**A Musical Instrument**

WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,

    Down in the reeds by the river?

Spreading ruin and scattering ban,

Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,

And breaking the golden lilies afloat

    With the dragon-fly on the river.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,

    From the deep cool bed of the river:

The limpid water turbidly ran,

And the broken lilies a-dying lay,

And the dragon-fly had fled away,

    Ere he brought it out of the river.

High on the shore sate the great god Pan,

    While turbidly flowed the river;

And hacked and hewed as a great god can,

With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,

Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed

    To prove it fresh from the river.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,

    (How tall it stood in the river!)

Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,

Steadily from the outside ring,

And notched the poor dry empty thing

    In holes, as he sate by the river.

“This is the way,” laughed the great god Pan,

    (Laughed while he sate by the river,)

“The only way, since gods began

To make sweet music, they could succeed.”

Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,

    He blew in power by the river.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!

    Piercing sweet by the river!

Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!

The sun on the hill forgot to die,

And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly

    Came back to dream on the river.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,

    To laugh as he sits by the river,

Making a poet out of a man:

The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—

For the reed which grows nevermore again

    As a reed with the reeds in the river.

 —Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**Piano**

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;

Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see

A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings

And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song

Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong

To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside

And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour

With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour

Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast

Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

 —D. H. Lawrence

**That Harp You Play So Well**

O David, if I had
Your power, I should be glad—
 In harping, with the sling,
 In patient reasoning!

Blake, Homer, Job, and you,
Have made old wine-skins new.
 Your energies have wrought
 Stout continents of thought.

But, David, if the heart
Be brass, what boots the art
 Of exorcising wrong,
 Of harping to a song?

The sceptre and the ring
And every royal thing
 Will fail. Grief’s lustiness
 Must cure the harp’s distress.

 —Marianne Moore

**The Violinist at the Window, 1918**

*After Matisse*

Here he is again, so thin, unbent, one would say captive — did winter ever leave — no one

has climbed the hill north of town in longer than one can remember — something hasn’t

been fully loaded — life is blameless — he is a stem — & what here is cyclic, we would so

need to know

about now — & if there is

a top to this — a summit, the highest note, a

destination —

here he is now, again, standing at the window, ready tơ

look out if asked to

by his

time,

ready to take up again if he

must, here where the war to end all wars has come

to an end — for a while — to take up whatever it is

the spirit

must take up, & what is the melody of

that, the sustained one note of obligatory

hope, taken in, like a virus,

before the body grows accustomed to it and it

becomes

natural again — yes breathe it in,

the interlude,

the lull in the

killing — up

the heart is asked to go, up—

open these heavy shutters now, the hidden order of a belief system

trickles to the fore,

it insists you draw closer to

the railing — lean out —

time stands out there as if mature, blooming, big as day — & is this not an emaciated

sky, & how

thin is this

sensation of time, do you

not feel it, the no in the heart — no, do not make me believe

again, too much has died, do not make me open this

all up

again — crouching in

shadow, my head totally

empty — you can see

the whole sky pass through this head of mine, the mind is hatched and scored by clouds

and weather — what is weather — when it’s

all gone we’ll

buy more,

heaven conserve us is the song, & lakes full of leaping

fish, & ages that shall not end, dew-drenched, sun-

drenched, price-

less — leave us alone, loose and undone, everything

and nothing slipping through — no, I cannot be reached, I cannot be duped again says

my head standing now in the

opened-up window, while history starts up again, &

is that flute music in the

distance, is that an answering machine — call and response — & is that ringing in my ears

the furrows of earth

full of men and their parts, & blood as it sinks into

loam, into the page of statistics, & the streets out there, shall we really

be made to lay them out again, & my plagiarized

humanity, whom

shall I now imitate to re-

become

before the next catastrophe — the law of falling bodies applies but we shall not use

it — the law of lateness —

even our loved ones don't know if we’re living —

but I pick it up again, the

violin, it is

still here

in my left hand, it has been tied to me all this long time — I shall hold it, it was my

one burden, I shall hear the difference between up

and

down, & up we shall bring the bow now up &

down, & find

the note, sustained, fixed, this is what hope forced upon oneself by one’s self sounds

like — this high note trembling — it is a

good sound, it is an

ugly sound, my hand is doing this, my mind cannot

open — cloud against sky, the freeing of my self

from myself, the note is that, I am standing in

my window, my species is ill, the

end of the world can be imagined, minutes run away like the pattering of feet in summer

down the long hall then out — oh be happy, &

clouds roil, & they hide the slaughterhouse, they loft as if this were

not

perpetual exile — we go closer — the hands at the end of this body

feel in their palms

the great

desire — look — the instrument is raised —

& this will be a time again in which to make — a time of use-

lessness — the imagined human

paradise.

 —Jorie Graham

**Sore Throat**

Sick in bed with a sore throat,

I can’t get out of my mind

the image of the cat

harpsichord from the eighteenth century,

soothing a prince with laughter.

It worked like this: the tails of them attached

to the strings of the instrument

were pulled by different notes, and the difference

between the way the cats

cried was music.

A shadow is only a shape.

Which is why certain individuals

can put their hands in light

and make them birds, can say in shadow

what they can’t in light.

The tiny branches of the hedge

in the yard that separates

my house from the next

look like the rib bones of a bird

when the sun hits lunch.

The world, they say, is best for a nest

but no good for a flying place.

*Come back,*I say to my dead,

and the branches don’t even graze

the window, when I eat it hurts.

 —Katie Peterson

 **senzo**

 *carnegie hall, october 19, 2014*

beauty eludes me, usually. i soak

up the lush red, violet, indigo blooms

abdullah ibrahim’s cool fingers pluck

from the keyboard’s bed, but bring to these ‘rooms’

(stanzas forged from replayed past as today’s

not-news) no solacing bouquets. my weeds?

i conjure rough green to rupture from seeds

so furious they bleed — or, grieving, raise

crabgrass and blue notes, peppered with rust,

where he grows flowers. yes, i tend my plants

incisively : no phrase that droops or wants

out of the sun survives long. but the rest

run wild, flush vivid, throw shade, deluge fruit,

 lavishly express their dissonant root.

—Evie Shockley