**Home**

Often I had gone this way before:

But now it seemed I never could be

And never had been anywhere else;

’Twas home; one nationality

We had, I and the birds that sang,

One memory.

They welcomed me. I had come back

That eve somehow from somewhere far:

The April mist, the chill, the calm,

Meant the same thing familiar

And pleasant to us, and strange too,

Yet with no bar.

The thrush on the oaktop in the lane

Sang his last song, or last but one;

And as he ended, on the elm

Another had but just begun

His last; they knew no more than I

The day was done.

Then past his dark white cottage front

A labourer went along, his tread

Slow, half with weariness, half with ease;

And, through the silence, from his shed

The sound of sawing rounded all

That silence said.

—Edward Thomas

**Home After Three Months Away**

Gone now the baby’s nurse,

a lioness who ruled the roost

and made the Mother cry.

She used to tie

gobbets of porkrind in bowknots of gauze—

three months they hung like soggy toast

on our eight foot magnolia tree,

and helped the English sparrows

weather a Boston winter.

Three months, three months!

Is Richard now himself again?

Dimpled with exaltation,

my daughter holds her levee in the tub.

Our noses rub,

each of us pats a stringy lock of hair—

they tell me nothing’s gone.

Though I am forty-one,

not forty now, the time I put away

was child’s play. After thirteen weeks

my child still dabs her cheeks

to start me shaving. When

we dress her in her sky-blue corduroy,

she changes to a boy,

and floats my shaving brush

and washcloth in the flush. . . .

Dearest, I cannot loiter here

in lather like a polar bear.

Recuperating, I neither spin nor toil.

Three stories down below,

a choreman tends our coffin’s length of soil,

and seven horizontal tulips blow.

Just twelve months ago,

these flowers were pedigreed

imported Dutchmen; now no one need

distinguish them from weed.

Bushed by the late spring snow,

they cannot meet

another year’s snowballing enervation.

I keep no rank nor station.

Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small.

—Robert Lowell

**Home is so sad**

Home is so sad. It stays as it was left,

Shaped to the comfort of the last to go

As if to win them back. Instead, bereft

Of anyone to please, it withers so,

Having no heart to put aside the theft

And turn again to what it started as,

A joyous shot at how things ought to be,

Long fallen wide. You can see how it was:

Look at the pictures and the cutlery.

The music in the piano stool. That vase.

—Phillip Larkin

**Questions of Travel**

There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams

hurry too rapidly down to the sea,

and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops

makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,

turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.

–For if those streaks, those mile-long, shiny, tearstains,

aren’t waterfalls yet,

in a quick age or so, as ages go here,

they probably will be.

But if the streams and clouds keep travelling, travelling,

the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,

slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?

Where should we be today?

Is it right to be watching strangers in a play

in this strangest of theatres?

What childishness is it that while there’s a breath of life

in our bodies, we are determined to rush

to see the sun the other way around?

The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?

To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,

inexplicable and impenetrable,

at any view,

instantly seen and always, always delightful?

Oh, must we dream our dreams

and have them, too?

And have we room

for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity

not to have seen the trees along this road,

really exaggerated in their beauty,

not to have seen them gesturing

like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.

–Not to have had to stop for gas and heard

the sad, two-noted, wooden tune

of disparate wooden clogs

carelessly clacking over

a grease-stained filling-station floor.

(In another country the clogs would all be tested.

Each pair there would have identical pitch.)

–A pity not to have heard

the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird

who sings above the broken gasoline pump

in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:

three towers, five silver crosses.

–Yes, a pity not to have pondered,

blurr’dly and inconclusively,

on what connection can exist for centuries

between the crudest wooden footwear

and, careful and finicky,

the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.

–Never to have studied history in

the weak calligraphy of songbirds’ cages.

–And never to have had to listen to rain

so much like politicians’ speeches:

two hours of unrelenting oratory

and then a sudden golden silence

in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

*“Is it lack of imagination that makes us come*

*to imagined places, not just stay at home?*

*Or could Pascal have been not entirely right*

*about just sitting quietly in one’s room?*

*Continent, city, country, society:*

*the choice is never wide and never free.*

*And here, or there . . . No. Should we have stayed at home,*

*wherever that may be?”*

—Elizabeth Bishop