The Garden

How vainly men themselves amaze
To win the palm, the oak, or bays;
And their uncessant labors see
Crowned from some single herb or tree,
Whose short and narrow-vergèd shade
Does prudently their toils upbraid;
While all the flowers and trees do close
To weave the garlands of repose.

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence, thy sister dear!
Mistaken long, I sought you then
In busy companies of men:
Your sacred plants, if here below,
Only among the plants will grow;
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen
So amorous as this lovely green;
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
Cut in these trees their mistress' name.
Little, alas, they know or heed,
How far these beauties hers exceed!
Fair trees! wheresoe'er your barks I wound
No name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our passion's heat,
Love hither makes his best retreat:
The gods who mortal beauty chase,
Still in a tree did end their race.
Apollo hunted Daphne so,
Only that she might laurel grow,
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.

What wondrous life is this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons as I pass,
Insnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs does glide:
There like a bird it sits and sings,
Then whets and combs its silver wings;
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light.

Such was that happy garden-state,
While man there walked without a mate:
After a place so pure and sweet,
What other help could yet be meet!
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two paradises 'twere in one
To live in Paradise alone.

How well the skillful gard'ner drew
Of flowers and herbs this dial new;
Where from above the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;
And, as it works, th' industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckoned but with herbs and flowers!

—Andrew Marvell

Nomad Exquisite

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth
The big-finned palm
And green vine angering for life,

As the immense dew of Florida
Brings forth hymn and hymn
From the beholder,
Beholding all these green sides
And gold sides of green sides,

And blessed mornings,
Meet for the eye of the young alligator,
And lightning colors
So, in me, come flinging
Forms, flames, and the flakes of flames.

—Wallace Stevens

The Green Eye

Come, child, and with your sunbeam gaze assign
Green to the orchard as a metaphor
For contemplation, seeking to declare
Whether by green you specify the green
Of orchard sunlight, blossom, bark, or leaf,
Or green of an imaginary life.
A mosaic of all possible greens becomes
A premise in your eyes, whereby the limes
Are green as limes fairly by midnight known,
As foliage in a thunderstorm, as dreams
Of fruit in barren countries; claims
The orchard as a metaphor of green.
Aware of change as no barometer
You may determine climates at your will;
Spectrums of feeling are accessible
If orchards in the mind will persevere
On their hillsides original with joy.
Enter the orchard differently today:
When here you bring your earliest tragedy,
Your goldfish, upside-down and rigidly
Floating on weeds in the aquarium,
Green in no panorama for your grief
Whose raindrop smile, dissolving and aloof,
Ordains an unusual brightness as you come:
The brightness of a change outside the eye,
A question on the brim of what may be,
Attended by a new, impersonal green.
The goldfish dead where limes hand yellowing
Is metaphor for more incredible things,
Things you shall live among, things seen, things known.

—James Merrill

Short Talk on Pain

Lawns and fields and hills and wide old velvet sleeves, green things. They stretch, fold, roll away, unfurl and calm the eye. Look lush in paintings. Battles are fought on greens. Or you could spread a meal and sup. How secretly they lie, floors of distant forests. Next comes the grave, in many a poem about green. But this is not a poem. This is a billboard for frozen green peas. Frozen green peas are good for pain.

—Anne Carson

Green Behind the Ears

I was still slightly
fuzzy in shady spots
and the tenderest lime.
It was lovely, as I
look back, but not
at the time. For it is
hard to be green and
take your turn as flesh.
So much freshness
to unlearn.

—Kay Ryan

Giving Up Green

Sometimes he determines what his choice
requires: it once or twice in coming years
it may seem awkward not to call on friends
with lawns, to walk in gardens, drive through towns
of houses lined in moss and bound with vines,
or gaze from passing trains at rain-soft valleys
lush with ferns and grass, he still might turn
his looking back on bricks and carriage axles.
Here, more simply, moving through a city
bare of cloud, its blocks secure, its river
earnest planes of shade and sun, his practice
slows to basic tasks and paces. Hours
of looking at a single rationed lime.
A morning till a leaf is only veins.
An afternoon of making stems appear
more lucid than their vase's frosted glass.
And yet his daily track grows longer, routes
extended: then he worries, climbing stairs,
that sheer exhaustion might obscure a lack
of patience. Or of nerve. So when the clear
that comes at five o'clock on cloudy days
engulfs the nearby roofs in gold and rose,
a stain of noon beneath the darker flaring
indigos of dust, he maps a blue,
a red, a yellow square across the wall
and stares. It's almost more than he can stand.
His curtains fill the room with fading air.
Below, a window frames a woman paring
apples: knife and hand; the skin unwinding
shyly from her guiding wrist, unwrapping
flesh and falling loose in severed curves.
He stops to rest. She smoothes a strand of hair.

—Siobhan Phillips