**Confessions**

What is he buzzing in my ears?

“Now that I come to die,

Do I view the world as a vale of tears?”

Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again

Where the physic bottles stand

On the table’s edge,—is a suburb lane,

With a wall to my bedside hand.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,

From a house you could descry

O’er the garden-wall; is the curtain blue

Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine, it serves for the old June weather

Blue above lane and wall;

And that farthest bottle labelled “Ether”

Is the house o’ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,

There watched for me, one June,

A girl: I know, sir, it’s improper,

My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way . . . you crept

Close by the side, to dodge

Eyes in the house, two eyes except:

They styled their house “The Lodge.”

What right had a lounger up their lane?

But, by creeping very close,

With the good wall’s help,—their eyes might strain

And stretch themselves to Oes,

Yet never catch her and me together,

As she left the attic, there,

By the rim of the bottle labelled “Ether,”

And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,

We loved, sir—used to meet:

How sad and bad and mad it was—

But then, how it was sweet!

—Robert Browning

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air -

Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -

And Breaths were gathering firm

For that last Onset - when the King

Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away

What portion of me be

Assignable - and then it was

There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -

Between the light - and me -

And then the Windows failed - and then

I could not see to see –

—Emily Dickinson

**The Emperor of Ice-Cream**

Call the roller of big cigars,

The muscular one, and bid him whip

In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.

Let the wenches dawdle in such dress

As they are used to wear, and let the boys

Bring flowers in last month’s newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,

Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet

On which she embroidered fantails once

And spread it so as to cover her face.

If her horny feet protrude, they come

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

—Wallace Stevens

**In Memory of Jane Fraser**

When snow like sheep lay in the fold

And winds went begging at each door,

And the far hills were blue with cold,

And a cold shroud lay on the moor,

She kept the siege. And every day

We watched her brooding over death

Like a strong bird above its prey.

The room filled with the kettle’s breath.

Damp curtains glued against the pane

Sealed time away. Her body froze

As if to freeze us all, and chain

Creation to a stunned repose.

She died before the world could stir.

In March the ice unloosed the brook

And water ruffled the sun’s hair.

Dead cones upon the alder shook.

—Geoffrey Hill

**Christmas Tree**

★

To be  
Brought down at last  
From the cold sighing mountain  
Where I and the others  
Had been fed, looked after, kept still,  
Meant, I knew—of course I knew—  
That it would be only a matter of weeks,  
That there was nothing more to do.  
Warmly they took me in, made much of me,  
The point from the start was to keep my spirits up.  
I could assent to that. For honestly,  
It did help to be wound in jewels, to send  
Their colors flashing forth from vents in the deep  
Fragrant sables that cloaked me head to foot.  
Over me then they wove a spell of shining—  
Purple and silver chains, eavesdripping tinsel,  
Amulets, milagros: software of silver,  
A heart, a little girl, a Model T,  
Two staring eyes. Then angels, trumpets, BUD and BEA  
(The children’s names) in clownlike capitals,  
Somewhere a music box whose tiny song  
Played and replayed I ended before long  
By loving. And in shadow behind me, a primitive IV  
To keep the show going. Yes, yes, what lay ahead  
Was clear: the stripping, the cold street, my chemicals  
Plowed back into the Earth for lives to come—  
No doubt a blessing, a harvest, but one that doesn’t bear,  
Now or ever, dwelling upon. To have grown so thin.  
Needles and bone. The little boy’s hands meeting  
About my spine. The mother’s voice: *Holding up wonderfully!*  
No dread. No bitterness. The end beginning. Today’s  
Dusk room aglow  
For the last time  
With candlelight.  
Faces love-lit,  
Gifts underfoot.  
Still to be so poised, so  
Receptive. Still to recall, to praise.

—James Merrill

*From* **Clearances**

vii

In the last minutes he said more to her

Almost than in all their life together.

‘You’ll be in New Row on Monday night

And I'll come up for you and you'll be glad

When I walk in the door . . . Isn’t that right?’

His head was bent down to her propped-up head.

She could not hear but we were overjoyed.

He called her good and girl. Then she was dead,

The searching for a pulsebeat was abandoned

And we all knew one thing by being there.

The space we stood around had been emptied

Into us to keep, it penetrated

Clearances that suddenly stood open.

High cries were felled and a pure change happened.

—Seamus Heaney