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 gruber, 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.)

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—

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
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.

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.
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.

Chewed Beauty
By Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glo
ory be to God for dappled things —
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled 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 all trades, 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.

Pied Beauty
By Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for breaded things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled 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 all trades, 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.
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,
Ibrout 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.