

Sonnet 26 (from *Astrophil and Stella*)

Though dusty wits dare scorn astrology,
And fools can think those lamps of purest light—
Whose numbers, ways, greatness, eternity,
Promising wonders, wonder do invite—
To have for no cause birthright in the sky
But for to spangle the black weeds of night;
Or for some brawl, which in that chamber hie,
They should still dance to please a gazer's sight.
For me, I do Nature unidle know,
And know great causes, great effects procure;
And know those bodies high reign on the low.
And if these rules did fail, proof makes me sure,
Who oft fore-judge my after-following race,
By only those two stars in Stella's face.

—Philip Sidney

Stars at Tallapoosa

The lines are straight and swift between the stars.
The night is not the cradle that they cry,
The criers, undulating the deep-oceaned phrase.
The lines are much too dark and much too sharp.

The mind herein attains simplicity.
There is no moon, on single, silvered leaf.
The body is no body to be seen
But is an eye that studies its black lid.

Let these be your delight, secretive hunter,
Wading the sea-lines, moist and ever-mingling,
Mounting the earth-lines, long and lax, lethargic.
These lines are swift and fall without diverging.

The melon-flower nor dew nor web of either
Is like to these. But in yourself is like:
A sheaf of brilliant arrows flying straight,
Flying and falling straightway for their pleasure,

Their pleasure that is all bright-edged and cold;
Or, if not arrows, then the nimblest motions,
Making recoveries of young nakedness
And the lost vehemence the midnights hold.

—Wallace Stevens

So Many Constellations

So many constellations, displayed to us. I was,
when I looked at you—when?—
outside with
the other worlds.

O, these paths, galactic,
O this hour that billowed
the nights over to us into
the burden of our names. It is,
I know, not true,
that we lived, a mere
breath blindly moved between
there and not-there and sometimes,
comet-like an eye whizzed
toward extinguished matter, in the canyons,
there where it burned out, stood
tit-gorgeous time, along
which grew up and down
& away what
is or was or will be—,

I know,
I know and you know, we knew,
we didn't know, for we
were there and not there,
and sometimes, when
only Nothingness stood between us, we
found truly together.

—Paul Celan
(translated from the German by Pierre Joris)

Stars Over the Dordogne

Stars are dropping thick as stones into the twiggy
Picket of trees whose silhouette is darker
Than the dark of the sky because it is quite starless.
The woods are a well. The stars drop silently.
They seem large, yet they drop, and no gap is visible.
Nor do they send up fires where they fall
Or any signal of distress or anxiousness.
They are eaten immediately by the pines.

Where I am at home, only the sparsest stars
Arrive at twilight, and then after some effort.
And they are wan, dulled by much travelling.
The smaller and more timid never arrive at all
But stay, sitting far out, in their own dust.
They are orphans. I cannot see them. They are lost.
But tonight they have discovered this river with no trouble,
They are scrubbed and self-assured as the great planets.

The Big Dipper is my only familiar.
I miss Orion and Cassiopeia's Chair. Maybe they are
Hanging shyly under the studded horizon
Like a child's too-simple mathematical problem.
Infinite number seems to be the issue up there.
Or else they are present, and their disguise so bright
I am overlooking them by looking too hard.
Perhaps it is the season that is not right.

And what if the sky here is no different,
And it is my eyes that have been sharpening themselves?
Such a luxury of stars would embarrass me.
The few I am used to are plain and durable;
I think they would not wish for this dressy backcloth
Or much company, or the mildness of the south.
They are too puritan and solitary for that—
When one of them falls it leaves a space,

A sense of absence in its old shining place.
And where I lie now, back to my own dark star,
I see those constellations in my head,
Unwarmed by the sweet air of this peach orchard.
There is too much ease here; these stars treat me too well.
On this hill, with its view of lit castles, each swung bell
Is accounting for its cow. I shut my eyes
And drink the small night chill like news of home.

—Sylvia Plath

Mirror Full of Stars

A can of shaving cream inflates
A ping-pong ball of lather,
Thick, hot, smaller than an atom, soon
The size of the world.

This does take time to happen.
Back at the start
Again, a pinprick swells so violently
It shoots out

Hallways to other worlds,
But keeps expanding
Till it is all
There is. The universe is all there is.

Don't play with matches.
The candle flame follows her
With its eyes. The night sky is a mirror
On a wall.

What she stands in front of are the roaring afterburners
Of the distant stars a foot away
Leaving for another world. They have been summoned
To leave her

For another girl
In another world who stands there looking
In a mirror full of stars
At herself in her room.

The room is not really,
But it might be. If there is
Something else as beautiful
As this snow softly falling outside, say.

The universe begins
With a hot ball of lather expanding
In a hand
That should be in her bed asleep.

—Frederick Seidel

Star Block

There is no such thing
as star block.
We do not think of
locking out the light
of other galaxies.
It is light
so rinsed of impurities
(heat, for instance)
that it excites
no antibodies in us.
Yet people are
curiously soluble
in starlight.
Bathed in its
absence of insistence
their substance
loosens willingly,
their bright
designs dissolve.
Not proximity
but distance
burns us with love.

—Kay Ryan