragrant. How to eat:  
put the knife away, lay down newspaper.  
Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the meat.

Chew the skin, suck it,  
and swallow. Now, eat  
the meat of the fruit,  
so sweet,  
all of it, to the heart.

Donna undresses, her stomach is white.  
In the yard, dewy and shivering  
with crickets, we lie naked,  
face-up, face-down.  
I teach her Chinese.  
Crickets: *chiu chiu*. Dew: I've forgotten.  
Naked: I've forgotten.  
*Ni, wo*: you and me.  
I part her legs,  
remember to tell her  
she is beautiful as the moon.

Other words

that got me into trouble were  
*fight* and *fright*, *wren* and *yarn*.  
Fight was what I did when I was frightened,  
Fright was what I felt when I was fighting.  
Wrens are small, plain birds,  
yarn is what one knits with.  
Wrens are soft as yarn.  
My mother made birds out of yarn.  
I loved to watch her tie the stuff;  
a bird, a rabbit, a wee man.

Mrs. Walker brought a persimmon to class  
and cut it up  
so everyone could taste  
a *Chinese apple*. Knowing  
it wasn't ripe or sweet, I didn't eat  
but watched the other faces.

My mother said every persimmon has a sun  
inside, something golden, glowing,  
warm as my face.

Once, in the cellar, I found two wrapped in newspaper,  
forgotten and not yet ripe.  
I took them and set both on my bedroom windowsill,  
where each morning a cardinal  
sang, *The sun, the sun*.

Finally understanding  
 he was going blind,  
 my father sat up all one night  
 waiting for a song, a ghost.  
 I gave him the persimmons,  
 swelled, heavy as sadness,  
 and sweet as love.

This year, in the muddy lighting  
 of my parents' cellar, I rummage, looking  
 for something I lost.  
 My father sits on the tired, wooden stairs,  
 black cane between his knees,  
 hand over hand, gripping the handle.  
 He's so happy that I've come home.  
 I ask how his eyes are, a stupid question.  
*All gone*, he answers.

Under some blankets, I find a box.  
 Inside the box I find three scrolls.  
 I sit beside him and untie  
 three paintings by my father:  
 Hibiscus leaf and a white flower.  
 Two cats preening.  
 Two persimmons, so full they want to drop from the cloth.

He raises both hands to touch the cloth,  
 asks, *Which is this?*

*This is persimmons, Father.*

*Oh, the feel of the wolftail on the silk,  
 the strength, the tense  
 precision in the wrist.  
 I painted them hundreds of times  
 eyes closed. These I painted blind.  
 Some things never leave a person:  
 scent of the hair of one you love,  
 the texture of persimmons,  
 in your palm, the ripe weight.*

### **On Gut**

By Ben Jonson

Gut eats all day and lechers all the night;  
 So all his meat he tasteth over twice;  
 And, striving so to double his delight,  
 He makes himself a thoroughfare of vice.  
 Thus in his belly can he change a sin:  
 Lust it comes out, that gluttony went in.

### **Blackberry-Picking**

By Seamus Heaney

for Philip Hobsbaum

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
 For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
 At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
 Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
 You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
 Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
 Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
 Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
 Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
 Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.  
 Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
 We trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
 Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
 With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned  
 Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
 With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.

We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
 But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
 A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
 The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
 The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.  
 I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
 That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
 Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

### From "Don Juan"

By George Gordon Lord Byron

And the small ripple spilt upon the beach  
 Scarcely o'erpass'd the cream of your champagne,  
 When o'er the brim the sparkling bumpers reach,  
 That spring-dew of the spirit! the heart's rain!  
 Few things surpass old wine; and they may preach  
 Who please,—the more because they preach in vain,—  
 Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,  
 Sermons and soda-water the day after.

Man, being reasonable, must get drunk;  
 The best of life is but intoxication:  
 Glory, the grape, love, gold, in these are sunk  
 The hopes of all men, and of every nation;  
 Without their sap, how branchless were the trunk  
 Of life's strange tree, so fruitful on occasion:  
 But to return,—Get very drunk; and when  
 You wake with headache, you shall see what then.

Ring for your valet—bid him quickly bring  
 Some hock and soda-water, then you 'll know  
 A pleasure worthy Xerxes the great king;  
 For not the bless'd sherbet, sublimed with snow,  
 Nor the first sparkle of the desert-spring,  
 Nor Burgundy in all its sunset glow,  
 After long travel, ennui, love, or slaughter,  
 Vie with that draught of hock and soda-water.

### Dirt

By Gary Soto

*With apologies to Wallace Stevens*

The philosopher says, The soil is man's intelligence,  
 And if so, then we are smarter than any tweedy Prof.,  
 We with the hoes, the horizon flat wherever we turn.  
 The sun comes up angry. The wind bullies us from behind,  
 And as we space beet plants with tiny golf swings  
 I say to my brother in the next row,  
 We're smarter than you think.  
 He looks up with his dirty face--  
 What are you talking about?  
 And I answer with a laugh,  
 Say, as I slaughter two more plants,

I got me two sandwiches to eat. How 'bout you?  
 My brother pleats his brow, tells me to shut up--  
 I do. The wind pushes,  
 The sun's half wafer of light reddens.  
 A dog's bark echoes from the canal  
 Where workers will later wash their feet at the day's end.  
 I'm glad to be by my brother,  
 Glad for this education in the Big Bosses' skinny rows.  
 I chop my beets, keep my mouth closed.  
 I think to myself, I'm in college,  
 I'm in this field where crows follow me like guards.  
 I'm thinking of the philosopher dead thirty years  
 And covered smartly in the same old ancient dirt  
 Lifted and falling from my hoe.

### Corned Beef and Cabbage

By George Bilgere

I can see her in the kitchen,  
 Cooking up, for the hundredth time,  
 A little something from her  
 Limited Midwestern repertoire.  
 Cigarette going in the ashtray,  
 The red wine pulsing in its glass,  
 A warning light meaning  
 Everything was simmering  
 Just below the steel lid  
 Of her smile, as she boiled  
 The beef into submission,  
 Chopped her way  
 Through the vegetable kingdom  
 With the broken-handled knife  
 I use tonight, feeling her  
 Anger rising from the dark  
 Chambers of the head  
 Of cabbage I slice through,  
 Missing her, wanting  
 To chew things over  
 With my mother again.

## Apples

By Anna Smaill

*for Barbara*

Glass apple spun on silver saucer,  
the rest of the kingdom revealed, spinning:

my cores under the bed,  
couch, carpet  
litter the way in a trail of apples

\*

crisp crunched first gala  
of the season, the fate  
day of the year, walking toward  
my autumn appointment

\*

the clutch of pips, once bit  
fills the mouth  
with taste of ants, roots

in spit, dark threads  
untwist and leak:  
seeding in your stomach  
a crop of apples

\*

always we held and juggled apples,  
spinning them into seasons:

beauty, pippin, pineapple heart

we battled with them,  
rolled them down the hall:

braeburn, granny smith, delicious,

tempted the corners with the  
reign of apples

\*

say, the heart is newly  
apple juice  
glottal sweet and  
sticky with provision,  
your lips tacked  
together, sugar

\*

slicing through thin skin  
with a little knife  
the spurt of juice  
which is sweeter and more replete  
than any other fruit

\*

and there was a bitter brightness  
of tossed green  
coils that center and split  
when landed,  
marrying us to the letter

\*

overheard, grandfather's snore  
so barbed  
that in the dream he is  
cutting down apples

\*

an apple in the hand, a present:  
the protectorate kernel-  
case perfect

until twang, the arrow cuts through the heart,  
the decisive sight,  
and planes it into poles

**I am sorry for her sake,**

Anonymous

*Care away, away, away,**Murning away.**I am forsake,**Another is take,**No more murne ic may.*

I am sorry for her sake,

Ic may well ete and drinke;

Whanne ic slepe ic may not wake,

So muche on her ic thence.

I am broute in suche a bale,

And brout in suche a pine,

Whanne ic rise up of my bed

Me liste well to dine.

I am broute in suche a pine,

Ibroun in suche a bale,

Whanne ic have righte good wine

Me liste drinke non ale.

**cutting greens**

By Lucille Clifton

curling them around

i hold their bodies in obscene embrace

thinking of everything but kinship.

collards and kale

strain against each strange other

away from my kissmaking hand and

the iron bedpot.

the pot is black,

the cutting board is black,

my hand,

and just for a minute

the greens roll black under the knife,

and the kitchen twists dark on its spine

and I taste in my natural appetite

the bond of live things everywhere.

**Sonnet 75**

By William Shakespeare

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,

Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;

And for the peace of you I hold such strife

As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found;

Now proud as an enjoyer and anon

Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure,

Now counting best to be with you alone,

Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure;

Sometime all full with feasting on your sight

And by and by clean starved for a look;

Possessing or pursuing no delight,

Save what is had or must from you be took.

Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,

Or gluttoning on all, or all away.