**Astrophil and Stella, sonnet 49**

I on my horse, and Love on me, doth try

Our horsemanships, while by strange work I prove

A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love,

And now man’s wrongs in me, poor beast, descry.

The reins wherewith my rider doth me tie

Are humbled thoughts, which bit of reverence move,

Curbed in with fear, but with gilt boss above

Of hope, which makes it seem fair to the eye.

The wand is will; thou, fancy, saddle art,

Girt fast by memory; and while I spur

My horse, he spurs with sharp desire to my heart;

He sits me fast, however I do stir;

And now hath made me to his hand so right

That in the manage myself takes delight.

—Philip Sidney

**Cirque D’Hiver**

Across the floor flits the mechanical toy,

fit for a king of several centuries back.

A little circus horse with real white hair.

His eyes are glossy black.

He bears a little dancer on his back.

She stands upon her toes and turns and turns.

A slanting spray of artificial roses

is stitched across her skirt and tinsel bodice.

Above her head she poses

another spray of artificial roses.

His mane and tail are straight from Chirico.

He has a formal, melancholy soul.

He feels her pink toes dangle toward his back

along the little pole

that pierces both her body and her soul

and goes through his, and reappears below,

under his belly, as a big tin key.

He canters three steps, then he makes a bow,

canters again, bows on one knee,

canters, then clicks and stops, and looks at me.

The dancer, by this time, has turned her back.

He is the more intelligent by far.

Facing each other rather desperately—

his eye is like a star—

we stare and say, “Well, we have come this far.”

—Elizabeth Bishop

**Poem**

*to James Schuyler*

There I could never be a boy,

though I rode like a god when the horse reared.

At a cry from mother I fell to my knees!

there I fell, clumsy and sick and good,

though I bloomed on the back of a frightened black mare

who had leaped windily at the start of a leaf

and she never threw me.

I had a quick heart

and my thighs clutched her back.

I loved her fright, which was against me

into the air! and the diamond white of her forelock

which seemed to smart with thoughts as my heart smarted with life!

and she’d toss her head with the pain

and paw the air and champ the bit, as if I were Endymion

and she, moonlike, hated to love me.

All things are tragic

when a mother watches!

and she wishes upon herself

the random fears of a scarlet soul, as it breathes in and out

and nothing chokes, or breaks from triumph to triumph!

I knew her but I could not be a boy,

for in the billowing air I was fleet and green

riding blackly through the ethereal night

towards men’s words which I gracefully understood,

and it was given to me

as the soul is given the hands

to hold the ribbons of life!

as miles streak by beneath the moons sharp hooves

and I have mastered the speed and strength which is the armor of the world.

—Frank O’Hara

**Words**

Axes

After whose stroke the wood rings,

And the echoes!

Echoes traveling

Off from the center like horses.

The sap

Wells like tears, like the

Water striving

To re-establish its mirror

Over the rock

That drops and turns,

A white skull,

Eaten by weedy greens.

Years later I

Encounter them on the road—-

Words dry and riderless,

The indefatigable hoof-taps.

While

From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars

Govern a life.

—Sylvia Plath

**A Blessing**

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,

Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.

And the eyes of those two Indian ponies

Darken with kindness.

They have come gladly out of the willows

To welcome my friend and me.

We step over the barbed wire into the pasture

Where they have been grazing all day, alone.

They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness

That we have come.

They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.

There is no loneliness like theirs.

At home once more,

They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.

I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,

For she has walked over to me

And nuzzled my left hand.

She is black and white,

Her mane falls wild on her forehead,

And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear

That is delicate as the skin over a girl’s wrist.

Suddenly I realize

That if I stepped out of my body I would break

Into blossom.

—James Wright