nocturnes

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Since time immemorial, night has been poetically charged - its atmospheric and metaphorical qualities have long mesmerized writers striving to capture its otherworldly, lyrical mysteries. Nighttime is at once sensuous, treacherous, and peaceful; it is a respite from the toils of the day, and a black mirror in which truths hidden by daylight are revealed. Organized on the occasion of the exhibition *Nocturnes: Night Scenes from GRAM's Collection*, this booklet brings together poems about night from the early modern period to the present. Some of the selected poets use night as a metaphor to contend with social, political, or spiritual issues, while others explore the tactile conditions of the world after dark. For many poets, night is a setting for a story, and an indelible character in and of itself. The editors of this booklet are grateful to be able to include the work of three contemporary Grand Rapids-based poets, Rosie Accola, Alice Darling, and LaTonia Pearl Harris.



Susan Goethel Campbell (American, b. 1956).
Aerials: Other Cities #2, 2012. Relief print on paper.
Grand Rapids Art Museum, Museum Purchase, 2014.11.
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04

Lenox Avenue: Midnight
Langston Hughes
American; 1901 – 1967

The rhythm of life
Is a jazz rhythm,
Honey.
The gods are laughing at us.

The broken heart of love,
The weary, weary heart of pain,—
    Overtones,
    Undertones,
To the rumble of street cars,
To the swish of rain.

Lenox Avenue,
Honey.
Midnight,
And the gods are laughing at us.

05

Untitled
e.e. cummings
American; 1894 – 1962

i go to this window

just as day dissolves
when it is twilight (and
looking up in fear

i see the new moon
thinner than a hair)

making me feel
how myself has been coarse and dull
compared with you,silently who are
and cling
to my mind always

but now she sharpens and becomes crisper,
until I smile with knowing
----and all about
herself

the sprouting largest final air

plunges
    inward with hurled
downward thousands of enormous dreams

06

I'm happiest now when most away

Charlotte Brontë
American; 1816 – 1855

I'm happiest now when most away
I can tear my soul from its mould of clay,
On a windy night when the moon is bright,
And my eye can wander through worlds of light.

When I am not, and none beside,
    Nor earth, nor sea, nor cloudless sky,
But only spirit splintering wide
    Through infinite immensity

07

Good Night

Carl Sandburg
American; 1878 – 1967

Many ways to spell good night.

Fireworks at a pier on the Fourth of July
    spell it with red wheels and yellow spokes.
They fizz in the air, touch the water and quit.
Rockets make a trajectory of gold-and-blue
    and then go out.

Railroad trains at night spell with a smokestack
    mushrooming a white pillar.
Steamboats turn a curve in the Mississippi crying
    in a baritone that crosses lowland cottonfields
    to a razorback hill.

It is easy to spell good night.
    Many ways to spell good night.

08

‘Twas the new moon!

Matsuo Bashō
Japanese; 1644 – 1694

‘Twas the new moon!
Since then I waited—
And lo! to-night!
[I have my reward!]

09

What Do I Care for Morning

Helene Johnson
American; 1906 – 1995

What do I care for morning,
For a shivering aspen tree,
For sun flowers and sumac
Opening greedily?
What do I care for morning,
For the glare of the rising sun,
For a sparrow’s noisy prating,
For another day begun?
Give me the beauty of evening,
The cool consummation of night,
And the moon like a love-sick lady,
Listless and wan and white.
Give me a little valley
Huddled beside a hill,
Like a monk in a monastery,
Safe and contented and still,
Give me the white road glistening,
A strand of the pale moon’s hair,
And the tall hemlocks towering
Dark as the moon is fair.
Oh what do I care for morning,
Naked and newly born—
Night is here, yielding and tender—
What do I care for dawn!

Railroad Avenue
Langston Hughes
American; 1901 – 1967

Dusk dark
On Railroad Avenue
Lights in the fish joints,
Lights in the pool rooms,
A box car some train
has forgotten
In the middle of the block.
A player piano,
A victrola.
942
Was the number.
A boy
Lounging on the corner.
A passing girl
With purple powdered skin.
Laughter
Suddenly
Like a taught aream.
Laughter
Suddenly
Neither truth nor lie.
Laughter
Hardening the dusk dark evening.
Laughter
Shaking the lights in the fish joints,
Rolling white balls in the pool rooms,
And leaving untouched the box car
Some train has forgotten.

Verses to the Moon
Luis Carlos López
Columbian; 1883 – 1950

Oh moon, who now look over the roof
of the church, in the tropical calm
to be saluted by him who has been out all night,
to be barked at by the dogs of the suburbs,
Oh moon who in your silence have laughed at
all things! In your sidereal silence
when, keeping carefully in the shadow, the
municipal judge steals from some den.
But you offer, saturnine traveler,
with what eloquence in mute space
consolation to him whose life is broken,
while there sing to you from a drunken brawl
long-haired, neurasthenic bards,
and lousy creatures who play dominos.

Moonset

Emily Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)
Canadian and Mohawk; 1861 – 1913

Idles the night wind through the dreaming firs,
That waking murmur low,
As some lost melody returning stirs
The love of long ago;
And through the far, cool distance, zephyr fanned.
The moon is sinking into shadow-land.

The troubled night-bird, calling plaintively,
Wanders on restless wing;
The cedars, chanting vespers to the sea,
Await its answering,
That comes in wash of waves along the strand,
The while the moon slips into shadow-land.

O! soft responsive voices of the night
I join your minstrelsy.
And call across the fading silver light
As something calls to me;
I may not all your meaning understand,
But I have touched your soul in shadow-land.

NORTH NODE

Rosie Accola
American; born 1996

A handheld night-vision camera seeks a poltergeist green,
the grainy liminal space between visual evidence and
calloused palms,
seeking heat.

Queerness as
notebook paper folded and creased until it is
smooth enough to glide beneath the crack under a door,
two sets of kitten heels clicking upstairs,
varnish chipping off wooden handrails.
The ceramic bowl of the sink sings as someone fishes
a bobby pin out with the milky crescent of a nail.

Strange filaments of a pink sweater
clinging to the garden gate.

Each night the hangnail of the moon lights the way.
A latticework of limbs and lips will bloom,
As the echo of a heartbeat starts to ricochet.

Is she an apparition or an angel?
Gone quicker than the chill that drapes itself
around a paint-chipped windowsill.

Underground cellar
coming undone
pilfer desire like a pill just under a tongue.

An ancient incantation,
darling and guttural
probing at radial symmetry.
Two sets of fingers spider-like
darting through tangled hair
weaving a crown for a heretic

The Night Is Darkening Around Me
Emily Brönte
English; 1818 – 1848

The night is darkening round me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me,
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow;
The storm is fast descending,
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,
Wastes beyond wastes below;
But nothing drear can move me;
I will not, cannot go.

Hymn to the Night
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
American; 1807 – 1882

I heard the trailing garments of the Night
    Sweep through her marble halls!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
    From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
    Stoop o'er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
    As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
    The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night,
    Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
    My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there, —
    From those deep cisterns flows.

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
    What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
    And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!
    Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most fair,
    The best-beloved Night!

Solitude

Luis G. Dato

Filipino; 1906 – 1985

Stars of the sky come out on the earth,
Out of the void of the sky,
Out of the clouds,
Of the mantle-clouds of the sky,
Come,
Come for the moon is pale.
Pallid and spectral
As the night,
Dead as the clouds of the night.
Wake from the woodland, winds,
Wanton and wail on the sea,
Move where the billows, rent and restless,
Are mute.
Rise from the clod and sea and air,
Arise, O forms that are lifeless, inert,
Start as by impulse
And tremble to being.
Now the light of the stars and the spheres,
Now the breath of the wind
And the rush of the watery waste,
Are motionless,
Immobile,
Dead.
Only the tumult,
The fire and the flame in the heart are here
Within, the beat and the pulse
Of long agitations
Perturb.
Longings for the loved ones lost,
Loved as the waves of the wind,
Loved as the stars of the night,
Lost as the wind and the night,
Lost as the waves and the spheres.
Without,
In the cold, lightless silence of night.
All is mute,
All is dead.

This Is Not Love

Elsa Gidlow

British-Canadian; 1898 – 1986

This is not love: we cannot call it love.
Love would make me aware of infinite things,
Drive me down the spirit's vast abyss
And through the narrow fastnesses of pain.
This is not love. Yet it holds loveliness
Beyond mere pleasure. Peace and passion both
Grow from the kiss with which I paint drab hours.
It is not love: love is for the gods
And our more godlike moments. Yet when stars
Withhold their splendor, why should we not light
Candles to warm with kindly mortal flames
The all-enfolding, cold, immortal night?

The Teaching Moon

Alice Darling
American; born 1998

My mother taught me how to bathe
in moonlight, how to harness the solitude
of night and shield myself in its embrace.
She gave me her soft hand

and told me that everything has
the power to hurt; an apple seed,
the curved petal of a tulip, a smile
from someone you're supposed to love.

Together, in the dark, in the safety
of our bond, we wade into water
and lift our hands. In the trees, an owl
turns its gaze to us, passed us

as a mouse-beady eyed, thumping heart-
dashes from the underbrush. I feel
the moonlight feather soft on my cheeks,
feel it's presence sink into my tender

soul. We teach each other how
to be free, in our own way. Pace hallways
patterned with memories, with
ghosts of laughter and tears, with

shadows cast by figures in the windows
on a full moon. We return home
and slip into bed, pulling ourselves
into a nest of quilts. Her hair

is curling against my nose,
I can smell the night on her as perfume,
as rain brings the smell of its body
from anywhere it passed through.

I sleep, curled up in the space her body
creates for me, returning to a time
before; this world, this life, it has hard
edges, but I know how to make

them softer.

The House of Night

Ameen Rihani

Syrian-American; 1876 – 1940

Her sable robes the gloaming trails
    From golden strand to purple height,
And softly, over the welds and dales,
    Into the vacant House of Night.

But lo, where first her footsteps mark
    The sunset's last extinguished pyre,—
Above the hills,—a saffron spark,
    A gleam of unconjectured fire.

Between the foliaged zone and sky,
    Where sentries of the forest stand,
It peeps and flits—a firefly;
    It soars and glows—a firebrand.

A sacred flame from hemlock shades,
    Rising like a mystic sign
Above the silence of the glades
    Into the solitudes divine.

A sign perchance from those who pass
    To those who follow in the gloom,
Dancing round a moulten mass
    Above the grudging gulfs of doom.

A new-born world, though years untold
    Have fed the forge that gave it breath,
Where life still casts of beaten gold
    Cressets for the shrine of Death.

A dying world, though like a gem
    Of sapphire hues in nacre bright,
Drop from the zone or diadem
    Of the immortal queen of night.

A world! From depths to heights as dark
    It leaps anon into the dance
And whirls away—'t is but a spark
    From the anvil of the God of Chance,

But Faith and Fancy often mar
    The mystery of things divine;
For that which is a rolling star
    Was fluttering neath a lonely pine.

And lo, another orb doth roll
    Above the groves where once it trod;
And still another seeks its goal
    In the infinities of God.

From where the eagle marks his flight,
    Across the void that earth-bound seems,
They twinkle forth, a circle of light,
    Around the Gloaming's couch of dreams.

And thus they first themselves disguise
    As glow worms in the gathering gloom,
And suddenly refulgent rise
    O'er the abysmal tracks of doom.

For aeons thus, from hill to sea,
    Athwart the grudging gulfs they glow;
And waning tell of the worlds that be
    And the ghosts of worlds of long ago.

For aeons thus, their torches high,
    The gods unseen—as when the light
Of day conceals the starry sky—
    Illuminate the House of Night.

Nocturne

Sadakichi Hartmann

Japanese-American; 1867 – 1944

Upon the silent sea-swept land
The dreams of night fall soft and gray,
The waves fade on the jeweled sand
Like some lost hope of yesterday.

The dreams of night fall soft and gray
Upon the summer-colored seas,
Like some lost hope of yesterday,
The sea-mew's song is on the breeze.

Upon the summer-colored seas
Sails gleam and glimmer ghostly white,
The sea-mew's song is on the breeze
Lost in the monotone of night.

Sails gleam and glimmer ghostly white,
They come and slowly drift away,
Lost in the monotone of night,
Like visions of a summer-day.

They shift and slowly drift away
Like lovers' lays that wax and wane,
The visions of a summer-day
Whose dreams we ne'er will dream again.

Like lovers' lays wax and wane
The star dawn shifts from sail to sail,
Like dreams we ne'er will dream again;
The sea-mews follow on their trail.

The star dawn shifts from sail to sail,
As they drift to the dim unknown,
The sea-mews follow on their trail
In quest of some dreamland zone.

In quest of some far dreamland zone,
Of some far silent sea-swept land,
They are lost in the dim unknown,
Where waves fade on jeweled sand
And dreams of night fall soft and gray,
Like some lost hope of yesterday.

Nocturne

Virna Sheard

Canadian; 1862 – 1943

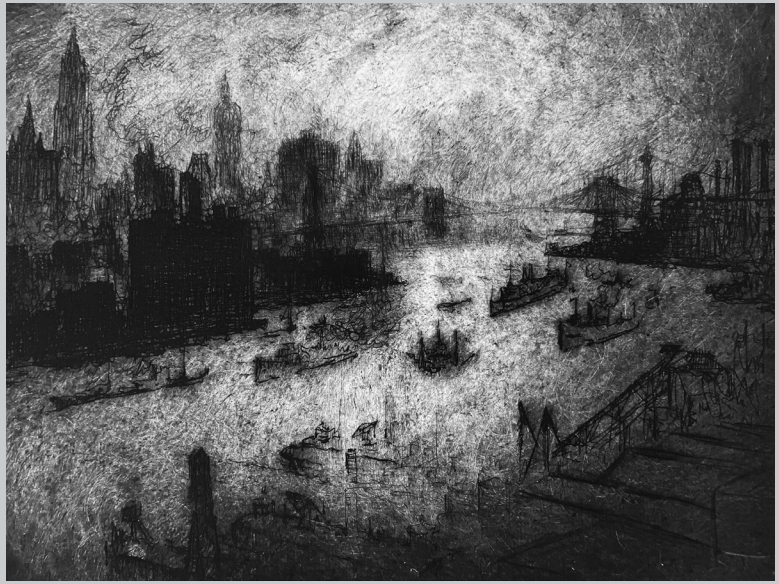
Infold us with thy peace, dear moon-lit night,
And let thy silver silence wrap us round
Till we forget the city's dazzling light,
The city's ceaseless sound.

Here where the sand lies white upon the shore,
And little velvet-fingered breezes blow,
Dear sea, thy world-old wonder-song once more
Sing to us e'er we go.

Give us thy garnered sweets, short summer hour:
Perfume of rose, and balm of sun-steeped pine;
Scent from the lily's cup and horned flower,
Where bees have drained the wine.

Come, small musicians in the rough sea grass,
Pipe us the serenade we love the best;
And winds of midnight, chant for us a mass,
Our hearts would be at rest.

God of all beauty, though the world is thine,
Our faith grows often faint, oft hope is spent;
Show us Thyself in all things fair and fine,
Teach us the stars' content.



Joseph Pennell (American, 1857 – 1926). *Sunset from Williamsburg Bridge*, n.d. Etching on cream laid paper. Grand Rapids Art Museum, Gift of Mabel H. Perkins.

La canción del camino
José Santos Chocano
Peruvian; 1875 – 1934

Era un camino negro.
La noche estaba loca de relámpagos. Yo iba
En mi potro salvaje
Por la montaña andina.
Los chasquidos alegres de los cascos,
Como masticaciones de monstruosas mandíbulas
Destrozaban los vidrios invisibles
De las charcas dormidas.
Tres millones de insectos
Formaban una como rabiosa inarmonía.

Súbito, allá, a lo lejos,
Por entre aquella mole doliente y pensativa
De la selva,
Vi un puñado de luces como un tropel de avíspas.
¡La posada! El nervioso
Látigo persignó la carne viva
De mi caballo, que rasgó los aires
Con un largo relincho de alegría.

Y como si la selva
Lo comprendiese todo, se quedó muda y fría.

Y hasta mí llegó, entonces,
Una voz clara y fina
De mujer que cantaba. Cantaba. Era su canto
Una lenta... muy lenta... melodía:
Algo como un suspiro que se alarga
Y se alarga y se alarga... y no termina.

Entre el hondo silencio de la noche
Y a través del reposo de la montaña, oíanse
Los acordes
De aquel canto sencillo de una música íntima,
Como si fuesen voces que llegaran
Desde la otra vida..

Translated into English
by John Pierrepont Rice

The way was black,
The night was mad with lightning; I bestrode
My wild young colt, upon a mountain road.
And, crunching onward, like a monster's jaws,
His ringing hoof-beats their glad rhythm kept,
Breaking the glassy surface of the pools,
Where hidden waters slept.
A million buzzing insects in the air
On droning wing made sullen discord there.

But suddenly, afar, beyond the wood,
Beyond the dark pall of my brooding thought,
I saw lights cluster like a swarm of wasps
Among the branches caught.
"The inn!" I cried, and on his living flesh
My broncho felt the lash
and neighed with eagerness.

And all this time the cool and quiet wood
Uttered no sound, as though it understood.
Until there came to me, upon the night,
A voice so clear, so clear, so ringing sweet—
A voice as of a woman singing, and her song
Dropped like soft music winging, at my feet,
And seemed a sigh that, with my spirit blending,
Lengthened and lengthened out,
and had no ending.

And through the empty silence of the night,
And through the quiet of the hills, I heard
That music, and the sounds
of the night wind bore me,
Like spirit voices from an unseen world
Came drifting o'er me.

Sofrené mi caballo;
Y me puse a escuchar lo que decía:

—Todos llegan de noche,
Todos se van de día...

Y formándole dúo,
Otra voz femenina
Completó así la endecha
Con ternura infinita:

—El amor es tan sólo una posada
En mitad del camino de la Vida.

Y las dos voces, luego,
a la vez repitieron con amargura rítmica:

—Todos llegan de noche,
Todos se van de día...

Entonces, yo bajé de mi caballo
Y me acosté en la orilla
De una charca.
Y fijo en ese canto que venía
A través del misterio de la selva,
Fui cerrando los ojos al sueño y la fatiga.
Y me dormí, arrullado; y, desde entonces,
Cuando cruzo las selvas por rutas no sabidas,
Jamás busco reposo en las posadas;
Y duermo al aire libre mi sueño y mi fatiga,
Porque recuerdo siempre
Aquel canto sencillo de una música íntima:

—Todos llegan de noche,
Todos se van de día.
El amor es tan sólo una posada
En mitad del camino de la Vida...

I curbed my horse, to catch what she might say:
"At night they come, and they are gone by day—"
And then another voice, with low refrain,
And untold tenderness, took up the strain:
"Oh love is but an inn upon life's way";
"At night they come, and they are gone by day—"
Their voices mingled in that wistful lay.

Then I dismounted and stretched out my length
Beside a pool, and while my mind was bent
Upon that mystery within the wood,
My eyes grew heavy, and my strength was spent.
And so I slept there, huddled in my cloak.
And now, when by untrodden paths I go,
Through the dim forest, no repose I know
At any inn at nightfall, but apart
I sleep beneath the stars, for through my heart
Echoes the burden of that wistful lay:
"At night they come, and they are gone by day,
And love is but an inn upon life's way.

Denotes

LaTonia Pearl Harris
American; born 1994

I feel better at night
I feel better at night
I feel better at night
Because there's no enmity
Between light & darkness
But mere degrees
Of luminosity between
the stars & our eyes

How big is the night?
You might as well measure God
How many tears are there in a lifetime?
As many denote stars

As the night allows us to unmask the stoic
We look different without our fictitious coverings

Don't we?

Everything does
At night
Like seeing a city from the highest building
The lights *just* might trace the constellations of
Orion and Ayish
&
We will
admire them
as we like who we are when our gaze
is upon them

Stargazing hopefuls
Instead of the
Depressed merchants
our 9 to 5's made us into

Our hour has come
Though the day has bested us &
With each button we undo from our uniforms
we take up our wins & loses

We peer out of our dust-stained windows
Unlatching the rest of ourselves *just*
To encounter the bewilderment of
Unflinching beauty
& then
Deep calls to deep
Beyond the streetlights beyond our brokenness beyond every unpaid bill
The breeze of the eve
uncorks pressure
produces tears
And subtly
With flowing streams- we say Let there be night!

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

T.S. Eliot

British, born American; 1888 – 1965

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question …
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the
window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the
window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald)
brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet — and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat,
and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it towards some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the
sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that
trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns
on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon
the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.
We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Night On The Prairies
Walt Whitman
American; 1819 – 1892

Night on the prairies;
The supper is over - the fire on the ground burns low;
The wearied emigrants sleep, wrapt in their blankets:
I walk by myself - I stand and look at the stars,
which I think now I never realized before.

Now I absorb immortality and peace,
I admire death, and test propositions.

How plenteous! How spiritual! How resumé!
The same Old Man and Soul - the same old aspirations,
and the same content.

I was thinking the day most splendid,
till I saw what the not-day exhibited,
I was thinking this globe enough, till there sprang out
so noiseless around me myriads of other globes.

Now, while the great thoughts of space and eternity
fill me,
I will measure myself by them;
And now, touch'd with the lives of other globes,
arrived as far along as those of the earth,
Or waiting to arrive, or pass'd on farther than
those of the earth,
I henceforth no more ignore them,
than I ignore my own life,
Or the lives of the earth arrived as far as mine,
or waiting to arrive.

O I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me -
as the day cannot,
I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by death.

Night

William Blake

English; 1757 – 1827

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower,
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles on the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
Where flocks have took delight.
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright;
Unseen they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest,
Where birds are covered warm;
They visit caves of every beast,
To keep them all from harm.
If they see any weeping
That should have been sleeping,
They pour sleep on their head,
And sit down by their bed.

When wolves and tigers howl for prey,
They pitying stand and weep;
Seeking to drive their thirst away,
And keep them from the sheep.
But if they rush dreadful,
The angels, most heedful,
Receive each mild spirit,
New worlds to inherit.

And there the lion's ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold,
And pitying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold,
Saying, 'Wrath, by His meekness,
And, by His health, sickness
Is driven away
From our immortal day.

'And now beside thee, bleating lamb,
I can lie down and sleep;
Or think on Him who bore thy name,
Graze after thee and weep.
For, washed in life's river,
My bright mane for ever
Shall shine like the gold
As I guard o'er the fold.'

Nocturne

Emily Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)
Canadian and Mohawk; 1861 – 1913

Night of Mid-June, in heavy vapours dying,
Like priestly hands thy holy touch is lying
Upon the world's wide brow;
God-like and grand all nature is commanding
The "peace that passes human understanding";
I, also, feel it now.

What matters it to-night, if one life treasure
I covet, is not mine! Am I to measure
The gifts of Heaven's decree
By my desires? O! life for ever longing
For some far gift, where many gifts are thronging,
God wills, it may not be.

Am I to learn that longing, lifted higher,
Perhaps will catch the gleam of sacred fire
That shows my cross is gold?
That underneath this cross--however lowly,
A jewel rests, white, beautiful and holy,
Whose worth can not be told.

Like to a scene I watched one day in wonder:--
A city, great and powerful, lay under
A sky of grey and gold;
The sun outbreaking in his farewell hour,
Was scattering afar a yellow shower
Of light, that aureoled

With brief hot touch, so marvellous and shining,
A hundred steeples on the sky out-lining,
Like network threads of fire;
Above them all, with halo far outspreading,
I saw a golden cross in glory heading
A consecrated spire:

I only saw its gleaming form uplifting,
Against the clouds of grey to seaward drifting,
And yet I surely know
Beneath the seen, a great unseen is resting,
For while the cross that pinnacle is cresting,
An Altar lies below.

. . . . .

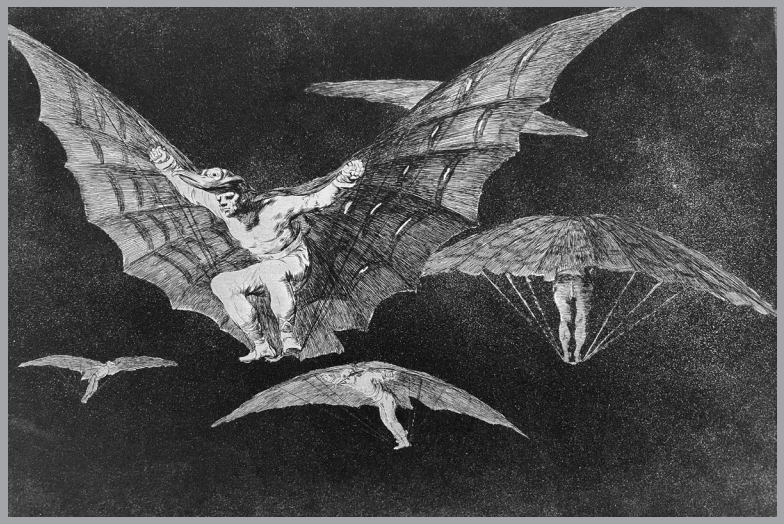
Night of Mid-June, so slumberous and tender,
Night of Mid-June, transcendent in thy splendour
Thy silent wings enfold
And hush my longing, as at thy desire
All colour fades from round that far-off spire,
Except its cross of gold.

Night

Susanna Moodie

Canadian; 1803 – 1885

I come, like Oblivion, to sweep away
The scattered beams from the car of day:
The gems which the evening has lavishly strown
Light up the lamps round my ebon throne.
Slowly I float through the realms of space,
Casting my mantle o'er Nature's face,
Weaving the stars in my raven hair,
As I sail through the shadowy fields of air.
All the wild fancies that thought can bring
Lie hid in the folds of my sable wing:
Terror is mine with his phrensied crew,
Fear with her cheek of marble hue,
And sorrow, that shuns the eye of day,
Pours out to me her plaintive lay.
I am the type of that awful gloom
Which involves the cradle and wraps the tomb;
Chilling the soul with its mystical sway;
Chasing the day-dreams of beauty away;
Till man views the banner by me unfurled,
As the awful veil of the unknown world;
The emblem of all he fears beneath
The solemn garb of the spoiler death!



Francisco Goya (Spanish, 1746 – 1828).
Los Proverbios: Modo de volar (Proverbs: One way to fly), 1815 – 1824; printed 1864. Etching, aquatint, and dry-point on cream wove paper. Grand Rapids Art Museum, Gift of Mabel H. Perkins.

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