**The Listeners**

‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller,

   Knocking on the moonlit door;

And his horse in the silence champed the grasses

   Of the forest’s ferny floor:

And a bird flew up out of the turret,

   Above the Traveller’s head:

And he smote upon the door again a second time;

   ‘Is there anybody there?’ he said.

But no one descended to the Traveller;

   No head from the leaf-fringed sill

Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,

   Where he stood perplexed and still.

But only a host of phantom listeners

   That dwelt in the lone house then

Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight

   To that voice from the world of men:

Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,

   That goes down to the empty hall,

Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken

   By the lonely Traveller’s call.

And he felt in his heart their strangeness,

   Their stillness answering his cry,

While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,

   ’Neath the starred and leafy sky;

For he suddenly smote on the door, even

   Louder, and lifted his head:—

‘Tell them I came, and no one answered,

   That I kept my word,’ he said.

Never the least stir made the listeners,

   Though every word he spake

Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house

   From the one man left awake:

Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,

   And the sound of iron on stone,

And how the silence surged softly backward,

   When the plunging hoofs were gone.

 —Walter de la Mare

**The Sound of Trees**

I wonder about the trees.

Why do we wish to bear

Forever the noise of these

More than another noise

So close to our dwelling place?

We suffer them by the day

Till we lose all measure of pace,

And fixity in our joys,

And acquire a listening air.

They are that that talks of going

But never gets away;

And that talks no less for knowing,

As it grows wiser and older,

That now it means to stay.

My feet tug at the floor

And my head sways to my shoulder

Sometimes when I watch trees sway,

From the window or the door.

I shall set forth for somewhere,

I shall make the reckless choice

Some day when they are in voice

And tossing so as to scare

The white clouds over them on.

I shall have less to say,

But I shall be gone.

 —Robert Frost

 **Listen. Put on Morning**

Listen. Put on morning.

Waken into falling light.

A man’s imagining

Suddenly may inherit

The handclapping centuries

Of his one minute on earth.

And hear the virgin juries

Talk with his own breath

To the corner boys of his street.

And hear the Black Maria

Searching the town at night.

And hear the playropes caa

The sister Mary in.

And hear Willie and Davie

Among bracken of Narnain

Sing in a mist heavy

With myrtle and listeners.

And hear the higher town

Weep a petition of fears

At the poorhouse close upon

The public heartbeat.

And hear the children tig

And run with my own feet

Into the netting drag

Of a suiciding principle.

Listen. Put on lightbreak.

Waken into miracle.

The audience lies awake

Under the tenements

Under the sugar docks

Under the printed moments.

The centuries turn their locks

And open under the hill

Their inherited books and doors

All gathered to distil

Like happy berry pickers

One voice to talk to us.

Yes listen. It carries away

The second and the years

Till the heart’s in a jacket of snow

And the head’s in a helmet white

And the song sleeps to be wakened

By the morning ear bright.

Listen. Put on morning.

Waken into falling light.

 —W. S. Graham

**Friday Midnight Exactly**

I heard the knock though I thought

possibly it was the drum in the phonograph

I open the door it is the girl upstairs

will ask me for a knife to open her lock

she forgot her key or to turn down the

phonograph I open the door I start & shake

all over an embarrassing little spasm

there is someone there after a week’s

waiting it isn’t you it’s the girl up-

stairs asking me to turn down the

 phonograph

 —Alice Notley

**Music**

Something overheard from the dissonant street—a screech, a bang-taken in and arranged. A subjective correlative. Sequences, resolutions, deliberate unfulfillments. The sublimity of large and small moments surrendering to the whole. What feeling feels like over time. An attempt to screw up what feeling feels like over time. Heartbreak and a high C. The twang the nervous system wants when it’s in revolt. The often welcome melodic lie. Ululation and a stomp of heels, scat-sense, voice and ear living together in brilliant sin. The soul’s undersong. The orchestration of randomness, a flirtation with the boundaries of silence and space. When Bun-Ching played last night—a reminder that the self wants to disappear, be taken away from itself and returned.

**Noise**

Solitude unchosen, the drone of it rising to a buzz. That poet you hate, his dead tune on a bad instrument. Hungover, the terrible fork glancing the excruciating plate and—that same morning—the frisson of corduroy, your own, as you walk. Loud music, not yours; somebody else’s good time. The oratory of an enemy. The cacophony of someone asking for love. Another remark after the argument’s been conceded, or the story’s over. Your stupid, habitual politeness when the telemarketer calls. The restrained ha-ha when only a belly laugh will honor the moment. Any complaint, even the gentlest, from a person incapable of praise. Someone you know you’ll not see again—the dull click of an unslammed door.

 —Stephen Dunn